THE EIDOPHUSIKON AT THE EXETER EXCHANGE

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DICK BALZER HAS KINDLY SENT me a beautiful illustration of a fly-poster announcing the presentation of the Eidophusikon at Exeter Exchange in the Strand, London (fig. 1), which supplies a little additional information regarding this fascinating pre-cinema device.

After its initial display at de Loutherbourg's house in Lisle Street, off Leicester Square, London, it opened at Exeter Exchange in the early months of 1786 (see my 'Eidophusikon Revisited' in Newsletter 105), which is the likely date of Balzar's illustration. Here it was exhibited in the evening in an exhibition room above the Exchange (fig. 2). It has not been determined how long it remained at this establishment, but we do know it was in Spring Gardens in 1793 when it passed into the hands of a Mr Chapman and was finally consumed by fire in Panton Street. Havmarket, in March 1800.



1. A fly-poster of Philippe de Loutherbourg's Eidophusikon exhibited at the Exhibition Room, Exeter Exchange, Strand, London, after first appearing at his house in Lisle Street, Leicester Fields. 200 x 270mm, 1786. (Dick Balzar Collection)

Here in the Strand the doors opened at 7.00 each evening, the performance commenced at 7.30 and the doors were closed at 9.30 so we presume the show lasted about 1½ hours. Seats nearest the stage cost 3 shillings (£0.15) and those further back 2 shillings (£0.10), which was not cheap in those days.

All the movements of the Eidophusikon have yet to be determined, not only under the management of de Loutherbourg but also while under the direction of Mr Chapman, but there is



 The Exeter Change (Exchange), engraved by Thomas H. Sheperd, 1829, from Metropolitan Improvements. The Eidophusikon of Philippe de Loutherbourg was exhibited here from February 1786. (Barnes Archive)

no reason to doubt that its other perambulations would be forthcoming with further research.

Perhaps a few words should be said about the Exeter Change (or Exchange) itself. It was situated where the Strand Palace Hotel now stands. In the 18th century its ground floor contained a bazaar of market stalls, selling a variety of goods and bricabrac. Above, on its first floor, were numerous exhibition galleries, home to a series of ever-changing displays of curiosities.

Towards the close of the century, when the Eidophusikon was exhibited here, live entertainments such as songs and recitations predominated. Finally, as our illustration shows, a menagerie of wild beasts was the main attraction.

The Exchange's end was signalled when plans were laid in 1828 to widen this part of the Strand. It moved to new premises in Charing Cross Mews and became known as Exeter Hall, and was finally swallowed up by the construction of the National Gallery.