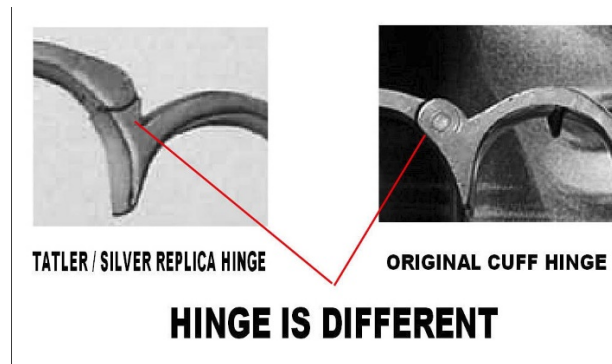


THE SPECIAL PAIR OF HANDCUFFS

From which Houdini liberated himself at the Hippodrome last Thursday after an hour's hard work. These handcuffs took five years to make and contained twenty-one separate levers. Below the handcuffs is shown the key with which they were locked

[Joe Notaro Collection]

And now added to the mix, is the Tatler Cuff with a short key, which could very well be the original cuff he escaped from.



[Handcuffs.Org]

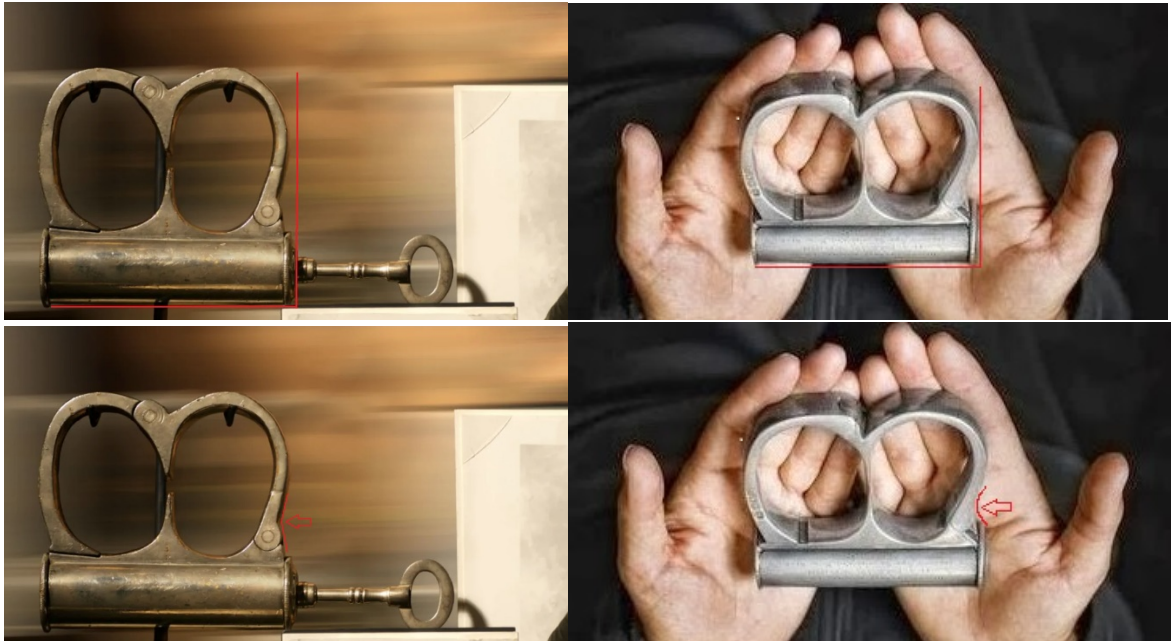
Handcuffs.Org forum pointed out that the Solid Silver Replica looks like (it was modeled after) the Tatler Cuff in the photo not the DC Cuff. That was shown by the direction of the middle hinge and the “foot” on the catch.



[Joe Notaro Collection]

The original key used in the famous photo taken at the London Hippodrome in the presence of London Newspapers is short, but what cuff is being locked on his wrists.

Is Houdini being locked into the Tatler Cuff or David Copperfield Mirror Cuff?

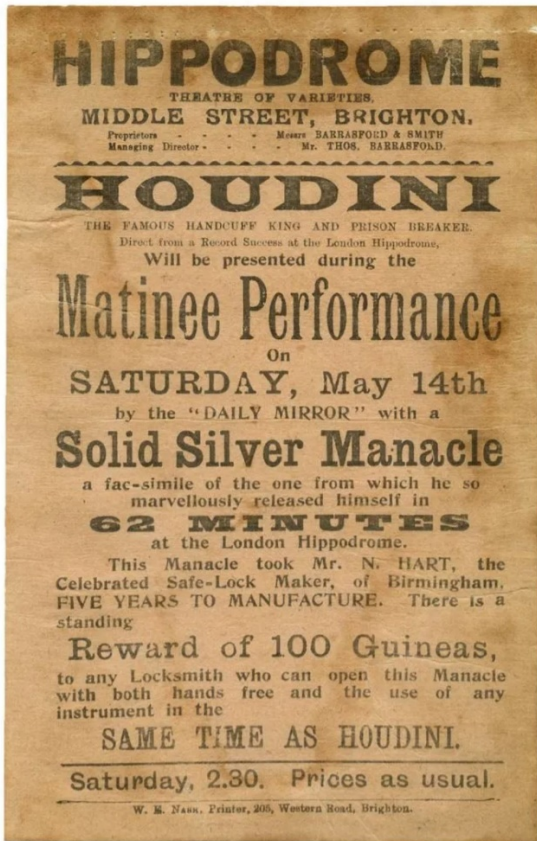


To help possibly answer that question, let's look at another subtle difference (not previously pointed out) between the DC Cuff and the Tatler/Solid Silver Cuffs.

The outermost point of the convex curved bow in the closed/locked position of the DC cuffs appears to be inside of a 90 degrees angle from the keyhole end cap, where the Tatler/Solid Silver Cuffs appears to line up more closely to a 90 degrees angle. And the outermost concave part of the curved bow on the Tatler/Solid Silver Cuffs appears to be more curved (or curve in more) than the DC Cuff. (Assumption: Tatler when locked lines ups with Solid Silver Cuff).



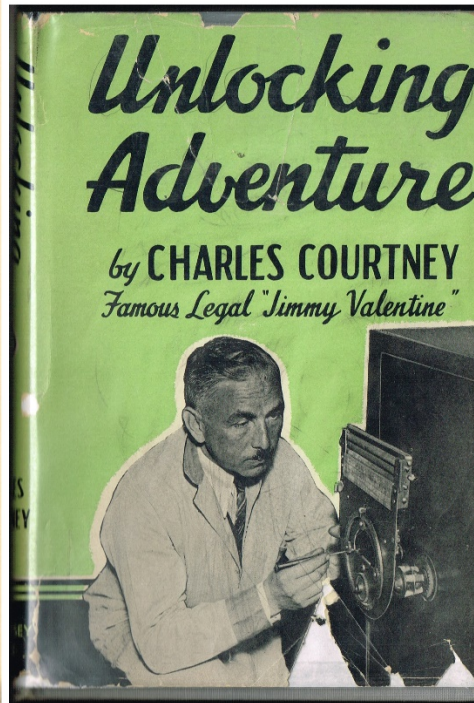
To my eye, the keyhole knob is facing up in the famous photo and the outermost convex point of the curved bow appears to be at a 90 degrees angle or more. And the outermost concave part of the curved bow appears to curve in quite a bit. Also notice the small key, which resembles the Tatler key.



[Potter & Potter Auctions]

So he escaped from the Tatler Cuff, a matching Solid Silver Manacle was presented, and the DC Cuff was shown to locksmiths and used for the reward after.

Mirror Cuff “exposed Jan 1920” and “locked in safe until 1935”



[Joe Notaro Collection]

While researching the Mirror Cuff, I added the following items to my collection:

- “Uncrowning the Handcuff King” by Joseph P. Wilson, **January 1920** issue of Illustrated World Magazine
- “Unlocking Adventure” by Charles Courtney (1942)

Both are discussed in Chapter Eight, “The Mirror Handcuff Mystery”, of Patrick Culliton’s book, “the Key” and offer key insights into the Mirror Cuff Challenge:

- Joseph P. Wilson’s theory on how Houdini Escaped the Mirror Cuff
- Locksmith, Charles Courtney had come upon a Mirror Cuff inside Houdini’s private safe after the magician’s death and offered to open them, but Bessie inferred that only Houdini was allowed to unlock them

Culliton asks the question, “*Could it be that Bessie Houdini was preventing Courtney from discovering that beyond that single Brahma lock lay the “false works” that Wilson described in his article?*”

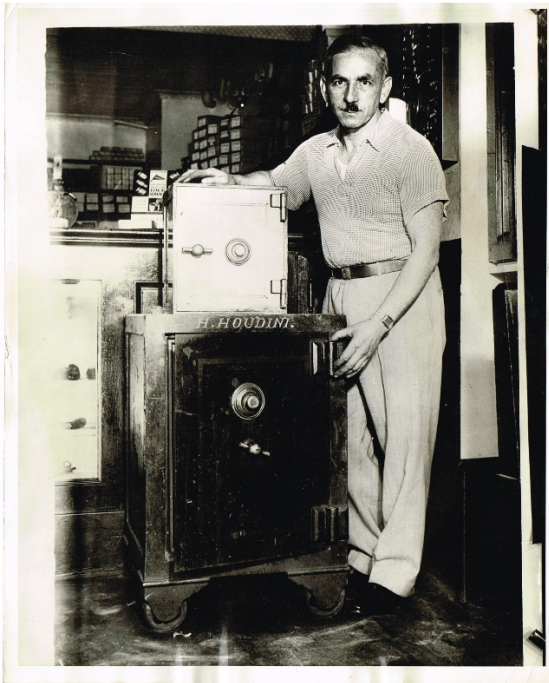
Joseph P. Wilson’s theory on how Houdini escaped the Mirror Cuff, is also discussed in the chapter, “How He Did It (Theory Two)” of Joe Posnanski’s book, “The Life and Afterlife of Harry Houdini”. Posnanski’s says “Wilson did not get it right”, since his claim was built around the premise that the Mirror Cuffs were gaffed and the one’s in David Copperfield’s collection are not. Well the Tatler Cuff may have been gaffed (with “false works”).

Here is the related snippet from Courtney:

Mrs. Houdini...asking me to unlock her husband's safe, the one he used in his act. In the safe, he had told her, was something to treasure but no one had been able to open the lock. On my next trip [1935] to the West, I paid her a visit in Hollywood. This gentle, tiny woman was living in a small home [2435 Laurel Canyon Blvd] surrounded by her keepsakes and sharing her home with a half-dozen elderly actresses who had no work. Her two chief concerns were a small two- or three pound monkey [named Satan], a pet that she carried everywhere perched on her shoulder, and portrait of Houdini under which an oil lamp burned perpetually. The lock on the chest was a trick one, I knew, so I asked Mrs. Houdini very carefully just how her husband opened it.

*"Houdini never touched it," she told me. "He just passed his hands over it and it opened." I went around the corner to the hardware store, returned in a few minutes and passed my hands over the lock. It opened immediately. The elderly actresses crowded around and asked me how I learned the trick, but my only magic was a small magnet that clicked with another in the shackle of the lock. On the floor of the chest lay the beautiful silver handcuffs that the city of London had once presented to the magician. **They were fastened with one of the finest Bramah locks that I have seen. It would have been interesting to open them, but Mrs. Houdini shook her head.***

*"I must never let anyone touch the lock. You may have the safe for your collection; Houdini would have wished it. **But these handcuffs—he promised that if he can pierce the veil of death, he will unlock them. Then I shall know that he has returned to me.**"*



[Joe Notaro Collection]

The Billboard **August 3, 1935** mentions the following:

THE LATE HOUDINI'S trick of opening a closed safe by passing his hands over it was exposed last week by Charles Courtney, president of the Master Locksmiths Association of America. Mrs. Houdini had sent her late husband's private safe to Courtney's shop at 530 West 125th street,

New York. There were some papers she needed and Courtney managed to open the safe in the usual way, turning the dial. Later he tried to open it as Houdini did and discovered that a magnet passed over the surface caught a hidden tripper and connected with the dial.

The Billboard **September 7, 1935** tells the story this way:

CHARLES COURTNEY, master locksmith, is in San Diego, Calif, on his way from New York to Honolulu where he hopes to open the vaults of a submerged treasure ship. Before leaving New York on his present venture, Mrs. Harry Houdini telegraphed him from Hollywood asking that he open a safe in New York which formerly belonged to her husband. Houdini had closed the safe for the last time and the secret of the combination was lost after his death. He and Courtney had been great friends. Courtney opened the safe and presented the contents to Mrs. Houdini. Besides documents, the significance of which Courtney refused to reveal, he found a pair of silver handcuffs presented to Houdini by the city of London.

So a Mirror Cuff was hidden in a safe for a number of years until Courtney opened the safe in 1935.



[Newspapers.com]

The David Copperfield Mirror Cuff (aka DC Cuff) interlocked with another pair of cuffs made its first public reappearance [the day Thurston died] in an **April 13, 1936** newspaper, where it was mentioned that the keys to the handcuffs have been hidden where no one can find them.



[Mark Willoughby Collection]

The DC Cuff interlocked with another pair of cuffs was also on the table at the **October 31, 1936** séance.



[Dr. Bruce Averbook Collection]

The long key (for the DC Cuff) made its first appearance in the photo [**most likely taken in the late 1930s**] of Bess with all of her keepsakes on the table. This also shows the Solid Silver Replica and DC Cuff together for the first time.



[John C. Hinson Collection]

The Solid Silver Replica (without the DC Cuff), can be seen for the first time in the 1938 photo of Vincent Hinson, younger brother of Harry Houdini Hinson.

Famed Birmingham "Tatler Cuff" appears in 1933

The following photograph is from a May 18, 1933 Pittsburg Sun Telegraph newspaper:

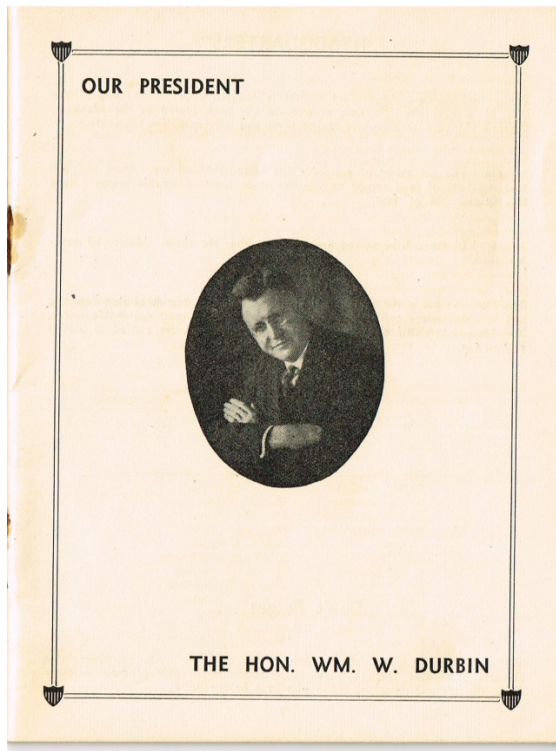


[Newspapers.com]

And to my eye, it sure looks like the Tatler Cuff but with a Long Key, as opposed to a short key. It shows the other side of cuff not shown in the famous photo from 1904.

The direction of the middle hinge and catch match the Tatler Cuff and not the DC Cuff.

At the time (May 17th, 1933) of the photo, the cuffs were in Pittsburgh at the home of Theodore H. Heuber, 241 Atwood Street. McCaffrey (national vice president of the **Society of American Magicians**) was helping with arrangements for the national convention of the **International Brotherhood of Magicians** to be held at Beaver Falls in June. He examined the handcuffs for a moment, and snapped them open.



[Joe Notaro Collection]

So is that the Tatler Cuff in May of 1933? It most likely is, the handcuffs that Bess Houdini gave to Durbin, the first elected president of the International Brotherhood of Magicians and editor of the Linking Ring Magazine. In, the Feb 1934 Linking Ring, Durbin states:

Today, I have in my possession, presented to me by Mrs. Houdini, the handcuffs which were made by Birmingham blacksmith and who took five years in making same, which Houdini got out of in the London Hippodrome after he worked for almost seventy minutes to release himself...I have never been able to find any magician or other person who can open and close these handcuffs.

So Durbin had these cuffs for some time prior to the Linking Ring article. Durbin's collection became the nucleus of the Egyptian Hall Museum. That said, Durbin also had strong ties to the **International Brotherhood of Magicians**. And, we know Bess gave away the Russian Manacle that the **Society of American Magicians** got. So got to believe the Tatler Cuffs are still out there in a collection somewhere.

Search for Tatler Handcuff given to W.W. Durbin leads to Abbotts?

Early in 2021, I sent the following email to the great grandson of W. W. Durbin:

Hi Jim!

I have been studying Houdini for 45 years and have a Houdini blog, HarryHoudiniCircumstantialEvidence.com that I have been running since 2011.

Leo Hevia, a Houdini Colleague, has been in contact with you regarding the search for a Houdini handcuff associated with the famous Mirror Challenge that was given to your great grandfather, W.W. Durbin, by Bess Houdini.

*According to the **February 1934** Linking Ring article, "With the Old Masters" by William W Durbin, President I.B.M., Kenton Ohio:*

Today, I have in my possession, presented to me by Mrs. Houdini, the handcuffs which were made by Birmingham blacksmith and who took five years in making same, which Houdini got out of in the London Hippodrome after he worked for almost seventy minutes to release himself...I have never been able to find any magician or other person who can open and close these handcuffs.

*Attached is a photograph from a **May 18, 1933** Pittsburg Sun Telegraph newspaper of the handcuff.*

Last year, I shared three ground-breaking blog posts on my latest investigation and findings on the Mirror Challenge. Which Included additional information, insight and new photographic evidence on the Mirror Challenge confirming Houdini escaped from a cuff known as the "Tatler Cuff" as opposed to the Mirror Cuff in David Copperfield's collection:

- *Is Houdini being locked into the Tatler Cuff or the David Copperfield Mirror Cuff?*
- *Mirror Cuff "exposed Jan 1920" and "locked in safe until mid 1930s"*
- *William McCaffrey and Famed Birmingham "Tatler" Handcuffs*

Any information you can provide to help determine what happened to these cuffs would be greatly appreciated. Did they stay with the Durbin family? Or did the I.B.M get them, or did they become part of Egyptian Hall Museum Collection, which has had a number of different owners (David Price, David Price III, Mike Caveney and George Daily) or did something else happen to them.

Thank You for your time,

Joe Notaro

The following is the reply I got back from Jim:

Hi Joe. I did do some investigating. Happy to discuss more on the phone, but here is what I did:

- I checked my David Price file, as I had a number of long letters from him.*
- You know that David was the buyer of the Durbin memorabilia left over from the American Egyptian Hall. I visited him and saw the museum he built in his own home in Nashville.*
- Before David, the remnants of the magic theater were acquired by two brothers, Tom and Bob Dowd—Kenton farmers. Tom became a judge, I believe. Before he died he brought me Durbin memorabilia, including a scrapbook from his time as Register of the Treasury.*
- But in my Price file is an article written by Bob Dowd about how they acquired the collection from the August 1994 Linking Ring. Here is the line of most importance to you.*

“His apparatus, books and whatever paraphernalia existed was sold, perhaps to Abbotts for resale.”

- E. *So my guess is the handcuffs were sold by my great-grandmother, probably not checking. But best guess is they went through Abbotts.*
- F. *One fun sidebar. Two years ago, some nice guys from Kenton, Ohio, asked me to come over and speak about Durbin and my book on him. They took me to the home that was made from the magic hall. The Dowds moved it to the country and made a one-story home of it. Completely cool to see that the wallpaper on the ceiling was still intact in what is now an attic. I have photos. The previous owner said she definitely heard an orchestra playing sometimes and felt the presence of a good spirit at times. Who knows, but the report seemed sincere. Maybe those cuffs are hidden in the walls of that home? We need to get Geraldo Rivera on it!*

Will keep thinking about it. I cannot tell you how hard it is for me to know these artifacts from my family are far-flung—but most people take good care of their collections, like Mike Caveney.

I am pleased you reached out, Joe. Nothing like a good old-fashioned obsession with a great riddle!

Jim

Below is a snippet from the August 1994 Linking Ring article, Egyptian Hall, the Reprise, by Bob Dowd:

*When Durbin’s estate was settled, I was living on my own in Cincinnati. **His apparatus, books and whatever paraphernalia existed was sold. I don’t know to whom, perhaps to Abbotts for resale. But I’m not sure of that.***

*At any rate, the building, with its **vestibule, walls and ceiling covered with a plethora of photos mounted under glass, as well as the large, book-like folio of 8×10’s which stood, head-high, to the right of the stage remained.***

*The distinctive front curtain with its Egyptian painting was left in place. The hangings also remained on the rather deep stage, with its side curtains and traveler to divide the stage into two sets. **Backstage, the sides and rear were lined with seven-foot high glass-fronted, shelved cabinets which had provided large storage.** And, of course, there were the footlights with a carpeted walk at the center leading to steps down to the auditorium floor.*



Standing on the stage of Egyptian Hall in front of its famous curtain are (l to r), Bob and Ethel Dowd and Tom and Mary Dowd. Tom served as I.B.M. International Treasurer from 1958-1979 and Mary served as Executive Secretary from 1973-1981.

[Askalexander.Org]

So, we learned from the grandson of W.W. Durbin and the August 1994 Linking Ring article that there were additional owners (Tom and Bob Dowd) of the Egyptian Hall Museum prior to David Price. We also learned that most likely [?] the handcuffs and other paraphernalia along with Durbin's apparatus and books were sold (possibly to Abbott's) by his great grandmother after Durbin's death (**Feb 4, 1937**) and before Tom and Bob Dowd acquired the remnants of the magic theater.

So were the Tatler handcuffs sold to Abbott's? Or is it possible the Dowd's with IBM ties acquired them?

Mike Caveney wrote this on his website:

Two years after Durbin's death in 1937 America's Egyptian Hall was sold to Tom Dowd who remembered attending (with his younger brother Bob) the early magic conventions at Durbin's home. The building was raised off its foundation and rolled two miles down the road to a spot next to the Dowd home.

Tom would eventually spend seventeen years as secretary/treasurer of the IBM, helping it grow into the largest magic organization in the world while his wife Mary worked as advertising manager of the Linking Ring.

Leo Hevia and I have been in contact with Abbott's and a relative of the Dowd's, respectively.

Per a May 30, 2022 email from Leo Hevia to Me:

I did get a response from Abbott's Magic. They don't have anything that fits the description of any old handcuffs. I'm afraid we hit a dead end on the Tatler cuffs. Durbin's widow sold his collection to the Dowd brothers, Tom, and Bob. After a few years they sold it to David Price and from there to Caveney and his pal George Daily. The collection exchanged hands three times. God knows where those cuffs are now.

In March, 2023, I had the following email exchange with Michael Lee, Grandson of Mary Dowd:

Mon, Mar 13, 6:53 PM to Me

Came across your posting of Egyptian Hall while researching my grandmother, Mary Dowd. I heard lots about the building growing up first hand from her as she helped her husband Tom perform. Sadly it was moved decades ago. It now sits on another farm outside, last I saw as a garage.

Tue, Mar 21, 10:10 PM to Michael

Wow, Mary Dowd is your grandmother, that is so cool the connection to Egyptian Hall. You don't happen to have any additional info or leads on the Tatler Cuffs?

Wed, Mar 22, 2023 4:22 AM to Me

Thank you for the reply back! Unfortunately that story is probably lost to time. I remember my grandmother speaking of some Houdini books, however I believe those were sold or donated before she passed, and my great uncle, Bob Dowd, I believed he had a good collection upon his death, but the items went to a magic collection / auction, never got to see what all he had as I was out of state at the time.

When my mother passed, I inherited a trunk full of my grandfathers show materials and props, I saved a few pieces as they seemed original, early 1900's. I'll attach some photos, you may have seen these items before. Also going through boxes of old letters, I came across the sale paper for Egyptian Hall. It really put Kenton on the map back in the day, times were definitely different back then. I'm happy to have found this, it keeps their memory going, thank you.

I shared with Leo Hevia my correspondence with Michael Lee, Grandson of Mary Dowd. Leo had this to say:

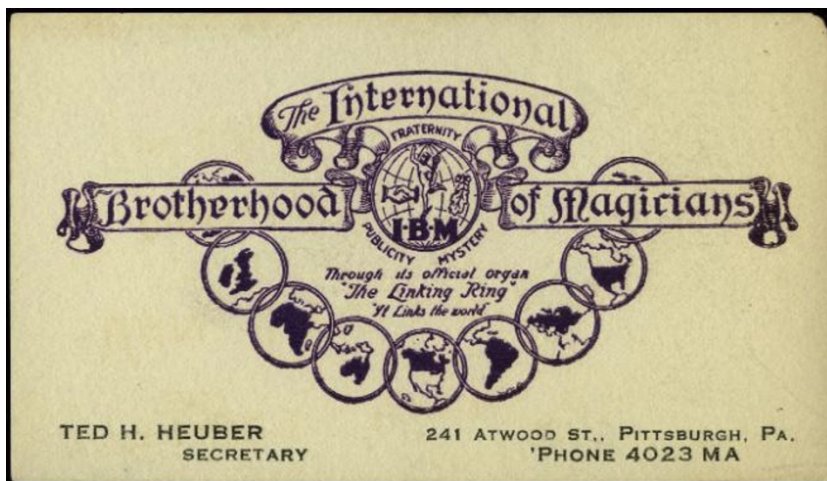
If Bob Dowd had the Tatler Cuffs and sold it off in his auction, then we're screwed. The cuffs could be in the attic of somebody's house in Ohio.

The missing IBM Museum is "the key" to the Tatler Handcuffs



[Quicker Than The Eye Auction]

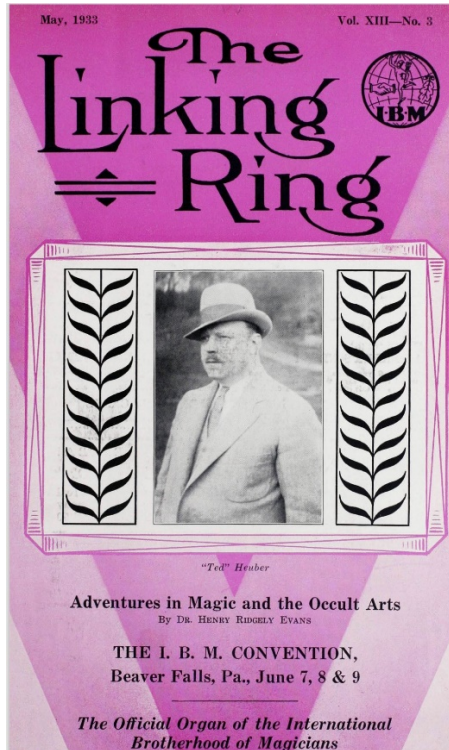
After scratching Abbotts and the Dowd's off the list, I came across the more likely possibility of what happened to the Tatler Handcuffs after they were given to W.W. Durbin by Bess Houdini; And Ted Heuber's missing IBM Museum is the key. Let's look at the evidence in chronological order.



[McCord Museum Collection]

May 17, 1933:

- Thanks to the 1933 photo of the Tatler Cuffs and corresponding article, we know that **the cuffs were in Pittsburgh at the home of Theodore H. Heuber, 241 Atwood Street.**
- McCaffrey (national vice president of the Society of American Magicians) was helping with arrangements for **the national convention of the International Brotherhood of Magicians to be held at Beaver Falls in June.**



[Askalexander.Org]

June 1933:

Theodore H Heuber (1894-1976; IBM Secretary 1933-1939) displays cuffs at convention in Beaver Falls.

March 1934 Linking Ring:

*The I.B.M. Museum I [Ted Heuber] started is developing into a big thing, and plenty interesting, as all the officials are enthusiastic about it. There will be a booth at the convention for the Museum, and all the articles of the old masters and the greats will be on display. I am asking every member to try and contribute to it in the way of old apparatus of the old masters that you might have. You may loan it to me or donate it to the museum giving a story of each article and it will be displayed with a card carrying the name of the donor. Wands, Lithos, or apparatus is what we want, just send to me at my above address, get busy at once, and let's make this a real feature of the Convention. **At Beaver Falls last year [June 1933] we had just a few things [Tatler Cuffs] displayed and it caused so much interest that I started the idea of a permanent museum, which will be taken to all Convention cities for publicity purposes from now on. Please get your articles in to me at once.***



[Joe Notaro Collection]

1934-1937:

- The first Convention city was Batavia NY (1934), followed by Lima OH (1935), Batavia NY (1936) and High Point NC (1937).
- During this time, Ted would continue to acquire additional items for the museum, thru 1939.
- 1937 appears to be last mention of the museum appearing at a convention.

Apr 1937 Linking Ring:

THE I.B.M. MUSEUM

It is with pleasure that we inform the Brotherhood that the I.B.M Museum in charge of Sec. Heuber will positively be on display at High Point.

*We are constantly adding to the most wonderful array of magical relics, the costume wore by Herrmann the Great has been graciously donated to the collection by Mrs. Durbin. **The Houdini Handcuffs will be on exhibition**, as well as will the Kellar rope. There are hundreds of magical objects and pieces of apparatus of great interest to all magicians.*

July 1937 Linking Ring:

The I.B.M. Museum under the care of Secretary Ted Heuber was housed in the store with the dealers, this display was of great interest and Ted in his spare time could be found explaining just what this or that was all about. Here was to be viewed Herman Trunk, his costume, and picture, many exhibits were loaned by Mrs. Durbin for the occasion, these were carried to and from High

Point by Vice President Cecil. **Houdini cuffs**, Kellar rope, old apparatus, some of which Ted himself has been unable to coordinate. The string of wands are an interesting exhibit in themselves. Much interest was displayed in the posters of Kellar, altogether a most educational and entertaining feature of the convention.

May 1955, Linking Ring:

*In a letter Billy Russell of Batavia, N.Y. writes: "In the early days of the IBM, we who are old-timers now, worked very hard to build up an International Museum of Magic. We secured many fine pieces used by the Old Masters, including the Escape Trunk used by Hermann the Great, tables used by Harry Kellar, **the famous handcuffs that were made in England to hold Houdini**, etc. (And from what I have been told that "etc" includes a lot more valuable pieces, A.L.B.) We collected many fine and valuable pieces.*

"The museum was last shown at the Batavia, N.Y. IBM Convention in 1934[?], and was under the care of Ted Heuber of Pittsburgh. I understand all these things are in storage some place in Pittsburgh and I suggest that your IBM Convention Committee get busy and find them and display them at the coming convention. It would be a big drawing card and create a lot of interest.

"It is a shame to have all this old apparatus lost as it is about all that is left to show the rising generation what old-timers used. Please bring this matter to the attention of your committee and let us see a good old Museum at the coming convention."

The above is Billy Russell's letter which I am sure echos the thoughts of many oldtimers in the IBM. Unfortunately, it is apparent that the IBM did not keep a record of the apparatus donated and no one seems to know what became of it. The Board of Trustees investigated this superficially a few years ago and former International Secretary Ted Heuber stated at that time that he only had a few pieces that were given to him for his personal use. How many old-timers recall, as Billy has, just what pieces were donated and by whom? Let me know. Maybe we can post a list of what was in the Museum, even if we can't exhibit it.

Billy continues: "I suggest that a truck—or a good rebuilt Greyhound bus would do it—build it into a museum to take around the country to schools and conventions and charge to see the museum. It would soon pay for itself and would do a lot for magic.

"Please see that something is done to find this collection and restore it to the IBM, who own it all. Hope to attend the Pittsburgh Convention—now 76 years old and can't go as fast as I once could. Billy Russell IBM No. 301."

Genii Jun 1955:

*Bob Nelson is fostering a plan to build a permanent Shrine to the Goddess of Magic in Kenton, Ohio, to house relics, memorabilia, etc., of our art. Seems a little late when we had a chance to buy Durbin's old Egyptian Hall once and passed it up . . . and **a lot of people who donated items to the I.B.M., Museum, with Ted Heuber as Curator, are asking what happened to them and why Ted doesn't produce them at the Conventions.** Pittsburg would be an ideal spot to see them show up again. I know Billy Russell is plenty burned up since he gave some of his choice items*

(Kellar's wand, etc.), to the collection in good faith, and he want them back if they are just gathering dust in somebody's attic. See what you can do, Pittsburgh.

Linking Ring May 1958:

IBM MUSEUM MISSING

In the March 1936 issue of The Linking Ring, page 10, under Convention Notes about the IBM gathering in Batavia, N.Y., is this paragraph:

"Theo H. Heuber, originator, collector and keeper of the IBM museum, has done wonderful work in collecting and preserving many choice relics of old time magic. A large room has been set aside for the Musuem display at Batavia. Magicians having rare magical curiosities will do well to donate them to the Musuem where they will be cared for and preserved for future generations. If you have relics that you do not care to part with please bring them to the Convention for the three day display."

*Here's an opportunity for the folks who want to go museum hunting to **form a posse and maybe they could unearth the treasures? After they are discovered? Then they can figure out what to do with them.***

So the last known whereabouts of the Tatler Cuffs was in Pittsburgh. It's time to form a posse and unearth them.

Addendum:

The London Express, **March 18, 1904** reported:

***and after two and half minutes** "click, click, click" was heard. The committee thought that Houdini had freed himself, but it was only the beginning of the end, for the Handcuff King had only broken free from the first lock. There were twenty others to conquer before he could get his hands free.*

So, I personally believe, Houdini engineered the entire challenge, was first out of the Tatler Cuffs in two and half minutes, and the rest was showmanship. After the challenge, the Tatler Cuff vanishes [later given to Durbin] and the unbeatable David Copperfield Cuff appears [later found in a safe].

The End