

# Spiritualism – A Brief History

By John Brett

Modern Spiritualism as we know it began in **1848**, and was sparked by events in a little town called **Hydesville** in New York State, USA. The Fox family were being disturbed by noises – rapping’s – and on **March 31st** they had reached such a pitch that the family were unable to sleep. The two younger daughters, **Kate & Margaretta**, began to clap their hands and shout to the noise “*Come on Mr Splitfoot, do as I do*”. Amazingly, the clapping was echoed by a like number of raps. The girls then asked for their ages to be rapped out, and these were given. When they made soundless ‘claps’, these were also repeated every time.

So they realised that the entity could see as well as hear.

By this time the family had been joined by pretty much all of the neighbourhood, and Mrs Fox, the girls’ mother, had asked how many children she had and the ages of them all. The reply included one which had died in infancy and no-one else there knew about.

An alphabetical code was soon established, which included one rap for ‘no’ and two raps for ‘yes’, and the entity was able to tell them that he was a pedlar named **Charles B Rosna** who had been murdered in 1843 by a man called **John C Bell**, who was a former tenant of the house, and that his body was hidden in the cellar.

This was eventually discovered to be true, and although the Fox Sisters were made to publicly retract their story, it was proven to be the truth in 1904 when the remains of the pedlar’s body were recovered, along with a pedlar’s tin box etc. The full story was published that same year in a non-Spiritualist newspaper.

After the events in Hydesville, many circles were set up all over America for the purpose of establishing communication with the *Spirit World*. Quite a lot of spectacular phenomena was to follow, and it quickly began to spread across the Atlantic to British shores. Organisation of the Spiritualist Movement in Great Britain began in the latter half of the 19th Century, with the formation of the first English Spiritualist Church in **Keighley**, West Yorkshire, in **1853**. The founder was **David Richmond**, born in Darlington, who had become a Spiritualist whilst living in America, and had returned home in 1853, where he tried unsuccessfully to start a Church in his home town before moving on to Keighley. This was the first of many Churches and Societies that began to spring up across Britain, and eventually it became necessary to unite these isolated Churches into some kind of federation.

This new movement, *The National Federation of Spiritualists’*, was formed in **1890** and led by **Emma Hardinge Britten** (1823 – 1899), a gifted medium, speaker & writer. She had also launched the Spiritualist journal ‘**The Two Worlds**’ in **1887**, and was its editor for five years (this magazine is still running today). She was largely responsible for the philosophical outlook of Spiritualists’, and in **1871**, through her mediumship, five statements or Principles of Spiritualism were given by **Robert Owen**, the renowned socialist who had converted to Spiritualism a few years prior to his death in 1858. These five principles were to become the basis for *The Seven Principles* used in the Memorandum of Association when the **Spiritualists’ National Union Ltd.**, was incorporated in **1901** under the Companies Act, and which had power to hold properties etc. The National Federation of Spiritualists’, which had gathered together many Churches and Societies, did not have any legal status, and so this was remedied in **1902** when it merged with the SNU.

The primary object of the Spiritualists’ National Union is to promote the advancement and diffusion of the religion and religious philosophy of Spiritualism.

[More information about Spiritualism and the SNU can be found here:](http://www.snu.org.uk)  
[www.snu.org.uk](http://www.snu.org.uk)