

ANNOUNCEMENT SLIDES

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I recently bought a group of ten textual slides, which at first sight are not of great interest. The owner of the set knew nothing about them, but a little research shows that they are in fact a very interesting survival from the early years of moving picture exhibition.

Films released in the first few years of exhibition did not have their titles printed on them. Projectors were essentially converted magic lanterns, able to show both slides and films.¹ A film title slide would be projected while the film itself was being threaded, ensuring the hall was not plunged into complete darkness. The exhibitor would then black out the slide lens, and either slide the lamphouse or swing across the film projector element so they were in line, according to the make of projector, and hand-crank the film.

One film catalogue called these 'announcement slides', and noted that they cost 1/6d each for white letters on a black ground, or 2s each for coloured letters on a black ground. As it explained:

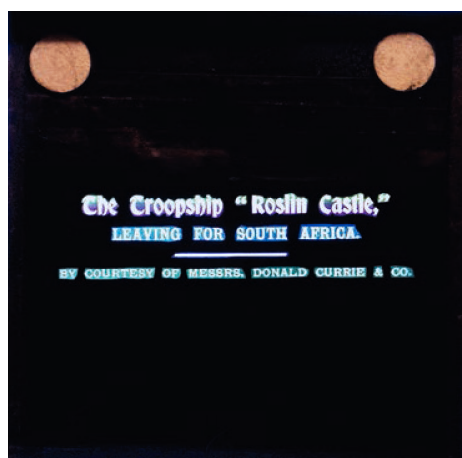
The use of these slides for announcing each subject on the screen before the animated scene is projected certainly enhances the value of an exhibit. The letters ONLY appear on the screen, and give a sharp, clear and pleasing effect.²

Title slides were a useful way of avoiding a blank screen while threading the next film, but the description 'sharp, clear and pleasing' indicates that, at this date, titles printed on film could also be unsteady and unpleasant to read.

The earliest slide in this group reads 'HIGH DIVING AT THE BATHS OF DIANA, MILAN'. It introduced a film taken in 1896 by an agent of the French Lumière company, and marketed in Britain by the Warwick Trading Company (Fig. 1). Less than a minute long, *High Diving* was full of interest and remained popular with exhibitors for, if the projector allowed, it could also be shown backwards for comic effect so that the divers leaped backwards out of the water.³



1. *High Diving*



2. Title slides for Boer War films

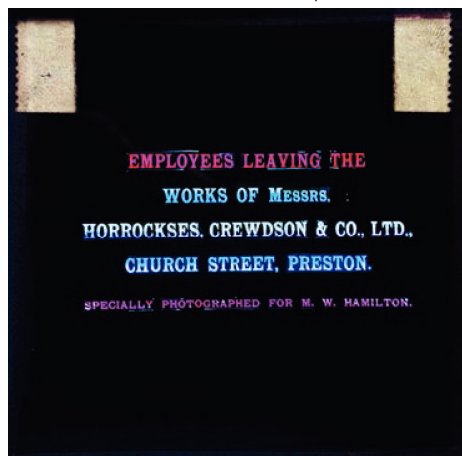
The showman who bought *High Diving* and its title slide may have done so some years after its release, as other slides in the group are for films from the Boer War, which first appeared in the Warwick Trading Company catalogue in 1899. A two-shilling coloured slide, 'The Troopship "Roslin Castle", LEAVING FOR SOUTH AFRICA', thus relates to a film taken by Warwick in October 1899, and a black-and-white slide 'The Transvaal War / Troops Embarking At Southampton for SOUTH AFRICA', is probably of the same date, as Warwick released four films of troops boarding the *Braemar Castle* in Southampton and leaving for the front (Fig. 2).

A fourth slide, 'Hospital Corps Attending The Wounded On The Battlefield After The Modder River Engagement', probably introduced another Warwick film from December 1899, which appeared in its catalogue as 'THE AMBULANCE CORPS AT WORK', and showed wounded soldiers being brought in after an early engagement in the Boer War. A further slide, 'WOUNDED WARRIORS LEAVING PRETORIA STATION FOR HOME', would have introduced an unidentified film of a similar date.

The next three slides were probably made by Mitchell & Kenyon, a firm based in Blackburn, Lancashire. 'The Despatch Bearer' is the only slide in the set relating to a fiction film, in this case Mitchell & Kenyon's film of the same name released in May 1900, which showed a plucky British dispatch bearer fighting off a Boer attack – although in fact filmed on the moors outside Blackburn. The other two slides are for 'factory gate' films, a class of non-fiction film for travelling exhibitors, in which Mitchell & Kenyon excelled. These films showed workers leaving big local factories and were commissioned by travelling exhibitors to give local audiences the chance of seeing themselves on screen.

The first slide reads 'EMPLOYEES LEAVING THE WORKS OF MESSRS. HORROCKSES CREWDSON & CO. LTD., CHURCH STREET, PRESTON', and carries the note 'SPECIALLY PHOTOGRAPHED FOR M[r]. W. HAMILTON' (Fig. 3). This identifies the original exhibitor of

3. William Hamilton's film of Preston, from October 19017



these slides and films as the 64-year-old William Hamilton of Hamilton's Excursions, a long-established travelling show whose painted panoramas of the world had been brought up to date with films and variety acts, including acrobats and a ventriloquist. This 'factory gate' film was one of the lead items in Hamilton's advertising for his twenty-eighth visit to Preston in October 1901, and was mentioned by the local paper, along with the type of projector he was using:

At intervals several capital variety turns are introduced, and the Eragraph is responsible for some good examples of living picture work, including an interesting picture of the workpeople of Messrs. Horrockses, Crewdson, and Co. leaving the mill.⁴

The film turn in Hamilton's show would have been booked by him, but run independently, like his other acts. When the film showman at one of the Hamilton family's other panorama shows left to go abroad in 1898, he sold his 'Cinematograph, together with ten films' for £20, and the show advertised for another 'Picture Worker' to join it on tour.⁵ These ten slides may indicate that William Hamilton's projectionist had a similar number of films. His 'Eragraph' projector had been launched in 1897, and was popular with travelling showmen, but it, like the Cinematograph, was becoming out of date by 1901.⁶

A similar slide in the set announcing film of 'EMPLOYEES LEAVING THE WORKS OF MESSRS. J. MUSGRAVE & SONS LTD., KAY STREET, BOLTON' is another record of Hamilton's regular tours through the industrial north. But it seems that his home base was in Brixton. A wonderfully imaginative poster in the Wellcome Collection (Fig. 4) dating from August 1896 shows him at the Brixton Hall, probably at the start of his annual tour – and depicts William Hamilton himself – and another slide in the set reads 'OUTSIDE THE BON MARCHE BRIXTON ROAD / TAKEN ESPECIALLY FOR MR. HAMILTON / SAT. AUG. 31st [1901]!'. The Bon Marché was a department store, so big that it had its own residential block for employees, and this was probably the London equivalent of a 'factory gate' film.

The final slide in the group reads 'Coronation Naval Review / The Royal Yacht passing down the Lines', and probably introduced film of Edward VII's coronation celebrations in August 1902, taken by Hepworth & Co. and listed in its catalogue as 'The Naval Review – Progress of the Royal Yacht'.

This superficially uninteresting group of slides thus represents the attempt by a touring panorama showman to keep his entertainment up to date after the appearance of projected moving pictures. They are title slides for the films in William Hamilton's touring show, and were possibly being shown as a group as late as 1902, for the Boer War ended just three months before Edward VII's coronation, and the war films could still have been attractive to audiences. But the appeal of such films, shown on an outdated projector, would not have lasted much longer, and by the time that Hamilton died in 1907 his sort of touring show had had its day.

Does anyone else have similar 'Announcement Slides' in their collections, perhaps unrecognised? I have not been able to locate any similar slides in film archives, but they are more likely to survive in the collections of MLS members.

HAMILTON'S EXCURSIONS,
 Visiting Places made Interesting by the
LATEST EVENTS OF THE DAY.
MAGNIFICENT VARIETY PROGRAMME
 Special Engagement of
THE AGUZZIS,
 Telegraph Wire Eccentrics.
"TALLY-HO,"
 The Great Hunting Sensation as seen at the London Hippodrome.
 Employees of Messrs. Horrockses, Crewdson, and Co., Ltd. leaving the Mill in Church-street, and the Latest Pictures by
THE ERAGRAPH.
 ST. JOHN and DWIGHT. Middle. FELIX.
 HORACE PICKETT. CLAUDE HOWELL.
 LOUIE HOWELL. THE THREE CLIFTONS.
 MICHAEL O'SHEA. LAUGHABLE SKETCHES.
 Prices: Stalls, 3s.; Reserved Seats, 2s.; Balcony, 1s.
 AREA, 6d.
 Children Half-price, Except 6d. Seats.

4. Poster for Hamilton's Excursions (courtesy of the Wellcome Collection)



NOTES

1. Claire Dupré la Tour 'Intertitles and Titles', in Richard Abel (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Early Cinema*, Routledge, London, 2011, pp. 326–7.
2. Charles Urban Trading Company, *We Put The World Before You*, CUTC catalogue, November 1903, p. 201.
3. The film, digitised by British Pathé, can be seen on YouTube as *High Diving at Milan Baths*.
4. *Lancashire Evening Post*, 'Preston Amusements', 8 October 1901, p. 4 col. 5.
5. *The Era*, 'Wanted, to sell', 19 February 1898, p. 29 col. 5 and *ibid.*, 'Wanted, Picture Worker', 26 February 1898, p. 26 col. 1.
6. Denis Gifford, 'Frank Haydon and George Urry', in Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan (eds), *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema*, BFI, London, 1996, pp. 63–4.
7. *Lancashire Evening Post*, 'Tonight! Tonight!', 7 October 1901 p. 1 col. 2.

A SMALL STEREOPTICON ...



This large biennial magic lantern was spotted by David Starkman (pictured) and photographed by Susan Pinsky (both from California) in May when the Stereoscopic Society went on a coach tour to Beamish – The Living Museum of the North – in County Durham, UK.

They believe it was inside the school in the 1900s Pit Village. The plate (enlarged) gives the maker as Walter Tyler of 48 Waterloo Road, London. Tyler opened a shop at 115 Waterloo Road in 1885 and moved to no. 48 in 1887. The business developed into one of the largest retailers of lanterns, lantern accessories and slides in the UK.

