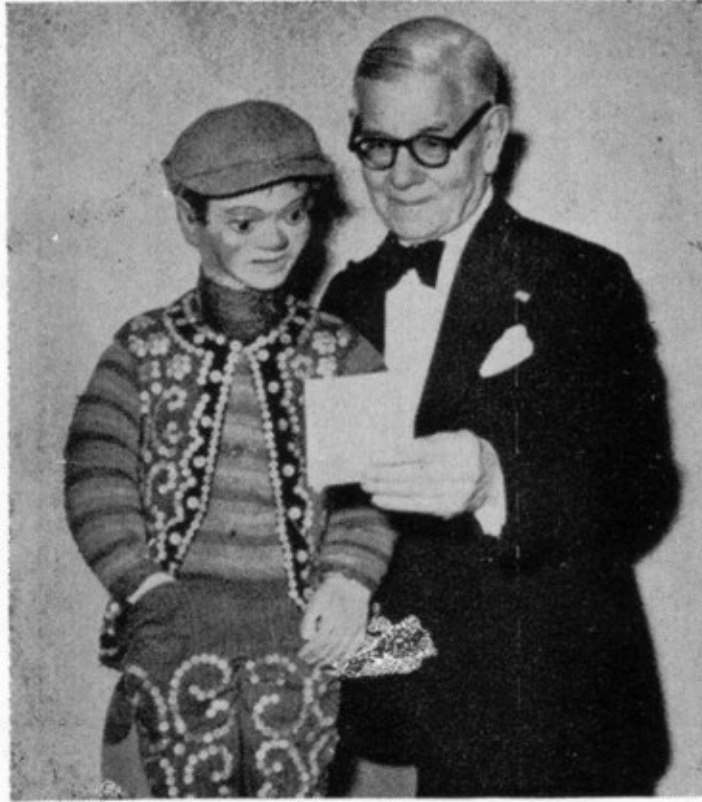


Fred Russell Dead



Fred Russell and "Coster Joe"

Fred Russell, the father of the British Music Hall, died at his home, Langley, 18 Queens Walk, London, England, on October 14, 1957, at the age of 95. His real name,
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Bro. Russell, made his first stage appearance in 1879, when he was 17 years of age. In 1882, he took up Journalism as a profession with Hackney and Kingland Gazette. He studied Ventriloquism with the expert of the famous Frederic Maccabe, and made his initial appearance on the Concert Stage, in London, in 1886, followed by his debut on the Music Hall Stage, at the Palace Theatre, London, in 1896.

In 1898, he published the book "Ventriloquism and Kindred Arts, with a wide distribution, and is now a collectors item. Various editions followed this work.

Bro. Russell was Star Performer for 40 years, toured Australia, in 1903, and 1906; America in 1905; South Africa in 1905, 1912, 1927; New Zealand, Tasmania and Ceylon in 1907.

In 1907, he filed specifications and drawings (Patent) in London on "Improvements in and Connected with Stage Apparatus." These improvements, pneumatic controls, operated by foot levers, screen with slits, spiral arm attached to the sleeve of the dummy, to permit a live hand to be introduced to pick up a match, cigarette and light it.

One of the outstanding ventriloquial accomplishments, in Russell's colorful career was in 1922, when he produced "Sylvester vs. Fitzholmondyley" in "Breach of Promise." This Ventriloquial mock trial involved a damage suit for five thousand pounds, for the failure of the Defedent to marry the Plaintiff. The court setting represented a fairly accurate Engilsh Court of Law. The production required one year of preparation, and constant practice and refinements, before the premiere at Llford Hippodrome Theatre, London, in 1923. The presentation was sensational and had a continuous run for almost three years. The actors in the cast: Judge in wig and robe; the Jury of 12 men; the Defendant; dude in dock; Defense Council; Fred Russell, council for the Plaintiff; Mrs. Russell played plaintiff; Policeman acting as usher; two witnesses and Coster Joe as call boy dressed as page. The Vent actors were created and made by Russell from clay models, and then finished in papier-mache, and custumed by Fred and his wife. Being a Journalalists he wrote his own scripts.

The operation of the actors was pneumatically controlled, with various movements by the feet from a sort of a switchboard under the feel of Russell. He was assisted by Mrs. Russell and a stage hand to set the props. To promote increased public interest in the trail, a four page pamphlet, giving a synopsis of the court pro-

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ceedings, including dialogue, was distributed by the thousands, a week prior to the opening dates. Later on two more characters were added to the cast . . . the plaintiff's landlady, and baby making 21.

The act we reproduced in 1928, one of the big successes was at the Coliseum, London. Russell appeared in the Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium in 1932, and as late as 1952 in his 90th year performed on T.V.

Russell was elected to the exalted position of King Rat-president, in the "Society of Vaudeville Performers, known as The Grand Order of White Rats, in 1903, 1911, and 1929 through 1939.

He also had the distinction of being one of the founders of "Variety Artistes Federation," and chairman of that influential body in 1909, 1915, through 1920.

Another accomplishment, being the establishment of the "Performer" a London newspaper. He wrote talented articles in the Christmas Number, 1946, on "Ventriloquism Ancient and Modern," and in the January, 1947 issue "American Ventriloquists."

At the time Russell started his ventriloquial career, the ventriloquists, employed a group of mechanical figures, ranging from three to ten, but Russell changed this procedure, and was the pioneer of the modern method on the Music Hall Stage, of performing a complete show with "Coster Joe" alone.

Fred Russell was a life member in the International Brotherhood of Ventriloquist, and "Coster Joe," is a life member in the Brotherhood of Ventriloquists' Dummies.

The survivors are, Mrs. Parnell, three sons, Val Parnell, managing director of Moss Empires; Russ Carr (former ventriloquists agent for Star Performers and Wallace Parnell, Hollywood, California.

The officers and members of the IBV and the staff of the Oracle are immeasurably saddened by his death.

R.I.P.