OBITUARIY

EUNICE ELSBURY

(1932–2017)

Jennifer and Keith Utteridge

Eunice Elsbury died after a short illness on 27 March 2017 and left us with lasting memories of decades of lantern activities.

She was born on 17 July 1932 in a house just along the road from where she and David eventually lived in Fishponds, Bristol. Her love of performance perhaps came from the shows she performed with the Mary Pearce School of Dance, many taking place at prestigious venues across Bristol. She attended Fairfield Grammar School which had the distinction of expelling old boy, Cary Grant. Luckily nothing so untoward happened to Eunice and she was able to start her career of working with children at a nearby nursery school, training as a mature student teacher when her children started secondary education. She spent most of her teaching career at Chester Park School and even in retirement, she volunteered three mornings a week, assisting countless small children to learn to read right up to just two weeks before she died.

Throughout childhood, Eunice had been an active member of Eastville Methodist Church, where she met David at the youth club. They were married in 1956 and began a lifetime of shared interests and friendships. As Eunice pursued her teaching at Chester Park, David began to fill the house with 'interesting' things amongst which was a magic lantern with a few slides. In the late 1970s, they gave their first lantern show in the front bedroom for a local fund-raising event. From such small things, big things grow and Eunice quickly realised how interested audiences of that time would be in such shows. They chose the name 'Century Image' and went on to raise thousands of pounds for charities. They widened the scope of their presentations to include shows and workshops for children, Victorian 'Songs of Praise' in church and numerous talks on different subjects. As committed Methodists, they had a particular interest in the temperance movement and its promulgation through the lantern. During their shows, Eunice was projection assistant but did all the narrations using her own clever and succinct scripts.

In the early 1990s, a group of fellow magic lantern enthusiasts in the Bristol area began to meet regularly, enjoying supper and impromptu shows in each other's homes. From this developed a series of large public events using two, three and even four biunial lanterns projecting simultaneously. Had this ever been done before or will it ever be done again? These enjoyable meetings led David and Eunice to start the series of 'At Home' days in the early 2000s which proved to be of enduring and increasing popularity. Eunice took a keen interest in all her friends in the Magic Lantern Society and enjoyed attending as many meetings as possible, including the AGM in January. We were already making plans for the September meeting in Fishponds – sadly Eunice will not be with us but we hope to hold a final event this year as a tribute to her and to David.

REPAIRING A CHROMATROPE

Lester Smith

How many beautiful chromatropes or windmills do we all have that revolve smoothly for a few moments and then stop, judder and sometimes come to a halt altogether? Quite a few, I imagine. How many of us have experienced that upsetting moment when viewing an auction lot of slides that have resided in an attic or cellar for a hundred years and along comes another viewer who tries as hard as they can to turn the handle of a 'rack-work' slide which is obviously jammed – and proceeds to grind down the teeth? Again, alas, all too common.

If the glass plates of a chromatrope are tight, then it is a very easy process to release them. Wrap the chromatrope in a damp cloth overnight. The wood will expand and it should not take more than 24 hours at the most to free the glass plates. The same applies to 'lever' slides. I have dealt with dozens this way and the paintwork has never been affected.

However, I have had many where the teeth have been ground down due to careless handling and this is a more difficult problem. I have tried several remedies to repair them – adding solder, building up with Araldite (other epoxy resins are available!) or metal filler and filing to shape afterwards – but nothing has been strong enough. I agree it is not easy.

So I decided to take a more professional approach and to make a new piece. I would then set this in the main ring – as experts do with broken teeth on a steel music box comb. To start with, I had to find another cog wheel with the same ratio of teeth to diameter of the wheel I wished to repair. I have accumulated a few 'beyond repair' cogs over the years but I have to point out that this is as hard as trying to match lantern lenses, proving the determination of manufacturers not to duplicate others' patents – or was it to keep customers loyal?

The chromatrope I was repairing appeared to need about nine teeth replaced. I found something suitable and cut out a section. I then filed out the same section in the wheel that needed replacing, making sure that the depth and the width matched perfectly (Fig. 1).

1. Before – matching the cogs

This is probably the trickiest part. I have found that Araldite is the best for gluing as there is no 'bulk' to it and a small clamp will make sure the work does not slip out of place. Fig. 2 shows the finished cog wheel.

This chromatrope is now running like clockwork and better – anti-clockwise! By the time you read this, I will have forgotten what to do, so please don't ask me! However, do send in your top tips for repairing magic lanterns and slides.

2. After – the finished repair