

The Glastonbury Scripts

The Glastonbury Scripts are texts communicated through a medium, seemingly by deceased former monks of Glastonbury Abbey in the southwest of England. They were obtained between 1907 and 1917, the result of an attempt by an archaeologist to solicit help with excavations at the site.

The Abbey

The monastery at Glastonbury was founded during the seventh century on 37 acres of ground given to the Celtic Church by the King of Dumonia. The buildings were ravaged by the Danes in 878 and restored by the Benedictine order under St. Dunstan in 943. In 1539 they were again destroyed during the dissolution of the monasteries ordered by Henry VIII on his break from Rome. The Church of England acquired the grounds in 1908 and in that year Frederick Bligh Bond (1864-1945), a Bristol-based architect and archaeologist, was commissioned to direct excavations there.

Besides being a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, Bond had been a member of the Society for Psychical Research since 1902. Through that organization he befriended John Allen Bartlett, an automatic writing medium, and asked Bartlett to assist him by using automatic writing to get clues as to where to dig.

At the time, neither Bond nor Bartlett believed that such writing came from spirits of the dead, subscribing instead to the somewhat less controversial theory that it was possible to access some universal mind or cosmic consciousness. The initial focus was the Edgar Chapel and Loretto Chapel, which were referred to in certain antiquarian works but whose locations were a mystery.

The Scripts

Bond and Bartlett made their first attempt on November 7, 1907, six months before the start of the excavations. Bond asked, 'Can you tell us anything about Glastonbury?' The response was, '*All knowledge is eternal and is available to mental sympathy. I was not in sympathy with monks – I cannot find a monk yet.*'

Bond then arranged for a friend, a monk, to sit with them in the hope it would provide the sympathetic link. After this, Bartlett's hand traced the outline of the main features of the abbey church. The name '*Gulielmus Monachus*' was written inside the sketch. A drawing of what was believed to be St. Mary's Chapel followed, signed '*Rolf monachus.*'^[1]

The sketches did not accord with Bond's own ideas drawn from antiquarian sources. He asked for clarification and received a reply in 'monk Latin', a combination of Latin and Old English, that made little sense. Four days later, Bond again attempted contact and heard from the unnamed communicator who had initially told him he could not find any monks. This 'directive agency,' as Bond referred to it, told him that conflicting influences had impeded the communication on his last attempt, but that the monks were anxious to communicate. '*They have been waiting to influence you for a long time, and they have been (endeavoring to?) reproduce things in your minds,*' the directive agency further communicated.^[2]

Subsequent messages came in a mishmash of words, most in monk Latin, some in Latin, some in Old English, some in fractured English, still others in more pure English. Some were signed by the communicator, some were not. The handwriting differed and was occasionally illegible, key words sometimes lost. At times the messages jumped between archaic spelling and phrasing and more modern forms. A communicator who identified himself as Johannes stated:

Ye names of builded things are very hard in Latin tongue – transome, fanne tracery, and the like. My son, thou canst not understande. Wee wold speak in the Englyshe tongue. Wee saide that ye volte was multipartite yt was fannes olde style in ye este ende of ye choire and ye newe in Edgares chappel....Glosterfannes (repeated). Fannes...(again) yclept fanne....Johannes lap...mason.^[3]

'Johannes' informed Bond that his full name had been Johannes Bryant, that he was born in 1497, had been a lapidator (stonemason) at the abbey, and had died in 1533. On November 22, Johannes again communicated and provided a further sketch. That was followed by a message that may or may not have been from Johannes. It read:

When you dig, excavate the pillars of the crypt, six feet below the grass – they will give you a clue. The direction of the walls...eastward...was at an angle...clothyards twenty seven long, nineteen wide.

(Bond noted that the word 'eastwards' was illegible and might have been 'westwards,' or even 'outwards'.)^[4]

On February 1, 1908, a lengthy message came through, reading in part:

The arche is flatte—three ells from side to side – ten feet high – all panellae. All ye midst of ye est ends was panellae and the grete chapell was....we have told you long tyme sins –panellae everywhere...thin walls and poore foundations in the new work...And ye chamber was in length seventy feet in four bayes and in width it was thirty and foure...There were faire steppes of marble and ye fannes over ye doore did hold a lyttel galerie the whych did open close on ye stairway looking down on them that passed there...Forty and two feete was the hight of ye newe chappelle and yt was ybuttressed with faire buttresses and walls slantwise at ye cornere.^[5]

The communications continued regularly over the next few months, sitting number 27 taking place on March 17, 1908. The excavation began in May, and it took some time to catch up with the initial messages. According to Bond, much of the information was very precise, some of it accurate to the inch, but measurements were given in different units by different communicators. Vandalism over the centuries made it difficult to locate and measure. Overlapping construction, with foundations of buildings having been built on older foundations, added to the confusion.

The monks claimed to be from different time periods and referred to themselves as ‘The Watchers.’ Johannes emerged as the chief communicator. In the 61st script, recorded on January 26, 1912, an unidentified monk corrected Johannes, suggesting that his memory was faulty. Johannes appeared to take offense at this, responding:

I dydde it not, God, not I! Why cling I to that which is not? It is I, and it is not I, butt parte of me dwelleth in the past and is bound to that whych my carnal soul loved and called ‘home’ these many years. Yet I, Johannes, am of many partes, and ye better parte doeth other things – Laus, Laud Deo! – only that part which remembreth clingeth like memory to what it seeth yet.^[6]

The Watchers, in general, then explained to Bond that it was very difficult for Johannes to communicate and apparently even more difficult for them.

Johannes now very far away: far, in that the force is weake; even soe may be within you and yet farre away, for the strength is as the distance; the one changeth as the other. Wee wold saye much, but the weakness here is strength gathered for other duties. All, he cannot do. What wold ye? ...The stones written in his memory as he knew them? What are real, and what are in his dreame, he knows not....It cease(th)...and yet remayneth in him ever the same. What wold he tell you? – cannot read your wishes.^[7]

The excavations were interrupted by World War I in 1914, and not resumed until 1921. At first Bond kept his mystical sources a secret, but in 1918 he told the story in his book *The Gate of Remembrance*, perhaps encouraged by the resurgence of Spiritualism during the war years, and the endorsement of some mediums by scientists such as Sir Oliver Lodge. As he had feared, the story was received with contempt by the Church and fellow professionals. Bond’s reputation was further compromised after the publication of *The Hill of Vision* in 1919, which added more spirit messages, mostly philosophical ones. After the excavations resumed, a co-director of excavations was appointed, but because Bond refused to work with the new co-director, he was relieved of his duties in April 1922.

Bond’s 1919 book offered an attestation by Bartlett, given the pseudonym John Alleyne in both books. A retired military officer, Bartlett stated that he undertook the project without any preconceived idea as to what might be the nature of the results and that his hand moved independently of his own volition. ‘I am unable to recognize the resulting script as in any appreciable degree the reflection of any notions of my own,’ he added, ‘and although I am a wide general reader and possess a retentive memory, I find myself often curiously unable to retain a clear mental impression of these scripts after they have been read to me.’^[8] Bartlett further mentioned that he had no sympathy for Spiritualism.

In the preface of the 1919 book, Dr. Ralph Adams Cram, an architect from Boston, Massachusetts, USA, told of witnessing ‘the whole mass of writings, as I remember, over an hundred foolscap pages in all, many of them in corrupt and colloquial “monk Latin”.’^[9] Cram further attested to the credibility of Bond and the story as he came to understand it during his ‘seven or eight’ trips to Glastonbury.

Cram was not convinced that spirits of the dead were responsible for the scripts. He wrote:

[A] plausible solution is possible without invoking “Spiritualism,” for Mr. Bond’s own theory of the operation of the intuition through the subconscious mind is tenable; so also is the doctrine of the reservoir of cosmic memory, and that of the multiple personality, one element in which (not the immortal soul, but a thing like the faculty of memory) survives that dissolution which is death, and remains for a time bound to its earthly environment and strives always to recover a fictitious life through the potentiality of the medium.^[10]

More recent thought in psychology identifies Bartlett's subconscious as the source of the writings. G. W. Lambert wrote:

If we follow the conservative line, we must suppose that a simple fact, e.g. that [a story] lodged itself in [Bartlett's] memory owing to his having read it in the ordinary way, and thereafter gradually developed unconsciously a fanciful story...

Such subconscious weaving of stories has been reported in other cases, and they are sometimes not understood by the persons who obtain them. Such inventiveness, working on available data, is not quite so difficult to envisage now as it was at the beginning of the century, owing to the advances made in the manufacture of computers. But a computerlike process cannot introduce facts not known to the automatist, and the verification of such facts is a matter of extreme difficulty, because the range of the automatisas reading cannot be exactly determined. I think that many of those who have made a study of reliable automatic scripts are convinced that they do occasionally show evidence of knowledge which the automatisas mind had never possessed. Bligh Bond was convinced that the scripts he published did show such knowledge, both as regards the abbey ruins and the self-styled monks who furnished it. I feel that we must regard such a claim as not proven.^[11]

Bond himself gradually came to believe that the communications came from spirits of the dead and not some universal mind, as he originally speculated. He noted in particular that the communicators seemed to have distinct personalities, also that much personal information was given, which one would not expect to get from a universal mind. He wrote:

These have been described as "intrusions," and are only dealt with incidentally in [*The Gate of Remembrance*], and necessarily to a very limited extent. Behind and beyond the mediaeval and monkish ideas and influences which are concerned with the Glastonbury Abbey, there are in evidence controlling influences which speak to us from out of the great profundity of time, and which seem to marshal the memories and personalities evoked in the script, as the stage-manager summons and controls the actors of a play in their several parts. These more dominant influences are many...^{'[12]}

However, Bond recognized that the scripts fell well short of providing veridical information, also that some of the information offered by the monks conflicted with historical records. The fact that the directions often conflicted with his own ideas as to the abbey layout suggested that the phenomenon was not one of mental telepathy: the medium, or the medium's subconscious, reading Bond's mind. But the extent to which the purported spirits helped him in his excavations could not be measured, since progress would have been made anyway, and there was no way for him to prove that his unorthodox methods expedited the excavations. Clearly, however, Bond was convinced that the 'spirits' significantly helped him.

Bond later worked with Cram in Cram's architectural practice in Boston, and served as an educational director for the American Society for Psychical Research as well as editor of the organization's journal. In 1936 he returned to England, devoting much of his final years to painting oil sketches of churches. The story of the Glastonbury Scripts receives little, if any, notice at the museum on the site of the ruins.

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References

Footnotes

- 1.^ Bond (1918), pp. 32-4
- 2.^ ____p. 37
- 3.^ ____p. 38
- 4.^ ____p. 40
- 5.^ ____pp. 43-4
- 6.^ ____p. 95
- 7.^ ____p. 95
- 8.^ Bond (1919), p. 134
- 9.^ ____preface x
- 10.^ ____preface xx, xxi
- 11.^ Lambert, pp. 282-3
- 12.^ Bond (1919) p. 2