



Two versions of the long slide *Running away with the Monument*

RUNNING AWAY WITH THE MONUMENT

Mervyn Heard

At the Magic Lantern Society Summer Meeting in Bath in 2016 (see Issue 8) we took a brief look at an ancient, baffling and very common English 'long' slide generally known as *Running away with the Monument*. It shows a thief, with the London Monument on his shoulder, being pursued by several gentlemen of the watch. Specimens of this long slide appear to date from as far back as the early nineteenth century or even earlier. But what are its origins and what does it represent?

For some time I guessed that it might merely be a satire on the Monument's architectural style or its 'monumental' cost. However, further research suggests a more evolutionary process at work.



ABOUT THE MONUMENT

The London Monument was erected to commemorate the Great Fire of London which took place in 1666. It stands at the junction of Monument Street and Fish Street Hill in the City of London and was finally completed in 1677. Designed by Sir Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke and built of Portland stone, it comprises a pedestal 21 feet square and 40 feet high, set upon which is a plinth and a tower 120 feet high and 15 feet in diameter. The edifice is crowned by a cylindrical balcony supporting a flaming urn of gilded bronze. Daniel Defoe described it as 'built in the form of a candle'. Standing at a total height of 202 feet this was, according to one of the inscriptions on the building, precisely equal to the distance horizontally westward to the baker's shop in Pudding Lane where the fire began. The surveyor-general in charge of its construction was Sir Christopher Wren.

Unfortunately the Monument's height and design also led to it becoming a suicide hotspot, especially for women, as recorded by Mr Charles Welch (1848–1924), long-time Librarian of the Guildhall, in his book *History of the Monument* (City Lands Committee of the Corporation of the City of London, 1893) (Fig. 2).

Three panels appear on the pedestal – the north panel describing the events of 1666, the south panel setting out the civic improvements made following the disaster, and the eastern panel recording the names of those involved in the building of the monument itself. There was a long-held belief that the fire itself had not been an accident but had been started on purpose by papists. Originally there was no mention of any papist terrorist involvement but in 1680, partly as a result of Parliament's reaction to the Popish Plot, it was agreed in the Court of Common Council that the following text should be added to the North panel: 'the City of London was burnt and consumed with fire by the treachery and malice of the Papists in September in the year of Our Lord 1666.'

There has never been any proof that this scurrilous accusation was true and the inscription was later removed when James II came to the throne in 1685. However, with the accession of William III in 1689 it was reinstated. A similar statement was posted on the side of the house in Pudding Lane where the fire began. Both inscriptions remained there until 1830.

RUNNING JOKES

The first known reference to this notion of someone running away with the Monument appears in an old English nonsense song published in approximately 1683 and catalogued by the British Library under the heading *Tom Tell-Truth*. *All you that will not me believe, disprove me if you can; you by my story may perceive, I am an honest man*. Designed to be sung to the tune of, *Tantararara, tantivee*, it was printed in London for J. Wright, J. Clarke, W. Thackeray and T. Passinger.



From Charles Welch's *History of the Monument*

The song is a Munchausen-style catalogue of exaggerated claims, among which this appears:

*The thing that did fright me I cannot express,
fa la, etc.*

*The thing that did fright me I cannot express,
fa la, etc.*

*The thing that did fright me I cannot express,
I saw a Man big as the Tower, no less,
with a fa la, etc.*

*This Man with the Monument would run away,
fa la, etc.*

*This Man with the Monument would run away,
fa la, etc.*

*This Man with the Monument would run away,
But at Aldgate Watch they did him stay,
with a fa la, etc.*

The song becomes much ruder as it progresses, but I think we'll leave it there.

So here we have the seed of an idea. But that's about all. For something more in line with the narrative shown on the slide we need to turn to a more influential literary source.



Daniel Defoe (1660–1731)

In 1704 Daniel Defoe began publishing his *Review*, or to give it its full original title – *A Review of the Affairs of France*. As we have seen, antipathy towards the French and their papist views was a hot topic at the time. Indeed England seemed always to be at war with France for one reason or another, whether it be the War of the Grand Alliance 1688–97 or the War of the Spanish Succession which began a few years later in 1701 and continued until 1714. Defoe's Protestant-Whig *Review* not only commented on political tensions between

the two countries but also attitudes arising. Any opportunity to have a joke at the expense of the Catholics was always too good an opportunity to miss. In the interests of balance an equally good target were the conspiracy theorists, who were prepared to believe any farfetched idea concerning papist ambitions.

In Defoe's *Review*, Vol iv, 530–1, the following anecdote appears. It concerns a curious dialogue that took place between one of Defoe's mischievous friends and a stranger he had chanced upon in a public tavern in the City.

Conversing upon the news of the day, the stranger, who was possessed with fearful notions of the machinations of the 'Papishes', had his curiosity worked up to the highest pitch, when the other related the following story: 'That last night, six Frenchmen came up and stole away the Monument, and but for the watch, who stopped them as they were going over the bridge, and made them carry it back again, they might, for aught we know, have carried it over into France. These Papists', adds he, 'will never have done!' The man stared as he well might, at the wonderful tale, and seemed loth to believe it; til De Foe coming into the room, and corroborating the story, with the addition, that he might satisfy his doubts by going to the spot, and seeing the workmen employed in making it fast again, the simple man swallowed the joke, and departed quite satisfied.

This anecdote bears all the hallmarks of the long-slide sequence. But there's more to consider.

In 1904 there was some discussion over the content of the ancient *Tom Tell-Truth* ballad referred to above. This occurred in the esteemed periodical *Notes and Queries*, which was founded in 1849



View of the Monument 1741

as 'a medium of intercommunication for literary men, artists, antiquaries, genealogists, etc.' and it's still going strong today.

A contributor to the issue of 17 September 1904, a Mr Joseph Woodfall Ebsworth, mentions the old ballad and the Monument reference in particular. As a result there were several follow up letters.

On 8 October a subscriber using the pseudonym Gnomon offered the following:

Among your civic readers there must be surviving some few ancient residents in the one square mile who can remember in the late thirties or early forties of the last century a corkcutter's shop occupying the ground floor of business premises on the north side of Eastcheap. In the shop window, among other trophies displaying the manual wonders that can be achieved with cork for the material, in an oblong glass case, about 2ft by 1ft 6in, was exhibited a model cut in cork, of the Monument on Fish Street Hill carried away on the shoulder of a running man, with a policeman (bearing a truncheon in his right hand and clad in the chimney pot beaver and swallowtails of the period) in hot pursuit. As a boy I often paused to gaze through the shop window at this interesting exhibit ... My preceptors expressed to me that this was a representation of a song formerly sung in pantomime by the then recently deceased clown, the renowned Joey Grimaldi. It was still highly popular in the harlequinades of my early boyhood. It will be observed that the ballad adds a still more extravagant denouement. I remember the first verse only. It ran:

*A story I've heard in my youth
I don't know whether serious or funny meant;
I don't mean to vouch for its truth,
Once a man ran away with the Monument.
Up Fish Street swiftly he flew,
A policeman who saw him quick followed it,
When what did this strange fellow do?
Why he made but one gulp and he swallowed it!*

Some months later (1 April 1905) another reader was able to add to the cork-cutter story:

The House where the cork model of the man running away with the Monument was displayed was that of an 'eminently worthy of prominent mention' cork manufacturer, Thomas Smith, No 5 Eastcheap, whence he appears to have removed to 16, Garlick Hill, the address given in the London Directory for 1894. Mr Thomas Smith seems to have been the leading 'retail, wholesale and export' cork-cutter in the City, the business itself having been established on the spot so early as about the year 1786. The grotesque model used to attract a great deal of attention, for it was of a very comical and clever design, and I think I remember seeing it so late as 1890.

Meanwhile (5 November 1904) a letter was received which is even more in tune with our lantern slide. A Mr Herbert Southam stated that he had in his nursery ...



Joseph Grimaldi (1778–1837)

... an old coloured print published in 1778 by N. C. Goodnight, engraver, No. 14, Great Warner Street, Coldbath Fields, London. It is marked No. 45, and is one of a series, of which I have others. It represents the musical cat and dancing dog and six other subjects. The centre one occupies the whole length of the print, and shows a red, eight-arched bridge with 'London Bridge' above it, towards which a man, with a look of pain – face turned towards pursuers – is running, carrying on his right shoulder a representation of the

Monument, over which 'The Man Running Away with the Monument'. Closely following is a watchman with scroll from mouth in which 'I am out of breath I can run no more'. He is followed by a second watchman saying 'let him run ever so fast, I'll be up with him'. A third man is evidently someone of importance. He remarks, 'There he goes! Run hard man!' The last figure is a watchman, holding a lantern like his fellows. His expression seems to be the key to the riddle, and to refer to some person or act, evidently well known, 'Why the Monument is just a feather to him'. I think from this plate the idea of the Eastcheap model was taken.

It's not much of a stretch to suppose that an enterprising lantern slide manufacturer would have considered the subject matter ideally suited to the lantern. Especially since chases were a common theme for the long slide.

This may have happened immediately or possibly a little later, after the famous clown Joseph Grimaldi had further popularised the idea in the context of his comic song, which was specifically titled *A Man Ran Away with the Monument*. This song was first aired in the production *London or Harlequin and Time* at Sadler's Wells in 1813. The libretto was subsequently published in the *Vocal Magazine* (April 1815).

POSTSCRIPT

Following on from Grimaldi's endorsement, reference to the concept can now be found in various political squibs. In 1826 (17 April) for example the *Glasgow Herald* reported on a motion set before the House of Commons by the Hon. Member for Shropshire, Mr Cresset Pelham. His proposal was that occasionally the country's national parliament should be held in regional capitals such as Edinburgh and Dublin rather than London. To the columnist this placed the learned gentleman on a par with 'the man running away with the Monument'.

Later in 1830, when the Earl of Clarendon was appointed Lord Privy Seal, the *Blackburn Standard* (30 October) questioned his supposed merits. In so far as they believed he was a man of mediocre talents and fickle, to the extent that 'he is just as likely to run away with the Monument on his back, as to sustain the failing fortunes of the clique with whom he is, unfortunately for himself, about to enter into closer union'.

Comparisons were still being made in 1893. On 21 January *The Globe* newspaper reported that an attempt had been made by an American gentleman to buy the famous Panyer Stone. This bas-relief is an ancient seventeenth-century carved depiction of a small boy seated on a woosack or possibly pile of rope, which is set into a wall in the City of London. The American had offered a bribe to one of the men working on its restoration with an offer of £80 to let him have it. But the workman had refused and a guard was placed upon it. *The Globe* supposed that it was bound for the Chicago Exhibition and suggested that it ...

... would be as well to keep a careful look out for the next few months – our American cousins are quite capable of stealing the Monument or even Charing Cross Railway Station on behalf of their coming show.

Of course we still can't be a hundred per cent sure who first came up with the notion of stealing the Monument and putting it onto a lantern slide but it was clearly a popular recurring idea.

HERMAN BOLLAERT'S 'GOODBYE' SHOW

Gwen Sebus and Michael van de Leur

Herman Bollaert has certainly been a very prominent magic lanternist over the years – as you can read in *The Magic Lantern* Issue 3. His *Laterna Magica Galantee Show* is justly legendary among Magic Lantern Society members and many more admirers besides. When we learned that his last 'goodbye' shows were

Herman Bollaert and Annet Duller



taking place on Saturday 17 December and Sunday 18 December 2016, we rushed to Ghent, Belgium, to attend one of these two events.

Not surprisingly we met up there with other Magic Lantern Society members from France, Belgium and the Netherlands who did not want to miss this last opportunity either. The slides were projected by Herman and Annet Duller – Annet has been Herman's assistant or co-lanternist for a very long time. The show was accompanied by Herman's own orchestra.

We saw the famous *The Flies' Ball*, *Natural Phenomena*, *Pompeii*, *The Rock of Ages* and many more delights. Led by a singer from the orchestra we all sang along to Eileen Alannah at the end of a wonderful evening.

