
St. George's Hall by Mike Caveney - Buch

During the first third of the 20th century, London was generally recognized as being the focal point of the magic world. It could be argued that St. George's Hall was largely responsible for this claim. The goal of most magicians was to eventually trod the hallowed boards at Maskelyne's Theatre.

Anne Davenport and John Salisse invite you to join them backstage to peek into the Maskelyne workshop where so many classic illusions first saw the light of day, to eavesdrop on board meetings where egos and personalities often clashed, and to watch from the wings as the world's top conjurors entertain generations of London theatre goers. It is a story that encompasses the loftiest heights of theatrical artistry as well as the darkest moments of a dying enterprise. It is quite simply the history of magic in England during its glorious golden age. Take a seat in the front row and watch as this incredible story slowly unfolds inside England's home of mystery - St. George's Hall.

Pages: 475 - 8" x 10" - Hardcover with dust jacket - 175 photographs (18 in full-color).

A PEEK INSIDE "ST. GEORGE'S HALL"

Publisher's Note

Mike Caveney

It didn't seem possible; writing a detailed history of St. George's Hall. I say that because I have been to the room. On the top floor of John Salisse's home in Hampstead, England there is a room that contains the results of one man's passion. John has spent decades collecting not just magic related ephemera but, more specifically, memorabilia pertaining to the Maskelynes' theatres. The material is kept in this room because it is the one room in the house large enough to contain what has become a monumental archive.

John is not a collector of "pretty things" although the lithographs that adorn the walls of the room will most assuredly take the breath away from even the most ardent collector. Rather it is the wall of black binders that forms the heart of the collection. Here, meticulously arranged, are hundreds upon hundreds of programmes, photographs, letters, playbills, reviews, advertisements, post cards and legal documents, all pertaining to the Maskelyne's theatrical ventures in London. Another shelf holds business records, including a Maskelyne's Ltd.

minute book that reveals the sometimes rancorous tone of the board meetings.

When you consider that J.N. Maskelyne and his friend George Cooke opened at St. James's Hall in 1873 and that twenty-eight of the next sixty years were spent at St. George's Hall and that three generations of Maskelynes employed scores of noteworthy magicians, you begin to realize that the history of the Maskelyne family is actually the history of magic in England. One can only wonder if Anne Davenport knew what she was getting herself into when she decided to document the Maskelynes' tenure at St. George's Hall. The complete story would have to include not just the wondrous view from the front of house, but also the often acrimonious interaction that occurred behind the scenes between brothers, sons and partners. At the very least, it was a daunting task.

Herself a member of a multi-generational family of magic (Anne married John Davenport, son of Gus Davenport and grandson of Lewis Davenport, in 1977) she was not intimidated by the enormity of the task and threw herself into it wholeheartedly. Anne's research took her far beyond the room as she delved into the Davenport family collection and tracked down elusive newspaper and magazine articles. Months turned into years as the story of St. George's Hall slowly took shape.

In 1996 John, Anne and I agreed that the completed manuscript would be issued as a Magical Pro-File and indeed it is number ten in our award-winning series of books on the history of magic. While we busied ourselves with *Servais Le Roy: Monarch of Mystery* (1999) and *The Houdini Code Mystery* (2000), Anne and John continued working on their epic project. Huge e-mails would arrive as each successive chapter was completed until the entire book (over 120,000 words) had been transmitted half-way around the world with a few simple key strokes. And as fast as I would Americanize certain words and spellings, Anne would change them back to the preferred British usage. And so she should. After all, the story of the Maskelynes is a thoroughly English tale and it is best told using the English language. Considering that the Maskelynes travelled less than a mile each time they relocated to a new theatre, Anne, John and I have travelled tens of thousands of miles in our effort to tell their story. In 1999 and again in 2000, Anne and John Davenport visited Los Angeles during which time we discussed progress on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1999 I visited the Davenports' home in Leicester, England. Then early in 2001 I made another pilgrimage to the room where I was once again dazzled by the Salisse collection. The two boxes of original photographs that I hand-carried back to California (and that now grace

these pages) represent the tiniest tip of John's magnificent archive.

I do hope that John and Anne are proud of their accomplishment. Only through the confluence of Anne Davenport's skill and persistence and John Salisse's remarkable collection could the complete story of St. George's Hall be told. Their book will serve as your backstage pass and it grants you full access to all areas of England's Home of Mystery. Take all the time you like and enjoy the tour.

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