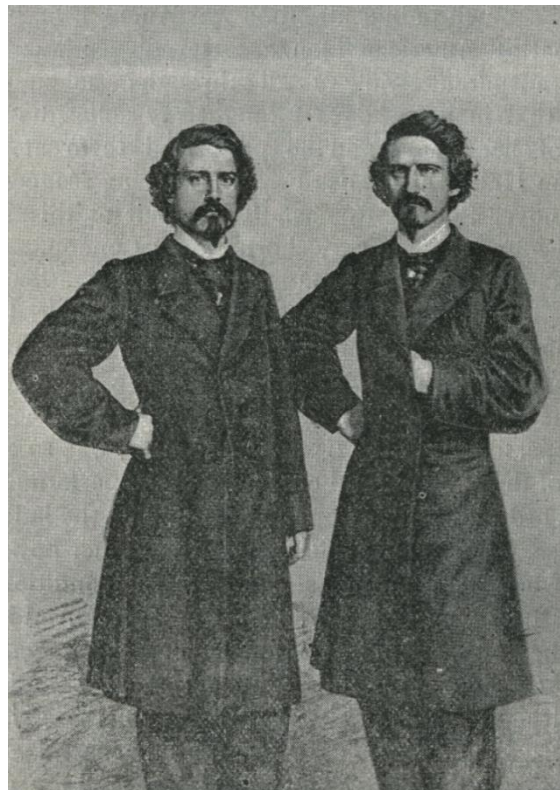


The Davenport Brothers in Britain

1864-1865



by

Anne Goulden

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The photograph of J N Maskelyne is a carte de visite in the Davenport Collection.
The drawing of the Davenport Brothers is in Lionel A Weatherley's book, *The Supernatural?*

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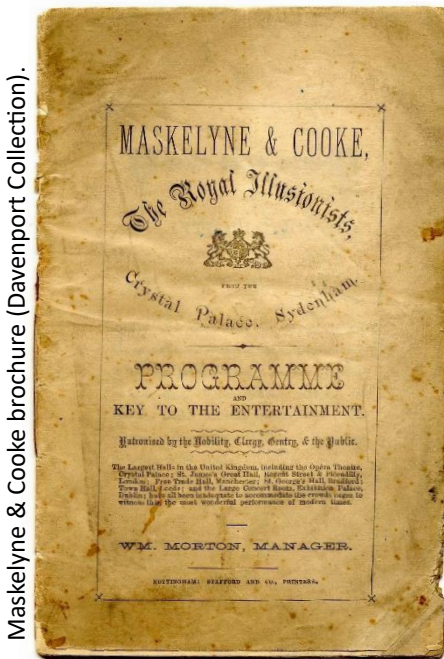
Introduction

The Davenport Brothers spent one day in Cheltenham, on 7 March 1865. For them it was the last stop on a provincial tour which had already gone badly wrong. For British magic it was a very important day. It set Maskelyne and Cooke off on their long career as professional entertainers, and led directly to the two Maskelyne theatres in London: the Egyptian Hall and St George's Hall.

Throughout his adult life, J N Maskelyne fought the good fight against fraudulent spiritualists. He saw his encounter with the Davenport Brothers as his first great blow in the cause of antispiritualism. This article explores what actually happened when the Davenport Brothers visited Cheltenham on that spring day in 1865. It sets the visit in the context of the Brothers' tour of the English provinces.

The Maskelyne version of the story

J N Maskelyne's encounter with the Davenport Brothers was a key part of Maskelyne mythology. An early version of the story can be found in a brochure published in 1873, just before Maskelyne & Cooke moved to the Egyptian Hall.¹ This extract is from pages 6-7:



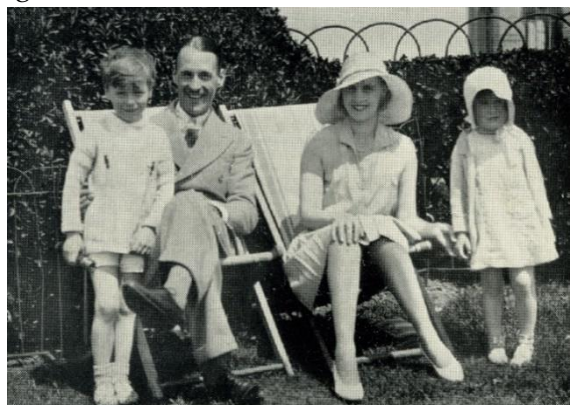
Maskelyne & Cooke brochure (Davenport Collection).

Mr Maskelyne attended a morning² cabinet séance given by the Brothers at the Town Hall, Cheltenham, on which occasion he was chosen as one of the committee of investigation. As is usual at a spiritual séance, it was given in semi-darkness; of course the familiar spirits of the Davenports — like those of all other mediums — appear to “love darkness rather than light”. The séance was produced, tambourines and bells came flying from the cabinet, *Rory O'More* was badly played on a violin, guitar and tambourine.

The doors of the cabinet were then opened, but instantaneously the Brothers were bound hands and feet. Again the doors were closed and the non-descript noise repeated, but the very instant the cabinet was opened a piece of druggot fell partly from one of the windows. Mr Maskelyne was thus enabled to see Ira Davenport eject the instruments, and then secure himself with the ropes — an operation which occupied three seconds. ... Mr Maskelyne announced what he had seen but was contradicted by the Rev Dr Ferguson, who acted as spokesman for the Brothers.

In 1910 Maskelyne included the story in a *Strand Magazine* article entitled *My Reminiscences*.³ I'll quote from that article later. The 1910 version of the story gives additional details but the core of the story is the same: a curtain fell from one of the windows, enabling Maskelyne to see inside the cabinet at a critical moment.

Jasper Maskelyne gave a detailed account in his ghost-written autobiography, *White Magic*, published in 1936. The photograph on the right is the frontispiece of his book. It shows Jasper with his first wife and their two children, Alistair and Jasmine. Alistair was nine years old when *White Magic* was published. Much later



Jasper Maskelyne and family.

in life he alerted the magic world to the flaws in Jasper's book, through a series of letters that he wrote to Richard Stokes.⁴

Jasper was J N Maskelyne's youngest grandson. He was a teenager when J N died. He'd heard family stories many times, but he didn't know much from his own experience. To make matters worse, Jasper's ghost writer used his imagination freely. So, it's best to assume that everything in *White Magic* is fiction. There **are** nuggets of fact, as there are in all family stories, and the game is to identify them.

For a long time the Maskelyne version of the story was all we had. Nowadays we have online access to many of the newspapers of the time. For this article I used the British Newspaper Archive (BNA). The Maskelyne accounts portray J N Maskelyne as the lone genius who unmasked the Davenport Brothers. The newspaper record tells us that it wasn't quite like that.

The people involved

This photograph was taken in the late 1860s, when Maskelyne & Cooke were touring the provinces with a full-evening show. On the right we have John Nevil Maskelyne; on the left is his friend and stage partner, George Cooke. In 1865, when the Davenport Brothers came to Cheltenham, Maskelyne and Cooke were shopkeepers. Maskelyne was a watchmaker and jeweller, Cooke was a tailor.



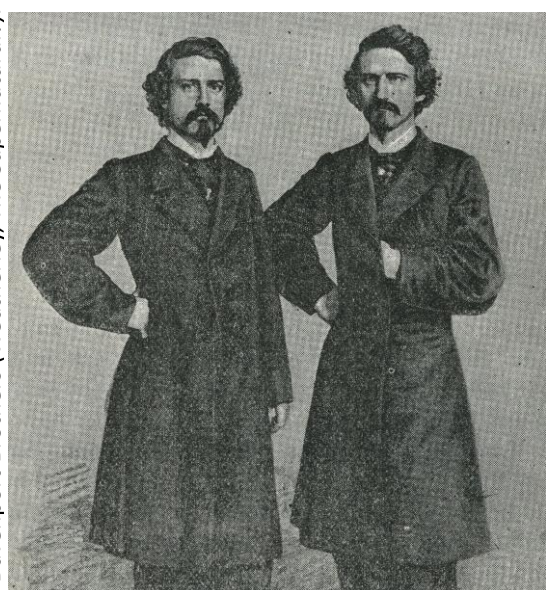
Maskelyne and Cooke (The Magic Circle Archives, London).

Jasper Maskelyne's book tells us that J N belonged to a "sort of conjuring club" which met "at the house of one or other of the members".⁵ I find that plausible. I imagine a group of friends,

getting together to show each other tricks and gossip about magic and magicians.

Maskelyne and Cooke were unknowns in 1865, but the Davenport Brothers, Ira and William, were famous. They gave public séances which were, in effect, high class ghost shows. Some people believed that they were genuine mediums; others believed they were fakes.

The drawing on the left was published in *The Supernatural?* by Lionel A Weatherley.⁶ I don't



Davenport Brothers (Weatherley, *The Supernatural?*).

know the date of the original drawing. As I understand it, Ira is the Brother on the right. He was the elder of the two, born in 1839 – by coincidence, in the same year as J N Maskelyne. William was seventeen months younger.⁷ The London correspondent of the *Belfast Newsletter* wrote this description of them in October 1864:

The Messrs Devenport [sic] are short of stature, slim in figure ... They are very like each other, and would be taken at once to be brothers. ... [They] are, I should say, apparently well informed and modest, but unequivocally addicted to the use of tobacco. There is no affectation of mystery about them. They converse about the power which they possess with the utmost frankness, and answer every question put to them on the subject with perfect candour."⁸

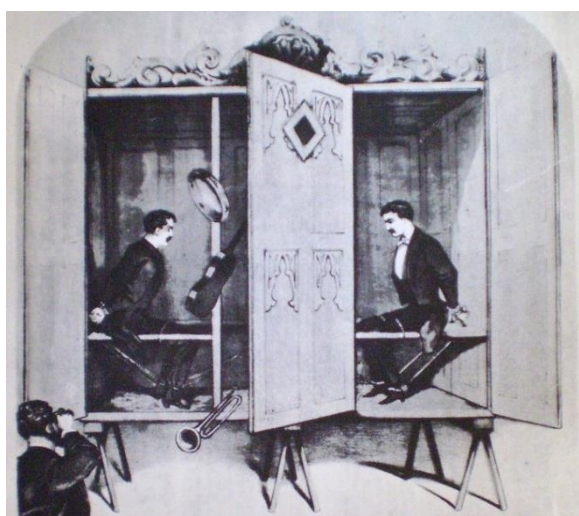
The Davenport Brothers claimed to have been touring in the United States for ten years before they came to England. During their time in England there were five people in their party:

- **The Brothers** themselves.
- **William Fay**, who acted as understudy in the cabinet séances. He invariably performed in the dark séances, when his speciality was the coat trick. The *Belfast Newsletter* man gave this description of him: “Mr Fay ... is a rather heavy-looking young man. His complexion is light, his frame of rather solid make, and his expression composed, if not apathetic. He is said to be of German descent, but I am informed that the name is unequivocally Hibernian.”⁹
- **Mr Palmer**, the Brothers’ manager, who seems to have been British. Anderson, the Wizard of the North, said that Palmer was a former employee of his. He described Palmer as a speculator who brought the Davenport Brothers to Britain.¹⁰
- **Dr Ferguson**, who acted as MC in the séances. It was his job to keep the audience under control. He succeeded admirably in southern England, but had less success when the Davenport Brothers moved north. The drawing on the right is from an 1864 press cutting in Peter Lane’s collection.¹¹

The *Belfast Newsletter* man gave this description of him: “Dr Ferguson ... is a tall, solemn-looking individual, about 50 years of age, with a somewhat saturnine expression of face, and a certain twang running through his pronunciation which at once reveals his origin. He wears his collar (an old-fashioned one that ought to stand up) turned down, and a long black frock coat. In speaking of the Messrs Devenport [sic] and Fay, he describes them as ‘these young men’.”¹²



Dr Ferguson (Peter Lane Collection).



The Davenport Brothers offered two types of séance: a dark séance and a cabinet séance. My story centres on the cheaper option: the cabinet séance. The main prop was a spirit cabinet, illustrated in the drawing on the left. The Brothers were tied up inside and the doors were closed. Strange things began to happen, helped greatly by dim room lights and a cooperative audience.

The drawing comes from a poster¹³ and the usual artistic licence applies. During an actual séance the Brothers were out of sight when the spirits were at work. From time to time a door would open a little, just enough for an object to be thrown out, or for a

ghostly hand to appear – certainly not enough for the audience to see inside the cabinet.

Further details of the cabinet séance can be found in appendix 1. Details of the dark séance are in appendix 2.

London 1864-1865

When the Davenport Brothers arrived in London in September 1864, they were taken up by a successful actor and playwright named Dion Boucicault. They gave two private séances at Boucicault's home in London and he used his press contacts to get maximum publicity for them. The first séance, on 28 September, was really a press show. Detailed reports appeared in *The Times* and other London newspapers.

Magicians were swift to react. Anderson, the Wizard of the North, issued a challenge saying that he could do what the Davenport Bros did without the aid of the spirits. A magician named Tolmaque did the same.¹⁴ The Brothers challenged Anderson and Tolmaque to a contest at the home of Dion Boucicault on 11 October. Anderson and Tolmaque didn't turn up, perhaps wisely. The Davenport Brothers gave their séance anyway, and Boucicault wrote a long letter about it to various London dailies.

Within a week that letter was reproduced in two Cheltenham newspapers.¹⁵ I can imagine Maskelyne and his friends reading it with great interest, and then setting to work to find out how the Brothers did their tricks. They'll have spent a lot of time tying each other up and trying to escape.

Before long the Davenport Brothers were giving public séances at the Hanover Square Rooms (also known as the Queen's Concert Rooms). The Hanover Square Rooms were originally conceived as a venue for classical music concerts and there was a big concert hall on the first floor. Presumably the Brothers had one of the smaller rooms.

The inevitable result of the Davenport Brothers' success was that imitators proliferated. Anderson was one of the first. He had a full evening show at the St James's Hall and he added a rope-tying séance to his programme. Anderson's séance won't have been as slick as the Davenport Brothers'. They'd had years to work their show in, but their imitators didn't have that advantage.

Robert Cooper of Eastbourne

On 1 January 1865 an article about the Davenport Brothers was published in the *Era*: "[They] continue to mystify all London by their wonders. They have appeared in four or five provincial towns near London on their off days and have met with great success. This is their last week but two here prior to their departure for the Provinces and the Continent." One of the "provincial towns near London" was Brighton, where the Brothers gave a cabinet séance and a dark séance at the Newburgh Rooms on 20 December. They followed up with a return visit on 29 December. These dates were organised by Robert Cooper of Eastbourne, who saw the Davenport Brothers' manifestations as evidence for his belief that "departed spirits interfered in the affairs of the world they had left".¹⁶ Sceptics in Brighton were on the lookout for evidence that he was wrong.

A journalist from the *Brighton Herald* gave a disappointed report of the cabinet séance. He complained about the dim room lighting which, he said, made it difficult to see what was happening. He remarked that the manifestations were as reported at the London séances and "little wonderment was excited".¹⁷ A reporter for the *Brighton Gazette* had a story to tell about the Davenport Brothers' closing trick, the flour test:

[The Brothers' hands were filled with flour. They were tied and enclosed and, in the semi-darkness, hands appeared at the opening of the cabinet.] Mr Malden, of Windlesham House, who was seated in the front row of stalls, being anxious to see this test properly made, went on the platform, and, in answer to the showman's request, told the audience that flour had been deposited in the performers' hands, 'about a teaspoonful'. 'Quite sufficient for all practical purposes', said the showman. The trick was performed and the assertion made that no flour had been spilled, hence the inference that the Brothers had no *hand* in the trick. Mr Malden examined the carpet on the floor of the cabinet and, holding it

up to the eyes of the audience, exhibited slight, but unmistakable traces of flour thereon. 'Oh, the quantity is so very trifling', said the showman, but Mr Malden's answer was most apropos: 'Quite sufficient for all practical purposes.' Hearty applause and roars of laughter succeeded.¹⁸

The "showman" was Dr Ferguson. His unctuous manner and glib replies were a source of irritation for British audiences.

The Davenport Brothers had an easy time of it in London, where their audiences were good-tempered and usually incurious. Their experience in Brighton was a foretaste of the detailed, hostile scrutiny that they met on some of their provincial dates.

In mid-January they finished their season at the Hanover Square Rooms and set off on their provincial tour. Their final London séances were on Friday 13 and Saturday 14. On the Friday they had an audience of nearly 500, including Dion Boucicault and his wife, to wish them well on the tour.¹⁹

The tour dates that I know of can be found in the timeline (appendix 3). The tour started off in Sussex, where appearances in Lewes and Eastbourne were organised by Robert Cooper. Details of the Lewes visit are in the advertisement on the right. At both towns Ira Davenport was indisposed and William Fay deputised for him. Ira's indisposition was said to be due to "a wound on his wrist through being very tightly tied some days before".²⁰

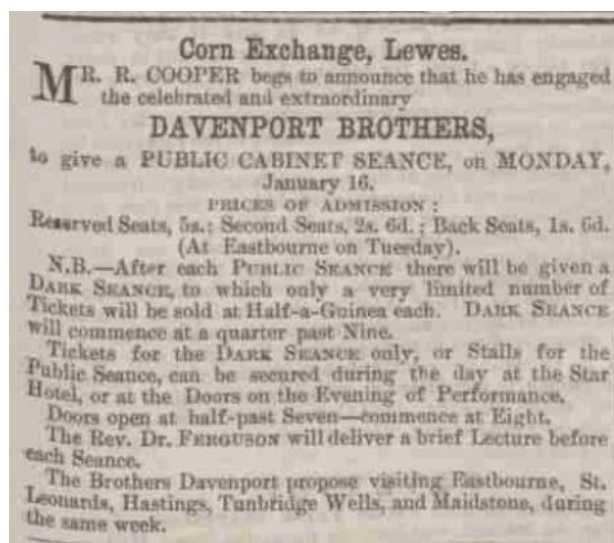
For their cabinet séances the Brothers asked for a committee of two volunteers from the audience, ideally people who were well-known in the locality. The chosen two were asked to inspect the cabinet, tie up the Brothers, and generally see fair play.

The volunteers at Lewes, Mr Crosskey and Dr Smythe, took their task seriously. Smythe asked Davenport and Fay to take off their coats so that he could examine their arms; he commented on their "muscular development". Crosskey and Smythe were repeatedly admonished by Dr Ferguson for "listening against the cabinet when closed".

Someone brought an extra rope to supplement the four ropes provided by the Brothers. Dr Ferguson accepted this, but refused to allow handcuffs to be used. At the end of the cabinet séance, both volunteers said that they found it unconvincing. Dr Smythe commented on the "shaking of the cabinet" during the manifestations. He said that Fay showed signs of violent exertion when he was "released from the cabinet".²¹

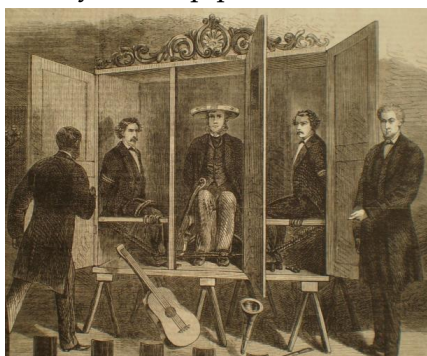
At Eastbourne the Davenport Brothers and their party found themselves at the centre of a lively debate. Standing alone on the spiritualist side was Robert Cooper, a well-respected resident of the town. Ranged against him were his friends and neighbours, who believed that he was misguided. They had asked him for evidence in support of his beliefs and he offered them the Davenport Brothers. Unfortunately for him, the cabinet séance went very badly. Part of the problem was the gas lighting, which could not be dimmed reliably. It was said that the town gas supply in Eastbourne was unreliable; the possibility of sabotage was not mentioned.

The volunteers at Eastbourne were Mr Dempster, a solicitor, and initially Mr Whitefield, a surgeon. They had seen the cabinet being assembled that afternoon and made an initial examination to check that it was the same cabinet. Whitefield wanted to tie Fay with silk thread; on being told



Sussex Advertiser, Sat 14 Jan 1865, p1 col.1

that this was not allowed, he stood down as a volunteer. He was replaced by a Mr Mockford, who put his rope around Fay's neck. He was allowed to continue on condition that the rope did not press on Fay's windpipe.



Illustrated Times, 5 November 1864, page 297 (Peter Lane Collection).

The manifestations proceeded as usual until a trick which I call "the Man in the Middle" (shown in the drawing on the left). Dempster sat between Fay and Davenport, and his hands were tied to their knees. The doors were closed and at this point the platform footlights should have been turned down. Instead they became very bright. Inside the cabinet there was enough light for Dempster to see Fay moving his hand, apparently to free himself from his bonds. This was suspicious because Fay should have stayed completely still, leaving the spirits to look after the manifestations.

After the flour test Dempster found flour on the floor of the cabinet, just as Mr Malden did in Brighton. At the end of the séance he gave his opinion that the manifestations were achieved by trickery, not by spirit intervention. Robert Cooper was heard to say afterwards that it was "one of the worst séances he had witnessed".²²

Herr Dobler

Round about that time Herr Dobler joined the ranks of the Davenport Brothers' imitators. Dobler was a British magician. He is **not** to be confused with the Viennese magician, Herr Ludwig Döbler, who belonged to an earlier generation.²³

Dobler seems to have introduced his cabinet séance at Leamington Spa in mid-January 1865.²⁴ Shortly afterwards he showed it at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, as advertised in the *Brighton Gazette* (right). Dobler offered his usual sleight of hand performance plus the cabinet séance. At the bottom of his advert he promised that "Herr Dobler will give an entire exposé of the mysterious feats and experiments of the Davenport Brothers", with "a cabinet made exactly the same as the one used by them".

I don't suppose that Dobler explained exactly how the Davenport Brothers did their tricks. He couldn't, because it meant giving away magic secrets. It's possible that he showed his version of a Davenport séance and said it was done without the aid of the spirits. That's exactly what Maskelyne and Cooke did some months later.

ROYAL PAVILION.
POSITIVELY FOR FOUR ENTERTAINMENTS ONLY.
 TUESDAY EVENING, JAN. 31, & THURSDAY EVENING,
 FEB. 2, at Eight.
 GRAND MORNING PERFORMANCES ON WEDNESDAY
 AND FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1st and 3rd, at Three o'clock.

H E R R D O B L E R,

The Greatest Sleight-of-Hand Performer in the
 World, will appear in his
ENCHANTED PALACE OF ILLUSIONS,
 And, at each assembly,
 Herr Dobler will give an entire Exposé of
**THE MYSTERIOUS FEATS AND EXPERIMENTS OF THE
 DAVENPORT BROTHERS,**
 And will introduce a CABINET made exactly the same as the
 one used by them.

Brighton Gazette, Thursday 26 January 1865, page 4, column 5

Davenport Brothers on tour: Eastbourne to Liverpool

After Eastbourne the Davenport Brothers had a few more dates in southern England. They then moved north towards Manchester, where they gave séances for five days at the Free Trade Hall Assembly Rooms. Up to that point their audiences remained good-tempered. At their next stop, St George's Hall in Liverpool, tempers frayed to breaking point.

St George's Hall still exists and the photograph on the right comes from an internet source. John Davenport and I walked past it several times when we went to Liverpool a few years ago. You can't miss it – it's enormous. The Davenport Brothers were booked into the small concert room, which held an audience of 1,000. They were perhaps unwise to take on a venue of that size.



Initially the Davenport Brothers' advertisements promised four days of séances in Liverpool: an evening séance on Monday 13, and afternoon séances on Tuesday 14, Thursday 16 and Saturday 18 February.²⁵ On each day there was to be a cabinet séance followed by a dark séance. On Monday evening the hall was half full and the séances went off fairly quietly.²⁶

At the cabinet séance on Tuesday afternoon the hall was crowded. The volunteers, John Hulley and Robert Bruce Cummins, had a secret weapon: the tomfool knot. It should be understood that the tomfool knot is not a trick knot, just a very effective way of restraining people.²⁷ Hulley and Cummins used it to tie the Brothers's wrists and the Brothers objected, saying that it was hurting them. Eventually they tied themselves up and gave their usual séance, but the audience was rowdy and no one was impressed.²⁸

"Tying themselves up" needs some explanation. It was part of a standard item in the Davenport Brothers' cabinet séance. The audience heard ropes lashing against the sides of the cabinet. Dr Ferguson opened the doors to reveal the Brothers sitting unbound, with the ropes at their feet. Then he shut the doors and the rope-lashing was heard again. He opened the doors and the Brothers were seen to be tied up. A believer would say that the spirits did the tying; a sceptic would say that the Brothers tied themselves up.

In spite of the disorder at the Tuesday afternoon séance, the Brothers advertised an additional evening performance on Wednesday 15 February.²⁹ That evening the hall was full, and Hulley and Cummins tried again. After almost an hour the Brothers agreed to be tied with the tomfool knot. William Davenport complained that the rope was hurting his wrist. Dr Ferguson cut the rope, saying that it was cutting the wrist, and William held up his hand to show that it was bleeding. Both Brothers then left the stage. Cummins exclaimed "That blood was from a wound made by Dr Ferguson in cutting the rope", and the audience rioted. Dr Ferguson was hustled into the cabinet and it was overturned. He managed to escape but the cabinet was smashed to pieces.³⁰ The Davenport Brothers and their party left Liverpool in a hurry and went back to London.³¹

It was said afterwards that pieces of the cabinet could be bought in Liverpool for a shilling each.³² I'm not aware of one in the Davenport Collection.

A new cabinet and a fresh start

The Davenport Brothers had another cabinet made and resumed their tour at Halifax on Monday 20 February, only five days after the Liverpool riot. Their original cabinet was an impressive piece of furniture. The replacement cabinet was more workaday. It was described as:

... a simple cupboard of plain deal ... The whole is fastened together by small screws ... The excessive plainness of the structure caused people to remark that it looked not unlike a workhouse cupboard or an unwieldy wardrobe ...³³

When the Halifax volunteers examined the cabinet they found that the side seats were not firmly fixed and could be moved forwards towards the centre of the cabinet. Very suspicious! Dr Ferguson explained that this was due to “the haste in which they had got up the new cabinet”.³⁴

On Tuesday 21 February the Davenport Brothers appeared at Huddersfield. The Halifax and Huddersfield séances were both written up in a long *Huddersfield Chronicle* article which included this comment:

On Monday evening ... the Brothers visited Halifax, and many Huddersfield gentlemen interested in the manifestations paid a visit to that town. There, however, the conditions which the Brothers imposed were observed so much to their satisfaction by the gentlemen selected to conduct the tying operations, that they were enabled to go through the trick of releasing themselves with comparative ease. But it was resolved that in Huddersfield the test should be of a nature to be more satisfactory to the public.³⁵

Hulley and Cummins were invited to Huddersfield to teach two prospective volunteers how to tie the tomfool knot. The Brothers’ manager, Palmer, asked for police protection and ten police officers were present at the cabinet séance. During the tying the Brothers complained that their wrists were hurting. Dr Ferguson cut the ropes and the séance was abandoned. The ten policemen stood at the front of the stage to protect the cabinet and eventually the audience dispersed peacefully.

Two séances at Hull on 22 February were cancelled when Hulley and Cummins arrived in the town.³⁶ The press reports don’t say whether it was the Davenport Brothers who lost their nerve, or the manager of the hall they’d booked.

At Leeds on 24 February, two medics from Leeds Infirmary were on hand “to see that no injury was done to the wrists of the Brothers”. William complained that he was tied too tightly; the medics said he wasn’t. A riot ensued and the Davenports fled. To quote a report in the *Era*, “the instruments ... were destroyed ... the cabinet was pitched [off the stage] into the body of the room [and] smashed to atoms. ... many gentlemen carried away relics of the ‘spiritual’ apparatus.”³⁷

The Brothers tried to carry on after the Leeds riot, but their record was discouraging. News reached Cheltenham that séances in Leamington, Leicester and Malvern were cancelled.³⁸ However the Brothers did appear at the Town Hall, Cheltenham on 7 March. It may not be a coincidence that Herr Dobler came to Cheltenham the week before and gave three performances of **his** cabinet séance.³⁹

The Cheltenham visit

The Davenport Brothers gave two cabinet séances in Cheltenham, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. The volunteers in the afternoon were J N Maskelyne⁴⁰ and a Mr E Lawrence.⁴¹ The evening volunteers were Messrs Lilleywhite and Friskney. The Brothers advertised a dark séance to follow the evening cabinet séance, but I don’t have any information about it.

The Davenport Brothers’ visit was a big event in Cheltenham. There are long reports in the *Cheltenham Journal*, *Cheltenham Mercury* and *Cheltenham Chronicle*, and a brief report in the *Cheltenham Examiner*.⁴² Unfortunately they don’t say much about the afternoon séance and Maskelyne’s name isn’t mentioned at all. With that in mind, let’s look at the Maskelyne version of the story.

Afternoon cabinet séance: the Maskelyne story

This is J N Maskelyne’s account in the *Strand Magazine*.⁴³

In due course the world-famous mystifiers held their séance at the Town Hall at Cheltenham. It was an afternoon performance and the windows were specially darkened for the occasion. ... The light in the room was always dim, so that even when the centre door was open it was difficult to distinguish any movement inside. ... I was one of the committee

of investigation elected by the audience. During the séance I was seated on one side of the stage, with a row of darkened windows at my back.

Once, while the centre door was opening and instruments were flying out of the cabinet, a small piece of drapery fell from the window behind me. A ray of sunlight shot into the cabinet, lighting up Ira Davenport ... There sat Ira with one hand behind him and the other in the act of throwing the instruments out. In a trice both hands were behind him. He gave a smart wriggle of his shoulders, and lo! when his bonds were examined, he was found to be thoroughly secured; so firmly bound, in fact, that the ropes were cutting into the flesh on his wrists.

But I had discovered the secret. Ira Davenport's movement had taught me the trick. And I knew that with a little practice I could do it.

Maskelyne announced that he'd discovered the trick and a row ensued.

Jasper Maskelyne's account in *White Magic* is rather more elaborate but the basic story is the same. There are two extra details:

- *White Magic* says that the "piece of drapery" didn't fall from the window by accident. It was a "little surprise" that Maskelyne had organised with a fellow magician.
- *White Magic* also says that Maskelyne's intervention stopped the séance, and the audience spilled out into the street "buzzing like bees from an overturned hive". I'd expect an incident like that to be reported in the local papers – but it wasn't.⁴⁴

The Maskelyne accounts don't mention the evening séances at all. We have to look in the local papers to find out what happened.

Evening cabinet séance: the newspaper record

At the evening cabinet séance the volunteers were Lilleywhite and Friskney. They brought their own ropes and took 30-45 minutes to do the tying up. There's no suggestion that they used the tomfool knot, but they may well have used several **short** lengths of rope to tie each Brother. The Brothers preferred two **long** lengths of rope, one for their arms and one for their legs. Usually they insisted on being tied up with their own ropes, but at Cheltenham they did not.

As at Leeds, there was a medic on hand in case the Brothers complained of mistreatment. One Brother did complain that his wrists were tied too tightly, but the medic said that "no injury would result from the pressure of the ropes".⁴⁵ Dr Ferguson allowed the tying to proceed.

Once tied up, the Brothers were shut up in the cabinet. Lilleywhite and Friskney sat at the side of the stage to await events. For half an hour nothing happened– no manifestations, just jeers and catcalls from the audience. Finally the cabinet doors were thrown open and the Brothers came out, "amidst great applause".⁴⁶

Then they went back into the cabinet, tied themselves up, and proceeded with the usual manifestations. The reporters weren't impressed and I don't suppose the audience was either. It was a long, rowdy, tedious evening – and a disaster for the Davenport Brothers. They may have hoped for lenient treatment when they came south, but Lilleywhite and Friskney in Cheltenham were just as harsh as Hulley and Cummins in Liverpool.

Aftermath of the Cheltenham visit

Cheltenham seems to have been the last stop on the Davenport Brothers' provincial tour. The following Saturday they were back in London at the Hanover Square Rooms. We're told that "A row was ... attempted, but not successfully".⁴⁷ By the beginning of September they'd moved on to Paris,⁴⁸ where they drop out of my story.

Meanwhile, back in Cheltenham, Maskelyne and Cooke were busy getting a cabinet made and working on their own Davenport séance. On 19 June they gave their first performance, on an open

air stage at Jessops Aviary Gardens. Six months later they had their first professional engagement: two weeks at the Bristol Assembly Rooms with a full evening show.⁴⁹ For the next seven years they toured the provinces, developing and improving their show until it was good enough for London audiences. They opened at the Egyptian Hall on 26 May 1873.


The poster on this page advertises Maskelyne & Cooke's first performances at the Egyptian Hall. By this time the Davenport Brothers weren't featured in their show. Maskelyne & Cooke still described themselves as antispiritualists, but the world had moved on. The Davenport Brothers were no longer the hot topic in British magic.

Photograph from the John Salisse Collection, now in the Davenport Collection. We do not know who owns the original poster.

EGYPTIAN HALL, PICCADILLY.
EVERY EVENING AT EIGHT
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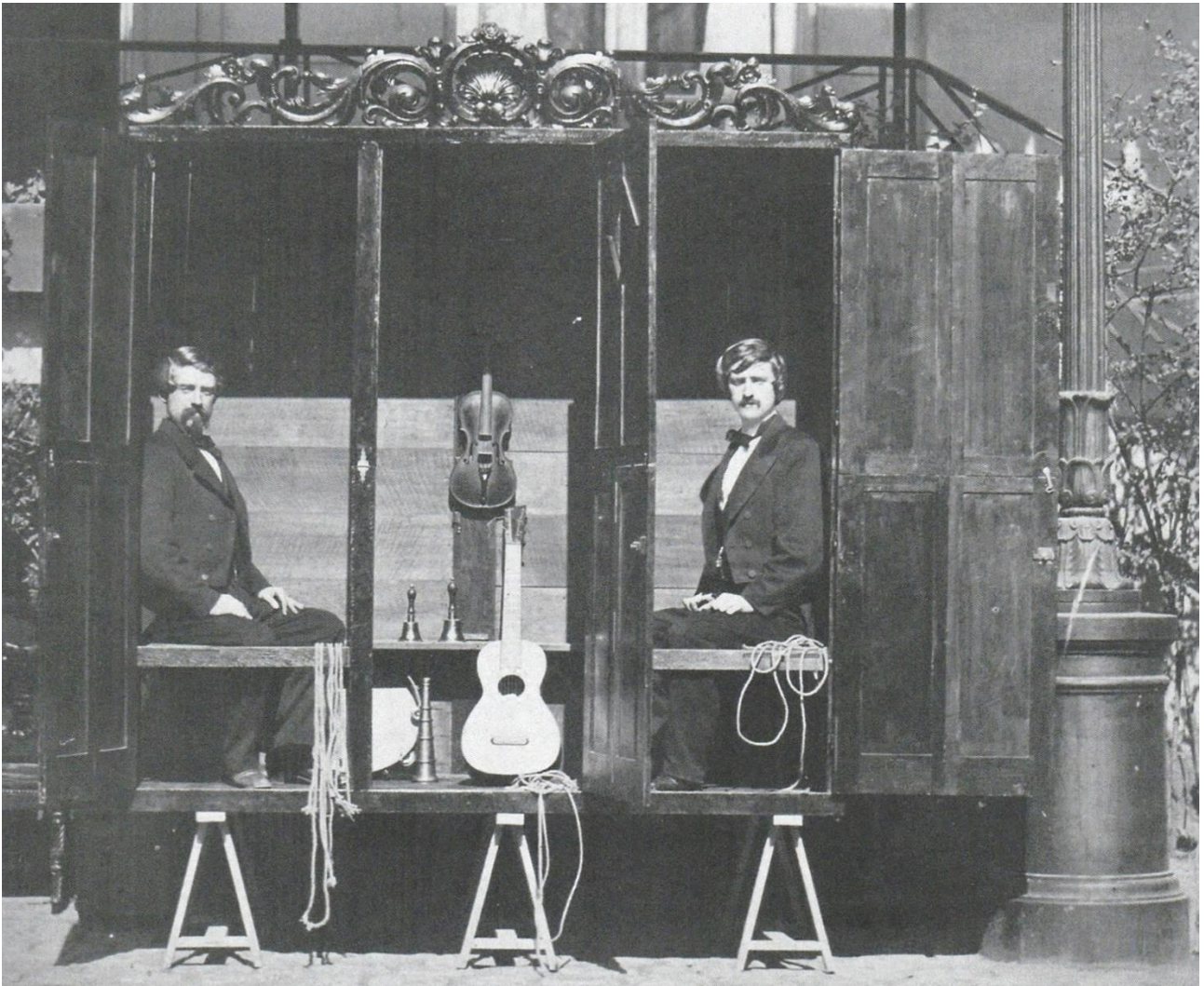
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Appendix 1. Cabinet séance

Some of the information in this appendix can be found in the main article, but it is convenient to bring it all together in one place. For the cabinet séances the Brothers asked for a committee of two volunteers from the audience, ideally people who were well-known in the locality. The chosen two were asked to inspect the cabinet, tie up the Brothers, and generally see fair play.

The apparatus



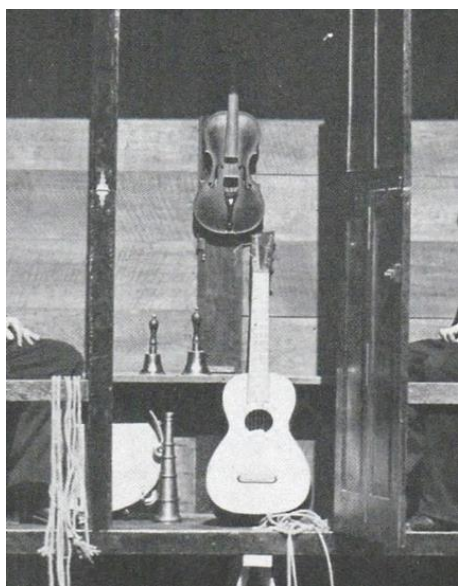
The main prop in the cabinet séance was a spirit cabinet like the one in the photograph. The Brothers were tied up inside, the doors were closed, and strange things began to happen – helped greatly by dim room lights and a cooperative audience.

The photograph was taken in Paris in the mid-1860s. It was in the Fechner collection and was auctioned by Swann Galleries in 2005. The image comes from the auction catalogue. We're in the early days of photography here, when photographs were best taken in daylight. For this one the cabinet was set up on the pavement, in the sunshine.⁵⁰

The cabinet looked like an oversize wardrobe, with ornate wooden decoration along the top and three doors on the front. The centre door had a diamond-shape window with a little curtain on the inside. Sometimes a ghostly hand would be seen in front of the curtain, perhaps ringing a ghostly handbell.

Inside the cabinet there were wooden benches along the back and sides. The Brothers sat on the side benches, as in the photograph. The tying up was done under careful supervision, using ropes

provided by the Brothers. You can see the ropes in the photograph. There were two ropes for each Brother, one for his arms and one for his legs.



This detail of the photograph shows the smaller props which were placed between the Brothers. The violin and guitar were thrown around quite a lot, so they'll have been battered and out of tune. The violin had a bow, which isn't visible in the photograph.

On the back bench there are two handbells of different sizes. We're told that they were a postman's bell and a muffin boy's bell.⁵¹

On the floor of the cabinet, to the left of the guitar, is a brass ear trumpet, very heavy and alarmingly dented. You can just see a tambourine between the ropes and the ear trumpet.

At times during the séances the spirits would play these instruments, accompanied by knocks (sometimes thumps) on the inside walls of the cabinet. The "spirit music" was loud but certainly not tuneful.

First Boucicault séance, 28 September 1864

The "London sceptic" is the name I use for one of the people who attended the first Boucicault séance. He read accounts in two London papers (the *Times* and possibly the *Morning Post*) and found them unsatisfactory. He wrote a long letter which gave many details of the cabinet and dark séances, and it was published in the *London Evening Standard* and other newspapers.⁵² He signed his letter "Incredulus Odi", but I find it convenient to refer to him as the "London sceptic".

The London sceptic's letter is an excellent eyewitness account of the Davenport Brothers' performance. However it is difficult to follow, not least because of its length and the lack of paragraphing. The summary which follows refers to the cabinet séance only; details of the dark séance can be found in appendix 2.

- The Davenport Brothers' party consisted of:
 - The two Brothers and Mr Fay, as performers (the two Brothers performed in the cabinet séance; Fay and one of the Brothers performed in the dark séance.)
 - Dr Ferguson and Mr Palmer, as assistants.
- The walnut cabinet was "erected on its trestles at one end of the apartment, with its back to the fireplace".
- Detailed description of the cabinet, including: "The three doors [are] fastened on the inside by a flat and easily moved bolt."
- The cabinet was examined and the Brothers were tied up.
- Various items were put in the cabinet, between the Brothers and apparently out of their reach: a guitar, a violin and bow, a tambourine, a very heavy brass ear trumpet, a postman's handbell, and a muffin boy's handbell.
- The two outer doors were shut and bolted, hiding the Brothers from view.
- The middle door was closed to. Its bolt was "heard to be drawn from inside", apparently by the spirits.
- Hands appeared at the hole in the middle door, "one from each side of the cabinet as it appeared" and "jiggled flittingly in front of the curtain, which was thrust slightly back". The hands had a ghostly appearance because the room lights were dimmed.

- An audience member went up to the middle door and placed his hand at the hole. He felt “the touch of a hand in a light and fugitive manner”.
- The instruments inside the cabinet were “played” and the handbells were rung. The ear trumpet was thrown through the hole in the middle door (and must have been put back by Dr Ferguson or Mr Palmer).
- All three doors “were burst ajar” and were fully opened by Dr Ferguson. The Brothers were seen to be bound.
- “Then followed a desultory opening and shutting of the side doors and middle door, anyone being invited to bolt the doors themselves”.
 - If a person stood at the middle door with his back to one of the Brothers:
 - he’d feel a hand lightly touching him from behind, and the audience would see the hand;
 - “hands were seen, as far as the wrist, hovering just at the profile of” one or other of the compartments where a Brother sat out of sight.
 - “As soon as darkness fell on any side of the cabinet a bustle took place on that particular side, and some one of the instruments was violently ejected” (and presumably put back in the cabinet).
- **Untying and Tying:**
 - The cabinet was closed completely and the sound of cords being untied was heard. When the cabinet was opened again, the Brothers were seen to be free of their bonds. A bundle of ropes sat between them.
 - The cabinet was closed again and the sound of cords being tied was heard. When the cabinet was reopened, the Brothers were seen to be tied up, apparently more securely than before.
- **Man in the Middle.** An audience member was invited to sit between the Brothers. Each of his hands was tied to the knees of the nearest brother. The instruments were put in his lap and the doors were closed.
 - “The usual confusion of sounds was heard”.
 - “The audience member was heard to say that the tambourine was playing on his head.”
 - The instruments were moved around very close to the audience member’s eyes. He felt obliged to shut his eyes in order to protect them. “He felt the contact of hands on his face and body and head”.
 - Presumably the audience member came out and the doors were closed again.
- The cabinet séance “ended by a prolonged *charivari* of all the instruments, in which a certain attempt at tone and harmony was perceptible”.

The London sceptic remarked that one or both Brothers were out of sight for long periods, but this was very cleverly disguised.

Specific items in the cabinet séance

The items that I’ve chosen to describe are:

- Closing and Opening the Doors
- Untying and Tying
- Flour test
- Man in the Middle.

The name “flour test” was used by the Brothers and their party; the other names are my invention.

Closing and Opening the Doors. Each door was fastened on the inside by a flat and easily moved bolt. This meant that the cabinet couldn’t be opened from the outside if all three doors were shut. It

was a safeguard against obstreperous audience members who might be tempted to open a door at an inconvenient moment.

Once the Brothers were tied up, the procedure for closing the doors was:

- Dr Ferguson closed and bolted the two outer doors, hiding the Brothers from view.
- He closed the centre door to. Its bolt was heard to be slid shut, apparently by the spirits.

From this point onwards, the doors could only be opened if one door was unbolted from the inside. The Brothers must have had some way of signalling to Dr Ferguson that they were ready to have the doors opened. This could be done, for example, by opening a bolt with an audible click. Once cued, Dr Ferguson opened the doors in this order: left hand door; centre door, right hand door.

A Mr Wilson of Huddersfield gave a graphic account of the door-opening procedure, as seen in Halifax on 20 February 1865.

Time in this part of the performance is what they are racing against. Ira, the one on the left, can open his door, and that is all the exertion he has to perform during this part of the séance. He is found cool.

The middle door is then opened and a short amount of time is gained ... in showing what is not at all surprising, that no one is in the middle of the cabinet.

[The door on the right is opened.] Then to the quick eye all is clear, the other brother presenting a very marked contrast in his flushed face, the long hair down upon his forehead, in a fresh form every time, while he is seen shaking it back, recovering his breath, and slightly coughing from exertion.⁵³

Untying and Tying. At Bradford on 1 February 1865 the untying and tying took place at the beginning of the cabinet séance. The Brothers were tied up and shut in the cabinet, and the room lights were dimmed:

Various noises were now heard inside the structure, as if the ropes were being rapidly unlashd and the instruments kicked or pushed about. The doors were opened and William was discovered released, the time occupied being 5.5 minutes. The doors were again closed. The noises were repeated and in 2.75 minutes Ira was revealed, perfectly freed from his bonds.

The brothers were next seated untied in the cabinet, with the ropes at their feet. The doors were closed, other noises were heard; and, *in three minutes and a half*, the doors were again opened, showing the young men, tied very firmly — immovably, indeed — in their seats.⁵⁴

Someone in the Bradford audience was recording the timings very carefully!

The Untying and Tying makes it clear, at least to a sceptic like myself, that the Davenport Brothers could tie themselves up when necessary. I'm aware of two occasions when they did this to avoid a stalemate:

- Liverpool on Tuesday 14 February 1865, when they refused to be tied up by Hulley and Cummins. Instead they were shut in the cabinet with the ropes. When the doors were next opened they were tied up in a manner which enabled the séance to proceed.
- Cheltenham on 7 March 1865, when Dr Ferguson allowed Lilleywhite and Friskney to use their own ropes to tie up the Brothers. It took the Brothers 30-45 minutes to free themselves, whereupon they came out of the cabinet to show themselves free. Then, as in Liverpool, they were shut in the cabinet with the ropes and tied themselves up.

Flour test. The Brothers were tied up and flour was put into each of their hands. The cabinet doors were closed and a selection of manifestations followed. When the doors were reopened, the flour was still in the Brothers' hands.

The flour test was called into question in Brighton on 20 December 1864.

Mr Malden of Windlesham House, who was seated in the front row of the stalls, ... went on the platform and, in answer to [Dr Ferguson's] request, told the audience that flour had been

deposited in the performers' hands, "about a teaspoonful'. ... The trick was performed and the assertion made that no flour had been spilled, hence the inference that the Brothers had no *hand* in the trick. Mr Malden examined the carpet on the floor of the cabinet, and holding it up to the eyes of the audience, exhibited slight, but unmistakable traces of flour thereon.⁵⁵

Mr Malden's observation did not explain how the trick was done, but the impact of the trick was blunted.

At Liverpool on 13 February 1865 a reporter made this observation:

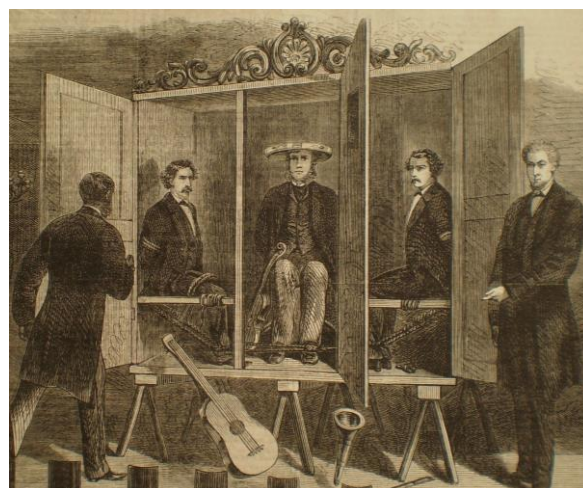
When the hands of the Davenports were not filled with flour, the violin was played in such a manner as to show that the performer was 'stopping' — that is, using his fingers on the strings. But while the hands of the brothers were filled with flour no 'stopping' was observable; the only sound made on the instrument was such as could be produced by bowing alone, the bow being held between the knees or teeth. We mention this fact, not as an explanation but simply as a suggestion.⁵⁶

In other words, the Brothers usually had at least one hand free to play the violin; during the flour test they had no hands free.

Man in the Middle. One of the volunteers was asked to sit on the back bench of the cabinet, as shown in the drawing on the right. Each of his hands was tied to the knee of a Brother. The cabinet doors were closed.

At Lewes on 16 January 1865 the volunteer was Mr Crosskey.

Mr Crosskey took a seat inside the cabinet between the mediums, his hands being right and left on each of their knees, to which they were secured by ropes. The tambourine was placed in his lap with the two bells and brass horn, and the guitar on the floor reclining against his left arm. The cabinet was then closed, and the noises [of the instruments] were repeated, and on the doors being reopened the tambourine was on Mr Crosskey's head, and the guitar behind his back. Mr Crosskey, on being released ... said the instruments moved about him, first on one part, then on another, during the whole of which time he did not perceive that the young men ... in any way moved.⁵⁷



Illustrated Times, 5 November 1864, page 297
(Peter Lane Collection).

The Man in the Middle went less smoothly at Eastbourne on 17 January 1865, when the volunteer was Mr Dempster. He sat between Fay and Davenport, and his hands were tied to their knees. The doors were closed and at this point the platform footlights should have been turned down. Instead they became very bright. Inside the cabinet there was enough light for Dempster to see Fay moving his hand, apparently to free himself from his bonds. This was suspicious because Fay should have stayed completely still, leaving the spirits to look after the manifestations.⁵⁸

In Cheltenham on 7 March 1865 the volunteer was Mr Lilleywhite. On this occasion the Man in the Middle went well.

On being released from his temporary imprisonment, Mr Lilleywhite, in a peculiarly pithy and pertinent manner, related his experience of what had transpired. "It was a rum 'un," he said. He felt all sorts of things; the instruments were flying about, but he did not find that the Brothers moved.⁵⁹

Appendix 2. Dark séance

After the cabinet séance there was usually a dark séance, for which an extra charge of 10s 6d (half a guinea) was made. This limited the number of people in the audience. Newspaper reports of the dark séance varied, not least because it was impossible to make notes in complete darkness. Two examples are offered, from London and Bradford.

London, 28 September 1864

This account was written by the London sceptic who saw the Davenport Brothers at the home of Dion Boucicault (see appendix 1). Here is a summary:

- The performers were Fay and one of the Davenport Brothers.
- Audience members sat on chairs arranged around three sides of a small table. They were asked to hold hands to form a chain. The instruments used in the cabinet séance were put on the table. Fay sat on one side of the table, Davenport on the other. Both were bound hand and foot to their chairs. The lights were extinguished and the room was in complete darkness (there was a thick curtain at the window). Dr Ferguson warned the company that it was dangerous to break the chain.
- Various manifestations ensued. The instruments “whirled close enough for [audience members] to feel the wind of their passing, sounding all the while and occasionally touching [people]”. Some people had “hardish raps on the head”. One man was hit hard enough to draw blood. The writer tried to grasp the guitar as it passed, “for which [he] received several hard raps, meant for [his] knuckles”. The voices of Davenport and Fay were heard, apparently from their chairs. Dr Ferguson struck a light (he had a “lucifer and candle”) and Fay and Davenport were seen to be tied to their chairs as before.
- **Coat Trick.** In the darkness, Fay’s coat was removed. When light was restored, he was seen to be bound to his chair as before; his coat was on the floor at his feet. A coat borrowed from an audience member was put at his feet and the candle blown out. When light was next restored, he was wearing the borrowed coat. Each feat was preceded by “a peculiar sound as of forcible wriggling”.
- “Two rings belonging to one of the company” were transferred to Fay’s hand. Their owner asked for them to be put back on his finger; instead they were put on Dion Boucicault’s finger.
- A lady was asked to hold out her watch. It “was removed from [her] hand and placed at the feet of Dr Ferguson, who sat at the further end of the room.”
- The finale involved three people: Fay, the *Times* correspondent, and the London sceptic. They sat in a row with the *Times* man in the middle. Next to them was a table on which the instruments were laid. Nobody was tied up, but the three people were interlaced as follows:
 - The *Times* man put a hand on each of the heads of Fay and the London sceptic.
 - Fay and the London sceptic sat with their feet together; the *Times* man covered their feet with his own.
 - The *Times* man stretched his forearms out; Fay and the London sceptic each clasped their two hands tightly over a forearm.

It seemed to the London sceptic that “no one of us could stir without it being felt by the other.” The light was put out and the *Times* man was asked to choose an instrument which was to play and move about the room. He selected the guitar; it “twangled”, and the London sceptic felt it “rise against my face, presently rapping me on the top of the head, as it did my

neighbour. This performance was rapidly brought to a close, Mr Fay complaining that he was exhausted by the effort”.

The London sceptic added this postscript to his letter:

The Brothers Davenport have denied that they ... attribute the phenomena ... to spiritual or any other agency. They should therefore, to be consistent, discard the jargon of spiritism and electrobiology, and not address the supposed agent as though talking to an individual, calling him familiarly “John” and requesting him to “be gentle” in his manifestations; and they should not talk unmeaning stuff about “electrical chains”, “negative” and “positive”, etc.

Bradford, 1 February 1865

The Davenport Brothers gave séances at the Mechanics’ Institute, Bradford, on Wednesday 1 and Thursday 2 February. A detailed report of their Wednesday séances appeared in the *Bradford Review* on 4 February. I have paraphrased it slightly in the interests of clarity:

[The light séance came first.] The dark séance followed, held in one of the classrooms of the Institute, adjoining the theatre. About 30 persons were present, besides Ira and William Davenport, Dr Ferguson, and Mr Fay. The audience were seated in chairs and forms, in two semicircles, one behind the other, and were required to join their hands while the phenomena were taking place. Utter darkness was one of the conditions of the séance. William and Ferguson sat among the spectators, and their hands were held.

Ira and Fay sat in two chairs, about four feet apart. They were bound firmly to their chairs, about a minute being consumed in the operation. The lights being extinguished, a series of phenomena followed, not easily to be described.

- Two violins, the tambourine, and two hand bells moved rapidly over the heads of the spectators, brushing and tapping them.
- Hands also patted many of them.
- One person who wore spectacles was deprived of them by a hand, and on light being again obtained they were found in the hand of a person eight feet distant.

Ira and Fay placed their feet on pieces of paper, which were then marked with pencil, and the floor was also marked. The phenomena already alluded to were repeated with additional circumstances, and then on the light being rekindled, it was shown by the marks that neither Ira nor Fay had moved in the slightest.

The instruments were rubbed with phosphorated oil, and by this means their course was traced as they swept about the room, playing all the time, and rising sometimes nearly to the ceiling.

Coat trick. The knots of the ropes by which the hands of Ira and Fay were tied [were] sealed, and inspected by some of the spectators. The lights were put out. Fay’s coat was instantaneously taken off him and thrown at one of the audience, falling on his knees, although Fay’s hands were tightly bound together behind him. With the same speed, another gentleman’s coat was placed on his back, and his arms were in the sleeves.

Darkness once more succeeded. The spectacles again suddenly departed from their owner, and were placed on the countenance of a lady at some distance. Ira requested *some one* to unbind them, using the simple adjuration “Will you unbind me, please?” The ropes at once began to be unlashd, the instruments still careering round the apartment.

In about a minute, lights were struck. It was found that, not content with unbinding Ira and Fay, the “spirits” had bound two of the other members of the party. One gentleman’s face was completely swathed with the ropes. This concluded the séance.⁶⁰

Appendix 3. Timeline

Sources of information

- Newspapers are in the British Newspaper Archive (BNA). Searching for specific references in the BNA can be a frustrating business. To help the reader, I have given column numbers as well as page numbers. Column numbers run from left to right (eg “col.2” is the second column from the left). Page numbers are as printed in the newspapers.

References to the *Standard* (London) and *Evening Standard* (London) can be found by searching under “London Evening Standard”.

- “Dawes 2012” refers to an article on W S Gilbert and the Davenport Brothers in E A Dawes’ *Rich Cabinet* series: One of Dawes’ sources was T L Nichols, *A biography of the Brothers Davenport* (Saunders, Otley & Co, London, late 1864).
 - Dawes’ article was first published in *Magic Circular* V106 N1146 (Jan 2012) p16-19.
 - The *Rich Cabinet* series has been updated and republished by Magicana (Toronto, Canada) as *The Rich Cabinet Collection*. The 2012 article on W S Gilbert and the Davenport Brothers is in volume VII, p2536-2543.

Page references are to the Magicana edition.

London

1864, 27 Aug. Davenport Brothers sailed from New York [Dawes 2012, p2537].

1864, 9 Sep. Davenport Brothers disembarked in Glasgow [Dawes 2012, p2537-2538].

1864, 11 Sep. Davenport Brothers arrived in London [Dawes 2012, p2537-2538].

1864, 28 Sep. First Boucicault séance.

- Dawes 2012, p2538.
- The London sceptic’s letter, published in:
 - *Evening Standard* (London), Mon 3 Oct 1864, p2 cols.1-2
 - *Standard* (London), Mon 3 Oct 1864, p2 cols.4-5
 - *Morning Herald* (London), Mon 3 Oct 1864, p3 cols.1-2.
- *Sun* (London), Thu 6 Oct 1864, p1 col.7. This is a column-length article on the Davenport Brothers. It includes a letter from the London correspondent of the *Belfast Newsletter*, giving descriptions of the Davenport Brothers and their party as seen at the first Boucicault séance.

1864, Tue 11 Oct. Second Boucicault séance.

- Dawes 2012, p2538
- Letter from Dion Boucicault describing the séance. The letter was published in:
 - *Daily News* (London), Thu 13 Oct 1864, p5 col.4
 - *Express* (London), Thu 13 Oct 1864, p1 col.5
 - *Standard* (London), Thu 13 Oct 1864, p6 col.4
 - *Evening Standard* (London), Thu 13 Oct 1864, p3 col.6
 - *Morning Herald* (London), Thu 13 Oct 1864, p6 col.6
 - *Sun* (London), Thu 13 Oct 1864, p1 col.6
 - *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Tue 18 Oct 1864, p8 col.5
 - *Cheltenham Examiner*, Wed 19 Oct 1864, p3 col.3.

1864, 29 Oct. First public séance at the Hanover Square Rooms.

- Advert in the *Sun* (London), Tue 25 Oct 1864, second (evening) edition, p1 col.1.

1864, 11 Nov. W S Gilbert went to the cabinet and dark séances at the Hanover Square Rooms. He published an entertaining account of the evening in *Fun* magazine on 26 Nov. [Dawes 2012, p2538].

1864, week beginning Mon 5 Dec. Arrangements for the Hanover Square Rooms séances varied from week to week. This week's adverts tell us that there were cabinet séances on Wednesday and Friday at 8pm, and on Saturday at 3pm. "After each public séance there will be a Dark Séance, limited number of tickets at half a guinea (10/6); 9.15pm." See:

- *Evening Standard* (London), Tue 6 Dec 1864, p1 col.5
- *Evening Standard* (London), Thu 8 Dec 1864, p1 col.6.

1864, Tue 20 & Thu 29 Dec. Evening séances at the Newburgh Rooms, Cannon Place, Brighton.

- A detailed report of the 20 December séances appeared in *Brighton Herald* and was reprinted in *Sussex Advertiser*, Tue 27 Dec 1864, p6 col.5.
- The 29 December séances were advertised in *Brighton Guardian*, Wed 28 Dec 1864, p4 col.6 and *Brighton Gazette*, Thu 29 Dec 1864, p4 col.4. I haven't found a report of them.

1865, 1 Jan. *Era*, p14 col.1. Article about the Davenport Brothers, who "continue to mystify all London by their wonders. They have appeared in four or five provincial towns near London upon their off days, and have met with great success."

1865, Sat 14 Jan. Last London séances.

- *Era*, Sun 15 Jan 1865, p15 col.1.

Provincial tour

1865, Mon 16 Jan. Lewes, Corn Exchange.

- Advert and puff in *Sussex Advertiser*, Sat 14 Jan 1865, p1 col.1 and p2 col.6
- Report in *Croydon Observer*, Fri 20 Jan 1865, p3 col.7
- Report in *Sussex Advertiser*, Tue 24 Jan 1865, p7 col.1.

1865, Tue 17 Jan. Eastbourne, Diplock's Assembly Rooms. Reports in:

- *Eastbourne Gazette*, Wed 25 Jan 1865, p4 cols.3-5
- *Tunbridge Wells Journal*, Thu 26 Jan 1865, p3 col.col.2 (also in *Sussex Advertiser*, Sat 28 Jan 1865, p2 col.5).

1865, Wed 18 & Thu 19 Jan. Hastings and St Leonards, St Leonards Assembly Rooms. Reports in:

- *Sussex Advertiser*, Tue 24 Jan 1865, p7 col.2
- *Sussex Advertiser*, Sat 28 Jan 1865, p2 col.6.

The second report seems to be a repeat of the first.

1865, Sat 21 Jan. Maidstone, Corn Exchange.

- Advert for "Public Cabinet Séance" in *Maidstone Telegraph*, Sat 14 Jan 1865, p1 col.1.

1865, Tue 24 Jan. Folkestone, Town Hall.

- Puff in *Folkestone Chronicle*, Sat 14 Jan 1865, p8 col.3.

1865, Wed 25 Jan. Southsea, Portland Hall.

- *Portsmouth Times and Naval Gazette*, Sat 21 Jan 1865. Puff on p4 col.4, advert on p8 col.5
- Brief report in *Hampshire Chronicle*, Sat 28 Jan 1865, p5 col.5.

1865, Mon 30 & Tue 31 Jan. Wolverhampton, St George's Hall.

- Advert in *Birmingham Daily Post*, Thu 26 Jan 1865, p1 col.3
- Detailed report in *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, Wed 1 Feb 1865, p4 col.6 & p5 col.1.

1865, Wed 1 & Thu 2 Feb. Bradford, Mechanics Institute. Reports in:

- *Leeds Times*, Sat 4 Feb 1865, p5 col.5

- *Bradford Review*, Sat 4 Feb 1865, p5 col.2.

1865, Sat 4 Feb to Wed 8 Feb. Manchester, Free Trade Hall Assembly Rooms.

- Advert in *Manchester Courier*, Wed 1 Feb 1865, p1 col.1
- Report of a press show on Fri 3 Feb, in *Manchester Courier*, Sat 4 Feb 1865, p5 col.4
- Report of first public show (Sat 4 Feb) in *Manchester Courier*, Mon 6 Feb 1865, p3 col.3-4
- Advert in *Manchester Courier*, Tue 7 Feb 1865, p1 col.1.

1865, Mon 13 to Wed 15 Feb. Liverpool, St George's Hall (riot on 15 Feb, cabinet smashed).

- The Davenport Brothers' visit to Liverpool was extensively reported. References that I have used are cited in the main article.

1865, Mon 20 Feb. Halifax.

- Reported in *Huddersfield Chronicle*, Saturday 25 February 1865, p8 cols.1 and 3-4.

1865, Tue 21 Feb. Huddersfield, Philosophical Hall (abandoned).

- Brief news item in *Huddersfield Chronicle*, Sat 18 Feb 1865, p5 col.4.
- Reports in:
 - *Huddersfield Chronicle*, Sat 25 Feb 1865, p8 col.1-3
 - *Huddersfield and Holmfirth Examiner*, Sat 25 Feb 1865, p7, col.1-3
 - *Leeds Mercury*, Wed 22 Feb 1865, p4 col.3.

1865, Wed 22 Feb. Hull, Public Rooms (cancelled).

- *Frome Times*, Wed 1 Mar 1865, p4 col.5
- *Leeds Mercury*, Thu 23 Feb 1865, p3 col.5.

1865, Fri 24 Feb. Leeds, Music Hall (riot, cabinet smashed).

- *Era*, Sun 26 Feb 1865, p15 col.4.

1865, Tue 28 Feb. Leamington. Cancelled.

- *Cheltenham Mercury*, Sat 4 Mar 1865, p2, col.2.

1865, Wed 1 Mar. Leicester. Cancelled.

- *Cheltenham Mercury*, Sat 4 Mar 1865, p2, col.2.

1865, Mon 6 Mar. Malvern, New Concert-room. Cancelled.

- *Cheltenham Journal*, Sat 11 Mar 1865, p8, col.2.

1865, Tue 7 Mar. Cheltenham, Town Hall.

- References that I have used are cited in the main article.

After Cheltenham

1865, Sat 11 Mar. London, Hanover Square Rooms.

- *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Tue 14 Mar 1865, p8 col.1.

1865, Tue 11 Sep. Paris.

- *The Examiner*, Sat 16 Sep 1865, p590 col.1 & p591 col.2-3. The Brothers had a hostile reception to which three factors seem to have contributed:
 - The performance started late.
 - The Brothers used an interpreter whose introductory speech was too long.
 - The French magician Robin gave his exposure of their séance the evening before.

References

¹ The front cover of the brochure tells us that it was written by Maskelyne & Cooke's manager, William Morton. He joined Maskelyne & Cooke some years after the Davenport Brothers visited Cheltenham, so he had to rely on J N Maskelyne's memory of the visit.

² Readers of Jane Austen's novels (published c.1800) will know that the word "morning" used to mean "daytime". The word "evening" had its modern meaning. J N Maskelyne's story was about an afternoon séance, which probably started at 3pm.

³ *Strand Magazine*, Jan 1910 (volume 39, number 229) p17-24.

⁴ Extracts from Alistair Maskelyne's letters were first published in a series of articles written by Richard Stokes for an Australian magazine, *Geniis Magic Journal* (editor Brian McCullagh). The series ran from November 1993 to March 1995.

⁵ Jasper Maskelyne, *White Magic* (Stanley Paul, London), chapter 1; p17 in first edition, p14-15 in subsequent editions.

⁶ Lionel A Weatherley, *The Supernatural?* (Arrowsmith, Bristol), opposite page 190. Weatherley's introduction to the book is dated November 1891.

The book includes a three-part chapter by J N Maskelyne on Oriental Jugglery, Spiritualism, and Theosophy. Maskelyne is named as joint author on the cover of the book; the title page makes it clear that he contributed only one chapter.

⁷ Maskelyne's birth certificate tells us that he was born on 22 Dec 1839. For the Davenport Brothers I have relied on David Price, *Magic: a Pictorial History of Conjurers in the Theater* (Cornwall Books, 1985) p443. This says that:

- Ira Erastus Davenport was born on 17 Sep 1839;
- William Henry Harrison Davenport was born on 1 Feb 1841.

⁸ The London correspondent of the *Belfast Newsletter* attended the Davenport Brothers' séance at the home of Dion Boucicault on 28 Sep 1864. His account of the séance appeared in the *Sun* (London), Thu 6 Oct 1864, p1 col.7, as part of a column-length article on the Davenport Brothers.

⁹ *Sun* (London), Thu 6 Oct 1864, p1 col.7.

¹⁰ Article about the Davenport Brothers in the *Express* (London), 08 Oct 1864, p2 col.4. See also a letter from Anderson in the *Morning Post*, 08 Oct 1864, p6 col.4.

¹¹ *Illustrated Times*, 5 Nov 1864, p297. The *Illustrated Times* was a weekly newspaper published in competition with the *Illustrated London News* (see Wikipedia article [here](#)). It survived for seventeen years, from 1855 to 1872.

¹² *Sun* (London), Thu 6 Oct 1864, p1 col.7.

¹³ A black and white image of the poster is in *100 Years of Magic Posters* by Charles and Regina Reynolds (Hart-Davis MacGibbon Ltd, London 1976, page 33). A colour reproduction can be found on page 288 of *Magic 1400s-1950s*, published by Taschen in 2009.

¹⁴ An account of Tolmaque's life and career can be found in Kent Blackmore's book, *The Eloquence of Herr Martin Tolmaque: Conjurer, Mesmerist, Actor and Author* (author publication, Sydney, Australia, 2024). Tolmaque performed a rope escape in London **before** the Davenport Brothers arrived there (p14-15 of Blackmore's book). On the evidence of Blackmore's book, it seems unlikely that Tolmaque could match the Brothers' skill and showmanship.

I'm indebted to Marco Pusterla for telling me about Blackmore's book.

¹⁵ Dion Boucicault's letter about the 11 Oct séance was published in the London daily newspapers on Thu 13 Oct 1864. It was reproduced in *Cheltenham Chronicle* on Tue 18 Oct and *Cheltenham Examiner* on Wed 19 Oct. See the timeline (appendix 3) for full references.

¹⁶ *Sussex Advertiser*, 27 Dec 1864, p6 col.5.

¹⁷ A detailed report of the 20 December séances appeared in *Brighton Herald* and was reprinted in *Sussex Advertiser*, 27 Dec 1864, p6 col.5.

There were additional séances at the Newburgh Rooms on 29 December. They were advertised in *Brighton Guardian*, Wed 28 Dec 1864, p4 col.6, and *Brighton Gazette*, Thu 29 Dec 1864, p4 col.4, but I haven't found a report of them in the Brighton newspapers.

¹⁸ *Brighton Gazette*, Thu 22 Dec 1864, p5 col.2.

¹⁹ *Era*, Sun 15 Jan 1865, p15 col.1.

²⁰ *Eastbourne Gazette*, Wed 25 Jan 1865, p4 col.3.

²¹ The Lewes séances were reported in *Croydon Observer*, Fri 20 Jan 1865, p3 col.7.

²² A very detailed report of the Eastbourne séances appeared in *Eastbourne Gazette*, Wed 25 Jan 1865, p4 cols.3-5. A shorter report was published in *Tunbridge Wells Journal*, Thu 26 Jan 1865, p3 col.2

²³ Herr Döbler came to Britain in 1842, retired in 1848, and died in 1864. See Edwin A Dawes, *The Great Illusionists* (David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1979) page 138.

²⁴ Dobler was at the Royal Music Hall, Leamington Spa for two weeks, finishing on 21 January 1865. He gave his usual sleight of hand entertainment for the first week and added his Davenport exposure at the beginning of the second week. See the following issues of *Leamington Spa Courier*:

- Sat 07 Jan 1865, puff on p4 col.3; advert on p7 col.4
- Sat 14 Jan 1865, p4 col.5
- Sat 21 Jan 1865, p4 col.5.

²⁵ See, for example, adverts in

- *Liverpool Mercury*, Wed 01 Feb 1865, p1 col.2, and
- *Liverpool Albion*, Mon 13 Feb 1865, p1 col.1.

²⁶ The Monday séances were reported in *Liverpool Mercury*, Tue 14 Feb 1865, p6 col.7.

²⁷ There is a Wikipedia article on the tomfool knot [here](#), with a useful photograph of the knot. The loops make a pair of handcuffs. Once pulled tight, the ends are secured with a reef knot. As a way of tying someone's wrists, it is simple but effective.

²⁸ A long report of the Tuesday cabinet séance appeared in *Manchester Courier*, Thu 16 Feb, p3 col.1. This report was copied from the *Liverpool Daily Post*.

²⁹ The Wednesday evening performance was advertised in *Liverpool Mercury*, Wed 15 Feb 1865, p1 col.1.

³⁰ The Liverpool riot was reported in great detail in local newspapers. See, for example, *Liverpool Mercury*, Thu 16 Feb 1865, p6 col.6-7.

³¹ *Liverpool Mercury*, Fri 17 Feb, p7 col.7. The last paragraph of the article gives this information: "The Davenport Brothers returned to the Union Hotel at 11.30 in the evening [on Wed, after the riot]. They remained there during the night, but left [on Thu] by the 9am train for London."

³² *Leeds Mercury*, Fri 17 Feb 1865, p3 col.4.

³³ *Huddersfield Chronicle*, Sat 25 Feb 1865, p8 col.1.

³⁴ *Huddersfield Chronicle*, Sat 25 Feb 1865, p8 col.3.

³⁵ *Huddersfield Chronicle*, Sat 25 Feb 1865, p8 col.1.

³⁶ The Hull cancellation was reported in *Frome Times*, Wed 1 Mar 1865, p4 col.5 and *Leeds Mercury*, Thu 23 Feb 1865, p3 col.5.

³⁷ All quotations in this paragraph are from *Era*, Sun 26 Feb 1865, p15 col.4.

³⁸ The Leamington and Leicester cancellations were reported in *Cheltenham Mercury*, Sat 4 Mar 1865, p2, col.2. The Malvern séances were to have been held on Monday 6 March, the day before the Cheltenham visit; their cancellation was reported in *Cheltenham Journal*, Sat 11 Mar 1865, p8, col.2.

³⁹ *Cheltenham Examiner*, Wed 1 Mar 1865, p8 col.4.

⁴⁰ The 1873 Maskelyne & Cooke brochure tells us that Maskelyne 'was chosen as one of the committee of investigation'. The two committee members were each asked to tie up one of the Brothers.

⁴¹ Mr E Lawrence was one of the volunteers who did the tying up at Maskelyne & Cooke's séance in Jessops Aviary Gardens on 19 June 1865. On that occasion he said that he tied up one of the Davenport Brothers. See, for example, *Sheffield Independent*, Fri 23 Jun 1865, p3 col.4-5.

⁴² The brief report is in *Cheltenham Examiner*, Wed 8 Mar 1865, p4 col.5. The long reports are in

- *Cheltenham Journal*, Sat 11 Mar 1865, p5 col.1-2
- *Cheltenham Mercury*, Sat 11 Mar 1865, p3 col.2-3
- *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Tue 14 Mar 1865 p5 col.2-3.

⁴³ *Strand Magazine*, Jan 1910 (volume 39, number 229), p19.

⁴⁴ Jasper Maskelyne, *White Magic* (Stanley Paul, London), chapter 2; p26 & 27 in first edition, p22 & 24 in subsequent editions.

⁴⁵ *Cheltenham Mercury*, Sat 11 Mar 1865, p3 col.2-3.

⁴⁶ *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Tue 14 Mar 1865 p5 col.2.

⁴⁷ London letter in *Cheltenham Chronicle*, Tue 14 Mar 1865, p8 col.1.

⁴⁸ The Davenport Brothers' first séance in Paris was reported in *The Examiner*, 16 Sep 1865, p591 col.2-3.

⁴⁹ Maskelyne & Cooke's engagement at the Bristol Assembly Rooms started on Boxing Day, Tue 26 Dec 1865, and finished on Mon 8 Jan 1866. Adverts and puffs for their entertainment can be found in *Western Daily Press* from 26 Dec 1865 to 8 Jan 1866.

⁵⁰ It's impossible to be certain, but the cabinet in the photograph could be the one used in Cheltenham.

⁵¹ *Standard*, Mon 3 Oct 1864, p2 col.4.

⁵² The London sceptic's letter was published in:

- *London Evening Standard*, Mon 3 Oct 1864, p2 col.1-2
- *Standard*, Mon 3 Oct 1864, p2 col.4-5
- *Morning Herald* (London), Mon 3 Oct 1864, p3 col.1-2.

⁵³ John H Wilson, described as a tailor of Cross Church Street, was one of a party from Huddersfield who saw the Davenport Brothers in Halifax on Mon 20 Feb 1865. His account of the cabinet séance was published in *Huddersfield Chronicle*, Sat 25 Feb 1865, p8 col.3-4. I have changed the word order slightly and added paragraphing in the interests of clarity.

⁵⁴ *Bradford Review*, Sat 4 Feb 1865, p5 col.2.

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- ⁵⁵ *Brighton Gazette*, Thu 22 Dec 1864, p5 col.2.
⁵⁶ *Liverpool Mercury*, Tue 14 Feb 1865, p6 col.7.
⁵⁷ *Croydon Observer*, Fri 20 Jan 1865, p3 col.7.
⁵⁸ *Eastbourne Gazette*, Wed 25 Jan 1865, p4 col.4.
⁵⁹ *Cheltenham Journal*, 11 Mar 1865, p5 col.2.
⁶⁰ *Bradford Review*, 4 Feb 1865, p5 col.2.