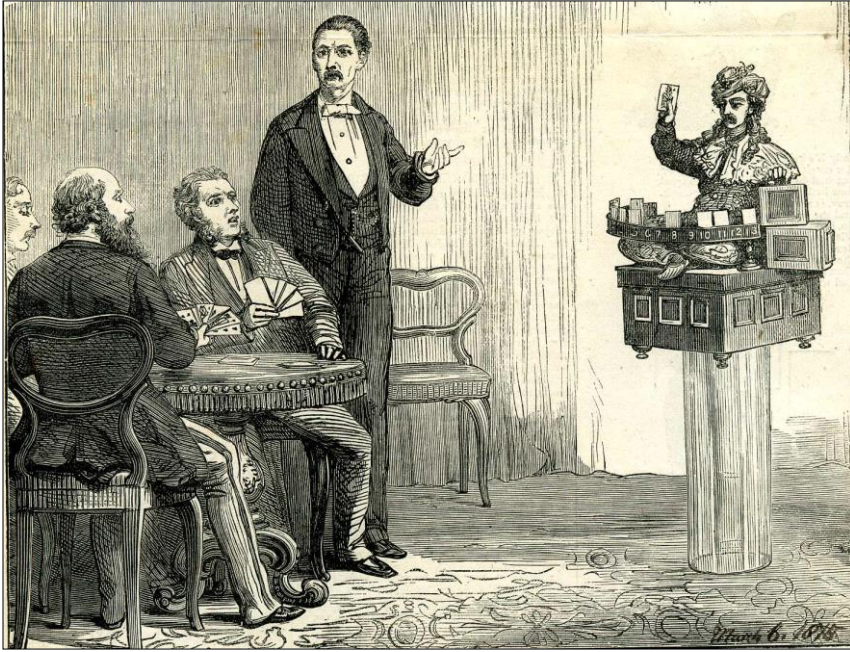


# Psycho at the Museum of London

By Anne Goulden

J N Maskelyne's whist-playing automaton, Psycho, has been at the Museum of London for eighty years. For much of that time he has been in store, but now he is on display in a special exhibition on Sherlock Holmes. The exhibition opened on 17 October 2014 and continues until 12 April 2015. This note celebrates Psycho's reappearance in public.



*Penny Illustrated Paper*, 6 March 1875

Psycho's debut at the Egyptian Hall took place in January 1875 and he was an instant success. The public in general, and newspaper reporters in particular, found him fascinating. The 1875 drawing from the *Penny Illustrated Paper* shows Psycho playing whist with three gentlemen from the audience. J N Maskelyne is standing by to take the card from Psycho's hand and lay it on the table.

J N Maskelyne built three more automata: Zoe, a girl who could draw and write; Fanfare, a trumpeter; and Labial, a euphonium player. J N was himself a cornet

player and he played in a trio with Fanfare and Labial. The four automata are shown with their creator in the 1878 drawing from the *Illustrated London News* (below).

When Zoe joined the show in May 1877, she and Psycho had a double act. The audience selected a name from a printed list of famous people, and Zoe drew the person's portrait. Psycho played his usual game of whist while the drawing was in progress. Zoe and Psycho could both do arithmetic. However Psycho displayed his answers digit by digit, using numbered cards, whereas Zoe could write down her workings as well as the answer.



*Illustrated London News*, 19 October 1878

In November 1880 Psycho went into temporary retirement. When he returned in 1884, he could nod his head and smoke a cigarette. He stayed in the show for another two years.

In 1910, after resting for 24 years, Psycho returned to the stage at St George's Hall. J N Maskelyne may have hoped that Psycho would repeat his success of 1875, but he proved to be too slow for the audiences of 1910.



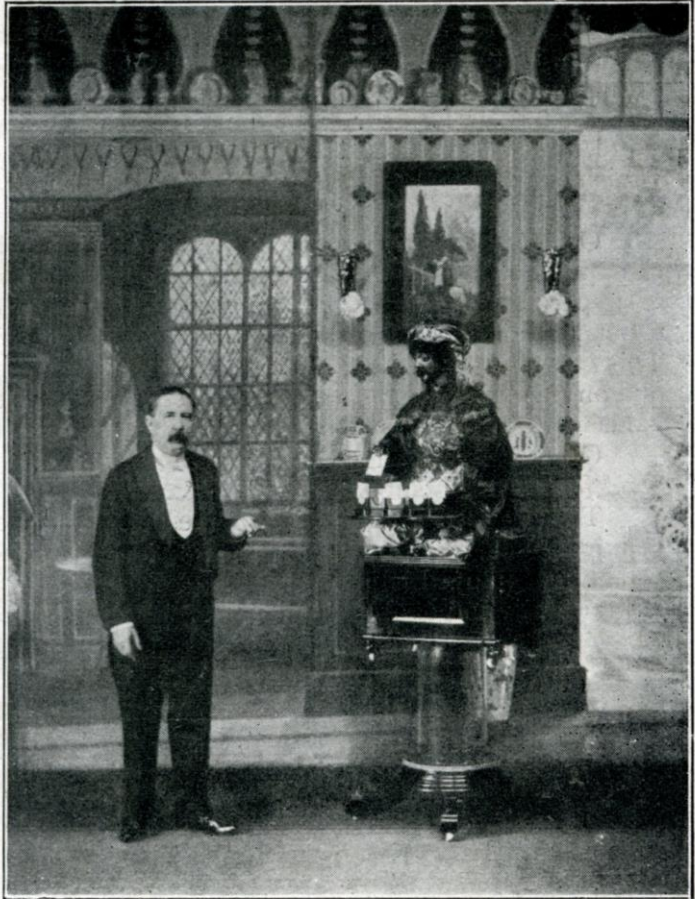
## "PSYCHO."

The illustration shews that this remarkable automaton is doubly insulated. The stand, which is submitted to the examination of the audience, is supported by castors with porcelain wheels. A transparent glass cylinder, also examined, is placed between the stand and the automaton.

"Psycho" plays a hand of Whist with any three members of his audience, ladies or gentlemen, and, whilst playing, smokes a cigarette.

He also spells and writes words correctly.

Mr. MASKELYNE offers £2,000 for any automaton that can produce the same movements under the same conditions.



*Wizard*, August 1910 (front page).



Detail of a 1910 photograph



Museum of London postcard, 2001