



Greetings and welcome to e-news #30, June 2026

Thirty newsletters. Doesn't time fly! It was Marco Pusterla who suggested a newsletter for the Davenport Collection website. Thanks Marco, I'm pleased I took your advice. Thanks are also due to my wife Anne, without whose help the newsletters would have more typos and longer sentences.

Much of the last three months has been spent on our collection of Herbert J. Collings photographs and publicity material. Links may be found in this e-news.

Film of Horace Goldin performing in London



Horace Goldin was one of the great magicians and illusionists of the early 20th century. He performed at a fast pace with no patter. His publicity often included the words *Silence is Goldin*. Many magicians remember him for his argument with Selbit over who first invented the Sawing a Woman in Half trick. The Davenport family took this film of Goldin performing on stage, probably in London in the 1930s. Unfortunately the cine camera was faulty and the film is of poor quality. Nevertheless, we show it [here](#) because the content differs from many on the internet.

I realize that the inscription on the Goldin photograph is hard to read. It says: "To my friends the Magical Davenports. Horace 1939."

Herbert J. Collings

I never met Herbert J. (1883-1958) but I'm certain I would have liked him. Today he is remembered for a host of reasons: twice President of The Magic Circle, an expert plate spinner, and a successful society entertainer for both adults and children. As Herbert J. Collings he gave a witty patter act in Western dress. As Col Ling Soo he performed in Chinese costume and used oriental style props.

The Magic Circle collection has a typescript entitled *Smilestones: Recollections of Herbert J. Collings in his own words: 1898-1946*. Some years ago The Magic Circle kindly gave me permission to publish it on the Davenport Collection website. You can read it [here](#). I recently re-read it with great enjoyment. Here are just a few extracts.

Plate spinning



“By April [1900] I could spin a plate with one hand, this after many breakages and months of practice.”

“By August [1902] I was able to spin four plates and a basin simultaneously and still practised this for an hour a day. Then I called at the Egyptian Hall to see Mr. Maskelyne. He was very courteous and kind, and interested in my efforts to spin plates. They had just started an entertainment agency and he said he would include my name in their list.”

Patter

“On October 15th [1903] I summoned up courage and set out to try and get a date at the Grand, Clapham Junction. I obtained an audition with Mr. Yates, the manager. He was very patient but told me that although my sleight of hand was good the weak part of the act was my patter. This made me think hard so I took myself in hand and tried to cultivate my own personality, bring in topical allusions and spontaneous remarks.”

Final thoughts

“To have a happy life is everything. You pay very dearly for much so-called success. The things that really matter are sincerity, loyalty and friendship, not forgetting a sense of humour without which life is not worth living, and finally, the art of being kind.”



During his career he produced a wide range of quality photographs and publicity material. You can find many of them on the website in the four PDFs below:

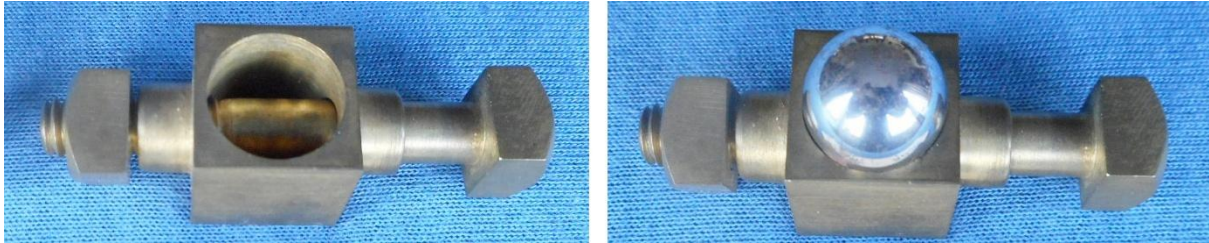
- Herbert J. photographs [N3714](#)
- Herbert J. publicity material [N3711](#)
- Col Ling Soo photographs [N3715](#)
- Col Ling Soo publicity material [N3712](#)

For other items, such as programmes, search on the Davenport Collection website for Herbert J. Collings.

Brass pocket tricks

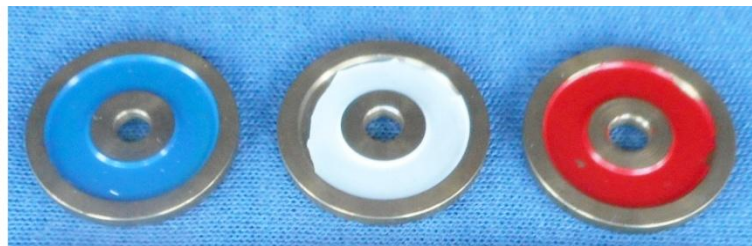
Nowadays magicians don't talk about pocket tricks. They call them close-up tricks instead. Brass was the material of choice for pocket tricks, not least because it is easy to machine. A skilled metalworker can achieve the tight tolerances so often critical for the successful operation of the trick. Here are three examples.

The Demon Fantastic Steel Ball Through Bolt



This brass trick can be examined both before and after the performance. A bolt is locked into position in a small brass frame by a nut. A solid steel ball is placed on top of the frame, and sinks slowly into the frame until it drops out of the bottom. The magic has happened: the steel ball has penetrated the brass bolt! Item [N3346](#).

The Demon Colour Trick



Three different coloured brass discs are examined and one is given to the performer behind their back. The performer immediately announces its colour. The spectators may examine the discs closely, but they find no clue to the mystery. Item [N3341](#).

Brass coin pedestal



The pedestal can be used for producing, vanishing or changing a small coin. It can also be used to perform a baffling trick with a British farthing, as follows.

- The lid is removed from the pedestal and the inside is shown to be empty.
- The magician then places the pedestal on top of a farthing on the table.
- The coin mysteriously vanishes, only to be found inside the previously empty pedestal.

The pedestal may be examined at the end of the trick. It is the quality of the machining that makes this examination possible. Item [N113](#).

A parrot anecdote



You'll have to trust me on this one. There really is a parrot in the cage in the right hand photograph. The photograph was taken at the family home, Ivydene, probably early 1930s. The gardener was at work and the parrot was enjoying the sunshine. When I was growing up in the 1950s, the parrot lived in its cage in the huge bathroom in the house. I was rather wary of it. My aunt Wyn told me that the boys (Gilly, Wally and Gus) used to tease it, so it wasn't too fond of men. So what is the anecdote? I'll let Fergus Roy explain in his own words:

There is one particular story which Lewis loved to relate to his family about the voyage [to South America]. On the journey out there was a particular passenger, an old lady, who steadfastly refused to leave her cabin. When the ship first arrived at its first port of call in South America, which would have been Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, she finally plucked up the courage to venture out on deck. Unbeknown to her, it was the custom for traders to row up to visiting ships with all kinds of weird merchandise for sale. The favourite was parrots, which were hurled up onto the deck of the ship from these little boats. However, the parrots were secured inside cages so that they arrived more or less safely aboard. As the old lady arrived on the deck she was struck down by one of these parrot missiles. She immediately retired to her cabin and was never seen again! This easy access to an exotic bird must have registered with Lewis, for on his way home he did buy one of these parrots, a magnificent grey and green bird which he took home and who lived on with the family for nearly 30 more years.

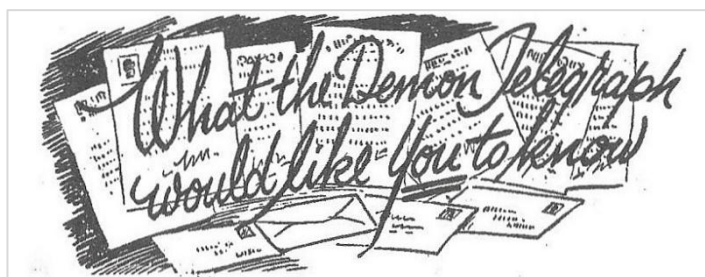
Face Puzzle compendium of games



I'm always intrigued by quirky ideas and clever packaging. This compendium fits the bill, in that the outer box contains six smaller boxes, each of which contains a game. On each of the sides of the smaller boxes is a picture of a part of a person's body. So yet another game or puzzle is to replace the smaller boxes in the larger box to create a consistent picture. Made in Japan. Item [N2471](#).

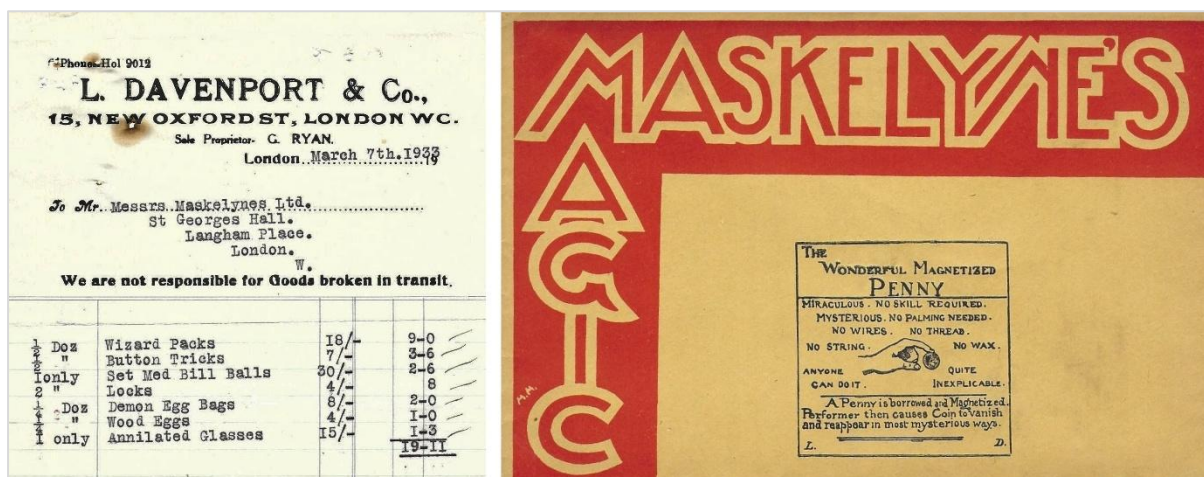
The little known Maskelyne's Magic shop

The magic press used to be full of information about the shows at the Maskelyne's Theatre, St. George's Hall. Virtually nothing was said about the magic shop there, but Maskelynes did advertise it in some of their 1933 programmes. In the *Demon Telegraph* of January 1949, the Davenports wrote:



We have seen it stated in several Magazines that Maskelynes have never had a Magical Depôt at St. Georges Hall. We must point out that this is entirely wrong. Maskelynes did run a Magical Depôt for about two years. Tricks were displayed in the window next to the pay box. Tricks were sold from the pay box. At one time a display was made in a window in the front of the house and of which we have a small photograph taken by Alex Gordon. Davenports also supplied the tricks sold, we can prove this by copies of orders and invoices of goods we supplied.

The Davenport Collection still contains evidence of this trade, for example the invoice and envelope below:



The invoice names the sole proprietor of L. Davenport & Co. as G. Ryan. Lewis Davenport was the stage name of my grandfather George W.J. Ryan.

All good wishes

John Davenport, curator of www.davenportcollection.co.uk

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