

THE AUTUMN MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

BIRMINGHAM AND MIDLAND INSTITUTE,

SATURDAY 22 OCTOBER

Mary Ann Auckland

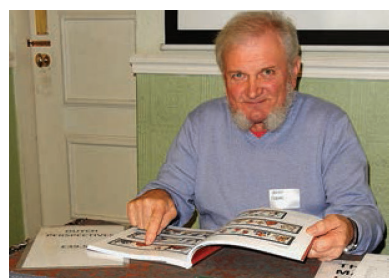
On 22 October over sixty members met in Birmingham for our autumn gathering. Halloween was definitely in the air and **Kevin Varty** set the context for phantasmagoria apparitions with a fascinating talk about the Victorian way of death. He gave a brief history leading up to 1860. For example, being buried 'six feet under' came in after the plague of 1665, and pre-1780 many graves were



marked by a skull and crossbones – not because pirates were numerous but because people believed a skull and thigh bones were required for resurrection. Kevin drew on his own experience working at Kensal Green Cemetery in London – where two children of George III, Augustus Frederick and Sophia Matilda, are buried, plus W.M. Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins and George Duke of Cambridge (1819–1904). According to Kevin, people were dying to get there!

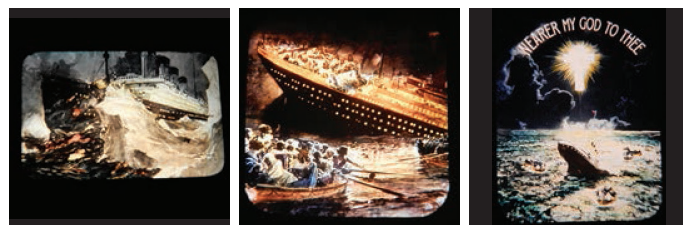
In 1861, with the death of Prince Albert, the business of death really expanded with black feathers galore, black pins, black bird cages, mourning cards, mourning jewellery, velvet covered coffins, pictures made out of the deceased's hair and so on. Peter Robinson had a mourning warehouse on Regent Street. Mourning clothes of black bombazine and heavy crepe were worn for a year and a day – and if another death took place you started again. Then in 1901 Queen Victoria caught the funeral business on the hop – by having a white funeral. With World War I the elaborate and expensive pomp largely disappeared.

Next **Lester Smith** showed us some homemade lantern slides from his collection. These included historical figures such as William Rufus in the New Forest, and some chromatropes made to a very strange format (see also article on homemade slides).

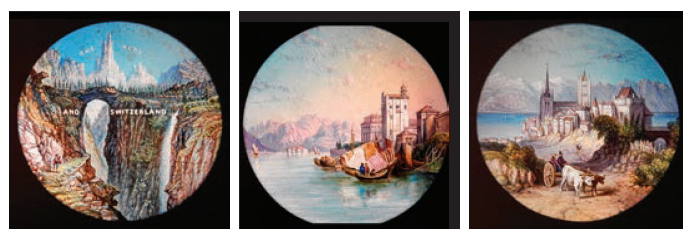


The new *Open Show* part of the meeting began with **John Finney** shedding 'new light' on the fate of *RMS Titanic*. Along with slides of the ill-fated ship, John gave us many facts and figures on its coal consumption (600

tons a day), lifeboats, crew, rivets, etc. He then put forward a highly contentious theory that it was not the *Titanic* that sank but her sister ship the *RMS Olympic*. You read it here first, possibly!



The **Spencer** family gave us a highly entertaining rendition of *Belle Belton and Her Bicycle Adventure*. Despite the disapproval of her father due to the immodesty of bicycle riding, Belle takes lessons, falls off, takes more lessons and eventually sets out only to have a puncture several miles from home. Fortunately a fellow cyclist (looking remarkably like King George V) comes along with a repair kit and escorts Belle all the way home. After some hearty singing of *Daisy Bell (Bicycle Built for Two)* we moved on to **Lester's** 'holiday slides' from Switzerland.



These were exquisite hand-painted slides featuring, among other sights, glaciers, Lakes Lugano, Maggiore and Como (straying into Italy), the Matterhorn, Berne, the grand quay in Geneva and a bullock cart ride to the Cathedral in Lucerne. **Jennifer and Keith Uttridge** followed this with a tale of a shorter trip with more humorous outcomes when *Roger Goes to London*. Country bumpkin Roger sets off with great determination but little local





knowledge, with predictable results. Aileen Butler picked up the homemade theme with some charming photographic slides her father had made in the 1940s. These featured a very young Aileen herself. David Burder reflected the seasonal theme with specs that turned light sources into Halloween images.

The final show was presented by **Pat and Ray Gilbert** with **Martin** projecting on his triunal (as he had throughout the day for other shows). The subject was King George IV's coronation on 19 July 1821. This was a grand affair as the new king was determined to outdo Napoleon. The final cost was around £243k – or £20m in today's money. George himself was half an hour late. The procession went from Westminster Hall to Westminster Abbey on blue cloth. Ray had counted ninety-four participants in the procession on a 17-inch slipper slide.



At the front was Miss Fellowes, the herb-strewer, and her six maids. This presumably was a reflection on the ambient smells (including the people) – many flowers were scattered around too. Then we had musicians – fifes, drummers and trumpeters – Masters and Clerks in Chancery, the King's Chaplains, flag bearers, Dukes, Barons of the Cinque Ports, the King's Gentlemen Pensioners and, of course, the King himself in ostrich feathers, a Spanish hat, sumptuous clothing and a 27-foot train. We then saw seven slides featuring various aspects and persona at the event. These included the Royal, Hanover and Union standards, bishops, officers of state, the Lord Mayor of London and a second procession into the Hall with the King's Champion on a white horse, throwing down a gauntlet that nobody took up. The slides and the research were of an exceptionally high quality, bringing another enjoyable meeting to a royal conclusion.



THE MAGIC LANTERN is edited, designed and produced by Mary Ann Auckland, Gwen Sebus and Dennis Crompton assisted by Annie Bridges.

Letters to the Editors can be sent by e-mail to: editor@magiclantern.org.uk

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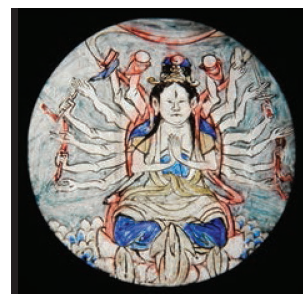
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1. Homemade hand-coloured slides

HOMEMADE SLIDES

Lester Smith

Many MLS members have come across homemade slides of various different types. Probably the most common are the messages scratched on blacked out slides – often about local events – and photographic slides. More unusual are hand-drawn and hand-coloured homemade slides (like Fig. 1) and, in particular, mechanical slides.

About twenty years ago I acquired an interesting collection of homemade slides. These come in several different sizes and all the frames are made from recycled metal boxes or cases (Fig. 2). The largest measures 11 x 8 inches with just a

2. Mechanical slides of various sizes



3. Largest in collection



4. Hand-coloured examples



5. Encapsulated example



2-inch diameter projection hole along one side. The single enclosed glass disc is turned by a simple built-in handle – one producing a series of eight different coloured balls, each with different coloured centres, and a second disc with a continuous pattern of clear spots, possibly designed to give an impression of a starry heaven or falling snow. However, the size of this slide raises a serious question about what the lantern looked like!

Slides in another series shown here measure 5.5 inches lengthwise and are mounted in fairly thick tin. The first ones (Fig. 4) are hand-coloured and show various subjects – people of the world, the natural world, landscapes and knights in combat (for some reason). Other subjects include historical characters. The second set (Fig. 5) comprise a leaf skeleton, dried grass, a feather, and various pieces of lace and netting. This could have been the white lace that Queen Victoria wore (see Birmingham report). Perhaps most intriguing is a chromatope made from metal recycled from a 4d 'Coffee and Chicory' tin. I recently found that MLS member Sjur Dagestad from Norway had a mechanical see-saw slide made from exactly the same brand tin (Fig. 6)!

If any members have some unusual homemade slides – and especially if you know their back story – get in touch with the editor.

6. A curious coincidence!

