

The Magic Lantern

IT'S CONVENTION TIME!
BIRMINGHAM TAKES CENTRE STAGE
28–30 APRIL 2017

In a few weeks' time Birmingham will once again take centre stage in the magic lantern world. As around 150 MLS members prepare to travel to the city from all parts of the globe for our tenth international convention – and the fourth to be held at the Birmingham and Midland Institute (BMI) – it is worth recalling the city's important role in magic lantern history¹.



New Street, Birmingham, from A New and Compendious History of the County of Warwick by William Smith, 1830 (copy from British Library)

INNOVATION AND MANUFACTURING

Birmingham – the 'city of a thousand trades' – not surprisingly became a centre for the manufacture of magic lanterns and slides. High-quality lenses were being produced there by at least the 1780s and probably earlier.

CONTENTS

Number 10 – March 2017

1. 'It's Convention Time'
2. **MLS NOTICE BOARD** – Announcements and News items from MLS members, Diary – New members
4. 'Diafanorama Research Project'
5. 'Running Away with the Monument' *Mervyn Heard*
7. 'Herman Bollaert's "Goodbye" Show', *Gwen Sebus and Michael van de Leur*
8. 'The Victorian Exhibition Halls of London' *Bill Barns*
10. 'The Eidophusikon and Spring Gardens' *Bill Barns*
12. 'A Microscopic Gesture' *Sarah Vangt* interviewed by *Nele Wynants*
13. 'News from Italy'
14. Obituaries: *Werner Nekes + Jack Judson*
15. Magic Lantern Society Committee News
'The Annual General Meeting of the Magic Lantern Society'
Mary Ann Auckland

One of the most important figures in the early nineteenth-century was Philip Carpenter (1776–1833)², who had a long association with Birmingham, the manufacturing side of his company being based there until 1830. Carpenter's copperplate transfer process revolutionised slide production, certainly for accuracy of the image and arguably for speed of production.

An optician by trade, Carpenter set up business in Inge Street, Birmingham, in 1808. He moved to Bath Row in 1813 where he began manufacturing a range of optical devices, including magic lanterns. By 1817 he had a large trade in lenses, even supplying Peter Dolland, the great London optician. He took on additional premises at 111 New Street, probably as a shop, around 1819.



Kaleidoscope with storage tube, 1817–18, and detail of end showing maker's mark (National Media Museum)



Carpenter slipping slide of a lion, 1826–33 (Lester Smith collection)

In 1817 Carpenter became the sole manufacturer of David Brewster's highly successful kaleidoscope – over 200,000 were sold in London and Paris in three months. Eventually the high demand required more suppliers to be taken on. From 1821 the company was manufacturing the improved phantasmagoria lantern and Carpenter's famous copperplate sliders. The company moved to 24 Regent Street, London, in 1826, leaving a manufacturing base in Birmingham. When Carpenter died in 1833, the business was taken over by his sister Mary and her husband William Westley, continuing as Carpenter & Westley until it closed in 1914.

Carpenter was not the only creative inventor at work in Birmingham during the nineteenth century. Others include John Barnes Linnett, who in 1868 invented and patented the Kineograph – the first commercial 'flick' or 'flicker' book – and Joseph Walker who produced toy panorama theatres during the late 1890s with subjects such as *An Excursion Round the World*, *The Life of Queen Victoria* and even a Pepper's Ghost.

ENTERTAINMENT AND EDUCATION

Given its position at the centre of England, Birmingham attracted itinerant lecturers and showmen from the early days of the magic lantern. Here are some examples.

On 27 October 1748 a Mr Smith exhibited electrical and optical phenomena related to the work of Abbé Nollet and Professor Musschenbroek of Leiden. The latter was famous for moving mechanical slides so these may well have been the first moving images ever seen in the city.

The scientist and clergyman Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), discoverer of oxygen, owned and used magic lanterns as shown by the inventory when his premises were destroyed by rioters in 1791. One of his notebooks records: 'The magic lantern in particular is capable of making so much diversion for children and persons unacquainted with the principles of "optiks" and even to philosophers themselves in an hour of relaxation. By

REFERENCES

1. Mike Simkin, 'Birmingham and the Magic Lantern', *Realms of Light*, Magic Lantern Society, 2005, pp.77–85
2. Phillip Roberts, 'The Early Life of Philip Carpenter', *The Magic Lantern*, Issue 6, 2016, p10

(continued on page 3)

IT'S CONVENTION TIME (continued from page 1)

means of this curious instrument small coloured images on glass are prodigiously magnified and thrown upon an opposite wall in all their natural and vivid colours and of whatever size a person shall choose!

Paul de Philipsthal came to Birmingham in 1806 with *Philosophical Experiments and Ingenious Productions of Art*. His advert promised: 'several original experiments in the science of optics, of which he is the sole inventor. A spectrological display of various grotesque, fanciful and interesting objects and characters that will be exhibited to the eye of the spectator during a tremendous storm of thunder and lightning; in which will be introduced the immortal and ever to be lamented hero, the late Lord Nelson, crowned by Fame in the Arms of Victory'. Nelson had been a very popular visitor to Birmingham about three years earlier so this was, no doubt, a good 'selling point'.

In April 1851 Mr Popham, with Mr E. Martin, was at the Theatre Royal with 'one of the best illustrated moving performances ever seen'. This included thirty-nine moveable transparent diagrams each 200 square feet (20 m²) in size; sacred, Arctic and Alpine scenery followed by chromatropes covering 2,000 square feet (200 m²).

Later in the century, in 1890, Eadweard Muybridge visited to show his groundbreaking photographs in his 'Zoopraxiscope' lectures on *The Motions of Animals* at the Town Hall. Two years later, in 1892, Joshua Dyson brought his very popular show, complete with triunial lantern – *Dyson's Dioramas and Gypsy Choir* – 'a medley of pictorial, musical and literary items with not a dull moment'.

VENUES, LEGACIES AND OTHER LINKS

Local records show that magic lanterns were used at the Central Hall in Corporation Street, the Birmingham and Midland Institute (extensively), Digbeth Institute, Curzon Hall, Aston Hall, and public libraries across the city as well as outdoors, for example in New Street and Victoria Square. Cinemas in Birmingham used to project slides advertising films currently showing and 'coming soon' on the pavement outside the cinema. The *Birmingham Post and Mail* projected 'live' election results from their offices onto screens on the Midland Hotel, New Street or the Town Hall.

Major companies based in Birmingham, such as BSA, Tangye's and GEC, maintained archives of slides. Cadbury's and Lucas certainly provided shows for employee entertainment and social evenings. One Cadbury's employee recalled: '... one of our favourite forms of communal amusement was to attend magic lantern shows'. Jan and Richard Rigby projected slides from Cadbury's archives at the convention in 2013.

Birmingham Central Library has a collection of over 60,000 slides that citizens could take out on loan right up to 1955. More recently these have been catalogued by MLS member Mike Simkin. The Library also houses the famous 'Servant of Light' magic lantern – commissioned by wealthy hotelier Frederick Gordon who enjoyed giving shows to his guests.



Slide from 'Lovely Dove' – Margaret Bergh
L'Angelus du Midi – Annet Duller



Making the slides for Grim Senji – Yoriko Iwata and Hana Washitani



Freidrich August Boettcher giant slide, 1871 – Bernd Scholze



THE 2017 CONVENTION

This year's convention has a proud history to uphold both in the city and the Society. We are confident that it will not disappoint. Among the many highlights are the following shows:

Margaret Bergh from the USA has made a special selection of ragtime-related slides from the unique Marnan Collection of American song slides to tie in with our informal theme of music and the magic lantern.

Yoriko Iwata and Hana Washitani are bringing a rare set of slides – *Grim Senji* – from Japan. Dating from the 1950s, they were only discovered in 2007 and give a fascinating glimpse into a world of gent – a Japanese word for still-image projection in the post-World War II period.

Annet Duller from the Netherlands has unearthed another rarity – some exquisite French slides dating from about 1910 that are the fruit of an extraordinary collaboration between artists, musicians and poets active in Paris in the early twentieth century. These will be performed with live music, perhaps for the first time since they were created.

Bernd Scholze from Germany will be showing unique slides once used by Freidrich August Boettcher who was described in the 1870s as the greatest lantern showman in Europe. These giant slides – Bernd had to commission a pair of lanterns especially to show them – are of exceptional quality, equal to the finest Royal Polytechnic slides, and were once shown to the German royal family at the Königliche Schauspielhaus.



**CABINET
OF
CURIOSITIES**

Magic Lantern Society
International Convention
28th-30th April 2017

WE CALL UPON YOU
Lanternists, Collectors, Artists, Inventors,
Engineers, Magicians and Eccentrics.
TO BRING YOUR WONDERS!

PLEASE SEND;
A description of the object, size e.t.c, and instructions on
how it functions (if known). History and maker if
known. An image if possible. Electrical requirements.
We need to know before end of February who is
planning on submitting so we can plan the final display.
Objects can be brought to the cabinet at the convention.

The Utteridges will bring the convention to a close with their show *Feel the Magic* bringing 'wondrous surprises for young and old'. While not always exactly following the original script, anyone at the 2016 Bath meeting knows how hugely enjoyable their performances turn out.

When not enjoying one of the shows or talks, this convention will also feature a Cabinet of Curiosities, an exhibition and a number of sideshows as well as a market and auction.

The Cabinet of Curiosities, curated and presented by Frog Morris and Nicole Mollet, will exhibit a range of wonders as wide as members' imaginations. Some will be interactive and some very curious. Delegates need to book a time on arrival to experience this unique encounter.

The sideshows include Tony Lidington – The Raree Man – and his amazing peepshow (see Issue 8, page 1) featuring *Lucky Dicky Crangle and the Cinnabar Moth*. Tony has recreated the old tradition of the travelling peepshow, although hopefully without the original high risk of pickpocketing. Other sideshows include interactive illusions and interesting sights for all tastes. Lester Smith is curating an exhibition of rare historical items – previous ones have become MLS convention legends.

Another feature – and a break with tradition – is a public show on the first evening at the Crescent Theatre. *Magic and the Muse* is a collaboration between musicians Richard Navarro, Nicholas Thurston, Miriam Gould and magic lanternists Jeremy Brooker and Mervyn Heard. This unique performance features a collection of 'living pose' slides originally used in variety theatres by the parents of film actor, comedian and singer Peter Sellers. These will combine with other unusual British and American 'pose slides' and effects from the 1910s to 1930s and similar visual surprises. The show will fill the theatre with colour, light and sound for a highly entertaining evening for delegates and public alike.



The Raree Man in transit

ACT NOW!

If you have not yet booked and want to come to the convention, please do so now via the Members Area of the website (www.magiclantern.org.uk).

We would also like members to spread the word to friends and family in the Birmingham area about *Magic and the Muse* – showing for one night only on Friday 28 April at 8pm. Tickets are £16 for non-delegates and available at the Crescent Theatre, 20 Sheepcote Street, Brindley Place B16 8AE (tel: 0121 643 5858). A unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help them understand your passion for magic lanterns!



DIAFANORAMA RESEARCH PROJECT

A research project on the diaphanorama plates in the Rijksmuseum collection is currently underway. This is a joint project with the University of Amsterdam leading to a thesis as part of a master's degree in conservation and restoration of cultural heritage at the University. The research phase will finish at the end of June this year.

Like magic lanterns, diaphanoramas were instruments purely for visual entertainment. They were popular in Holland between the second half of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Diaphanorama plates are cold-painted glass plates that usually come in sets of three. Each plate depicts the fore-, middle- or background of an image. The complete image was produced by viewing them together, placing each behind the other, which created a remarkable illusion of depth. The plates were designed to be viewed with a light source and a concave mirror – a so-called 'burning mirror' – that enlarged the image and enhanced the effect of depth.

Diaphanoramas are quite rare objects and not many have been preserved. The Rijksmuseum Amsterdam has a wonderful collection of twenty-

one diaphanorama plates, some of which can be admired in the permanent exhibition. Unfortunately, some of the plates have condition problems, paint delamination being the greatest concern. In order to restore and stabilise these beautiful objects, research needs to be carried out into the material composition of the plates and the causes of the problems. There are also questions to answer about the original operation of these objects, such as how the plates were used and what was the original set-up of the plates in combination with the light source and burning mirror. This thesis project will focus on these issues over the next few months.

In order to learn more about these intriguing objects, we would like to get in touch with any Magic Lantern Society members who have more knowledge about diaphanoramas and/or who have one or more themselves. Information, ideas, suggestions or advice on the topic are very welcome!

Please contact: Noa Kollaard: noa.kollaard@student.uva.nl and Margot van Schinkel: M.van.Schinkel@rijksmuseum.nl. Thank you!