THE FIRST OF 80 BRITISH RING CONVENTIONS
Cheltenham 1931

Presented by
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The ‘History of Mystery’ session at the British Ring of the International Brotherhood of Magicians convention in Buxton, 9th September 2016

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The first of 80 British Ring Conventions

85 years ago in Cheltenham, during a hot, sunny June, the first British Ring convention took place. With the exception of the WW2 period, they have taken place every year since. At this, our 80th convention, I want to explore why Cheltenham, who were the personalities involved and what happened. To some of you who have read my history of the British Ring, Linking Britain, or have heard me before, some of what I say may be familiar. For that I apologise, but it is worth remembering at a modern convention, our early pioneers.

Firstly, as is common with all modern research, let us establish some dates and a time-line. The IBM was established by Canadian Len Vintus and American Gene Gordon in February 1922. The concept of an international magic association was followed keenly by some British magicians and indeed there were 4 British members in the first 100 IBM members. By 1924 there were 30 British members and, after the establishment of The Linking Ring as a fine printed magazine in 1925, many more.

The impetus for gathering these early IBM members into a British Ring came from the popular professional magician Oswald Rae. Rae was known as the ‘Bewildering Humourist’ and as well as a performer was a well known writer and magical inventor of such items as ‘Bending glass’. He needed 10 IBM members to form an official Ring, which after a plea in The Linking Ring he soon obtained. The ‘Founder Members’ as they were henceforth known, founded the IBM British Ring in August 1928. Oswald (Ossie) Rae

Greetings to all Magicians

:: WELCOMES YOU ::
TO OUR FIRST ANNUAL
I.B.M. CONVENTION
became the first President, a post he held until 1948, with Dick Nesfield (Dleisfen) of Bridlington as the first Hon Secretary, and later treasurer and first editor of *The Budget*.

These early Ringers were avid readers of *The Linking Ring*, and indeed some, such as Ossie Rae, Dleisfen and George Blake were regular contributors. They were particularly engrossed by the descriptions of the first IBM conventions held in Kenton, Ohio in 1926 and 1927. It was at the 1927 convention that there was the first ever British delegate. This was Edward D Taylor from London who is forever portrayed in this portrait cartoon by Sid Lorraine, captioned ‘Mr Taylor who came all the way from London’. I think he looks like a country solicitor rather than a magician, but then what does a magician really look like!

*Dick Nesfield (Dleisfen)*

*Sid Lorraine’s portrait cartoon of Edward D Taylor.*
We do not know whether Ossie Rae ever met Edward Taylor and discussed his convention experiences, but Ossie was keen to experience things for himself. He set sail for a North American trip firstly for professional engagements in Canada, but was also invited to perform at the IBM Fort Wayne, Indiana convention 3-6 June 1930.

He gave a number of shows at the convention but was damned with faint praise by Howard Thurston who said ‘You are a wonderful artiste – for an Englishman’. Ossie certainly felt that the Americans did not understand English humour. Although he felt, as a professional performer, the convention had too much ‘conjuring for conjurors’, he did pick up a lot of knowledge about organisation of a convention, and returned determined to establish a British version the following year in 1931. But where to hold a convention, and who to organise it? Step forward Cheltenham magician Prof L Bofeys.

Cheltenham already had good magic credentials being the home town of Jasper Maskelyne and the historic family home town of John Neville Maskelyne and George Alfred Cook, but Bofeys volunteered to organise and more importantly had the accommodation with his large house and grounds, more of which later. So who was Bofeys? His full name was Benjamin William Henry Fry 1896 - 1973 and he lived at Westmon House in Charlton Kings, a reasonably affluent suburb of Cheltenham. When I was doing the research for my history of the British Ring, I liaised with Charlton Kings Historical Society who were intrigued by Bofeys as a local celebrity about whom at first they had little knowledge, but eventually they did discover quite a lot for me. Although he was born into relatively humble circumstances, he married Dorothy Peacey who was an only child and, I suppose a sort of heiress, and it was she who inherited Westmon House and grounds. Before marriage he worked for some local insurance companies but afterwards seemed only to do his magic and Punch and Judy. Certainly the locals
regarded Bofeys as ‘moneyed’. He was however well known as a performer in the area. Terry Seabrooke remembered him as the first magician he ever saw when he was on holiday as a young boy at his uncles in Gloucestershire.

The name Bofeys is a bit of a mystery and nobody I have spoken to can give a suitable explanation. His real name Benjamin Fry has initials b and f but I am probably stretching it a bit. The ‘Professor’ bit is not a problem as he was certainly a ‘Punch Professor’, although I have no idea what the ‘L’ of Prof L Bofeys stands for as L is not one of his initials. A recording in the Gloucestershire Archives also refers to him as ‘Prof Bo Face’!

His Punch and Judy artefacts are now in the Cheltenham museum but they are a little strange. His backdrop is shown here, I think it looks a little amateurish for a regular punch performer, or is it just me?

Also his unusual looking puppets are quite large—some up to 32” long with 9” heads and held by an internal stick, not the usual glove puppet articulated arms. The puppets are probably continental, maybe
German, and I have seen similar stick puppets in York Art Gallery although they had legs to throw over the stage platform. He was still performing and using these in his middle 70s at a Cheltenham British Ring picnic.

He was a small man and was also known in the magic world as Curley Bofeys due to his luxuriant thick hair, shown here in a portrait cartoon dated 1929 by Sid Lorraine.

Now let us look at the convention location. In 2008 I went in search of the site of the first British Ring convention having already discovered that the Westmon House itself had been demolished. I walked down a steep lane in Charlton Kings which was described by Ossie Rae as being ‘in a delightful sylvan setting midst the green scenery of Gloucestershire’. I eventually discovered the entrance drive, confirmed by one of the residents of the drive cottages.

So here is an historic British Ring location – the way in for the 1931 conventioneers and the site of the Indian Rope Trick, more of which shortly. The gable of the house ahead is on the site of the original house. It has not been possible through either archives or the local press, to find any photographs of Westmon House, but it must have been reasonably substantial. If you remember the old style rating system, adjacent properties were rated at between £4 and £8, but Westmon House was £25.10.0.
The extensive gardens in excess of an acre are shown here in 1885. Bofeys seemingly had a theatre of sorts in the grounds or house. Some reports say that he had ‘erected’ a theatre, but of what materials is not known. A marquee is never mentioned so it must have been more permanent. A convention report in the Linking Ring of the time says that ‘he had a small private theatre in his own house’. Home theatres must have always been a feature of Bofeys’ life as in a later interview, he remembered that he and his brother had a theatre in their childhood home ‘which his parents called a cellar’! At Westmon house it could have been a conversion of one of these outbuildings shown on the plan. Sadly, all who were there at the time and would remember it are now gone. For the 1932 convention in the same place, it was reported that he had ‘improved’ his theatre.

Bofeys soon formed a Convention committee consisting of early Ring stalwarts Dan Bellman, W. Jeffries, Harry Kaye and a first appearance on a Ring committee, Bill Stickland. Although this is Bill’s first listing in an official capacity, by the end of 1931, he had taken over as Secretary from Dleisfen who had resigned for business and personal reasons, and was still in post 52 years later. The Convention date was fixed for 26 – 28 June 1931. It is of course an historical fact that the first official British Ring convention took place on these dates – hence my talk today – but in 2008 I found a
curious reference to a British Ring Convention two weeks earlier in Bridlington, which is worth briefly remembering. Dleisfen, as well as being Hon Sec of the Ring, was also editor of the *Budget* and it was he who reported on a convention of British Ring members at the Grand Pavilion, Bridlington, Yorkshire.

Bridlington at this time was quite a centre of northern British magic. Dleisfen, called by the *Linking Ring* magazine ‘Mr British Ring’ of course lived there, and nearby, the celebrated magical theorist, Sam Sharpe, so, many northern magicians used to come to Bridlington for magical get-togethers.

It so happened that professional Ring member Chris Van Bern was appearing at the Grand Pavilion and another professional Ring member Laurance Glen (Spitari) was appearing at the Spa Theatre in the same week 15-20 June, so Dleisfen organised a get together with them and such Northern magicians as George Blake, Walter Geary, Alf Browne and others. They certainly had late night sessions at the Grand Pavilion, which sound very similar to similar sessions at later conventions, but whether this get together can be truly called a Convention is open to debate. The phrase Dleisfen used in his *Budget*
Editorial ‘a convention of British Ring magicians’ is a reasonably accurate description of the Bridlington get together but one does feel that the deliberate use of the word *convention* in the run up to the real thing was a bit of a Dleisfen joke.

And so to Cheltenham itself and three hot, sunny June days. Here they all are in Curley Bofey’s garden wearing their suits, often with waistcoats, as was the fashion of the day.

I have counted 52 here but there are some faces missing that can be seen on a Lewis Davenport film made on the Sunday morning, so this photo may be early on in the convention timetable. With late comers and day visitors we can probably expand the numbers to 70 and maybe more – the local press certainly quoted 100.
Here is President Ossie Rae, the great enthusiast for a British convention, with, I think, his wife next to him.

And here is Curley Bofeys, looking rightly satisfied after all his arrangements, and Mrs Bofeys with one of their cats or dogs.

They produced a very smart programme for this first convention and here is the cover. I suspect, as with now, printing costs were helped by the large number of member’s greetings. So what did they do over the three days in 1931, and was it anything like our three or four day conventions now?
Ossie Rae formally opened the convention at 3pm including international messages of goodwill and then it was a social get together plus tea before the opening show at 6pm. This consisted of Ossie himself and various other committee members plus other notables such as Donald Crombie and John Ramsay. Late arrivals kept coming and seemingly, according to later reports, they wondered whether Prof Bofeys private theatre would be big enough. At 7.30pm they all sat down to a sumptuous ‘cold luncheon’ prepared by Mrs Bofeys and helpers – a somewhat strange description for a meal at that time of the evening.

At 8.30pm they began their competitions and here we notice a difference to competitions today. Our Shield competition for stage acts only began in 1937 and Close up in 1958. In 1931, they competed in 10 categories such as silks and ribbons, balls, liquids, card tricks, mental tricks and more generally, best impromptu trick and best original patter. There were nearly 30 prizes to be awarded, all donated by members. These included popular ‘in’ magic books of the time such as Blackstone’s *Secrets of Magic*, and Bill Stickland’s *Wessex Wizardry* and actual tricks such as *Stung*, *Demon Rice Bowls* and *Fako Deck*. Some cash prizes of 25/- were really quite generous considering the convention registration was only 7/6. Prizes were awarded on Sunday and winners included both John Ramsay and Donald Crombie in a number of categories. The evening concluded with the usual chat and tricks back at the Belle Vue Hotel in Cheltenham where many of the visitors were staying. Seemingly, Bill
8.30 p.m. Competitions

(Judges: Mr. F. E. Walker, Mr. Stanley Collins, Mr. Ellis Stanyon, Mr. Oswald Rae)

1. Best Original Trick with Silks, Ribbons, etc.
   - First Prize: Blackstone’s “Secrets of Magic” presented by Max Holden
   - Second Prize: “Trix & Chatter” presented by Blair L. Gilbert, U.S.A.
   - Third Prize: “Original Magic” presented by Oswald Rae

2. Best Original Trick with Balls.
   - First Prize: Enhanced Tube presented by Thayers, U.S.A.
   - Second Prize: Cups and Balls presented by Reilly & Co., U.S.A.

   - First Prize: Stung! presented by R. E. Powell, U.S.A.
   - Second Prize: “Wessex Wizardry” presented by Wm. G. Stickland
   - Third Prize: “Publicity Miracles & Book of Moses” presented by Ovette, Ontario

4. Best Original Impromptu Trick without apparatus.
   - First Prize: value 21/- presented by Ellis Stanyon
   - Second Prize: “Patter Chatter & Dramatic Art of Magic” presented by Blair L. Gilbert
   - Third Prize: Jimmy’s Jumping Pencil presented by Jimmy Saunders, U.S.A.

5. Best Original Patter used with any Trick.
   - First Prize: “Sub Rosa” presented by Oswald Rae
   - Second Prize: Demon Rice Bowls presented by Harry Kaye
   - Third Prize: “Detecta” Publicity Miracle presented by Archie Byford

6. Best Presentation of any Trick.
   - First Prize: “Here’s Magic” presented by Max Holden, U.S.A.
   - Second Prize: Change-o-Card presented by R. W. Hull, U.S.A.

7. Best Original Liquid Trick.
   - First Prize: “Effective Conjuring” presented by Will Blyth
   - Second Prize: Release-it presented by Eric F. Impey

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**FIRST DAY (continued)**

8. Best Original Effect.
   - First Prize: value 25/- presented by Edw. Bagshawe
   - Second Prize: value 3 Dollars presented by Princess Magic Shop
   - Third Prize: Two Secrets presented by Stewart James, Canada

9. Best Original Mental Effect.
   - First Prize: Transcendental Book Mystery presented by Stanley Collins
   - Second Prize: “Magical Mentalism” presented by John Booth
   - Third Prize: Mental Discernment presented by R. W. Hull, U.S.A.
   - Fourth Prize: Five Mental Secrets presented by John Booth

    - First Prize: Box of Numbers presented by Nelson Denys
    - Second Prize: Fako Deck presented by Elmer Eckam, U.S.A.
    - Third Prize: presented by S. W. Reilly, U.S.A.

*The prize categories for the competitions*
Stickland, who possessed a car, operated a virtual taxi service back and forth from Westmon House into town.

Saturday morning was free and easy, but notable for an outside event that received a lot of good publicity. This was Prof Bofeys’ version of the Indian Rope trick. There was a full description of this in the Gloucester Echo by a rather gullible reporter. This is the only illustration of the event, unfortunately from a rather bad 85 year old half tone.

The reporter said that after many years searching, Bofeys had discovered the true secret of the Indian Rope trick just a few weeks before the convention – good timing! I gather that Bofeys, with tongue firmly in cheek, had been telling people that he had paid £5000 for the secret! Committee member Dan Bellman muttered that it was more like 9d.

Just after 8.30 pm, Bofeys donned a cloak and threw a rope in the air where it remained rigid. He said it was not near any buildings, but a witness to the event told me it was in the driveway that I discovered. Ethel Byford, the daughter of magician Archie Byford, then aged 7, climbed the rope then disappeared. A moment or two later she was re-discovered in a wicker basket. The reporter said he took a photo of Ethel at the top of the rope, but when the film was developed she had gone! Had he been hypnotised, he mused or had he really seen the famous trick? Peter Warlock in his later writings, described it as ‘a cleverly faked rope trick’. It caused enough publicity for the celebrated journalist Bill Deedes (later Lord Deedes) to be
sent from the London *Morning Post*. He interviewed Jasper Maskelyne, who said that in spite of this photograph, the Indian Rope trick was a myth. As well as obviously being a good wheeze and getting publicity, this outside stunt is the first of long tradition at Ring conventions. Often they involved genuine danger such as the blindfolded walk by Paul Graham here in Buxton on the parapet of the Crescent in 1937 when he nearly fell.

Finally, before we totally leave the Bofeys Indian Rope Trick, there was a 1932 development. Bofeys, seemingly as a joke, submitted the report of his performance of the trick to the Occult Committee of The Magic Circle who were vetting Indian Rope trick claims. At first it was taken seriously until it was realized that Bofeys had his tongue firmly in his cheek! However, the Bofeys performance at the 1931 convention had (I quote) ‘mystified men who knew most about the secrets of magic’ so it must have been a pretty good illusion.

On Saturday afternoon, the magicians left the Bofeys theatre – whatever it was - and moved to the Cheltenham Town Hall, a much larger auditorium, for the Children’s Show.
The show was for the benefit of the local children’s hospital and was well attended. The bill was full of well-known magical names – Oscar Paulson, Archie Byford, Bill Stickland with his ‘Tiny Tots Circus’, Ossie Rae, John Gambling and Alleyne Deane with Punch and Judy.

George Blake was due to appear but did not make it in time as he was travelling from Yorkshire with Dleisfen in one of Dleisfen’s famously unreliable cars – although maybe most cars were unreliable in 1931. His place was taken on the bill by Leslie Vincent who did a vent act. It could be that George had also been booked to do his vent act which I well remember from my early days of magic in Leeds.

In the evening there was the main public event of the convention – the Grand Public Entertainment as it was called – what we now know as the Gala show. The weather as previously mentioned was very hot and there was also an open air fete in the
town as well as another theatre and cinemas, so they wondered if they could fill the large town hall.

However, the magician’s fame had gone before them and the full house settled down what was later called the finest evening magical show ever put on by a British magical society.

As you can see here, it was a large bill of 15 acts. Ossie Rae was a good reporter of magical events and shows, albeit maybe not over critical, so quite full descriptions of all the acts on the bill can be found in the July 1931 *Linking Ring*. The bill with many famous magic names of the time including Ellis Stanyon, George Davenport, Bill Stickland and Ossie Rae himself. Time precludes us from describing all the acts, but maybe I could just comment on one or two.

The whole show was compered by Walter Kemp, who seemingly kept the audience in fits of laughter between each act. Walter was a popular and witty

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![A modern view of the interior of the Cheltenham Town Hall.](image)

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**SECOND DAY (continued)**

7.30 p.m.

**GRAND PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENT**

TOWN HALL  
CHELTENHAM

**PROGRAMME**

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<td>The man who swallows Razor Blades</td>
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*INTERVAL OF TEN MINUTES*

| Armour, assisted by Vonetta      | Chinese Magic |
| Roberta                         | The Dainty Miss of Mystery |
| Mr. and Miss Tree               | Royal Command Telepathists, in amazing Thought Transference and Musical Thoughts Transmission Demonstration |
| Oswald Rae                      | Bewilidring Humorist |
| Dalban                          | The Magician |
| Wm. G. Stickland, The Wessex Wizard | In Amusement and Amusement |

*STAGE DIRECTION - HARRY KAYE*
performer who always compered the Ring’s London dinners and smoking concerts. When Ossie was in Fort Wayne, he must have seen the then 12 year old Roberta and noted the impact she made.

She was the daughter of an American attorney, R.J. Byron – a non-magician but a magical enthusiast. Ossie maybe asked her to perform in England at his proposed convention and indeed she and her family arrived in England ready for the Cheltenham convention. Roberta, by the time of this convention, just 14, appeared in what was described as ‘a wonderfully costumed act with some delightful magic’. Her younger sister Marion, also appeared briefly with her. They charmed the audience, and in return they were equally charmed by lashings of English cream teas – no doubt Mrs Bofeys again! Roberta is important to be remembered as the first of many American acts that have appeared on our Gala shows, and she was also the first Hon. Member of the British Ring. She studied law, married, and was last heard of doing magic in 1945.

Another much anticipated performance on the bill was the mental act of Leo Tree and Miss Tree. They had been a big hit on the 1926 Royal Variety Show and were at the top of their powers. It was a musical thought transference act. Miss Tree – in reality I believe, Mrs Tree but a good play on words, was an accomplished pianist who could play any chosen melody ‘transmitted’ silently by any member of the audience, assisted no doubt by Leo Tree, a magician seemingly with a vibrant personality. Ron and Nancy Spencer who many of you will remember occasionally did a similar stunt as Nancy was also a good pianist.
As with all other acts, these top professionals had given their services for no fee. All in all, it had been an exceptional show, long remembered by all present. An after show party went on into the small hours at the Belle Vue hotel. The final day, Sunday, was always going to be somewhat of an anti-climax after the excitement of the day before, but a lot of fun was had in the grounds of the hotel with Lewis Davenport and the family film camera. We shall see that bit of film shortly.

Back at Westmon House, prizes for the competitions were awarded and then finally an annual general meeting – Dleisfen’s car having allowed him and George Blake to arrive just in time.

It was unanimously decided to ask Curly Bofeys if they could hold the 1932 in Cheltenham as he and Mrs Bofeys had made such a success of arrangements. And they very nobly agreed. Thanks were expressed to everyone involved and they had yet another of Mrs Bofey’s splendid lunches on the lawn. That was really the end of the convention, but as Ossie put it, the ‘old guards’ refused to go and put on an improvised show in the Bofey’s theatre including John Ramsay, Leo and Miss Tree and Dleisfen.

And so it ended. It garnished a lot of local press reporting, some of which is shown on the following two pages.
IN CHELtenham

FIRST CONVENTION OF Conjurers

Magician entertained magician at Westmon House, Bredworth-road, Charlton Kings, yesterday, where the first convention of British Ring 26 of the International Brotherhood of Magicians is being held.

These magicians, all of whom specialize in telepathy, leger-de-main, and all the arts of the conjurer, are enthusiasts. Their favourite topic is magic.

Last night they mystified each other. They hate nothing so much as formality, and, owing to the excellent organisation of the host, Professor T. Boeys, the delegates spent a very happy day.

Mr. Oswald Rae (president of Ring 26) opened the convention at 3 o'clock, and tea in the garden followed.

BEWILDERERS BEWILDERED

After tea there was a delightful exhibition of the highest form of the conjurer's art. The magicians bewildered each other and everybody else with a dazzling display of sleight-of-hand tricks, etc., and novel patter.

CHINESE RING TRICK

One of the most fascinating tricks shown was the manipulation of the Chinese rings. The Chinese ring trick is known to have existed for 6,000 years, and it has never failed. The magician makes you believe he joins rings of solid steel by merging metal through metal in a magical transformation. The rings are open to any inspection.

Competitions followed, for which many interesting prizes will be given.

Today, the second day of the convention, the public will be shown the mysteries of magic. There is an entertainment for the kiddies at the Town Hall in the afternoon, and in the evening a public entertainment. The magicians, each of whom is an entertainment on his own, will lead you through the whole gamut of your emotions except one—they will not bore you.

Mr. and Miss Tree, the celebrated Royal Command telepathists, are featuring in the programme to-night.
MAGICIANS LEAVE
CHELTENHAM

PRESENTATIONS TO
PROF. BOFEYS

The magicians whose visit to Cheltenham
has given us such a liberal supply of food
for thought, dispersed yesterday at the end
of the convention.

The concluding stages took place at the
house of their host, Professor Bofey, who
was the recipient of two presentations from
the members of British Ring 25 of the Inter-
national Brotherhood of Magicians, as a
token of their appreciation of a happy three
days in Cheltenham.

So pleased are they, in fact, that the
general wish is to hold next year’s conven-
tion again in Cheltenham.

During the last three days Cheltenham
has been privileged to see some of the most
famous magicians in the world.

It was interesting to notice the attitude
of one conjurer to another. The member-
ship of the I.B.M. is mainly composed of
amateurs, who learn sleight of hand for
sheer love of the art.

The motto of the convention was “Have
you seen this one?” Each man was able
to show the other something he had not
seen before.

A number of the delegates stayed in Chel-
tenham overnight.

Gloucestershire Echo 29 June 1931
Even a magical poem was written and appeared in the Gloucestershire Echo on 26 June 1931. It was introduced as:

**Ditty of the Day**

*Dark deeds will be happening in Cheltenham this weekend if what we hear is true.*

**THE MAGIC CIRCLE**

If you, dear reader, turn around to see your neighbour
Inside the bus you’re in, go up in smoke,
You needn’t think it’s under a delusion that you labour,
Or run, your eye consultant to invoke.

If, suddenly, your ‘gin and it’ becomes a shade of ‘Kola’
Or if your hand at bridge consists of ‘twos’;
Or if, returning late at night, find bunnies in your bowler,
Don’t sign the pledge, or give way to the blues.

You may be shocked to see your watch being slowly champed to pieces;
That man there may pull streamers from his ears;
But don’t suggest the witches’ pyre, or ask where the police is,
Bear up, be brave, and don’t give way to tears.

Remember, if your best brunette’s top-nob becomes a Titian’s,
Or if your trusted cashiers disappear,
Don’t worry, it will turn out right; it’s just that the Magicians
Are holding a summer conference here.

An interesting thing to note about this poem is its title –The Magic Circle – not the IBM or the British Ring. The Magic Circle was only formed 26 years before this convention, but already it seems to have become the generic name for magical societies.
Luckily for us there was a cine camera at the proceedings. We learn from Oswald Rae’s write up of events in the July 1931 *Linking Ring* that:

‘Sunday morning at the Belle Vue resulted in some good fun with a movie camera. Lewis Davenport took shots of the crowd doing this, that and the other, on the lawn. It will be a jolly film methinks, I am looking forward to seeing it.’

And now let’s look at the Davenport family film taken on that Sunday morning, with my grateful thanks to the Davenport family collection. Some of the filming was also done at the Bofeys’ house. See how many personalities you can recognise, but you have to be quick! [This film cannot be accessed via this PDF. Serious researchers are welcome to contact the curator of this website to enquire about access. Some stills from the film have been added at the end of this PDF.]

So there they all were, 85 years ago, larking about and enjoying themselves at the first convention as we have all done at so many subsequent conventions. There have been many triumphs over these 85 years and some mishaps. And now we are here in Buxton for the 5th time for our 80th convention. We have been here before in 1937, 1947, 1959 and 2013. Buxton has had some notable firsts – not all good. It was the longest ever public queue for a Ring Gala show at this theatre in 1937 (reputedly one mile long, but unlikely) – Levante, always popular here was the top of the bill. In 1959 it was the longest ever stage competition with 27 acts starting at 8pm and finishing at 1.55am the following morning. Also in 1959 was the longest ever wait for service at the Convention banquet – so much so that many left in dinner jackets went for fish and chips. We hope that will not be repeated for those of us dining tonight! So to my final remarks and back to Westmon house where it all happened. I am going to finish by cheating a little – I am going to use my own words in the final paragraphs of *Linking Britain*, my history of the Ring, as I think they sum up neatly the whole convention story. Here is what I wrote.

‘In 2008 I was standing in a lane between two rows of cottages in Charlton Kings, Cheltenham wondering whether I had found the site of the entrance to Westmon House. As I was about to photograph it, a man emerged from one of the cottages and I asked him if I was correct. He confirmed that it was indeed the old drive to the Bofeys home, Westmon House. Not only that, he then told me that his mother had lived in the first cottage and as a little girl in 1931 had seen the outside stunt of the Indian
Rope Trick. She was still alive, and although now in a care home, still talked about the exiting times in 1931 when “the magicians came to town”. For me this was a magic moment. I had found the site of the first Convention and suddenly the benign ghosts of Bofeys, Rae, Crombie, and all the others seemed to be around.

The woman who was that little girl all those years ago had remembered a magic moment in her life. The British Ring has provided magic moments for many, many others over all these years. Long may it continue to do so.

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Some stills taken off the Davenport cine film are shown on the next two pages. The photograph on the left, taken at the 1931 convention, shows Lewis Davenport on the right, holding the strap of what may well be the case for the cine camera on which the film was shot.

_The people in the photograph are, from left to right: Wally Davenport, unknown, Stanley Collins, Gus Fowler and Lewis Davenport._
Mr and Mrs Byron standing behind Marion, with Roberta on the right.

George (‘Gilly’) Davenport producing a coin from underneath Roberta’s chin.

Roberta.

Mr and Miss Tree.

Mr and Miss Tree.

Mr and Miss Tree.
The many faces of John Ramsey.