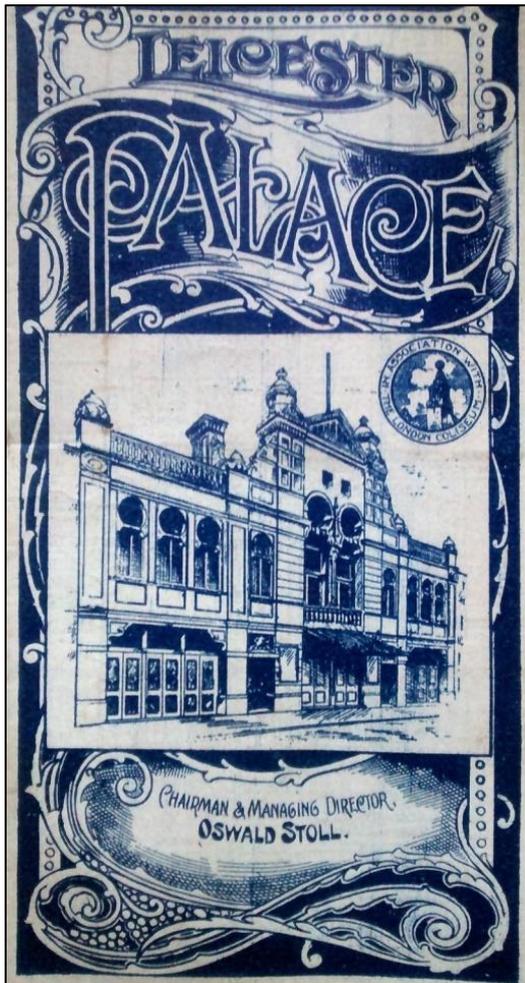


Oswald Williams at the Leicester Palace

Week beginning Monday 3 August 1914

By Anne Goulden



In 2016 Paul Kieve sent me scans of the programme on the left. It is of interest to magicians because Oswald Williams was joint top of the bill.

At the bottom of this page are details of the show from the centre pages of the programme. The sums of money in red are the salaries paid to the acts. These are recorded in a salaries book which belongs to the British Music Hall Society Archive.

Oswald Williams was not the highest paid act that week. He shared top billing with Alfred Lester, a comedian who had appeared before King George V and Queen Mary in the 1912 Music Hall Command Performance at the Palace Theatre, London. Alfred Lester was paid £100, Oswald Williams £65.

Oswald Williams' week at the Leicester Palace in 1914 was memorable because the first world war broke out while he was there. Monday 4 August was a bank holiday, but there was little cause to celebrate because the international situation was so alarming. The German army invaded Belgium on the Tuesday, and from Wednesday onwards Britain was at war. For Oswald Williams and his contemporaries the world was turned upside down.

<p>THE LEICESTER PALACE Theatre of Varieties, Belgrave Gate, Leicester. In Association with the London Coliseum. Licensed by the Lord Chamberlain to Oswald Stoll, Chairman and Managing Director, The Leicester Palace Theatre, Limited, Stoll Offices, Coliseum Buildings, London, W.C. Proprietary.....THE LEICESTER PALACE THEATRE, Ltd. Chairman and Managing Director.....OSWALD STOLL Acting Manager.....TRUEMAN TOWERS Assistant Acting Manager.....THOMAS J. PHILLIPS Telephone No. 1089.</p>		<p>PROGRAMME</p>	
<p>[B] PROGRAMME MONDAY, AUG. 3, 1914 AND TWICE NIGHTLY DURING THE WEEK.</p>		<p>4 DU CALION £25 The Loquacious Laddie on the Tottering Ladder</p>	
<p>1 OVERTURE— "Pantomime Plums" <i>Pether</i> Conductor JOHN W. LOWE.</p>		<p>5 OSWALD WILLIAMS £65 The Great English Illusionist, supported by his own Company Presenting an entertainment in Two Parts, comprising a series of Entirely Original Mysteries presented in the most Gorgeous Setting ever seen on any stage, and presented at Lightning Speed, including The Geisha Mystery, The Homing Bells, The Flying Chest, Oriental Paper Art, The Water Babe, The Knotty Problem, The Chair of Death, Concluding with a POLITICAL MAGICAL REVUE, introducing Professor Lipton, The Commercial Conjuror, Professor Lloyd George, The Modern Coin Manipulator, Professor John Redmond, The Great Irish Illusionist, Professor Winston Churchill, The Nautical Necromancer.</p>	
£11	<p>2 BRUCE GREEN The Most-Talked of of Dames</p>	G. H.	<p>6 CARLISLE & WELLMON £35 Composers, in their New Idea, "STRENGTH and WEAKNESS"</p>
£100	<p>3 ALFRED LESTER In his Laughable Burlesque, "THE VILLAGE FIRE BRIGADE" Assisted by Miss BUENA BENT. Public Warning—Due Notice must be given of intended Fires, otherwise the Fire Brigade will not be held responsible—Signed, A. LESTER.</p>	H. M.	<p>7 THE BIOSCOPE £8 5s Topical Events</p>
			<p>8 EDITH ENGLAND £6 The Celebrated Contralto</p>



This advertisement appeared in the *Leicestershire Chronicle* on Saturday 1 August 1914. It shows that Alfred Lester and Oswald Williams were joint top of the bill; Du Calion was bottom of the bill, even though he was paid less than Carlisle and Wellmon.

A long report of the show was published in the *Leicester Daily Mercury* on Tuesday 4 August:

The patriotic instinct was in evidence at the beginning of the performance at the Palace, last evening, when the National Anthem was sung in a most sincere manner. At the end of the proceedings, when pictures of the English preparations for emergencies were shown on the screen, there was such enthusiasm exhibited that one instinctively felt that whatever might be the ultimate decision of the Cabinet, those in authority will have the support of the rank and file of the nation.

The programme was intensely interesting, right from the beginning to the end. Every turn was to the liking of the holiday crowd, and none could say that there was not full value for money.

Oswald Williams, the English illusionist, supported by his own company, made many friends with the audience. The turn comprised mysteries which fairly brought down the house.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to Paul Kieve for permission to reproduce the programme.

Besides presenting the *Geisha Mystery*, the *Homing Bells*, the *Flying Chest*, *Oriental Paper Art*, the *Water Babe*, the *Knotty Problem*, and the *Chair of Death*, Mr Williams gave a political magical revue introducing 'Professor Lipton, the commercial conjurer', 'Professor Lloyd George, the modern coin manipulator', 'Professor John Redmond, the great Irish illusionist' and 'Professor Winston Churchill, the nautical necromancer'. Each character was treated in fine style and political opponents could not grumble at the way in which their 'pets' were 'let down'.

Alfred Lester, in his laughable burlesque *The Village Fire Brigade*, scored another great success. It would be impossible to listen to the arguments between Lester and Miss Buena Bent without laughing in the most hearty manner, the whole performance being really delightful from every point of view. Alfred Lester is an artist in the true meaning of the word, and Miss Bent fully understands the art of elocution.

Du Calion, the loquacious laddie on the tottering ladder, was splendid. He provided a capital entertainment of a novel character.

Edith England, a pleasing contralto, sang several songs in first rate style, and was loudly applauded for her rendering of *Somewhere a Voice is Calling* and *Because*.

Bruce Green, the most-talked-of-of-Dames, renewed his acquaintance with a Leicester audience, and had no cause to grumble at the reception accorded him.

G H Carlisle and H M Wellmon, composers in 'Strength and Alertness' [sic], were excellent, their rendering of the *Pilgrims' Chorus* as a pianoforte duet being well received. The pianos and organs used in the performances are supplied by Wm H Russell and Son, 7 London Road.

The reporter could have written most of his article from the artists' publicity material, without going to the trouble of sitting through the show. However his opening paragraph suggests that he did go to one of the performances on the Monday.