

# BITS AND PIECES

## ANOTHER BULL'S-EYE!

Further to the articles by Deac Rossell and John Barnes in previous issues of *NMLJ* (Vol. 9, Nos 5 and 6), John Taylor writes:



1. John Taylor's bull's-eye lantern (note the chimney pattern and door handle)

**MY LANTERN** (Fig. 1) seems different from all the others! We have not been given details of the illuminants for the others, but mine has an adjustable candle holder (Fig. 2) held in place by 'runners' similar to the usual ones holding lighting trays, but with a narrower gauge (does anyone know when these originated?). A wire to adjust the position of the holder emerges through the front via a small hole. Whilst this gives easy fore-and-aft adjustment, there is no way of compensating for the candle burning down. This seems a significant drawback compared to an oil lamp. The 'pediment' of the lantern forms a complete chamber with both upper and lower floors pierced for ventilation, and the ball feet

facilitate the airflow. I feel this is all original and not a conversion. The black paint on mine looks original – the rust much later. Do any of the other lanterns have feet? John Barnes's own photo of lantern No. 5 (Vol. 9, No. 6, p.94) shows no feet and, curiously, the rear of the

2. Candle holder and runners in John Taylor's lantern



## LANTERN MEMORIES – THE CINEMA LANTERN IN WARTIME

This was my personal experience of the lantern in the West End cinema, Birmingham, from 1943 to 1944, and the Hippodrome Theatre, Birmingham, from 1944 until I was called up into the RAF.

The lantern boy, together with the organist, was responsible for entertaining the audience while the projectionist had a break. I was provided with a big box of slides bearing song lyrics and had to keep on my toes to recognise the opening bars of a song and get the right words up. The other part of the interval was of course the advertising slides. My first job at the start of the interval was to close the curtains on the end of the film, and then open them just far enough to reveal the square screen and frame it nicely. Fortunately, the curtains were operated by an electric motor with a switch in my projection box. The main 'house' curtains were operated manually from the side of the stage.

One ephemeral type of slide was the one you made to meet emergencies: we had boxes of plain glass slides coated in matt white paint, and little scrapers or steel pen nibs, with which you wrote, as tidily as you could, such messages to the audience as 'Air Raid Warning' and 'All Clear'. I still have the slide which mother made

pediment appears to slope slightly too.

Like Martin Gilbert's example (Vol. 9, No.6, cover) mine has the 'over and down' chimney, though this is different in that the bends are not as tight, and it terminates with two indented rings, which I can only guess were cosmetic and surely added to the cost. Just as there are numerous versions of the bull's-eye lantern, so there seem to be many patterns of 'phantasmagoria' chimney, with angles varying quite considerably with the 'over and down' as well as the 'dog-leg' type. Does each difference indicate a different manufacturer? I'm not convinced.

My lantern has a door handle of bent wire. The 1908 Riley/Wrench catalogue illustrates (pp. 14-15) lanterns with what looks like the same bent-wire door handle. It seems remarkable that this design handle lasted nearly a hundred years.

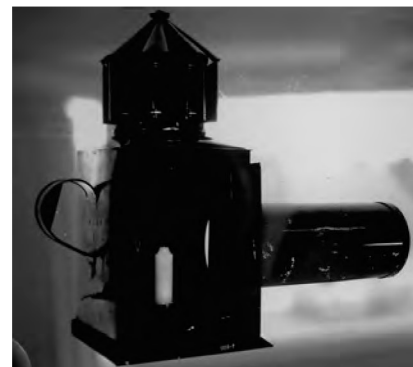
The *Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern* mentions Edward Wrench starting a business as optician in 1816. This date is very close to 'circa 1810' suggested by John Barnes for these lanterns. In those days 'Optician' meant more than making spectacles: many traded in anything optical, e.g. telescopes, microscopes, magic lanterns, etc. So is Wrench a candidate for a maker of these lanterns? Did late 18th- and early 19th-century Continental lanterns use this design of handle? None of my Nuremberg toy lanterns does but I have no 'adult' ones to refer to.

So far I'm happy to think the bull's-eye design is English, but even though they all have differences I can't go along with a suggestion that they are all by different makers. How many lantern makers were there in England in 1790–1810 or thereabouts? We seem to know so little about makers as distinct from retailers in any period. Gloria Clifton's *Directory of British Scientific Instrument Makers 1550–1851* contains at least 15 entries mentioning lanterns that are not in the *Encyclopaedia*. Not all 15 were necessarily makers, as some are described as 'known to have sold' and/or 'instruments advertised' and neither term confirms manufacture.

Going through my old slides I found one specially made for me by the Science Museum, London, in 1981 (Fig. 3). It shows a bull's-eye lantern (do they still have it?) which was catalogued as 'late 18th century': it too had a candle as illuminant. The chimney appears to have seven or eight large columns and the lens tube looks much longer than usual. In recent times I've had doubts that the candle was correct in such a large lantern, considering that oil of one form or another had been used for centuries previously. Now I'm happier that both this lantern and mine are genuine.

To get much further we need more information. I hope other members will be able to supply details of further bull's-eye lanterns!

John Taylor



3. Bull's-eye lantern in the Science Museum collection (inventory no. 1916-7)

when I was at the Hippodrome. I came home very upset that I had dropped and broken the Cadbury's Chocolate slide, but handed her a blank which she lettered almost exactly like the original.

John Horton

## OUTDOOR LANTERN EXHIBITIONS

Lantern shows in the open air have always been something of a rarity, but the very novelty this implies has sometimes been turned to advantage by ambitious showpeople. Our cover illustration for this issue shows one such use by a Methodist clergyman, as described in the *Optical Lantern and Kinematograph Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (November 1906), p.20:

*Writing in the Primitive Methodist Leader, the Rev. Thomas Jackson, who conducted the lantern addresses on Cleethorpes Sands, which we illustrate, says: – 'Serious difficulties had to be grappled with in carrying out this item of my programme, but faith, that worked by the average business tact of a commercial traveller, overcame them all. Notwithstanding the unfavourable weather for the majority of the meetings, I was able to give addresses on nine*

evenings, and speak for an hour and a half each evening. The large numbers that gathered to see and hear were evidence of the interest these novel meetings excited. By means of these meetings, not only were our funds and the list of our subscribers increased, but many persons outside the membership of our church had their knowledge of what we are doing agreeably enlarged.'

Ninety minutes on a beach on the North Sea coast, in bad weather on an autumn evening, sounds like a true test of faith, and if his claim to have drawn and held a crowd for nine evenings can be believed (and who could doubt the word of a Methodist preacher?) the Reverend Jackson must have been a skilled showman indeed!

RC, with thanks to Lester Smith

#### SLIDES ACROSS THE OCEAN

In the internet age, international exchanges of images take place without so much as a thought. In the 1890s it was a more challenging logistical proposition to have one's pictures circulated for the appreciation of others, as this reference from the 1890 *International Annual of Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* (Vol. III, p.356) shows:

##### AN INTERNATIONAL INTERCHANGE OF LANTERN SLIDES

By F. C. Beach, New York

*The INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL is surely the proper medium to bring to notice an enlargement of the plan of the present American lantern slide interchange, as the title above given indicates. Steamers now ply so quickly between the two continents that there is no reason to prevent an international interchange of lantern slides between American and foreign countries. The idea I have to suggest is for several photographic societies in England to combine and send over to America each year, one or two hundred of their latest slides, having a list made out, with interesting facts added for each picture; this set then to go the rounds of the societies or clubs forming the American Interchange, and then to be returned to England, there to be redistributed among the contributing societies. An American box of slides would in the same way be sent to England and come back again.*

*The success of such an undertaking will depend on the proper men to look after it in each country. Interchanges could be made with France, Belgium, Austria, Germany and other countries, and would afford an almost unending variety of pictures.*

I trust the suggestion may receive the attention of some of the foreign Societies.

Supplied by Brian Widdowson

#### A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL

This account of an unfortunate evening spent in New York was found in *Harper's Weekly* of 24 April 1858. No doubt we can all recall similarly exciting shows – given by other people, of course:

*The American Geographical and Statistical Society is an institution which has recently advertised itself somewhat extensively in connection with a series of lectures and an exhibition of pictures. In common with others we received an invitation, issued by their 'Committee on Syrian Exploration', to attend a private exhibition of the illustrations to be used in these lectures, and in particular the pictures of Mr Edward Troye, the well-known artist, who has been an Eastern traveler, and has finished some elegant works while there. The invitation was well printed, and very definitely requested us to go to Niblo's Saloon, 'lower door on Broadway', on a Friday evening, March 26, at eight o'clock.*

*We accordingly presented ourselves at the door described at the time appointed and found it closed. A person connected with the theatre suggested to us an inquiry at the ticket-office, which we made, but received for reply that they knew nothing about it, and had told some forty persons the same story already. We pushed our inquiries, however, to the ticket-collector, and he passed us in the theatre entrance, whence, by a side-door, we made our way through passages familiar in concert days to the saloon, which we entered. Here all was darkness except behind a white screen which was stretched across the*

*stage for the purpose of receiving 'magic lantern' views. Some twenty or thirty ladies and gentlemen had found their way as we had to the room. Stumbling over stools and benches in the gloom, we at length found a seat, and waited the Society's proceedings.*

*Ten or fifteen minutes passed, and then some one began sprinkling the screen with water. An occasional profile was visible on it, cast by the dim light in the rear. Possibly these were profiles of the members of the Geographical and Statistical Society. If so, it was all we saw of them or their committee. At half past eight some one behind the screen tried his skill at making rabbits with his hands interlocked in an ingenious manner known to boys. It was well done – on the whole, successful. Next, an occasional view of a man with a syringe in his hand was thrown on the screen, and fresh showers of water were added. The effect on the dark air was not refreshing; on the contrary, rather chilling. At nine o'clock the spectrum of the magic lantern was thrown on the canvas, and tried by an operator – larger, smaller, more light, less light – for ten minutes. At 9.15 a view of a city, upside-down, was introduced, tried till the focal distance was satisfactory; then a view of some trees was let down over it (in the fashion of dissolving views), lifted, let down – lifted, let down; then both were withdrawn. Ten minutes later the city appeared, right side up, then wrong side up, then was withdrawn. Five minutes more, and the same city reappeared and disappeared. Five minutes more, and the same. Five more, and the same. By this time the experimenters seemed satisfied. There was a general shutting up of the shop and departure from behind the screen, and the invited audience, thus cavalierly left, could they have seen each others' faces, would doubtless have presented countenances of undisguised astonishment.*

*A self-organized committee of invited gentlemen now ascended the stage, and found a solitary individual in charge of the magic lantern. He was not a Geographer nor a Statistical gentleman, but our excellent friend Mr Starr, who manipulates the lantern once in a while for the public on his own account. Mr Starr was shocked at the invasion, and hastened to open the slide of his lantern, at which, for the first time, the invited guests saw who one another were, and recognized some of the most respectable gentlemen of the city. 'What are you here for?' demanded Mr. Starr. 'We were invited', was the reply. 'You have mistaken the evening', said Mr Starr. 'Read the invitation', said we. Whereupon he read it, and protested that he knew nothing about it; and as no one was present on behalf of the Society to explain or apologize, the company retired about ten o'clock, with no favorable anticipations from the lectures under such auspices.*

*As it afterward proved, they were not far wrong in these unfavorable opinions. The price of the tickets was fixed at a dollar a lecture, the audiences were slim, and the lecturers were choked off, when two-thirds through, to allow of the exhibition of pictures that might have amused children in a Sunday School, but which were a disgrace to a scientific body. Mr Troye's paintings were, indeed, exhibited, and are magnificent works of art in the room where he now shows them. But they might as well have been hung in the dome of the Exchange as on the front of the stage at Niblo's. And to finish the chapter, when Mr Troye came to remove his noble painting of The Syrian Plowman on the Plain of Damascus, a careless workman so managed his ladder as to fall absolutely through the canvas, and nearly ruin one of the finest works of art which this country possesses. We have given more space to this account than we intended, hoping that this is the last we shall hear of the American Geographical and Statistical Society, or its Committee on Syrian Exploration. Until they can manage a course of lectures in a New York saloon, it will hardly be safe to trust them with running a line from Jaffa to the Persian Gulf, or giving to the world any new information on Eastern Geography.*

Supplied by Stephen Bottomore