

# HOW'S TRICKS?



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## Media Release

### Help the State Library solve the mystery of the disappearing magician?

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The State Library of NSW is calling on the public to help uncover the secrets of one of the earliest and most comprehensive magic collections in Australia, as part of its new exhibition *How's Tricks? Magic in the Golden Age*.

The Robbins Magic Collection, purchased by the State Library 50 years ago, contains more than 900 books and magic memorabilia owned by Sydney's 'Man of Magic', Bob 'Merlini' Robbins. The collection holds some closely guarded trade secrets known only to professional magicians.

According to State Library curator Margot Riley: "The Robbins collection gives a rare insight into the types of material a magician working in the mid-20th century would have used to research and develop their act. But there's a lot we don't know about how and when the collection was put together, and we're keen to hear from surviving family members."

Bob Robbins' career was cut short by his sudden death at the age of 37, but he had some incredible achievements — he was the youngest magician to perform at the Tivoli Theatre in Sydney at age 14 and the first hypnotist to perform "live" on Australian TV in 1957.

"His biggest legacy is perhaps his magic collection, which we know was passed onto him by his teacher and mentor, The Great Levante (Leslie George Cole), who is still considered to be Australia's greatest-ever stage magician," said Ms Riley.

Names like The Great Levante, Magic Murray and The Amazing Mr Rooklyn were among Australia's first celebrity performers, dominating the Australian and international entertainment scenes in the mid-20th century, following magic's golden age from 1880 to 1920.

"These celebrity exports were the Hemsworth's and Kidman's of their day. Like Robbins, many of these once-household-names have disappeared from our collective memories and now all that remains of their work is the evocative evidence found in 'magicana' collections like those held at the State Library," said Ms Riley.

These stars of yesteryear will take centre stage once more when parts of the State Library's marvellous magic collection go on public display for the first time.

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Exhibition highlights include:

- rare magic books like Henry Dean's *Hocus Pocus*, first published in 1722 and reprinted in 15 editions, remaining a bestseller for over 150 years
- vintage photographs revealing Sydney's first magic shop and rare images of stage magic's female pioneers like 19th century 'magicienne' Madame Core De Lamond, and world-class Australian magician's assistants Esme Levante and Moi-Yo Miller
- dazzling promotional posters, which are often the only surviving record of long-gone performers.

*How's Tricks? Magic in the Golden Age* is a free exhibition at the State Library of NSW until 27 March 2022.

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