

# THE SLIPPING SLIDES OF ARCHER & SONS

Lester Smith

I have always been fond of the animated slipping slides of Archer & Sons. The company was established in Liverpool in 1848 by William Frederick Archer, an optician who also specialised in musical instruments.<sup>1</sup> His eldest son Walter took over the business around 1875. Soon after William died, Walter's two younger brothers, Frederick and Foster Archer, joined the company, and in 1881 added several more shops.<sup>2</sup> It appears that they stopped trading soon after the end of the First World War. The last advertisement I have found for them was in May 1907 when they were offering a new biennial, two models of single lantern and a quick-action slide changer.

The slipping slides of Archer are easily recognised on two counts. Firstly, the wooden frames are the standard 7 inches x 4 inches, except that the upper and lower wooden frame is only  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch wide instead of the usual  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch. This would result in the glass being  $\frac{7}{16}$  inch wider. Secondly, the paintings fill the whole area of picture shown on the screen, not only on the static view but also on the slipping slide that replaces it when it is 'pulled'. Most are very beautifully painted. A description is written along the top outside edge in black ink with descriptive titles such as 'The Artist Who Will Make A Noise In The World' or 'Professor Katchem In Search of Science', or simply 'Boy Squirting Water'.

Another distinctive feature is the subject matter. They almost always seem to be of the 'calamity' variety: an accident is about to happen ... and does. There are very few of the more general type of slipper slide such as flowers opening, animals drinking, eyes looking left and right, eating or drinking and so on which make up a considerable amount of other makers' stocks. With over fifty Archer slides I have examined, almost every one is a 'calamity'.

There are exceptions of course, and in my collection there is a series of slides which go together to tell a story. The longest sequence comprises three slip slides, hence six different images. It tells the story of a canary that escapes from its cage and flies back to the shopkeeper who sold it, while desperately being followed by its master (Fig. 1). Another story of two slides, using four pictures, is about a sum of money being willed to a dog for as long as it lives (Fig. 2). Unfortunately it dies, so the owner gets it stuffed. On a predetermined day, she presents it to the solicitor under her arm while a small boy, hidden from sight, wags the dog's tail! I believe this type of story-telling is unique to this company.

Archer & Sons concentrated on new ideas to improve their lanterns and did not produce a great many slides. They regularly ran advertisements in the *Optical Magic Lantern Journal* for their lanterns and very occasionally a new set of slides was mentioned. 'Slum Life in the Great Cities', one of their most famous productions, appeared in October 1892. In 1891 they boasted 'Effect slides painted for the wholesale London Houses', so maybe they mostly supplied the wholesale business. I have never found a catalogue or seen any lists for their slipping slides, which I would dearly love to find. Of my own Archer slides, about 10 per cent have the name impressed into the wood, along the top or else along the bottom. This is usually of F.W. & F.H. Archer, 43 Lord St & 60 South Castle St, and therefore after 1881 when they had expanded their base of operations. This may also suggest my other slip slides are earlier than this.

*Comments on this subject are always welcome please.*



1.



2.



3. *Old Man Pulling Boot On'*



*Professor Katchem In Search of Science*

## NOTES

1. John Barnes 'A List of Magic Lantern Manufacturers and Dealers ...', in *Magic Images*, Magic Lantern Society, London 1990.
2. Entry 'Archer' in Lucerna database [www.slides.uni-trier.de](http://www.slides.uni-trier.de).