

OBITUARY JOHN HORTON

Peter and Pat Spencer

John Horton, a long-time member of the Society, died at a Moseley rest home, in his native Birmingham, in November 2017. He was 89. He and his late sister Elizabeth (who died in January 2017) worked together as lanternists, giving costumed performances in various Midland venues. Family and friends are hoping to erect a memorial bench at Avoncroft Museum, Bromsgrove – a place they both loved – in their memory.

John's career was extraordinary. He had worked as a theatre technician since childhood, having assisted his father who was a club entertainer. After leaving school at 15, he became a trainee projectionist at a wartime cinema, and the following year became switchboard operator of the Birmingham Hippodrome – and was duly smitten. The world of the backstage – the 'nuts and bolts' of theatre – was to be his life. He worked in 26 venues in various parts of England, from Raymond's Revue Bar in London to the Arts Theatre, Cambridge (where he introduced much new technology). He went where his skills were needed, mainly in the all-important lighting department, but also in stage management and in the construction of scenery and props. His last job was Assistant Entertainments Manager for Derby Corporation.

In retirement his work with the magic lantern had time to flower and, until recently, he attended as many Society meetings as he could. His avian



John and Elizabeth Horton

figure, sharp-eyed, bearded, with attendant walking stick, was unmistakable. His sometimes forbidding exterior belied a man both passionate and precise, a Christian gentleman who devoted much time and energy to religious drama, and saw his profession as a 'calling'. He also had a fund of entertaining stories of his life backstage, always good to listen to, sometimes outrageously funny. It's certain that the Magic Lantern Society gave structure and interest to the last expression of his lifelong love – the theatre in all its forms.

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

Kevin Varty



I recently came across an unexpected reference to magic lanterns – in the lyrics of the musical *Oklahoma!* no less. *Oklahoma!* was written by Rogers and Hammerstein in 1943. It was set on a farm near to Claremore, Oklahoma Territory in 1906 and was based on the play *Green Grow the Lilacs* written in 1931. One of the most famous songs in the show

is 'Kansas City' sung by the cowboy Will Parker after returning from a visit to Kansas City in Missouri which, he reports, is right up to date. He sings: "Everything's like a dream in Kansas City, It's better than a magic lantern show!" This strongly suggests that in 1906 the best thing in Oklahoma was a magic lantern show.

Research into other song lyrics revealed some surprisingly modern references to magic lanterns. Here are seven that I have found:

- Uriah Heep, *Landsdowne Tapes* album (1994), song 'Magic Lantern': "When you look inside my magic lantern, all the world is left unseen."
- XTC, *Fuzzy Warbles Vol. 1* album (1994), song 'Goosey, Goosey': "Everybody has a magic lantern, everybody has an inner eye"
- Jethro Tull, *Heavy Horses* album (1978), song 'Moths': "Chasing shadows slipping in a magic lantern slide"
- Michael Penn, *Days Since a Lost Time Accident* album (2000), song 'Perfect Candidate': "Like a magic lantern beaming with projection"
- The Hollies, *French Singles* album (2006), song 'Corrine': "Magic lanterns lighting the way"
- Frou Frou, *Details* album (2002), song 'Flicks': "People concertina to my private magic lantern"

And the most obscure was:

- Rob Zombie, *Venomous Rat Regeneration* album (2013), song 'Dead City Radio and the New Gods of Supertown': "A world of magic lanterns and chemical blue"

I am sure there must be others. If you have more relatively modern song lyrics or examples of references to magic lanterns in unexpected places, please let *The Magic Lantern* know (editor@magiclantern.org.uk).

LAST CHANCE TO SEE ...

Gwen Sebus

The Bredius Museum in The Hague, Netherlands, currently has a wonderful exhibition to visit showing paintings with *trompe l'oeils* and other optical 'jokes'. There is also a very rare Dutch 17th-century peep show box with a living room, painted in perspective. The exhibition is open until the first of April so you will need to hurry if you want to catch it.

