

# THE MAGIC LANTERN and PAUL SANDBY

JOHN JONES

It must be almost a year since I was asked to write a few words for the *Journal* about this water-colour (1) and the artist Paul Sandby who painted it. I was glad to agree to do so and it shouldn't have taken long but the picture reminded me of others by the same painter and led me, via the print room of the British Museum, along a thread of information, of which I haven't yet come to the end. What I've found out so far is not exclusively about magic lanterns, although I hope that the connection is just strong enough to justify a place in the *Journal*.

Paul Sandby (1725/6–1809) has been called, rather puzzlingly, the 'father of water-colour art'. He was also an engraver, the first in England to explore the aquatint process. Gainsborough singled him out among English landscape painters for substituting artificially composed, picturesque scenes with 'real views from nature'. The pictures that are relevant here are not in fact 'from nature' but made up.

The first of these, Sandby's water-colour '**The Magic Lantern**', seems straightforward enough. A large

man at a table on which there are slides and a magic lantern which his body conceals from us projects an image on to a sheet hanging on the wall. His audience includes a girl with a babe-in-arms, a boy kneeling on a table and leaning on the head and shoulders of a young man, a seated old woman wearing spectacles who points her stick at the screen at which another man, pig-tailed and wearing a sash and sword, peers through an eye-glass. A negro servant, looking a little anxious, carries away a candle and a book entitled 'Dr. Taylor on Sight' (this is perhaps the famous Brook-Taylor whose work on perspective features in the Sandby print discussed below); three cats with backs up and tails swollen with fright and a dog who howls at a hurdy-gurdy-type instrument played by a child (or a dwarf) in the foreground of the picture.

The circular projected picture is of a parade or a carnival or triumph. The figures taking part seem to be wearing fancy dress and carry pennants with writing on them which is difficult to read in the photograph I have.

On the floor beneath the screen is a telescope –

another of the aids to vision which the picture seems to be cataloguing – a copy of Newton's *Optics* and an open booklet on which can be read 'The Mayor of G(a)rr(i)ck(?) by (Foot?)'. This could be a clue to the nature of the parade – a reading to go with the slides perhaps. Is it a sort of Lord Mayor's Show? Or part of an election campaign? The banners may identify rival candidates in an election. One reads: 'Lord Twankum – No wooden shoes?' Is that his slogan? His election platform promise? Another says: 'Sir Thomas de ...' and an illegible bit '... size?'

There may not be very much more to understand about the picture but until the written parts are deciphered there remains a suspicion that one is missing its full 'meaning', especially as some of the other engravings by Sandby that I want to mention are full of 'message'.

To make sense of the next print one must know something of its background. The giant figure of mid 18th-century British painting was William Hogarth. He expressed controversial opinions about painting which provoked attacks from other

1. Paul Sandby, 'The Magic Lantern'.

British Museum





3. Paul Sandby, detail 'The BURLESQUE burlesqued.' First state, 1753.

British Museum



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Museo Nazionale del Cinema de Torino

artists of whom Sandby was one. In 1752 Hogarth published his *Analysis of Beauty* in which he proposed (among other things) that beauty in art depended on the use of a particular flowing, sensuous line which became known as the 'Line of Beauty'. Hogarth was also critical of the fashion for paintings which were feeble imitations of Dutch masters. For a joke he made a 'burlesque' engraving of one of his own pictures, *Paul before Felix*, which he labelled 'designed and scratched in the true Dutch taste'. Paul Sandby's engraving is called 'The BURLESQUE burlesqued' and it satirises Hogarth's taste and art and opinions. In the picture (2 – see rear cover) Hogarth's dog Trump brings him a bone (left) 'to pick in the Line of Beauty'; Hogarth, seated at his easel is depicted as half-dog himself. A butterfly-winged insect at his ear 'inspires him with vanity'. Beside his easel are books: Brook-Taylor's *Perspective*, Vanbrugh's *Designs*, Joe Miller's *Jests* and Sir Richard Blackmore's poem *King Arthur*, all thought in their day to be in the worst of taste. The folder at his feet is his *Analysis of Beauty*. On the right are two apprentices, one making a childish drawing,

and above them are a series of flaps labelled 'Raphael', 'Rembrandt' etc., which can be adjusted to control the degree of light entering the studio to 'produce the effect of all ye great painters'. His window-shade is made of the torn pages from *Lives of the Great Painters*.

On the easel itself is a lunatic version of the bible story of Isaac in the guise of a butcher sacrificing Jacob by shooting him with a musket. An angel sent from God intervenes in the nick of time by peeing on his gunpowder – the final representation of this act of salvation is not as explicit as earlier states (3).

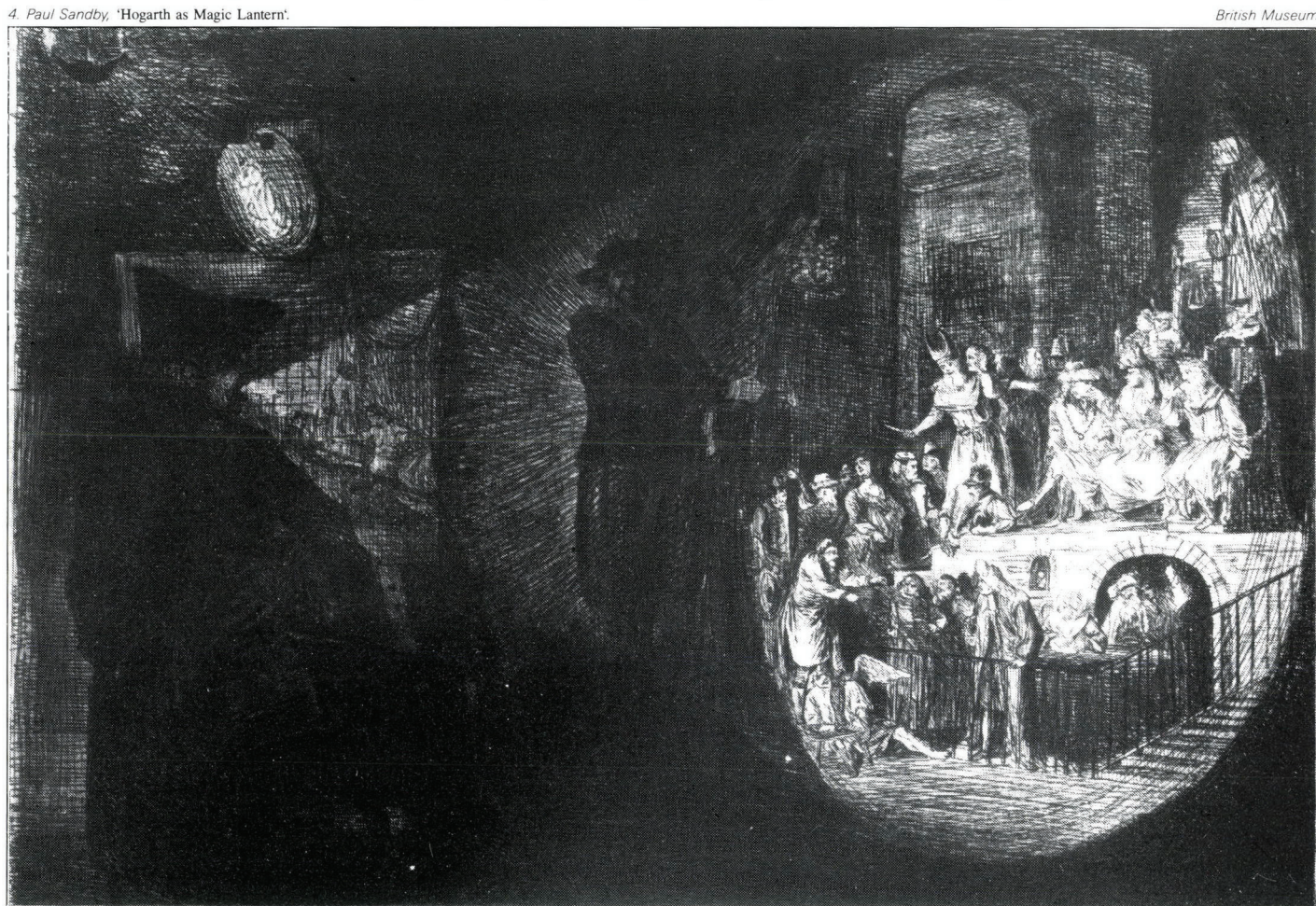
At the top of the picture Hogarth is seen with 'his brains taken out and his skull serving as a magic lantern'. A slide passes between his ears and from his mouth the burlesque image of his *Paul before Felix* is projected on to the wall. Beside him the traditional figure with the hurdy-gurdy and the man with the box (peep show?) on his back. Another version of this part of the print was also published by Sandby (4). In it Hogarth sits at his easel, topped with a palette bearing his 'Line of

Beauty', again a slide passing through his head is projected from his mouth to the screen which is watched from the shadows by his dog Trump. The hurdy-gurdy player is now absent, as is the showman – both being replaced by the central figure of the 'lecturer' who appears to be explaining the action on the screen.

Finally, and providing for us one further lantern connection, in the top left corner of the print (2) one can see the figure of the fat French priest examining a delivery of a huge sirloin of beef on its way to the English eating house 'Mme Grand-sire's' in Calais. It's taken from Hogarth's picture of 1748 sometimes called 'O The Roast Beef of Old England'. This same image (5) was used in a lantern slide now in the Turin Museum of the Cinema and illustrated in the book *Museo Nazionale del Cinema de Torino*, page 41.

There's a happy ending. When Sandby saw Hogarth's paintings *Marriage à la Mode*, he conceded that so great a painter should not be the subject of derision and ridicule and withdrew all his satirical prints from sale.

British Museum



4. Paul Sandby, 'Hogarth as Magic Lantern'.

the BURLESQUER burlesqued the second Edition Price £. done from & French



The Progress of the pug-dog in Art of Painting with his Invention by a Variety of Lights A B C D E F to produce a Effect of all a great Painters. Showing how far in his Opinion he has excell'd them in Design Colouring and Taste. — (4 his Brains taken out & his Soul serving for a Magician's. Paul before Felix is reflected from a ony Wall  
1 an Inlet helping a Painter with Vanity 5 his Layman 8 Lives of All the best Painters torn in pieces for his window blind  
2 a History piece suitable to a Painter's Capacity from a Dutch Master 6 Road Boat 9 a parcel hanging him a time to pick in a line of Beauty  
3 Old prints from whence he steals Figures for his Design 7 his Disciples

avec Privilege du Roy Decembre 1753

2. Paul Sandby, 'The BURLESQUER burlesqued.' Final state, 1753. British Museum

EDITED, DESIGNED AND PRODUCED by David Henry and Dennis Crompton

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