

# Scarborough fair

As I could only manage one of the two days at the Northern Magic Circle's shindig in Scarborough, I was luckily able to dragoon Donald into covering the other. I've done the Saturday and he the Sunday; so he takes over when I leave off.

Snow and bad weather were forecast when I set out at 7:30 a.m. in bright sunshine. Until the return journey, all I saw was a little patchy rain, although Scarborough itself was quite chilly. Parking anywhere near the HQ hotel was a nightmare too. But I arrived well before opening time at 10:00 a.m. and walked in to find all the usual suspects:

Alan Maskell, John Palfreyman, Dorothy Savage, Cynthia Neptune, Clive Moore but no Jean Ellison.

Jean, who was the president this year and for whom this should have been the highlight and climax of her term in office, had sadly been hospitalised following a fall. So she is likely to be out of action for a few weeks and Clive was having to deputise. Meanwhile we all wish Jean a speedy recovery.

Another president also suffered a bout of incapacity which meant an early return home. That was British Ring president Derek McFaul, who felt unwell during the first afternoon and wisely decided to take his leave. The next day he telephoned to say that he had arrived home safely despite the very long drive down to Wiltshire.



L to R: Derek McFaul, Clive Moore and John Pye. He is not a member of the flashy spinning, flourishing Sybil-cutting army who seem to prevail these days. Go to any convention and somewhere around will be a small flotilla of pubescent finger flingers who seem to spend every waking minute fidgeting with cards until you feel like screaming: "Stop it! You'll go blind!" On the contrary, Peter is very much on the art-conceals-art wing of the sleight-of-hand domain. For him, skill is something to use quietly as a means



to an end, not to flaunt for its own sake. He is also emphatic about crediting sources and not claiming anything by either by deceit or default. He told one story about a youngster who went into Tarn Shepherd's in Glasgow and showed Roy Walton Card Warp. When Roy mentioned that he had invented the trick, the young man refused to believe him because he had got it off an American DVD, where no credit had been given.

After Peter, it was the Close-up Competition, although during the break in between, I was able to spend a few minutes with Jack Henderson, playing around with a trick he had bought for £2.50 from a novelty shop around the corner. (The next day, I was to see the same thing on sale at Peterborough for three times the price.)



Peter McLanachan



Stephen Clarkson

There were only six competitors. Eight were billed but two had pulled out (or didn't turn up). So there were only two tables, at opposite sides of the room; one was hosted by the event organiser Stevie B, mine by Stephen Clarkson. The first on my table was Alan Duncan with a coin on rope followed by some strong card magic which included a novel slant on the any-card-at-any-number theme and something which resulted in an unlabelled tin being found to contain whatever vegetable was written on the back of a chosen card. Alan came third. Alex Moffat followed with the sequence that I have seen him do several times now. But it's well worth watching again! His repeat gag, where the pack keeps

suddenly disappearing and being found back in the box from whence it was originally removed, is a piece of expert choreography and attention control. His apparently wrenching the arm off a borrowed pair of spectacles is another very strong bit. He deservedly won the competition.

Allan Clarke followed with an act involving cards and ropes (not both at the same time). Everything was smooth and well performed but I felt that it lacked that element of novelty which seems to be so essential in competitions these days. The era has gone, when you could gain second or third place by simply presenting standard material nicely.

Fourth was Steve Gore, who must have been in serious contention for first place, but in the event came second. This was an act with a lot of nice touches, especially a mini Chop Cup routine which resulted in four



Alex Moffat

golf balls and a glassful of wine being produced. He also neatly performed Guy Hollingworth's Reformation — a reputation-maker for Guy ... but he was the first to do it!

Malcolm Bromwich was number five, but didn't really have the right sort of material for a competition. The sponge balls is very strong with the lay public but it doesn't do much for magically sophisticated audiences, unless you have some novel wow factor. Most of what Malcolm did was good solid time-tested stuff... but just too well known.

The final competitor Steve Grundy had some interesting ideas, delivered in a pleasant low key manner. A lot of what he did had a mental flavour although there was some straight magic too.

At 2:30 p.m. events moved to the smallish but well-equipped YMCA Theatre, about half a mile up the road. The first of these was the Junior Show, which is always one of the NMC's big features. This year's effort was scripted by John Russell and arranged by Cynthia Neptune. Because of the far-flung places from which the members come, the Northern's junior section is split into two groups. So the first time the entire cast get together for a full run-through is literally a few hours before curtain up. The anchor-man this year was James Orr from York (Photo no. 1 on page 619), who was on stage more-or-less through-out. He played the role of a young would-be magician trawling the Internet to learn about magic. (The concept of looking at books was never even hinted at.) The rest of the cast played the various people from all over the world whom he encountered, each showing him a trick. One running gag was that all of them, from whatever country they supposedly came, introduced themselves by saying that they had been born in England so didn't have any sort of foreign accent! Apart, that is, from Jack Gleadow who was a sort of comic-book Italian.



Steve Grundy

Unfortunately, there is so much to cram into this issue that space does not allow for a full account of the show other than to say that it was a creditable effort by all concerned. Afterwards, it was back to the St Nicholas Hotel for Geoffrey Newton's lecture. This was very much a something-for-everyone tutorial with nothing that required any great level of technical skill to perform or craftsmanship to make. There were a number of extremely good ideas, including one that I certainly intend to use and I'm sure everyone else felt likewise. However, I'm sure the bit that most *Abra* readers will relish is when Donald was dressed up as the Mayor to assist with a mental card mystery.

Brian Sefton (left) assisting  
Geoffrey Newton



Allan Clarke



Jim Cuthbert followed with a talk entitled *How to begin a Magic Memorabilia Collection*. Jim had brought some of his own collections with him. These encompassed such things as greetings cards, playing cards, old magazines and manuscripts, letters etc. Among the cards, I was interested to see that several novelty packs which had obviously been designed exclusively for use in the UK, were in poker size. But then I have noticed that a lot of the cheap packs on sale in stationery shops nowadays, are this size too. So let nobody tell you that it's wrong to use poker-sized cards in this country because people will think there is something strange about them. It just ain't true!

The evening brought the stage competitions, both introduced by Terry Crawford. First were the juniors with only four entries. James Orr opened, exuding tremendous self confidence with Unequal Ropes and Cups & Balls. Jack Gleadow followed with his usual cheeky style. Apart from impersonating me, he inveigled Annette Claire on stage for a lost & found borrowed ring, which involved her having to wear some large joke lips. Jack won the competition, but was run a very close second by Patricia Duncan who came next. Looking none the worse for her 2.00 a.m. start from Glasgow that morning, she worked silently and finished with one of the best floating ball presentations I've yet seen. Chris Michie was last. Chris is one of those youngsters mentioned earlier, whom you see around at conventions always fiddling with a pack of cards. He is very skilful for his age (or almost any age) but does not really exploit his technical prowess to its full potential. He should think about concentrating on putting together a classy manipulative act. He could do it; and now's the time to start.



Alan Duncan (right) with the  
assistant who tried to take over  
the act.

There were only four entries in the adult section which followed immediately. Steve Gore opened and had a nice routine with a puppet dog, which surprised everyone by blowing up a balloon. Alan Duncan, who came next was the runner up, with some clever stuff in including a very baffling prediction involving a clock. However, he was almost upstaged by his volunteer assistant, who seemed determined to steal the show. But to upstage Alan would take some doing.

Stuart Brown was the winner, with the same act (or almost) as at Nottingham, including his signature Dancing Handkerchiefs along with some slick work involving card productions, canes etc. To close, came Malcolm Bromwich with an elaborate double Rope & Ring sequence and a presentation of UF Grant's Chink Cans (a prop which I haven't seen for almost fifty years, when I had a set myself). Malcolm has a rather nice table, from which the apparatus rises in an almost magical way.

But as I said earlier, about his close-up, you need to have something novel or skilful which excites the judges if you are to come anywhere. They were Danny Hunt, John Palfreyman and Jill Jobling, while Lisa Shackleton with assistance from Brian Lead kept count of the time.

Then it was back home through the snow, leaving Donald to take over.

## Once More Into the Fray

### DONALD BEVAN REPORTING

When Walt announced on Saturday morning that he was leaving that night to attend another convention the following day and needed a reporter for Sunday's NMC events, his challenging gaze shot in my direction. So it's a case of 'Once More Into the Fray'!

First we need to catch up on Saturday, with the late night presentation of competition awards and the late, late, late item engineered by Stevie B, who really was a busy B throughout the weekend. The awards list is quite formidable so let's crack on with that. In the president's absence Jean Ellison's escort Clive Moore handed over the awards and Secretary Brian Lead announced the winners. Heading the list were special awards — twenty-five-year certificate to Brian Lead; thirty-three-year Richmond Memorial Badges in absentia to Jeff Evans and Stewart Kinnaird. Then to warm acclaim, Honorary Life Vice Presidency to Cliff Lount, a stalwart worker for NMC. and a Past President. I'll slip in a reminder to everyone that Cliffs Bradford Magic Studio is the second oldest magic business in the country. We are not sure about towns, but the country . . . !

The Eric Bland Trophy for best article in *Northern Lights* (The Northern Magic Circle's bi-monthly magazine), judged by Walt Lees, went to John Palfreyman.

Close-up Competition: N.M.C. Jim Lumley Challenge Cup plus £100, 1<sup>st</sup> place, won by Alex Moffat, who also achieved the N.M.C. Vice President's Trophy for Leicester Magic Circle. In 2<sup>nd</sup> place for the John Pye Trophy and £50, Steve Gore. The N.M.C. Close-up Trophy, 3<sup>rd</sup> place, Alan Duncan.

**Stage Competitions. Junior:** Philip Theodore Trophy plus £25, 1<sup>st</sup> place, Jack Gleadow. Jack also won the Tommy Aldus Comedy Trophy. NMC. Silver Jubilee Trophy plus £10 for 2<sup>nd</sup> place went to Patricia Duncan. No third prize awarded.

Junior Merit Award Certificates (the trophies were presented after the Junior Show) went to Steven Bridges and Michael Jordan.

Senior: Stuart Brown won the Charles Sowden Shield plus £100, 1<sup>st</sup> place, also the George Eyers Vice President's Trophy for Derby Magic Circle. Runner-up for the Frank Baumforth Cup plus £50 was Alan Duncan. Finally, Council gifts were made to Cynthia Neptune for her twenty-one years service as NMC. Secretary — and many other capacities — and to Bill Peckitt, whom ill health prevented from being there.



Steven Bridges

So was that the end of the day? No chance! Not in Stevie B's book, who had devised a 'boys & girls' team competition of magical charades, but instead of acting out subjects they had to be drawn using clues only. Two teams of four competed, helped along by the audience. The boy's team won — I think!

Sunday morning's Northern Magic Circle AGM. approved Scotland's Jim Cuthbert as president for 2008/09 and Steve Gore from Bradford president-elect. Next year's Northern Magic Circle Spring Parade will be in Southport, April 4<sup>th</sup> — 5<sup>th</sup> 2009. Meanwhile the ladies — and other non-believers — enjoyed 'Fishy Tales' from Fred Normandale, Operations Manager of Scarborough Lifeboat.

The day consisted of two workshops, one lecture, a peep into fairground illusions and Gala Show. First on parade was Michael Jordan of High Jinks with a Juggling Skills workshop. I slipped into the YMCA Gymnasium a little late, expecting to find half a dozen younger people tossing balls into the air and to the floor. Instead I was amazed to find more than thirty people aged from ten to more than eighty attempting balls, clubs, even unicycling. One lady, to my knowledge well past the three score-and-ten mark was valiantly attempting to juggle rice balls. Yes, you read that right — rice balls. Made from compressed rice and balloons they handle well and when they hit the deck whilst practising do not shoot away from you at a rate of knots, but simply stay there with a dull thud. It all looked to be great fun!

The lecture by 'Tricky' Ricky (McLeod) was fun too. He has a great personality to entertain children and lays emphasis on outrageous puns, visual gags and well constructed magic routines. These included Jack Silver's Shoeshine effect with laces appearing in illustrated shoes and a very effective routine involving sweets, with multiple outs. There was fun with a 'band' of children, Cards Across, a card revelation using a plastic shark and several more. All strong commercial stuff, tried and well tested. The second workshop featured Alan Maskell with 'Variations on a Theme'. This was really a lecture, but Alan had



Alan Maskell

provided everyone with a 'working package', consisting of printed details of several of his effects, plus the necessary props to perform them. So everyone was able to follow his instructions 'hands on'. We learned variations on Just Chance, going way beyond the simple note in envelope theme. Alan taught a book test, with everything unprepared and, if you up the fee, the book given to the spectator at the end! This was a well presented enlightening session.

Way back in the early part of the last century through to the 1960s, fun fairs had the usual abundance of rides and stalls as seen today. In addition however they also had novelty sideshows such as so-called freaks like bearded and tattooed ladies, midgets, animals with additional legs or heads. Also various other mishaps of nature preserved in glass jars. All have thankfully passed into history. What have also been lost however are sideshows, many of which were illusions. One of our great exponents of side-show illusions and ultimate showman was the late Jon Gresham (1930-1995). In recent years Jon Marshall, through Pat Gresham and a dedicated team, has recreated, redesigned and presented several of Jon Gresham's fairground or 'seaside special' illusions. Among them 'Geo: the Girl in the Goldfish Bowl', 'Yvette: the Headless Lady', and the latest, 'The Living Half Lady'. First presented by Jon Gresham in the 1960 summer season at Rhyl, it later appeared at Scarborough. In a screened presentation we saw several of these illusions as Jon Marshall painted a vivid picture of his idol, the other Jon, in narrative and pictorial form. A fascinating and enlightening 'History of Mystery' event, introduced by Brian Lead.

Looking at my notes I see I have not mentioned the dealers. With only a few that's not difficult. Blackpool and British Ring conventions are a different story! In Scarborough these were Kaymar Magic, Black Cat Magic (Danny Hunt and Annette with escapology items, winning them the Cliff Lount Trophy for best display), High Jinx Juggling Supplies, Magic Books by Post, plus Burning Card Magic and Magicians' Cave Productions, both new to me — but then, so are ninety percent of magic dealers today! Stevie B as organizer saw to their needs.



Amethyst with the Cliff Lount Trophy.  
(That's a silver cup, not a waxwork replica of Cliff himself)

He showed skill with diablo and hat juggling and would have been a sensation had the act been half the length.

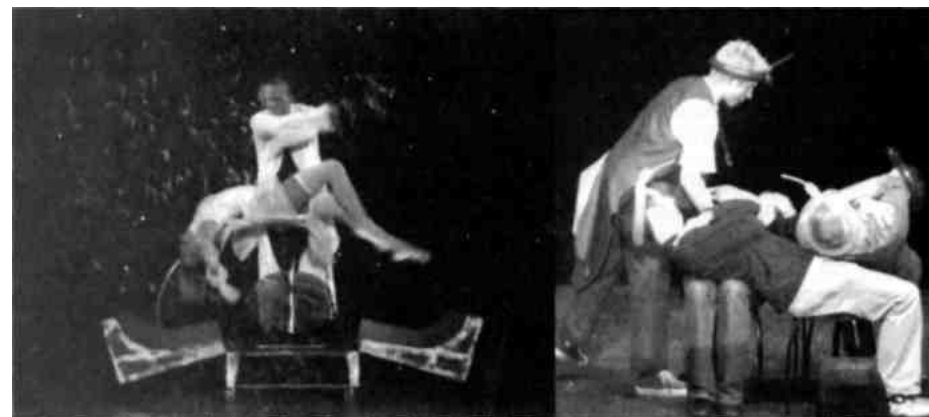
You do not win major awards in magic easily, so High Jinx (that's teenagers Michael & Siobhan Jordan) proved their worth in winning the British Ring Shield at Southport last year. Featured were an excellent cardboard box prod, of Siobhan, simultaneous strait-jacket escapes, which frankly slowed the act and had little impact, there was a Mini Zig-zag illusion and stage-filling Snowstorm to close. Everything about these two spells talent!



*High Jinx*

The dancers opened the second half with another scintillating routine; fast and skilful. Next, Congo erupted on stage again; and after more slapstick and 'swallowing a balloon', cajoled four men from the audience on stage. These were seated on stools and arranged in such a way that when all four stools were removed, the | guys remained in situ. That was impressive and drew considerable applause. Closing the show, illusions and front-cloth magic from Andrew Green & Company. Another lengthy act but with a lot of magic as girls appeared, were penetrated by fluorescent tubes, floated on air above a whirling fan; all interspersed with small magic and manipulation involving canes, flowers — Dagger thru' Arm with dripping blood, which I always find revolting — the Bra Trick, funny to some but not the victim. The act closed with a standard Sub Trunk routine.

Cynthia Neptune put the show together, Godfrey Shackleton steered the stage crew as manager and Sheriton Swan controlled sound and lighting.



*Andrew Green*

*Max Marshall*

#### GALA SHOW



*Clive Moore (left) passes the presidential regalia to Jim*

Prior to this show the new Northern Magic Circle President Jim Cuthbert had been installed, receiving the regalia from stand-in President Clive Moore. Ricky McLeod compered, blotting his copybook early on by introducing the wrong act — not once, but three times! The placid audience shared the embarrassment and warmed to him for the rest of the show, as they should, for Ricky was bright, funny and entertaining. Egg bag, a romp with rabbit and hat silks, and Gypsy Thread as fillers. This was a good yet strange show. Strange from the fact that the first two acts were non-magical and two others were lengthy — one almost doubling the allotted (and booked!) time. Dancers opened the show, a five-strong team of girls from the Rowlies Academy of Dance with a macabre and tightly choreographed routine. They were excellent. For what I found a strange reason, although I feel sure there was a good one, we next had more dance along with smart aero movement from The Stepping Out Girls, two youngsters with verve, vitality and theatrical skill.

Su Jayne was the first magic act (of only three), whom I have not seen for several years. Her elegant Victorian magic with dress to match was delightfully routine and presented, and although I know our editor is not keen on trick listing, Su's clever sequence with Mutilated Sunshade and nifty use of her dress for one effect (a silk 'spot' from her back is removed, vanished and reappears visibly) should not go unrecorded.

Next an explosion — of talent, hilarity, skill and sheer stage presence. This was Max Marshall from Scotland, who as Congo, a clowning character attacked the audience — almost literally as he jumped from the stage, climbed over seats, juggled balls and other objects, including apples which were eaten on the way, and devoured a banana, threatening to toss the masticated mash into the audience!