

# THE GRIFFIN



VOLUME 66 NO1 SPRING 2009

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL OF NORTH WALES MAGIC CIRCLE : CULCH HUD GOGLEDD CYMRU

ALI BONGO:  
1929 - 2009



As you all know America has elected its first black president, we at the North Wales Magic Circle have also got our first Magician in Black as president (Howie's turn next year)

I would like to say I am very honoured to follow in the footsteps of our previous presidents who have helped make our circle the success it is today as, I believe our circle is very successful and I am proud to play a major role, I can only hope I do as such a good job.

I would like to thank all concerned (you know who you are) in making our Annual Dinner in the Lido such a fantastic night; I and my partner Sue really enjoyed ourselves. The only downside was the kiss from Howie

Talking of presidents you may be aware that our own Trevor Lewis is the new president of the IBM, I know we all wish him a very successful and enjoyable time in his new role

I must thank the committee for the support and help they have given me so far it is very much appreciated

Bye for now  
Rob

## Ali Bongo Dies



Ali Bongo, who died on March 8 aged 79, was a hard-working stage magician with a prodigious talent for inventing tricks; although he eventually became the inspiration for the outlandish magician Adam Klaus in the BBC's *Jonathan Creek*, Ali spent most of his career in television behind the scenes, devising routines for performers such as David Nixon and Paul Daniels.

Born William Oliver Wallace on December 8 1929 (he claimed to be a direct descendant of the Scots warrior), he was brought up in India where his father was posted as a regimental sergeant major. It was here, aged six, that he performed his first magic routines for the benefit of an indulgent uncle, picking up tricks from the children's pages of the *India Times*.

Returning to England in his teens, William attended the Sutton Valence

public school in Kent where his father had taken a post as head of the Officer Training Corps. But though a success academically, schoolwork could never quite capture his full enthusiasm, and by the time he was 17 he was already working as a semi-professional magician, piecing together a career performing at children's birthday parties in villages around the Kent countryside. Having played the part of a wizard called Ali Bongo in a village hall pantomime, he borrowed the name for his stage act. On stage Bongo always claimed himself to be of "Pongolian" descent, but the character he created was no doubt partly inspired by his Indian upbringing. He wore brightly-coloured clothing, spoke in a ringing Asian accent, and tore through his act at a frantic pace, with a litany of endearingly absurd catchphrases – "hokus-pokus fishbones chokus" or "uju buju suck another juju" – thrown in for good measure.

The purple turban (from which, midway through a show, a flag would suddenly and mysteriously hoist itself) and exuberantly-curved golden shoes became his trademark. Though he would go on to work with many performers in a variety of different styles, on stage Bongo himself was always very much a comic magician.

Returning from National Service, he moved to London, where he took a series of office jobs before becoming a demonstrator and salesman at Harry Stanley's Unique Studios. Stanley was publisher of the magicians' monthly magazine *Gen*, and the most respected magic dealer in London.

Orson Welles, a keen amateur magician, was an occasional customer and highly-rated professionals like Hugh Miller and

Ken Brooke worked on the staff. At the time it was commonplace for aspiring performers to help out at a place like Stanley's during the daytime, and tour the nightclub circuit in the evenings.

Four years later Bongo became a manager in his own right, at the magic department of Hamleys in Regent Street. When eventually he left the store to become a full-time professional, he came to the attention of David Nixon, a likeable and witty magician with his own show at the BBC.

Impressed by Bongo's ingenuity and grasp of stage technique, Nixon employed him as an adviser on David Nixon's Magic Box until 1971, when Bongo was given his own slot on the children's entertainment series Zokko. His reputation grew and in 1972 he was voted Magic Circle Magician of the Year. But he continued to be employed as an adviser on such television shows as Tarot Ace of Wands, Doctor Who, The Tomorrow People, and later worked with Nixon's successor at the BBC, Paul Daniels, with whom he was to remain a close friend.

In 1973, the usually unassuming magician found himself at the centre of a controversy which the Daily Mail called "the great debate of the moment". Bongo was the first experienced magician publicly to challenge the Israeli-born showman Uri Geller over his supposed psychic powers. Vowing to "put my money where my mouth is", Bongo made an appearance on the Blue Peter programme aiming to recreate Geller's spoon-bending and mind-reading experiments in front of a studio audience using only conventional magic techniques.

The experiment was a muted success – "He didn't break the fork, he only bent it," complained the metallurgist Alistair Brown – but Bongo emerged from the episode as a likeable figure, self-deprecating and generous with his expertise. He had been taken to Geller's hotel by a Daily Mail journalist the previous day in an attempt to force Geller into "proving" his abilities before an expert. The Israeli psychic ordered him out of the building with the words: "I have no time for magicians! What do they know about my powers?"

Bongo was rather more realistic about the source of his abilities. He devoted an extraordinary amount of time to professional self-improvement, often staying up all night in his south London flat to work on routines or plough through the magic magazines which constituted his only reading material. He ate irregularly, surviving on self-concocted dishes such as "Pongolian hotpot" ("I start with a tin of stewing steak and add anything I can find"). His props were equally innovative. And though several of these, like the Bongo Hat, have now been mass-produced, the originals were generally designed to last for no longer than the length of a show, fashioned from whichever materials Bongo happened to have to hand at the time.

David Renwick wrote the part of the flamboyant Adam Klaus in Jonathan Creek after meeting Bongo on the set of his sitcom One Foot in the Grave, where the magician had been overseeing the filming of a guillotine trick. Bongo continued to advise on the show, and seemed to have enjoyed teaching actors. "They have a sense of drama," he said, "and that is the most important part of magic."

Despite insisting that he would continue with Ali Bongo “as long as my legs hold out”, in his later years he gave up the character in favour of a more sedate existence, lecturing and judging at magic conventions around the world. With his bald head, thick black spectacles and bright bow ties, he was a familiar figure at conventions from Brighton to the United States, and enjoyed nothing more than mixing and “talking shop” with other magicians.

In 2008 he was elected president of the Magic Circle and remained a frequent visitor to its premises near Euston, helping to run the Young Magicians’ Club where he passed on the tricks of his trade to the next generation of performers.

Ultimately he was a man obsessed with magic. Indeed at one point his flat in Clapham became so crammed with props that Bongo was forced to buy another on the floor below in order to have a place to sleep.

Though he described his home as “a slightly upmarket Steptoe’s yard”, his existence, in truth, was somewhat more salubrious, as his many years of television work had earned him a quite substantial income.

But by his own admission it was not one which allowed much room for family life. Though Bongo had several girlfriends he never married.

“There are a few lady magicians but not all that many,” he said. “Grown-up men playing with toys – that’s how people see us. Magic props are like toys, and they take up a lot of space.”



David Blaine told donors at a New York charity event he was too cold to do magic for them after donating his coat to the homeless. The magician - who once spent 63 hours in a block of ice as one of his endurance stunts - donated his own coat to the New York Cares coat drive in Bryant Park in December. The New York Post reported that Blaine then stood in just a T-shirt and slacks in the 15-degree cold, collecting coats and autographing his custom playing cards for the fundraising event. But when asked to do some magic by those donating coats he apologised and said his hands were too cold. Blaine said: “If you really want to understand why the Coat Drive is important, try standing outside for an hour without a coat.

# Magician teaches 'rip-off' tricks



**A teenage magician has been recruited by a council in London to educate shoppers about the risks of being ripped off by “street gamblers”.**

Waltham Forest Council has already issued anti-social behaviour orders (asbos) to hustlers offering bets on card games which are actually scams.

Emmanuele Faja, 17, was due to be in Walthamstow later to demonstrate the techniques used by the tricksters.

He was enlisted after a police officer

saw him performing magic in a pub.

The officer was sufficiently impressed by his skills to contact the council, which asked him to try to stop people falling for the scams in the run-up to Christmas.

### **Confidence-building**

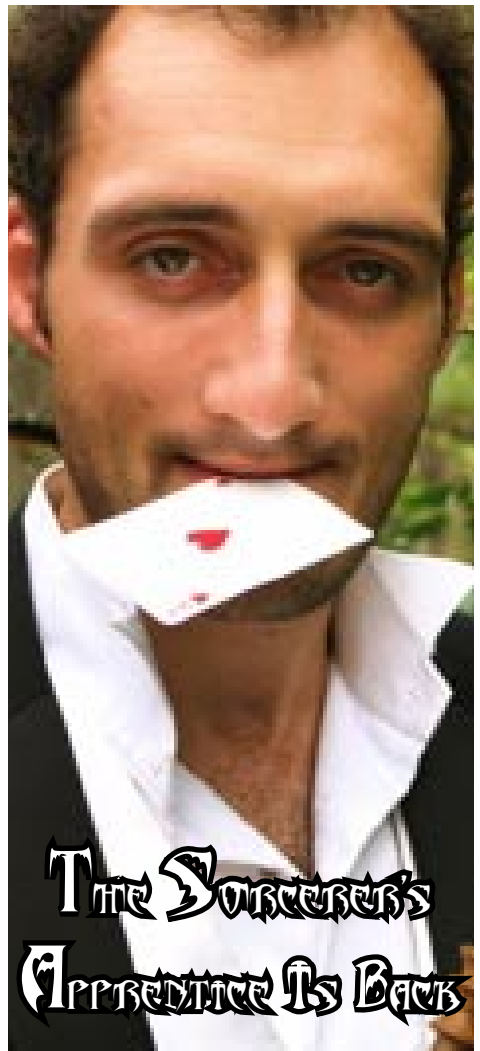
The tricks involve games such as “Chase the Lady”, where people try to guess which playing card is which.

Another sees a ball placed under a cup, which is swapped around with a number of other cups. People are



asked to say where the ball has ended up. Frequently they will be “allowed” to win on the first or second occasion to build their confidence and encourage them to bet ever-greater amounts of money. But the “street gamblers” win on every subsequent occasion by using sleight-of-hand techniques. They are often urged on by others who have been deliberately positioned in the crowds, the council said. Mr Faja said “Chase the Lady” was a “well-documented game” which had been played for about 250 years. “It’s not a fair game. It’s a con,” he told BBC London 94.9.

“They are criminals and there’s no way you can make money on it.” Often there would be a group of between three and seven men at a stall, he added. “They’re betting and other people get drawn in,” he said. Mr Faja has been performing magic for seven years, since the age of 10. His brother worked in a pub where members of the Magic Circle used to meet, and he was inspired to learn tricks after spending time with them.



The Sorcerer’s Apprentice is back and it’s bigger than ever before! 12 sorceresses are thrown in at the deep end as the Sorcerer (Maxamillian Sommerset) informs the novice magicians that in just a couple of days two of them will be eliminated. It’s not just the sorceresses competing, their magic teaches Mr Knight (Tariq Knight) and Ms Evans (Sophie Evans) are also battling it out, in a series of teacher challenges. Every Sunday morning on BBC2. See TV Magic (Sorcerer’s Apprentice is also available via BBC iPlayer).

## 'Bongo's magic would turn anyone into a star'



A CLOSE friend of magician Ali Bongo said he turned wannabes into stars with no trouble at all.

Fellow magician Jack Devlin, 77, from Orpington, visited the much-loved performer in St Thomas Guy's Hospital in Westminster, before he died aged 79 last Sunday morning.

Now the grandfather-of-three looks set to take over from Bongo, whose real name was William Wallace, as the president of the magicians' society, the Magic Circle.

Mr Devlin whose is also president of the Bexleyheath Society of Magicians said Bongo was always ready to help a fellow magician.

Mr Devlin, who was performing for a birthday party at Dartford's Irish Club on Tuesday told the Times: "Any magician

who was stuck for something in their act, would ring him up and no trouble at all, he would tell them where they were going wrong and turn them into stars." Indian-born Bongo was known as the 'magicians' magician' after advising many leading performers, including Paul Daniels, David Nixon and David Copperfield.

He also toured the world performing his different acts, including the Shriek of Araby, before he became the inspiration for the character of Jonathan Creek in the BBC programme of the same name.

Mr Devlin said it is Bongo's kindness and generosity he will miss the most.

He said: "If you said to Ali do you know the trick where so and so happened he would say: 'Of course I do. I invented it'. He would make these claims and we would laugh at him but they would turn out to be true.

"I saw him up until a couple of days before he died. I haven't broken down about his death yet but I know it is going to happen."

The close friends met when Mr Devlin was in his 20s working at the magic shop Ellisons in Holborn and Bongo was working in the famous Hamleys toy shop in Regent Street.

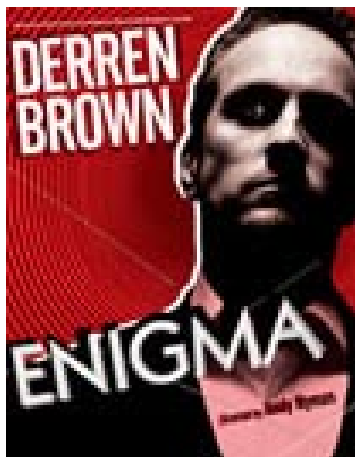
They would meet once a week for coffee with other budding magicians and then started going to the Magic Circle together when Devlin would pick Bongo up from his Clapham Common flat.

When Mr Devlin informed the society's members about his death they held a round of applause. He said: "He would have hated to see us all sad."

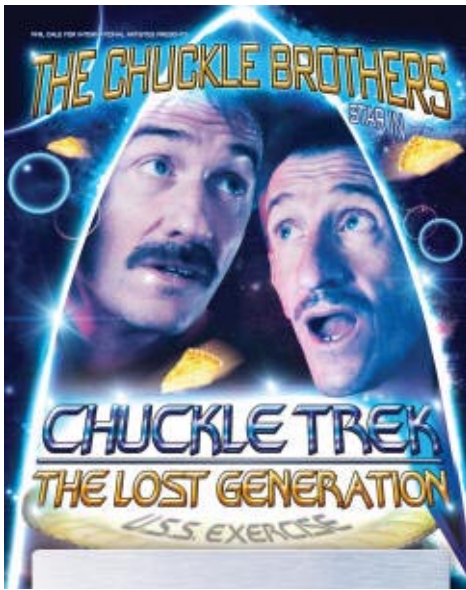


**Howie, Ali & Rob in happier times, receiving another bit of quality silverware at Chester Guild of Magicians**

The Magic of Variety Show. As part of The Order of The Magi's Centenary Celebrations the society is presenting The Magic of Variety Show at Waterside Arts Centre in Sale, Greater Manchester on Friday 27th March at 8pm. The event features Brian Sefton, Ward Allen with Roger the Dog and Snowflake the cat, High Jinx, Phil Hoyles (Jerome Flynn's understudy in the stage play 'Jus' Like That'), Steve Royle, Amethyst and the Magic Dancers choreographed by Corin Travis. All tickets are £10.00 with reserved seating from the box office on 0161 912 5616. See [www.orderofthemagi.org.uk](http://www.orderofthemagi.org.uk).



Derren Brown Enigma. Michael Vine , Andrew O'Connor and Corrie McGuire for Objective Talent Management Ltd present Derren Brown Enigma directed by Andy Nyman. An all-new theatre show. An evening of groundbreaking, extraordinary mind-feats and staggering audience manipulation. Dark, funny, chilling and utterly baffling. Not suitable for children under 12 years. Nationwide tour: April, May, June. West End Run June 15th - July 18th at the Adelphi Theatre, The Strand, London WC2R 0NS. Box Office: 0844 579 0090. [www.seetickets.com](http://www.seetickets.com). All performances at 8pm, no performances Sunday. Tickets: £25.00, £35.00, £45.00, plus limited number of £65.00 premium seats at each performance. (Derren Brown Evening of Wonders is being repeated at 10.30pm on Monday 23rd March on E4



**Stuart and Jayne Loughland** (Safire) are about to embark on their 7th Chuckle Brothers tour in a new show 'Chuckle Trek the Lost Generation', which will take in 60 dates across the UK. This year they will be perform in sketches, present their illusion act featuring two new illusions, and their Sci-Fi themed UV Magic Light Puppet Company act.

Visit

[www.thechucklebrothersontour.co.uk](http://www.thechucklebrothersontour.co.uk)

for tour information,

# WHAT'S ON AT NWMC IN 2009

7th April

## MENTAL COMPETITION

14th May (Not a normal Club Night)



## STEVE BEAM LECTURE

Seriously...who is Steve Beam?

Steve Beam has been inventing, performing, and teaching card magic for over thirty years. In addition to authoring more than 25 books, he edited and published The Trapdoor. This underground journal of magic spanned fifteen years and 1500 pages which, by Steve's own calculations, averages out to almost 900 pages a year! Steve lives with his long-suffering bride and three daughters (the resident card-pickers), along with thousands of decks of cards in Cary, North Carolina - the thimble capitol of the world.

9th June

## PAVEL LECTURE





by Kevin Gallagher

Magic competitions are an extremely healthy thing and long may they prosper. These days, standard sponge ball and four Ace routines or colour changing cane and blendo routines are unlikely to pick up any prizes in worthwhile competitions. Something new is required to take the eye of the judges. Many magicians avoid entering competitions stating that they require 'Magic for magicians'. People who use this term in my experience are usually lacking in magical ability and the statement is one of insecurity. There is no such thing! It is simply exceptionally good magic. Magicians and laymen alike will know that they are seeing something special when they see the likes of Gary Kurtz perform. The most effective method of setting yourself apart is Originality and this generally falls into one of three categories. Firstly, original presentation. Here, an original character or theme is thought of and standard magical effects are used with unusual props or with a new presentation angle. A great example would be the late Mark Nathan Sicher who made his mark with his Internationally known Dental act which included toothpaste, mouthwash, dental

floss, fillings, gas, toothbrushes and so forth. These items would have occurred first, the time being spent on trying to apply them to known magical effects. Secondly, standard magic achieved through completely new methods which deceives even magicians who are familiar with the original. An example would be Guy Hollingworth with his torn and restored card, travellers and twisting the Aces plots all pushed to new heights. Here, complex or new sleight of hand techniques are used to produce a simple effect with minimum apparent handling. Thirdly, the origination of completely new plots. The first person that springs to mind is Paul Harris who, in his occasional creative periods comes up with totally new amazing plots. For this, it is often an idea to simply think of a new effect without any regard for how it might be achieved and later, to try to work out a magical solution. In the first, the magician's strongest suit will usually be his presentation or acting ability. In the second, he will likely be a superb technician with an impressive armoury of skilful sleights. In the third, he will be capable of creative or lateral thinking. If you examine the current top magicians the likes of Williamson, Martinez,

Kurtz, Topas, Frewin, and analyse their work, you will see that all of them score very highly in one category or another, or in a combination of them. The magic itself need not necessarily be new, the presentation need not necessarily be new and the techniques employed need not necessarily be new but it is originality in one form or other that sets magicians apart.  
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# BLACK BANKING MAGIC

I've grappled with whether or not I should reveal one of the City's spookiest, most scandalous secrets. Savvy bankers learn it early in their careers, when the most promising are pulled aside and taught how to trade with 'smoke and mirrors'. Real magicians come in and share their techniques to us on the blackest of arts: how to spin financial black magic. Of course, it's not immediately obvious how balancing a deck of cards would relate to balancing a balance sheet. So I'll explain. The truth is that bankers have needed the misdirection, deception, and illusory skills of magicians to make their billions over the past couple decades. Securitisation, for instance, was a hoax taken from that age-old trick where the magician turns a 2p coin in his hand until it becomes £2. In the world of

finance, we took subprime mortgages, sold them to investors God knows where, and distanced the lender from the borrower as much as possible, until a 2p loan actually did look like a £2 one. Our investor audience could not believe their eyes, and could not think of an explanation. Pure magic. Abracadabra accounting was another celebrated transforming ruse. When those subprime mortgages became, well, sub-paying, we hid that 'toxic debt' in SIVs - off-balance sheet investment vehicles that changed our P&Ls from red to green - as easily as magicians change the colour of a silk handkerchief. We didn't even need a magic wand. And speed is an easy tool to fool. By innovating financial products at a mind-boggling pace, we overwhelmed the capacity of both regulators and financial institutions themselves to assess the risk. They don't call it 'pulling a fast one' for nothing, right? But there is an unspoken agreement between real magicians and their audience about what is going on. We pay magicians to be sneaky, to 'pull a fast one' on us. But when scams defraud the innocent, entertainment turns to resentment. The public trusted cunning, wealthy bankers not to take advantage of them, yet this is exactly what happened. Now that the financial crisis has unveiled their wizardry, investment banks are in danger of losing their supernatural powers. Our tricky houses of finance are on the verge of failure as fewer and fewer investors, regulators, or everyday taxpayers will be fooled by any hocus pocus. If the magic stops, it'll be the worst thing that could happen for those sneaky financial fat cats - and the best thing that could happen to us.



## **A magician's assistant for David Copperfield was rushed to the hospital with a severe injury after some kind of prop malfunction.**

The accident occurred during Copperfield's finale performance of his MGM Grand Las Vegas show on 17<sup>th</sup> December. The employee was assisting Copperfield during the "fan illusion" and got his arm caught in the fan. In the illusion, Copperfield appears to walk through the 12-foot high industrial fan and disappear as he turns to smoke. A rep for Copperfield said that: "Just prior to David himself walking through the fan, [the assistant] was accidentally pulled into the vortex of the moving fan blades, causing injury to his arm and face." The assistant, named Brandon (his last name is withheld for his privacy), broke his arm in multiple places requiring several hours of surgery to insert pins and bolts. The puncture on his face requiring eight or nine stitches. An eyewitness to the incident tells The Griffin that when it happened, the audience "heard a thump." "One of the assistants dropped to the floor. The curtain came down partially. Blood was everywhere, and the other assistants dragged the victim back. Then the

curtain closed all the way." Shortly after, "Copperfield came out and said, 'We have an emergency and we might have to end the show...please give me two minutes.' He came back a minute later and said, 'I'm sorry, the show is over...if you want your money back, refunds will be given.'" US Magazine reports that an illusion technician is recuperating after getting his arm caught in the rotating blades of a 12-foot industrial fan on stage Wednesday. The arm broke in several places, requiring surgery, and a cut on his face required stitches. David Copperfield told the celebrity magazine that he was at the hospital when the assistant awoke, and he gave him a children's magic set to practice on during his recovery.

## **ARTicles Wanted**

It's been a while since your favourite Magic Mag was published. This is mainly because the editorial team had very little to put in it!

With all the members and readers of the Griffin, we're sure there are a few of you who could rattle a few words into an email. It doesn't have to be Shakespeare or Wordsworth. You don't have to talk of wandering through bloody daffodils! Or perhaps you have something to sell? Want to buy some elusive gimmick? Come on Guys, help us out. Send your contributions to: [editor@griffinmagazine.co.uk](mailto:editor@griffinmagazine.co.uk)

## **Do It Today**

## North Wales Magic Circle: Cylch Hud Gogledd Cymru

Minutes of the Committee Meeting held in the Crown Bard, Rhyl on Tuesday the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2009.

*Presiding: Rob Coleclough*

The meeting opened at 20:00

12 members present: R Coleclough, P Hewson, E Hughes, P Hughes, S Jones, G Land, N Massey, I Nethercott, P Owens, R Roberts, R Scott, M Thorold

**1:Apologies for Absence:**H Fay, J Garrod.

**2:Minutes of the Last Meeting:**

The minutes were read and accepted as a true record.

**3:Matters Arising from the Minutes:**

a)*The Little Theatre* – the rehearsal room was in a bad state at the meeting last week.

It was again discussed whether to stay at the theatre in the hope that there will be improvements, or to find an alternative venue.

Again, it was decided to wait a little longer to see what happens.

b)*Abbey Account* – The account has been set up, but is ‘frozen’ as Abbey have lost the security information that was given to them.

It was agreed that R Scott should look for a different account, possibly one requiring only one other signatory to simplify matters.

**4:Minimum Standard for Competitions**

The following were discussed, to be put forward at the AGM:

a)If the Magic Judge(s) of a competition feel that the standard of acts is too low to be awarded the trophy, two other committee members should be consulted and a decision made as to whether to award the trophy for the competition or not.

b)The minimum and maximum times for the competitions to be altered:

Close up – 8 minutes minimum, 12 minutes maximum.

Mentalism – 15 minutes minimum, 20 minutes maximum

Cabaret – 10 minutes minimum, 15 minutes maximum

**5:Applications for Membership**

The following were accepted as Associate Members:

Christopher Williams. 20 Denness Place, Llandudno, Conwy LL30 2UX

Wil Pritchard. 38 Gogarth Avenue, Dwygyfylchi, Penmaenmawr LL34 6PY

**6:Any Other Business**

a)The date of the Annual Dinner clashes with a Magic Circle event, and may limit who is available to invite as the guest of honour.

b)Meetings

July Magic Workshop

August Cabaret Competition

September President's Night

October Matthew Johnson & Christopher Taylor Lectures

November Annual General Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 21:30

INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF MAGICIANS



# Trevor Lewis's Presidential Dinner

at

**Kimmel Manor Hotel, Abergele, North  
Wales**

**Saturday 18th April 2009**

**Cabaret**

**Ken Dodd OBE + Quentin Reynolds + Welsh Male Voice  
Choir**

**MC: Clive Stock**

**Tickets £40.00**

Available from Trevor Lewis: Tel: 01492 512 658

[trev@trevorlewis.com](mailto:trev@trevorlewis.com)

Accommodation available at concessionary rates for this special  
event. Telephone for bookings 01745 832 014

**Dress: Black Tie**





# Your Magical Stars

By ARTHUR BOOKER



## **Aries March 21 - April 19**

They say you love money more than anything else in the world, but then, they've never seen you around a stack of pancakes



## **Taurus April 20 - May 20**

The stars indicate professional success in the days to come, though it's quite difficult for them to keep a straight face during it



## **Gemini May 21 - June 21**

It might not be today, and it might not be tomorrow, but you'll soon come to regret staging a pie-eating contest to select a new spouse



## **Cancer June 22 - July 22**

While being a good friend means telling the truth, you'll soon realize that being a true friend means keeping your mouth shut.



## **Leo July 23 - August 22**

Sure, a spoon full of sugar may make the medicine go down, but if it's suppositories you're struggling with, the spoon isn't going to help.



## **Virgo August 23 - September 22**

Your shortness of breath and wild fainting spells will be cured this week, thanks to a series of well-placed commas.



## **Libra September 23 - October 23**

The stars apologize for last month's prediction of "money problems." Looks like they forgot the "k" in there..



## **Scorpio October 24 - November 21**

You're no art expert, but you know what you like, which explains all the meatball sandwiches hanging on your walls.



## **Sagittarius November 22 - December 21**

You'll go peacefully in your sleep this February, forcing disgusted nurses to once again change the sheets.



## **Capricorn December 22 - January 19**

Everyone will realize what a wonderful person you are in 2009—The International Year of Mean-Spirited Sarcasm.



## **Aquarius January 20 - February 18**

Bloodied, alone and in shock, you'll finally realize it's not a Gorilla Gram.



## **Pisces February 19 - March 20**

Wrinkles are usually a sign of aging, but in your case they just mean you should get out of the bath.