

## The Passing Acquaintances Of Arthur Conan Doyle - Part 1: Victor Eugene Kroemer

by Matthew D. Hall

During his tour of Australia and New Zealand, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle interacted with many people, and spoke to tens of thousands in his audiences. Yet ACD's book describing the tour, *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist*, mentions relatively few people by name. The pages of *The Passengers' Log* have included a series of articles identifying sites and buildings visited by ACD on his tour of Australia, and also an excellent essay on Carlyle Smythe, ACD's local agent on his trip, titled 'An Admirable Cobber' by Passenger Arthur Williams.<sup>1</sup> Smythe was of course central to the visit of Doyle and accompanied the author and his family around Australia. There were others mentioned in Doyle's memoirs, but fewer than one might expect given the length of the book. Why did ACD choose to mention those that he did? Who were these Australians? This occasional series aims to provide bio-sketches of each person mentioned in *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist*, and point to more detailed resources.

Some decisions must be made: for example, the first person mentioned is "the Premier (sic), Mr. Hughes" who had sent a letter of welcome to ACD. While Billy Hughes is mentioned, it was not in the context of a personal meeting, and so an unnecessary biography of a well-known Australian historical figure is avoided. As a side-note, it would be interesting to know whether this letter still exists. It is also clear from perusing newspaper articles from the time that other people ACD met are mentioned in newspapers, but not in *Wanderings*. These individuals may be revisited later in the series.



Victor Eugene Kroemer

And so, the first individual mentioned on Australian shores is Victor Cromer, who ACD met at the Grand Central Hotel in Adelaide where the Doyle family was staying in late September and early October 1920:<sup>2</sup>

*We had a small meeting of spiritualists in our hotel sitting-room, under the direction of Mr. Victor Cromer, a local student of the occult, who seems to have considerable psychic power. He has a small circle for psychic development which is on new lines, for the neophytes who are learning clairvoyance sit around in a circle in silence, while Mr. Cromer endeavours by mental effort to build up the thought form of some object, say a tree, in the centre of the room. After a time he asks each of the circle what he or she can see, and has many correct answers. With colours in the same way he can convey impressions to his pupils. It is clear that telepathy is not excluded as an explanation, but the actual effect upon the participants is according to their own account, visual rather than mental. We had an interesting sitting with a number of these developing mediums present, and much information was given, but little of it could be said to be truly evidential. After seeing such clairvoyance as that of Mr. Tom Tyrell<sup>3</sup> or others at home, when a dozen names and addresses will be given together with the descriptions of those who once owned them, one is spoiled for any lesser display.*

<sup>1</sup> *The Passengers' Log* Vol.10, No.4

<sup>2</sup> Doyle, Arthur Conan *The Wanderings Of a Spiritualist*. Berkeley, CA, Ronin Publishing, 1988 (reprint), p.68.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Tyrrell, spiritualist and clairvoyant from Lancashire, England (1858-1928).

Victor Cromer was born Victor Eugene Kroemer (1883-1930), and he earned an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that Kroemer modified his Germanic surname to the homophonic but more English Cromer early in World War I – the surname Kroemer appears in newspaper articles in 1915, but from that year forward the name Cromer is used instead. Briefly, Cromer was born in South Australia, and educated until twelve when he embarked upon intensive self-education at public institutions in Adelaide. Cromer became active in a range of religious and political organisations, and was also active in spiritualist movements – as his *ADB* entry notes: “as a youth, Victor often found himself ‘surrounded by a bluish or violet light’, it was not until later that he ‘discovered the nature of that force.’” In 1903 Cromer moved to Victoria, worked in the newspaper industry and joined the socialist movement. In that latter capacity Cromer represented the Socialist Federation of Australasia at the seventh congress of the Second International in Stuttgart, Germany. He married his wife in Paris in 1907 and lived in England, where the family had three children, ultimately returning to Australia in 1913. In Adelaide again, Cromer worked as a journalist, taught, and expanded teachings on spiritualism.

Cromer’s interests extended into healing, and was based in Christianity:

*To him the healing of early Christian times was the outcome of a spiritual power, the secret of the use of which had been lost when the emphasis was placed upon the power and prestige of the Christian Church as a political institution rather than upon “the gifts of the spirit.” Throughout the ages this force, he held, has undoubtedly been operative in the case of certain individuals, giving rise to many recorded seemingly miraculous healings.*<sup>5</sup>

It is clear in newspapers of the time that there was strong awareness of ACD’s impending visit, and Cromer was certainly looking forward to his arrival. Just a month prior to the visit Cromer was quoted in the *Adelaide Advertiser*:

*SPREAD OF SPIRITUALISM. Spiritualists in Australia expect that the cult will derive impetus from the coming visit of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Mr. Victor Cromer, a leading Adelaide exponent of the doctrine, stated on Friday that spiritualism had already made great progress in the Commonwealth...*<sup>6</sup>

Cromer also responded to critics of spiritualism (and by extension ACD) in the newspapers, and in doing so made an insightful observation:

*Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has risked his whole career by associating himself with spiritualism, and a man of his keen intellectual attainments is not likely to dedicate his life to a cause in which he did not thoroughly believe after careful investigation... I would like to point out to Mr. Davey, in conclusion, that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle will be here in a week or two, and he might be doing everybody a service by interviewing him, and pointing out to him how deceived he is...*<sup>7</sup>

The Adelaide newspapers were evidently not privy to (or possibly not interested in) the meetings between ACD and students of the occult such as Cromer, and no contemporary reports of such meetings in Adelaide appear in the papers. But the connection between ACD and Victor Cromer did

<sup>4</sup> Bongiorno, Frank ‘Kroemer, Victor Eugene (1883–1930)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2005. <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/kroemer-victor-eugene-13035/text23569> , Accessed online 23 June 2023.

<sup>5</sup> ‘The Work of Victor Cromer’ in *The Voice of the North* (NSW), Monday 10 March 1930, page 6.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Spread of Spiritualism’ *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), Saturday 21 August 1920, page 9.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Spiritualism’, *The Daily Herald* (Adelaide), Tuesday 31 August 1920, page 7.

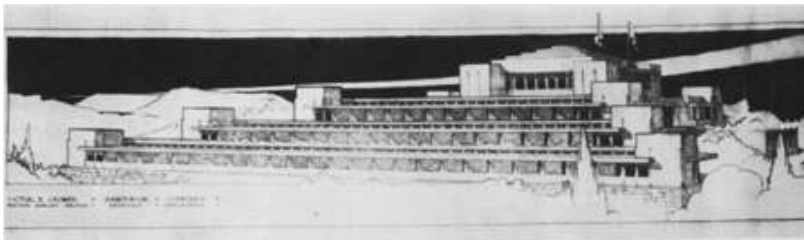
not completely terminate after their meeting in the Grand Central Hotel. In 1925, ACD's prophecy of a "coming world catastrophe" was defended by Cromer.<sup>8</sup> A brief article in 1926 revealed that Cromer had received a short letter from ACD regarding his defence of the aforementioned catastrophe: "Sir Arthur Conan Doyle writes to me as follows...."

**SIR CONAN DOYLE AND REVELATION.**  
 From VICTOR E. CROMER:—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle writes to me as follows with reference to a letter in *The Register* on the "Coming World Catastrophe":—"Dear Mr. Cromer—I am glad to hear that you are alive and well. I found your letter most interesting, and the article is the clearest Biblical interpretation that I have read. The same general sequence of events comes to me from many mediums, who have certainly not read Revelations."

From *The Register* (Adelaide),  
 Friday 8 January 1926, page 13

Around 1926, Cromer relocated to Sydney with his family where he established an institute for spiritual healing. Regular advertisements offered demonstrations of faith healing power, some of which received considerable attention in the press. Cromer must have had grand plans for his growing practice, as the National Library of Australia holds a design by the architect Walter Burley Griffin for a planned 'sanitorium' (sic) at Covecrag (now named Middle Cove) in Northern Sydney.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately Cromer couldn't turn his powers on himself, and he died suddenly aged 46 following treatment for appendicitis at Cabarisha Private Hospital (now the Castlecrag Private Hospital). Cromer was

cremated, and I have been unable to identify a final resting place for his remains.



The Victor E. Cromer Sanitorium designed by Walter Burley Griffin,  
 Architect, Castlecrag in the 1920s

<sup>8</sup> 'The Coming World Catastrophe' *The Register* (Adelaide), Wednesday 23 September 1925, page 15.

<sup>9</sup> Griffin, Walter Burley 1920, Victor E. Cromer Sanitorium, Covecrag, Viewed 24 June 2023 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-150260346>

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