

THE SPRASON LANTERN

We illustrate this lantern from the Don Attle collection and reproduce the corresponding patent specification.

Don Attle points out that, while two of the three chief features of the patent – the spiral strip tube (replacing the usual draw tubes) for focussing and the movable frame at the front for adjusting the angle of the lantern – are present, his lantern lacks the third feature: the ability of the lens system to be turned back on itself thereby facilitating ‘... the packing of the same when not required’.

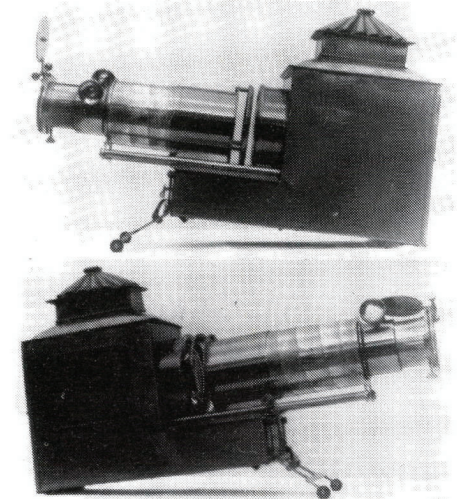
As the three *improvements* proposed by John Ambrose Sprason in this lantern are quite independent, it was clearly possible for any of them (or, indeed, any two of them) to be dropped when the lantern actually went into production – without the omission affecting the remaining modifications. While not overlooking the possibility that the lantern illustrated was a version which pre-dated the patent – made at a time when only two of the *improvements* had been undertaken, leaving the further refinement of the folding lens still to be added – it is clear that

the folding lens was a rather *unnecessary* proposal, which seems not, in fact, to achieve its stated object of making the lantern occupy ‘less compass than otherwise for transport or storage’. We can see this from the dotted portion of Fig. 1, which indicates the position of the lens when the spiral tube was compressed and the lens folded. Though the lantern is undoubtedly *shorter*, it is now also *taller* and, if not already the highest point on the lantern, the folded lens would almost certainly become so when – in the normal way of things – the chimney of the lantern was detached and stowed inside the body of the lantern for packing and transport. Indeed, when one remembers that in ordinary lanterns of this general type the lens unit is often unscrewed and – also in the normal way of things – similarly stowed inside the body of the lantern, which would reduce the length without adding to the height, it is clear that the folding lens proposal would be unlikely to succeed.


It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves, given this difference between *object* and *documentation* – the first we have encountered in our series of studies – that patents were granted solely on the basis of written applications (with or without accompanying drawings) and not the submission of completed examples of the objects involved. Many of the wonderful devices recorded in the patents undoubtedly never materialised – some because they were, in the event, incapable of manufacture, in spite of the bold claims made for them – while others failed to appear for any number of less dramatic reasons, and thus it would be a considerable error, as Brian Coe has pointed out,¹ to take ‘... the existence of a patent as proof of actual accomplishment (which it is not)’, though it can undoubtedly tell us something about the patentee’s ideas and hopes.

NOTE

¹ Foreword, p6, in John Barnes, *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England*, Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1976.



The lens flasher carries the engraved name *A. E. COE and SONS, NORWICH*. While this firm of photographers & opticians was founded in 1883 (and is still in existence today) it seems that they only adopted the style *and Sons* around 1930 – it first appeared in the firm’s *Kelly’s Directory* entry in 1931. If this information is reliable it places a surprisingly late date on the sale of the lantern – which one might otherwise have imagined being sold some twenty-five years earlier.

N^o 15,607  A.D. 1905

Date of Application, 31st July, 1905
Complete Specification Left, 31st Jan., 1906—Accepted, 31st May, 1906

PROVISIONAL SPECIFICATION.

Improvements in or connected with Optical Lanterns

I, JOHN AMBROSE SPRASON, of St. Georges Place, St. Georges, Birmingham, Optical Brassworker, do hereby declare the nature of this invention to be as follows:—

This invention relates to improvements in or connected with optical lanterns, and its object primarily is to provide an improved adjustable tube device; also improved means for carrying the lens; also improved means for adjustably raising or lowering the front part of the lantern.

The body of the lamp is of the ordinary shape, but the telescopic tube is made by a spiral strip whose edges overlap somewhat, so that it may be drawn out to a greater or lesser length. At the front part of this tube a door frame is secured to which is hinged the lens carrier, in such a manner that the latter (with the lens) may be raised or turned up out of the way when not required, and retained in either position by suitable stops or catches.

Again, at the forward end of the lantern I provide a frame or lever, or the like, which may be pivotedly carried from the abovesaid door frame, in such a manner that its outer end or part may adjustably rest upon the ground line upon which the lantern is placed. This adjustment is effected by means of a pawl and ratchet, or their like, by which the outer end of this adjustable frame may be held at any determined angle, that is to say, the lower the said frame is held the higher the front of the lantern is raised, and *vice versa*.

Dated this 28th day of July 1905.

CHARLES T. POWELL,
Agent for the Applicant.

COMPLETE SPECIFICATION.

Improvements in or connected with Optical Lanterns.

I, JOHN AMBROSE SPRASON, of St. Georges Place, St. Georges, Birmingham, Optical Brassworker, do hereby declare the nature of this invention and in what manner the same is to be performed, to be particularly described and ascertained in and by the following statement:—

This invention relates to improvements in or connected with optical lanterns, and its object primarily is to provide an improved adjustable tube device; also improved means for carrying the lens; also improved means for adjustably raising or lowering the front part of the lantern.

In order to more clearly explain this my invention I have appended herewith illustrative sheets of drawings upon which are figures and numbers of reference,

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similar numbers referring throughout the several views to the same thing or part, and in which:—

Fig. 1 is a general side view, and Fig. 2 an end view of a lantern constructed according to this my invention.

The body 10 of the lamp is of the ordinary shape, but the telescopic tube 11 is made by a spiral strip whose edges overlap somewhat, but fit closely together so that it may be drawn out to a greater or lesser length, as may be required. At the front part of this tube 11, a door frame 12 is secured, to which is hinged at 13 the lens carrier 14, in such a manner that the latter (with the lens) may be raised or turned up out of the way when not required, and the tube 11 closed as shown in dotted lines.

Such a contrivance facilitates very much the packing of the same in a less compass than otherwise, for transport or storage. When in the usable position, the lens carrier is secured by means of the turn catch 15 which is pivoted to the frame 12, and turns over on to the flange 16 of the carrier.

Again, at the forward end of the lantern I provide a frame or lever 17 or the like, which is pivotedly carried at 18 from the abovesaid door frame 12, in such a manner that its outer end or part 19 may adjustably rest upon the ground line upon which the lantern is placed. This adjustment is effected by means of a pawl 20 and ratchet 21, or their like, by which the outer end of this adjustable frame may be held at any determined angle, that is to say, the said pawl is pivoted at 22 to the lever 17, and its front end engages with the teeth of the ratchet under spring pressure; hence the lens end of the lantern may be readily adjustably raised or lowered accordingly. When not in use the lever 17 may be held up against the frame 12 and secured thereby by the turn button 23.

The telescopic tubes 24, and the other general parts except where mentioned are of the usual construction, and therefore not described.

Having now particularly described and ascertained the nature of this my said invention, and in what manner the same is to be performed, I declare that what I claim is:—

1. In optical lanterns, the extensible tube 11 consisting of a spiral strip constructed and arranged as set forth and shown.
2. In optical lanterns, as claimed in Claim 1, connecting the lens 14 to the adjustable frame 12 by means of the hinge joint 13 pivoted at the upper part of such frame, and so arranged that the said lens may be turned over on to the upper part of the extensible tube, as set forth and shown, and for the purposes specified.
3. In optical lanterns, the combination with the lantern having a forward frame such as 12, and rack 21, of the lever 17 pivoted to said frame, and pawl 20, all substantially as set forth and shown and for the purposes specified.

Dated this 30th day of January 1906.

CHARLES T. POWELL,
Agent for the Applicant.
Prudential Buildings, Corporation Street, Birmingham.

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