

Harrogate society of magicians



Issue 7 : July 2009

**President
James Ward MMC**

Presidential

A slightly more serious Presidential this month – as befits my high office.

First off, a big thank you to those who were able to make it to the June meeting and welcome our speakers, Roy Field and Paul Freeman. I enjoyed their lectures, and am sure you did, too. For those who couldn't be there, I hope the write-up elsewhere in this newsletter, and the website photos, give you some idea of what you missed.

George's talk was another highlight in our 'This Is My Life' series, the only complaint being that it wasn't long enough. He brought along several scrapbooks – a fascinating record of his life in magic – but, in the time available, it was only possible to skim through them.

Like Brian's before him, they're a treasure trove of detail. As some of you are aware, I'm attempting to compile a 'History of the Harrogate Society of Magicians'. (If you weren't – then you are now.) As founder-members, Brian and George know more about the club than anyone else and both have been kind enough to lend me their books – which contain original newspaper reports, posters, programmes and occasional membership lists from the past 62 years.

In reporting on the founding of our club, the *Harrogate Advertiser* observed, "No beetle-browed necromancers these members, though the name might suggest it, nor yet mysterious dabblers in the black arts, but a collection of men who make magic their hobby". Today's *Advertiser* might word it differently, but, in our hopes and interests, we doubtless share much in common with our forebears from 1947.

Delving into the past has made me appreciate how important it is to record and preserve what we're up to today, so that, hopefully, future generations of Harrogate magicians will look back and find what we get up to of some interest.

In the absence of more formal minutes, the newsletter is of great importance, recording, as it does, our ongoing activities. Neil has done a terrific job in his short time as Editor, building on George's previous hard work and ensuring we have a detailed record of events. (As long as all our computers don't crash and we lose everything overnight!)

So next time you're performing at the club, remember - one day you may be under the historical spotlight.

But don't let that worry you too much. Unless, of course, you're one of our younger members and hope to still be around 60 years from now.

I know I do – which is why I keep taking the tablets.

Till next time, keep your Bicycles dry and your sponge balls where I can see them. J

This Is Your Life : George Fowler

George was born in 1932. Winning a scholarship to Harrogate Grammar School, he was a keen sportsman, playing rugby, and taking part in field events (where he equalled the existing school high jump record). He was also a prime mover in forming the school's successful magic society.

His family owned a retail leather goods business, originally established as Saddler's in 1804 and, in 1948, following the death of his grandfather, George joined the family business, now known as G. Fowler & Son. He was paid £1 a week, plus his keep, and as he told us, 'my magic brought in the rest'!

His interest in magic was sparked by his father, who, from time to time, produced from the attic a shoe box full of tricks. His first record of performing a public magic show was a 30-minute outing on 23 November 1945 at Victoria Park Methodist Church (now the Westgate Co-op).

In January 1946 he earned the magnificent sum (back then) of five shillings for performing at a Killinghall School party. On the back of this he was asked to perform at the vicarage Christmas children's party. Having asked for five shillings he was, instead, given the sum of ten shillings!

Jack Perry, a professional magician, provided further inspiration, and, eventually, George, along with Brian Knowles, and Wilfred Hartley, became co-founders of the Harrogate Society of Magicians in 1947. George has held many positions in the Society, from Librarian through to Assistant Secretary, President and, at the present date, Secretary.

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George has led an interesting and eventful life. He did his National Service in Egypt, was at one time heavily involved in the scouting movement, and has travelled the world in a variety of occupations.

He spent ten years in Africa, arriving in Nigeria in 1954 armed not only with enthusiasm for his new job with the West African trader, G.B. Ollivant, but a steel trunk of magic props, which went with him everywhere. While in Nigeria, he performed mostly for family, interspersed with the occasional foray into cabaret. On one occasion, his magic helped raise money for the rugby team in which he played to compete in the capital, Lagos, some 600 miles away. George's team – Eastern Nigeria – played Western Nigeria and, later, Ghana.

A former school governor, General Tax Commissioner and chairman of the Low Harrogate Tennis Club, his interest in magic remains undiminished. And with four grown-up children, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren, he won't be taking it easy any time soon!

LECTURES

At the June meeting, we enjoyed two excellent lectures from Scarborough members, Paul Freeman AIMC and Roy Field AIMC. Paul's talk – *Noms de Theatre: Names To Conjure With* – explained the thinking and inspiration behind a host of names, some well known, others less so. Among them were: Slydini, Cardini, Houdini, David Devant, Kalanag, Klingsor, Chung Ling Soo, Dr Faust, Amac and Ali Bongo.

By contrast, Roy Field's lecture – *Dleisfen: The Forgotten British Ring Secretary* – focused on one man, Dick Nesfield (1908-1972), a founder member of the British Ring and its first Secretary. Nesfield might have featured in Paul's lecture – rearranging, as he did, the letters in his surname to create the stage name, Dleisfen. A tireless worker, and prolific inventor of tricks, he is the only person to have held three British Ring posts – Secretary, Treasurer and Editor of *The Budget* – simultaneously.

As Editor, he would type every word of the magazine. In the days of Tippex-only corrections, this was a slow, time-consuming job. Roy showed us a slide of an early copy of *The Budget*, described at the time as a magazine for 'splendid fellows'!

Never a full-time professional magician, Dleisfen was, nonetheless, in great demand at parties, concerts and the like.

At the age of 28, however, under serious business pressures – he was a solicitor's clerk – and having suffered the devastating loss of a child, he effectively dropped out of magic altogether.

Roy owns many of Dleisfen's books and props (having met him in the 1960s), and showed us his 1929 'Trick With Giant Dominoes'.

Both talks were well illustrated with Powerpoint slides and delivered by speakers who were clearly passionate about their subject matter. In 2008, they lectured at the IBM convention in Eastbourne, and in September Paul will be taking his talk to Vienna. It was a very enjoyable evening – we were very lucky to have them address us.

There was no theme, or time for magic this month as our usual programme was replaced by the two excellent lectures described above. However, we're back to normal next month.

Next Meeting

Cups or glasses

This is Your Life : Stevie Bellerby

Meeting Date & Time

20 July 2009 @ 20:00

PHOTOS



Paul Freeman



Roy Field



George Fowler



From George's poster collection