

REVIEW: *REALMS OF LIGHT*

Robert Macdonald

Richard Crangle, Mervyn Heard and Ine van Dooren (eds)
*Realms of Light: Uses and Perceptions of the Magic Lantern
from the 17th to the 21st Century*

London: Magic Lantern Society, 2005
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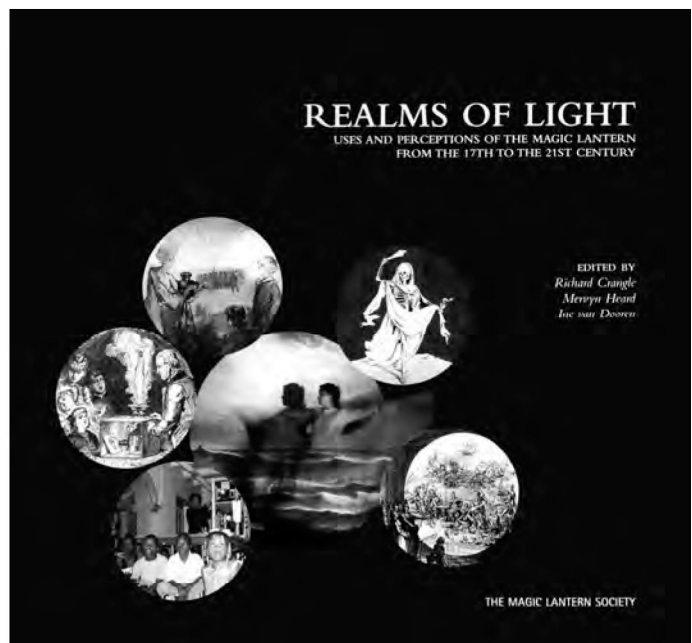
THE LATEST MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY PUBLICATION is one that has to be on every member's bookshelf.

In the Committee's discussions before the book was produced, it was felt that with our previous books we had covered the 'hardware' (*Servants of Light* and the *Encyclopaedia*) and the 'software' (*Magic Images*) of the magic lantern, but we had never covered the uses of the magic lantern. And so what later became *Realms of Light* was instigated. With any book that utilises a series of articles, there is bound to be variability in the length and content of the individual contributions. It is to the credit of the editorial team that every article in the book adds to our knowledge of the history (and in some cases the future) of the magic lantern.

The book is divided into four sections. The first is entitled 'Devices and Desires: some themes and strands of lantern history'. This section includes a brilliant survey of magic and the magic lantern (including an exploding walking stick) by Mervyn Heard. Mike Simkin writes about the magic lantern and the child, and introduces a new name for galantee lanternists (*Termajis* in the Breton dialect). We then read articles about the magic lantern's use in travelogues (possibly first seen in 1657) and pornographic slides. The use of temperance slides is at last the subject of a serious article that places them in their historic perspective. After a very original article from Stephen Bottomore on the use of the term 'magic lantern', we have Helen Weston's almost forensic dissection of images of magic lanternists and lantern shows.

The second section is 'Projection International: the lantern in different international contexts'. We start in Birmingham, with an article that includes a review of a Muybridge show; move on to Madrid, where Wendy Bird gives us a potted history of the entertainments in the Spanish capital; jump across the Atlantic to find out how to research a small collection of nineteen slides from the Ancient Order of United Workmen; and back across the Atlantic to Revolutionary France to read about how the lantern was both a tool and a metaphor in that time. Then it is back to America to cover the slide shows in one small town in 1895; back to Europe and the Netherlands for a history of Dutch projection (including a second new

Devices and Desires



name for galantee lanternists – *Luikerwalen*, professional lanternists from Belgium, so we now know what to call Herman Bolleart!). This section ends in Australia with the history of five generations of lanternists giving shows in and around Melbourne.

The third section is entitled 'People and Places: case studies of the lantern in use'. We start in the late 17th century with Samuel Reyher's work at Kiel University. We then move on to two articles about the Royal Polytechnic. What a joy it is to find articles that explain the history of this great institution and how the lantern performances fitted into its other activities. Hauke Lange-Fuchs presents an article that discusses early lantern shows for the courts of Europe. Early dissolving views by the magician M Henry are followed by the astronomer Robert Ball and his lantern lectures. Ball is reputed to have said 'there are eight ways to put a slide in a lantern, and seven of them are wrong' – a comment still all too true even today! There is an article about William Thomas Stead and the use of lanterns in missionary work. We then have an article about lantern shows in Hastings in 1881. On 23 March 1881 in the St Leonards Assembly Rooms there was a lecture about the difficulties the troops were facing in Afghanistan. *Plus ça change* ...

The final section of the book is 'The Lantern is not Dead: lanterns and slides in the 20th century and beyond'. This section opens with a beautifully illustrated article by Peter Gillies on advertising and propaganda slides; an article on the archaeological slides held by the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford follows. This includes a slide on the





Projection International

types of faces seen in Greece, so useful for your holiday at Faliraki. Jack Judson introduces us to the Brenograph projector as used in movie theatres in the 1920s and 1930s. This section also has articles about the creation of modern shows; the first is the Muckle Flugga show that entertained us so well at the 2005 Convention dinner. Ann Hecht describes lantern shows given in her home by herself and her late husband Hermann. It is particularly interesting to find an article about 35mm slides and the way they were used in families to record holidays and the children growing up, although the sight of our esteemed Journal editor as a child is not for the faint hearted (only joking). The article on the Diascoop artists' collective includes a very interesting new moving slide – everyone will want one. We visit the Hove Museum to find out how they created their new galleries. A fascinating article from Ludwig Vogl-Bienek explains how they recreated an 1887 projection of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, and went on to create a show of *The Flying Dutchman*. The final article in the book is a survey of people currently performing around the world, with details of their shows.

Dennis Crompton and his team have done their usual exemplary job on the design, layout and production of the book. It looks so good that it is impossible to resist picking it up and thumbing through it.

Robert MACDONALD is an engineer and project manager. He has had a lifelong interest in magic lanterns and other 19th-century entertainments. He is a committee member of the Magic Lantern Society, with responsibility for marketing the Society's publications.

People and Places

