

A LANTERNIST'S TOUR DE FRANCE

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This summer Michael and I with our not-so-trusty campervan (but that is another story) planned to tour France. However, our plans took a more magic lantern direction following the MLS summer meeting in Bath (see report). In his presentation Patrice Guérin invited members to visit Le Musée National de l'Éducation in Rouen, just across the Channel, and promised to guide members around the museum. As our holiday took us through Rouen, this opportunity was not to be missed. We found the museum in the picturesque centre of the city, within which its traditional timber-framed front fitted perfectly. Unfortunately for us, Patrice Guérin was *en vacances*, but we had ample opportunity to browse around.

The ground floor is devoted to education, in particular as provided in the classroom. The floors above house the temporary 'Lumineuses Projections!' exhibition about the history of the French magic lantern. Here the entertainment aspect has clearly been given priority over the magic lantern's use as an educational tool. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Lapiere lanterns and slides with their distinctive green sides were present in abundance. The various displays were beautifully presented and we noted that many objects came from Patrice Guérin's own collection.

The traditional connection between many catchpenny prints and lantern slide sets was well illustrated with quite a few shown side by side. We were surprised to see two Lapiere series depicting the medieval legend of Geneviève de Brabant with two different endings – one in which she dies and one in which she survives happily. We only knew about the happy ending so here is an avenue for further investigation. For me as a collector and lanternist the information about the French slide makers – such as Mazo, Monteni and La Bonne Presse – was both interesting and very useful. This is an exhibition not to miss!



Le Musée National de l'Éducation in Rouen and the 'Lumineuses Projections!' exhibition.

Next we drove east, heading for Lorraine, and we stopped off en route at La Maison de la Magie in Blois – a museum devoted to Robert-Houdin (1805–71), widely considered the father of modern magic. This contains several intriguing optical illusions and a magic lantern. Our ultimate destination was the town of Épinal where we intended to explore what can still be found of the ancient producer of the famous 'images d'Épinal and Pellerin' catchpenny prints, 'devinettes' and cut-out games. Handily located within strolling distance of where we could park our camper, we were in for a surprise.

The printer's business is still in operation producing images in various forms on printing equipment which they often had to invent themselves in the distant past. The business was established in 1796 following the merger of the two leading competitors producing



La Maison de la Magie in Blois, devoted to Robert-Houdin

'images d'Épinal and Pellerin' – making the company 220 years old. On its premises, called 'Cité de l'Image', the Imprimerie Pellerin runs a large visitor centre plus a museum – Imagerie d'Épinal – telling the story of the printing business. In addition, there is a separate museum – Le Musée de l'Image – which puts on exhibitions about all the different types of product supplied in the past by the Imprimerie Pellerin and its founding fathers (see also Peepshows – Gestetner Collection article).

When we visited Le Musée de l'Image, a special exhibition, 'Ombres chinoises et autres variations' was in operation (it runs until 8 January 2017). The displays told the history of shadow images, such as the story of the eighteenth-century Shadow Theatre of Séraphin which even played a role during the French Revolution. The stories on several of the catchpenny prints were also explained. Since 1840 the Épinal printers have been producing *ombres chinoises* prints with figures that people could cut out and use in shows for the family. Even the use of *ombres chinoises* in films was not forgotten. Altogether it was quite a learning experience and well worth a visit (see page 2 for details).



Le Musée de l'Image in Épinal