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### Cover picture:

A rare first-hand sketch of a lantern lecture from 1893. This illustration is from the diary of W.H. Bow (c.1865–98), a Bristol undertaker's labourer, which was published as *The Diary of a Bristolian 1893* (Bristol: Engart Press, 1986). Bow gives a brief account of the show: 'The lantern throws a lot of fine views on a big sheet, consisting of portraits of the Col[onel], officers, captains, major &c of the Regt, the Regimental Camp at Kelston and the various aspects of their life there, good twas too.' Elsewhere in the diary he describes another lantern lecture by Frederick Villiers and a visit to Poole's Myriorama at the Colston Hall.

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**WITH MANY APOLOGIES** for the hiatus between this issue of our *Journal* and the previous one, here at last is the first number of our tenth volume. Work for the Society's recent publication *Realms of Light* (reviewed by Robert Macdonald in this issue) absorbed all our publication resources in the early part of 2005, and this effectively means that we have slipped one issue in our otherwise biannual schedule.

This issue, as you will have noticed, carries the dateline Autumn 2005, and the intention is now to try to produce issues in Autumn and Spring, rather than Summer and Winter as for Volume 9. This will spread the Society's publishing workload a little more evenly throughout the year, among other things reducing the 'Christmas rush'. Other aspects of the format will remain the same, though with small adjustments here and there: the regular 'Bits and Pieces' feature, for example, will now only appear when sufficient contributions are available, giving us a bit more space for articles and reviews.

The start of a new volume, and especially a milestone like a tenth volume, tends to give editors the feeling that it's time to take stock of the situation, and this editor is no exception to that rule. Over the past 27 years and nine volumes – one of which appeared in book form as *The Ten Year Book*, our *Journal* has carried some 540 pages of lantern research, illustration, news and miscellanea. It is not an exaggeration to claim that, taken together with the thousand or so pages in our Society's other books, plus sundry items in our *Newsletter*, this represents practically all of the published work on the magic lantern and its related media that has appeared in that period. The material ranges from the highly scholarly to the speculatively enthusiastic (and I'm not going to offer an opinion on which of those is 'best!'), and has touched upon pretty much every area of the history and practice of a very diverse medium. That said, much of what we have published tends to open up the surface of, rather than definitively close, areas of enquiry – relatively few pieces of work on a fragmented and shadowy area like projection history can truly be said to offer the 'last word'.

The challenge presented by such a track record, of course, is essentially to keep up the good work, and here, perhaps, is the rub. Looking back through the editorials of Volume 9, most of them seem to have been expressing a general optimism about the state of what might loosely be called 'lantern studies'. I still think that's the case: while we have a dedicated band of researchers exercising their curiosity on the historical and technical materials of projection history, there's plenty of reason for feeling that the future is bright. But there's an underlying question, and it's a big one: where is the 'new blood' coming from to maintain the dedicated band, to bring in new ideas and questions and to challenge (or confirm) our current understandings? There are a few younger academics aware of the lantern, to be sure, but on the whole the higher education interest in 'film studies' or 'media studies' avoids any deep delving into the past, and the universities' obsession with league tables and assessments tends to work against the opening up of new lines of enquiry. So we shouldn't expect or depend on an influx of students to inject new life and personnel into our subject any time soon. Perhaps there is more hope in drawing the attention of schoolchildren to our subject, though that's a long-term strategy in terms of membership applications.

Outside the academic world we're perhaps presented with a version of the question that is beginning to face all groups of amateur historians (except possibly the genealogists), especially those based around special-interest societies like ours and those whose activities are based on the collection of old things. The younger generations do not appear to 'collect' as a pastime in the same way as those of us – if I may over-generalise – born in the couple of decades either side of 1945. A psychological or sociological analysis of why this might be will have to wait for some other occasion. The question that might concern us more is what, in the long term, is to become of our assembled knowledge about the things we have collected – not to mention the collected things themselves? And, in a virtualised world of fast-moving and fast-changing media, how do we pass on our interest and enthusiasm for these old things?

These aren't questions to which a short editorial could, or perhaps should, provide an easy answer, and I'm not going to attempt to do so. Neither do the questions mean, in themselves, that the future for 'lantern studies' in general, or our *Journal* in particular, isn't a bright one. But it seems to me that unless we begin considering these questions, and unless we can begin to find practical ways of extending interest in the slides, equipment and ephemera we so treasure, we may find ourselves on a metaphorical iceberg floating south into ever-warmer seas.

All contributions to *NMLJ* continue to be welcome at any time for our forthcoming issues, of any length or format and on any magic lantern related subject. Please send items to the editorial address given on this page.