

An Unrecorded Series of Skit Notes – William Seville and his Striking Likenesses

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Introduction

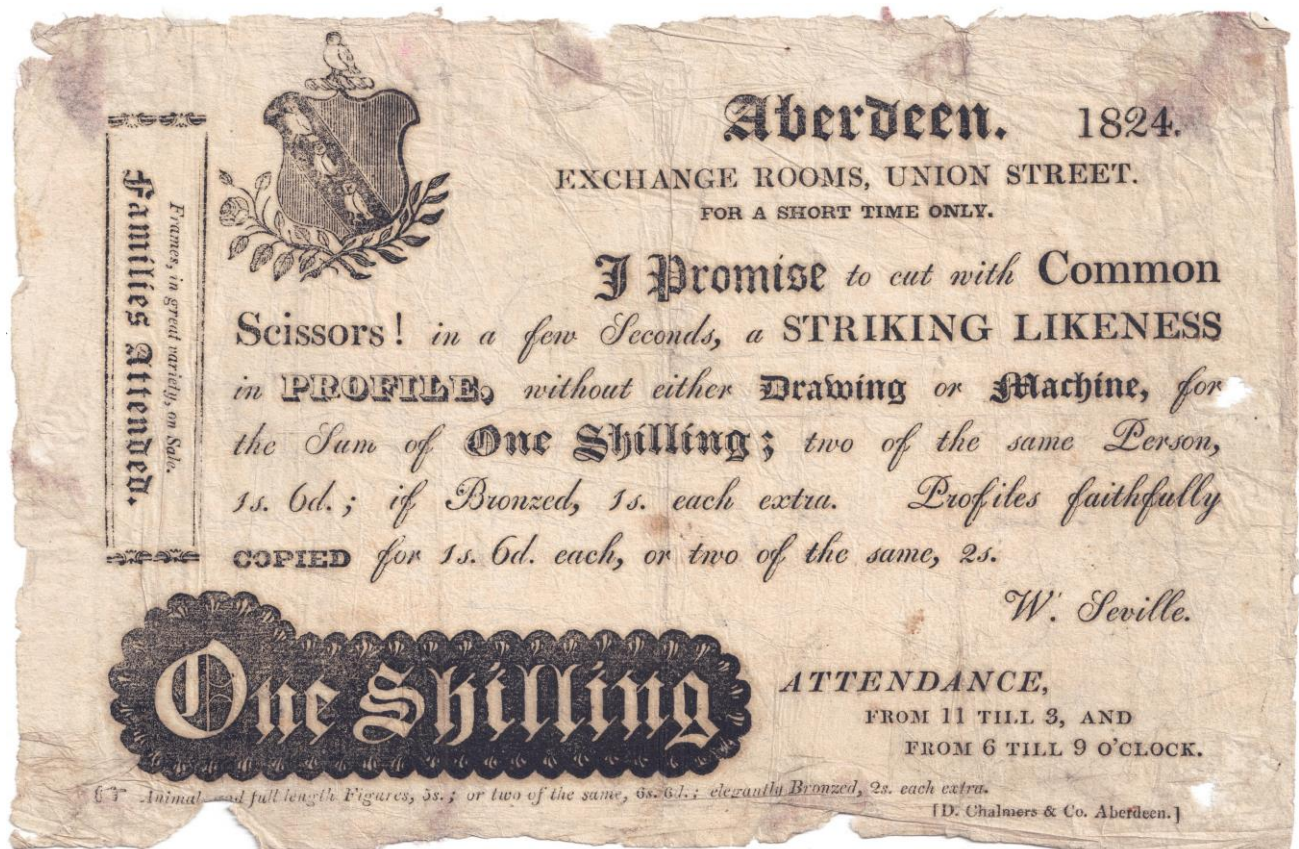
Skit notes are items resembling banknotes but were never intended to be used as money. The most well-known of these is the “anti-hanging” note produced by George Cruikshank in 1818, which was reprinted by the Bankers’ Magazine in the 1840s. Skit notes were printed for various reasons ranging from Cruikshank’s political statement showing how easy it was to create a very deceptive note, to humour and entertainment where many notes have spurious names and addresses, to small handbills that look like banknotes but are advertising events and businesses.

Not strictly banknotes, a section at the back of Roger Outing’s excellent catalogue of provincial banknotes of England and Wales, lists 91 such skit notes⁽¹⁾. The most recent book on Scottish banknotes has a chapter on Private Non-Bank Issues which covers skit notes as well as merchant notes, advertising notes etc etc. There are about 20 skit notes listed⁽²⁾.

The recent acquisition of a skit note that is not catalogued, and the research into its issuer that suggests that several others likely exist, has prompted this note for the Blog.

The Skit Note

The note shown below at 90% is 190×126mm and printed on one side on un-watermarked paper. This is without doubt the thinnest paper I have seen on a printed note. It is very fragile, tissue thin, and weighing about 0.2g makes the paper weight 8.4gsm in modern units. Weighing the note is much easier said than done.



There are no prizes for guessing why this note was of interest to the author! However, unlike coins and tokens, a note has a much larger area to contain information. Thus, assuming there is no subterfuge on the part of the issuer, the who, where, when and why are already answered on the note. W. Seville is in Aberdeen in 1824 and

is advertising his business of cutting out by hand, profile silhouettes in paper or card. The statement ‘for a short time only’ suggests this is a temporary address. So with such a good starting point, what else can be uncovered?

Profiles of the Past

And so to Google, and a search for ‘Seville silhouette cutter’. A fraction of a second later and a webpage with the title ‘Seville, W. and Son’⁽³⁾ is found amongst the 349 artists catalogued in ‘Profiles of the Past – 250 Years of British Portrait Silhouette History’⁽⁴⁾.

What follows is a very brief summary of the website entry last updated 6 February 2023 by Brian Wellings. The methods used to trace Seville, his life, family and business activities are exactly the same as those used for researching tokens, viz: genealogical records, trade directories, census records and the newspaper archives that have been digitised in recent years.

The entry for Seville also has links to full extracts from *British Silhouette Artists and their Work 1760-1860*, by Sue McKechnie, a 1978 publication that, even today, is recognised as the silhouette ‘bible’⁽⁵⁾.

William Seville was born in 1797 and by 1820 he was a schoolmaster in Salford. He married in 1820 and also began a parallel career as a commercial profilist. Newspaper advertisements can be used to trace his tours of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. By the 1850s he had become a photographer and his last commercial appearance can be found as a Photographic Artist in Whites Derby Directory of 1857. By the 1861 census he is described as a retired artist, living with his son, Frederick William Seville and his family in Shrewsbury. William died sometime between April and June 1866.

Frederick William Seville was born in 1825 and was the second son of William and Frances Seville (née Bethell). He worked with his father until at least 1845. The 1861 Census records him as a ‘Photographer and Tobacconist’. Following the death of his father in 1866, he moves with his family to Shrewsbury, where the census from 1871-1891 list him as an artist and photographer and the Kelly’s directories of 1891 and 1895 list him as an artist. He produced many watercolours of the Shrewsbury area. He died in Shrewsbury sometime between January and March 1899.

Also on the ‘Profiles of the Past’ website, as well as several profiles made by William Seville and the maker’s labels attached to the reverses and frames, is another handbill or skit note, as shown below⁽⁶⁾.



Whilst the 'Profiles of the Past' website mentions that William Seville was at various locations around Britain from the 1820s to 1850s, there are no specific details. The existence of two skit notes advertising his services at Aberdeen in 1824 and Dundee in 1825, suggests that this was one of his methods for advertising his business and operating address as he made the tour.

Other Possible Hand-Bills or Skit Notes.

It is highly likely that such handbills, taking the form of what we now call skit notes, were produced for each of his venues. To identify the addresses and dates of residence, searches have been made of the British Newspaper Archives⁽⁷⁾ to reveal the following possibilities.

The adverts and editorial are all very similar from paper to paper and only a selection will be reproduced here.

Working from his own academy at **29 Bury Street, Salford**

Manchester Mercury 16 **September 1823** p4 col4

Manchester Mercury 16 September 1823 p1 col1

Manchester Guardian Saturday 20 September 1823 p1 col1

Manchester Mercury Tuesday 30 September 1823 p4 col3

Arrival in Lancaster, working at the **Large room of Mr Hartley's, adjoining the Merchant Coffee Rooms Market Street, Lancaster**

Lancaster Gazette Saturday 3 **January 1824** p3 col2

We understand that Mr. Wm. Seville, from Manchester, intends to visit this town, This inimitable artist has met with wonderful success in the towns of Manchester and Bolton, in cutting profiles on paper, with common scissors, in a few minutes; and his likenesses are so striking that at a single glance the individual can be recognized. He has met with such great patronage in this ingenious art, as to induce him to extend his visit to other towns, and we have no doubt he will meet with that encouragement in this town which he has met with at other places.

Lancaster Gazette - Saturday 10 January 1824 p3 col1

FOR A SHORT TIME ONLY.
STRIKING

LIKENESSES

CUT with COMMON SCISSORS in a few seconds, without either Drawing, or Machine, or any other aid, by

W. SEVILLE

At a LARGE ROOM of Mrs. Hartley's, adjoining the Merchants Coffee-Room, Market-street, Lancaster.—Attendance from eleven till one, from three till five, and from six till nine.
FLAMES, in great variety, on sale.
N. B. Families attended.
A Fire is regularly kept in the room.

Lancaster Gazette - Saturday 10 January 1824 p3 col2

The stay in Lancaster was further advertised using a handbill with as shown below⁽⁸⁾.

Lancaster, **1824.**

AT A LARGE ROOM ADJOINING THE MERCHANT'S COFFEE ROOM,
MARKET STREET.

Striking Likenesses cut with common *SCISSORS!*
in a few seconds, without either *Drawing*, or *Machine*, or any other aid, but by a mere
glance of the *EYE!!* by **MR. SEVILLE.** Full length *Figures, Animals,*
&c. &c. cut in any attitude. Profiles faithfully copied. Plain *Bust* 1s. Two
of the same *Person* 1s. 6d. Elegantly *Bronzed* 1s. each extra. **Frames** in great
variety on Sale.

Attendance
From 11 till 1, from 3 till 5,
and from 6 till 9 o'Clock.

ONE SHILLING *Families attended.*

Full length 5s. or 2 of the same 6s. 6d.

Lancaster Gazette Saturday 17 January 1824 p2 col4

LAST WEEK

STRIKING LIKENESSES
CUT with COMMON SCISSORS in a few
seconds, without either *Drawing*, or *Machine*, or
any other aid, by

W. SEVILLE

At a LARGE ROOM of Mrs. Hartley's, adjoining
the Merchants Coffee-Room, Market-street, Lan-
caster.—Attendance from eleven till one, from
three till five, and from six till nine.
FRAMES, in great variety, on sale.
N. B. Families attended.
A Fire is regularly kept in the room.

Announces move to Kendal

Lancaster Gazette Saturday 17 January 1824 p3 col2

We are glad to find that Mr. Seville has re-
ceived so much encouragement in this town as
to induce him to stay another week. We have
seen numerous specimens of his likenesses,
and have no hesitation in saying, that they are
superior to any thing of the kind we ever saw,
being cut with common *scissors*, without either
drawing or any other *aid* than a mere glance
of the *EYE*. KENDAL we understand is the
next place he will visit, and we would recom-
mend our friends who have not visited him to
make hty while the sun shines.—For hours of
attendance, &c. see advertisement.

Arrival in Kendal, working at **Mrs Brooks, The White Hart Inn, Highgate, Kendal.**
Westmorland Gazette Saturday 31 **January 1824** p3 col1.
Westmorland Gazette Saturday 31 January 1824 p2 col1.

FOR ONE FORTNIGHT ONLY.

IN THE LARGE ROOM,
At Mrs. Brooks's, the White Hart Inn,
HIGHGATE, KENDAL,
STRIKING

LIKENESSES

CUT WITH COMMON SCISSORS!

In a few seconds, without either Drawing, or Machine, or any other aid, but by a mere glance of the **EYE!!**

BY MR.

SEVILLE

Full length Figures, Animals, &c. &c. cut in any attitude. Plain Bust 1s. Two of the same Person 1s. 6d. Elegantly Bronzed 1s each extra.
FRAMES in great variety on Sale.
PROFILES faithfully copied - s. 6d. each, or two of the same 2s. Full length 5s., or two of the same 6s. 6d.
Families attended.
Attendance, from 11 to 1, from 3 till 5, and from 6 till 9 o'clock,

The 1824 tour continues across the north of England and into Scotland.

Arrival in Durham, working at **Mr Mason's, New Elvet, Durham.**
Durham County Advertiser Saturday 29 **May 1824** p3 col3.
Durham County Advertiser - Saturday 05 June 1824 p2 col3.
Durham County Advertiser - Saturday 05 June 1824 p2 col4.
Durham County Advertiser Saturday 19 June 1824 p3 col3

Announces move to Sunderland, working at **Mr Friends, High Street, Bishopwearmouth.**
Durham Chronicle Saturday 26 **June 1824** p2 col3
Durham Chronicle Saturday 26 June 1824 p3 col3
Durham Chronicle Saturday 26 June 1824 p4 col2
Durham Chronicle Saturday 26 June 1824 p1 col1

Next appearance at **Mrs Armstrong's, near the Post Office, North Shields.**
Newcastle Courant - Saturday 7 **August 1824** p1 col3

Then working from the **Exchange Rooms Aberdeen**
Aberdeen Press and Journal Wednesday 17 **November 1824** p2

Then working from **Mr Wilson's Room, Church Street, Inverness**
Inverness Courier Thursday 16 **December 1824** p1

Several months pass before William Seville is found again in Scotland in June 1825

Then to the **High Street, Cupar**

Fife Herald Thursday 16 **June 1825** p3 col2.

MR SEVILLE'S PROFILES.—As you pass out of the Bonnygate into the High-Street of Cupar, you will observe a somewhat narrow door, leading into the corner shop. Enter if you please, and be nothing alarmed, for this at present is the fashionable forenoon lounge of Cupar. On the one side, and immediately upon your left hand as you enter from the Bonnygate, you will observe a figure seated in a chair, *a la profile*, chin erect, countenance fixed, and whole person, as it were, wedged into immobility. There at right angles, with the sitter's vision, will you perceive a smart genteel-looking personage, with a pair of scissors on his fingers, clipping away, and edging round, with much ease and velocity, a piece of double paper, blackened upon one side, and unfolding itself, even whilst you are speculating on the meaning of what you see, into the similitude of a human countenance. Behind your back, and along a green curtained wall you will perceive the forms, and semblances of "things that are"—the human face divine of various sorts and sizes, but all of one black or brown copper coloured expression. Look a little more narrowly into the group, and it is ten to one that you discover the profile of a friend, the stoop, strut, or erect position, of one with whom you are every day conversant, or along side of whom you are now actually standing. The ladies and gentlemen, the *laddies* and *misses*, thicken in around you, and your gentleman of the scissors and paper, makes way for them all in their turn, on this same chair of state, where motion is inadmissible, and from which even speech and smiles are banished. Ere you can say "It is past *twelve*, the council will be met," you are yourself whipt into this same mysterious position, your nose, brow, and chin, are made to face the window in one continued steady outline, and hack, hack, snap, snap, go the scissors, and there you are, brought as out of a turning-loom, the very identical bend in your nose, and peak of your chin, and protruding of your lip,—in short, it is your own dear, or rather *cheap* profile, being all for a shilling, done in less than no time, and without the help of any machine whatever, save a pair of very ordinary seeming scissors, by your very obedient and much obliged humble servant, **SEVILLE, Esq.**, whose hand-bills are almost as thin and promising as a bank of England £20 note.

This last line is a direct reference to William Seville's handbills and their similarity to Bank of England notes – "whose hand-bills are almost as thin and promising as a Bank of England £20 note."

The tour continues to the **Commercial Hall, High Street, Perth.**

Perthshire Courier Thursday 15 **September 1825** p3 col1

There is then a gap that searches haven't been able to fill until he appears in Ireland in 1830.

Mr. Doyles, 57 High Street Newry

Newry Telegraph - Tuesday 23 **March 1830** p3 col3

Then returning to England and **12 Cheapside Preston**
Preston Chronicle - Saturday 08 **September 1832** p3 col3.
Preston Chronicle - Saturday 22 September 1832 p3 col1.

Then there is a nine-year gap before reappearing in Ireland and **Mr Hindes, Main Street, Enniskillen.**
Enniskillen Chronicle and Erne Packet - Thursday 30 **September 1841**, p2 col4.
And on p3 col2.

And a year later at **Mr Mitchell's, Saddler at Monagham**
Northern Standard - Saturday 10 **September 1842**, p3 col3



ONLY A FEW DAYS LONGER, AT No. 43, CHEAPSIDE.
AN EXACT LIKENESS FOR 6D., BRONZED, 1S. 6D.

23

Profiles taken in the Evening equally as well as by day-light.
FAMILIES ATTENDED WITHOUT ANY EXTRA CHARGE.

BONNY MIKE.

FULL Length Figures, Family Groups, Dogs, &c., taken in any attitude by Mr. SEVILLE, from Manchester, who has taken so many thousands of Likenesses, in Bolton, Lancaster, Edinburgh, &c.
Coloured Profiles, 5s. each.

(Note that this is a typesetter's attempt to copy a Seville silhouette)

Then a short visit to Wales - **Opposite Westgate Hotel Newport, Monmouth.**
Working with his son, Monmouthshire Merlin - Saturday 7 **January 1843** p2 col1

And then back to Ireland – **43 Lower Sackville Street, Dublin.**
The Freeman's Journal (Dublin) Tuesday 7 **February 1843** p1 col3. Note the reduced prices.

EXTRAORDINARY TALENT.

ONLY for a Few Days longer at 43, **LOWER SACKVILLE-STREET.** The most Perfect and Striking **LIKENESSES** Cut with Scissors in A Few Seconds, without either drawing or machine, by Mr. **SEVILLE** and SON, of Manchester.

AN EXACT LIKENESS for 6d., or Two of the same Par-
son, 9d., beautifully Bronzed, 2s. each. Full Length
Figures, bronzed, 3s., or with an extra finish, 4s. each.
Children's full length Likenesses only 2s. 6d. each.

Specimens of full length Likenesses, Family Groups, may
be seen at the Artist's Rooms.

And then to **Mr Richard Carty's at Wexford**

Wexford Independent - Wednesday 29 **March 1843** p3 col4.

Then to Tipperary at **Miss Hearnese, Opposite Sutherland's Hotel, Clonmel**

Tipperary Free Press - Wednesday 21 **June 1843**, p3 col3.

Then at **Mr Smith's, Queen Street, Wolverhampton.**

Wolverhampton Chronicle and Staffordshire Advertiser - Wednesday 30 **July 1845** p2 col1

Then at **42 Queen Street, Derby.**

Derby Mercury - Wednesday 20 **March 1850**, p2 col5.

Then to **37 Upper Row, Leeds, near the Corn Exchange.**

Leeds Intelligencer - Saturday 19 **October 1850**, p1 col4.

Conclusions

William Seville was a prolific and highly skilled commercial profelist and a hand-bill in the form of a skit note issued in Aberdeen in 1824 has led to a search for his activities. This search has uncovered two further skit notes - one issued at Lancaster in 1824 and another at Dundee in 1825. Many newspaper advertisements have been found that can be used to track his journeys around Britain from 1823 to 1850. He would take up residence at a central address in a town for just a few weeks, before moving to the next town and a new pool of customers.

A contemporary reference to his handbills having the appearance of Bank of England notes has also been found (June 1825).

Finding one note might be considered luck, two notes might be considered a coincidence, but three is certainly pointing towards a series. It would be a brave person that would bet against similar notes appearing from the other nineteen addresses listed above. Interestingly, as Seville's business relied totally on local advertising, and his stay in Dundee has not yet been found in the newspapers, this is likely due to gaps in the newspaper archives, so there may be yet more addresses to be discovered.

It would seem appropriate to finish this article with a piece of Seville's work . . . though a scan of a greyscale print in a 1978 book^(3, 5) is unlikely to do justice to the original.



“Mrs Stevenson” cut silhouette, pencilled in gold, (254×178mm, shown approximately 30%) inscribed on the reverse “Taken at Shrewsbury, January 1845, by W. Seville.”

References and Acknowledgements

- (1) R. Outing. *The Standard Catalogue of the Provincial Banknotes of England and Wales*. 2010. Section 4, pp409-415.
- (2) J. Callaway and D. Murphy. *Paper Money of Scotland*. 2018.
- (3) <http://www.profilesofthepast.org.uk/artist/seville-w-and-son>
- (4) <http://www.profilesofthepast.org.uk/>
- (5) S. McKechnie. *British Silhouette Artists and their Work 1760-1860*. 1978. With over 800 pages and 1600 images this looks rather interesting and may have numismatic connections.
- (6) <http://www.profilesofthepast.org.uk/mckechnie/seville-w-and-son-mckechnie-section-1> entry 585.
- (7) <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- (8) This image can be found on several internet sites, but the original was published in Emily Nevill Jackson. *History of Silhouettes*. 1911.

Thanks to Jonathan Callaway for finding the Lancaster handbill in Nevill Jackson and also to David Condron for finding several Irish addresses that my searches had missed. Thanks also to the British Library via the British Newspaper Archive for the newspaper excerpts.

