

REVIEW:

EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE

Mervyn Heard

Stephen Herbert (ed.)

Eadweard Muybridge: The Kingston Museum Bequest

Hastings, East Sussex: The Projection Box, 2004

159pp, ill. Hardback, ISBN 1 903000 07 6

£35.00 (UK) or \$72.00 (USA), including postage, from the publisher at 12 High Street, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 3EY, UK. For the cost including postage to other destinations please contact the publisher.

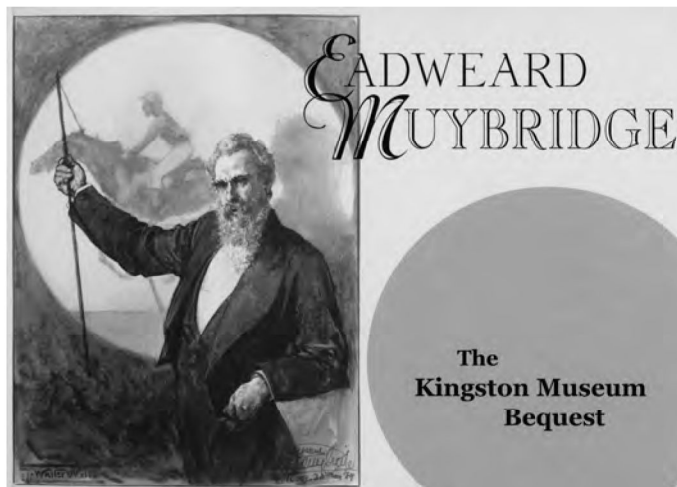
THE LATEST PUBLICATION from The Projection Box catalogues in meticulous detail the extent of Eadweard Muybridge's bequest to the people of Kingston upon Thames, the town of his birth. Although best known for his experiments in deconstructing the nature of animal locomotion, this book reveals the full extent of Muybridge's photographic activities and general flair for invention.

Born Edward James Mugeridge in 1830, Eadweard Muybridge, as he would choose to become, emigrated in his early twenties to New York, where he began a career as a bookseller. It was not until his mid-thirties that he began to show an interest in photography, establishing a studio in San Francisco. From there he travelled with his camera to various photogenic corners of North America, producing scenic views of areas of natural beauty such as Yosemite and Alaska. Adventurous in other ways, he also produced at least two versions of a 360-degree panorama of San Francisco, setting up his equipment on the tower of the Mark Hopkins mansion on California Street Hill, or 'Nob Hill' as it was more familiarly known. Muybridge's panorama of 1878 is reprinted in this publication, with a fascinating essay by Paul Hill on the development of the project and the social history of this vibrant new city.

However, it was some six years prior to this that Muybridge became drawn into a heated debate over animal locomotion, carrying out his famous sequential camera experiments with a galloping horse at the Sacramento racetrack to try and establish the exact nature of equestrian footfall. The next few years were spent in other pursuits, including a photographic assignment in Panama and the slaying of his wife's lover, a crime of which he was acquitted. In 1878 he resumed his experiments in animal locomotion, this time in earnest, seeking to establish various patents for special sequence camera shutters and publishing articles on his findings in both the *Scientific American* and *La Nature*. A year later he converted his sequence photographs into painted images as the basis for his latest invention, the 'Zoogyroscope', later renamed the 'Zoopraxiscope'.

This projection device was to command Muybridge's attention for over a decade, in both its development and exhibition, and naturally much of this book is given over to his efforts to perfect the mechanism and convince others of its merits. Many of the painted Zoopraxiscope discs from the period 1893-4 are reprinted within the pages of the book, in full colour. There are 71 known surviving discs, 67 of which are held by the Kingston Museum.

During the period from 1884 to 1886, by when he was based at the University of Pennsylvania, Muybridge produced an estimated 20,000 sequential photographs of athletes, animals and people engaged in simple everyday movements – albeit, in many cases, *au naturel*. Herbert states that 'of the 781 collotype prints published in



Muybridge's animal locomotion folios, Kingston Museum has 158'. These are introduced in the book by a short essay by Marta Braun, who has spent twenty years studying these images.

In the second half of the book we begin to learn more about Muybridge the man, through tales of his career as an exhibitor of the Zoopraxiscope and magic lantern. His surviving biennial lantern, which is also examined in some detail in the book, was manufactured by Ottway and Son of London. It has many special features, not least a detachable sliding lens panel replacing the normal tube system.

In addition to those items which Muybridge intended to be saved for posterity, Stephen Herbert, editor turned archaeologist, details other newly discovered finds in the form of glass plates, which were unearthed (quite literally) during his own researches in the back garden of the house in Kingston where Muybridge died.

Herbert describes this book as a 'basic overview of the collection', which also encompasses private notebooks, scrapbooks, monographs and ephemera, intimating that with so large a resource there is much more work to be done. But that is to perhaps suggest that this book deals with its subject in a superficial way, which is certainly not the case. What it does is to concentrate on the fundamental aspects of Muybridge's work and to do so thoroughly.

Another great merit of the book is the prolific use of images, both Muybridge's own and the editor's additions. This is very much a story told in pictures, emphasising and reflecting the preoccupations and obsessions of its subject.

I also commend the way that Stephen Herbert has included examples of contemporary arts-based activities – a play; a school project – inspired by Muybridge's work. In so doing he demonstrates the worth of such collections, not just to historians and academics, but to the communities in which they reside. All in all this is a beautifully conceived and produced piece of work, which combines lucid introductions and essays with a comprehensive selection of images and catalogue listings.

Mervyn HEARD is a well-known magic lantern performer and scholar, and editor of the Magic Lantern Society *Newsletter*. He was also a co-editor of and contributor to the Society's recent publication, *Realms of Light*.

