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an educational resource on the paranormal, pseudoscientific and the supernatural



Library

The Case of the Cottingley Fairies

In the early part of this century, Arthur Conan Doyle endorsed these photos as genuine evidence of fairy folk... What was he thinking?



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In 1917 two innocent-seeming English schoolgirls, 16-year-old Elsie Wright and her 10-year-old cousin Frances Griffiths, launched a deception that somehow managed to fool many people over the following years, including the creator of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. While playing in Cottingley Glen, just behind the Wright home, the girls took what they claimed were close-up photographs of winged fairies dancing amid the foliage. The girls then took each other's picture with the wee creatures, and photo experts who were consulted said that the images were not double exposures nor had the negatives been altered. The simple fact is that the girls had just posed with very obvious cutouts of fairy drawings to make the "authentic" pictures. A complete account appears in my book, [Flim-Flam!](#)

Some sixty years later, the aging Elsie and Frances confessed to what had begun as a prank but soon got out of hand as the story was publicized. Paramount Pictures revived the case with the magical release *Fairy Tale: A True Story*. Unfortunately, the film failed to provide modern audiences with many of the incriminating details that are now known of the Cottingley hoax.

Of the nine remarkable Arthur Conan Doyle letters that the JREF has just received, four directly relate to the infamous Cottingley Fairy photos, and five to the famous "Margery" affair in Boston that involved Houdini. I will describe here the first four.

Two of the letters were written and mailed on June 30, 1920. The photographs had been put away in a drawer at the Wright home for three years, Mr. Wright having decided that they were only pranks, though his wife was thoroughly convinced of the authenticity of the fairies; she was a Theosophist, and that religion accepts elves, fairies, goblins and all such nonsense. These two letters from Conan Doyle were sent about a month after he had first been informed that the two girls, Elsie and Frances, had produced the fairy images. Very properly, Conan Doyle wrote separate letters to Miss Elsie Wright, then 19 years old, and to her father, Arthur Wright. Elsie's letter arrived by registered mail, addressed to:



Miss Elsie Wright
31, Main Street
Cottingley
near Bingley
Yorks.

[Here are the transcripts of these letters....](#)

Cottingley Photos

- [Photo 1](#)
- [Photo 2](#)
- [Photo 3](#)
- [Photo 4](#)
- [Photo 5](#)

Cottingley Transcripts

- [June 30 to Elsie Wright](#)
- [June 30 to Arthur Wright](#)
- [July 12 Reply to Conan Doyle](#)
- [July 14 to Arthur Wright](#)
- [August 3 to Arthur Wright](#)

Cottingley Extras

[Read Randi's review of the movie *Fairy Tale*.](#)

Read more on this amazing story, and many more, in Randi's book [Flim Flam!](#)

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