

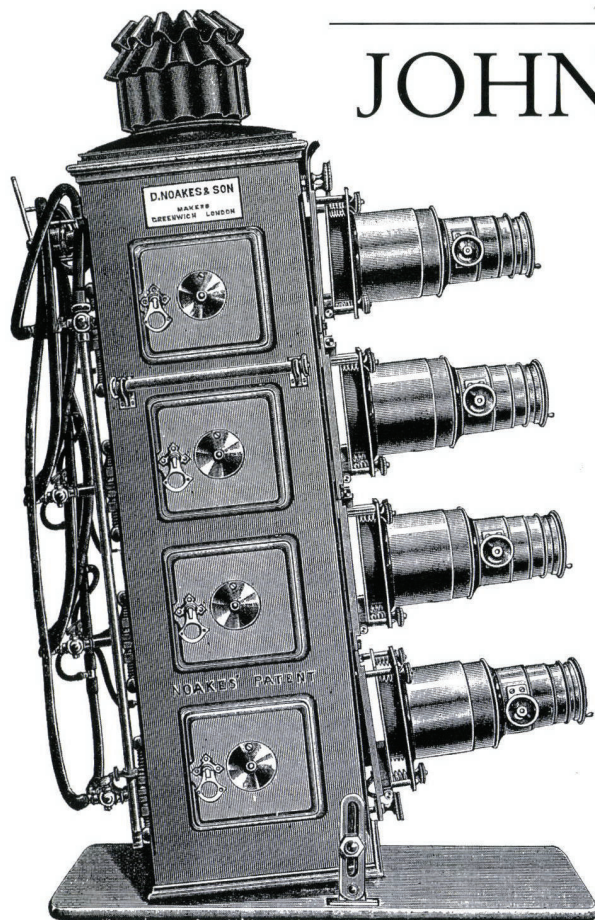


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JOHN BETJEMAN VISITS MR NOAKES



John Betjeman, the poet laureate who delighted in Victoriana of all sorts, contributed the following note to *The Spectator* dated 20 March 1956. After the death of G W Noakes, the quadruple 'Noakesoscope' described by Betjeman passed to a Mr Harold and thereafter to his son Alfred Harold. Thanks largely to the efforts of Sir Arthur Elton, film-maker, eccentric and enthusiast for all archaic technology, this majestic machine was shown in action at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith and at the National Film Theatre in 1961, since when it has passed from view. We have been unable to trace a photograph of the Noakesoscope. The impression, left, is therefore speculative, based on an illustration of the Noakes triennial.

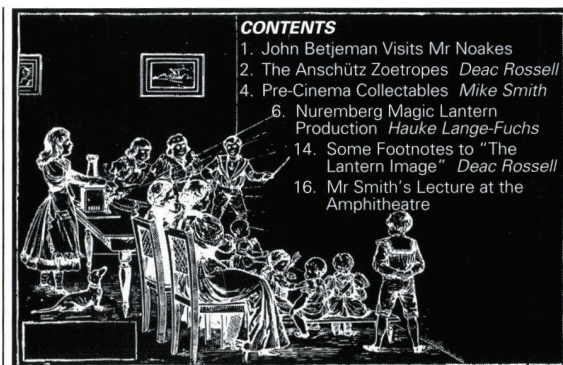
MR G W NOAKES is the official Magic Lantern Projectionist to the Albert Hall. He it is who erects the large screen at the back of the singers in Hiawatha and projects on to it the American-Indian setting. He lives at Southend-on-Sea, and Mr Robert Aickman, of the Inland Waterways Association, Sir Arthur Elton and I had the pleasure of visiting him last week at Southend to see the Noakesoscope. This was invented by his father, Mr D W Noakes, whose Dioramic Lectures delighted town hall and philosophical society audiences in the Nineties. The instrument consists of four projectors arranged vertically and focused on the same spot on the screen. Thus most magical effects are obtained, such as night falling on Leighton Buzzard, and to me the most beautiful of all was called 'Our Lodge'. First we saw a stucco Gothic lodge in colour by daylight. Night fell and light appeared in the windows. Then snowflakes shimmered down, waifs appeared in the garden and dawn revealed 'Our Lodge' and its surroundings all crisply white beneath a pale blue sky. Another optical effect was a channel packet leaving Dover on a rocking sea, with clippers sailing past in the background. Again the sun set, and as night fell the packet arrived at Calais, whose lamplit houses twinkled beneath the moon. Mr Noakes, who is now getting on in years, accompanied his slides with the patter which his father must have spoken before him. We were projected into a world as thrilling, remote and impressive as that which I find in my favourite London entertainment, Cinerama. But here we were in the past, and the colouring of the slides had an unearthly texture which cannot be

put into words. A good coloured magic lantern slide is as different from Technicolor, or any other of those processes, as is a coloured aquatint from a coloured photograph.

MORE SCOPE?

Coming out from Mr Noakes' bungalow into the windy side-roads of Southend, we felt ourselves walking in a magic-lantern slide and deeply concerned for the future of the Noakesoscope, the thousands of slides which Mr Noakes possesses, and the well-nigh lost art of projecting them. There are other such examples of Victorian ingenuity — things like the panatrope, the stereoscope, the old-fashioned kind of kaleidoscope and doubtless decaying in garden sheds and stables there may be other Victorian inventions designed to please the child in all of us. I do not like to think of these things, if they are rescued, lying dead behind glass cases in the Science Museum. They should be used and kept in repair. Both Dr Julian Huxley and Miss Barbara Jones have the excellent suggestion that a house should be taken for assembling these things and giving demonstrations of them. Dr Julian Huxley suggested 'The Logs' at Hampstead, but that fantastic building is now being destroyed. There must, however, be some huge villa not yet converted into flats in Highbury or near the Crystal Palace, where people could enjoy the coloured brilliance of our past prosperity.

Note: Can any reader offer more information about 'The Logs', which seems to have eluded writers on London buildings?



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