

Lester Smith continues his investigations into some of the lesser-known manufacturers of slipping slides (otherwise known as 'slip-slides' or 'slipper slides'), with guidance on how to recognise them through distinctive features of construction or painting style.

THE SLIPPING SLIDES OF ALFRED PUMPHREY OF BIRMINGHAM

The earliest mention of the brothers Alfred and Josiah Pumphrey was in 1870, with a factory at Camp Hill Works, Ryland Street, and another at Leopold Street, Birmingham. The eldest brother, Alfred, became the proprietor of a lantern, dissolving views and photographic business. Josiah was involved with rubber production but had passed away before the end of 1873.

I wish to concentrate on the Company's distinctive 'Comic Movable Coloured Slides'. In their own words: 'They are all photographed from large sized original drawings made expressly for the purpose and afterwards coloured by hand. They will be found superior to hand drawn slides, as being copied from large drawings, the details are more correct than if drawn the size of the slide and on so un-artistic a material as glass.'

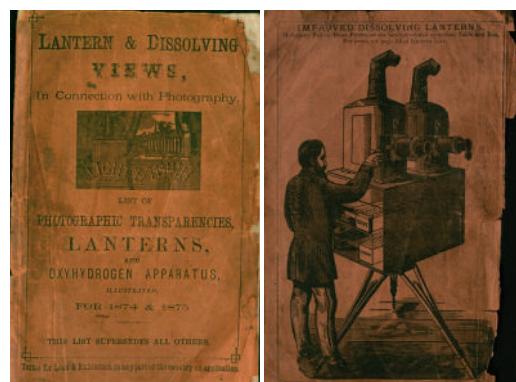
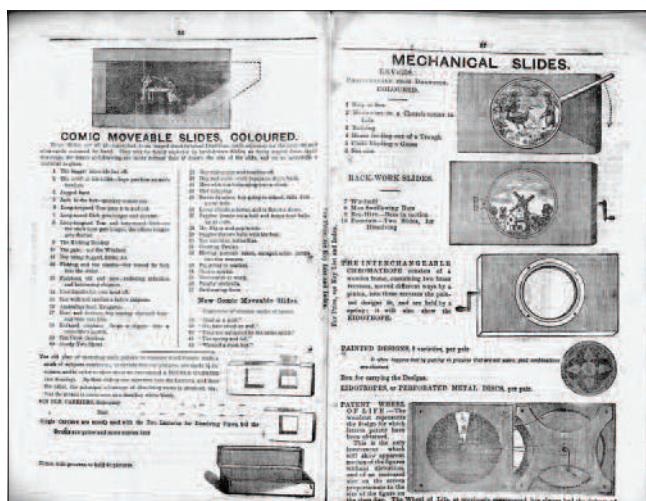
Their slides are easily recognised. Many are a quarter of an inch shorter than conventional slipping slides (i.e. 6 3/4 inches x 4 inches) and the frames on all sides are 5/8 inch wide and almost 1/2 inch thick. The construction is also unusual in that one fillet of wood joins the horizontals to each of the uprights. They are easily identifiable amongst a pile of slides. When looking at the reverse of these slides the photographic outline of the picture is clearly visible, and it is often possible to see the number of the slide within the photograph. This is blacked over so as not to show on the screen.

By 1874 the company offered forty-two subjects and the catalogue number appears on a small oblong piece of paper stuck to the upper-right-hand corner. It easily falls off as I have only seen a few with it still intact. After that build-up and their description about being 'superior' to hand-drawn slides, I can honestly say that some I have come across have been disappointing. They are fairly simple designs and rather small for the area on the slide, sometimes filling only part of the glass. My personal favourite is the Bear.

Alfred Pumphrey also sold 3 1/4-inch sets of slides, some their own work but many from other suppliers, and they were particularly keen on more expensive products such as the Wheels of Life, Interchangeable Chromatropes, Lever and Rackwork slides and Dancing Witches. They were also retailers for the American manufacturer 'Sciopticon' of Philadelphia, reproducing verbatim text and pictures of the lantern and other illustrations taken from the 3rd edition of the 'Sciopticon' 1874 catalogue.

Their own range of lanterns (singles, doubles and limelights) appears very old-fashioned and still in the style of 1860s apparatus, so I think they saw an opportunity to break into the lucrative lantern market in Birmingham, and without too much experience produced a rather inferior range of goods.

Their business was taken over by Robert H. Clark of Royston, Hertfordshire, England in March 1901. Clark was a successful publisher of postcards, and a photographic business under his name continues at the same address to the present day.



Front and back covers of Alfred Pumphrey's catalogue for 1874/5



Bull & Fisherman



The Bear

