

BITS AND PIECES

‘THE MOST POWERFUL LAMP FOR THE LANTERN’

The last issue of *NMLJ* referred, both in the item on Bull’s Eye lanterns and in Trevor Beattie’s excellent piece on Woodbury and the Sciopticon, to the question of lantern illuminants. Woodbury’s Improved Sciopticon of 1881 used two wicks in its paraffin lamp, but of course manufacturers began to compete by producing brighter lamps with three or four wicks. Perken Son & Rayment made the ‘Optimus’ three-wick lamp, and Newton & Co. produced lamps with both three and four wicks, and doubtless there were other makers as well.

But the claim of ‘the most powerful lamp for the optical magic lantern’ rested with the Stock’s Lamp. This had four individually adjustable wicks and produced 109 candle power(!), with a hinged lamphouse to facilitate lighting of the wicks. First produced in 1893, the ‘most powerful’ claim obviously referred only to paraffin lamps, as the superior limelight and electric arc were still around at this time.

One of the first magic lanterns I acquired was a handsome ‘Russian iron’ and brass model by Negretti & Zambra, and came complete with a Stock’s Patent Lamp. This is a fine example of Victorian design and craftsmanship; the soldered joints alone are very finely executed. In describing the Woodbury Sciopticon lantern, Trevor Beattie quoted T.C. Hepworth writing that ‘the front glass of the lamp was apt to break’. This problem is overcome in my own Stock’s Lamp, as both front and rear ‘glasses’ are replaced by pieces of transparent mica, though I am not sure if this was an original

modification by Stock’s or has been done by an enterprising former owner, but certainly mica withstands heat better than glass. I did fire up this lamp many years ago and I can confirm that, once the chimney ventilation is correctly set by means of the rack and pinion adjuster, it produces a remarkably steady flame and – for a paraffin lamp – a surprising level of illumination.



It was while I was photographing this lantern that I made an additional discovery. A small brass turn-screw threaded into the end of the Russian-iron carrying box had been puzzling me for years. When the case is turned on its side, the purpose of the screw becomes clear, because the small hinged bracket suspended from the front of the lantern base can then be fixed to the metal box by the turn-screw, thereby providing adjustable elevation for the front of the lantern, as shown in the photograph. How often do we look around for two or three books or a piece of wood to prop under the lantern base in order to raise the projected image to fit the screen? They thought of everything, those Victorians.

Jeff Barnard

CORRECTIONS

A couple of minor gremlins crept into the article ‘Bull’s-eyes and Illuminants’ in our last issue (Vol. 10 No. 3, pages 52–3): in the first full paragraph on p. 53, the ‘fat plano-convex condensing lens’ should be immediately *before* the slide, not after; and the captions to Figs 4 and 5 were reversed. Apologies to all concerned – Ed.

POETRY CORNER

This very visual eighteenth-century evocation of an allegorical lantern show is by the Reverend Samuel Bishop (1731–95), from his *Poems on Various Subjects* Vol. 1 (London: 1800), 127–30. Among other appointments, Bishop was Headmaster of Merchant Taylor’s School; his collected poems were published posthumously in 1796 and this slightly revised edition four years later. *RC*.

Imaginary Personages

The PASSIONS once, in frolic pastime gay,
Stole FANCY’s Magic-Lantern for a day:
And each, in order, its effect essay’d,
On some new Phantom, which herself portray’d.

Fierce ANGER first her hasty hand apply’d,
And sketch’d an earth-born Giant’s towering pride:
Vast was his strength, and terrible his nod;
He spoke in thunder, and on storms he rode;
He mow’d down armies, and he kick’d down thrones;
And infants call him still, Raw-head-and-Bloody-Bones,

VALOUR, of glorious hazard only proud,
Drew Dragons hissing from the bursting cloud;
Sorcerers, whose spells could wrathful warriors tame;
And wedge in rifted rocks the captive dame;
Till happier Hardihead th’ enchantment broke;
And magic adamant dissolv’d in smoke.

FEAR’s trembling pencil group’d a Goblin crew,
Ghosts clattering chains, around the church-yard yew;
Forms, without heads, that crost the midnight ways;
Heads, without limbs, where saucer eye-balls blaze;
And Shaped grotesque, down eve’s grey shade that slide –
And buzzing, grinning, chattering, screaming, glide.

To her succeeded HOPE, intent to trace
A friendly Wizard’s comfortable face –
The reverend Merlin of a former age –
Unconquerably just, benignly sage.
Low o’er his breast a milk-white beard was spread –
Aw’d by his want the Powers of Mischief fled;
Till – every peril past – sure triumph grac’d
The brave; and happy wedlock crown’d the chaste.

A scene far different wild DESPAIR employ’d;
Furies, whose whips clash thro’ the darksome void;
Demons with forks of fire, and breaths of flame,
That howl revenge, and chuckle at our shame –
Mock guilty misery’s most alarming hour –
And to the rage of malice, add the power.

MIRTH then display’d a jocund troop to view;
Trim Fairies, frisking on the twilight dew;
Fantastic Will-a-wisps thro’ bush and brier,
That lur’d the staring clown, and sous’d him in the mire;
And fire-proof Elves, that round the cauldron squat,
And burn the housewife’s dumplin to the pot.

Then SUPERSTITION came, her Sprites to shew,
That make the mastiff’s yell, the note of woe;
At melancholy’s window flap their wings,
In concert with the dirge the raven sings;
O’er Nature’s face a veil of omens spread –
Perplex the living, and belie the dead.

ENVY’s shrunk finger next th’occasion caught;
And scratch’d the hideous image of her thought;
A scraggy Witch, on broom-stick hors’d for flight;
Equipp’d with all th’ artillery of spite;
Mildews and blights, to blast the forward grain;
Philtres t’ intoxicate the mad’ning brain;
Prayers mumbled backwards, discord to promote;
And crooked pins, to rend the sufferer’s throat.

LOVE still remain’d – but lo! while she prepares
Her little family of Joys and Cares,
FANCY herself surpris’d the wanton train,
Reclaim’d her Lantern, – and resumed her reign;
Seiz’d on the spot, the visionary scroll,
And then to GENIUS gave the motley whole.

GENIUS, sublime with taste, correct with ease,
Alternate soften’d those, and heighten’d these;
From features rude, and parts of monstrous size,
Bade mystic sense, and moral beauty rise;
Engag’d Tradition on the side of Truth;
And made the Tale of Age – the Oracle of Youth.