

## What's where in David Devant's *My Magic Life* A guided tour by Anne Goulden



*My Magic Life* is Devant's autobiography and it can be summed up in a sentence: if you want to find about Devant's life, **don't** read chapters 9-11 and 15-20, and **don't** read the appendices.

I have a theory as to why *My Magic Life* is as it is, and it goes like this. The publishers (Hutchinson) commissioned the book. When Devant sent the manuscript to them, they sent it back saying that it was too short. Devant then padded it out with three chapters on how to perform magic (chapters 9-11) and six chapters on the history of magic (chapters 15-20).

I also think that the book needed rewriting to make it flow better. Devant could have done this when he was in his prime, but by 1931 he was too disabled. Presumably the publishers were unwilling to pay an editor to do the job, so they published the enlarged manuscript as it stood - to the frustration of people like me!

Page numbers refer to the first edition, published by Hutchinson & Co in 1931. There is another edition, published by Supreme Magic after the second world war, with different page numbers. The page numbers of the Supreme edition could usefully be added to this document - if you feel like doing this, contact the website curator by going to the Contact section of the website.

And please contact him if you find any errors in this document.

### Contents: what's where

#### **Pictures of My Early Life, pages 13-20**

Devant's early life: school, first jobs, his first year as a professional entertainer.

p14-15. Devant's father, the artist James Wighton.

p18-19. Addresses of Devant's family.

#### **Chapter 1, pages 21-32**

p21. Two or three years before Devant became interested in magic, Dr Holden, the Royal wizard, performed at Devant's school.

p21-22. Devant saw a disappearing egg trick, priced at 1s, in the window of Bland's magic shop. He bought it, and became a regular customer at Bland's and then Proskauer's.

p22-27. Devant's encounter with Kasper, the Great Court Conjurer, and his purchase of *Modern Magic* and *Houdin's Masterpieces*.

p27. Devant first went to the Egyptian Hall in 1883.

p28. Devant's first public performance (Professor Hoffmann in the audience).

p28-29. Devant went to Frank Hiam's shop in Nile Street, City Road. It was "a sort of informal club". He met Servais Le Roy, who became a good friend; also Dr Harley, Lieut Albini, Dr Nix, Col. Meurice De Cone, Henry Donn.

p29-32. Magicians seen by Devant: Professor Hellis; Carl Hertz (first performance in London); Buatier de Kolta; Charles Bertram; Verbeck.

p31-32. Devant's views on colour schemes; his wife's colour sense; his early fit-ups.

## **Chapter 2, pages 33-44.**

Some anecdotes about Devant's early shows, including the hot pudding and vanishing lady tricks.

## **Chapter 3, p45-52**

Devant's tour with the Royal American Midgets.

p49. Devant met H B Lodge (a friend of J N Maskelyne) and Sidney Oldridge.

p51. Devant met his future wife at Sanger's Hall by the Sea, Margate.

p51-52. Music hall appearances at the end of the Midgets' tour.

## **Chapter 4, p53-62**

p53. The Devants took a house on Ashmore Road, Kilburn.

p53-54. Magicians seen by Devant: Buatier de Kolta (Cocoon and Captive's Flight); Trewey; Professor Field.

p54-61. Devant employed Augustus Pereno as his agent and business manager, at a commission of 33%.

p55. Bookings at mental hospitals, hydropathic establishments, and hotels.

p55-56. Performance for the Queen of Roumania.

p56. Devant's bout of rheumatic fever at Christmas 1889. To save money, he and Pereno took a house together at Dawes Road, Fulham.

p56-62. Music hall work; Devant and Pereno parted company; Devant restored to health.

p57-58. Engagement at Waterloo Panorama, where Devant met Gintaro.

p58. Devant's memories of Imro Fox (see also p61).

p59-60. Booking at the Ronacher Theatre, Vienna.

## **Chapter 5: p63-69. Devant's appearances at the Egyptian Hall.**

p63. Devant took a house in Balham; three-night entertainment at the Baths, Balham; Vice Versa at the Opera Theatre, Crystal Palace.

p63-65. Morrill left the Egyptian Hall; Devant replaced him; *The Artist's Dream*.

p65. Devant's use of models (including a miniature stage) when designing illusions.

p66-67. The Egyptian Hall suited Devant but it was hard work.

p67-68. Information about the Egyptian Hall.

p68. R A Roberts

p68-69. The Birth of Flora.

## **Chapter 6: p70-79. Devant's involvement in early cinema.**

p70-72. The beginning of the story.

p72-73. J N Maskelyne's Diamond Jubilee stand.

p73-74. Devant's adventures with cine-photography.

p74-75. J N Maskelyne's box trick.

p75-76. Devant's three companies touring the provinces; *Zauberwunder*.  
p76-79. The Maskelyne & Cooke Provincial Company and Entertainment Bureau.  
p79. Devant went on tour with the Provincial Company.

#### **Chapter 7: p80-85**

p80-84. Various sketches and illusions: *The Enchanted Hive*; *Sylph*; *Trapped by Magic*; *St Valentine's Eve*; *Two's Company and Three's None* (The Three Graces); *Elixir Vitae*; *Will, the Witch and the Watchman*; *Oriente*.  
p84-85. Anecdotes, totally unconnected with the rest of the chapter, about (a) two pupils of Devant and (b) George Grossmith.

#### **Chapter 8: p86-97**

p86-87. Various people who helped Devant, including Ernest Wighton (four paragraphs) and Henry Bate.  
p87-88. The Magic Kettle.  
p88. Replacement of Valadon by Martin Chapender.  
p88-91. The *Coming Race* fiasco. JN Maskelyne visited Devant in Edinburgh.  
p91. Devant returned to London and put on a new show at St George's Hall.  
p91-92. Maskelyne & Devant formed, with Devant as managing partner.  
p92-93. Mascot Moth.  
p93. Devant's working day as managing partner.  
p93-94. Tours in America, Britain, and continental Europe.  
p94-95. The New Page.  
p95. Barclay Gammon, Oswald Williams, Julian Wylie.  
p95-97. Devant elected to the Savage Club; *Mental Magnetism* (assisted by Dora).

**Chapter 9: p98-104.** Devant's opinions on Magic and the Public.

**Chapters 10 & 11: p105-127.** Two chapters on Secrets of Magic.

#### **Chapter 12: p128-134**

p128-129. The Colley case and the Side Issue illusion.  
p129-130. Devant's season at the Sofien Saal, Vienna; the *Giant's Breakfast* (Little Chanticleer).  
p130-132. The Indian Rope Trick and *The Magical Master*.  
p132-133. Devant's experience of providing special effects for stage productions.  
p133-134. Oswald Williams and Julian Wylie; Devant went on the music halls as a headline act.  
p134. Maskelyne & Devant Ltd; Charles Morritt.

**Chapter 13: p135-142.** Three anecdotes (which might have come from Devant's publicity material).

#### **Chapter 14: p143-148**

p143-145. Devant and spiritualism.  
p145. *Window of the Haunted House*; *The Pillar of Brass*; Devant on the music halls.  
p145-147. 1912 Music Hall Command Performance.  
p147-148. Other command performances.  
p148. Devant performed at the opening of the theatre on the *Aquitania*; he was in the opening shows at Golder's Green Hippodrome and the New Palace, Manchester.

**Chapter 15: p149-156.** Magic in the past,

**Chapter 16: p157-168.** Conjuring on the continent.

**Chapter 17: p169-182.** Past masters of their craft.

**Chapter 18: p183-192.** Magic in the 19th century (including Maskelyne & Cooke, p187-192).

**Chapter 19: p193-203.** Magicians abroad.

**Chapter 20: p204-210.** Magic of the East.

Chapters 15-20 are said to be based on Sidney W Clarke's *Annals of Conjuring*.

**Chapter 21: p211-215.** Magic today and tomorrow.

Devant's views on the conjuring of the time. Most of his comments are valid today.

**Chapter 22: p216-217**

p216-217. The 1913 testimonial.

p217. Devant left St George's Hall; his incapacity; retirement in 1920.

### **Appendices: p219-279**

**Appendix I, p221-229.** Details of shows, illusions and sketches at the Egyptian Hall, and at St George's Hall up to 1915. It looks as if the function of this appendix was to demonstrate that Devant was more inventive than J N Maskelyne.

**Appendix II, p230-233.** Script of *The Artist's Dream*.

**Appendix III, p234-244.** Script of *St Valentine's Eve*.

**Appendix IV, p245-259.** Script of *The Enchanted Hive*.

**Appendix V, p260-270.** Script of *The Pillar of Brass*.

**Appendix VI, p271-280.** Script of *The Mascot Moth* (David Devant's version).