

The Memel





February 2022

Robson and Wright

The dynamic duo return!



2022 CONJURER'S CALENDAR MEETINGS - 2:00PM

JAN		9th January Annual General Meeting		25th January WORKSHOP
FEB ALLAN CLARKE		6th February Robson & Wright: The Dynamic Duo return!	17th - 20th February Blackpool Magic Convention	22nd February WORKSHOP
MAR BRIAN LEAD		13th March Geoffrey Newton with 'Key Ring' Magic		29th March COMMITTEE & WORKSHOP
APR DONALD MONK		10th April Seaside Magic with Roy Field OPEN MEETING		26th April WORKSHOP
MAY CARL PEARSON		8th May OPEN MEETING Andrew Lound with 'The Magical Maskelynes'	15th May - Merlins Day of Magic	24th May COMMITTEE & WORKSHOP
JUN ROGER WOODS		12th June Chairman's Day OPEN MEETING	26th June - Northern Magic Circle One Day Convention: Harrogate	28th June WORKSHOP
JUL ALLAN CLARKE		10th July Summer Lecturettes Members' Day		26th July COMMITTEE WORKSHOP
AUG BRIAN LEAD		14th August Desert Island Tricks Members' Day		23rd August WORKSHOP
SEP TBC		11th September Auction of Magic. Visiting Magi welcome.	1st - 4th Sept IBM British Ring Convention at Eastbourne.	27th September COMMITTEE WORKSHOP
OCT TBC		9th October Star lecture from Marc Oberon		25th October WORKSHOP
NOV CARL PEARSON		13th November President's Day OPEN MEETING		22nd November COMMITTEE WORKSHOP
DEC ROGER WOODS		4th December Magic @ Christmas OPEN MEETING		NO WORKSHOP

NOTE* - Name = Refreshments

CHANGE NOTE** Change of usual Date

COMMITTEE - 7:00PM

WORKSHOP - 8:00PM

WHAT'S INSIDE?



**EDITORIAL:
WITH BRIAN LEAD**

**PEARSON'S PRESIDENTIAL
MOVING ON...**



**CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER:
HEROS AND CONVENTIONS**

**CARL'S COLUMN:
THE EGYPTIAN HALL**



**HANDS, FACE, SPACE
FROM STUART CASSELS**

**PAGE 13: THERE IT
WAS, GONE!**



**MARK RAFFLES;
THE HONEST PICKPOCKET**

**TRAIN OF THOUGHT: IN
SEARCH OF THE CREDIBLE**



**MEETING TIME! ALWAYS
GREAT MAGIC...**

A WISE MAN ONCE SAID...



As usual, we have a packed edition for you this month.

All your favourites are here (Carl now has three regular contributions), and Allan switches tracks seamlessly from the Presidential to the first instalment of an on-going series - 'Train of Thought'.

The new centenarian Mark Raffles is central to this issue, with pieces both by and about him, and Stuart Cassels returns with the first of a trilogy based upon the topical theme of Hands, Face and Space.

Clive Moore tells more Page 13 tales, while Jay Fortune slips effortlessly into the Cartoon Corner slot.

So, let's not hang around . . .

Brian



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From the Editor's desk...

People sometimes ask me why I wanted to be an editor. To cut a long story short . . .

Mark Raffles celebrated his 100th birthday last week, and here he is with his card from the Queen. I asked our Donald to create a suitable picture for him as a special gift, and he produced the wonderful image you can see on our back cover this month, depicting all of Mark's favourite routines, from his cups-and-balls with a final load of chicks to his pickpocketing, linking rings (I especially like the 'key ring' in-joke!) and the wonderful Wychwoods dog act with miniature poodles. Artist/magician Jay Fortune also created a very special image of Mark in performance at my request. We can't show it in these pages, but we do have a cartoon by Jay in our Cartoon Corner this month. Just like his mother before him, Mark was interviewed on television on his birthday, as well as having a Zoom call from the Mayor and his Local MP.



There must be something in magic which promotes longevity, as we heard recently that Henry Lewis, Hon Vice President of The Magic Circle, was awarded the MBE in the Queen's New Year's Honours List at the age of 102. He joined the Circle in 1946, notching up 75 years of membership. His citation is for services to magic and charity fundraising.

For those who were unable to attend the AGM, as editor I was able to report that, in spite of the pandemic, we were able to maintain the standard of the magazine in 2021, continuing to produce 32 or 36 pages each month, with material having to be held over on a couple of occasions.

This is due in no small measure to the small band of regular contributors who provide the framework month by month: Allan Clarke, Roger Woods, Carl Pearson, Donald Monk, Bob Benyon and myself, with other items from Paul Guy as Secretary. Special mention must be made of Carl, who not only presents a well up-dated Welfare page but has also produced Carl's Column, which during the year morphed into a thoroughly researched history series.

I must also pay personal tribute to Allan, who invariably comes up with an excellent range of front covers (see the compilation on the back cover of the January edition for evidence) and generally gives the magazine a professional look, often providing additional images, fillers and 'all the trimmings' . . . and always meeting the publication deadline.

Added to this, we have been very fortunate in receiving articles from a wide range of sources. So far, no-one has ever refused a request to be involved. It has been a joy and privilege to have Chris Wardle as an occasional contributor, along with Tony Noon (articles plus cartoons), Leslie Melville, Ray Roberts, Rick Tynan, Geoffrey Newton, Roy Field, Stuart Cassels and Dale Salwak. Clive Moore must be singled out for so many funny stories in the Page 13 slot, and individual pieces came in during 2021 from Ian Adair, Ian Marriott, Jon Marshall and Brian Berry.

Editing, of course, is not a passive job, and an editor who simply waits for material to roll in will not get very far; and general requests are of little use. I am constantly going after sources which seem to have potential, and have built up good reciprocal relationships with other editors: Geoffrey Newton at *The Key Ring*, Sammy Smith at the international *Linking Ring*, Carol Tynan, former editor of *The Orbit* (Mahatma), Marco Pusterla of *Ye Olde Magic Mag*, Bob Loomis of *The Magical Spectator*, Bill Temple of *The Northern Lights* and Will Houstoun of *The Magic Circular*. All have been generous in sharing material, and in turn have used some of ours. This can also be said of on-line sources such as Ian Keable's Newsletter, David Britland's Cardopolis and Jeff McBride's Museletter.

The quality of the MeMeL is reinforced by our continuously growing readership beyond the Society, which enhances our standing in the world of magic at no extra cost to us.

It was good to see our old friend Jon Marshall on *The Repair Shop* on television last week, bringing in a Bucking Bronco bicycle for restoration. This was part of the fairground paraphernalia amassed by Jon and Pat Gresham over the years and kept in a barn. Jon himself, of course, has restored many of the other Jon's larger-scale illusion side-shows, and these are detailed in a splendid book by Jon and Eddie Dawes. The Bucking Bronco has no pedals, and is propelled by means of up-and-down movement. Needless to say, the team did a first-rate job.



BGT finalist Ben Hart will be bringing his 'Wonder' show to the Burnley Mechanics this Friday (4th February). He had this to say about it in the local press:

"My job is to remind people that they are full of wonder, and what makes you human is seeing that the world is astonishing. I'm just a tour guide. We are all born with that feeling of astonishment, then as you become an adult you put up all these barriers. It's still there, only you have just forgotten where it is.



"I have to confess, I was really turned off with the magic I saw on the TV when growing up. It never really did it for me. What I do is the antithesis of the cheesy, bad-joke magician, and the public seems to like that.

"I use everyday objects from the audience. I borrow things from them, so it's very clear that we don't have stupid boxes and elaborate things. I basically deliver an acoustic set on stage. It's very stripped back; a very different approach.

"Producers want a big stunt, but if I ask you to hold a coin, close your hand around it and it vanishes, are you telling me that that is any less impressive?

"There are really two types of tricks. One is where the more you think about it, the easier it is to understand it. Those are the box tricks. Then there's the other type of trick, where the more you think about it the more impossible it becomes. I always try to do those kinds of tricks.

"I don't like the emotionally empty exposure of magic, which I don't think anybody gains anything from, but which has a sort of voyeuristic appeal. I don't see the benefit of that.

"The job has to be driven by obsession. If it's not driven by love and obsession there's no way it would make sense to be a magician. The way I approach it is that I'm going to do magic anyway, and the fact that it's also my job is a nice bonus."

My thanks to David Stones for alerting me to an item in *The Guardian's* supplement on 17th January, all about a new eight-part podcast called 'Wild Things', created by Steven Leckart. It concerns Siegfried and Roy, beginning with the dramatic detail that it took four men and a fire extinguisher to get Montecore the tiger off Roy on the night of the much-publicised attack. The magical pair had performed 30,000 shows over 50 years for an estimated 50 million people, earning in excess of a billion dollars in the process.

Every night, Roy had delivered a spot-lit monologue with the seven-year-old Montecore, until the animal inexplicably turned on him. Roy defended the tiger and refused to have it destroyed, saying that he may possibly have suffered a stroke and the animal was trying to take him to safety. Every new investigation requires a controversial new angle, of course, and the podcast questions why officers normally associated with counter-terrorism were called in. Could animal rights activists or homophobes have deliberately caused the disaster with ultrasonic devices? Who was the mysterious woman sitting on the front row sporting an elaborate beehive hairdo, which could have been concealing something? Our very own former President Anne Walmsley was there on the night, of course, and witnessed the horrific event, but I have it on good authority that Magik-Anne has never had a beehive hairdo.



I know it isn't magic, but we are so fond of word-play here at the MeMeL that I thought it would be appropriate to conclude with the story that a new fleet of snowploughs and gritting lorries has been brought into service in the Blackburn area. They all have individual names, which include Aunty Freeze, Snowella de Vil, Freezy Rider,

Gritty Gritty Bang Bang, Wall-ice and Gromit, Melton John and the Sir David Attenbrrrrrrrough.

The most important job of an editor is to check to make sure that no words have been out.

Brian

‘ Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes.

That way, when you do criticize them, you're a mile away and you have their shoes ’



Pearson's Presidential

Hello everyone, and welcome to my first Presidential ramblings.



First, I must say how honoured and humbled I feel to have been asked to represent our club as your President. I would also like to thank the members who voted for me to be the recipient of the Les Brooks Trophy. I have a little story I would like to share with you.

In 2002 I applied to join the British Ring of the IBM. At the time, you had to be interviewed and show your magical ability. I was sent to an address in Harwood where I was interviewed by Les Brooks. I remember Les speaking fondly of his magic club, The Modern Mystic League. I spent a pleasant couple of hours talking magic before leaving, after Les assured me that I had passed my interview. It's a small world, and these moments pass, but they mean a great deal when looking back.

A heartfelt 'Thank You' must go to our outgoing President Allan Clarke, who took charge at the helm and guided our club through a very unsettled time. Zoom shows were the new normal, and face to face meetings were sorely missed. We now move forward, and have resumed our meetings at Saint Francis, where we chat, interact and enjoy being part of a rather special magical society. At the time of writing, all our meetings and workshops are covid safe, and I encourage our members to come along and support the club.

I have already arranged my guest entertainer for the Presidents Day, and have some other plans afoot to encourage new members. We as a club must now look forward to a new year, and make the most of every opportunity to support and plan for the future of the Modern Mystic League. Please drop me an email or give me a call if you have any Ideas or suggestions, or just want a chat.

With the membership and the committee behind me, I'm sure 2022 is going to be a good year for the Society.

Until next month,

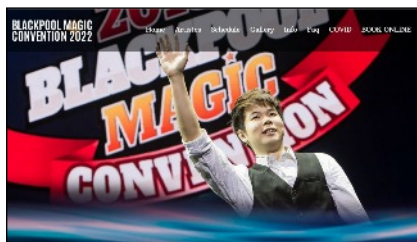
Carl



Chairman's Chatter

I think the AGM was one of the shortest on record, as we started at 2.05pm and finished at 3.15pm! Many congratulations to Carl, our new President, who also won the Les Brooks Shield award and to Paul who received the President's award from Allan. All the officers' reports are available to read on our website, with the usual password protection. Brian has managed to organise a varied line up of meetings for 2022, so please give us your support.

A week earlier than usual we have a lecture from our old friends Harry Robson and Matthew Wright. They always manage to come up with something new, and are very entertaining into the bargain.



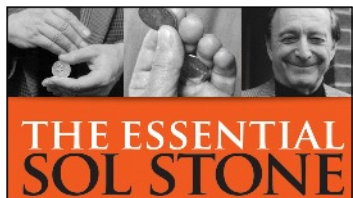
The Blackpool Convention is going ahead, and I am looking forward to attending and seeing how the new Conference Centre extension to the Winter Gardens improves things. A long list of performers and dealers has been posted on the Convention

Facebook page, so there is plenty to see despite some restrictions being in force.

The Session Convention has been postponed until July, and there is no word on the South Tyneside International Magic Festival as yet. The Northern Magic Circle Convention scheduled for April has been postponed until next year, although there will be a one day event on 26th June in Harrogate.

What do you do magic wise during the dark cold days of January? I have been reading John Fisher's idiosyncratic book *Heroes Of Magic*. It is a deeply personal account of many famous magicians, most of whom John worked with. I have a long list of magic I should be studying, but progress is very slow.





For those of you interested in coin magic *The Essential Sol Stone* by Stephen Hobbs has been reprinted as a paperback and is available from Amazon and other sources at a reasonable price.

One for Brian (Berry) here: Brando, of Brando and Silvana, Argentinian magicians who have appeared at the STIMF, has a book coming out for Blackpool on the Paddle Move (looks good, too). No doubt there will be many other new releases planned as we approach the Convention dates.



'Tis the season of coughs and colds (let alone Covid), so the Workshop meeting planned for 25th January was cancelled; although we hope to resume on 22nd February. Get better soon, everyone.

Best regards to you all,

Roger

PS; I'm all for an accessible library but Donald's latest idea for somewhere to relax whilst reading a good book, seems a bit over the top...



Carl's Column...

THE EGYPTIAN HALL: ENGLAND'S HOME OF MYSTERY



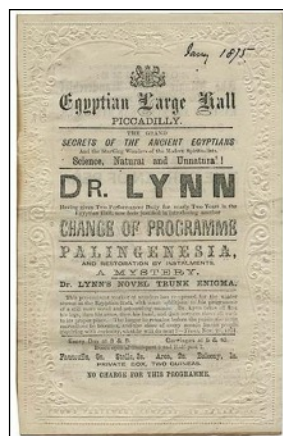
Maskelyne and Cooke opened at the Egyptian Hall on 26th May 1873 with the same performance they had previously shown at The Crystal Palace; an evening of entertainment that featured monsters, special effects,

playlets, a theatre show and, of course, magic and illusion. The show was a great success, with sold-out performances for weeks in advance. The only problem was that the theatre was too small.

Maskelyne and Cooke were in the much smaller theatre on the first floor, which seated fewer than a hundred people, whilst downstairs the larger performance space could accommodate a much larger audience of two hundred. This was leased by Dr Lynne. The rivalry between them was legendary. Both performers even went as far as to employ men to stand in the foyer with flyers and usher the theatre goers to their own box office to buy tickets. Behind the scenes, plans were already being made to remove this thorn in their side, who was both a professional and financial irritation.

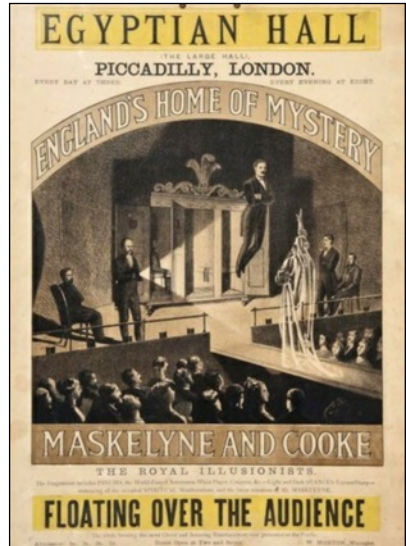
William Morton began writing up a very financially rewarding lease before he approached the theatre owner with a quite extraordinary offer. In the latter part of 1874, after some tough negotiations, a contract was signed and sealed for a thirty-year lease of both theatres within the Egyptian Hall. In 1875, after two very successful years, Dr Lynne was required to pack up his illusion show and return to a career as a travelling magician. This was a tough and exhausting life, and after having been settled at his own theatre returning to this way of life on the road took its toll. Dr Lynne continued to tour for the next 26 years, both in Britain and India. On 20th March 1899, he passed away aged only 63, from heart failure caused by heart disease.

‘ Dr Lynne continued to tour for the next 26 years, both in Britain and India. ’



Houdini much admired Dr Lynne, and in 1914 whilst on a tour of England he approached his son and made an offer to buy all of the contents of his late father's act. Later the same year, Houdini went on tour and performed the Pangenesis Illusion in honour of his magical hero.

The much larger main theatre was now Maskelyne and Cooke's, and they set about making some major engineering changes below, behind and above the stage. With John's previous skills as a watchmaker and George's carpentry skills, the changes were to make the Maskelyne and Cooke performances the most amazing and impossible show that the theatre goers of London had ever witnessed. People would levitate upwards to the top of the curtain, a cast of three would just vanish right in front of the audience's eyes and large creatures would appear and breathe fire.

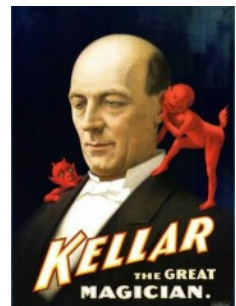


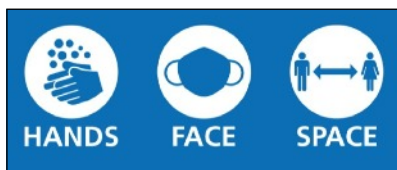
Audiences were used to watching magic shows, but this was a night of wonder and entertainment which took their breaths away. Audiences would tell their friends, and Maskelyne and Cooke would come up with new playlets and illusions which would bring back the same people again and again. The duo were grabbing the attention of the paying public, but also magicians who were curious to see for themselves this amazing theatre show to see if they too could bottle a piece of the 'Real Magic' for themselves.

One such Wizard was Harry Kellar, and the Egyptian Hall was in his sights on his next visit to England's capital!

We'll hear more about him next month.

Carl





**By
Stuart
Cassels**

How many times over the past eighteen months have we heard the phrase 'Hands – Face – Space' used by the Government? They were, of course, referring to sanitising hands, covering faces and giving each other extra space. However, it could just as easily be the title of a guide to Palmistry, Phrenology and Astrology - three methods of fortune telling and character analysis.

Over the next three months I'll be offering ideas for mentalism and pseudo-prognostication effects based on 'Hands, Face, Space'.

This month: Hands - Palmistry

Definition (noun): *"The art or practice of supposedly interpreting a person's character or predicting their future by examining the palm of their hand."*

Palmistry is traditionally the art of interpreting character traits, and has very little, if anything, to do with predicting someone's future. Why does it matter? I have found that those who are sceptical about tarot cards, runes etc. are often still somewhat interested in palmistry, as it gives them information about their own character, and it is something that they can instantly agree (or disagree) with as 'factual'.

Effect: The performer asks everyone present to study their hand, and explains that whilst our hands can give many clues to our career choice, hobbies, marital status and, according to the Victorians, our character, it is a myth that our hands can be used to predict our future. One person is selected to take part in an experiment and to join the performer. Some aged cards are displayed casually, each depicting the simple outline of a hand and the performer explains that these are replicas of cards used by palmists and fortune tellers over a hundred years ago.



They say you should always check your car before you set off on a journey; something that a responsible motorist would do, and this should also apply to magicians with our tricks/props. Unfortunately, I do not always practise what I preach. Most of my props have been stored in my lockup this last eighteen months. I have already fallen flat with my Ring on Sword, where the mechanism had seized up. Luckily, I was able to fix the prop mid show and I feel the audience didn't know the difference. There were, though, two magicians in the audience who realised that I had a problem. Fortunately, after a good clean and a squirt of WD40, the prop revived and it has now been returned to regular use.



A few weeks later, whilst performing at a children's birthday party show (a rarity these days), all was going well with the Silver Sceptre. The kids were shouting out, letting me know the wand had risen in the air. Then, a quick twang and the wand would rise no more and yes - you have guessed it; the elastic had perished.

On a non-related lockdown issue, some years ago, whilst acting as compère for the Derby Magic Circle Dinner, a couple of magicians, who will remain nameless, were chatting back stage about a Three Card Monte routine. As my cabaret table was there, they asked if they could borrow three cards from a pack I had in my box, and I never thought that they wouldn't put them back.

I went on stage to force the Queen of Diamonds, not realising that one of the cards they had taken away was, unfortunately, the Queen of Diamonds and this was the card in my Card Frame. Oops! Luckily, I was able to locate the Queen of Hearts, flashing it to the spectator and telling him it was the Queen of Diamonds. By amazing good luck, I seemed to get away with it.

Now just to round off: I had bought a stash of silk roses (obviously left over from St. Valentine's day) and, again, I had not checked the quality of the roses. I went to perform at a care home. All was going well with the Ring on Rose trick and I presented an elderly lady with an artificial rose. I was quite shocked when she realised that the head of the rose was a lacy red thong; she was quite amused as she held it up.



I often wondered if she ever wore it. Fortunately, it got a laugh and it has taught me a lesson; to check my roses in the future.

Keep waving those wands.

Clive



THE DAY I MET A HERO by Mark Raffles

Will Goldston was a very influential person in the world of magic. When I first met him I had a very limited knowledge of magic, and it is a puzzle why he took to me. Goldston was disliked, even hated, by many for his alleged sharp business practice, but I valued his friendship.



When playing a London venue my first call would be to Will's premises, just off the lower end of Charing Cross Road. Once, when appearing at the Empire Theatre in Shepherd's Bush, I ascended the stairs and opened the door to find a stranger, but someone I seemed to recognise, sitting in the dim interior. He was tall and of ample proportions, holding a magnetic air of dignity. Although it was a cold day, he wore an elegant lightweight beige-coloured suit. The darker beige of his shoes matched perfectly the colour of his leather gloves and pocket handkerchief.

A toning-coloured shirt was adorned with a brown, lace-like tie held in place by an ornate band of gold. The gold knob of his cane could be glimpsed through the gloved fingers of his right hand, which rested on top. A diamond sparkled in the large gold ring on the left hand, which held an enormous cigar. The white, almost silver, goatee beard and hair flowing from beneath his cream-coloured Stetson accentuated his tanned features. Through the wreathing cigar smoke his eyes twinkled humorously at my immobility. Will's voice was the jump start I needed to get my limbs mobile again: "Have you met Mr Dante?" he asked.

Dante was between dates on his 1946 British tour, closing that year with a Christmas season, opening on 11 December at the Garrick Theatre. Will arranged that they would both view my act the following night. Suffering a severe attack of stage fright, I was thankful that the strong spotlights prevented me from seeing them sitting in the centre stalls at the second house. No mishaps occurred during my manipulation act, but it was with great relief that I heard the orchestra playing my curtain music.



After the show, I was bundled into a taxi and we were swept off to Olivetti's restaurant, a favourite rendezvous for the pros. We dined and talked, and stories flowed in rich streams. Sim Sala Bim, my favourite magic words, immortalised by Dante, could never have conjured up a more delightful and memorable evening.'

Mark Raffles

'The problem with kleptomaniacs is that they always take things literally'



MARK RAFFLES: AN HONEST PICKPOCKET

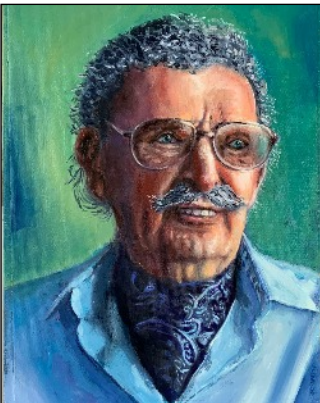


‘One of the great acts of British Variety’

(John Fisher: author and producer, *Heroes of Magic*)

Mark began his professional career in 1938, at the age of sixteen, with an act inspired by Cardini. Reviewing it in its early years, Bayard Grimshaw, a former editor of *The Budget* wrote: ‘In direct

contrast to the smart-alec air so often adopted by young performers, St Clair is shy and ingenuous; and the effect is definitely pleasing. Immaculately dressed, he opened with the production of lighted cigarettes, following up with stick to silks and a short billiard-ball routine. Next came the untying silk, then some twenty cards were snatched simply from the air, ending with a fan of jumbos.’ There was then the comical production of an ‘unconvincing’ rabbit which was vanished in a box, and a rope sequence. Another cigarette was produced, but as it was unlit a candle with flame materialised from a pocket in order to light it, along with half a dozen others. This led to seven or eight more lit cigarettes, progressing to a cigar and a pipe. Mark used 32 cigarettes in each performance. ‘We wish we knew his tobacconist!’ said Bayard. In the end, the table became a suitcase, the drape became a scarf and another table became a stick and top hat as



Mark exited to ‘a storm of applause not easily extorted from a Rochdale audience.’

Mark toured with ENSA during the war years, performing for both troops and civilians.

In his series of ‘Rich Pickings’ articles for *Abracadabra*, he commented: ‘The Queen’s Park Hippodrome in Manchester was a great influence in shaping my theatrical life for four very good reasons.

My mother and father first met there, I saw my first live show there, I saw my first pickpocket act there and I made my professional debut there.’ The pickpocket in question was the Italian Giovanni, who made a name for himself by ‘stealing’ a diamond tie-pin from the Prince of Wales. Mark saw the potential in this type of act, and resolved to emulate him.

In December 1945, Mark was appearing near the bottom of the bill at the Grand Theatre in Bolton, describing himself as ‘Mayfair’s Mystery Man’. Little more than six years later, in May 1952, he was topping the bill at the same theatre, hailed as ‘Mark Raffles – The Fabulous International Pickpocket’. Audiences were warned: ‘Watch your pockets! Come and be amazed . . . but leave your valuables at home.’

In 1968, Mark became the first British Magical Grand Prix Champion. In the background of the photograph which shows him holding the award can be seen that Grand Theatre playbill which was the start of it all.

Mark had transformed himself from a magician to a pickpocket, and taken on a new identity with a name based upon the fictional character created by E W Hornung, the brother-in-law of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Magic still played a part in the act, but was now used to distract the participants. Ideal for this purpose was the egg bag, the ‘lifting’ being done as the volunteer examined the prop. Similarly, Mark employed a cups-and-balls routine using large plant-pots and a final load of baby chicks – often as many as six, including one distinctive black one. Again, the dirty work was done as the volunteer peered into the pots.

While appearing in what amounted to a glamorous drag show at the Theatre Royal in Bilston in 1948, Mark first set eyes upon a dancer



called Joan Cleare, who ‘swayed smilingly down the staircase sheathed in a fabulous sequined creation.’ They were married six months later, and eventually Joan joined Mark on stage as part of the famous Wychwoods act, involving a dozen toy poodles.

The pickpocket act continued to evolve, Mark introducing a full-sized tailor's dummy named JR after the popular television character from *Dallas*. He had an electronic circuit wired into him, to foil clumsy pickpockets by ringing a bell. Of course, only Mark could empty all of the pockets without setting off the alarm – not least because the bell was under his remote control throughout the routine!



Mark recorded his magic career in the aforementioned series of 'Rich Pickings' in *Abracadabra*, the reminiscences being later collected together in the book *Diamond Jubilee Memoirs* to celebrate the first sixty years of his life in show business. Mark has also produced the definitive performer's manual, *The Pickpocket Secrets of Mark Raffles*.

Mark has continued to innovate, appearing at the age of seventy in the cutting-edge *Secret Cabaret* on television, pickpocketing to the soundtrack of 'You've Got To Pick A Pocket Or Two' from *Oliver!* He performed his hilarious but meticulously choreographed linking rings routine at FISM 2012, at the age of ninety, and as a nonagenarian has appeared with great success at the Tyne Theatre with Chris Cross.

Recently, the talented Vanni Pule has painted Mark's portrait (calling him 'extremely versatile, charming, funny and always so elegant'), and a full-length picture is to be exhibited at the eagerly awaited Museum of Blackpool – the place he thinks of as home, having lived there for many years and having performed in every theatre in the resort. With his typical sense of humour, Mark has already predicted the headline:

PICKPOCKET HUNG IN BLACKPOOL!





Subscriptions are now due...

At the AGM I outlined the reasons why we needed to increase subscriptions. The motion was passed and by the time you read this, every member will have received details of showing what your dues are, depending on the status of your membership. If you have not done so already, it would be helpful if you could attend to the payment as soon as practical. Many thanks to all those members who have already done this, your continued support is very much appreciated.

The revised rates are as follows:

Full Member: £60.00 Country\Student\Junior member: £30.00

The printed version of the MeMeL is £25.00 for 12 issues.

The preferred method of payment is by BACS using the following details:

Payee: The Modern Mystic League

Account No. 21662660

Sort Code: 77-76-01

For those who prefer, we are happy to accept cash at our meetings or you can send a cheque made out to The Modern Mystic League for the amount due. This should be sent to my home address using the addressed envelope provided. (Please do not send cash by post)

NOTE: Once again, members have the option to pay the remittance in three monthly payments Jan/Feb/March. For those who wish to do so, please send the first payment (or post-dated cheque's) with your reply.

You can contact me on 01772 685073 or

Email allan.clarke@memel.org.uk

Allan Clarke: Treasurer

41 Alexandra Road

Wesham

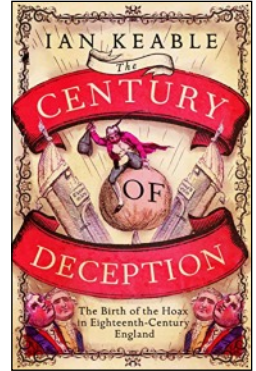
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Mis-selling or good PR?

Amongst the Christmas presents I received was Ian Keable's book *The Century of Deception*. I

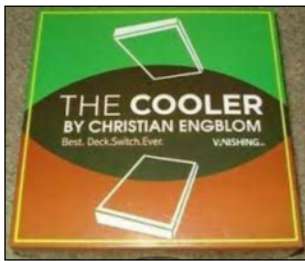
was due to get this for my birthday back in October, but for reasons I needn't go into it got delayed. Ian's book chronicles 'The Birth of the Hoax in 18th Century England'. As the publisher's preamble says; *'Fake News' and 'going viral' may be modern terms, but the book illustrates that these concepts have been with us for centuries*'. And so it does. The story of how the English public were duped into believing stories of bizarre phenomena, impossible contortions, questionable psychic abilities and outrageous predictions speaks more to the gullibility of the populace than to the charlatans who exploited them. For a magician, there is much to be learnt here.



It does show how human nature conspires to draw us into a good story, and how this medium, once vital to expanding knowledge and information, can be twisted to prey on the vulnerable and ill-educated. This said, many notable scholars, members of the aristocracy and popular writers of the day, were also hoodwinked, sometimes unwittingly propagating the hoax. The book contains several examples; some short lived and others that ran for a while, often resurfacing unexpectedly to be fanned by the flames of newspaper editors keen to sell more copy. Outrageous headlines and flyers were the 'clickbait' of the day, and just like some of the advertising we see nowadays it shows how a good 'hook' can draw people in. *The Century of Deception* is a really good read, and if you haven't got yourself a copy I recommend you part with the £20 asking price and settle back for a laugh and a valuable insight into the inner workings of the human psyche.

The experience got me thinking about the value of storytelling and, by inference, plot and motivation in magic. Whilst I haven't been keeping up with the avalanche of so called 'new effects', seemingly released by the hour, I have seen a lot of adverts, special offers and trailers, large and small, for the latest and greatest. I have developed a, possibly irrational, dislike of any strap line that says this effect is based on a 'brand new method'. We have all been around long enough to realise that there are no new methods, and that in reality these 'methods' are but variations on a theme.

With a lot of them, digging a little deeper into the sales blurb quickly reveals not a new method, but rather a different plot. (I deliberately avoided using the word new!) This is not to say that a different plot or motivation can't turn around an old and maybe 'clichéd' trick nor, it has to be said, that a new method can't actually be a combination of two or more other methods which make the effect more appealing. It's just that it feels like we are being duped and no-one, most of all magicians, likes that. This is all the more galling when the 'new method' turns out to be an expensive and, for the most part, impractical gaff. Whether the gaff is 'easily switched in or out' as the blurb says, is of no consequence; it's still an expensive and impractical gaff.



Some years ago, I remember seeing Christian Engblom perform a couple of great effects using 'The Cooler'. I have to say I was totally bowled over by it. At the time, this 'new method' of stacking a deck or producing a lightning quick colour change was advertised as 'ground-breaking'. The reality was, of course, an expensive and disappointingly poor-quality gaff. Don't get me wrong. It was a

very clever idea with some real potential, but it was let down by being fiddly in execution (due in large part to the poor quality) and not very convincing as a deck shell. A couple of friends at The Session where this was 'dealer demmed' (under the guise of a lecture) bought it, discounted at £40 no less, and struggled to make the switch effective and seamless. The main problem was that the switch happened when all the heat was on the deck; never a good idea even if you have the sleight of hand of Guy Hollingworth or the misdirection skills of Dani Da'Ortiz. So, the lesson here is to avoid the hype and look beyond the sales patter.

As is often said in magic, 'nothing is what it seems . . . '

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsZn0K7e97s>



Allan



THE LIBRARIAN SEZ

I have plans! . . .

Yup, I'm going to tell you here, so that I'm committed.

That's not as in 'put away' committed; rather putting things in writing here will spur me on to getting these ideas up and running.



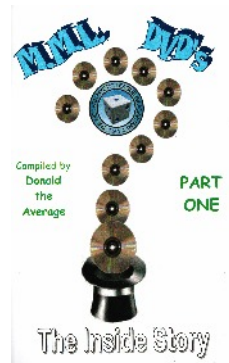
Anybody who has visited our H.Q. will know that all our books are stored in their respective cupboards underneath the stage.

However, the access to this space means negotiating the low ceiling (stage) by walking down some steps from our meeting room. I have bumps and bruises to prove it!

Allan Clarke had a wonderful idea whereby we might utilise the room above our meeting room to house our library. This, however, raises various logistical problems which I'm hoping can be solved in this New Year.

Here are two other ideas that I mean to run with this year too . . .

(1) Update *The Catalogue* that I started umpteen months ago titled '**The Inside Story**'. This catalogues the DVDs from 1 to 99, which optimistically bears the sub-title '**Part One**'.



(2) I would also like to add umpteen library books at no cost to the club, - but would add some duplicates which we already have in our Library for a future sale, with the usual % cut that we give to the donor. *This idea might be a good idea also for other members to utilise.*

I currently keep all of our DVDs at home, so if anyone wishes to borrow any they can just give me a ring, or send an email, and I will bring any orders to our next meeting. Of course, unless there is a change in our thinking, there is no charge for borrowing from our amazing MML Library.

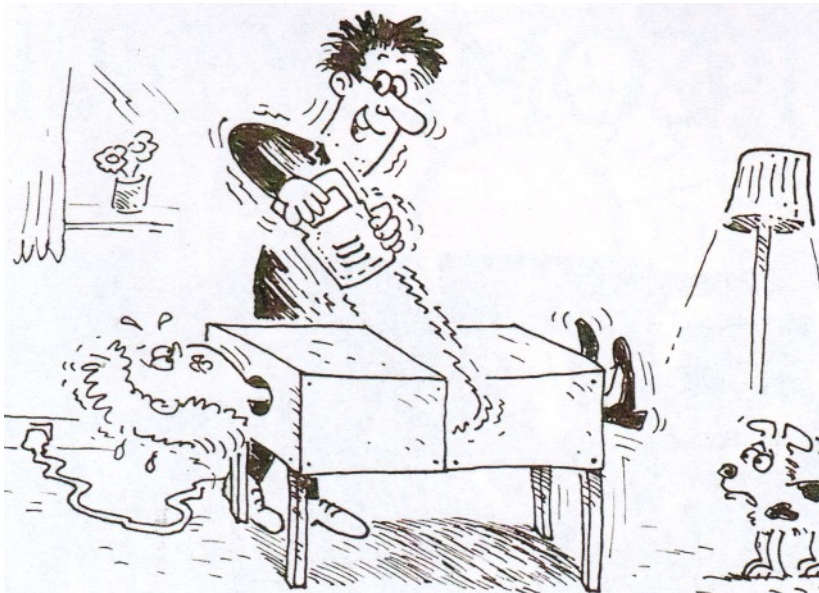
To date we have 301 Magic DVDs & 58 no Secrets, just Entertainment, DVDs.



We also have 671 books, *minus 67 books that are missing due to the great flood of 2014 in our last venue*, which gives us the **present total of 604 books available** to any lucky member who can read.

Again, if anyone wishes to borrow any books, and/or videos, just contact me in good time before a meeting and I will try my best to have them available at said meeting.

Donald Monk



DESPITE BEING THEIR FIRST MEETING
SANDRA WAS ALREADY PLOTTING THE
COMPLAINT LETTER TO MATCH.COM



AGM: Always Great Magic...

Masked, sanitised, ventilated, distanced and tested, eight members assembled for our AGM on 9th January, with others having the opportunity to 'look in' thanks to the technological expertise of Craig 'Electrickery' Docherty. We just managed a quorum.



Working within Covid-19 guidelines, the meeting was brisk and business-like under the Chairmanship of Roger Woods, beating all previous time records.

The Officers delivered their reports, as we looked back over the past year and forward into 2022. Covid had had its pros as well as cons, allowing us access via Zoom to national and international performers. The programme for 2021 had been rich and diverse.

The Committee was returned *en bloc*, Allan Clarke becoming actual rather than acting Treasurer and the post of Publicity Officer being discontinued. Carl Pearson assumed the role of President following



some well-chosen words from Allan, and also picked up the Les Brooks Trophy for his outstanding contributions to the MeMeL, 'Carl's Column' having morphed into a well-researched series on historical themes. Paul Guy was awarded the President's Trophy of Hecate.

Without the need for debate, our annual subscription was raised to £60 to reflect current values, while a paper copy of The MeMeL will now cost £25 per annum.

The unanimous decision was made to remain at St Francis, with the church hall as our Headquarters. A very amicable and productive afternoon was rounded off with informal chat and refreshments provided by the participants.



Now we look forward to 2022 and the familiar blend of lecturers, performances and in-house events.

In March we will have **Geoffrey Newton** with some 'Key Ring magic', followed by Northern Magic Circle President **Roy Field** in April – Magic at the Seaside.

For May we anticipate another 'first' in the form of a specially-commissioned presentation by **Andrew Lound** on 'The Magical Maskelynes'.

As tradition dictates, in June we will have Chairman's Day, and I know that Roger has a very special guest in place.

In July and August, when we usually experience a lull in attendances owing to the summer holidays, there will be two members' days with complementary themes encompassing lecturettes and favourite tricks.

September will bring the eagerly anticipated auction, thanks largely to the generous donations of Anne.

In October we hope to welcome, at long last, **Marc Oberon**; which just leaves President's Day in November, in the very capable hands of Carl, and Magic@Christmas in December.

In the immediate future, of course, we anticipate the welcome return of 'local lads made good', **Harry Robson and Matthew Wright** on Sunday. You don't need me to vouch for their quality, and we hope this sees the return of many more members to our HQ.

Brian

The joy of listening



Whilst I don't get to see a lot of TV, I found that I can generally find time to listen to a podcast, especially if I'm in the car on a longish journey. If you like short stories or



documentaries, then go and check out **BBC Sounds**.

There is huge library of interviews, documentaries and discussions on a variety of topics, so there is sure to be something to interest you.

You would not be surprised to hear that one of my favourite podcast subjects is Science and Technology and one series has kept me entranced for quite a few years; The Infinite Monkey Cage which is hosted by Professor Brian Cox and Robert Ince. The series covers a wide range of topics about science, and I particularly enjoy the format which brings in some very diverse inputs, usually from one or two science-based guests but always juxtaposed with a comedy writer or performer. Suffice it to say that I have listened to Brian Blessed on Dinosaurs and Katy Brand on The Secret Life of Birds!

Recently I got a message inviting me to listen to a series by Jim Al Khalili; 'if you liked 'Monkey Cage', then you will like this...' you know the kind of thing. However, on this occasion, they were right.

Jim's series is called 'The Life Scientific' and he interviews various leading lights from around the scientific community. One that caught my eye (or rather my ear) featured Richard Wiseman that bore the strap line; 'lying, luck and the paranormal'. Sounded right up my street!



I met Richard a few years ago at one of the Session conventions and his quirky approach to magic intrigued me. He has posted a lot of videos on magic, mostly to demonstrate how easy it is to fool your brain, and some are quite inventive. His official title is 'Professor of the Public Understanding of Psychology' at the University of Hertfordshire and the podcast delved into how he ended up in his chosen career. I won't spoil it for you but suffice it to say that his big break came when he devised a nationwide experiment involving TV and radio to see if the general public could tell if someone was lying. His premise was to get several MPs on the programme and have them tell the truth or lie to see if the audience could spot the difference. The results were very interesting. (and yes, they had MPs who didn't lie)

He went on to write a thesis on the belief of the paranormal and mind reading, both of which seem to have no scientific basis. He also touched on ESP and luck posing the question; 'are there really some people who are born lucky or is it just a mindset that could be learnt?'

Richard was a professional magician before he went into Psychology, so he spent his working career trying to understand how our brains can be fooled. It was a really good listen and I recommend you find it and treat your ears.

If you want to explore things further, Richard has a YouTube channel called 'Quirkology' and it is there that most of his brain fooling stuff is streamed. One of my favourite videos is the one on assumptions which demonstrates how easy it is for your brain to be tricked with incorrect visual clues.

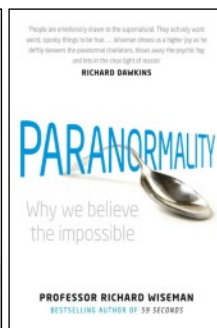
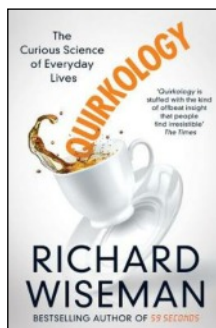
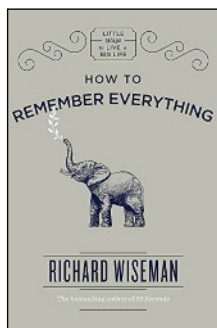
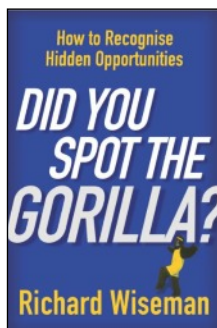
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNbF006Y5x4> (click image to view)

Richard has also written several books which are worth a look at from 'The Luck Factor' exploring positive actions, and 'Did you spot the Gorilla?' revealing the way the brain focuses without us being aware of it, and my favourite, Quirkology; The Curious Science of Everyday Lives; which explains how character traits are perceived. There's a lot in all of these books of interest to the magician.



Allan

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0008y3y>





Hello once again, and thank you to everyone who keeps me updated about welfare matters.

Steve Eastham has been in and out of hospital recently and as well as coping with his ongoing health issues he is now recovering from Covid. Our thoughts and best wishes are with him and his family at this difficult time.

David Hemingway remains in respite care at the Hazeldene Care Home: 49 Ribchester Road, Clayton le Dale, Blackburn BB1 9HU. There has been a covid outbreak within the home, which has prevented any visitors. Lorraine continues to keep me updated.

Brian Berry is back to his usual self after recovering from covid. He managed to perform at three children's shows at local schools just before Christmas. I think Brian is one of our busier magicians at the moment!

Allan Clarke continues to improve, and it was nice to see him at the AGM smiling and not in constant pain with his hands.

I think the rest of us are as well as we can be!

Please let me know of anyone who is under the weather, or just needs a chat.

My email is: pearsoncarl1@virginmedia.com

Mobile no. is 07807 115784.

Keep safe - **Carl.**

Quotation of the month



‘Secrecy is not the essence of the performing art of magic. Secrets are a theatrical tool of magic.’

(Jamy Ian Swiss)



100 years ago (14th February, 1922): A Smoking Concert was held at Mr Beaver's rooms in Livesey Branch Road. It was well attended by a select gathering. As well as magic there were humorous

readings, a vocalist and a pianist. The acts were exceedingly well received, and the singing of the National Anthem concluded a very enjoyable evening. It was interesting to note that this date commemorated the eighth year in the existence of the Modern Mystic League.

90 years ago (16th February, 1932): Five members attended, at 8, Maple Street. The question of an open meeting was dropped, as we cannot get the support of members.

80 years ago (8th February, 1942): Held at the White Bull, with 22 members present. There was an alteration of the rules; no person under the age of seventeen to be eligible for membership. The joining fee was raised to 10/- (50p) and the annual subscription to 12/- (60p). We had received an invitation from the Wirral Society to attend their President's Day, but this had to be declined owing to various difficulties. It was decided to purchase a duplicator for the printing of the magazine, and members were asked to subscribe to this. A discussion was held relating to the appropriateness of performing on a Sunday, following some controversy in *The World's Fair*. Local bylaws seemed to vary, but the point was made that our performances were charitable (not working for profit on the Sabbath) and 'the ends of our Lord are well served in giving pleasure to others.' Quotation from a member: "Personally, I am against some of today's variety acts being used on any day of the week, let alone Sunday, but ours is a medium which must not be allowed to have anything in common with vulgarity, because the two will never mix." Sadness was expressed at the sudden death of Theo Annemann at such a young age.

60 years ago (11th February, 1962): 18 members were present. A series of six donated magic books, published by Supreme Magic, were raffled in aid of League funds, raising 34/-. The winner was Dick Wildman. A sale and exchange was held, a number of items being sold at very low prices. Commission for the League amounted to 18/9 (94p). A pair of Chinese sticks and several other items made their fourth or fifth successive annual appearance.

Bob's Bits

With Bob Benyon

If you want to improve your memory, just lend someone some money.

People keep accusing me of questioning everything. Why is that?

Everyone says that stealing is wrong, but I don't buy it.

I'm not a natural linguist. I used to think that the French word for 'dentures' was aperitif.

It's never too late to start . . . so I think I'll put this off until tomorrow.

I always wondered what made my teachers tick - then I realised it was correct answers.

The other day I was accosted by a tobacconist - and I've still got the cigars to prove it.

I thought a documentary on TV about pig farming was going to be boring and predictable . . . but there was a twist in the tail.

I intended to join Alcoholics Anonymous, but joined the AA by mistake . . . but at least I'm on the road to recovery.

A thief stole a crate of soap from my local supermarket last week. Apparently, he got clean away.

I bought a book on addiction the other day. I haven't been able to put it down.

Drugs are never the answer; unless the clue is 'anagram, durgs, five letters.'

My motto has always been 'fight fire with fire.' Maybe that's why I was sacked from the fire brigade.

Did you hear about the dyslexic chap who walked into a bra?

My wife accused me of being verbose and pedantic. I was so shocked that I experienced the temporary restriction of oxygen flow from the immediate environment into my windpipe and lungs.

Bob

AND FINALLY: *108 Happy Returns!*

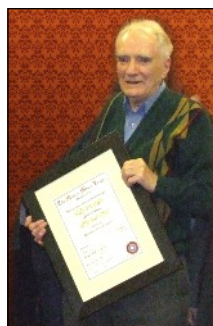
Happy Birthday to US !

On Thursday 12th February 1914 nine members of the, about to be formed, Modern Mystic League met to lay down the first chapter in the story of one of the longest running magic clubs in the UK. Those nine were joined by others and within a few short years, and despite the intervening war, membership had grown to 25.



Membership back then cost 2/6d (half a crown) which is 12.5p in decimal currency. Fifty years later, in 1964, it had risen to 30/- (£1.50). Fifty years after that in 2014, as we celebrated 100 years, the subscription was £35.

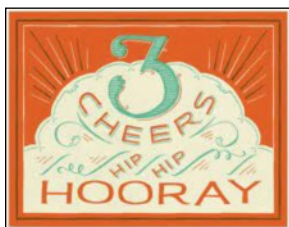
Our longest serving member was **Jack Ledwick** with an impressive 70 years under his belt. Jack was closely followed by John Tattersall, Mo Howarth and Trevor Dawson all achieving 60+ years of membership.



Since the League formed, we have recorded over 260 members and our current subscribing members have a combined contribution of over 700 years! That's an awful lot of professor's nightmares, linking rings, six card repeats and cup and ball routines...

In our 108 years, we have had 64 presidents, 20 different Chairmen, 22 Secretaries, 21 Events Secretaries and 14 Treasurers, not to mention other assorted committee roles occupied by 20 other assorted members.

The MeMeL came into existence in November of 1941, although its predecessor, 'The Circular' had been produced since 1938 under the first editor, Albert Maddicks. It has enjoyed several iterations (and editors) since its inception and continues to entertain and inform members and friends to this day.



So, there's quite a lot to celebrate!
Three cheers for the MML !

Officers of the MML

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THE LAST COPY DATE FOR
THE NEXT EDITION IS:

Wednesday 2nd March

All articles, reports and
submissions should be sent to
Brian Lead by the above date
to ensure inclusion.

Honorary Vice Presidents



**Debbie
McGee**



**John
Pye**

Honorary Members



Sooty



**Steve
Eastham**



**Norman
Greenhalgh**

Dates for your Diary:

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023

Sunday January 15th

(1 week later than usual meeting date)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

13TH MARCH 2022

Geoffrey Newton With 'Key Ring' Magic




Our good friend Geoffrey Newton needs no introduction to MML members - but as we don't want you staring at a blank page we had better give him one.

Geoffrey briefly joined us via Zoom last year, and has previously treated us to sessions on mathematical magic, paper magic and the magic of Tommy Cooper. It is almost five years since he was last with us for a full afternoon.

As editor of the British Ring magazine The key Ring, Geoffrey is often called upon to invent effects under different guises, and at our next meeting he will be performing and explaining some of those tricks to prove that they really do work and are relatively easy to make.

We are going to benefit from a wealth of experience in both presenting and creating magic . . . so do be there for what promises to be an enthralling afternoon.



'I went to a
seafood
disco last
week...
and pulled a
mussel...'



The MeMeL is the Journal of The Modern Mystic League.