

# BITS AND PIECES

## THE LANTERN IN LITERATURE

This curious lantern reference comes from *The Shape of Things to Come* by the great English novelist H.G. Wells (1866–1946). This book, first published in 1933, is a strange mixture of contemporary political commentary, fantasy novel and social treatise. It is written as a wide-ranging imaginary social history of the future world-wide 'Modern State' from the viewpoint of the year 2106, and can be read as a warning of the consequences of the rise of Fascism in the 1930s. Although it was the inspiration for a notable film version produced by Alexander Korda in 1936, the original book is now relatively little known among Wells's works, partly perhaps because its imitation-textbook style now seems rather dated and parts of its 'prophecy' have been overtaken by events.

Deep among the earnest prose lurks the following interesting lantern metaphor. It occurs in a section (the First Book, chapter 2) which deals with 'the scattered and diverse individuals who first gave expression to this idea of the modern World-State'. The 'Revolutionary Manifesto of 1937', drafted by an American progressive named Peter Raut, is described as 'a very inspiring document'; yet in its margins Raut has scribbled calculations of his stock market speculations:

... even while Raut, so far as his foresight permitted, was

*planning our new world, his thoughts were not wholly fixed on that end. They wandered. For a time the manifesto was neglected while he did these sums. He was gambling in industrial equities, and a large and active portion of his brain was considering whether the time had arrived to sell.*

*A more illuminating instance of what social psychologists have called the 'divided mind' of the intellectuals in the twentieth century of the Christian Era could scarcely be imagined. In the middle years of the nineteenth century there was a primitive form of entertainment in Western Europe and America called 'Dissolving Views'. Crudely coloured pictures were thrown on a screen by a double-barrelled arrangement of lenses called a 'Magic Lantern'. A picture would be projected first by the right-hand lens of the contraption and then the light would be shifted to the left-hand side, so that the picture cast by one half of the apparatus faded as the other became brighter. The real became a phantom and vanished and the faint intimations of its successor became at length the only reality visible. Apparently this is where our ancestors found the 'magic' effect. At a certain phase it must have been hard to determine which details were advancing and which were receding realities, or of any part of the ensemble whether it was real. It was very much after the fashion of this artless Victorian wonder-toy that faith in established institutions and usages faded and the idea of the Modern State dawned upon the intelligence of mankind.*

RC, with thanks to Amy Sargeant

## RUDGE AND THE MOTION PICTURE

An addendum to 'The Motion Picture Experiments of John Arthur Roebuck Rudge' (*NMLJ* Vol. 8 No. 2, October 1997)

I have been revising my ideas on Rudge and Friese-Greene. I have never believed that the Biophantic Lantern was devised to show the 'headless Rudge' effect, six of the pictures from which were illustrated on pages 2–3 of my previous article. It was more likely to have shown a continuously repeating subject – probably Rudge's favourite facial expressions. I thought that the 'headless Rudge' sequence was a one-off, utilising the seven pictures in a jerky movement – one picture held briefly on the screen and then a rapid move to the next, and so on for just the seven slides.

Having studied the pictures, including the seventh image (showing Rudge bending down and nearly touching the ground) which appeared in Will Day's *Illustrated London News* article of 1 October 1927, I would suggest that these pictures were never intended for the Biophantic Lantern, but were taken from three much longer sets. The first three pictures of Rudge taking off his head would be the first three slides for two longer series ending in (a) Rudge's head held at arm's length, and (b) Rudge with his head under his arm. In the third series he may have been shown standing on his head, the picture of him bending over and nearly touching the ground being one from the middle of that series.

All this brings out new questions. Will Day obviously believed that the seven slides were all there were, or he would have said otherwise in his 1927 article. So if there were more pictures, did they never crop up in Day's conversations with Friese-Greene? I can't help thinking of Rudge's nephew Edgar's emphatic comment when I interviewed him in 1952: 'He [Friese-Greene] never saw the

Biophantic Lantern working because he would never have gone so mad as when he saw the face move!' I thought that this must have been a momentary lapse of memory and discounted it, but now I wonder if Edgar Rudge was right. If so, the body in the seven slide pictures could not have been Friese-Greene.

Rudge sold the Lantern in 1882 when he obviously had no further interest in it and no further use for the slides. The seven existing slides have only survived because they happened to have been sold with the Lantern.

The date 1882 is significant for another reason. This was the year that the elephant Jumbo was sold to Barnum and Bailey's Circus, and Rudge produced his comic sequence *Jumbo's Funniosities*. Edgar Rudge said in a 1953 article in the *Bath Critic*, 'I remember we showed *Jumbo's Funniosities* at the Assembly Rooms, and at the YMCA Building in Broad Street', and commented that the slide carrier 'stretched for several feet out of the side of the Lantern'. This must have been the same slide carrier that previously held the 'headless Rudge' sequences, and no doubt others.

While Edgar Rudge definitely talked of seeing *Jumbo's Funniosities*, neither he nor Ernest Crawford, to the best of my recollection, mentioned ever actually seeing either the Biophantic Lantern or the 'headless' slides. They both emphatically referred to Will Day's 1927 article as if it were the ultimate authority. I am sure that if they had known these images at first hand they would have said so. Will Day said that he bought the Biophantic Lantern in 1926 – which was 23 years after Rudge's death and five years after Friese-Greene's, so he could not have asked them about the slides then. Did he just assume the body was Friese-Greene's because of their friendship?

Raymond Newport

## LANTERN MEMORIES

My grandfather, the Reverend William Russell Davey, used the lantern frequently, both for Sunday School parties and for family entertainment at Morley, near Leeds, during the period 1912 to 1923. Then in 1941 my father, the Reverend Paul Greaves, gave frequent lantern performances at his church in Whitewell, near Whitchurch, Shropshire. There was no mains electricity so he used a carbon arc and a battery to create the illumination. My mother explained that it was a tricky process to get the light just right, and my father would spend ages setting up the lantern and practising before the audience arrived. In the 1950s he moved to become Rector at Hardington Manderville, near Yeovil, Somerset. Here he was remembered for his lantern shows of the Arctic Regions.

Rosemary Banham

In 1945 my father Kenneth Banham was appointed as General Secretary of the International Mission to Miners, with missionaries working in fourteen 'foreign' countries. Frequently on Sunday

evenings he would be invited by churches over a wide geographical area to preach at evensong and then afterwards to give a magic lantern show to illustrate the work of the Mission. As I grew older I was often allowed to accompany my father on his travels and to witness first hand the marvels of the magic lantern.

There was an interesting spin-off, as I was to become a very young commercial lanternist at the age of eight or nine. Having no sisters, I was particularly interested in the secret physical attributes of the opposite sex. I had discovered in my father's study some slides put on one side as not suitable for his missionary talks. These were African views showing some delightful girls and young women wearing hardly any clothing at all. The financial opportunity became apparent and from time to time I held some private lantern showings of these 'unsuitable' slides to my school fellows when my father was away from home. My mother was impressed by the large number of friends I appeared to have.

Philip Banham