

HOW TO BUY TWO BULL'S-EYE LANTERNS IN 48 HOURS

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From time to time I look over different internet platforms for collectors. One Tuesday evening recently marked the beginning of a very exciting two days. My first find was a bull's-eye lantern from the Netherlands. Unfortunately this had been repainted in matt black paint and decorated all over with a design of white lines. It really looked terrible, and in addition the top end of the chimney was missing. I continued my search and to my surprise found several offers (again from the Netherlands) of panoramic magic lantern slides in wooden frames: three or four lots totalling about twenty-five slides. The reason for my excitement was that I felt sure they were from the second half of the eighteenth century, or even earlier. I contacted the seller, and eventually managed to buy the slides. To my great surprise and good fortune, they came with another bull's-eye lantern! I was able to collect the slides and lanterns a few days later, combining my trip with the AGM of the 'Nederlandse Vereniging van Fotograficaverzamelaars' in the Louwman Museum in Den Haag, including a free visit to the museum, with its wonderful collection of antique and classic cars and also of historic telescopes.¹ A perfect end to a very exciting week!

A DESCRIPTION OF THE LANTERNS

The first one has – contrary to previously known examples – a pediment which is sloped on three sides (left, right and front). It seems to have its original black paint with some gold-coloured lines. The big (bull's-eye) lens/condenser has a diameter of 100 mm and the small front lens (which is a later replacement) 38 mm. The chimney is decorated with eight columns. The overall height is 38 cm (the top ring is missing), the body is 18 cm square and the slide stage 12.5 cm.

The second bull's-eye magic lantern has an (incomplete) 'phantasmagoria' chimney (Fig. 2). The big lens measures 95 mm in diameter, the front lens 42 mm, and the slide stage is 10.5 cm. The lantern has been repainted in black, and has a height of 51 cm. The body measures 15.5 cm square. The door has a curled flat tin catch. When I removed the lenses I made an exciting discovery: the tube for the big lens shows a scratched word and a number on its surface that I read as 'Storrop 2' or 'Slorrop 2'.

My research showed only one result that might be helpful and that was the name of George Sterrop, London. He was a maker of optical instruments such as microscopes, solar microscopes and telescopes.² Apart from the different spelling of the name on the lens tube we have to recognise the fact that George Sterrop died in 1756, and I found no sources to indicate that his workshop was continued. Usually the earliest use of this kind of chimney is dated to the early nineteenth century. Therefore it seems impossible that the lantern was made by George Sterrop. Another question is: what was the purpose of this signature and the number 2? Was the scratching made in the workshop, or by the owner of the lantern? The name Storrop seems to be most likely of British origin.

I hope future research on the bull's-eye magic lantern will take this new information into account, and perhaps help to solve this mystery.

NOTES

1. See: www.louwmanmuseum.nl.
2. See P.F.K. Louwman, *A Certain Instrument For Seeing Far: Four Centuries of Styling the Telescope* (Wassenaar: Louwman Collection of Historic Telescopes, 2013), 114, and different sources

