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Cover picture:

Frontispiece: illustration from *The Magic-Lantern*, by Robin Ranger, published by the Sunday-School Union of New York in 1862. The family lantern show portrayed in this image (the only illustration in this charming little book) is described at length in its text – see 'Bits and Pieces' on page 29 of this issue.

From the collection of Mark Butterworth.

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HAVING 'SETTLED DOWN IN THE CHAIR' a little apprehensively in the last issue, it is very pleasant to report that for this issue your editor finds himself in the position all editors dream of – namely, having slightly too much material to fit into the *Journal*. A number of good items, and promises of a few more, have been held over until the next issue, which hopefully will not be too long in appearing. I am very grateful to everyone who has commented favourably on the new appearance of the *NMLJ*, and even more grateful to those people who have generously supplied material and ideas. None of this means, though, that there isn't room for more contributions – so if you have an idea which you think needs to see the light of day, please do get in touch!

In a recent number of the *Society Newsletter*, Mervyn Heard commented that 'the lantern is becoming more popular,' and I think I would agree – not just in the sense of contemporary performance which Mervyn went on to discuss, but also in the sense of increasing interest in its history and heritage. The articles and other contributions featured in this issue once again give some idea of the wide range of approaches being taken. In one sense, the only thing most of this issue's contents have in common is that they all deal with some (sometimes tangential) aspect of the magic lantern. Otherwise the spread of interests represented here would verge on the baffling: from the scholarly world of art history represented by Wendy Bird's consideration of the great Francisco Goya and his possible optical influences, to the 'small finds' and other items outlined in our *Bits and Pieces* feature (which is where most of the holding-over has had to take place).

In between the tour takes in technical features, in the shape of Stephen Herbert's Muybridge discovery, some more digging into the earliest history of lantern use by Deac Rossell, and a couple of investigations into the background of particular sets or collections of slides, in Jeff Barnard's *History of a Sovereign* piece and Brian Widdowson's 'Vicar' puzzle. The latter also illustrates nicely how investigations into lantern history can – and should – cross over into other areas, such as the increasingly popular pursuit of local history, to the benefit of both. We may sometimes assume that there is little information left to us about how lanterns were used, and particularly who saw and gave lantern shows, but in fact there is a surprising amount of detail available if we know just where, and how, to look. And finally, it is very pleasing to include some small recognition of one of the great collections of optical material which make it possible to study this subject at all, in the shape of a review of the glorious catalogue of the Minici Zotti Collection which appeared at the end of last year. All in all, the various shapes and sizes of research activities in lantern history bode well for the future of our subject, as well as that of our *Journal*.

At the same time, it seems to me that history is not just about the past – or rather, as we look back, there is no easy way of deciding at which point things start being 'historical'. One point of view would say that we are creating history ourselves all the time, and that the process that decides which records of our activities survive to form 'history' is largely accidental. This is one motive behind the inclusion of personal 'lantern memories' in our *Bits and Pieces* pages. John Selway's contribution in this issue is a good example of the importance of recording what we (or our parents, or their parents) remember doing: without this kind of personal account there may be little or no record of how lanterns and other optical materials were used, or seen, in the everyday twentieth century.

One (temporary) casualty of the amount of material supplied for this issue has been the index of *NMLJ* promised last time. This is in hand and progressing well, but pressure of space and time meant there was no room for it in this issue – unless it was divided up into sections, which would defeat the object somewhat. The index will appear as soon as possible. When it does it will also find its way onto the Society website, which will allow it to be updated as new issues appear, and to expand to cover other Society publications as well. While on the subject of indices, you may notice that the page numbering of this issue is slightly different: in future the numbers will run consecutively through a volume, which should make indexing slightly less confusing, to say nothing of the production of bound volumes.

Our next issue is scheduled to appear at the end of 2002, and will hopefully have a slightly seasonal flavour. Contributions of all shapes and sizes are welcome at any time, but the editorial deadline for Volume 9 Number 3 will be **1 September 2002**. Please send any articles, ideas, illustrations, letters, comments, speculations, questions – in fact anything of lantern interest, great or small – to the Editorial address at the bottom of the Contents column.