



Christmas in London, 1864

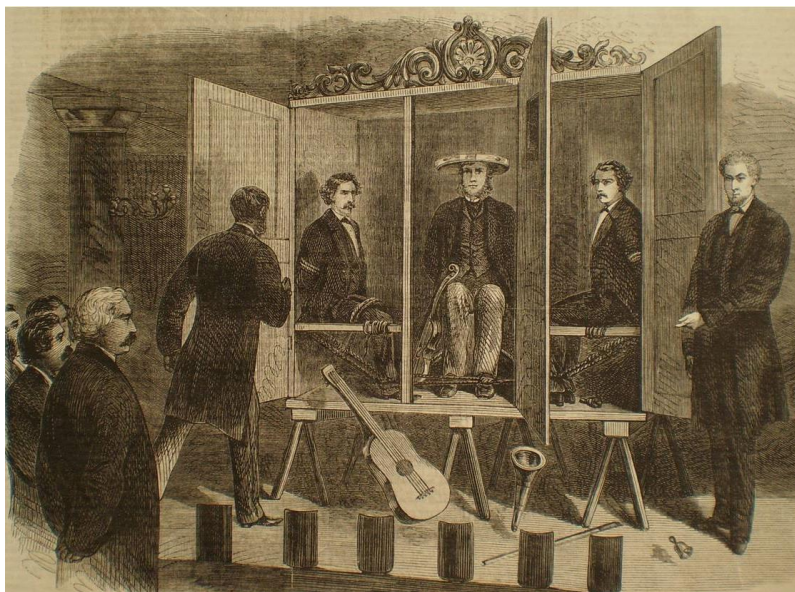


The **Davenport Brothers** came to London in October 1864 and gave public séances at the Hanover Square Rooms. They offered two types of séance.

The less expensive option was a cabinet séance under dim room lighting, as illustrated in the drawing on the right. The “spirit manifestations” occurred when the cabinet doors were closed.

The dark séance was more exclusive. It took place with a small audience in complete darkness, and the charge for it was half a guinea (10s 6d).

The drawing is from a press cutting in the Peter Lane Collection.



Anderson, the Wizard of the North, was an early opponent of the Davenport Brothers in London. Eddie and Michael Dawes told the story on pages 102-103 of their 2014 book *John Henry Anderson, the Great Wizard of the North, and his magical family*. The frontispiece of their book is a portrait (left) in the Peter Lane Collection.

Anderson opened at St James’s Hall, Piccadilly on 5 September 1864. When the Davenport Brothers arrived in London he issued a challenge to them, and from mid-October almost until Christmas there were newspaper reports relating to it. Other people jumped on the bandwagon and *The Times* delivered its verdict on 27 December: “Their imitators and expositors are just as absurd in their own way as the spiritualistic claims of the Davenports are in theirs.”

This pair of advertisements appeared on the front page of the *Daily News* on Christmas Eve 1864. Anderson’s performances at St James’s Hall were less expensive than the Davenport Brothers’ séances at the Hanover Square Rooms. The two venues were a mile apart.

The Brothers’ advertisement tells us that the evening cabinet séances started at 8pm and the evening dark séances at 9.15. This suggests that the cabinet séances were no more than an hour long.

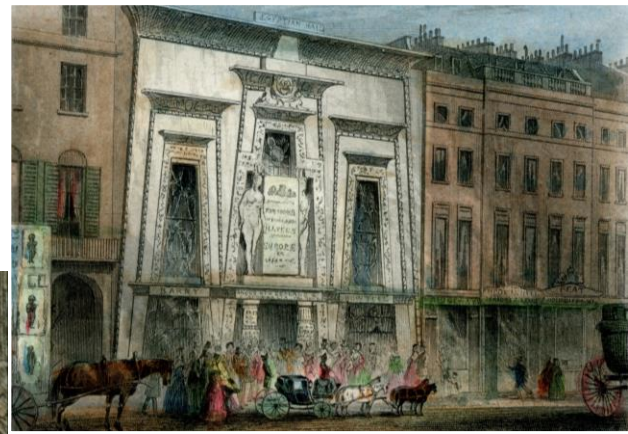
The Brothers finished their London season shortly after Christmas, on 14 January. They made a disastrous tour of the English provinces before moving on to Paris.

DAVENPORT BROTHERS' FAREWELL SEANCES, prior to their departure for the Continent.—**GREAT SUCCESS** of the **PUBLIC CABINET SEANCES**.—**THIS AFTERNOON** (Saturday), at 3, and **MONDAY EVENING**, at 8, at the Hanover-square Rooms.—Sofa stalls, 7s. 6d.; stalls, 5s.; body of hall, 3s. N.B. After each Public Séance there will be a **Dark Séance**, to which only a limited number of tickets will be sold at a half-guinea each.—Dark Séance will commence at 4 o'clock. Tickets for the Dark Séance only, or the stalls for the Public Séance, can be obtained during the day at the office of the Rooms.—On Monday, Fourth Public Cabinet Séance at 8, and Dark Séance at a quarter past 9.

CHRISTMAS!—Look Out!!—Best Treat for Children &c!—Paterfamilias must pay a visit to the Palace of Enchantment, St. James's Hall. WIZARD of the NORTH'S WORLD of MAGIC. HOMOLOGICAL EVAPORATION: or, The Mysterious Disappearance, Second Sight by Miss Anderson. Also the great Rope Tying Tricks, Cabinet Séances, Anti-Spiritualistic Manifestations, as performed by the Davenport Brothers, illustrated by Miss Lizzie Anderson and Mr. Sutton. Every Night at eight; Saturday Afternoon at three. Grand Juvenile Gift Distribution. Monster Christmas Tree for the Holidays. Special Day Performance Boxing-Day, Dec. 26, Wednesday, 28th, and Saturday, 31st December.—Admission, 1s.; balcony, 2s.; stalls, 3s.

General Tom Thumb in London

General Tom Thumb was the stage name of Charles Sherwood Stratton (1838-1883). He was an American actor, singer, dancer and comedian. P T Barnum brought him to Europe for the first time in 1844, when he was six years old and just over two feet tall. He had successful seasons at the Egyptian Hall in 1844 and 1845.



Above. Hand-coloured print of the Egyptian Hall (Davenport Collection). A fashionable crowd has gathered outside the Hall to admire General Tom Thumb's coach.

Left. Detail showing the coach with its two matching pairs of ponies.

A New York wedding. In February 1863 Stratton married Lavinia Warren amid much publicity. At the time Stratton was 25 years old and about three feet tall.

The photo of the wedding party (right) belongs to the Library of Congress and can be found in General Tom Thumb's Wikipedia page. Lavinia's maid of honour was her sister, Minnie. Stratton's best man was Commodore Nutt.

The four people in the photo came to London in December 1864, and appeared at the Crystal Palace for a short season which ended on Christmas Eve. It was an occasion to show off their wedding finery as well as their talents as entertainers. Commodore Nutt and Minnie Warren then transferred to St James's Hall. The advertisement below is on the front page of the *Morning Herald*, 27 December 1864.



COMMODORE NUTT and MINNIE WARREN.
—ST. JAMES'S HALL, Piccadilly.—Boxing-day and during the Holidays. Three Grand Levees Daily at Eleven, Three, and Eight o'clock. "Nature's smallest edition of her choicest work." A bachelor and belle of mature age, not larger than two infants. At eleven o'clock they appear in the identical wedding costume worn by them at the marriage of General Tom Thumb. They also perform Songs, Duets, Dances, giving several Comic Personations, with an entire change of programme at each Levee. They will be brought to and from St. James's Hall in their Lilliputian carriage by four of the smallest ponies in the world, pre-ented to them by General Tom Thumb. Box-office open from Ten to Four o'clock.—Admission, 1s. and 2s.; reserved seats, 3s.; children half-price to the 2s. and 3s. seats.