

FROM THE IVORY TOWER AN UPDATE ON CURRENT RESEARCH

Lydia Jakobs

This is the first of a regular series by our new Research Officer, Lydia Jakobs, from the Media Studies Department of the University of Trier. The aim is to keep members up to date on research projects from around the world concerning magic lanterns and related material. The first article is based on Lydia's presentation at the Convention.

This series is an opportunity to tell you about some current research projects into the history – and present – of the magic lantern. To start with, I will focus mainly on what we are currently doing at the University of Trier, Germany, quite simply because I know most about our project. But I will mention other research and welcome news of projects from members for future articles.

Many will be familiar with *A Million Pictures* (see recent editions of *The Magic Lantern*) – the joint research project of scholars from several European universities with twenty associated partners from the heritage sector (museums, archives) and creative industry (artists, performers).¹ Their focus is on magic lantern slides used for educational purposes and one of their goals is to “develop a standard for documentation and conservation of magic lantern slides”.² This refers to the metadata and photographic standards for digitizing lantern slides that museums, archives, libraries or private collectors will be able to adopt.

The revaluation and rediscovery of magic lantern slides as cultural heritage objects is emerging as a recurring theme in current research. A project led by Dr Martyn Jolly at the Australian National University is called *Heritage in the Limelight: The Magic Lantern in Australia and the World*.³ Their focus is on collecting and studying 19th century lantern slides found in Australian museums and archives. And their investigation of historical performance practices also includes live performances for modern audiences.

Apart from these larger research projects there have been a growing number of individual PhD and master's theses loosely connected to them. To name a few from just the last two years – Karen Eifler of the University of Trier has written on the use of projected images by temperance and charitable organisations in Great Britain, Emily Hayes of the University of Exeter has studied the lantern slides of the Royal Geographical Society, and Sarah Dellmann has included numerous slides about the Netherlands in her investigation into *Images of Dutchness*.⁴ And, of course, there is my own PhD project on the popular works of George R. Sims and their adaptations for the screen – both as series of life model slides and as silent films.

However, the third large research project that I want to discuss is the latest of several consecutive projects at the University of Trier funded by the German Research Foundation. Similar to the standardisation aim of *A Million Pictures (AMP)*, the need for standardized documentation and digitization practices for magic lantern slides is at the heart of our project. Indeed it is something all projects collaborate on to some extent but are also approaching from slightly different angles. *AMP* has tended more towards making large numbers of digitized slides available to the public while, at the University of Trier, we are producing model editions of individual lantern slide series with high-quality digital reproductions.

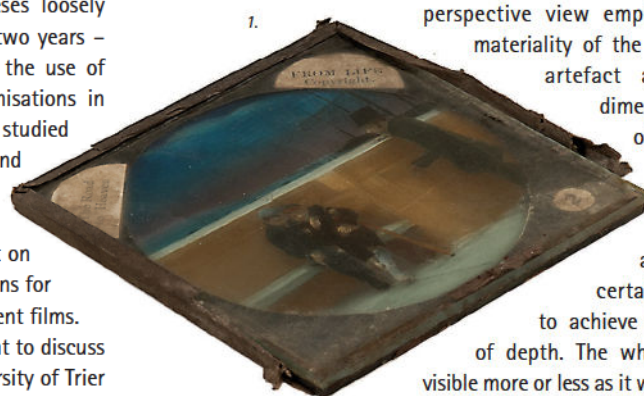
All three projects that I have mentioned are engaging the interested public, for example through public performances and topical talks. All three are also committed to the principle of open access and catalogue their digitized slides in free online databases like Lucerna, or *Heritage in the Limelight*.⁵ Together they are laying

the groundwork for further research and making more lantern slides than ever easily available to anyone with an interest in the art of projection. All three projects receive public funding from research funding organisations in their respective countries and, in the case of *AMP*, also from the European Union. That is certainly a good sign for the future of magic lantern research because it shows that established research institutions recognize the study of the magic lantern as a worthwhile pursuit and are willing to put their money where our work is – so to speak.

But back to our current project at the University of Trier. It is titled *Media-historical, methodological, and media-technological Principles of the Digitization of Works in the Historical Art of Projection* – but what does that actually mean? We are producing two main resources. One is the *Companion to the Historical Art of Projection* – a digital publication that collects basic knowledge about the historical art of projection (ie the use of the magic lantern), its technologies (eg projection apparatus), works (types of lantern slides) and performances (eg venues, programmes). Scholarly articles are illustrated with digital animations and additional online resources. The *Companion* will provide contextual information to those not yet familiar with the history of the magic lantern and enable collectors, museums or archives to produce digital versions of lantern slide series following our model.

We are currently producing two types of digital editions. First, our archive editions combine digital reproductions of lantern slides with related material like readings, negatives, boxes or sheet music. Second, our critical editions additionally provide introductions and critical commentary. They also allow users to collate and compare multiple versions of a slide series next to one another which can lead to surprising discoveries. Here, the slides become digital research objects.

The photographic standard used to digitize these lantern slides was developed by Ludwig Vogl-Bienek, senior researcher at the Screen1900 research focus in Trier, in co-operation with the illuminago collection. The standard procedure includes capturing up to eight distinct views of each slide, each serving a different purpose. The



1. perspective view emphasises the materiality of the slide as an artefact and three-dimensional object (Fig. 1).

The slides are shot in full and from a certain distance to achieve the illusion of depth. The whole slide is visible more or less as it would appear to the naked eye. The screen image view is shot with transmitted light from a lightbox and presents the two-dimensional image that appears on the screen through projection (Fig. 2). This view can also include digital animations of projection effects like dissolving views or superimpositions. In the digital editions that will be available on our website we also offer a 'directing tool'. Here, screen images can be combined with existing recordings of the associated reading to produce a video that simulates a real-time performance. But, of course, this



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does not replace the unique pleasure of experiencing a live performance with original lantern and slides.

Because of the high resolution (the photographs were taken with a Nikon D800 camera with 36.3 megapixels) the digital images can reveal details that are invisible on inspection of the slide with the naked eye. This includes details in the glass images like the



3. Christmas mottoes in the back of the first slide from *In the Workhouse* after George R. Sims's famous ballad (Figs 3 and 4). They can also highlight or help identify damage to the cover glass, the binding or the slides themselves (Fig. 5). And, perhaps most importantly, these digital research objects give researchers who might never have seen (or owned) a physical lantern slide a chance to conduct research.



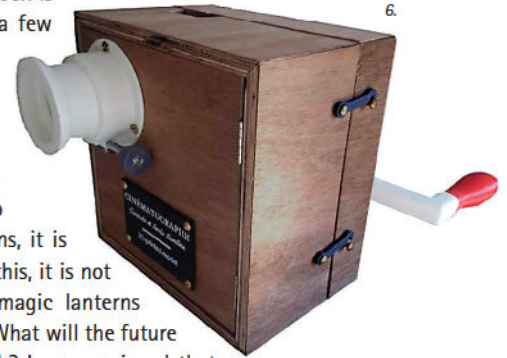
So what have members of the Society done to enable research in the past and how can they help and encourage future research? It is no exaggeration to say that without the contribution of collectors who took pains to maintain and study their own archives and opened them to researchers, there would not be lantern research today. For decades, the Magic Lantern Society has provided a structure to facilitate these exchanges and its publications like the *Encyclopedia of the Magic Lantern* and *Realms of Light* have become foundational texts for



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lantern studies. Over the years there has also been a mountain of excellent original scholarship in the pages of the *New Magic Lantern Journal*, the *Society's Newsletter*, and most recently *The Magic Lantern*. But most of it remains and will remain practically hidden from the wider scientific community until we put it online.

On a lighter note, this 3D-printed model (Fig. 6) of a Cinématographe Lumière was created at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. The box is made from wood with a few nuts and bolts but the entire moving mechanism for the film strip can be made with a 3D printer – and the design is freely available to anyone. If you add a lens, it is not that hard to imagine magic lanterns made with 3D printers. What will the future hold for lantern research? I am convinced that only one thing is certain – it will be digital. And if we want the magic lantern to survive another 360 years, we will have to go digital too, in one way or another.



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NOTES

For more information visit their project website at <http://a-million-pictures.wp.hum.uu.nl>
 Project description *A Million Pictures: Magic Lantern Slide Heritage as Artefacts in the Common European History of Learning*. <http://a-million-pictures.wp.hum.uu.nl/files/2016/04/AMP-Project-Flyer-April2016.pdf>
 Their website is available at <http://soa.anu.edu.au/heritage-limelight>
 Karen Eifler, *The Great Gun of the Lantern: Lichtbildereinsatz sozialer Organisationen in Großbritannien (1875-1914)*, Dissertation, Universität Trier, 2015; Emily Hayes, *Geographical projections: lantern-slides and the making of geographical knowledge at the Royal Geographical Society c.1885-1924*, PhD Thesis, University of Exeter, 2016; Sarah Dellmann, *Images of Dutchness: Popular Visual Media, the Emergence of National Clichés and the Creation of Supposed Common Knowledge about the Netherlands and the Dutch (1800-1914)*, Proefschrift, Universiteit Utrecht, 2015
 Available free of charge at <http://slides.uni-trier.de> and <https://ehive.com/collections/6553/heritage-in-the-limelight>

ROYAL APPOINTMENTS

Wilhelm Widenmann found this charming advert on the back of a Millikin and Lawley catalogue of conjuring tricks. The company was established in 1815 and was based at 165 Strand, London. The text below the illustration reads:

THE ROYAL CHILDREN AT SANDRINGHAM WITH THEIR MAGIC LANTERN.

On January 7th, 1873, Messrs. Millikin and Lawley had the honour of receiving from H.R.H. the Prince of Wales instructions to forward to Marlborough House a Magic Lantern and assortment of Slides, from which a selection was desired to be made and forwarded to the Royal children for their amusement at Sandringham. His Royal Highness was much amused at the comical character of the various laughable slides, and on examining the chromatropes, in which portraits of the Royal Family were depicted in the centre, exclaimed "that they were capital," and drew the special attention of the Princess to them. His Royal Highness was much pleased also with the simplicity of the gas lamp – for burning ordinary gas – supplied with the Magic Lantern. The Prince commanded a copy of the 'Lectures for the Magic Lantern' to be supplied with the Lantern and Slides, and evinced evident gratification on glancing over the engravings within it.'

Meanwhile Professor Mervyn Heard and Lester Smith have been taking advantage of the Royal Collection Archives now being online and have uncovered the following two pieces:

Letter from Charlotte, Princess Royal (1766-1828), to her mother Queen Charlotte (1744-1818, George III's consort) dated 27 December 1777: "Dear Mama, I hope that by the time you get this letter you will be cured of your cold. I beg you will so good as to present my duty and my love to Papa. Tomorrow I give a breakfast to my brothers and sisters and some other people. Last night we saw a



Advert in Millikin and Lawley catalogue

Mager Clanter [magic lantern] of Mrs Chevely's which made me laugh very much. All my brothers and sisters present their duty to Papa and to you Mama. I hope that you have been able to go to Windsor. Dear Mama, I am your most Dutiful Daughter Charlotte Augusta Matilda"

From the diary of Queen Charlotte, 11 April 1794: "goes to the German Chapel at St James's; visit from Madame [Elizabeth Beauvais] the milliner; visits from Lord Ailesbury and Field Marshal Freytag; sits for picture. 'This Evening the Kg saw Mr [George Adams junior] the Optician. He brought a Magic Lantern in which He shewed the whole Solar System"