

BENJAMIN JOHN MALDEN (1838–1933)

A Prominent Lecturer of the Royal Polytechnic

Lester Smith

A CHANCE GIFT of some programmes to Allan and Rene Marriott after a recent lantern show has opened up a new chapter in the life of one of the doyen lecturers of the 'old' Polytechnic after its closure in 1882. A lady approached the Marriotts and said she had several old programmes that were of no use to her and would they like them? It turned out that she was the great-niece of B.J. Malden, one of the principal lecturers at the Royal Polytechnic Institute. Allan and Rene said 'yes please' of course and have kindly lent them to me to peruse.

The Polytechnic reopened six months after the 1882 closure as a true Institute, and the magic lantern remained as an important educational tool for the students and for the occasional 'Christmas treat'.

The four programmes given to the Marriotts are in mint condition and cover the years of the Dioramic Lectures of Benjamin John Malden (FRGS, FZS) between 1892 and 1897. The 1892/93 series contain 20 pages covering the choice of 16 lectures, with the title of each slide, and mention of the painters or photographers of the slides (fig. 1). The other three programmes are of only four pages and each contains mention of new programmes plus a summary of the previous years.

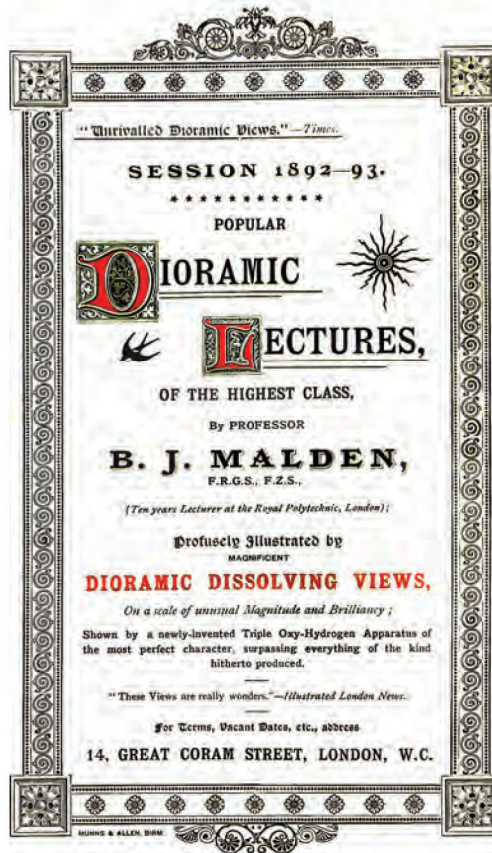
Mr Malden was born in Bedfordshire, England, and was apprenticed to a wood engraver in London. Later on he opened his own business. The opportunity to become a lecturer came about after he joined a library in Great Portland Street which was run in connection with the local church. The vicar asked him to give a lecture to the children, which proved to be so popular and he found himself in such demand that he gave up his engraving business, handed it over to his assistant as a free gift and began his life of lecturing and travel.

Mr Malden joined the Polytechnic in the late 1860s, and when the Polytechnic set up the 'New Travelling Branch' in 1872, he jumped at the chance. He thus became the 'Special Travelling Lecturer', along with Professor Gardener, who enjoyed demonstrations, specialising in science and chemistry, smoke, fire, light and colour, models and machinery (similar perhaps to the Royal Institution lectures today). The third and last was a Mr Robinson, whose subjects were explorations of the Holy Lands, the Shah and the Persians, Brighton Aquarium and the Transit of Venus (after it occurred in 1874). Literary lectures, children's entertainments,

musical events and even magic tricks were also available for hire. Needless to say, the slides were not the 9 x 6½in large-format glass slides (usually reserved for Christmas entertainments) but the standard 3in diameter painted slides in 7 x 4in wood frames or else 3¼in square hand-tinted photographic slides. Even so, many were painted by Mr Hill and Mr Wilkie, and others.

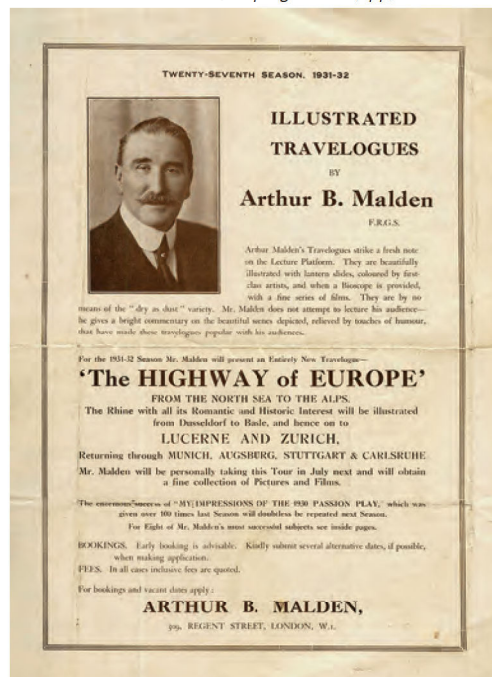
According to the programme of 1892/93 Malden had given 600 lectures whilst at the Poly and another 3,000 lectures since then and was using 'the newly invented triple oxy-hydrogen apparatus of the most perfect character surpassing everything of the kind hitherto produced and specially built for him by W.C. Hughes to his own designs'. He was equally at home talking to 20 or 30 people at a private lecture as addressing an audience of 3,000 to 4,000. Mr Malden had a penchant for travel and photography. Over 30 years or so he had visited Switzerland 20 times, Denmark seven times, much of Europe, Canada and Niagara, taking his camera everywhere he went. This may not have been his first camera, but the Swinden and Earp falling plate camera was his favourite (fig. 2).

In 1902 his son, Arthur Malden started giving public performances in his own right with a No.7 Prestwich cinematograph attached to a lantern plus a 'miniature' triple lantern.² Following in his father's footsteps, he was able to keep audiences spellbound with his beautiful travel films and dissolving views, along with



1. Front cover of the 1892/93 programme

3. Front cover of the 1931/32 programme (4pp)



2. The Swinden and Earp camera

his storytelling, music and effects. He had the help of an excellent film operator, a Mr Tom B. Mercer, who gained his large experience whilst working at the Polytechnic.

They had a regular spot working at Hastings Pier Pavilion. Indeed it is believed that he and his father showed the first films ever seen in Hastings (apart from kinetoscope peepshow films), at the White Rock Pavilion.

One final programme given to the Marriotts was that for Arthur's 27th film and lantern Season 1931/32 (fig. 3). The programme contains nine talks, each accompanied with artistically coloured slides and Pan-chromatic film.



MR. B. MALDEN, SEN.

4. The Kinematograph & Lantern Weekly, 8 October 1909

The 'hit' of the season was the 1930 Passion Play at Oberammergau, shown over 100 times and with record audiences, and this with coloured slides only. One interesting fact for me is that he is still using the address of the Polytechnic Institute, 309 Regent Street.

For the last ten years of his life, Mr Benjamin Malden (fig. 4) and his family lived at Southsea. He died there aged 95 on 26 January 1933. Sadly, Arthur had died two years earlier and his wife two years before that. He left another son, Hubert (who was in the film business), and a daughter, Miss Lucy Malden.³

The 1892/93 series contain 20 pages covering the choice of 16 lectures with the title of each slide and mention of the painters or photographers of the slides. I have endeavoured to repeat the descriptions associated with each lecture, each of which makes me wish that I had been there!

Lectures were always 'profusely illustrated by magnificent dissolving views on a scale of unusual magnitude and brilliancy'.

'Sight Seeing In Sweden and Denmark'. The 100 photos were taken by Mr Malden during the summer of 1892 with Swinden & Earp's Patent Camera.

'The Great World Of Australia'. 100 photographs were also taken expressly for this lecture but the photographer's name was not mentioned.

'A Holiday In Tenerife, Grand Canary & Madeira'. Profusely illustrated by over 100 photos taken on the spot by Mr Malden.

'A Visit To Windsor Castle' with 80 photographs taken by Mr William Brooks (with permission from her Majesty the Queen, of course).

'A Holiday In The Highlands via The Great Forth Bridge', illustrated with a splendid series of 90 photographs with novel and artistic effects.

'Italy & Sicily'. Their sublime scenery, lovely lakes, curious cities and marvels of art illustrated by a series of Nature photographs with novel effects and changes.

'Our Glorious Colonies'. A cruise under the British Flag with over 70 brilliant scenes with novel changes and scenic effects.

'An Evening With Charles Dickens, His Works and Characters', profusely illustrated with magnificent dissolving views. The pictures are works of art painted by Mr J.H. Steward and taken from the well-known etchings illustrating the works of the author.

'London, Its History and Mystery', including a moving panorama before the fire of 1666 with the original 70 magnificent dissolving views by Mr W.R. Hill, the eminent artist, concluding with photographs taken from the top of an omnibus showing the hustle and bustle of a great city.

'My Holiday In Norway'. A yachting cruise in the 'Domino' to the 'Land of The Midnight Sun', illustrated with 80 splendid nature photographs taken by Mr Malden.

'Picturesque Ireland', with 80 splendid scenes on the largest scale with artistic effects and changes.

'Wonders Of The World', being an epitome of the most remarkable natural phenomena with 65 magnificent dissolving views specially designed and painted for this lecture and which by means of Professor Malden's newly invented triple apparatus will be shown with unprecedented brilliance and marvellous reality, each scene covering 60 feet in circumference, This wonderful show will conclude with the exhibition of the marvellous Astrometeoroscope, illustrating the persistence of vision. This is the only instrumental of its kind in Europe.

'To Mont Blanc and Back', with 76 artistic and beautiful dioramic views, hand painted by Mr Hughes and Mr W.R. Hill from sketches taken on the spot.

'Recollections of Rome, Naples and Pompeii'. This most intensely interesting lecture, including the 'Ascent of Vesuvius', is admitted to be one of Mr Malden's best subjects.

'America And Niagara, How I went And What I Saw'. All the great sights of Professor Malden's tour illustrated by 60 brilliant and dioramic views.

'The Glories Of The Heavens'. A grand popular astronomical entertainment concluding with the Great Planetarium showing at one view, all the planets in actual motion (by complicated machinery) on a scale of grandeur and completeness never before produced away from the Polytechnic Institute.

The last page of the programme catalogue contained 11 opinions of the press, all in the most glowing terms and unsolicited (of course).

NOTES

1. Fellow of The Royal Geographic Society & Fellow of The Zoological Society.
2. The Kinematograph & Lantern Weekly, 31 October 1907.
3. Obituary. *Hastings & Leonards Observer*, 28 January 1933.