

26 June 2021 to 16 January 2022

## LIST OF WORKS



Magic is one of the world's oldest art forms. Magicians have baffled and amazed people for millennia, creating tricks and illusions which continue to confound onlookers today. Early magicians were innovative show business pioneers, inventing colourful personas and new promotional techniques.

Two great conjurers emerged in the 19th century: French watchmaker Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin and Scotsman John Henry Anderson. Taking magic off the streets, these trailblazers turned a fairground pastime into dazzling entertainment. Houdin combined scientific processes and clockwork mechanics in his perfect illusions, performed in elegant evening wear. Anderson captivated audiences with expert showmanship, popularising the trick of pulling a rabbit out of a hat.

The magician's craft reached its pinnacle during magic's 'golden age' from 1880 to 1920. Enterprising magicians, already enjoying commercial success in vaudeville and music halls in Europe and America, looked to the antipodean entertainment market. Magic's greatest conjurers and illusionists travelled to Australia, where fresh audiences were eager to see something different — the more extravagant and exciting, the better. Soon, Australia was producing its own magical celebrities who would achieve great fame and stellar international careers.



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## MAGICANA

Many books have been written about magic tricks. Some magicians kept their secrets, while others shared them with the world, inspiring imitation and innovation.

Henry Dean's *Hocus Pocus* was first published in 1722 and reprinted in 15 editions, remaining a bestseller for over 150 years. Based on earlier magic manuals, it described common tricks, some with woodcut illustrations, revealing the conjurer's processes for the first time.

Toy and game seller, WH Cremer operated a Conjuring Saloon in Regent St, London, in the 1860s. He produced some of the earliest known magic supply catalogues and edited a popular series of magic books, including *Hanky Panky* (1872), which encouraged a magic publishing boom.

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*Hocus Pocus or the Whole Art of Legerdemain in Perfection*  
by H Dean, facsimile edition, 1880s  
Robbins/ 0546

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*Hanky Panky: A Book of Conjuring Tricks*  
edited by WH Cremer jnr, 1870s  
Robbins/ 0658

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(background) Playbill, Anderson's Magic & Mystery show, Standard Theatre, London, c1855  
Robbins/ 0918A

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(inset) Detail from *Giant Surprise Catalogue of Professional Magic*, by Vick Lawston, 1961  
Robbins/ 0735

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(left) The 'Magician's Saloon' from the *Catalogue of Apparatus for the Performance of Experiments in Natural and Recreative Philosophy* by WH Cremer, 1862  
Robbins/0707

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## ANDERSON'S MAGIC & MYSTERY SHOW

Professor John Anderson, known as the Great Wizard of the North, was the first magician to tour internationally. An audacious advertiser, his elaborate posters and playbills used preposterous language and a profusion of superlatives to sell his illusions and himself. Reports of a performance for the British royal family in 1850 secured his reputation in the colony, and he was invited to Australia by local theatre manager George Coppin.

An unprecedented campaign of show-business advertising launched Anderson's Australian tour. His *Magic and Mystery* show opened in Melbourne in March 1858 but the business partnership soon failed. In December Anderson booked Sydney's Lyceum Theatre for four weeks, spending £500 on transforming the 'dirty, desolate, dingy and deplorable Lyceum into a Fairy Palace of Magic', in which to display his 'gorgeously elaborate paraphernalia'.

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Advertisement, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 1858  
BN445

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Program on silk, Anderson's Magic and Mystery show, Lyceum Theatre, Sydney, 7 January 1859  
SAFE/D 356/Collection 16/Item 18

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## ON TOUR

European colonisers at Sydney Cove brought with them an appetite for theatrical entertainment. The expansion of settler society through the 1800s saw the development of a thriving market for popular amusements, with audiences clamouring for the types of performances they had known back home.

Sydney's emergence as a 'magic town' came after the discovery of gold. The resulting prosperity boom and population explosion — from 60,000 in 1850 to 350,000 in 1886 — saw rapid social and cultural change, with a rising middle class made newly rich in leisure time and money. As the city approached its centenary in 1888, a flourishing commercial theatre scene led to the development of entrepreneurial chains, with extensive touring circuits capable of presenting vaudeville and music hall acts, including magicians, to packed houses.

With the arrival of a new century, live theatre continued to remain a viable part of the entertainment industry despite the growing popularity of cinema. Many of the world's most prestigious magicians — for whom the success of a Southern Hemisphere season would secure their fame — performed to great fanfare, stimulating interest in the art of magic and inspiring future generations of Australian magicians.

## WIZARDS, PROFESSORS & MAGICIANS

Wizards, professors and magicians abounded in colonial Sydney and quickly dominating the local entertainment scene. Conjurer and ventriloquist Professor Jacobs' arrival was heralded by huge placards and posters all over town. The 'Wizard of Wizards' promised to 'electrify the Sydneyites', playing to packed houses in 1855 at the Royal Victoria, the city's first large theatre, which seated 1,900 people. Countless stage magicians pursued careers around the world, some achieving more fame than others. Little is known about Professor Lorento, described as 'the celebrated and renowned Australian wizard' in his *Wizard's Guide*, which was published in New York city in 1878.

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Engraving, 'Royal Victoria Theatre', from *Sydney in 1848* by Joseph Fowles  
Q84/56

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Professor Jacobs, 'Wizard' drawing by WF Gordon, c1855  
P1/832

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Booklet, *Lorento's Wizard's Guide, or Magic Made Easy* Hurst & Co. New York, 1878  
793.8/8

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## MAGICIENNES

As magic performances gained greater popularity, women began to earn their livings as stage magicians too, either with their husbands and families, or by themselves. American 'magicienne' Madame Cora de Lamond (aka Ursula Bush) was the first woman to tour Australia with her own magic show. Opening at Sydney's Prince of Wales Theatre in 1871, her repertoire included troublewit (folding paper into shapes) and legerdemain (sleight of hand). The high point of her show was the Couch of Angels illusion during which her sister, Christina, lay suspended in mid-air with her elbow resting on a pole.

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Photo cards  
(from top)  
Magician with spirit apparatus, by Nicholas & Co, Queensland, c1860  
PXA 682/ p.16

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Madame Cora, 'Magicienne', by Bardwell's Royal Studio, Ballarat, c1872  
P1/382

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Prof Bosco, by A Tronier, Sydney, c1860  
P1/202

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(right) Advertisement for Cora de Lamond from the *Hobart Mercury*, 22 January 1872

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## THE HELLERS

British-born musician William Henry Palmer took the stage name Robert Heller, after seeing Robert-Houdin perform in London in 1848. Combining magic with humour and music, Heller entranced audiences in a six-year world tour, travelling with a life-sized mechanical peacock which fanned its tail and performed tricks, selecting playing cards with its beak. His sensational second-sight act saw Miss Haidee Heller (billed as his half-sister) describe items held up by the audience, while blindfolded. Opening at the School of Arts in Pitt Street in late 1869, the Hellers returned for a second Australian tour in 1870.

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(right) Heller with his automated peacock from *Conjuring by Robert Heller: the Devil's own Wizard* Will Andrade, Melbourne, 1870s  
Robbins/ 0580

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(below) Pamphlet *Robert Heller, his doings* H Cordell, Melbourne, c1868  
DSM/042/P401

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Photo cards  
Robert Heller, conjurer, and Miss Heller, photographer unknown, c1870  
PXA 362/Vol.2/item 7 & item 8

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## THE HASELMAYERS

Known as the Prince of Prestidigitators, Professor Louis Haselmayer made his debut at Sydney's Prince of Wales Opera House in 1872. Returning in early 1880, he introduced Australian audiences to Psycho, a card-playing mechanical figure of a man, first shown by John Nevil Maskelyne at London's Egyptian Hall in 1875.

Madame Haselmayer, the magician's wife, was 'the chief agent in a curious illusion'. With her wrists fastened and padlocked into miniature stocks, which were in turn fixed to the floor of a locked and covered cabinet, after 15 seconds she reappeared 'free and smiling, having escaped from her bonds by some clever trick'.

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(above right) Professor and Madame Haselmayer from the *Bulletin*, 20 March 1880

F88/3

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(right) Advertisement, 'Mair Hazel Nuts o' Haselmayer's' from *Sydney Punch*, 27 February 1874

QA827/S

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## DAVENPORT BROTHERS

Ira and William Davenport's hugely influential spirit cabinet routine was presented as a genuine supernatural phenomenon, despite repeated exposure of its trickery. Touring Australasia in 1876, during their performance the brothers were tied up inside a box with musical instruments. Once the doors were closed, the instruments could be heard by the audience. When the doors were opened, the brothers were revealed still tied in their bonds. The Davenports' popularity encouraged other magicians to add spirit phenomena to their acts. Considered among the earliest escape artists — employing special rope ties for quick release — their methods were also used by 20th century escapologists.

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(above) Sketches at the Davenports' Performances from the *Australasian Sketcher with pen and pencil*, 30 September 1876

TN 79

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Photo cards  
Ira Davenport (top) and William H Davenport (bottom) by Bardwell Studio, Ballarat, 1876  
P1/446; P1/447

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Pamphlet, *Davenport brothers and Prof. WM Fay: a containing a short sketch of the lives, travels & performances*, compiled and written by JH Jenkins, Tamworth, 1877  
DSM/793.5/1A

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## PROFESSOR ANDERSON JNR

Philip Prentis Hind was a son of the original Professor John Anderson and had toured with his father's act during the 1860s. Hind began using the stage name Professor Anderson during his 1881 Australian tour, with his wife, Louise Anderson, a clairvoyant. Their show at the School of Arts in Sydney, on 26 March 1881, was billed as a 'Cagliostromantheum of Wonders and Wizardian Prestidigitation', prompting local reporters to wonder at the 'fresh delusions promised' to the audience when 'one of the words is so big as to be almost alarming', and requiring 'a large audience to study it'.

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(above) Professor Anderson, detail from his photo card by Murell & Co., George St, Sydney, c1886  
PXD 357/127

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(right) Poster, School of Arts: Saturday March 26: Professor Anderson Great Wizard of the North, printed by H Solomon, Sydney, 1881

Courtesy Victorian Performing Arts Centre, Melbourne

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## KELLAR, THURSTON, CARTER & LEROY

Towards the end of the 19th century, lavish magic shows were regularly staged at big theatre venues. American Harry Kellar, among the world's favourite magicians, had one of the largest and most elaborate magic shows. Retiring in 1908, Kellar's chosen successor was Howard Thurston, known as the King of Cards. Thurston had the early 20th century's largest travelling vaudeville magic show, requiring more than eight train cars to transport his props and equipment.

Touring Australia in 1907, eminent American prestidigitator Carter the Great travelled with 28 tonnes of apparatus and was known for his elaborate illusions, including sawing a woman in half and making an elephant disappear. Belgian-born Servais LeRoy invented numerous illusions still popular today. Nicknamed 'the devil in evening dress', he performed alongside his wife Mary Ann Ford, who was known as Talma, the Queen of Coins. Billed as Le Roy, Talma, and Bosco, they astonished and bewildered local audiences when they played to packed houses at Sydney's Tivoli Theatre in November 1905.

(above) Theatre Royal, King Street entrance, Sydney, photographer unknown, c1882

SPF/1589

'To Carter, the Magician', acrostic poem from the *Sydney Sportsman*, 13 November 1907

BN 30

(left) Poster, St Georges Hall, commencing Saturday, May 6th: Kellar & Cunard: in their marvelous and world-famed entertainment called A night in Dreamland, printed by WM Marshall, Melbourne, 1882

POSTERS 1236

Booklet, *Thurston's Easy Pocket Tricks: the ABC of magic*: Thurston's Mystic Palace, Cos Cobb, Conn., c1900

Robbins/ 0570

Brochure, *Carter the Great: the World's Weird & Wonderful Wizard* Otis Litho Co., Cleveland, 1926

G 2013/4655

Poster, 'Servais Le Roy: A Flying Visit', London, Denmark Works, c1890

Robbins/ 0918A

(cut out figure) Magician's assistant Dorraine Skupinski, photographer unknown, c1940

MLMSS 8612/Box 4/ Folder 1

(exhibition identity) Detail from *Giant Surprise Catalogue of Professional Magic*, by Vick Lawston, 1961

Robbins/ 0735

## OFF STAGE

Sydney was a popular stop on the magicians' international touring circuit, and local interest in magic blossomed as Sydneysiders tried to emulate the tricks they'd seen performed on stage.

Magic shops like Will Andrade's (173 Pitt Street), Mick Simmons (George St, Haymarket) and Weirido's (220 Pitt Street), stocked a wide variety of magic props and theatrical notions imported from leading overseas suppliers.

Set up in 1919, Andrade's was Australia's leading dealer in magic books and apparatus. Many bitten by the magic bug bought their first box of tricks at Andrade's upper floor premises, reached by climbing a flight of creaking wooden stairs. The black door opened onto a muddled mass of ventriloquist's dolls and magician's paraphernalia, with old posters and photographs of famous magicians and covering the walls. From the windows, huge grinning masks looked down onto the city's busiest street.

Major magic depots were staffed by some of Sydney's best-known magicians, who gave advice on purchases to hobbyists and professionals alike. Magic shops also became drop-in centres where leading Australian and visiting international magicians gathered to discuss the latest tricks.

This laid the groundwork for the growth of the city's magic clubs, attracting colourful characters, collectors and prominent personalities of the Sydney magic scene. Andrade's also operated as a magicians' employment agency.

(background) Will Andrade's Magic Shop with assistants Harry Job and Cecil Cook, photographer unknown, c1930

MLMSS 8612/Box 1/ Folder 1

COLLECTORS:  
HARRY JOB  
(1909-1996)

Harry Job developed an interest in all things magical after his family moved from Parkes to Sydney in 1919, the same year Will Andrade opened his magic business near Central Station.

Buying books on magic and regularly browsing magic catalogues, Job answered Andrade's 'Boy Wanted' ad in 1923. He was soon demonstrating tricks for customers at Andrade's new Pitt Street premises and performing at concerts and variety shows. By the early 1930s, Job was managing the store. After Andrade's death in 1939, Harry purchased the business, including the right to trade and perform as Will Andrade.

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Harry Job, magician,  
photographer unknown, c1930  
MLMSS 8612/Box 4/Folder 2

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Letterhead, 'Harry Job / Will Andrade:  
Fun For all / All for Fun', c1950  
MLMSS 8612/Box1/Folder 2

—  
Business or Throw cards (in the form  
of playing cards) 'Will Andrade And His  
Bag of Tricks', c1950  
MLMSS 8612/Box 3

—  
Harry Job demonstrating ball trick,  
photographer unknown, c1930  
MLMSS 8612/Box 1/Folder 1

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Harry Job demonstrating scarf trick to  
woman, photographer unknown, c1940  
MLMSS 8612/Box 1/Folder 1

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Harry Job in tuxedo demonstrating scarf  
trick, photographer unknown, c1940  
MLMSS 8612/Box 1/Folder 1

FIVE DEMONS

Magic enjoyed a boom in the 1940s as the war increased demand for live shows at soldier's concerts in camps and battle areas. Harry Job was among the local magicians who took to the road to entertain the troops at home and abroad. Several magic societies were also operating in Sydney including The Five Demons, formed in the mid-1930s. Members met in secret and wore papier-mâché devil heads to mask their identities during performances. The society also collected a library of over 1000 magic books.

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(reproduction) The Demons Den  
photograph by Ivan Ive for *PIX*,  
30 July 1938  
ON 388/Box 033/Item 034

—  
Will Andrade, 'The Demon of Magic'  
(aka Harry Job), photographer unknown,  
1949  
MLMSS 8612/Box 4/Folder 1

—  
With compliments slip,  
The Five Demons, c1940  
MLMSS 8612/Box1/Folder 2

—  
Trade card, The Five Demons -  
Welcome You, c1940  
MLMSS 8612/Box1/Folder 2

COLLECTORS:  
KEITH ABSON  
(1912-1988)

Keith Abson loved magic. He started compiling his scrapbook of Magician's Dreams as a teenager, while travelling with The Incomparable Sloggetts. Enlisting with the AIF, he saw active duty in several theatres of war before joining the Milne Bay concert party as a magician — Sydney magic dealer and friend J Albert Briggs sent books and tricks for his act. After the war, Abson continued his itinerant lifestyle, touring Australia with his show, *The Palace of Magic*, and working as a journeyman magician until his retirement in 1968. Also involved in several magic clubs, he became President of the Australian Magicians' Club in the 1970s.

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(reproduction) Blueprint for 'Sawing  
a Woman in Half' apparatus, c1950  
MLMSS 10509/ Box 10X

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(reproduction) Keith Abson, 'Man  
of Magic', detail of printed portrait  
photograph, c1970  
MLMSS 10509/ Box 9/ Folder 2

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Business card, c1970  
MLMSS 10509/Box 9/Folder 2

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Catalogue, *The leading magical house in  
Australasia J. Albert Briggs*, Alexandria,  
NSW, c1930s  
793.8028/1

—  
Title page of 'The Magician Dreams'  
scrapbook by Keith Abson,  
24 September 1973  
MLMSS 10509/ Box 4

—  
Trick, 'Rabbit from Hat' from  
Keith Abson's magic scrapbook,  
16 November 1982  
MLMSS 10509/ Box 5

COLLECTORS:  
ROBERT ROBBINS  
(1926-1964)

Sydney-born Robbins was captivated by magic when, at the age of eight, he saw Carter the Great perform his spellbinding illusions. Robbins met Carter backstage, and the magician later sent him theatre posters from all over the world. Taking the stage name 'Merlini', 14-year-old Robbins was the youngest magician to perform at the Tivoli Theatre. In 1957 he became the first magician to perform on Australian television, making regular appearances with assistant Irene Sheargold on the ABC's *Cafe Continental*, among other variety shows. Robbins acquired the magnificent magician's reference library compiled by his mentor, The Great Levante. After Robbins' sudden death in 1964, this collection was purchased by the State Library.

—  
Bob 'Merlini' Robbins  
photographer unknown, c1960  
Courtesy Kent Blackmore

—  
Business card, 'Robert Merlini', c1960  
GRL 68/1069

—  
(reproduction) Merlini and Irene  
performing in the ABC's *Cafe  
Continental* 2nd anniversary show  
photographer unknown, 18 August 1960  
Courtesy Timothy Hyde

—  
*More Tricks of the Television Stars*  
by Harry Stanley, London, 1960s  
Robbins/ 0069

## MAGIC SHOPS

Sydney's magic shops were an important part of the local magic scene, and each had its own character. The growth of specialist dealerships from the early 1900s included Will Andrade's (1919-96), J Albert Briggs (1920-69), Mick Simmons' Premier Magic Store (1935-60), Cecil Cook's (1961-75) and Steve McKechnie's Weirdo's (1947-87).

J Albert Briggs and Mick Simmons produced regular catalogues. Will Andrade's produced its only magic catalogue, *Better Magic*, in the 1930s and Weirdo's published its *Catalogue No. 2*, in about 1943. Andrade's Home of Magic and Mystery, in Pitt St's Central Chambers, was probably the most famous building in Sydney magic history. In 1971, after 47 years at the same address, Andrade's moved up the road to the Sydney School of the Arts, where many 19th century magicians had given their first performances.

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Promotional signs for Will Andrade's Magic Shop, c1950  
MLMSS 8612/Box 6X

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Cartoon, 'Grease paint & Guinea Pigs', *Australian Women's Weekly*, 28/9/1946  
MLMSS 8612/Box 6X

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Novelty mirror, 'WILL ANDRADE PLAYS & MAKE-UP', c1965  
MLMSS 8612/ Box 3

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Central Chambers, Pitt St, photographer unknown, 1929  
MLMSS 8612/Box 4/Folder 1

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Stationery, Will Andrade / Harry Job (Andrade's Magic Depot), c1950  
MLMSS 8612/Box 1/ Folder 2; MLMSS 8612/Box 4/Folder 1

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Phoney Money, 'Harry Job / Andrade's Magic Depot', c1950  
MLMSS 8612/ Box 4/ Folder 1

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Business Cards 'Will Andrade Theatrical supplier' / 'Will Andrade The Post Office is Next to Us', c1930s  
MLMSS 8612/Box 4/Folder 1

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Catalogue, *Weirdo's Superior Magic and Novelty Shop, No 2*, c1943  
793.8028/2

## MAGETA, THE MAGICIAN

Magic became a marketing gimmick to advertise everyday products like chocolate, stock cubes and peanut butter. The ETA Magician's Club was an early Australian corporate promotion, using the lure of magic to promote ETA's food products. Harry Job collaborated on the mid-1930s publicity campaign, possibly initiated by Sydney magician Bob Carbine, who worked at ETA as an accountant.

Trick cards were supplied in ETA products, and MagEta the magician would perform at any theatre offering free peanuts. Children joining the ETA Magician's Club received MagEta's *Book of Exclusive and Secret Tricks* and could collect up to 60 trick cards. Similar ideas overseas had received widespread coverage in magic magazines, as a way to stimulate flagging interest in performance magic following the arrival of talking pictures.

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Booklet, *The ETA book of exclusive and secret tricks* by MagEta: Nut Foods Ltd., Sydney, 1935  
793.8/15

### MAGIC SHOP DISPLAY

(background image right) Unidentified magician with rings, photographer unknown, c1935  
MLMSS 4062

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Book, *Dunninger's Popular Magic*, New York, 1929  
Robbins/ 0610

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Interior views of Will Andrade's Magic Depot, photos by Ivan Ive for *People* magazine, 26 April 1950  
MLMSS 8612/Box 1/Folder 1

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Magician Harry Job demonstrating tricks photographer unknown, c1950  
MLMSS 8612/Box 4/Folder 2

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(mirror above right) Harry Job demonstrating the waterfall card shuffle to Scots College boys, photo by Ivan Ive for *People* magazine, 26 April 1950  
ON 388/Box 068/Item 194

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(background images)  
Francis Watts - conjurer photos by Max Dupain, 1946  
ON 609/Box 04/nos.78-95: File 08

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Interior views of Will Andrade's Magic Depot photos by Ivan Ive for *People* magazine, 26 April 1950  
ON 388/Box 068/Item 194

## A MAGICAL LIBRARY OF BOOKS

In the February 1939, Andrade's announced its latest service innovation to Sydney's Independent Magical Performers (the IMPS) via the club's magazine:

It had to come! Sydney magicians have for a long time now needed a real-up to date Magician's Library. To meet their needs, we have decided to establish a Magical Library of Books which we doubt can be excelled anywhere in Australia ... new books, old books, rare books. Books you never thought existed. Books you've read about but never seen — gathered from the four corners of the earth, for your perusal. Now made available on a low weekly rental basis — a Personal service for magicians — Exclusive to MAGICIANS ONLY.

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### Selection of magic books from the State Library of NSW collection:

#### ROW ONE

*Better magic: a catalogue of tricks for all entertainers in magic with some hints, tips and gags:* Sydney: Will Andrade, 1930s  
793.8/6

*Fifty-one Impromptu conjuring tricks:* Sydney: Cecil Cook, 1946  
793.8/18

*Giant Surprise Catalogue of Professional Magic:* London: Vick Lawston, 1961  
Robbins/ 0735

*Practical magic:* London: David Robbins, 1955  
E793.8/ROB

*Amateur conjuring: clever, inexpensive tricks for home or public entertainment:* W Russell London: 1908  
Robbins/ 0578

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#### ROW TWO

*The best tricks and how to do them:* David Devant, London, 1931  
Robbins/ 0304

*The Ghost: as produced in the spectre drama...:* Henry Dircks. London, 1863  
Robbins/ 0282

*Practical Magic with popular patter,* Guy K Austin. London, 1919  
Robbins/ 0075

*After Dinner Sleights and Pocket Tricks,* C Lang Neil, London, 1921  
Robbins/ 0278

*Scientific mysteries: a collection of simple and effective experiments...:* Offices of The Chemist & Druggist, London, 1891  
Robbins/ 0268

*Deceptive conceptions in magic,* Stanley Collins. London Magical Co, 1920  
Robbins/ 0238

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#### ROW THREE

*The Book of Modern Conjuring,* R Kunard. London, c1890  
Robbins/ 0608

*Modern magic: a practical treatise on the art of conjuring,* Professor Hoffmann. London, c1914  
Robbins/ 0430

*Conjurer Dick, or, The adventures of a young wizard,* Professor Hoffman. London, c1890  
Robbins/ 0138

*The art of modern conjuring and drawing room entertainment ...:* London, 1909  
Robbins/ 0108

*Sleight of hand: a practical manual of legerdemain for amateurs and others,* Edwin Sachs. London, 1885  
Robbins/ 0105

*Spirit slate writing and kindred phenomena,* William E Robinson, New York, 1898  
Robbins/ 0251

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## CONJURING FOR BEGINNERS

Magic tricks have been considered a suitable hobby for children, especially boys, since Victorian times. Sleights of hand involving cards, coins and handkerchiefs can easily be mastered with practice, relieving boredom, and entertaining others while developing skills in concentration and observation.

*The Conjuror's Kit Book* (complete with wand) was produced in the mid-1930s. Endorsed by third-generation English magician Jasper Maskelyne, it contained tricks and puzzles printed on pre-cut cardboard, which could be punched out and folded for assembly. Along with traditional apparatus and magic supplies, including the most popular lines in pre-packaged, commercially made tricks, magic depots like Will Andrade's also did a profitable sideline in jokes and gags.

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*The conjurer's kit book complete with magic wand...*, London, c1935

Robbins/ 0875

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### Selection of tricks and gags from the Keith Abson Collection:

The Mysterious Water Jar of India  
MLMSS 10508/ Box 1/ Folder 3

The Marvelous Memory Trick:  
Second Sight  
MLMSS 10508/ Box 1/ Folder 3

The Liars License  
MLMSS 10508/ Box 1/ Folder 3

Jumbo Monte Cards & envelope  
MLMSS 10508/ Box 1/ Folder 3

Magic Catalogue, c1970  
MLMSS 10508/ Box 1/ Folder 3

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## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Showmanship is the secret to the magician's success. Australia's legendary magical performers were all masters of walking, talking and dressing the stage. A magician must be in total control if they are to deceive the senses — keeping up a steady flow of words, or 'patter', to entertain and distract the audience.

The Amazing Mr Rooklyn's show opening never failed to bring gasps from the audience. As the curtain went up on a darkened stage, a spotlight revealed his immaculate figure standing at the top of ornate stairs. Resplendent in top hat, tails, cloak and snow-white gloves, as the music reached a crescendo, he slowly descended. Passing his hat and cloak to assistants, he deftly removed his gloves and, tossing them into the air, turned them into a white dove which flew around the stage. From then on, he entertained — delivering a bewitching two-and-a-half-hour performance.

Adding to the magician's aura is their attire — dark-coloured clothing camouflages their actions and strategically placed extra pockets hide a multitude of secrets. In the 1930s, Magic Murray had an evening suit made with 30 pockets. During his performance, he would reach into the tails of his jacket to produce a kicking rabbit, or a foaming glass of beer to reward each assistant from the audience.

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(left) Diagram, Magician's tailcoat showing locations of extra pockets

(stage) Maurice Rooklyn in his performance ensemble, photographer unknown, c1950, from *Spherical Sorcery and Recollections of a Pro*, Sydney, 1973

QA927.938/R777.1/1A1

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Magician's props purchased for display only

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## THE AMAZING MR ROOKLYN (1905-1992)

British-born Maurice Rooklyn migrated to Australia with his family in 1912. Dazzled by a magician producing coins from thin air, at the age of 11 he bought *Hopkin's Magic*, and spent 14 hours a day wiggling coins and cards through his fingers. Thousands of hours go into producing an act that appears effortless on stage and Rooklyn eventually formed two large corns on the palms of his hands, which were later insured for £10,000. Rooklyn's signature masterpiece was a billiard ball manipulation routine, called *Symphony in Spheres*. Touring the UK in the 1930s, he became the first magician in the world to appear on television, when he performed this act in the BBC studios in 1936. He also perfected hypnotism, ventriloquism and pseudo-mind reading skills. In 1958, his 12-minute demonstration of finger wizardry earned him the title of World's Champion Prestidigitator, the first Australian to win this award, bestowed by the International Congress of Magicians.

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Promotional items for The Amazing Mr Rooklyn c1940-70  
MLMSS 8177

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The Amazing Mr Rooklyn on stage, photographer unknown, 1940s  
Lent by Kent Blackmore

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Book: *Spherical Sorcery and Recollections of a Pro*, Sydney, 1973  
Lent by the Sydney Jewish Museum

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(stage) Top hat, tail suit, cape, ball stand and travelling case owned by The Amazing Mr Rooklyn, c1950s  
Lent by the Sydney Jewish Museum  
Accessories courtesy The Vintage Clothing Shop

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## HEADLINERS

The history of magic is dominated by the personalities and stories of its star performers. As Australian magicians worked their way to the top of the bill in the world of variety theatre, they achieved their ambitions to stage their own touring shows.

The Great Levante launched his magical extravaganza *How's Tricks?* in London on Boxing Day 1937, with fellow magician Dante's *50 Mysteries* playing at the nearby Wintergarden Theatre. The Amazing Mr Rooklyn built two full evening shows, *Blue Velvet* (1946–47) and *A Night of Pink Champagne* (1949–54) establishing his own travelling troupe of 30 musicians, dancers and comedians. Magic Murray produced his *Round the World with Magic* (1942–53) revue, adding illusions and feats of magic, until it was one of the biggest magic shows on the road. The rise of television in the 1950s saw the eventual decline of variety theatre and tours of magical entertainment on such a grand scale.

Australian headliners rose to positions of high standing in the global magic community, participating enthusiastically in professional societies like the International Brotherhood of Magicians and creating lasting friendships with many of magic's greatest names.

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(background right) The Great Levante with Assistant (Esme Levante) in a Box, c1950

PXE 1367

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(below, from left) Magicians at the Mayfair Hotel, Dante, Horace Goldin, the Great Levante, Magic Murray, and journalist Brunel White, London, 1936

Courtesy Kent Blackmore

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## THE GREAT LEVANTE (1892–1978)

Widely regarded as Australia's greatest magician, Leslie George 'Les' Vante Cole was born in the Sydney suburb of Alexandria, and grew up in Victoria. At the age of 10, his 60-year magic career was sparked by the gift of a book, Hoffman's *Modern Magic*. Cole taught himself tricks to amuse his friends and began performing professionally at the age of 18. He met English magician Tom Selwyn, who gave him the stage-name 'Levante'. Touring the bush with his escape routines, Levante later took to the road with wife, Gladys, and daughter, Esme, gaining show business skills along the way.

In 1927, the Levantes began a world tour, travelling through Asia before touring England from 1933 to 1940. Gladys and Esme worked behind the scenes and onstage — they were probably sawn in half more often than any other women in the world. Levante's on-stage presence was enhanced by his suave appearance and impeccable tailoring. His £1000 Steel Trunk Mystery thrilled audiences and was named the London Institute of Magic's Mystery of Mysteries. In 1939 the International Brotherhood of Magicians elected Levante the world's number one magician.

Returning to Australia, Levante toured his magic revue *How's Tricks?* into the 1950s and worked on illusions at his 'Fun Factory' in Guildford. In 1977 he became the inaugural recipient of the world's highest award for magicanship, presented by the Academy of Magic Arts.

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(above) Promotional poster, c1920s

Courtesy State Library of Victoria, Will Alma collection

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(left) Promotional materials, and photographs, c1940–50  
MLMSS 3622; PXE 1367

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(bottom left) Performance prop, c1950

Tricked up handcuffs belonging to The Great Levante, and photo

Lent by Kent Blackmore

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## MAGIC MURRAY (1901–1988)

Five-year-old Norman 'Murray' Walters saw American Howard Thurston's show in Melbourne and was invited on stage to assist with the 'egg trick'. Receiving a box of magic tricks as a Christmas gift, by the age of eight Murray had taught himself the art of escapology using a pair of 'regulation wrist irons' he'd purchased through a mail order catalogue. Murray designed his first business card at 13, working in Sydney as The Boy Wizard, and becoming the Australian Society of Magicians' youngest member.

Murray left Australia at 16, honing his skills as he entertained audiences all over the world — chained, shackled and hung upside down! Back home by 1919, he spent the next few years barnstorming his way around the outback. By 1926, he was topping the bill in London. During a triumphant 1928 season at Sydney's Tivoli Theatre, he staged his famous straitjacket escape outside the Public Library of NSW. By 1933 Murray was touring Europe with his illusion show, assisted by his wife Marion, and using escape stunts for publicity. Murray retired from the stage in 1954 due to ill health, opening Murray's Magic Mart in Blackpool, UK, which became a meeting place for magic-lovers of all ages.

Often described as the 'last of the greats', Murray epitomised the entrepreneurial type of illusionist. One of the most-travelled entertainers of his day, he covered more than 800,000 kilometres (ie. around the world x 20) during his 40-year magic career, touring 92 countries on six continents.

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(above) Murray, the Escapologist performing his straitjacket stunt, Sydney photos by Sam Hood, 16 February 1928

HOME & AWAY 6370; HOME & AWAY 6375; HOME & AWAY 6377

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(left) Magic Murray chained to railing, c1930 autographed photograph

Lent by Kent Blackmore

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(bottom left) Promotional poster, c1930s  
Courtesy National Library of Australia

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## DANTE THE EXHILARATOR (1883–1951)

Danish-born Harry Jansen migrated to America in 1890, where he made his stage debut in 1900, aged 16. In 1911 he set out to conquer the world, first visiting Australia in 1912. For the next 20 globe-trotting years he was known as The Great Jansen. Harry had started out as an illusion builder, co-owning a Chicago-based magic manufacturing company which made many of the great Howard Thurston's illusions. In 1922, Thurston hired Jansen to build and co-produce his 2nd unit show — he also gave Jansen the stage name 'Dante', in honour of the original Dante, Oscar Eliason, a world famous magician who was accidentally killed in 1899, during a kangaroo shoot near Dubbo, NSW.

Sailing from New York in 1927, Dante visited hundreds of cities with his magical revue *Sim-Sala-Bim*, named for the trademark magical incantation of nonsensical words he used to elicit applause. Programs for this revue showcase Dante's love for big illusions and stage effects, often touted as '50 Mysteries'. Back in Melbourne in 1933, Dante recruited a new assistant by launching a competition for 'Australia's Most Beautiful Woman'. Geelong-born entertainer Loretta Miller won the title. Billed as 'Moi-Yo' Miller, she performed with Dante for the rest of his career, becoming one of the world's all-time great magic assistants.

(above) Dante on stage with Moi-Yo Miller, c1935, photographer unknown

Courtesy State Library of Victoria, Will Alma collection

Promotional brochures, Theatre Royal, Sydney, c1935 and Winter Garden Theatre, London, 1937

MLMSS 4062; Robbins/ 0918A

(left) Harry August Jansen (aka Dante), Sydney, photographer unknown, 1913 P1/833

Business card, promotional booklets and souvenirs, c1930–1950

MLMSS 8612/ BOX 1 / FOLDER 2; GQ 2013/1512; MLMSS 4062

## ON THE BILL

Magicians of the golden age were among the first artists to promote themselves through illustrated advertisements, ranging in scale from small, printed souvenirs to billboard-sized posters. Many of these attention-grabbing artworks are fine examples of chromolithography, a printing technique used in the mass production of colourful, eye-catching advertising material which began in the 1870s.

In this competitive era, magicians often acted as their own publicists, fighting an advertising war. Australian Escape King Magic Murray served part of his apprenticeship as advance man for The Incomparable Sloggetts, travelling ahead of the show to slap up posters in each town on the circuit. The posters themselves had real pulling power, raising the art of self-promotion to a new height. The imagery used fed audiences' curiosity and played to their fantastical expectations in a unique collision of performance art and graphic design. The popular image of the tuxedo clad, top hat wearing magician was also fixed in the public imagination through widespread use of illustrated posters to advertise their shows.

Now, over a century later, these posters are often the only glimpses we have of these performers, their grand illusions and notable conjuring feats, and how popular entertainments like these were advertised to Australian audiences in the past.

### Promotional posters

c1900–1950s

The Incomparable Sloggetts Mystic Comedy Show, colour lithograph, c1930s

POSTERS/2021/28

The egg trick: David Devant... St. George's Hall, colour print, London, c1900

Robbins/ Posters/ 2

Bernardo, colour lithograph, Hamburg, Aldolf Friedlander, 1930s

Robbins/ Posters/ 3

Dante The World-Famous Magician and His Big Novelty Company, colour print, FS Pacey & Son Printers, Ryde, NSW, c1935

POSTERS/2021/29

The Amazing Mr. Rooklyn from London: 100 laughs! Thrills! Mysteries! colour print, 1946

POSTERS 2500

Murray the Sensational Escapologist appears and disappears personal appearance of the favourite magical entertainer of the universe, colour lithograph, The Perfecta Press: London, c1950

POSTERS/2021/15

Third world tour, famous Australian illusionist! The Great Levante: £1000 steel trunk mystery! weird unique 'thrilling', colour lithograph, UK, c1955

POSTERS/2019/460/1, 2 & 3

Not for a Decade has there been a show such as this! The Great Levante, news sheet, Wellington, NZ, 30/31 July c1950

MLMSS 3622

The Levante Show: Girls and gaiety, legs and laughter, mirth and melody, funny enough to make a cat laugh! Positively the most outstanding attraction touring to-day, colour print, c1950

POSTERS 2523

Deloras. A Terrific Act of Rare Entertainment, colour lithograph, c1955

POSTERS/2021/27



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