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THE NEW MAGIC LANTERN JOURNAL

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**INTRODUCTION** - In addition to serving as the catalogue for the exhibition organised by the Architectural Association, this publication is also the first issue of the Journal of the Magic Lantern Society of Great Britain. We therefore hope not only to introduce the scope of the exhibition, but also to include a range of topics to interest both the casual observer and the committed enthusiast and collector of magic lanterns, Victorian slides and optical toys.



**EDITORIAL** - During January, February and March 1978 the Communications Unit at the Architectural Association organised a lecture course entitled 'Illusions of Reality - The Projected Image'. The course encompassed the entire range of projection techniques from the sixteenth century Camera Obscura to the laser beam and hologram of the nineteen seventies. The present exhibition concludes that course.

The magic lantern is simply a slide projector. At its most simple a child's toy capable only of showing a small and dimly lit picture a foot or two away; at its most sophisticated capable of filling a cinema screen at a hundred feet with a dazzling continuum of dissolving views, trick effects and animated pictures to an amazed audience of thousands.

Although the lantern is first mentioned in the literature of the mid-sixteen hundreds the peak of its development was reached in the mid and late nineteenth century at the Royal Polytechnic Institute and in the hands of itinerant lanternists such as T.C. Hepworth and C. Goodwin Norton. With the advent of the moving picture projector in 1896 the magic lantern went into decline and, although both lithographic and photographic slides were available up to the start of the second World War, the spirit of invention and development was directed to the new medium of film. During the past few years there has

been a revival of interest in the lantern as a collectable item, and fifteen months ago the Magic Lantern Society of Great Britain was formed with the aim of encouraging the conservation of magic lantern material and research into its background.

As the lantern grew from its simple beginnings with a lamp of burning whale oil projecting images hand painted on glass or thin sheets of other transparent materials, so its attendant paraphernalia expanded. Lighting techniques using acetylene gas, limelight, the electric carbon arc, paraffin, and of course the electric lamp, were all developed for the lantern. Similarly lantern slides evolved from the simple, through Robertson's Phantasmagoria, which conjured up advancing and receding ghosts from a lantern on wheels, back projecting onto a screen between the projector and the viewer (the first zoom lens perhaps in 1805) to the greatest of all, the grand series of 10" x 8" hand painted dissolving views of the Royal Polytechnic, London, where great historic events were re-enacted for the general entertainment and information of the public.

All of these gadgets were eventually the products of a thriving industry, which is the forerunner of the modern film, photographic and postcard industry. Indeed several manufacturers of the period are still in related parts of the industry. Bamforths, the famous postcard firm, were amongst the leaders in the slide making business at the turn of the twentieth century and their song sets, produced within hours of the publication of any new song, are now eagerly sought-after collectors items.

As in any such field there were commentators and writers on both the scientific and entertainment application of the lantern and an extensive library of magazines and books were available. Unhappily for today's collector there are no contemporary books describing the subject. Thus the only source of information is either a fellow collector or one of the diminishing stock of increasingly expensive and rare Victorian books.

In addition to providing a forum for the activities of members of the Magic Lantern Society, this journal hopes to fill the gap in the literature concerning the lantern by combining the publication of historical research with the reprinting and adaptation of material from the original Victorian books. Contributions will always be welcome and, although publication cannot always be guaranteed, it is hoped that members of the society will be increasingly prepared to make items from their collections available for publication. Until the availability of an encyclopaedic volume on the lantern, it is only through the sharing and exchange of information that our knowledge of this over-neglected quarter of our entertainment, scientific, artistic and technological history can be expanded.

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THE MAGIC LANTERN IN THE OLDER TIME.

The MAGIC LANTERN EXHIBITION is at the Architectural Association, 36 Bedford Square, London WC1, from Monday 24th April to Saturday 20th May 1978. Open daily from 10.00 to 19.00, Saturdays 10.00 to 15.00. Admission free.