

BITS AND PIECES

NOT ALL RESEARCH discoveries or other interesting items merit a full article, and very often it is the small pieces of random information which supply the unexpected connections to make up larger stories and histories. This feature – which will appear at least occasionally, and on a regular basis if contributions allow – aims to provide a place for such small items to gather. It will also be a home for additions to the *Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern*.

Contributions will be very welcome, whether they add new information, take up points raised in other items, respond to queries here or raise new queries in search of answers. Please send any contributions or responses to the editorial address on page 2.

LANTERN MEMORIES – PEPPER'S GHOST IN THE THIRTIES

The articles on Pepper's Ghost (*NMLJ* Vol. 8 No. 5) were of special interest to me. They took me back to an evening in the early 1930s when I and a group of school friends watched goggle-eyed while this illusion was performed in a tent at the annual fair at Bingley in West Yorkshire.

The illusion might have been old but the presentation had been updated: no apparitions now, but medical science. It was described as 'The Transparent Woman', and the Barker assured us that no less a celebrity than Lieutenant-Colonel Lindbergh had spent millions of dollars developing it as a means of diagnosing serious ailments.

'We are going to pass tens of thousands of volts through a beautiful woman,' he told the small crowd outside the tent, adding with a leer, 'her clothes will simply melt away and all will be revealed as to the surgeon's eye.' That clinched it for me and my friends: surely it was worth twopence to explore what had hitherto been the inaccessible mysteries of the female anatomy.

We were, of course, disappointed: the comely lady on the dimly-lit rostrum went straight into a skeleton and straight back again when the current was switched off. Nevertheless we *believed*. And that belief was not shattered until the following year, when the lady whose form we had studied so hopefully turned up, again fully clad, as 'The Headless Woman'.

Peter Spooner

TEMPERANCE LANTERN LECTURES, ABOUT 1933

From 1928 until 1938 my family lived at 46 Harbour Crescent, Wibsey, Bradford. I went to Buttershaw Church School and I was a choirboy at Buttershaw Church. In about 1933 my father was still a chairman at Great Horton Church, continuing from when the family had lived in Great Horton, about a mile away from Wibsey. The family attended both Buttershaw and Great Horton Churches.

On one or two occasions that I can remember, evening lantern lectures were held by touring Church Army Captains in Great Horton Church Hall, and I was taken to them by my father. I believe the topic was Temperance. There were perhaps 30 to 50 people at them. The slides were 3¼ x 3¼ inch, monochrome line drawings, but I am not really sure about the topics. The projector was an old carbon arc light one. Such events attracted reasonable audiences in church halls. The cinema was not very active and of course there was no television.

Soon my parents became more settled in Wibsey and went mostly to Buttershaw Church. I do not remember going to church hall lantern lectures after we moved to Sheffield in 1938. Of course the Second World War started soon afterwards and so messed up all this sort of activity.

John Crangle

Professor of Physics, University of Sheffield (retired)

A CHRISTMAS SHOW

Christmas, 1943. We'd been 'evacuated' – my sister and I – to an uncle's house in Poole (on the south coast of England). Poole Harbour was a base for the Sunderland flying-boats, and the shoreline was dotted with concrete blocks, placed so close together that enemy tanks couldn't squeeze between them. In early December, a German plane had made an emergency landing in a field not far from another uncle's house, and we were part of the crowd that stood round while the pilot was being taken to the Cornelia Hospital. For a small boy of five, the adult world of Poole at the end of 1943 had strange shadows, of the kind we generally associate with

twilight, but which, for me, signalled searchlights and barrage balloons. It was a place full of noises – the drone of planes, bursts of anti-aircraft guns, sirens, fire-engines – and then, as evening fell, the outlines of the town faded into black-out.

You had to go indoors to find the light at night.

I write all that because I've no doubt that the atmosphere and experiences of December 1943 contributed to the aura that surrounded my first (and only innocent) encounter with a magic lantern. It must have been Christmas Eve, and there must have been my sister, my mother, a grandmother, cousins, aunts and uncles there. It would surely have been a family occasion – because Uncle Lee had acquired (borrowed, I think) a magic lantern. But the intensity of my memory is of nothing more than Uncle Lee, the massive, funnelled lantern, shadows on the wall when the lantern was switched on – and then the pictures: the prewar Blackpool illuminations, several Scottish lochs, the boating-lake in Poole Park; and Grace Darling being heroic. Those are the ones I remember. I'm sure there must have been chatter, but for me everything took place in a weird pictorial silence. I expect Uncle Lee gave a commentary, though he was a man of few words. I'm sure there would have been moral uplift in it, and for the adults probably a morale boost. I know that smoke came out of the funnel – I was besotted with steam-trains, and the lantern became one for me – and it's only in retrospect that I suppose it was cigarette-smoke caught in the light. All my uncles smoked, and my Aunt Mary smoked for the county. The projections probably reached the wall through the kind of smoke-cloud dear to the charlatans of the phantasmagoria. In my memory, anyway, the images are soft-edged and flickering; and it was a terrible moment when the extraterrestrial lantern was switched off and the mundane light switched on.

Peter Thomson

Professor of Drama, University of Exeter

SUNDAY SCHOOL SHOWS

from Long Bennington and Foston Parish Magazine, 1905

March 1905, Long Bennington

British and Foreign Bible Society. On Tuesday, 21st of Feb., was held the Annual Meeting of the Bible Society. The Rev. H.J. Watney, Vicar of Canwick, attended as Deputation and gave a talk entitled 'From England to India' illustrated with Lantern views. The Lecturer's remarks interested those who heard them, and the result will be increased zeal for the Society.

Waifs and Strays. On Tuesday, 7th of March, we are promised a Children's Concert and a Lecture on Coal Mining, on behalf of the Waifs and Strays Society. Mr C.F. Hardy will deliver the Lecture, which will be illustrated with Lantern views, and Sunday School children will give songs and recitations. We hope that our readers will patronise this children's effort to help a most deserving Society.

April 1905, Long Bennington

Children's Concert. We are glad to record, as the result of the Children's Concert, that £1 10s. 3d. has been handed to the Waifs and Strays Society. We trust that this amount will be largely increased by the sum collected in the Lent Self-denial Boxes. The children one and all acquitted themselves with great credit, and Mr Hardy's Lecture was listened to with much interest.

(Long Bennington and Foston are two villages in Lincolnshire, located (in 1905) on the Great North Road from London to York and Edinburgh).

Supplied by Brian Widdowson

ALL BEING WELL, the next issue of the *Journal* should appear in Spring 2002, with another towards the end of that year. The aim thereafter (subject to time, tide, acts of God and finance) is to produce two issues per year. Such ambition depends, of course, on a regular supply of material: like Alfred Saunders, I hope that 'our contributors will supply with their usual generosity'. If the production of this issue is a guide, there are plenty of ideas about, and the *Journal's* future should be bright.

Contributions of every type, from any source, will be more than welcome. In particular, we need good illustrations which have not appeared in the Society's other publications, articles on any aspect of the lantern and its use, and short items for the 'Bits and Pieces' page. The deadline for Vol. 9 No. 2 will be 28 February 2001, but contributions are welcome at any time.

Please e-mail or write to the editorial address given on page 2.