PAUL DE PHILIPSTHAL
&
THE PHANTASMAGORIA IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

MERVYN HEARD

Part Two:
Shoo!

The impact and pattern of development of Phantasmagoria exhibition in Britain has many striking parallels with the arrival of the cinema, a century later.

Within weeks of Paul de Philipsthal's first performances at the Lyceum, other London theatres, independent stage magicians and the proprietors of penny-gaffs were clamouring to exploit public interest in the new marvel. In London, and soon after in the provinces, the Phantasmagoria was featured chiefly as a twenty-minute added attraction as a 'fore-piece' to the main programme. Copies of Philipsthal's apparatus and images were quickly produced to satisfy the market. There were even claims of prior invention. Public reaction was mixed. Some found the spectacle vulgar. Just as with the cinema at the end of the century, there were apocryphal reports of members of the audience attempting to flee from the salon in terror at the image apparently hurtling towards them.

In Part One of our story (Vol. 8, No. 1, October 1996) we examined Philipsthal's shadowy background and his initial, unrivalled success at the Lyceum. In Part Two we take a closer look at the inevitable competition and the onset of 'phantasmagoria fever'.

A HAUNTING WE WILL GO – PHANTASMAGORIAMANIA

It was some ten weeks after Philipsthal's London debut that the first advertisement appeared for a rival phantasmagoria exhibition.[1] Placed by the lessees of the Royalty Theatre in Wellclose Square, it stated this was to be staged each evening, from 21 December, as a prelude to the evening show – a hippodrome performance. The showman was identified as 'M. St Clair ... just arrived from the continent, who, previous to his intended visit to Dublin, will have the honour to present the numerous visitors of the Royalty Theatre with a new imaginary exhibition of optical illusions, called Phantasmagoria, or Supernatural Appearances – through which it is intended to do away with the superstitious idea of ghosts and spectres by unmasking the artifices practised by certain pretended magicians on the mind of the weak and credulous.' And warning that '... as it is absolutely necessary that the theatre should be entirely darkened during these aerial experiments the Spectrology will begin at half past six o'clock, precisely'.

On 27 December, an addition to the advertisement appeared, stating somewhat provocatively, that 'M. St Clair's wonderful spectres prove that this uncommon discovery is not confined to any one individual.'

It is important to note that the main lessee of the Royalty at this time was not just any upstart copyist but one of the greatest impresarios of the Georgian era. His name was Philip Astley, 'the father of circus'/'inventor of hippodrome'. He had opened his first unroofed circus building in 1770, on the site of a timber-yard at the foot of Westminster Bridge. By the 1780s this had acquired a roof and become Astley's Royal Grove. By now a popular figure far and wide, he began to transport his famous company to towns and cities as distant as Dublin and Paris. Where no suitable circus-shaped auditorium existed he would establish his own, often leaving a resident company behind him. Paris was no exception. Here he built a circus, often returning to perform equestrian feats himself, to the delight of the French royal family. However, in 1793, on the outbreak of war between England and France, and in view of the revolutionary changes which were taking place in the city itself, he was forced to leave. From this time until the signing of the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, the circus was leased by the Franconi family, and even served, for a time, as the headquarters for the new revolutionary government. In 1801 Philip and his son John were concentrating their attentions on their newly titled 'Royal Amphitheatre' and various other offshoot interests in London. A special Christmas season at the Royalty being one of them.

Although chiefly remembered as a proponent of equestrianism, Philip Astley had always been interested in all manner of spectacular entertainments, including the optical. He had regularly promoted performances of the Ombres Chinoises in London, and staged playlets conducted in silhouette.[2] It is possible that he may even have witnessed Philidor's original phantasmagoria performances in Paris, back in 1793, or, at least, heard about the subsequent shows of Robertson through his Parisian contacts. St Clair himself may have been an earlier acquaintance from Astley's Paris days.

Whatever his pedigree, we know that St Clair was in attendance until the end of January, drawing to the phantasmagoria, for the first time, the attentions of the rather grand theatrical press, in the form of *The Monthly Mirror of the Arts* whose critic had been forced to allow that the Royalty performance had been 'a delicious treat for the honest tars'.

St Clair's performances, a few miles west of the Strand, probably had little impact on Philipsthal's exhibition. Indeed, at the start of the new year an announcement appeared stating that morning shows at the Lyceum 'have had to be suspended ... to accommodate a large number of requests for shows in private houses. However morning shows could be arranged for private parties at the Lyceum, if preferred'.[3]

Although not directly affected by St Clair's exhibition, Philipsthal was no doubt mindful of further likely territorial incursions. On 26 January he registered a patent for his apparatus – British Patent No. 2,575. 'Apparatus for Reflecting Objects'.[4]

The patent itself seems hastily composed, describing in rather vague terms four different forms of optical effect. The first two apply to the actions of the variable phantascope apparatus; the third to the projection of opaque figures and the fourth to an effect known as the 'Dance of Witches'. Strangely there is no account of the use of opaque projection in any of his shows, and the 'Dance of Witches' is not introduced into his programme until much later, as we shall see. In a final summing-up Philipsthal seems to be attempting to cover all other eventualities in the field of projection with the declaration that 'by means of this briefly described apparatus and method of working a thousand different divertisements and surprises may be produced, by preparing the necessary apparatus proportionable to the space and place, and possessing judgement to moderate the rays of light, which would be too extensive to be here described'.[5]

As a broadside to further rivals, notice of the existence of the patent appeared in various subsequent newspaper advertisements.[6]

Unfortunately this announcement seems to have had quite the opposite effect to that intended.

Two days later a certain 'Mr Jones' published an advertisement for the regular demonstration of various optical aids to artists which he presented at his premises in Wells Street. In it he included a new mechanism, which he entitled the 'optical tube'. Claiming to be its sole inventor he informed potential customers that with this instrument they might 'perform optical illusions in any dark chamber, for their amusement, in a manner exhibited at the Lyceum, Mr Jones having sold these instruments 20 years ago'. Furthermore, 'ladies and gentlemen wishing to see the effect of said instrument may do so on payment of 2/6d each, refundable on purchase.'[7]

In much the same way that the proprietors of the Alhambra Music Hall had engaged Robert William Paul's Animatographe to compete with Trewey's presentation of the Lumière Cinematographe at the Empire in 1896, the proprietor of a nearby conjuring salon, at No 28 Haymarket, immediately sought to acquire the services of Mr Jones.

On 21 February 1802 the magician Moritz announced the opening of his 'new and elegant theatre', proclaiming, under the banner heading 'Geister Scheinniiig', that as part of the bill,

Mr Jones, 'artist and inventor of the optical tube', would display the power of optics in a manner 'the same as has met with such wonderful marks of approbation at Vienna, Paris and London, under the title of the PHANTASMAGORIA'. This was as a complement to Mr Moritz's own feats and displays of the power of 'strength, art and mechanism' and an 'entire new, superb and brilliant display of Emblematic and Allegorical Fireworks'.[8] In direct competition to Philipsthal, Moritz was also offering morning shows and 'detached performances'.

On 28 January, the same day that Mr Jones had placed his challenging advertisement for the 'optical tube', the first phantasmagoria performance had taken place beyond London. The venue was the fashionable Theatre Royal in Bath, and the show took the form of a half-hour display, staged as a prelude to a three-act play *The Birthday*, and a short farce *The Padlock*. The advertisement in the local paper is interesting: 'the manager has engaged, for a few nights and at very considerable expense, the PROPRIETOR of that very popular exhibition the PHANTASMAGORIA, or wonderful display of optical illusions, which now engrosses the attention of the fashionable World of London …'[9] Could this really be Philipsthal in Bath? It seems unlikely, given his successes in London. However, it has already been suggested[10] that he may have had local family ties with the area. Could this possibly have been a replica show conducted for his local theatre, by someone else acting under Philipsthal's tutelage? Conversely, was this merely an impostor? There is certainly no mention of any showman by name.

On 1 February the same exhibition transferred to its sister venue, The Theatre Royal, Bristol.[11]

Seven days later The Theatre, Gloucester, was also promoting a twenty-minute 'pre-show' phantasmagoria performance, by an unnamed perpetrator.[12] On 22 February this theatre even went so far as to drop the traditional pantomime to accommodate an even longer presentation, with many new spectres. According to the advertisements the proprietor was bound next for Birmingham and Wolverhampton.[13] Were all these performances conducted by the mysterious exhibitor of Bath? If so, then it could hardly have been Philipsthal.

Venturing even further afield, on 5 February 1802 we come across the first mention of a phantasmagoria in Ireland. The venue was Astley's Amphitheatre Royal in Dublin, where it was featured as part of Messrs Davis and Saunders' circus bill.[14] This may have been St Clair carrying out his intended trip to Dublin. However, no showman is named.

Back in London, somewhat dubious penny-gaff versions of the phantasmagoria had already begun to appear by the beginning of February. On 2 February, *The Lady's Magazine* records that a certain William Grosset, proprietor of a theatre in Dorset Mews, was hauled up before the magistrates to answer a complaint regarding his phantasmagoria performance. It would appear that not only was the show itself of a suspect nature, but, more to the point, the theatre was full of children during the performance. These reports, coupled with the fact that the performance started at 9pm and sometimes did not finish until 1am represented, in the magistrates' opinion, a serious evil. Grosset was committed to the Bridewell and his company required to find sureties for their future good behaviour.[15]

Faced now with an impending deluge of competition, Philipsthal began lashing out in all directions. On 7 February his advertisements were warning off potential plagiarists with details of his patent, whilst – with an eye to the main chance – offering lanterns for sale, with full instructions for use.

Such was the success and rowdy nature of the patronage that by mid-February he was beginning to incur the disdainful murmuring of his neighbour.

From 26 December the larger Upper Theatre at the Lyceum had been occupied by the former manager of Sadlers Wells Theatre, Mark Lonsdale, and his more tasteful 'Egyptiana' exhibition.[16] This seems to have been a panoramic or dioramic representation – a tour of ancient Egypt, coupled with a programme of illustrated excerpts from the works of Shakespeare and the classical poets.

In February, clearly unable to compete with the somewhat more sensational exhibition downstairs, Lonsdale decided to try to appeal to the sensibilities of the more discerning theatregoer. In an advertisement on 12 February, he was at pains to point out that although his own show embraced elements of the popular 'Spectrology' – i.e. 'the ghost of Bevis of Lancaster' – such elements appeared 'as so natural an illusion that the effect it leaves on the spectator is perfectly diverted of the raree-show representation, and of course draws forth the approbations of classical sense, as well as the plaudits of curiosity'.

When this subtle approach failed to work, Lonsdale went all out to promote his own 'Spectographia', presumably in a last-ditch attempt to attract audiences. This 'new finale' included 'illustrations from Milton, the gothic tale of Sir Bevis, the ghost of Julius Caesar appearing to Brutus, the murdered Princes appearing to Richard IIIrd, the apparition of Sir George Villiers, the spirit before MacBeth, a mock spectre in a country churchyard' – and all accompanied by suitable recitative. However, failing to grasp a primary element in the public's attraction to the phantasmagoria, he also added that 'since the phantomimic appearances are materially connected with scenery, and general effect, the total extinction of light in the theatre is unnecessary'.[17]

Invited to review the new production, the refined *Monthly Mirror of the Arts* rallied to his cause, declaring that the 'popular subject of spectography, which has been introduced, is conducted on a scale and in a manner superior in effect to the terrific and unnecessary darkness in which the spectator is at other exhibitions of this kind involved'. Furthermore, 'The action of the ghosts was animating and pleasing, and the corresponding transitions on the canvas highly curious. The terrors of a dreary heath formed a grand and magnificent scene and little will o'wisp caused a considerable exertion of the risible faculties.'

Whether Philipsthal had been forced to have words with Mr Lonsdale apropos such reports is not known. However, in April Lonsdale seems to have back-tracked a little, being at pains to point out that his exhibition was not intended to be some 'servile imitation of the phantasmagoria, which is rightly, universally admired and deservedly applauded at the Lyceum'.[18]

Across town, at No 28 Haymarket, Mr Moritz and Mr Jones were no longer in partnership. Indeed their relationship seems to have lasted only a few weeks. Perhaps Mr Jones proved no showman or there had been a tiff. By 14 March Moritz was offering the presentation of Mons. Montpelier 'who has just arrived from Paris', with his 'Skiagraphenia, which has been received with such astonishing applause for the last four years, under the title of phantasmagoria'. Montpelier also exhibited an 'animated bust'.

During March the citizens of Edinburgh received their first glimpse of the phantasmagoria. First presented at the Panorama Rooms on the 11th, it was staged as a side-show accompaniment to the panorama of 'The Battle of Copenhagen'. Performances were given hourly, to 'parties of 10 or more only'.[19] These continued throughout April, to be eclipsed slightly, at the beginning of the month, by the arrival of the aforementioned M. Montpelier at Astley's Royal Circus.[20]

At the same time, in Dublin, Astley's Amphitheatre Royal was promoting a 'new phantasmagoria, just arrived from England, far superior to any that has ever yet been presented to the public'. In an attempt to court local favour, the show even included a representative ghost of Ireland's own St Patrick.[21]

On 27 March the Dublin season finished, and by 19 April, M. St Clair was back in London – this time at Astley's famous Royal Amphitheatre, where he presented a thirty-minute show prior to the evening performance.

By mid-May even Lonsdale's fine old theatrical institution, Sadlers Wells Theatre, was offering a phantasmagoria presentation before the main drama. The exhibitor was yet another unnamed 'eminent artist from the continent'.[22]

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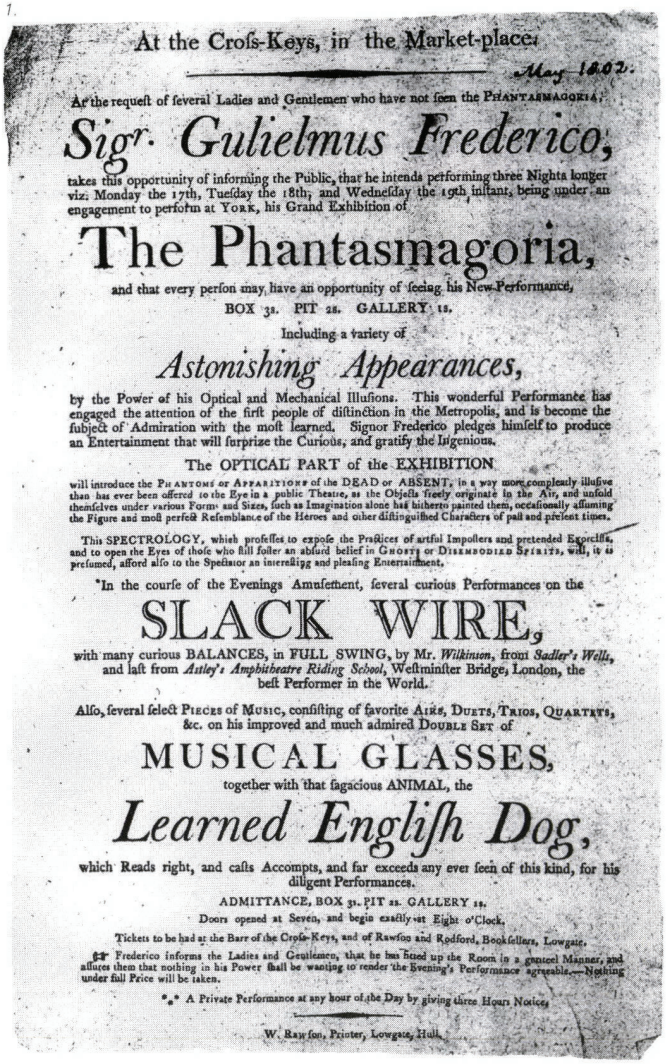


At the Crofs-Keys, in the Market-place.

May 1802.

At the requeſt of ſeveral Ladies and Gentlemen who have not ſeen the PHANTASMAGORIA;

Sig^r. Gulielmus Frederico,

takes this opportunity of informing the Public, that he intends performing three Nights longer viz: Monday the 17th, Tueſday the 18th, and Wedneſday the 19th inſtant, being under an engagement to perform at YORK, his Grand Exhibition of

The Phantasmagoria,

and that every perſon may have an opportunity of ſeeing his New Performance,

BOX 3s. PIT 2s. GALLERY 1s.

Including a variety of

Aſtoniſhing Appearances,

by the Power of his Optical and Mechanical Illuſions. This wonderful Performance has engaged the attention of the firſt people of diſtinction in the Metropolis, and is become the ſubject of Admiration with the moſt learned. Signor Frederico pledges himſelf to produce an Entertainment that will ſurprize the Curious, and gratify the Ingenious.

The OPTICAL PART of the EXHIBITION

will introduce the PHANTOMS or APPARITIONS of the DEAD or ABSENT, in a way more compleatly illuſive than has ever been offered to the Eye in a public Theatre, as the Objects freely originate in the Air, and unfold themſelves under various Forms and Sizes, ſuch as Imagination alone has hitherto painted them, occaſionally aſſuming the Figure and moſt perfect Reſemblance of the Heroes and other diſtinguiſhed Characters of paſt and preſent times.

This SPECTROLOGY, which profeſſes to expoſe the Praſtices of artful Impoſters and pretended Exorciſts, and to open the Eyes of thoſe who ſtill foſter an abſurd belief in GHOSTS or DISEMBODIED SPIRITS, will, it is preſumed, afford alſo to the Spectator an intereſting and pleaſing Entertainment.

In the courſe of the Evenings Amuſement, ſeveral curious Performances on the

SLACK WIRE,

with many curious BALANCES, in FULL SWING, by Mr. *Wilkinſon*, from *Sadler's Wells*, and laſt from *Aſtley's Amphitheatre Riding School*, Weſtminſter Bridge, London, the beſt Performer in the World.

Alſo, ſeveral ſelect PIECES of MUSIC, conſiſting of favorite AIRS, DUETS, TRIOS, QUARTETS, &c. on his improved and much admired DOUBLE SET of

MUSICAL GLASSES,

together with that ſagacious ANIMAL, the

Learned Engliſh Dog,

which Reads right, and caſts Accompts, and far exceeds any ever ſeen of this kind, for his diligent Performances.

ADMITTANCE, BOX 3s. PIT 2s. GALLERY 1s.

Doors opened at Seven, and begin exactly at Eight o'Clock.

Tickets to be had at the Barr of the Croſs-Keys, and of Rawſon and Rodford, Booksellers, Lowgate.

☞ Frederico informs the Ladies and Gentlemen, that he has fixed up the Room in a genteel Manner, and aſſures them that nothing in his Power ſhall be wanting to render the Evening's Performance agreeable.—Nothing under full Price will be taken.

*** A Private Performance at any hour of the Day by giving three Hours Notice.

W. Rawſon, Printer, Lowgate, Hull.

John Jones collection

At the end of March the Treaty of Amiens had been signed, officially bringing to an end the hostilities between England and France – for a while at any rate. The illustrator Gillray was quick to satirise both the Treaty and the phantasmagoria in a brilliant cartoon (*2.*) depicting the illusion of Peace arising from the smoke of a French cauldron.

This peace brought a sudden influx of foreign showmen. One such was the obscure Sigr Gulielmus Frederico (*1.*), who presented his phantasmagoria show, plus slack-wire act, musical glasses and learned English dog, at the Cross-Keys in Hull on 17 May. Although stating his intention to move on to York, there is no trace of him appearing there, and he is probably just one of many magicians offering phantasmagoria displays at this time.

Another even more suspicious sounding foreigner was one Snr. Yeldarb, who brought his Montpelier-inspired 'Skiagraphema' to the Shakespeare Tavern, Birmingham on 10 May, appearing under the patronage of Mr Webster, a conjurer. Was this by chance a Mr Bradley, reversing his name in hopes of cashing in on, or even satirising, the foreign, phantasmagoria invasion.

In June there was an indication that some such unscrupulous showmen may have been trading directly on Philipsthal's name, forcing him to publicise the fact that 'other inferior London shows under the title phantasmagoria have no connection with his', and that 'his "optical illusions" etc., are exhibited at no other place of entertainment in London'.[23]

A report in a newspaper dated 1 July suggests that maybe, during the previous month, the pressure and workload on Philipsthal had begun to take its toll. An announcement appears in the form of an apology for his recent 'severe indisposition', from which though, he 'is now considerably recovered, and … in all probability he will he able to entertain them with the whole performance in the following week'.[24] In a renewed attempt to transcend the competition he also advertised an addition to his repertoire, a 'Grand new, comic, optical illusion – the Sorcerer's Anniversary'.[25]

Philipsthal's exhibition continued until 30 July when, possibly exhausted by the number of performances and his bout of illness, and somewhat bruised by the competition, he announced that his show was to close 'for a short time, to make way for an entire new series of amusements'.

In August, taking advantage of the Treaty and, perhaps, for the first time feeling it was safe to do so, he returned to Paris, to look up an old friend and acquire some extra ammunition.

2. Satire on the Treaty of Amiens. Etching by James Gillray, 1803.

PHILIPSTHAL UNMASKED BY A WOMAN!

Whilst Philipsthal was out of the country his place at the Lyceum was taken up by one M. Charles, a French ventriloquist, with his 'Auricular Communications of an Invisible Girl'. It is possible that Philipsthal had had some prior acquaintance with this showman before his arrival in London, for he was none other than the brother of Professor Charles of Paris, mentor to Etienne Gaspard Robertson, to whom he had passed on information relevant to Philidor's seminal phantasmagoria performances in 1793.

At some point M Moritz of No 28 Haymarket must have made a decision that there was only one person in the country who could do justice to the art of phantasmagoria, and that was none other than M. Moritz himself. It was a wise assessment. By the summer he had earned himself so fine a reputation, that he was invited to exhibit before their Royal Majesties at the Queen's Lodge, Windsor. Then, soon after – probably in September – to give another command performance at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, expressly for the Prince of Wales.

The Brighton show included the newly produced spectres of Louis XVI changed into a skeleton, an image of the Prince himself, Paswan Oglou the Turkish rebel and the spirits of Martha Guy and Old Smoaker – the two famous Brighton 'dippers', who unceremoniously introduced fashionable ladies to the rudiments of sea bathing.

Directly afterwards, flushed with success, Moritz embarked upon a 'royal progress', touring minor theatres throughout the South of England with the same show. He made one- or two-night appearances at venues which included the theatres at Southampton, Winchester, Gosport, Newbury & Spteenamland, and Windsor.[26] (At some point in 1802 the former actor manager of the theatre at Margate is also said to have toured the South – mainly Kent – with his own 'wonderful display of optical illusions', but the nature of the show and route is uncertain.)

It is perhaps important to recognise that, as time went by, the notion of a 'phantasmagoria show' was often interpreted in a very broad sense. The common element was probably the manner in which the images were executed – i.e. that they were produced with black backgrounds. Although the themes were still gothic and phantoms mandatory, no doubt showmen introduced elements of the normal lantern show to diffuse the mixture. As an example, one show, which took place on 28 December 1803 at a private theatre in Berwick Street, London, advertised itself as a 'phantasmagoria', but appears to have consisted of little more than likenesses of famous actors and actresses, albeit some in ghostly roles.

Indicating the impact of the 'phantasmagoria', the word was used for at least one cheap and sensational novelette featuring the lantern in a minor role (*3.*). The phantasmagoria show was also used as the basis for satires, including popular songs performed at Drury Lane and other fashionable theatres. There is also some suggestion that it had some influence on the art world, in particular on the work of Fuseli and Goya.

As the word 'phantasmagoria' passed into everyday parlance, it was in time, as we shall see, used to describe quite entirely unrelated entertainments.

While phantasmagoriamania was at its height in London, the man responsible for unleashing the phenomenon was in Paris. Here he paid a visit to Marie Tussaud, the inheritor of the famous wax museum of M Curtius – the man who had spoken up for Philipsthal back in 1793, when he had fallen foul of the now deceased Citizen Robespierre.[27]

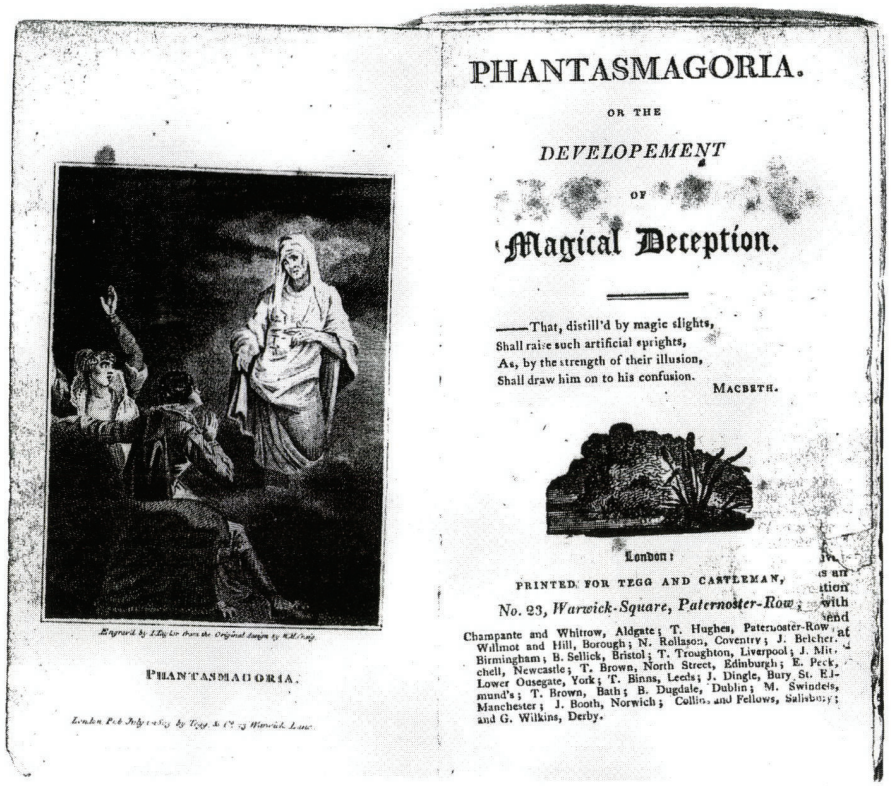
Since their last encounter Marie had married François Tussaud, and together the couple were struggling to keep the exhibition going at their salon in the boulevard du Temple, faced with a steadily declining interest in the figures of the old revolutionaries.

Philipsthal offered Marie a proposition – the chance to share in his great celebrity in London, where audiences were always hungry for the new and sensational and there was still a morbid curiosity in the history of the recent Revolution. In truth his motives were less than philanthropic. He knew that the current craze for 'his invention' couldn't last, and was working on the idea of adding fresh blood in the shape of other rational wonders, even at some financial risk. Marie's exhibition would not only add an extra frisson to the phantasmagoria, but it was also to a certain extent self-contained and therefore represented a certain degree of surety.

After some deliberation Marie agreed to enter into a partnership with the showman, partly to assist in the revival of the fortunes of the wax museum and also, more fundamentally, to win some respite from a by now loveless marriage.[28]

In October she set sail for England, armed with thirty wax figures and her four-year-old son Joseph, leaving behind her two-year-old baby. The adventure was a great risk for her. With no knowledge of the English language and no other known acquaintances anywhere in Britain, she was entirely dependent upon the good offices and favours of a man about whom, unfortunately, she knew very little – M. de Philipsthal.

Marie's letters home reveal a catalogue of problems, which began immediately on arrival in London. On 7 November, Philipsthal, who had gone on ahead, reopened his own exhibition at


PHANTASMAGORIA.

OR THE

DEVELOPEMENT

OF

Magical Deception.

—That, distill'd by magic slights,
Shall raise such artificial sprights,
As, by the strength of their illusion,
Shall draw him on to his confusion.

MACBETH.

London:

PRINTED FOR TEGG AND CASTLEMAN,

No. 23, *Warwick-Square, Paternoster-Row*;

Champante and Whitrow, Aldgate; T. Hughes, Paternoster-Row; Willmot and Hill, Borough; N. Rollason, Coventry; J. Belcher, Birmingham; B. Sellick, Bristol; T. Troughton, Liverpool; J. Mitchell, Newcastle; T. Brown, North Street, Edinburgh; E. Peck, Lower Ousegate, York; T. Binns, Leeds; J. Dingle, Bury St. Edmund's; T. Brown, Bath; B. Dugdale, Dublin; M. Swindels, Manchester; J. Booth, Norwich; Collins and Fellows, Salisbury; and G. Wilkins, Derby.

PHANTASMAGORIA.

3.

the Lyceum, but this time in the larger Upper Theatre, reserving space for Marie in the Lower Theatre. The wax museum was not the only new addition. 'The original Phantasmagoria' was now defined in advertisements not merely as an optical exhibition, but rather as an 'optical, mechanical, acoustical, hydraulic and aerostatic exhibition'. Taking over some of Marie's space in the Lower Theatre, Philipsthal also presented a small exhibition of 'Egyptiana', including an Egyptian mummy – possibly the remnants of Mr Lonsdale's unsuccessful entertainment.

When Marie arrived in November she discovered, much to her alarm, that Philipsthal had entirely failed to advertise her own exhibition. Philipsthal drew her attention to the small print of their contract. Although he was to take 50 per cent of all profits, all of Marie's expenses and repairs to figures would be payable from her own share of receipts. Hence he had not undertaken to pay for any advertising.

As a consequence of this, the first advertisements for the 'Curtius' waxworks did not appear until 26 December, and Marie had difficulties surviving her first Christmas in England.[29]

In the new year, however, Marie Tussaud began to establish her own contacts in English society, chiefly through Sir Francis Burdett, the politician, who had agreed to pose for her. The real breakthrough came in February 1803, with the trial and execution of Colonel Despard. Despard had made an unsuccessful attempt to seize the Tower of London, and Marie was given permission to make a waxen image of the severed head. Marie's correspondence says that this grim addition to the collection gave a much-needed boost, not only to her own exhibition, but also that of her partner.

Philipsthal slowly and reluctantly came to accept that the novelty of the phantasmagoria, in London at least, had largely passed. In April the Lyceum season ended, with the display of wax figures now attracting far more patronage than the phantasmagoria.

Philipsthal's solution was to look to the provinces where his show might still be considered a novelty, or, at least where there might be interest in finally meeting its 'true inventor'. This was a fundamental error of judgment.

The showman suddenly informed Marie that, unmindful of the fact that she was just beginning to make an impact in London, they would both be moving on to Edinburgh. Despite her hatred of the man, she was bound both by contract and her dependence upon his contacts. She had also recently received a letter from her husband François to say that the Paris end of the business was failing fast. Reluctantly she acceded to Philipsthal's wishes. The prospect of the new incumbent at the upper theatre may have given her some sense of relief in vacating the Lyceum, however. He was Mr Windsor, the German inventor of gas lighting, whose hot furnaces, and his intended illumination of the entire building with the new gas, might not have seemed propitious for Marie's wax figures.

During her last days in London, Marie had a fierce argument with Philipsthal, who was refusing to let her inspect the books of accounts. She even threatened to return to Paris. To appease her, he offered to pay for the sea voyage and even to provide her with £10 spending money. She was also offered help in the crating of her exhibits by a Mr Tenaveil, who seems to have acted as a kind of secretary to Philipsthal. Tenaveil also became her chaperon on the journey.

Having some 'unfinished business' in London, Philipsthal sent Marie on ahead. Marie says that this 'unfinished business' was with a mysterious character, who crops up again at intervals in correspondence, and to whom she refers simply as 'the Baron' or 'M. le Baron'. Was this the same mysterious 'Baron' who crops up in October of 1805, in relation to a phantasmagoria show given at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton? In *The Creevey Papers* it is suggested that this 'Baron' was a close confidante of the Prince of Wales. I suspect in fact that this was not Philipsthal's Baron. There were in fact numerous eccentric German barons moving in fashionable circles at this time, including the original, real-life Baron Munchausen, who often organised quaint entertainments for the Royals.

Leonard Cottrell, in his biography of Marie Tussaud,[30] suggests that Philipsthal's bit of business was a legal suit. Cottrell cites an article from an unidentified contemporary newspaper describing how a certain 'Mr D., a gentleman of fortune, of Baker Street, Portman Square, was summoned before a Commissioner of Requests by a foreigner to answer a debt of one guinea, which he alleged that Mr D. owed him.' Mr D. had apparently engaged the 'foreigner' to exhibit before a select party in his house 'his deception in the spectrological arts'. Apparently this demonstration of the phantasmagoric arts had so affected the ladies in the company that the exhibitor had been asked to desist, whereupon he had been presented with only part payment for the show. In due course the exhibitor had brought a court action for the residue – just half a guinea. The court found in the showman's favour.

Cottrell goes on to suggest that the 'Baron' may well have been the defendant in the case. But Philipsthal's relationship with the Baron was much closer than this. He was also clearly very influential, and I would suggest that it is more likely that the Baron was some form of 'diplomatic agent'.

Although Philipsthal was no longer presenting his show at the Lyceum, in the few months prior to joining Marie in Edinburgh, the showman kept the phantasmagoria running during the evenings to mop up any last vestiges of cash in the capital. These shows were presented by a Mr Kasta – who is described as being 'for many years assistant to M. Philipsthal'.[31] Admission was half price. During April a further attraction was added to this minor exhibition – 'John Bull, the conjuror'.

SCOTTISH PLAY

On 10 May Marie arrived in Edinburgh suffering from exhaustion. Many of her precious figures had also been smashed during the stormy sea voyage. To make matters worse she discovered that Philipsthal had not provided her with enough money to pay for the transport of the crates to their final destination, Lauries Exhibition Rooms.

Luckily, in Edinburgh she encountered a friend, M. Charles, the French ventriloquist, whom she had known in Paris, and had met again, briefly, in London. He offered her a loan of £30, which she accepted, and rather gallantly agreed to extend his exhibition of 'The Invisible Lady' in the city until such time as she had safely opened her own show.

The day after her arrival in Edinburgh she also wrote to her husband informing him that 'through the good offices of the Baron', she had also been provided with the services of 'an interpreter … a German, a very worthy man who speaks fluent English and French as well'.

With great determination she opened in one week, on 18 May. A letter home on 26 May gives further insight into Marie's relationship with Philipsthal, and some of the best clues yet as to the probable character of the man.

Philipsthal is worrying at my success in Edinburgh and wondering how to get more money out of me. He has the reputation of a "ranter" and cannot understand why everybody is on my side. I am liked here as much as in my own country and not treated as a foreigner. We are always gay, Nini [her son] and I – we have hardly time to take a meal! He is a very hard worker and keeps his little head

down. Sometimes we are too tired for supper but we have promised ourselves a trip to the country on Sunday to get some wild honey. It is so nice to get a trip to the country and the people are so kind. Oh Philipsthal is jealous to hear it! He wants us to mix with no-one. In fact, I know him as my enemy wishing me harm. But I hope in six months to have done with him. His business is in a bad way and he has only my Cabinet on which to really rely! ... embrace you with all my heart.

A few days later she wrote to another friend:

I think I shall stay in Edinburgh. for three months and if all goes well pay off Mons. Philipsthal. I have good friends, and if he thinks I am afraid of him he is mistaken. According to our dreadful arrangement I alone have had to pay all expenses and buy materials out of my half of the receipts ... I do hope to be finished with him. I am regarded as a great lady here and have everyone on my side ... They look on Philipsthal with his Phantasmagoria as a charlatan ...

On 9 June in a very long letter to her husband, she declared that in eighteen days she had taken over £190, with the prospect of even better takings on the occasion of the forthcoming fair and horse show. Also,

... about Mr Philipsthal – I have been advised to wait until enough money comes in to square my account ... if he demands an exorbitant rate of interest I shall bring an action to dissolve the partnership, and be free of his insupportable domination. I have had the good fortune to become acquainted with the Governor of Edinburgh castle. His wife is a French woman who made friends with Nini who told her all about our difficulties and she has promised me her protection and that of her friends. Mr Charles is doing good work here and again suggests joining me, but once bitten by Philipsthal I do not want any more joint ventures ... I have had an unhappy experience and am better off on my own.

On Saturday 11 June a large advertisement appeared in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* for Philipsthal's exhibition, which was due to open on Wednesday 15 June.

If M. Philipsthal had imagined that his was to be the first manifestation of the phantasmagoria to greet the eyes of Edinburgh society he was sadly mistaken. As we have already seen the first such exhibition had taken place fifteen months prior to this, and had been revived at regular intervals and various venues thereafter. In October 1802 Edinburgh had also seen the opening of its own 'Optical Theatre' in Hunter's Square, with yet another 'Original Phantasmagoria, from Vienna, Paris and London'. Moreover, 'This exhibition has no connection with any other which has been here before.'[32]

Philipsthal's exhibition opened at the Corn Rooms – in a venue some distance from the waxworks exhibition. The first night was an unmitigated disaster. Philipsthal was forced to publish an apology in the *Courant* of 18 June, stating that because of its being the first night of operation his apparatus 'was not completely in order and failed of producing the effect intended'.

It would appear that Philipsthal never really rallied support for his show in Edinburgh. Nor is there any mention of him ever returning to Scotland again.

On 23 July both exhibitions closed.

Five days later Marie wrote to François setting out the final statement of box office receipts for the entire period from 18 May to 23 July. It came to over £420, less expenses of £118. She wrote:

I have parted with Philipstahl's share of £150.16s. sterling. We had plenty of rows arriving at a settlement. I have been forced to accept his accounts as he placed them before me ... He treats me like a slave. I have made all possible efforts to break the association. I have shown our agreement to different lawyers who say there is not the least chance of it being broken legally ... The only proper solution is to separate and he will have none of it. Now he wants to go off without telling me where – I have got to go to Glasgow but he holds my nose to the grind-stone ... he seeks only to flout and ruin me so he can take all. Tomorrow I am going to make yet another visit to a lawyer in case there might be any means of getting out of this mess The interpreter sends you his best wishes, but he is no longer with me – a few days absence through illness was sufficient pretext for Philipsthal to replace him.

(In fact, although dismissed, the interpreter seems to have refused to leave Marie's side, since later letters still refer to him.)

In October Marie moved on to Glasgow, whilst Philipsthal left, refusing to let his partner know where he was heading. He did not make contact with her again until December.

However, before we follow the further exploits of the elusive M. Philipsthal it is worth looking at the progress of the phantasmagoria activities that were shaping up elsewhere. Moving back some nine months to January 1803, an interesting new pattern of development becomes evident in provincial theatres. In Taunton (*4.*) the resident company were offering phantasmagoria fore-pieces. The bill matter lists each of the twelve images to be presented in such a way as to suggest that they may have been obtained in some pre-packaged 'kit' form. The bill also stipulates that after just three performances the exhibition will be 'set aside for other novelties, currently in rehearsal'. At the end of March the phantasmagoria was indeed restated, with additional images, including Lord Nelson, Bonaparte, the King and 'Tuck [sic], the fairy from Shakespeare'.

A few days later M. St Clair resurfaces, this time at Exeter, where he is advertised as offering a phantasmagoria exhibition after the main programme – the play Lover's Vows and the musical farce The Flinch of Bacon. As a footnote to this announcement, the bill boasts that 'By this exhibition only the proprietor in London, last Winter, cleared six thousand pounds'.[33]

Finally in this brief round-up, in September 1803 we encounter our first mention of the phantasmagoria as an attraction at Bartholomew Fair. Somewhat surprisingly Meson's Phantasmagoria is the only one of its kind mentioned in the Fair's official rent books prior to 1812.[34] However, it should be borne in mind that there were always a number of unofficial shows, cunningly evading rental payments, and sited in the shops and taverns just outside the precincts of Smithfield. What must also be considered is that this form of optical show would have required substantial darkness, which could not perhaps be provided by a canvas tent. In the next instalment we shall also meet a new era of showmen who suggest quite a strong link between the phantasmagoria and the London fairs.

LOW SPIRITS IN IRELAND

In December Philipsthal resurfaced, with the Baron, in Dublin. He wrote to Marie demanding that she join him there.

It is possible that by this time Philipsthal was well and truly on his uppers. To make matters worse he may well have lost part of his apparatus during his winter crossing of the Irish sea.

In *Fireside Philosophy*, published about 1840, William Martin recounts this anecdote told by Mr Clark, the son of the Dublin optician, at a children's party in London.

Some time after ... [the Lyceum exhibition] ... on proceeding to Ireland, poor Philipsthal encountered a severe storm at sea. His ship was wrecked, his magic lantern lost, and little was saved excepting the slides, with the scenes and figures painted upon them.

With these slides, he applied to my father for a new apparatus to exhibit them; and accordingly a new magic lanthorn was constructed.

Unfortunately no date is given for this incident, and since Philipsthal made more than one visit to Dublin this may well have occurred on a subsequent trip. However, if this incident did indeed befall him in November/December of 1803, it may well explain his determination to have Marie join him post-haste.

Philipsthal opened at the Little Theatre, Capel Street, Dublin on 23 January, 1804. If he had needed to replace his lantern apparatus that Christmas, it would seem that at least his precious automata collection had remained intact. *Saunders Newsletter* itemised the phantasmagoria and the usual 'Grand Variety of Mechanisms', including 'The Self-defending money chest, Mechanical Peacock, Cossack solo dancer, self-impelled windmill, the Magnetic Clock' and the various other pieces.[35]

In February Marie Tussaud arrived in Dublin. Again her exhibition was housed in another venue, the Shakespeare Gallery near Grafton Street. Reunited with Philipsthal, she lost no time in buying herself out of their agreement, persuading him to accept all of her Scottish earnings in settlement of all contractual obligations.

On Tuesday 10 April the *Newsletter* promised 'new additions' to the Philipsthal exhibition: 'Hydraulic, aerostatic, mechanic and optical illusions', concisely described:

Hydraulics ... the water rises, from the front of the stage and after forming itself into many delightful fountains &c. is enjoined with fire, and the two elements roll together.

Aerostation - A complete air balloon & parachute will ascend (Mon. Thurs. & Sats only).

Mechanics [in the form of] a beautiful female figure as a rope-dancer ... grand additions to the optical department, to conclude with a most brilliant fancy firework.

These were probably not 'new' in the sense that he had blown his recent windfall on them, but rather new to Dublin. They may well have been some of the items billed, though not full described, when he had appeared at the Lyceum the previous year.

We can only guess at what transpired in the few weeks following this last announcement, for on 1 May appeared the following notice:

A card to Amateurs.

Mr de Philipsthal ... the nature of his engagements in England will not permit him to remain longer in this city. Having nearly completed an apparatus for a novel and extensive exhibition of another nature, to be produced in London, he takes this opportunity of informing the curious in experimental and philosophical amusements that he intends to dispose of his present collection.

Any gentleman of a scientific and mechanical turn will find this an object worth his attention: either for gratification of private society or, in its present successful connection with the public, as a source of profit. Mr de Philipsthal will most readily explain the motives and eligibility of this offer upon any direct application being made to him at

18, Capel Street, opposite the Little Theatre, between the hours of 3 and 4: he begs to say at the same time, that no person applying either from idle curiosity or with a view to making improper discoveries can possibly be attended to.

... The exhibition will continue ... til the end of May.

What was the reason for this sudden impulse to withdraw from Dublin? In all probability the phantasmagoria element had met with the same relative indifference as in Scotland. Whilst reluctant to admit that his own 'superior' invention was losing its appeal, at the same time Philipsthal was no doubt forced to face economic reality, and his interests were never entirely confined to the optical.

Hence at the end of May he left Dublin and parted company, for the last time, with Marie Tussaud, who would go on to become far more famous.

As a footnote, on 22 November 1804, another 'Grand Phantasmagoria' was advertised, for one night only, at Capel Street. However, this was not a phantasmagoria at all, but an entertainment comprising 'favourite airs' and 'comic interludes' presented by a 'Society of Gentleman Amateurs and a lady from the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane'.

End of Part Two

In the third and concluding part: More of Philipsthal. Schirmer & Scholl, Gyngell, Beizoni, Bologna and the American connection.

Amazing disclosures as to the true inventor of the new 'dissolving views'.

Special thanks to Madame Tussaud plc for their assistance and permission to quote from Marie Tussaud's correspondence.

4.

Taunton Theatre.

On WEDNESDAY Evening, January 26, 1803, will be presented
A NOVEL EXHIBITION called,

Phantasmagoria;

Comprehending the following Subjects!

1st.—STORM with *THUNDER and LIGHTNING.*
2d.—WITCH of ENDOR.
3d.—HAMLET's GHOST.
4th.—MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS.
5th.—DEATH—from "*Young's Night Thoughts.*"
6th.—DOCTOR FRANKLIN, THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER
7th.—The KING of TERRORS—from "*Pilgrim's Progress.*"
8th.—The BLEEDING NUN—from the "*Monk.*"
9th.—The DEMON of DECREPITUDE—from the "*Arabian Nights.*"
10th.—The KING of FRANCE.
11th.—A SKELETON
12th.—The FIEND of HORROR—from TASSO's "*Jerusalem delivered.*"

The Art of Divination *was formerly in great Repute amongst the PERSIANS; they are supposed to be the Inventors of it; there were Four Kinds,* Aeromancy, Pyromancy, Geomancy, *and* Hydromancy.—*Similar Combinations first suggested to the Optician the Science of SPECTROLOGY which exhibits the* Phantoms *or* Apparitions *of the Dead, or absent, in a way, more completely illusive than was ever before offered to the Public Eye;—the Objects freely originate in the Air, and unfold themselves under various Forms and Sizes, such as Imagination alone has hitherto painted them;—it is presumed, the most intelligent Mind will here find a rational Amusement, in the Reflection that it tends to expose the Arts of Impostors and Exorcists, and removes absurd Opinions which in the minds of young Persons are productive of evil consequences.*

The interest excited in the Public mind by the above Exhibition, has been beyond example;—not only in London but in all the principal Cities on the Continent;—It has alarmed the timid, created the admiration of the curious, and engaged the attention of the learned and philosophical,———To those who are acquainted with the sciences appertaining to *Vision*, these remarks may be unnecessary, but it may not be amiss to observe, that the *Phantasmagoria*, or science of *Spectrology* is founded on philosophical principles, supposed to be similar to what the Ancients comprehended amongst their *Mysteries*, and with which they are said to have performed so many Miracles to the astonishment of their infatuated Disciples.

After which a COMEDY *called, The*

Child of Nature.

Marquis Almanza, Mr. WHEATLY,
Count, Mr. WOODS——Duke Mercia, Mr. LLOYD——Granada, Mr. COOPER,
Saville, Mr. B. SMITH——And, Alberto, Mr. CROSS.
Marchioness, Mrs. LEIGH,
And, Amanthis, (the Child of Nature) Mrs. KEYS.

To which will be added a FARCE *called,*

The Deuce is in him.

Colonel Tamper, Mr. LEE,
Major Belfield, Mr. COOPER——James, Mr. RENNELS,
And, Doctor Prattle, (a Male Gossip) Mr. WOODS.
Bell, Miss LLOYD——Emily, Miss COOPER,
And, Mademoiselle Florival, Mrs. KEYS,

☞ *The* Phantasmagoria *will commence exactly at* Half past Six; *those Ladies and Gentlemen who wish to see it, are requested to be in Time, as it will be inconvenient coming in during the Performance, the House being in* Total Darkness.

J. Poole, Printer, Fore-Street, Taunton.

NOTES

1. *The Observer*, 20 December 1801.
2. Richard Alitick, *The Shows of London* (Belknap, 1978), p.119.
3. *The Observer*, 15 January 1802.
4. For a full specification of this patent see Herman Hecht, *Pre-Cinema History* (Bowker-Saur, 1993).
5. *The Repertory of Arts & Manufactures*, Vol XVI (Nichols, 1802).
6. Theatre Cuttings, 44-46, Lyceum Theatre, British Library.
7. *The Oracle & Daily Advertiser*, 28 January 1802.
8. *Morning Chronicle*, 21 February 1802
9. *Bath Chronicle*, 28 January 1802.
10. See Part One of this series in *The New Magic Lantern Journal*, Vol. 8, No.1.
11. *Bristol Journal*, 1 February 1802.
12. *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, 8 February 1802.
13. *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, 22 February 1802
14. *Saunders Newsletter*, 5 February 1802.
15. *The Lady's Magazine*, 2 February. 1802.
16. Theatre Cuttings, 44-46, Lyceum Theatre, British Library.
17. Theatre Cuttings, 44-46, Lyceum Theatre, British Library.
18. *Morning Herald*, l5 April 1802.
19. *Edinburgh Courant*, 11 March 1802.
20. *Edinburgh Courant*, 25 March 1802.
21. *Saunders Newsletter*,15 March 1802.
22. *The Times*, May 1802.
23. Theatre Cuttings, 44-46, Lyceum Theatre, British Library.
24. Theatre Cuttings, 44-46, Lyceum Theatre, British Library.
25. The Sorcerer's Anniversary, otherwise known as The Dance of Witches, was probably a Robertson invention. In a later announcement, Philipsthal describes the effect: 'A small figure instantly multiplies itself into a great number, moving without any visible interference or agency, and is surrounded with groups of witches, expanding themselves, as it were, all over the inside of the theatre.' In its simplest form this could be effected through the use of silhouette shapes and various pin-points of candlelight. It is interesting though that Philipsthal states that such images were made to appear all over the inside of the theatre.
26. Various local newspapers.
27. See Part One of this series in *The New Magic Lantern Journal*, Vol. 8, No.1.
28. Anita Leslie and Pauline Chapman, *Madame Tussaud – Waxworker Extraordinary* (Anchor Press, 1978). This book is the primary source for subsequent quotations from the Tussaud correspondence.
29. Throughout her working life – almost thirty years – Marie always billed the waxworks as that of M. Curtius. Only after settling in the Marylebone Road in London did she refer to it as her own exhibition.
30. Leonard Cottrell, *Madame Tussaud* (Camelot, 1951).
31. Theatre Cuttings.
32. *Edinburgh Courant.*
33. *Exeter Flying Post*, 11 March 1803.
34. Official Rent Books of Bartholomew Fair (1801–33), Guildhall Library, London.
35. *Saunders Newsletter*, 19 January 1804.

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