

THE SUMMER MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

ST LUKE'S CHURCH HALL, BATH
SATURDAY 23 JULY 2016

Meetings of the Magic Lantern Society do not always turn out quite as expected. On a sunny Saturday in July, a total of 67 members and guests gathered in historic Bath. After a call from our Chairman for suggested new venues with the appropriate combination of economy, black-out and some link to the magic lantern (please contact Jeremy with ideas), we did not board the P&O ocean liners on the programme but crossed the Channel to Normandy.



Patrice Guérin showed us around his exhibition 'Lumineuses Projections!', currently at the Centre d'Expositions de Le Musée National de l'Éducation in Rouen. Although the magic lantern was not used for educational purposes until the nineteenth century, we began a century earlier with shows by itinerant peddlers with strong Savoy or Auvergne accents. Next, on to Paris and Robertson's scary phantasmagoria. Then, as lanterns for all ages entered the home, we arrived at the second half of the nineteenth century and 'education through the eyes'. Lantern slides were used in Government-backed adult evening classes, for popular lectures such as world tours and for a range of subjects in schools – you can experience this for yourself in Rouen – with glass slides eventually being replaced by film strips and 35mm slides heralding the 'golden age of education projection'.

The exhibition covers many different aspects including manufacturing, light sources and more scientific uses of the magic lantern – in one example a magic lantern is set up alongside a solar microscope. The real thing is not to be missed (see page 2 and Gwen's article).



Next Richard Crangle gave us an update on the *Million Pictures Project* – with a suitable health and safety warning that his presentation included databases! Four countries are involved in this project since it was set up with a EU grant a year ago – the Netherlands (Utrecht), Belgium (Antwerp), Spain (Salamanca and Girona)

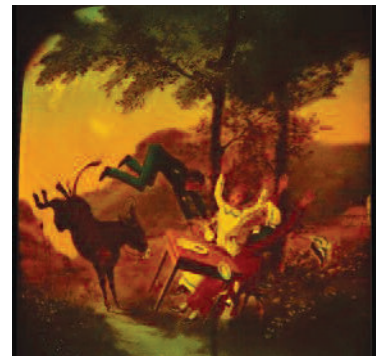
and the UK (involving Richard, based at Exeter University). Richard has been photographing collections of slides and uploading them to the Lucerna database, starting with the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) in Exeter and more recently two collections in Manchester – the Manchester Museum (including the vast collection of the Manchester Geographical Society) and Chetham's Library.

Among RAMM's material is a collection that came from a local

Devon donor who ran a dairy business – and the slides arrived in Kraft cheese boxes. These belonged to Alfred Rowden, a photographer-naturalist who also served during World War I in Mesopotamia, taking many slides of his tour of duty in Baghdad and Basra.

As a result of all this, Lucerna's digital slide images have now increased from eight to eighteen thousand, with a further nine thousand waiting to be processed. The search facility has improved (although it still helps to know what you are looking for). Next steps include making it more international, including formats other than 3¼ ins (such as moving slides), and moving beyond slide images to 'everything you want to know'. In these Olympian times, it seems only right to record Richard's personal best – 1,339 slides digitised in one working day, at ten seconds per slide (if not wrapped individually!). At the lunch break Richard gave a demonstration of his technique (see Sarah Dellman's article for more on the *Million Pictures Project*).

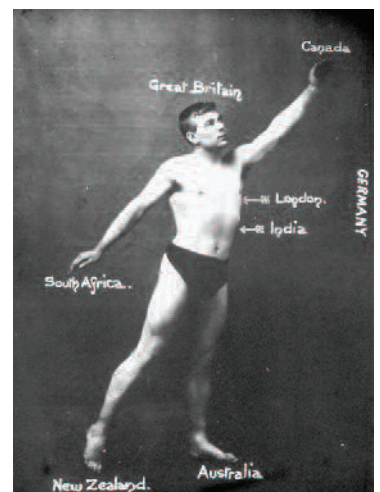
Then there was time for a Wilhelm Busch story from Peter Gillies, assisted by Gordon Casbeard. To start on a topical note, Peter had been sent a cartoon from Germany depicting Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson as the Max and Moritz of Busch fame (from 1865/66) up to their usual tricks sawing a 'Brexit' bridge in half. Our story was *Harry's Donkey Ride or Cousin Franz and his Donkey*. This story was about a young man out to impress a young lady. He catches a donkey and rides it with the predictable outcome that he leaves a trail of destruction and is eventually dumped on the picnic table – the young man, not the donkey.

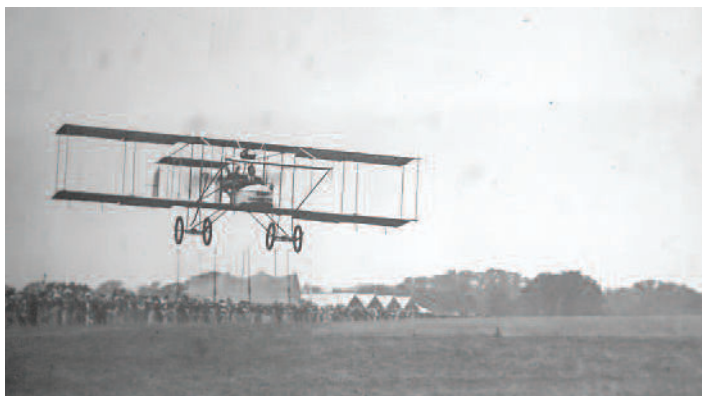


Alexia's 'bring, share and tell' was about Rudge's grave (see her article). Reg Bosley brought some slides of Sanger's circus (see *The Magic Lantern*, issue 7) including one of elephants towing an exhibit of an elephant skeleton. He warned that slides of George Sanger's Circus often actually depict the circus run by his older brother John.



The first session in the afternoon was hosted by Mervyn Heard and featured 'bizarre and unfathomable' slides from his and other members' collections. The range was extraordinary – from curious depictions of the Commonwealth to 'old sea dogs' (Science and Mystery No. 5), from 'Naughty Norman' and an apparently two-headed boy to a man cutting off his nose to spite his face, not forgetting early aviators – one (A.V. Roe) whose





plane was probably towed by a car. This was a truly interactive session with a mix of learned and witty interventions.

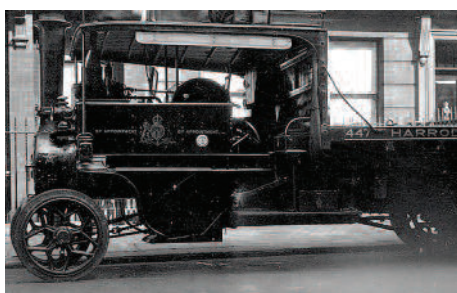
Long slides – with no scripts available before the 1820s – are a source of endless speculation about the images. One that provoked



much interest was 'Running away with the Monument'. Was this political, or a 'monstrous carbuncle' protest or from a song for Grimaldi or a pun on 'muniment' (title deeds and important documents)? *Notes and Queries* of 1905 posed this very question and one response described a 1778 print with similar images. Mervyn also brought

some pairs of slides, exactly the same, depicting possibly theatre backdrops. Was this vintage virtual reality? After much discussion, members thought one might be front- and the other back-projected to increase light and produce dramatic lighting effects, such as silhouettes. This was a very popular session that everyone hoped would be repeated.

Next Reg Bosley took us through the history of the road steam engine through magic lantern slides, beginning with Cugnot's steam carriage of 1769 – although not an auspicious start as both Cugnot and his engine were imprisoned in Paris when it ran out of control. Various models followed with minor degrees of success – even the great Cornishman Trevithick managed to burn down his house. When William IV died in 1837, the steam carriage seems to have suffered a similar fate. Roads were poor and steam carriages weighed several



tons more than horse-drawn vehicles. Eventually traction engines arrived along with steamrollers – so iconic that even when replaced with diesel models they kept the name – and steam lorries. One slide

showed a Harrods steam wagon making deliveries after WW1 – many of these were used behind the front during the war and later returned to civilian use.

Apart from farm and industrial uses, traction engines famously generated electricity for showground attractions, including the Bioscope, and powered the rides. Eventually taxes drove them off the

road, and Reg concluded with some photographs of abandoned skeletons left to rust away.

Another session with members' contributions was hosted by Andrew Gill and looked at the work of photographer Graystone Bird (1862–1943). He was born in Frome, Somerset, where his father Frederick Charles Bird was a portrait photographer on the rise – they moved to upmarket Milton Street in Bath. We saw a dazzling range of photographs, all with pin-sharp focus and extraordinary levels of detail. One set featured Whitby – the patch of an equally eminent photographer of the day, Frank Sutcliffe. We also visited London, whence Mr Bird Snr retired, and Switzerland. Paddle steamers, regatta day in Dorset, may-poles, roller skating, early flying machines such as Samuel Franklin Cody's 'Flying Cathedral' at Brooklands in 1911, and John Sanger's circus in Bath all featured in a fascinating glimpse of days gone by through the lens of one of the great observers.



The grand finale was far from 'Plumbing the Depths' as billed. Keith and Jennifer Uttridge with the Travelling Light Magic Lantern Company royally entertained us with stories and songs, sometimes rather a modern interpretation of the slides we saw! We began with the Somerset Temperance League and dire warnings of the consequences of intoxicating drinks and gambling.



This was illustrated by the story of family man John Smith, who became the landlord's best customer until his little daughter Cissie had to beg him to come home. A temperance meeting in the town hall begged the question 'Who killed Tom Roper?' (cider, ale, champagne, wine, gin, brandy were the options), and, fortunately, by the end of the story, the little bow of blue and that great hymn *Throw out the lifeline* had John Smith and the rest of us signing the pledge.

Another highlight was the well-known tale of *Jane Conquest* – with original slides accompanied by an interesting version of the Who classic *Pinball Wizard*. Having been unable to phone the NHS helpline due to lack of signal, Jane 'sure rang a mean church bell'. Then *Pussy's Road to Ruin* featured the blog – with increasing numbers of followers – of Darcy Bristle attempting to break away from a life of catching mice and spinning with the local Catsonova. Somehow *Purrsuasion* (for Jane Austen lovers), *My Fur-r Lady* and *Runaround Sue* came into the story but all ended in tears with Pussy incarcerated having been caught red-pawed with the master's pet canary. On this high note, with us all hoping the Uttridges will not retire from lanterning as threatened, a hugely enjoyable meeting came to a close.

THE MAGIC LANTERN is edited, designed and produced by Mary Ann Auckland, Gwen Sebus and Dennis Crompton assisted by Annie Bridges.

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