

# A Mine of Maskelyne Information

What we learn from the business records of the Maskelynes at St. George's Hall



John Davenport

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## Introduction

Many of the Maskelyne items in the Davenport Collection were made for public consumption: programmes, publicity material, printed books, and so on. One of our shelves is occupied by books which were always intended to be private. They are the surviving business records of St. George's Hall. When Anne Davenport and John Salisse wrote their book on St. George's Hall<sup>1</sup> they naturally drew on these records. At the time some were in the Salisse Collection and some in the Davenport Collection, but nowadays they all reside in the Davenport Collection.

The purpose of this article is to record the scope of these business records and provide examples of their content. Where appropriate, reference will be made to the St. George's Hall book.

## House receipts books



There are seven house receipt books, each 330 x 205 mm:

- Aug 1906 to Jul 1908;
- Aug 1908 to Jul 1910;
- Aug 1910 to Oct 1911;
- Nov 1911 to Nov 1913;
- Nov 1915 to Jul 1917 with Comparative Receipts going back to 1908;
- Nov 1919 to Dec 1921;
- Oct 1933, one week only.



The house receipts book for August 1906 to July 1908.

The earliest entry is for the week ending 11 August 1906; unfortunately we have no records for the period when *The Coming Race* was at the Hall.

HOUSE RECEIPTS															Week ending August 11 <sup>th</sup> 1906													
Date	No. Paid at Doors	Bill Parties & Comps.	No. of Trade Bookings	Total House	Libraries	Matured Bookings per Box Office	Cash	Advanced Booking per Book Office	Received from Libraries	No. of Progs.	Programmes	Bills	Total Cash Paid into Bank	Notes														
Monday 6	387	3	3	41	6	6	12	40	14	6	170	1	8	4	Very fine. Hot.													
" 6	306	4	4	29	14	6	11	29	6	6	121	1	2	4	Bank Holiday													
Tuesday 7	243	3	4	20	1	6		19	14	6	93	15	6		Very fine. Hot.													
" 7	241	13		20	12			8	20	4	91	15	2	12	" " "													
Wednesday 8	224	14		19	8	6		6	19	2	101	16	10		" " "													
" 8	166	52	4	14	19	6	7	1	11	13	85	14	2	3	3	38	14	6	Booker but very fine									
Thursday 9	211	12		19	15	6		1	5	6	88	14	8		" " "													
" 9	248	26	2	22	17	1	9	8	22		155	1	5	10	2	18	6	46	15	" " "								
Friday 10	251	12	3	20	6	1	9		19	17	106	17	8		" " "													
" 10	205	85	1	17	17	6	4	6	12	17	113	18	10	12	18	52	6	" " "										
Saturday 11	308	10		29	1	6		12	28	9	136	1	2	8	" " "													
" 11	247	2		19	7	6		8	18	19	117	19	6	3		53	7	2	" " "									
	3040	232	17	275	10	6	2	12	6	5	14	6	267	3	6	8	3	6			3289				315	10	10	Golden's 4th. Bookings. £ 26. 3. 10. Institution £ 43. 1. 7. Selling £ 4. 3. 5 Suburban £ 9. 10. 0 77. 6. 10

LIBRARIES.		ADVANCE BOOKING.	
Owing from last week	£ : : :	To Balance from previous week	£ : : :
Add Library Bookings as above	2 : 12 : 6	„ Advance Booking Returns	5 : 14 : 6
LESS CASH RECEIVED AS ABOVE	2 : 12 : 6	TOTAL	£ 8 : 3 : 6
NOW OWING	£ 2 : 12 : 6	LESS BOX OFFICE RETURNS	5 : 14 : 6
		BALANCE IN HAND	£ 2 : 9 : -

The house receipts book entry for the week ending 11 August 1906.

<sup>1</sup> St. George's Hall - behind the scenes at England's Home of Mystery. Published by Mike Caveney's Magic Words, Pasadena, 2001. Anne Davenport is now known to magicians as Anne Goulden, her maiden name.

On pages 64 and 65 of *St. George's Hall* there is an overview of the information that can be gleaned from these receipt books. For example:

The number of non-paying patrons varied enormously. When there was a full house and every seat could be sold, there might be no free tickets at all. At other performances there might be more than a hundred. The average was about fifty. Some of the non-paying patrons were magicians who were allowed in free to swell the audience and create a friendly atmosphere.

We know from London County Council records that the Hall seated 550, so non-paying patrons could account for up to 20% of the audience.

Sometimes the information in the receipt book is at odds with that in the public domain. An example of this is on page 67 of *St. George's Hall*:

Devant said in *My Magic Life* that 'A Side Issue' packed the Hall for months and months. In fact the full houses lasted for only two weeks, after which the audience figures dropped gradually. Nevertheless attendances were much better than usual in the closing months of 1906. The next year, 1907, was a very good year at the Hall and the Colley challenge must take at least some of the credit.

### Minute books

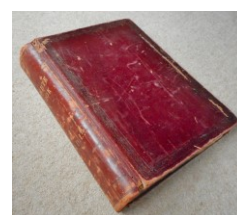
There are two minute books, each 255 x 330 mm:

- Jun 1914 to Mar 1917. The spine is embossed with "M&D Ltd". At the start of this period the company was Maskelyne & Devant Ltd. At the end it was Maskelyne's Ltd.
- May 1917 to Aug 1928. During this period the business was known as Maskelyne's Ltd. The spine is embossed with "M&D Ltd", just to confuse matters!

Like all businesses, St. George's Hall ran into trouble from time to time. There was a major crisis in 1914; it was not reported in contemporary magic magazines but full details can be found in the Maskelyne & Devant Ltd minute book. This extract from *St. George's Hall*, page 152 gives some idea of the issues:

The annual general meeting of Maskelyne & Devant Ltd. was held on December 9, four months after the outbreak of war. With all the arguments in the boardroom and the difficulties caused by the war, it comes as no surprise to find that the meeting was a stormy one. Nevil [Maskelyne] made a long speech which included the following points:

- The type of programme presented at St. George's Hall was wrong. It was a variety programme and the music halls could present shows of this kind better and more profitably.
- There should be a sketch in every show. This was an essential part of the unique entertainment which J.N. Maskelyne ran at the



*The minute book for May 1917 to August 1928.*



Egyptian Hall for many years. St. George's Hall patrons expected it. Contrary to Devant's belief, sketches could be put on at reasonable cost.

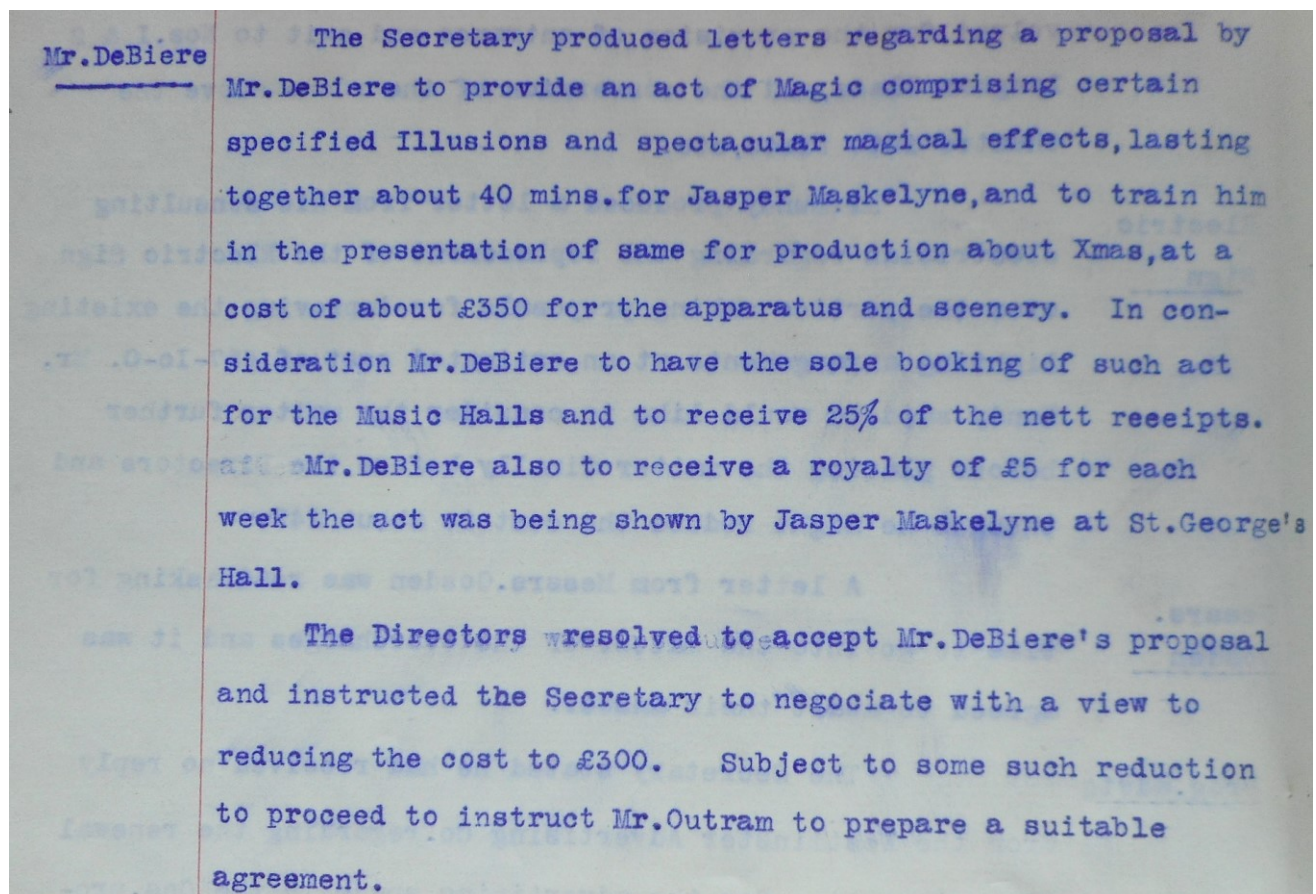
- Devant's music hall tours had damaged the Hall. It depended largely on 'the patronage of visitors from the provinces' and they would not pay shillings at the Hall when they could see the same thing for pence at their local music hall.

The crisis was resolved when Devant left St. George's Hall in 1915. In *My Magic Life* (chapter XXII, page 217) he said that he "reached an amicable settlement" with the Maskelynes. However it is clear from the minute book that his departure was anything but amicable.

As a result of Devant's departure St. George's Hall was left with a redundant donkey on its hands. The donkey was used in Charles Morritt's Disappearing Donkey illusion. Devant had Morritt's permission to present the Disappearing Donkey, but the Maskelynes did not. Page 155 of *St. George's Hall* tells us that:

At a board meeting on 10 March 1915 Devant said he would like to buy the donkey for the price originally paid for it, £4, because Mrs. Devant wanted to find a comfortable home for it. Amid all the troubles of Devant's last few months at the Hall, it is pleasant to find that the donkey was not forgotten.

Most of the decisions recorded in the minute books were matters of routine. The example below from 1925 is more interesting.



*This photograph shows part of the minutes from the Board meeting of the Directors of Maskelyne's Limited on 27 August 1925. The full story of De Biere's offer may be found on page 267 of 'St. George's Hall'.*

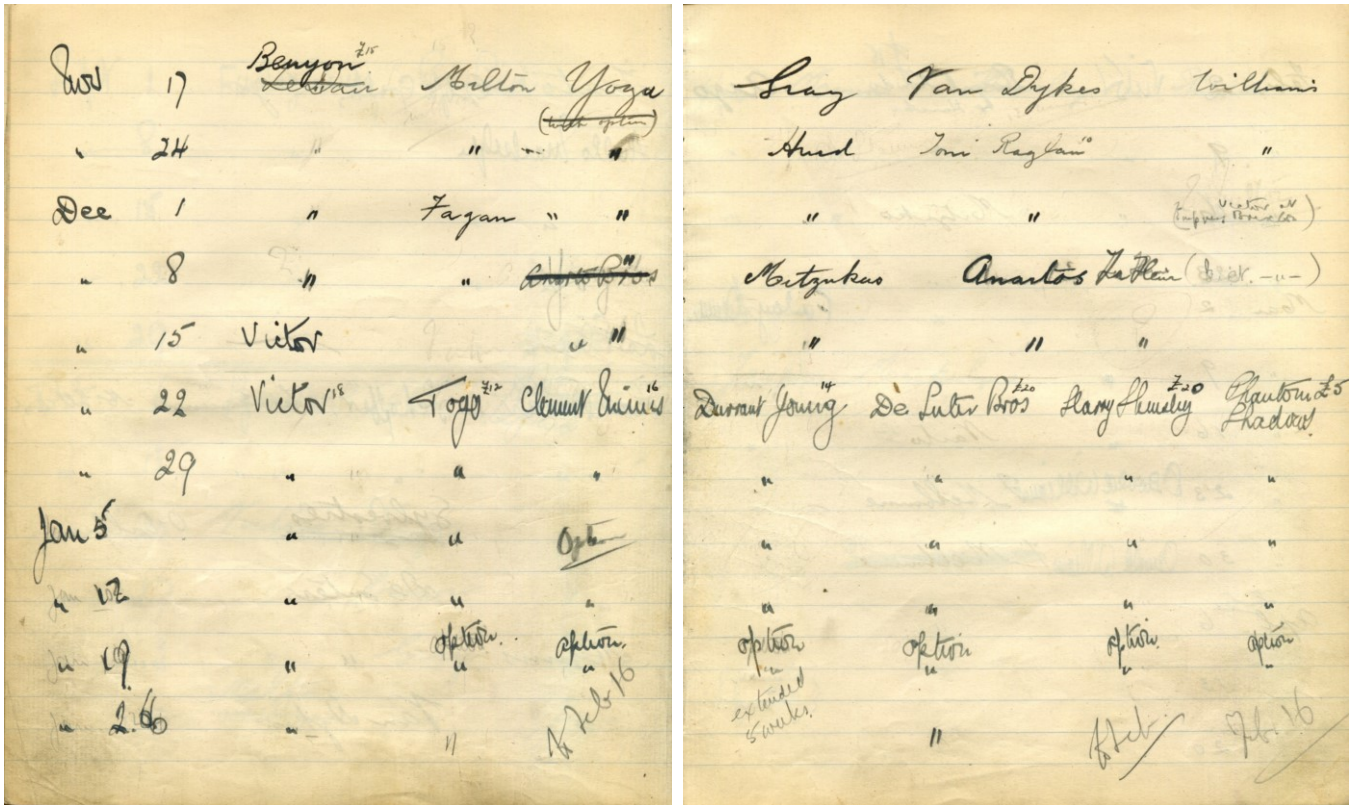
**Performers book**

There is only one book of this type:

- Size 190 x 230 mm. It records the acts booked for St. George’s Hall, week by week, from January 1925 to April 1932. In addition there are two pages in a different format, giving details of performers’ contracts in 1932 and 1933. It looks as if this latter part of the book was abandoned rather abruptly! The spine of the book is in poor condition.



The main part of the book belongs to the period when Clive Maskelyne and Jasper Maskelyne were managing directors and were in charge of bookings. Clive and Jasper were not particularly competent as record keepers. The contents of this book have not yet been analysed in detail and compared with available programmes. An example of the format is shown below.



The handwritten line at the top of this two-page spread relates to the show for the week beginning 17 November 1930. The performers listed for this week are Benyon, Milton, Yoga, Gray, Van Dykes and Williams. The advertising card shown on the right, dated 17-11-30 in the bottom right corner, confirms that these performers were indeed at St. George’s Hall for that week.

**MASKELYNES THEATRE**  
NEAR OXFORD CIRCUS, W. TELEPHONE: LANGHAM 1545

A REALLY JOLLY SHOW

**OSWALD WILLIAMS**  
ENGLAND'S FOREMOST ILLUSIONIST

<b>VAN DYKES</b> Dutch Instrumental Cameo	<b>EDGAR BENYON</b> A One Man Vaudeville Revue	<b>HERBERT MILTON</b> Card Magic Extraordinary	<b>EDDIE GRAY</b> Comedy Juggler
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**YOGA** THE ORIENTAL MYSTIC

DAILY AT 3 & 8. SMOKING PERMITTED SEATS 1/3 TO 7/6.

17-11-30



### Tour book

There is only one book of this type:

- Size 210 x 330 mm. This book is a record of various tours sent out from St. George's Hall from 1912.



The book contains details of the various tour routes, with financial information for each stop on the tour. The people who headed up these tours included David Devant and Archie, Nevil, Clive and Jasper Maskelyne. Devant's three music hall tours (1912-14) were very much more profitable than the Maskelynes' tours.

1916		Provincial Tour				1916			
1916		Stamps Receipts				Total Expenses	Salaries	Stamps Expenses	Profit
July	8. Bournemouth	108 15 6				86 17 5	74 13	5 12 6	6 12 2
	15. Plymouth	174 16 9				93 13 9	81 9 5	5 7 9	6 16 7
	22. Southampton	126 2 7				85 17	75 13	4 10 3	5 13 9
	29. Bognor	57 13 11				10 68 16 5	72 13	4 9 6	1 13 11
Aug	5. Weston-super-Mare	63 17 5				70 14 10	60 9	7 14 2	2 11 8
	12. Paignton	37 6 3				63 14 2	57 13	3 5	3 9
	19. Southsea	125 9 1				64 18 7	57 13	5 9 2	1 16 5
	26. Out					15 12 6	16 12 6		

This extract from the tour book shows part of Nevil Maskelyne's 1916 tour. Details are on page 167 of 'St. George's Hall'.

### National Insurance contributions book

- Size 210 x 330 mm. This book records National Insurance contributions for each employee, week by week, from Jan 1926 to May 1932. This book would be useful to anyone interested in researching Maskelyne's employees during this period.

### Petty cash book

- Size 210 x 330 mm. The period covered is December 1920 to December 1931. This book is a summary of weekly cash expenditure in four departments: office, box office, refreshment bars, wardrobe. Presumably each department had its own petty cash float and kept detailed records of its cash expenditure.

### Advertisers book

- Size 170 x 270 mm. According to the title page, this book is a record of "Advertisements on programmes. St. George's Hall, W. Commencing Aug 6th 1905". The period covered is quite short (probably 1906-1908) but it is interesting to see the prices of advertisements in the early St. George's Hall programmes.

## Inventory and valuation

- Size 210 x 330 mm. This is a copy of a typed inventory, made for insurance purposes in April 1925 and covering furniture, tenant's fixtures and effects.

The total valuation is £6,603. Furniture and fixtures are described in some detail, but illusions are covered by a single entry: "Illusions £2,000."

One of the more interesting items is listed in the Lantern Room: "The Ernemann Dresden Cinematograph lantern on iron stand complete with reels and connections", valued at £115.

## Private ledger and balance sheet books

There are four books, all fitted with brass locks.

Size 220 x 330 mm.

- Private ledger 1920-1926.
- Private ledger 1927-1931.
- Balance sheet 1912-1927.
- Balance sheet 1927-1932.

The private ledger was part of what accountants call the nominal ledger. The nominal ledger formed the basis of the company's annual accounts. In the old days, before computerisation, the nominal ledger was often in two parts:

- The general ledger - that part of the nominal ledger which wasn't considered especially private.
- The private ledger - sensitive information such as directors' salaries, loans, and so on. This explains why the two private ledgers were fitted with locks.

The information in the balance sheet books was also sensitive, hence the locks.



## Debenture book for Maskelyne and Devant Limited with related records

- The debenture book size is 435 x 285 mm.
- The related records included contracts and correspondence.

Debentures were a way of securing a loan to a company. These debentures carried interest at 10% per annum and the loan was secured on the assets of the company. The book contains numbered pre-printed forms, specific to Maskelyne and Devant Limited, which could be filled in and authorised as required. The example illustrated here is from 1911 and relates to a loan of £100 from the Rt. Hon. Lady Agnes Howard.





## Libraries book

- Size 430 x 335 mm. The period covered is 1927 to 1933.

In Victorian times, tickets for Maskelyne's performances could be bought from libraries. As the years went by, sales moved to ticket agencies. So, although the book has LIBRARIES BOOK on its spine, the content relates to agency sales. The agents' names are pre-printed throughout the book, as in the illustration on the right, and the various columns are used to record the ticket sales and relevant financial information. The greatest number of ticket sales was through Keith Prowse.



## Acknowledgements

I want to thank my wife Anne Goulden who has made invaluable contributions to this article.

In addition to her major role in researching and writing *St. George's Hall* with John Salisse, Anne has restructured the Davenport Collection Maskelyne material to create a unique research tool covering the Maskelynes and those people who crossed their paths.

## AGENTS.

ADAMS

ARMY & NAVY

ASHTON

CECIL ROY

CIVIL SERVICE

CHAPPELLS

DIS. MESSENGER

HAYS

KEITH, PROWSE

LACON & OLLIER

LASHMAR

LEADER

MORLEY

PHILLIPS

WEB. & GIRLING

WEB. & WADD.