

Silent soothsayer

## **Duncan Campbell**

**c.1680-1730**

Born in Lapland, his father was a shipwrecked sailor who married an important local woman.

Then again, that might all be nonsense.

Duncan was a deaf mute who achieved fame as a soothsayer and an unflinching self-publicist with a love of tall tales.

He became a sensation in London, communicating predictions and advice through nods and shrugs.

After the appearance of a book entitled *The History of the Life and Adventures of Mr Duncan Campbell* in 1720 he was presented to King George I.

Never missing an opportunity, he gave the monarch a copy of the book.

Pamphlets and promotional material followed, some supposedly by clients who consulted him over issues including marital problems.

So too did arrests and court appearances, which only added to his celebrity.

Duncan then started selling miraculous medicines and loadstones.

He even claimed that, acting on the advice of a spirit which had accompanied him since childhood, he had used a loadstone to cure himself of a long illness.

Even death did not discourage Duncan.

In 1732 an autobiography appeared which told readers how the talismans and potions he had used in life were now on sale from his widow.

- Read the Oxford DNB biography here: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/dnb/4494.html>.