

BITS AND PIECES

I'VE COMMENTED BEFORE on the remarkable amount of information available to the patient internet researcher, and offer here two anecdotal accounts of small recent discoveries. There are many people in lantern history about whom we know nothing except their name, what they did, and (maybe) when. But the resources now available for the family-history industry make it possible to trace at least some of these people. All you need is time, an internet connection, and a bit of imagination in following up the clues!

RC

F. GROVE PALMER

I had been coming across this person for years as the author of (usually painful) comic verses for slide sets by York and Son: over 20 of his poems and lectures are in the Society's Readings Library. A typical example of his *oeuvre* would be:

And then he photographed the group – the mother and the maid.

In photographing now he found almost his only glory,

And lib'rally he several took, in their conserva-tory.

And said, 'The pictures worthy were of Rembrandt or of Doré!'

(*'Adventures of Mr Snapshot and his camera'*, 1893
– the laboured political puns are original)

It proved impossible to find anything further from standard genealogical sources. Palmer is a common English surname, and without more information about the 'F' (one might guess 'Frederick', but there are many people of that name in the records) I was getting no closer.

But in an idle moment while scanning the *Optical Magic Lantern Journal* for its recent DVD reissue, I came across this reference in the small ads of the May 1891 issue (Vol. 2 No. 24, page iii):

LIBRETTOS WRITTEN on any subject – Comic, Secular or Serious – by an experienced Author. – MERVYNDENE, Court Road, West Norwood, S.E.

Having nothing better to do with my time and needing a bit of 'brain exercise', I wondered if it was at all possible to track that advertiser down.

British Census records cannot be searched by address, so to find records for Court Road I first had to find someone who definitely lived there. The place to start was a London street directory: several are available online, both at www.ancestry.co.uk (requires a subscription) and at www.historicaldirectories.org (free, though not easy to use). No directory was available for 1891, but the 1902 Kelly's Directory gave distinctive surnames for some of the Court Road residents, though none I yet recognised as possible 'libretto' authors.

But this gave me something to search for in the 1891 Census, in case any of the 1902 residents were there at that date as well. Sure enough, I fairly quickly found someone living in Court Road, and then it was a simple process to work through house by house. And, to my surprise, there at number 6 was Frederick Grove Palmer with his family. To confirm the identification, his younger son (aged 8 in 1891) was called Mervyn, hence the house name. From here the search became a fairly standard one, turning up some other details for 'FGP':

- He was born in the fourth quarter of 1851 at St Giles, in the centre of London.
- In 1871 he was a Brass Founder, living with his parents David and Mary (both aged 57) in Carlisle Street, Soho. His father was also a Brass Founder, employing three labourers and two boys.
- He married Emily Bignall in the second quarter of 1877 at Westminster.
- In 1881 his occupation was 'Brass Founder, Lecturer', still living with his parents, with one son aged 2.
- In 1891 his occupation was 'Brass Founder's Assistant', with two sons aged 12 and 8.
- In 1901, aged 49, his occupation was now 'Actor', and on the

Census day he was in lodgings in Birkenhead, though his wife and sons were still at 6 Court Road.

- The death of a Frederick G. Palmer, age 76, was registered at Lambeth, London, in early 1927.

One more reference came up from a bit of Google searching, and is worth quoting. This is from the theatrical newspaper *The Era* of 23 October 1897, in an obituary for the dramatist Charles H. Ross, creator of the cartoon character Ally Sloper in the comic paper *Judy*:

About the time of the first 'boom' in Sloper [c.1870], among the contributors to Judy was an able young humourist, then known as Mr Grove Palmer, who developed into that smart comedian, Mr Fred Grove. At the time referred to Mr Grove Palmer gave some capital little shows at schoolrooms, &c, in the West-end. Ross was always delighted with Palmer's portrait of Ally.

Until there is time for a bit more research it will be hard to build up a more detailed biography than this. Nonetheless the picture of someone employed in a family business, who finds a sideline in writing comic verse and so develops an alternative career on the stage, is an intriguing one. Maybe there were many such people whom the lantern 'liberated' in some sense or other.

PROFESSOR KOENIG

Another character whose identity aroused my curiosity was Professor Koenig, a showman who advertised regularly in the small ads of *OMLJ* between 1890 and 1901, offering 'Professor Koenig's Dioramic Entertainment'. In 1893 (Vol. 4 No. 54, p.vii) this consisted of:

Lectures, Music, Songs and Mirth, pictorially illustrated and painted by the most eminent artist, shown with a powerful triple oxy-hydrogen apparatus [...] sparkling music, descriptive songs and marvellous effects, pronounced to surpass all other exhibits.

His address in the early 1890s was 373 Edgware Road, London. By 1901 (Vol. No. 140, p.iii) he was advertising from 15 Monmouth Road, Bayswater:

LECTURERS intending to give their own lecture would do well to communicate with C. Koenig, who has a magnificent collection of slides, being a life study, and painted by all the best artists, Simpson, Dickson, Dabell [sic – probably Doubell], Child, and Hill, each being a work of art, and can be hired with high-class triple lantern with oxy-hydrogen light to show pictures any size at any distance, with experienced operator taking the whole of the responsibilities; suitable for drawing-rooms, schools, institutions and public halls; terms moderate; list on application.

But who was he? He has an entry in our *Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern*, but little definite information is known.

My attempts at genealogy drew a blank – there was an August Koenig in London, born in Bavaria around 1843, but he was always a 'sealskin purse maker', based in Islington, and had no obvious connection to the 'Professor'. Of course if 'Koenig' was a stage name, genealogical searching would be a fruitless exercise. So again the trail seemed to have run cold fairly quickly.

However, as I worked on through *OMLJ* I found a couple of references in the 'Notes' column of trade news and gossip. In November 1896 (Vol. 7 No. 90, pp.175–6) the editor offered congratulations to Koenig ('one of our greatest authorities on lanterns and their manipulation') on the marriage that August of his daughter Florence to Henry James Hill, son of the slide painter W.R. Hill (who Koenig mentions as the source of some of his slide stock). But only four months later, (Vol. 8 No. 93, p.23), it was the editor's 'painful duty' to reveal the death of the new bride, of 'a severe cold', in December 1896.

This sad, but not obviously very relevant, report was actually the key to the mystery. The unfortunate lady was still referred to as 'Florence Adelaide Koenig', but with the full first names of bride and groom I could trace the registration of their marriage and discover the bride's real name: Florence Adelaide New. Better still, her father's name was given in the marriage record, as Charles William New.

This now made it possible to trace 'Professor Koenig'. New was born in Westminster in the third quarter of 1842. He seems quite elusive in the Census records (perhaps his name has been transcribed wrongly) but in 1901 he was married to Martha, his occupation was 'Own Means' (i.e. living on private income), and sure enough he lived at 15 Monmouth Road. In the same household was his four-year-old granddaughter Florence Hill, which suggests that his daughter's death might have been related to childbirth (in which case the birth was either very premature or the marriage was very late ...). Charles New's death was registered in the first quarter of 1919 at Paddington, London, aged 76.