

# Trying to date some long slides

JOHN JONES

**Cleonicus:** I have procured an Artist, well skilled in this Miniature Painting, to draw on two or three Slips of Glass the whole PROCEEDING of the late CORONATION, which, when you observe the Motion on the Wall, you will certainly have a different Idea, that what you have hitherto entertained of these Subjects. –See, I put the slips in, one after another, and will move them in a proper Manner, while you take a cursory View of them as they pass in the regal Procession.

**Euphrosyne:** This will be an elevated Subject, indeed: – Good Heavens! The Herb Woman appears at a greater Advantage than when I saw her on the Platform at the Time. The painter has certainly complemented her six Maids... The Flowers lie as naturally on the Carpet as I then saw them: ...A delightful Appearance, indeed; the various Orders and Degrees of Gentry and Nobility, with their proper Habits, Robes, and regal Investments, bring to my Mind so naturally the Thing itself, that I really judge this View, by Candle-light, much to exceed that by Day-light, if it may be so called when they returned from the Abbey... The Canopies, under which our Sovereigns walk, are very elegant and highly improved by the Painter's Hand: ...The King and his Royal Consort appear with all the Pomp of solemn Majesty... Upon the Whole, it is a most exquisite, grand, and beautiful scene; and were such Subjects as these to be used for this Lanthorn, I cannot say but I should be as much entertained with its Effects as any of my Sex.

THE YOUNG GENTLEMAN AND LADY'S PHILOSOPHY  
Benjamin Martin c.1770

British Museum

4a.



British Museum

3a.



1a.



or about twenty years I have been trying to date twelve hand painted slides that came my way through an advertisement in *Exchange and Mart*. Six of them were numbered (1 to 7 with No.6 missing) and showed dignitaries taking part in a procession to Westminster Hall as part of a coronation ceremony. Over their heads their titles are written: Dukes of Aquitaine and Normandy; Dean of Westminster; King's Herald etc. (1). The other six slides are of clowns and tumblers, animals in human clothes aping the royal progress, a Noah's Ark and a joke about a rejuvenating machine. This is not an account of ingenious detective work that led me to an irrefutable conclusion about their date – I have not yet finally dated them. What follows are some bits of information stumbled on in the course of meandering research.

The previous owner guessed their date as twentieth century and thought they might be copies of illustrations from a recent book, but everything about them, glass, style of painting, wooden frames and the wire hinges of the box they were in, seemed much older to me. The written titles employed the old-fashioned 's' that resembles the letter 'f' and I thought this might be a clue to a date, but when I phoned a historian in the University of Leeds to ask when this form of the letter 's' ceased to be used, he replied discouragingly that he knew an old lady who still wrote like that!

It has been suggested that some sort of analysis of the wood, glass and paint (something along the lines of carbon dating?!) might yield a date, but, even if this is feasible, I have rejected that, to me, crashingly uninteresting solution. The truth is I am half-reluctant to find a mere answer. Better than arriving, the proverb says, is travelling hopefully.

To take the six coronation slides first; mine are not the only copies. The Science Museum in South Kensington has a set, also incomplete, which, when I first saw it, was dated 1820, but is no longer. It is virtually identical with mine, as far as hand-made copies can be, and is certainly by the same slide-maker.

When I showed the slides on a television programme in the sixties a viewer wrote to tell me that there was a similar set in the Bishop Ken Library at Longleat House in Lord Bath's collection. Her husband had researched them and obtained the opinions of James Laver (of the Victoria & Albert Museum, author of histories of costume) and Mr Hargrave Graham (assistant keeper of monuments at Westminster Abbey), whose conclusions were that the dress is of the period James I but that the possible date of their construction is about 1720–1740 and that 'such processional pictures were often copied from earlier records'. The coronation was thought to be that of King William and Queen Mary (1689) or, 'since the Queen has precedence, the coronation of Queen Anne (1702)'. These conjectures are not contradicted by the costumes of the clowns and tumblers in my slides, nor by Mrs Noah who wears a timeless bosom-baring number that is vaguely Jacobean, and Noah who wears robes appropriate to an occasion of uncertain date i.e. the Flood (2). I visited Longleat and confirmed that the slides, like the Science Museum's, were by the same artist as mine, although the sequence and identity of the personages are slightly at variance in the three sets. This may indicate that they are meant to depict different coronations, but I am inclined to ascribe these very minor discrepancies to the casualness of the slide-maker when copying. It is quite clear that all three sets have as their source an engraving which I found in the British Museum Print Room (3). It represents the coronation of William and Mary and is dated 1689. Much as I would like to, I cannot conclude that the slides also date from that year if only because this engraving appears to have been the source of several other subsequent prints (4) purporting to describe later coronations. In all of them – slides and prints of different coronations, the titles above the figures and more relevantly, the postures of the figures themselves are similar beyond the scope of coincidence.



3.

British Museum

4b.

British Museum



3b.

British Museum



7b.



A further coronation set (5), in the possession of Lester Smith, although obviously painted by a different hand to the others, also duplicates the titles and postures of the figures in this family of engravings.

Since the order of precedence was likely to be much the same from one coronation to the next, the engravers and slide makers simply copied the work of their predecessors without reference to the particular coronation they were depicting.

The trouble about dating copies is, of course, that one can only say that they are not earlier than their source, in this case 1689. To be certain that they are not *later* than a given date requires a different sort

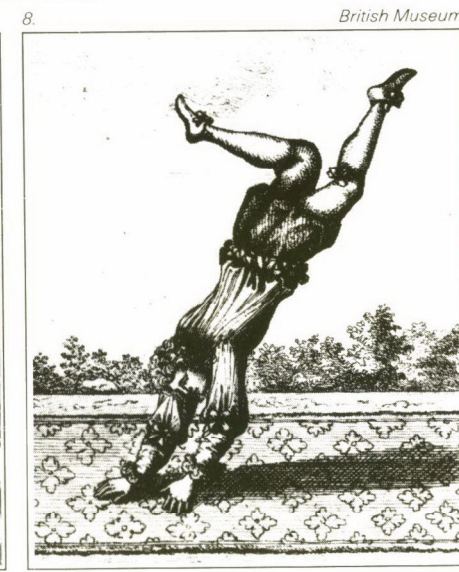
of evidence. All the slide sets I saw included a queen in the procession and no queen took part in the coronation of George IV (1820), whose rejected wife Caroline scandalized everyone during the ceremony by beating on the doors of the Abbey, howling to be let in, thus conveniently eliminating *that* coronation from our search. Putting aside William and Mary, the most likely coronations are 1702 (Anne), 1714 (George I), 1727 (George II), and 1760 (George III); on the evidence of the coronation slides alone it isn't possible to choose between them. The quotation from Martin's *PHILOSOPHY* (above) inclined me to choose 1760 if Euphrosyne's description of the slides is not taken too literally but,

although the book is meant to teach scientific facts, its form is fictional dialogue and has to be regarded with suspicion. Further evidence came from the remaining six slides, or, more exactly, the three showing clowns and tumblers. (6)

I soon realised that even these seemingly invented images were also copied from other sources. The slide-maker appeared to be using a large file of engravings, of all periods, to which he constantly referred. By finding, mostly by luck, some of these old prints and their dates, it has been possible to throw more light on the age of the slides.

The comic slides are related to the royal procession in that the grotesque figures on them belong to the

Lester Smith collection



British Museum



popular entertainments and celebrations that accompany a coronation – the fairs and revels – for example, rope-dancing, which seems to have been a recurring favourite show. Some dancers were so much admired that they became as famous as pop stars. Pepys wrote about one called Jacob Hall, whom Dryden put into a poem and who shared a mistress with Charles II. The slide of rope-dancers and tumblers does not seem to represent any such celebrities (7); the figures look as if they were painted wholly out of the slide-maker's head, but even the trivial figure of the tumbler appears to have been copied from a print in a series featuring Dutch performers, (8) engraved by Bellange. Unfortunately

the engraving is undated and sources of information about Bellange contradict each other. There was more than one Bellange; the one most likely to have made this engraving died in 1638, which tells us very little except that Dutch rope-dancers must have been about for a long time as Morley in his *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair* quotes accounts of them right into the eighteenth century.

Morley's book has been most useful. It records the popularity in England of the Commedia dell'Arte characters who make up most of the figures on the remaining two slides. Harlequin, Punchinello and Scaramouche are easily identified (9), the problem with them being that there are too many images of

them to be able to identify any one as the copyist's source; Harlequin for example is invariably represented stepping out with one hand touching his hat and the other thrust forward, usually holding his wooden stick or sword (10). Other tantalisingly similar images are just not exact enough to be acceptable evidence although interesting in themselves; in an 18th century French print is a Commedia dell'Arte character called Signor Ramponelli holding a wine skin or bottle and a raised glass (11) who clarifies what our figure (12) is doing whilst clearly not being his prototype. One bit of evidence that might clinch the date I am seeking, if I could only find the right print, is the case of the Macaroni. (13)





18.

19.

British Museum



14.



15.



The Macaroni was originally a privileged young man who had made the Grand Tour (of Italy). His fellows formed clubs and became more and more extravagant in dress and mannerisms until the word came to be a term of reproach, says M. Dorothy George, 'to all ranks of people who fall into absurdity.' The word survived for an 'effeminate fop', a recognisable stereotype in the 1760s and 1770s. Cartoonists mocked their eccentric dress, a chief feature of which was 'a huge queue of powdered (false) hair.' These prints 'dominated the print shops and magazine shops about 1770 to 1773.' The figure on the slide has Macaroni attributes – the snuff box, the pig-trail (queue) and the hint of a sword hilt but nothing reliable enough to justify a date.

But some of the little grotesque figures match their sources indisputably. One eccentric figure I took to be a famous English contortionist (14) turned out to have his origin in a drawing by Callot, the great recorder of the variety and drolleries of the Italian

comedians (15). But this beautiful match adds nothing to our search since Callot made his drawings early in the 17th century and died in 1635.

Many of these fairground showmen were associated with quack doctors and I was sure one of them (16) was carrying a sort of stethoscope. I had also persuaded myself that the the object he held at his shoulder was a kind of device for making or sorting pills. Eventually, through one or two images of the precursors of Mr.Punch and an illustration in a child's history of the theatre I realised he was carrying a pair of tongs (misunderstood and badly copied by the slide-maker) and a griddle which he pretends to play like a violin. His source: an undated print of 'Polichinelle' by one of two artists called Fruytiers, Dutchmen, one who died in the 1660s and the other in 1782 (17).

Even when they contribute nothing to the dating of the slides I get disproportionate satisfaction from

21.

Museo Nazionale del Cinema de Torino



tracking down these original prints which the slide-maker was looking at two to three hundred years ago. One especially satisfying find came from reading the above-mentioned *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair* (18). This is a picture of one of the most famous comedians in the history of fairs – called 'Merry Andrews'. His name was William Phillips and he may have written a tragedy in 1698 called 'The Revengeful Queen' and some other plays. Morley comments that he would not be the only clown whose gaiety concealed a tragic sense of life. His popularity did not prevent, in fact may have caused, his being arrested and whipped for a joke which mocked the Revolutionary Government of the day. In the print he is the 'Bartholomew Fair Musician', one of a set of 'Street Cries of London' of 1688 by an engraver called Pierce Tempest (19). The idea that the slide represents a particular person, the only one of all the figures to do so, makes it rather special.

22.



The figure I have left until last is rather more useful in establishing dates and interesting for a quite different reason. Its animal legs led me to its sources, two prints by C.Huet in the Cinema Museum in Turin (20). The standing monkey (21) turning the handle of the hurdy-gurdy supplies the lower half of the figure on the slide and the upper half with the back-pack and the three-cornered hat comes from the other, kneeling figure (22). Once again there is some confusion about the artist; it may be Charles or Christopher Huet. Both painted 'Singeries' – monkeys aping humans – in French stately homes in 1735 and 1745, and a series of prints of 'different incidents in the life of humans represented by monkeys'. One source says Christopher died in 1759 and that Charles was born in 1760 but another says they may be the same man. For dating it is the engraving which matters and that is by J.Guélard about whom I can only be certain that he was active around 1730. On this

feeble evidence I have to say that whilst the date of the coronation could be 1727 (George II) I incline to the view, without putting money on it, that 1760 (George III) is the more likely. The slides were probably made within a year or two of that occasion.

As I said earlier, this research has been in progress for some twenty years. I gave an account of its initial stages at the inaugural meeting of the Magic Lantern Society of Great Britain in 1976 and am happy now to present this further progress report ten years later and to note how appropriate that the print which comes nearest to solving the dating problem should be the same one chosen (23) by the Society as an illustration to its announcements of the great anniversary Convention of 1986! I wish my conclusions could have been more irrefutable. The research will not stop and perhaps for the 1996 Convention I shall have something rather more positive to relate to the Society.

23.

Announcing  
**The Magic Lantern Society of Great Britain**  
**1986 CONVENTION**  
CELEBRATING THE 100th ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOCIETY



Friday Saturday and Sunday April 4th 5th 6th 1986 From 9.30am. to 9.30pm Each day  
**THREE GLORIOUS ACTION PACKED DAYS**  
 Including SHOWS & TALKS - THE MARKET HALL AUCTION  
 & THE EXHIBITION GALLERIES

featuring lantern ephemera, selected lanterns, slides & optical toys

THE FOLLOWING ARTISTES & LECTURERS ARE ALREADY BOOKED TO APPEAR

**MIKE SIMKIN** on **ALBERT SMITH**  
 The Great Victorian Panoramaniac and Traveller

**RON MORRIS** "A room with a view" **DAVID & LESLEY EVANS** "Dissolving Views"  
**DICK BALZER** Chairman Magic Lantern Society of USA and Canada

**ERNST HRABALEK**

from Vienna with "The Toy Magic Lantern Extravaganza"

**DOUG & ANITA LEAR'S** MAGICAL LANTERNS

**MERVIN HEARD AND WHITES WONDERS**

**LARRY RAKOW**

from the USA with "The Professor Optrix Magic Lantern Show"

**TERRY BORTON**

"The America of Joseph Boggs Beal"

**WILHELM WAGENAAR**

sings, dances and discourses on optical illusion and the magic lantern

TOGETHER WITH NUMEROUS OTHER PERFORMERS AND PRESENTERS

& The Birthday Dinner: Full colour closed circuit T.V. - (Canteen - Bar - Restaurant - Refreshments

at

**THE ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION**

36 BEDFORD SQUARE - LONDON W.C.1

TICKETS £36 - DINNER £12

(to include all the above plus

10% DISCOUNT FOR MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY) (PLEASE PREPARE TO PAY BY CASH OR BY CHEQUE)

16.



17.



20.

