

39th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

THE MUSICAL MUSEUM, BRENTFORD, 24 January 2015

For our AGM, the Society returned once again to the welcoming surroundings of the Musical Museum at Brentford, home to one of the world's foremost collections of self-playing musical instruments. There were 69 members and guests present, with 13 apologies.

Two guided tours took place during the day, when members could not only see, but more importantly hear, the range of instruments on display. Like magic lantern slides, these beautifully preserved exhibits only really come to life when put to practical use and the whole museum is a tribute to the dedicated craftsmen who keep them in such good repair.

The business part of the meeting concluded with a very special event marking the launch of the Society's latest publication, *Dutch Perspectives*. **Annet Duller** and **Margreet Wagenaar-Fischer** described the genesis of this beautifully produced book, which is a fitting tribute to the life and work of the late **Willem Albert Wagenaar** and the close bonds of friendship he enjoyed with members of the Magic Lantern Society. Willem was well known for his depth of knowledge but above all for his unique qualities as a showman, with entertainments that were always full of warmth, humour and inventiveness.

The afternoon session began with a presentation by **Vanessa Toulmin** celebrating twenty years of the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield. Professor Toulmin's career has been a remarkable one, and the history of the Archive is inextricably tied up with her own life history. Born into a Lancashire fairground family, her early years were spent dispensing candyfloss

and taking money for the gallopers. Reversing the traditional course, she ran away from the fair at 16 to study for her A-levels. She has gone on not only to establish a distinguished academic career but, as 'Professor Vanessa', has also organised exhibitions and performances throughout the country. Amongst other highlights, she has curated the annual Showzam festival in Blackpool and her *Wondershow* at the Roundhouse in Camden, London, was a highlight of the international CircusFest 2012.

Nicholas Highley was next to the podium, with an entertainment he called 'A Show with No Content'. Rather than focusing on narrative slides, dissolving views or any of the other 'content' with which the lantern is associated, he instead turned his attention to those incidental slides that punctuate a performance but are largely unremarked. Plentiful 'Welcome' and 'Goodnight' slides in a bewildering range of styles, but also admonitions to remove over exuberant hats, keep quiet or (most importantly of all!) not to forget the collection plate. An original and hugely enjoyable take on the traditional lantern show, illustrated throughout with slides from the presenter's own collection.

The day ended in fitting style with the mighty Wurlitzer organ rising majestically from beneath the stage and resident organist Chris Barber giving a virtuoso demonstration of its powers, before ending the day with a rousing sing-along.

There was some lusty singing from members of the Society, though some of us were hushed into embarrassed silence by the beautiful tones of our own **Juliette Harcourt**, whose fine voice rose above the cacophony to end the day on an appropriately musical note.

Jeremy Brooker

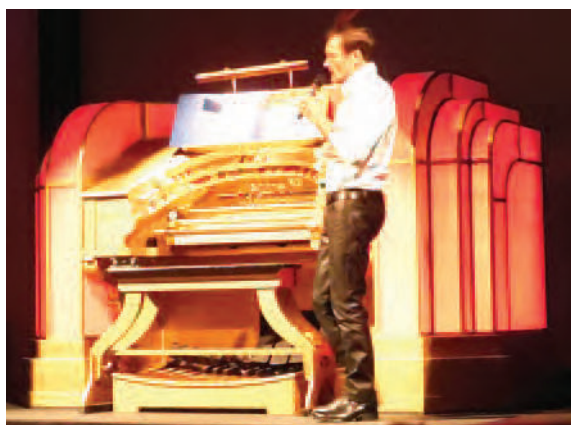


"Welcome to the 2015 AGM" GA



Margreet Wagenaar-Fisher, George Aukland and Annet Duller

Fairground life



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Printed by MPC for Dave Morgan

Published by:

The Magic Lantern Society,
South Park, Galphay Road, Kirkby Malzeard,
Ripon, North Yorkshire HG4 3RX, England
Web site: www.magiclantern.org.uk

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ISSN 2057-3723

