

Magicians in Wyn Davenport's autograph albums

presented by

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at the

IBM British Ring Convention, Bournemouth
25 September 2014

John Davenport and I inherited three autograph albums from Wyn Davenport. The albums are ninety years old now and they're rather fragile, so they had to be scanned before I could do any work on them. John did that for me, for which I'm grateful – it was a long job.

We've always enjoyed looking through Wyn's autograph albums - but to my mind a collection of autographs isn't very interesting unless you know something about the person who collected them, and the circumstances in which they were collected. So you won't see many autographs in the next fifty minutes, but you'll hear about Wyn Davenport, and some of the magicians she encountered, and the places where the magicians worked. There's a trick I'd like to tell you about, too.

Wyn was the daughter of Lewis Davenport, the magician and dealer. John Davenport is her nephew. When I first met her, she was not long turned sixty – about the same age as I am now, in fact. She was living with her mother Winifred in a big house in Kent called Ivydene.



This photograph was taken in the 1930s, when the house looked rather grand. Forty years later, when I went to Ivydene, it was looking sorry for itself. The family hadn't been able to keep up with repairs and maintenance, and the house was going downhill.

Eventually Winifred and Wyn had to leave Ivydene and move to a small flat in Tonbridge. In 1981 Winifred celebrated her 90th birthday.



This photograph was taken in her flat – Winifred on the left, Wyn on the right. Winifred died later that year, leaving Wyn on her own in the flat in Tonbridge. John and I used to visit her from time to time and take her out to lunch.

Wyn was always happy to talk about the old days. She'd toured the music halls with Lewis Davenport's magic act in the 1920s, and she'd been to South Africa and South America. She'd worked in Davenport's magic business, too. We were glad to hear her stories and she enjoyed telling them.

Wyn never liked this photograph of herself. But it's as I remember her, when I knew her in her old age. She had a lot to put up with – she was lonely after her mother died, and she had a great deal of ill health - but she was always pleased to see us when we visited her.



This is Wyn as a young girl, photographed on Wanstead Flats in London when her family was living nearby. That cheerful smile was Wyn's trademark. I don't know how old she was when this photograph was taken, but she was given her first autograph album when she was ten years old.

When Wyn died in 1991, she left the contents of her flat to John. It was crammed with things that she'd rescued from the big house, Ivydene – more furniture than you'd think possible given the size of the flat, but also posters and programmes and old letters - all sorts of things. Among them were her three autograph albums two small ones and a large black one.

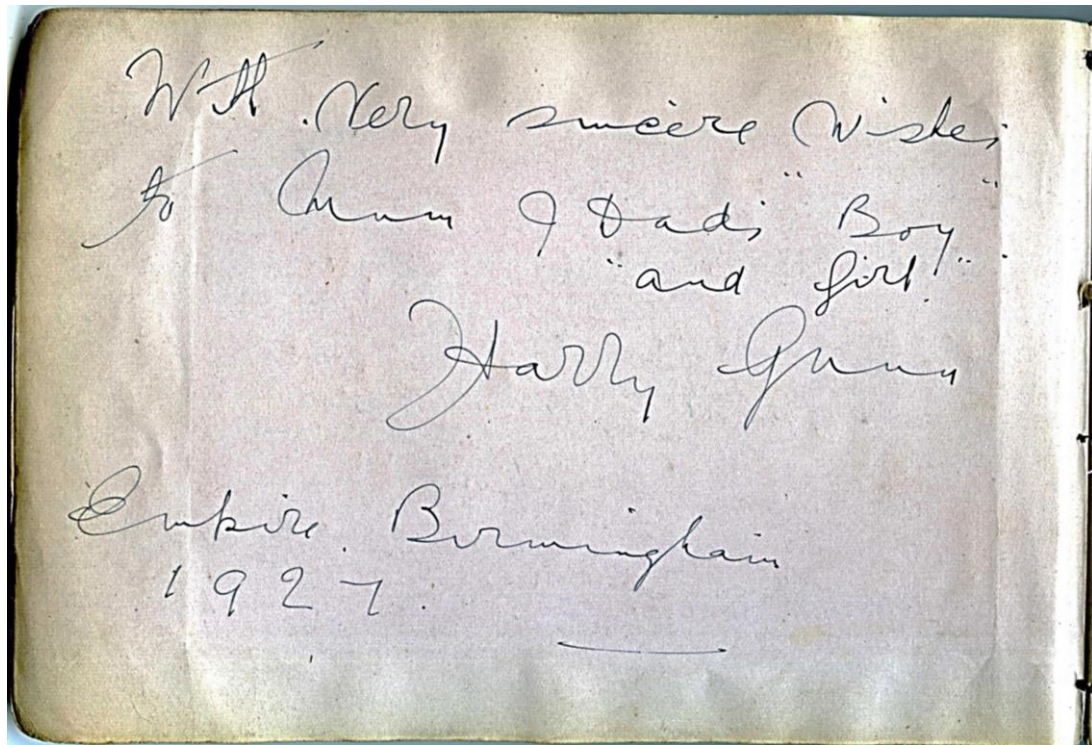
The two small albums were given to her as Christmas presents in 1924 and 1926.



These photographs of Lewis and Winifred Davenport are from the large black album – they’re publicity photographs for the stage act. Lewis had them made into postcards, as performers often did, and the postcards are pasted onto the first two pages of the album.

Lewis’s page is just signed “Dad”. The inscription on Winifred’s page says “With love to Gus and Win. Alhambra, London, April 22, 1926.” And it’s signed: “Mum”.

Gus was Wyn’s brother. In April 1926 he was a lad of 13 and Wyn was 11. I like to think of the two of them racing round the theatres they visited, badgering the performers for their autographs – though I’m sure that in reality they were very polite, because you had to be in those days.



This autograph is on the third page of the large album, the page after Winifred's. Harry Gunn appeared in the same show as Lewis Davenport at Birmingham Empire in February 1927. I think he must have been tickled by the glamorous photographs signed "Dad" and "Mum", because he wrote:

With very sincere wishes to Mum & Dad's "Boy and Girl".

At Birmingham Empire Harry Gunn's act was billed as "Seaside Silhouettes". Elsewhere I've seen it described as "comedy song scenas" [poster for the London Coliseum, week beginning 22 Sep 1924]. So he wasn't a magician.

In fact there aren't many magicians in Wyn's autograph albums. It was very unusual to have two magicians on a music hall bill – so Lewis Davenport wouldn't usually be working with another magician. To illustrate this, I'll show you a typical music hall poster.



This is for the Palace, Bradford, week beginning 1 June 1925. It says at the top:

SPLENDID VARIETY COMPANY.

By the 1920s, the terms "music hall" and "variety" were used interchangeably. People might talk about "going to the music hall", but the show they saw when they got there was variety – nothing like the original music halls of the mid-Victorian period. And a "music hall" of the 1920s was a proper theatre, with tip-up seats and a fully equipped stage – again, nothing like the mid-Victorian music halls.

Does anybody remember a television programme called *The Good Old Days*? With Leonard Sachs as the music hall chairman? [Ran from 1953 to 1983.]

Well, the music halls of the 1920s weren't like that. Music hall chairmen went out of fashion around 1900, and variety shows of the 1920s didn't even have a compere.

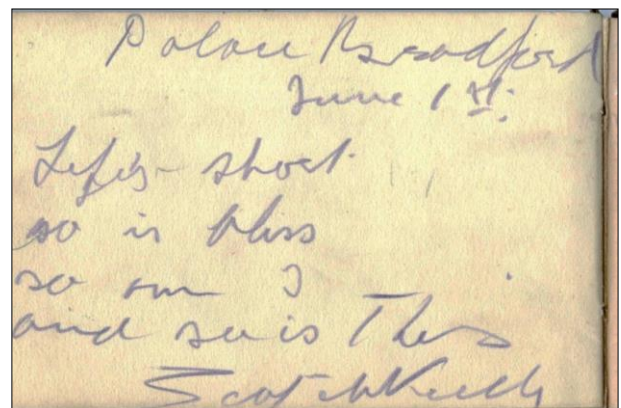
Looking at the details of the Bradford show, Lewis Davenport was joint top of the bill. Bear in mind that music halls varied enormously in status. In the 1920s Lewis Davenport appeared at some of the number one halls, but he never topped the bill there. As a general rule of thumb, if he did top the bill – as at the Palace, Bradford – it wasn't one of the best halls. But that doesn't mean that he didn't have a good act.

The other joint top was a comedian named Scotch Kelly. He was billed as:

The miniature comedy comet.

Gus and Wyn asked him to sign their album and he wrote:

Life is short/So is bliss/So am I/And so is this.



Scotch Kelly's autograph album page



There were seven acts in the show. Two or three of them were classed as speciality acts: Lewis Davenport, the Benedetti Brothers, and possibly Rose and Bud. Dorothy Colston was a singer, and the other acts were comedians of various kinds.

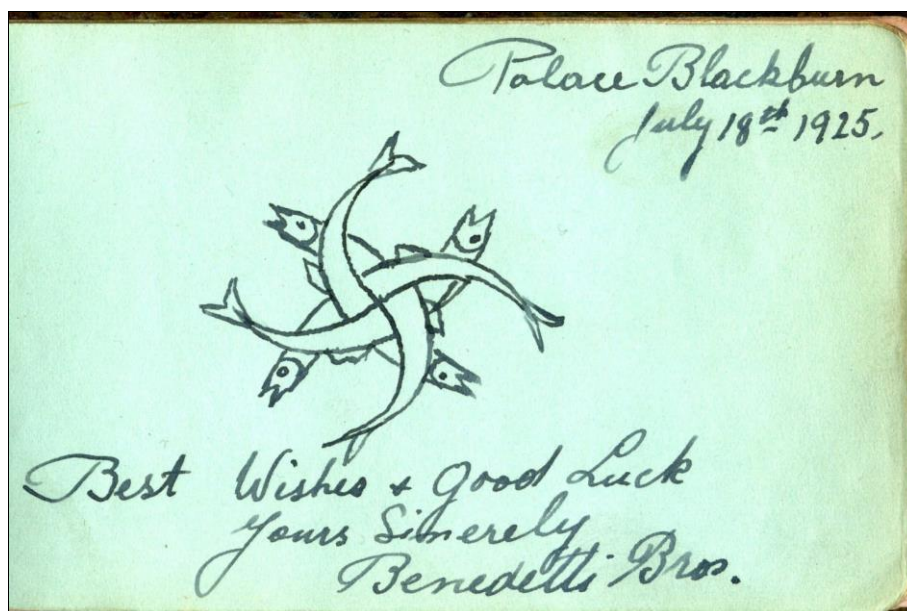
In music hall and variety circles, the term “speciality act” included all sorts of acts: magicians, jugglers, ventriloquists, acrobats, and so on – broadly, any act with a special skill. There might be several speciality acts on a variety bill – but with that range of specialities to choose from, no music hall would book two magicians for the same week.

Lewis Davenport had many friends who were speciality acts. I’m sure he respected their skill, just as they respected his. But the music hall world was tough on speciality acts – they didn’t get the prestige and the financial rewards that their skill deserved.

The Benedetti Brothers are interesting. They were billed as:

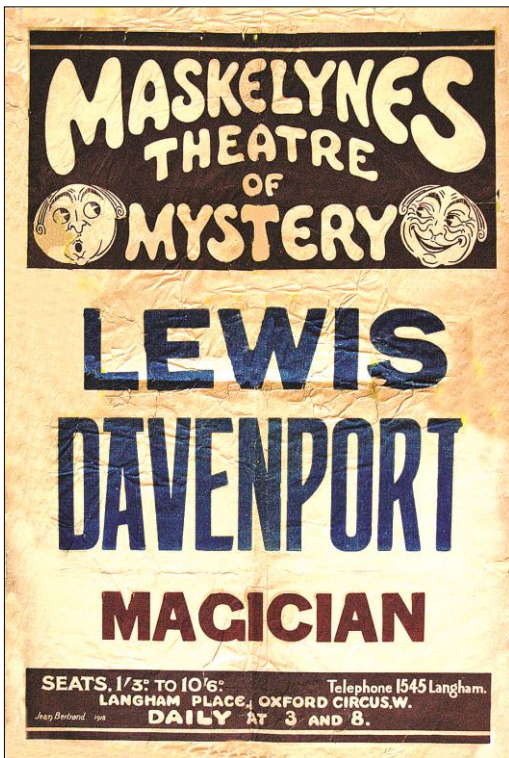
Italy’s funniest comedians and violinists,
introducing their own original one-violin duet.

Six weeks after their Bradford date they were at the Palace, Blackburn and Lewis Davenport happened to be on the bill with them. Gus and Wyn asked the Benedettis for their autograph and here it is



.... with a rather nice drawing of three intertwined fish.

Variety was international and in principal performers could get work overseas, especially if they had a silent act – in other words, didn’t use patter. Lewis Davenport’s act was silent and he did take bookings on the Continent – though not as many as you might expect, given the amount of time he spent in Germany on business. He took his act to South Africa and South America as well, but only for one season each.

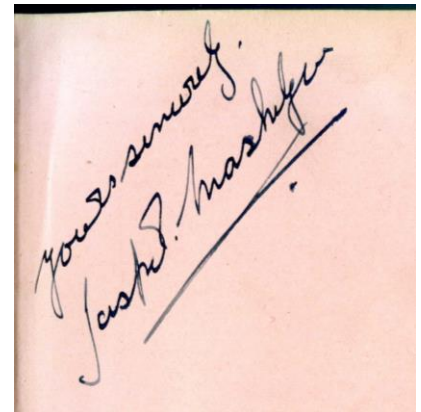


One place where Lewis did work with other magicians was Maskelyne's Theatre in London – St George's Hall. He appeared there many times and at the end of his career he claimed over 3,000 performances under the Maskelyne banner. I don't actually believe that figure, but he was certainly at St George's Hall a lot.

When Wyn Davenport was given her first autograph album at the end of 1924, St George's Hall was going through a major change of management. J N Maskelyne, the founder of Maskelyne's Theatre, was long gone. His son, Nevil Maskelyne, had just died unexpectedly and Nevil's four sons – the third generation - were struggling to keep their theatre in business.

One thing they had in their favour was a pool of experienced, reliable performers, some of whom are in Wyn's autograph albums. The other thing that helped was that the youngest of the brothers was Jasper Maskelyne. He was a born entertainer and showman, a worthy successor to the great J N Maskelyne.

Gus and Wyn must have been rather pleased when they got Jasper Maskelyne's autograph. It's not very exciting, though. He just signed his name without giving the date or the name of the theatre. There's no photograph, either – but that doesn't matter because we have plenty of photographs of Jasper in the Davenport Collection.



This one's my favourite. Jasper was very good looking by the standards of the time. To add to his appeal, he dressed like a fashion plate.

<p>1. Overture by the Orchestra. (Conductor ... JACK GOLDY).</p> <hr/> <p>2. JACK LE DAIR, The Unusual Conjuror. BRIGHTER MAGIC. Aided and abetted by Miss Edna Pryce.</p> <hr/> <p>3. LEWIS DAVENPORT, The Bewilderist. Presenting a series of Bewildering Novelties. Supported by Winifred Wynne & Co.</p> <hr/> <p>4. EDWARD VICTOR, Vendor of Hand-made Hamour.</p> <hr/> <p>5. JASPER MASKELYNE with Miss Cecil Home-Douglas Presents A Startling Illusion: "BANG!" Invented and produced by Jasper Maskelyne. Designed and constructed by Noël Maskelyne. Also: (1) RINGING THE ROD. (2) HOW TO BECOME A MAGICIAN. (3) "AND SO TO BED."</p>	 Edward Victor.  Jack Le Dair.	<p>"HULLO MASKELYNE" (SECOND EDITION). A new "All Magic" Show in Eleven Swindles. <i>Invented, written and produced by OSWALD WILLIAMS.</i></p> <p>Swindle No. 1. "HULLO EVERYBODY" Oswald Williams and Jasper Maskelyne will muster the Company.</p> <p>Swindle No. 2. "WE'VE BEEN TO A SHOP" The aforementioned couple will indulge in a chat on Magic.</p> <p>Swindle No. 3. "THE MAN FROM PENNSYLTUCKI" Jack Le Dair and Harry Hemsley will play "shop."</p> <p>Swindle No. 4. "THREE WORN OUT WIZARDS" What Messrs. Maskelyne, Williams and Yettmah may be like in a few years time.</p> <p>Swindle No. 5. "MEMORIES" <table border="0"> <tr><td>The Professor</td><td>...</td><td>...</td><td>...</td><td>Harry Hemsley.</td></tr> <tr><td>His Friend</td><td>...</td><td>...</td><td>...</td><td>Cyril Yettmah.</td></tr> <tr><td>His Butler</td><td>...</td><td>...</td><td>...</td><td>Jack Le Dair.</td></tr> <tr><td>His Son</td><td>...</td><td>...</td><td>...</td><td>Edward Victor.</td></tr> </table> Scene ... The Professor's Study.</p> <p>Swindle No. 6. "THE DISAPPEARING HANDKERCHIEF" Oswald Williams will break all the rules of Conjuring, and show you "How it is done."</p> <p>Swindle No. 7. "EVERYDAY MAGIC" Edward Victor will conjure with all sorts and conditions of things.</p> <p>Swindle No. 8. "THE WIZARD OF BAGDAD" Cyril Yettmah in a new role.</p> <p>Swindle No. 9. "MAGIC A LA MODE" Showing how a few more mortals might conjure.</p> <p>Swindle No. 10. "TAKE A CARD" Oswald Williams will insist upon showing Jasper Maskelyne a Card Trick.</p> <p>Swindle No. 11. "THE SIT ROUND" A Magical Minstrel Show by the whole merry crowd.</p>	The Professor	Harry Hemsley.	His Friend	Cyril Yettmah.	His Butler	Jack Le Dair.	His Son	Edward Victor.
The Professor	Harry Hemsley.																		
His Friend	Cyril Yettmah.																		
His Butler	Jack Le Dair.																		
His Son	Edward Victor.																		

My guess at the date of Jasper's autograph is early 1927, during the run of a magical revue entitled *Hullo Maskelyne* at St George's Hall.

This is the programme for the show. The first half was the ordinary St George's Hall offering, with magic acts by Jack Le Dair, Lewis Davenport, Edward Victor and Jasper Maskelyne. The revue was in the second half.

The original concept was that the cast of the revue should include all the magicians who appeared in the first half. But Lewis Davenport couldn't or wouldn't adapt to the revue format. Unfortunately for the St George's Hall management, he had a contract for a four-week season there, and he'd already agreed to postpone it once. So they were stuck with him. He gave his usual music hall act in the first half, and didn't appear in the revue.

The programme describes the revue as "A new all-magic show in eleven swindles; invented, written and produced by Oswald Williams". In the cast were Jasper Maskelyne, Oswald Williams, Harry Hemsley, Cyril Yettmah, Jack Le Dair, and Edward Victor – all of whom signed Wyn's autograph album.

This was the second edition of *Hullo Maskelyne*. The first edition did well, but it was an expensive production. Money was short at St George's Hall in these later years, hence the more economical second edition.



These are four of the performers in the revue. On the left we have Jasper Maskelyne and his assistant, Cecil Home-Douglas. The two gentlemen on the right are Oswald Williams and Harry Hemsley – who I’ll talk about later. For now, I’ll tell you a bit more about Oswald Williams’ revue.

Outside Maskelyne’s Theatre, in the wider entertainment business, a revue was a self-contained show in a large number of short scenes. The emphasis was on comedy, glamour and spectacle.

The second edition of *Hullo Maskelyne* had eleven short scenes, which Oswald Williams called Swindles. There was comedy in plenty, and glamour was provided by Jasper Maskelyne and Cecil Home Douglas. But spectacle was lacking. The only scene which might have been remotely spectacular was Swindle No.8, in which Cyril Yettmah appeared as “The Wizard of Baghdad”.

But it was a fast-moving, up-to-date sort of show – and it was inexpensive to produce. The Maskelynes made much use of magical revues like this one in their last years at St George’s Hall.



This is Wyn's autograph album page for Oswald Williams. He was a very inventive magician, greatly respected in the world of magic. In the early part of his career he did a lot of music hall work – though I'm sorry to say that music hall buffs don't remember him. He was a speciality act, after all.

His first booking at St George's Hall was in 1917 and he was an important figure there in the 1920s and early 1930s. He became the resident magician and producer, and eventually the Maskelynes made him a director of their family company. He was still with them when Maskelyne's Ltd went into receivership in 1935.

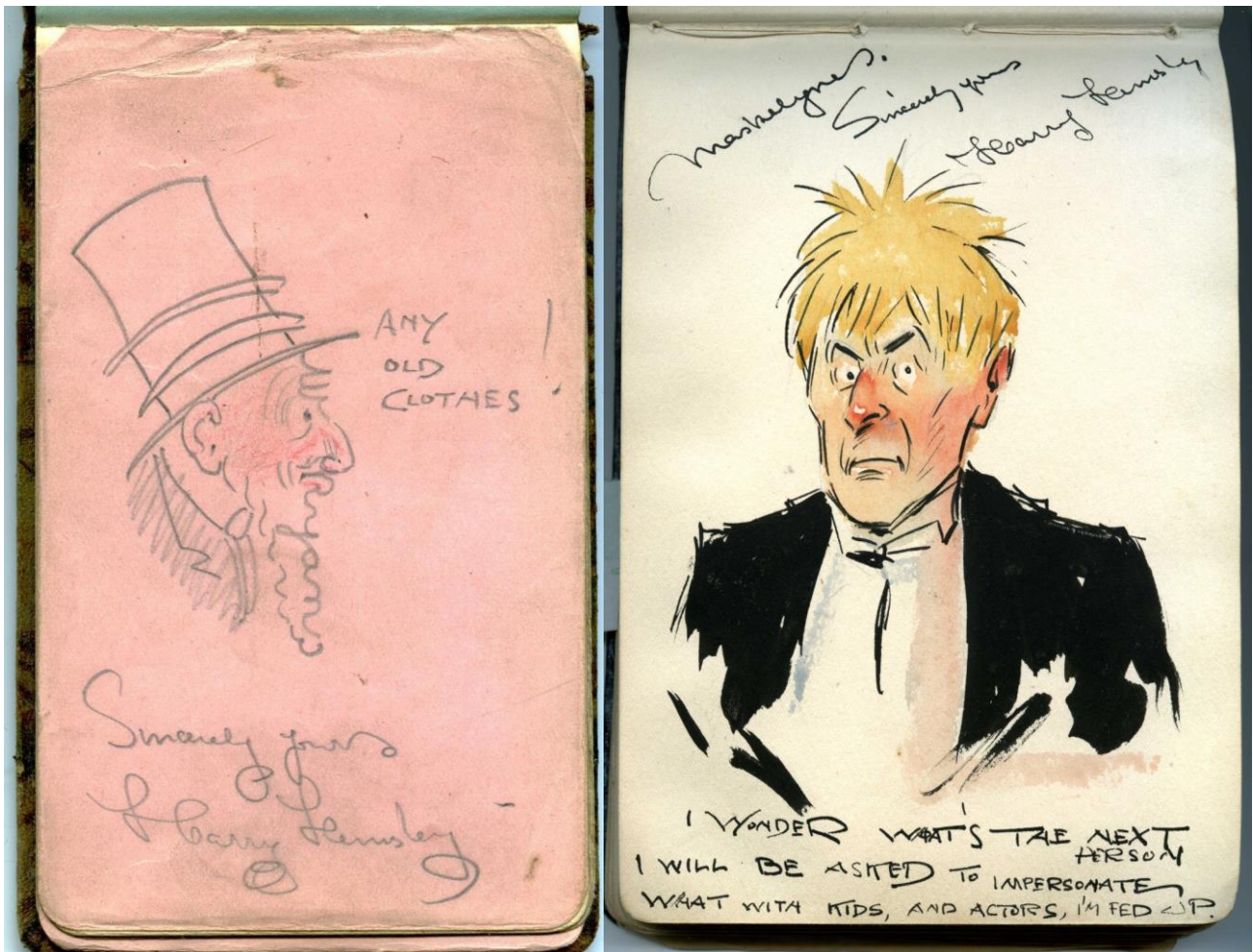


I promised to tell you about Harry Hemsley. Photographs of him are hard to find, and I'm grateful to David Hibberd for helping me out with this one. It's from an entertainment agency brochure in the Magic Circle Archive. The same photograph was used in the St George's Hall programmes in the 1920s. I rather think that it was out of date by then – it's what Eddie Dawes calls the Peter Pan effect. Entertainers don't bother to change their publicity photographs as they get older, and the photographs never grow up.

Harry Hemsley was a child impersonator, not a magician, but he worked with Oswald Williams behind the scenes as well as on stage. Oswald Williams' repertoire included a comedy item entitled Crazy Inventions. Some of the Crazy Inventions were Hemsley's ideas.

Harry Hemsley had a very long career, on the stage, on radio and on television. At the time of his

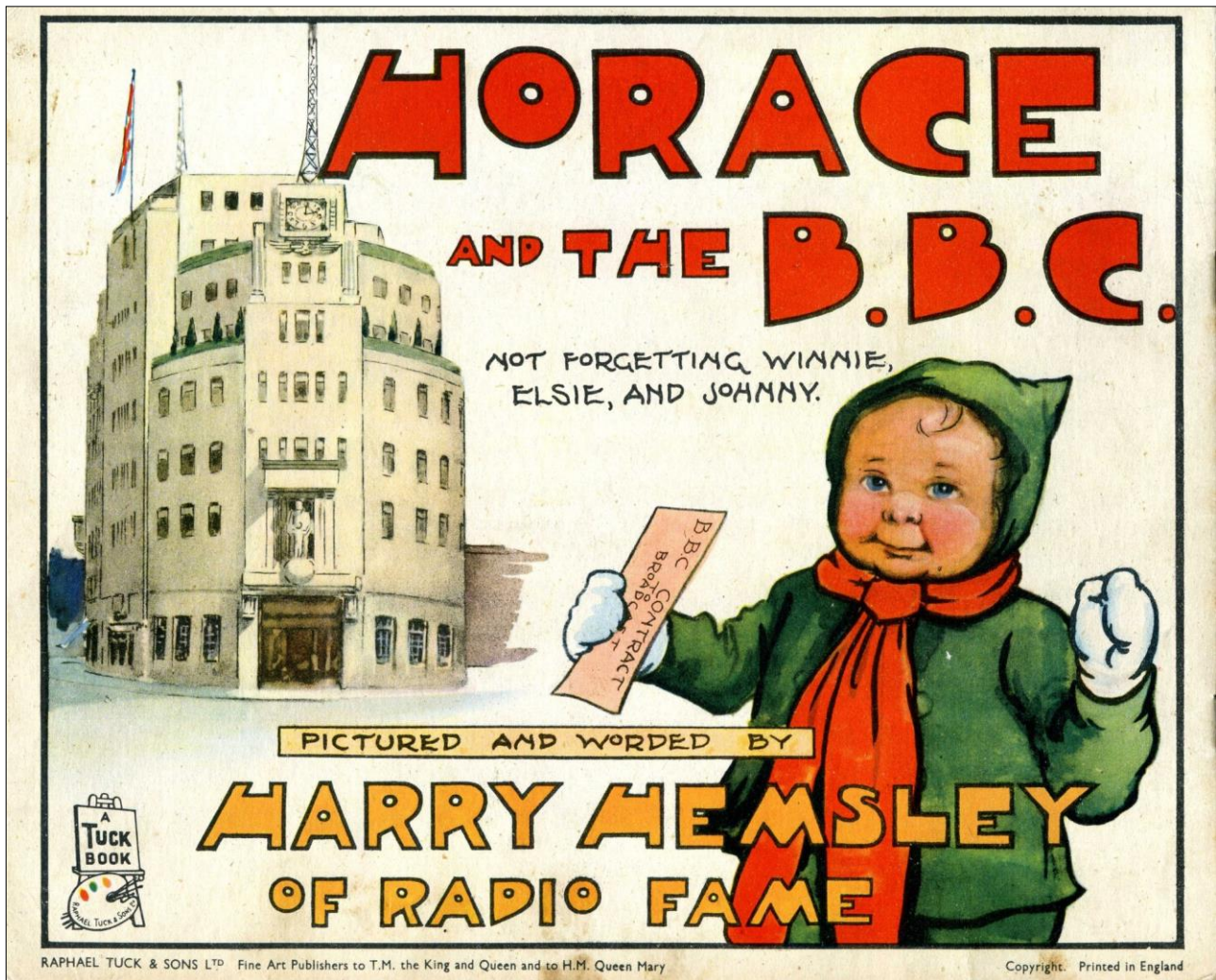
death in 1951, at the age of 73, he was under contract to appear in the BBC television programme *Children's Hour*. He was a remarkable man.



Harry Hemsley appears twice in Wyn's autograph albums. The left hand page is from one of the small albums. My guess is that it dates from 1925 or 1926, when Harry Hemsley was in the same show at St George's Hall as Lewis Davenport. His act was billed as "Child Life and Eggstraordinary Art", which suggests that he did lightning cartoons as well as his child impersonations. It's possible that the "Any old clothes" drawing is one of his lightning cartoons.

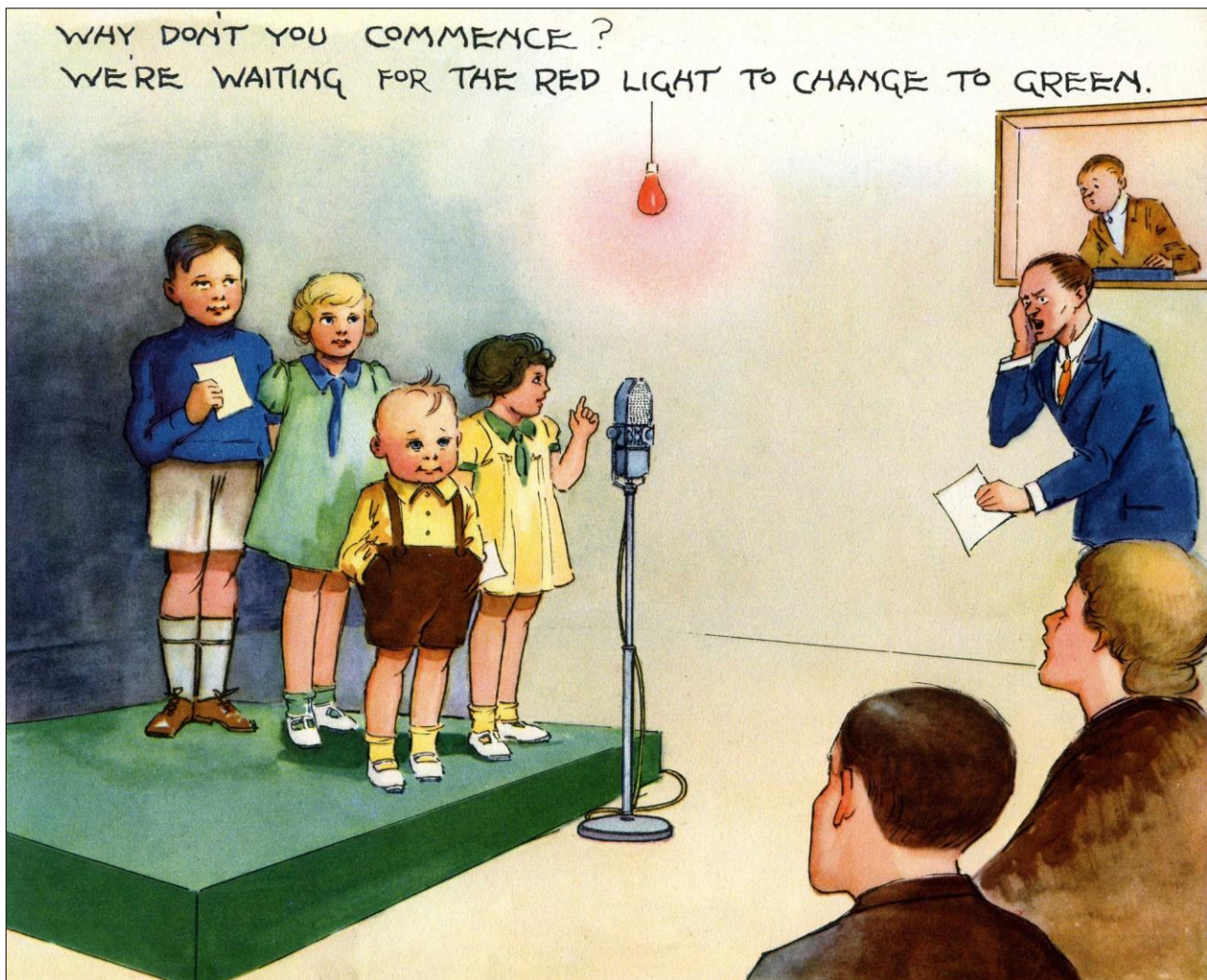
The right hand page is from the large black album. Hemsley must have got out his box of paints to do this page. It was a lot of trouble to go to for a children's autograph album, but theatre work involves a great deal of waiting around and perhaps he was glad of something to do. Perhaps he enjoyed drawing.

Harry Hemsley came from a family of theatrical scene painters and he was a talented artist as well as a successful performer. We're delighted to have these two examples of his work in Wyn's autograph albums.



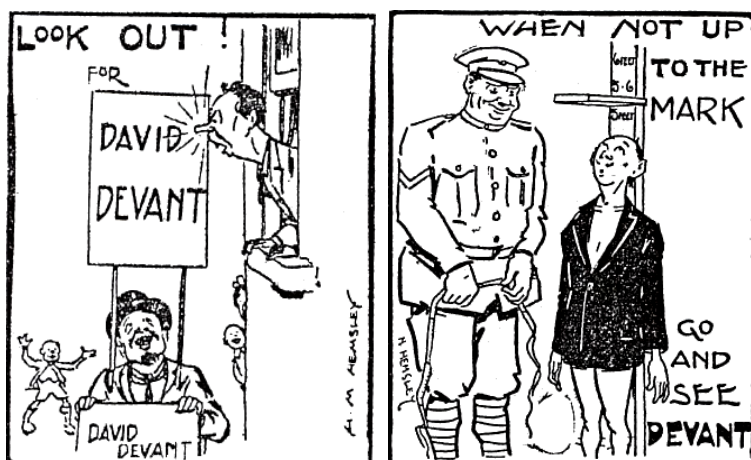
This book was published by Raphael Tuck in 1947. It's a sideways look at the BBC as Hemsley knew it. He did a lot of work for Radio Luxemburg before the second world war, and he might have found the BBC rather stuffy in comparison.

Hemsley had an imaginary family of children, Johnny, Elsie, Winnie and Horace. Horace spoke baby-gibberish which only Winnie could understand. Hemsley's catchphrase was "What does Horace say?"



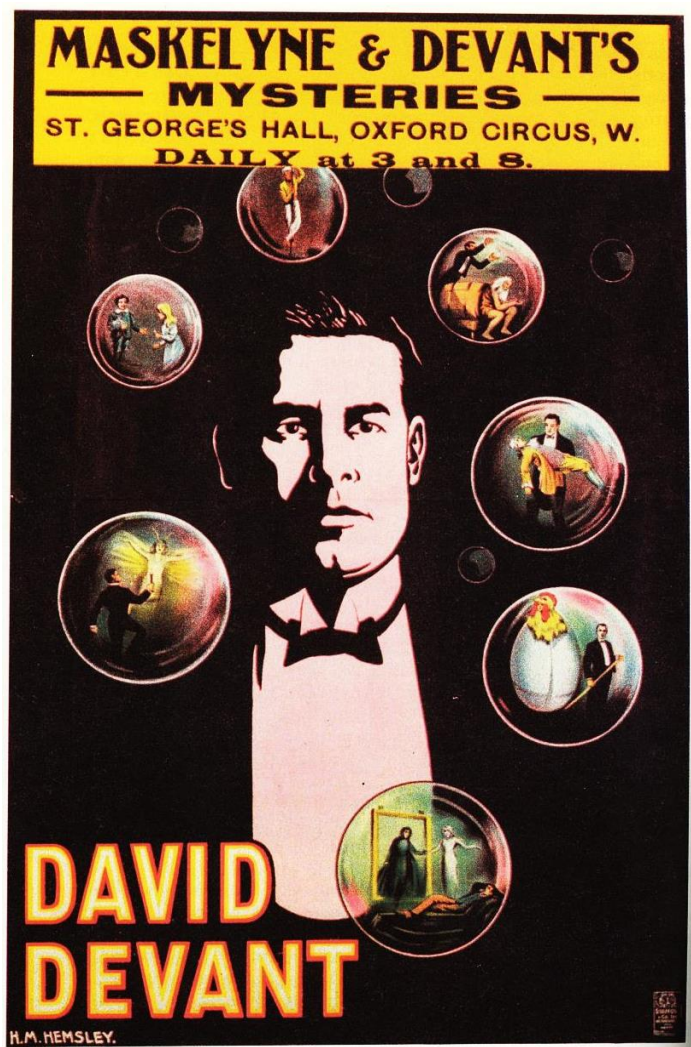
This is one of the cartoons from Hemsley's book. The four children are about to make a broadcast. The red light has come on, to show that they're on air and someone asks, "Why don't you commence?" Winnie replies, "We're waiting for the red light to turn to green."

Earlier in his career Harry Hemsley did some work for David Devant.



These cartoons are in the Devant scrapbooks in the Magic Circle Archive. They're two of about twenty different cartoons which Devant used in his newspaper publicity towards the end of the first world war – hence the wartime flavour of the one on the right. If you thought you could get away from the first world war by coming to the IBM convention – well, you can't.

The Magic Circle Archive doesn't have Hemsley's original artwork for these cartoons. The images here were scanned from press cuttings by David Hibberd and cleaned up electronically by Karl Bartoni. They're still a bit fuzzy, but the original newspaper cartoons are very small. David and Karl have done a splendid job.



Also in the Magic Circle Archive is this poster, which Harry Hemsley designed for David Devant. It's a striking image and the pictures in the bubbles show some of Devant's tricks and illusions.

Devant retired from the stage around 1920, a few years before Wyn had her first autograph album - so we **don't** have his autograph.

The next performer I want to talk about belongs to the generation after Devant.



Herbert J Collings was a successful society entertainer and a founder member of the Magic Circle. He was held in great affection there and he became the Magic Circle president in 1928. He held that office until he died thirty years later. He was also president of the IBM for a short time in 1948, after Oswald Rae bowed out.

The term society entertainer needs some explanation. Quite simply, it was an entertainer who did private work. When Herbert J Collings was a young man, it was said that a society entertainer might be booked for a party at a posh house in the West End of London one day – and the next day he might be performing at a Sunday school treat in a poverty-stricken East End parish.

Like many society entertainers, Herbert J Collings was versatile. He was a patter magician and he could do stage magic or drawing room magic as required. One of his specialities was plate spinning.



This is a young Herbert J, doing his plate spinning in front of a photographer's backcloth.

Plate spinning is a juggling speciality and perhaps its best-known exponent was the great J N Maskelyne. J N presented a plate spinning act in his very last show at St George's Hall at the age of 77.

Herbert J presented his plate spinning act at St George's Hall on two occasions. The first was a special show that the Magic Circle put on in 1923, when they celebrated Maskelyne's golden jubilee [it was the annual Grand Séance].

The second occasion was in the ordinary shows at St George's Hall, for a short season in 1927. Herbert J Collings appeared twice in the show: in the first half with plate spinning and drawing room magic, and in the second half with Chinese magic.



This is a mature Herbert J doing his Chinese act at a rather posh children's party. It was a comedy patter act in pidgin English, usually under the name of Col Ling Soo. The effect of the gorgeous Chinese robes is rather marred by the horn-rimmed spectacles, but it was all part of the fun. It's clear that everyone at this party is having a splendid time.

When he did the Col Ling Soo act on stage, he'd ring a small brass bell to point each joke. It was a running gag and apparently it always got laughs. There's no sign of a bell in this photograph, but perhaps it wasn't needed at a private party.

...



My next performer, Okito, was a successful stage magician. The likely date of his autograph is 1931. He was a Dutchman named Theo Bamberg and he had a silent Chinese act. He belonged to the sixth generation of the Bamberg dynasty of magicians. He was a customer of Davenport's magic shop and a friend of the family.

In the month of January 1931, Lewis Davenport and Okito were both performing in Berlin. Okito was at the Scala, Lewis Davenport was at the Wintergarten.

Vorstellungen:
Täglich 8^{1/2} Uhr
 Sonnabend u. Sonntag
 2 Vorstellungen
 4⁰⁰ Uhr und 8^{1/2} Uhr
 4⁰⁰ Uhr kleine Preise

Wintergarten
 Januar 1931

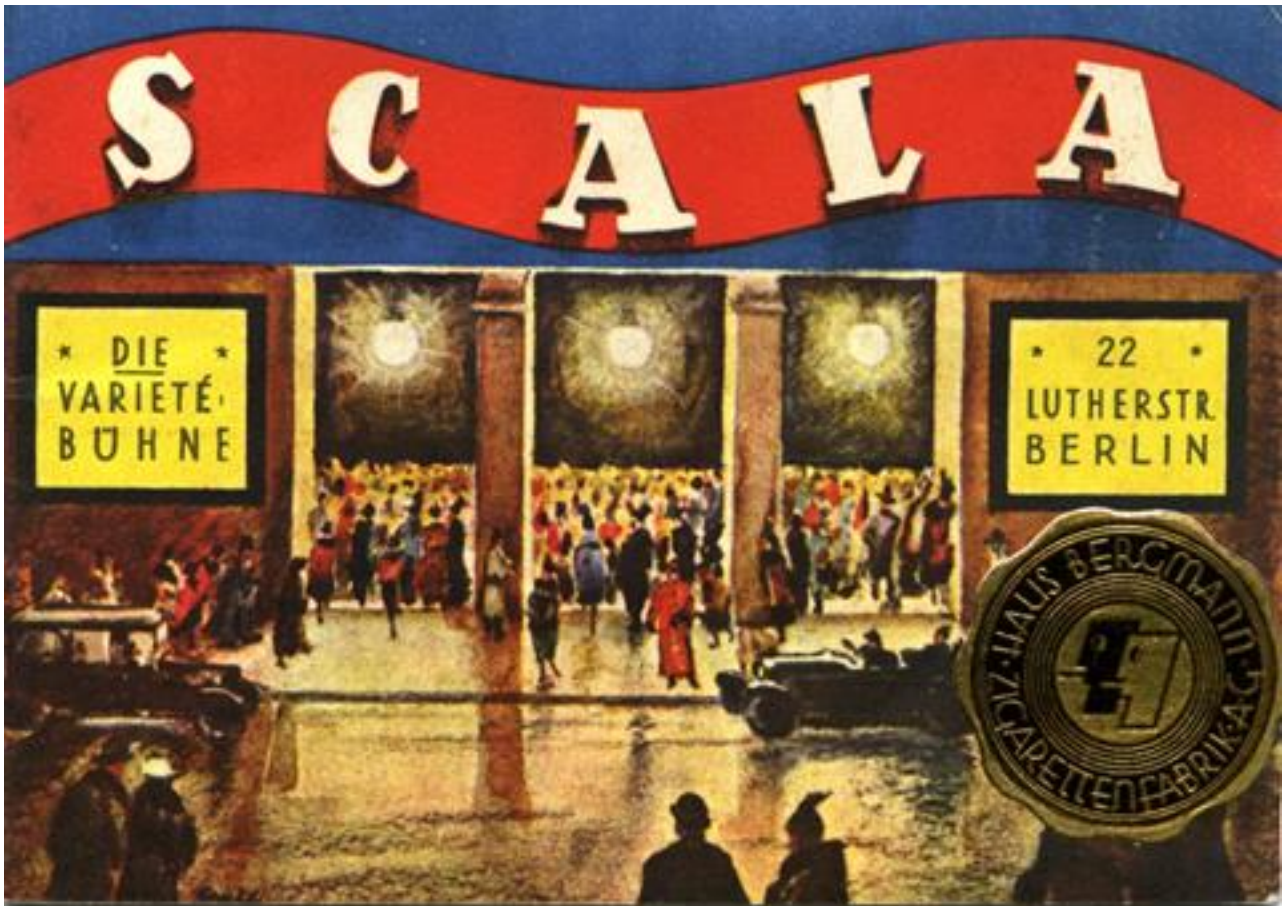
Vorverkauf an der Tageskasse
 Dorotheenstr. 16 ab 10 Uhr
 vormittags ununterbrochen. /
 Bei Tietz, Wertheim, Karstadt,
 K. d. W., Invalidendank und in
 allen Hotels und Biletbüros.

Die Welt-Sensation	3 CODONAS	Muß man sehen
5 SONGS	8 SUPERB'S	
Das berühmte Clown-Trio Barraceta	Der Manipulator Davenport	
Breker's Bärenschau	Leon Rabello Der jugendliche Jongleur	
Nesle und Partner Exzentriks	Wintergarten-Film-Revue	
! LILLIAN LEITZEL !		
Das führende Varieté		

Rauchen gefährlich!

Theater-Kaffe
 A4Zentrum
 2819

This is the poster for the Wintergarten. Lewis Davenport was billed as "the manipulator Davenport". The Wintergarten was a very good date. While Lewis was there, he wrote a series of letters to variety agents and other people who might book him. The tone of the letters was "Look, I'm at the Wintergarten, Berlin. I'm doing really well. How about giving me some work?"



This is the programme for the Scala, where Okito was appearing. He was billed as “Chinese magician and illusionist”.

. The cover illustration of this programme - with the well-heeled, fashionably dressed audience, and the lights, and the posh cars – tells us that the Scala was a good theatre, just like the Wintergarten. It puts me in mind of a 1920s programme card that we have for the Victoria Palace in London

Germany and Britain both had serious economic problems in 1931. They were rooted in the first world war and they were solved temporarily when both countries rearmed for the second world war. The glitz and glamour that you see here was no more than surface froth.



While Okito was at the Scala, he sent this postcard to Lewis Davenport at the Wintergarten. The message on the back is:

Hotel St Petersburg
Mittelstrasse, Berlin

Dear Louis

Kindly drop me a line to the above mentioned address where I can see you **after** the show, as I have no time in the daytime. I will be delighted to have a chat with you. Remember me kindly to Mrs D and good luck to both of you.

Cordially yours
Okito.

Variety artists usually had their evening meal after the show, so it's possible that Lewis Davenport and Okito had a late dinner together. In those days of live entertainment, professional entertainers lived and worked at different times from ordinary people. They were often free during the day, when ordinary people were working, and they worked in the evening, when ordinary people were enjoying their leisure time. They often said, "Pros are different" – and they were.

If you want to read more about Okito and his life on tour, I can recommend David Bamberg's book, *Illusion Show*. It's actually the autobiography of Okito's son, who spent much of his career touring South America under the name of Fu Manchu. It's clear from David Bamberg's book that Okito wasn't an easy person to live with, still less to have as a father - though I'm tempted to believe that David wasn't the most tractable of sons.



Wyn Davenport as a young woman

When Lewis Davenport met Okito in Berlin in January 1931, Wyn Davenport was sixteen years old and very much the young lady. She played an active part in Lewis's stage act as Winifred's dresser.

Later in 1931 Lewis added Lyle's Chocolate Box to his act. It needed a girl assistant, and Wyn was the obvious person. We have in the family collection a telegram which Cecil Lyle sent to Lewis Davenport at the Grand Theatre, Bolton on 5 October 1931: "Wish you luck with box."

The Davenports and the Lyles were friends, and clearly they'd come to some arrangement over the performing rights to the Chocolate Box.

Nowadays there are two Lyle's chocolate boxes in the Davenport family collection, and for many years John Davenport and I looked after one of them. Betty Davenport and Fergus Roy had the other one.

About thirty years ago I took a series of photographs to help explain how the trick works. This one shows the chocolate box in our living room. On the left is John Davenport. On the right you can just see Fergus Roy and his son, Roy Davenport.



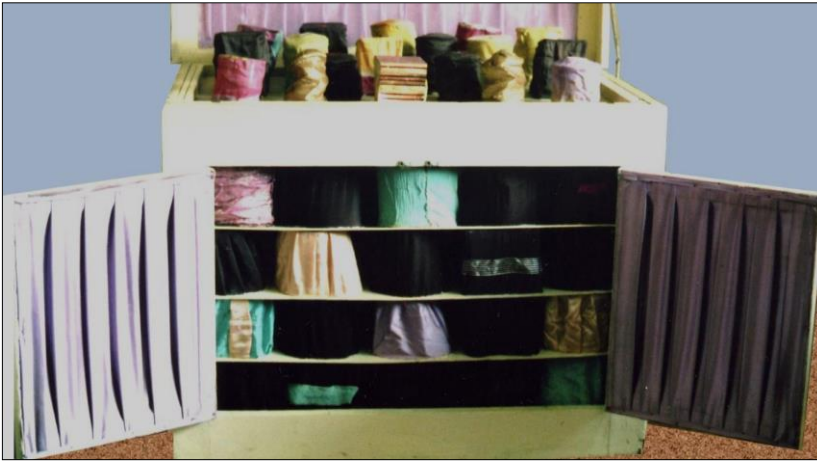
You have to imagine a large red ribbon tied round the box with a bow at the top, so that it looks like an old-fashioned box of chocolates. The box is on a stand with wheels, which means that it can be moved around the stage.

At the beginning of the trick, the box is turned round and shown to the audience on all sides. Then the ribbon is taken off and the box is opened up.



The two front doors can be opened, as you see, and the lid hinges up as well. The stick at the back of the box is ... an ordinary stick. The magician uses it to prod around inside the box and prove that there are no mirrors and the box is empty.

Once he's done that, the box is shut and opened up again.



Now it's full of giant chocolates - a very colourful production.

The box is shut once more and then opened up.



The chocolates have gone, but there's a girl inside. We didn't have a showgirl on hand when I took these photographs, so you'll have to use your imagination.

In Lewis Davenport's presentation, the girl was Wyn. I don't want to explain how the trick worked, but you'll appreciate that Wyn had to do a lot of scrambling to and fro inside the box. She told us that her costume for the trick included a short red skirt.

She was always barking her knee on part of the mechanism, but she'd wipe the blood off on her red skirt and no one noticed. Once out of the box, she'd do a tap dance to round off the trick.



Here we have a very young Roy Davenport on the left, and a young-at-heart Fergus Roy on the right, both contemplating the top tray of chocolates.

The reason for their visit was that Fergus was involved in the *Illusions* television series and he wanted to use Lyle's Chocolate Box in one of the programmes. Our chocolate box had been used in a local show three years earlier and John understood how to work it. So he showed Roy and Fergus round our chocolate box

and I took photographs of the various stages of the trick.

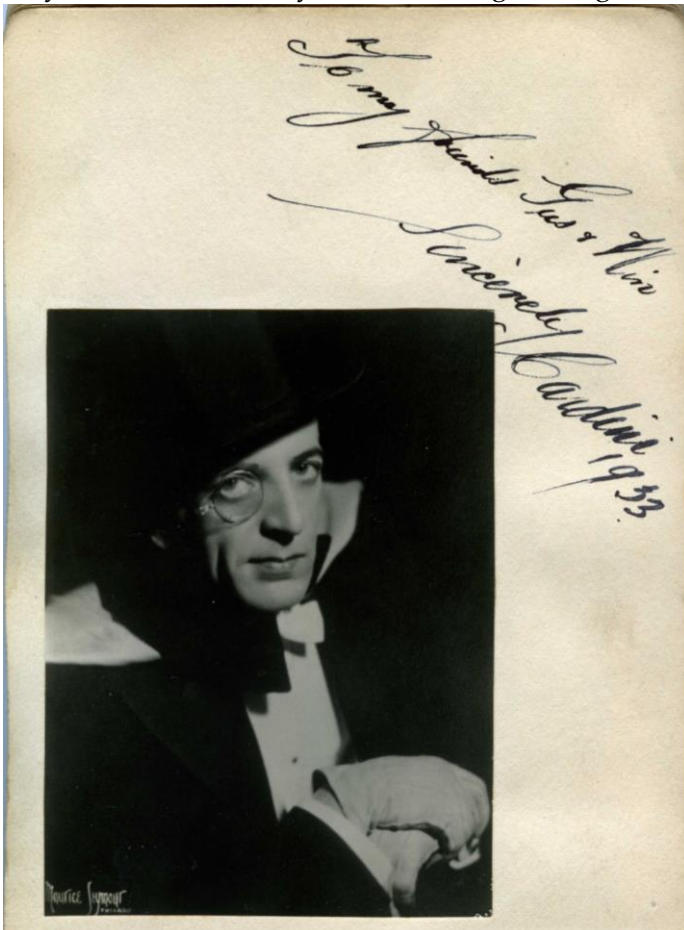
There were two *Illusions* series and Lyle's Chocolate Box was used in the first programme of the second series. I thought the television team did it beautifully. Wyn was interested to see the

chocolate box on television. She knew exactly what the girl assistant had to do, of course, because she'd done it herself. But in 1985 she was an arthritic old lady with limited mobility. She found it hard to imagine that she'd ever been that nimble.



This is a recent photograph of Roy Davenport, from a brochure for Davenports Magic Kingdom. He's changed a lot in the last thirty years, but he's as enthusiastic about magic as ever.

One last performer: the magician Cardini, who signed Wyn's autograph album in 1933. He had a very successful comedy act which might not go down well today. It involved cigarettes and over-



indulgence in alcohol – both frowned on by our nanny state. He came on stage as a toff who'd had too much to drink. His wife and assistant Swan was a very petite lady, and she appeared as a page boy.

Cardini's costume was full evening dress with cape, top hat, cane and gloves – as you see in the photograph. Partway through the act he handed the cape and cane to the page boy, but he kept the gloves and hat on. His act featured multiple productions of card fans and lighted cigarettes – all done wearing gloves.

He did a lot of work in the United States and in 1957 his act was filmed by NBC for a television programme. John Fisher made it possible to include the film of Cardini's act in one of the Paul Daniels Magic Shows, and his biography of Cardini includes a very detailed analysis of the act. Do see the film if you can - and if you're interested in Cardini, you can do no better than read John Fisher's book.



This photograph was taken at Ivydene, around 1935, when Lewis and Winifred Davenport were entertaining a party of magicians. Dick Cardini is on the far right, next to Gladys and Les Levante. Swan Cardini is the short lady towards the left of the photograph. She's standing next to Wyn Davenport. Wyn was not much more than five feet tall, so you can see that Swan was tiny.

Kneeling on the ground, with a baby on his shoulder, is my father-in-law, Gus Davenport. Behind him are Bill and Poppy Stickland - Poppy's helping to support the baby. Bill Stickland was secretary of the British Ring of the IBM for 52 years, until his death in 1984. He was also president for two years, from 1951 to 1953. It's entirely fitting that the bronze bust of him should be on display at the side of the stage during the annual British Ring conventions.

Lewis and Winifred Davenport are very much in the background. Winifred isn't even looking at the camera - she's talking to someone you can't see. Lewis is almost invisible - you can just see his head between Bill Stickland and Wyn.

Wyn told us that Lewis was often very quiet on occasions like this, but if he did start talking people would listen - because they knew he'd have something worthwhile to say.



In this photograph the group has broken up. Gladys Levante is in the background, talking to one of the other ladies. Lewis has his back to us and he's trying to organise Les Levante, the Cardinis and Bill Stickland for another photograph. What he doesn't know is that there's a camera behind him.

I think Wyn might have grown out of collecting autographs by the time of this visit, so we don't have Bill Stickland and Les Levante in her albums. But it's good to round off my talk by showing you these informal photographs of the Sticklands and the Levantes with the Cardinis.

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