

SOME LESSER-KNOWN LIFE MODEL SLIDE MAKERS

No. 2 – W. Rider & Co. of London

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Not unlike T.T. Wing (*TML* 14, p.8), W. Rider is now a little-known name, though the slides they produced may be more familiar. Rider was another example of a small family business that appeared in the 'boom' period of commercial slide production in the 1890s but they operated in an unobtrusive way and, apart from their slides, left few traces of their activities. Their slides are quite distinctive in style, well made and found regularly in modern collections.

The most informative indication of Rider's existence as a slide manufacturer is a half-page advertisement in the *Optical Magic Lantern Journal* of October 1900 (Fig. 1).¹ The scale of this advert, and the range of 'new Life Model sets this season' announced, suggests a well-established and active producer, yet after repeating the advert in the following issue of *OMLJ* they never advertised there again – or, apparently, anywhere else. If that 'new' output – 252 new Life Model slides in thirteen sets – was actually all new in 1900 (rather than an accumulation of several years' work, which is possible), it would be more than York & Son advertised in the same issue of *OMLJ* (189 slides in 18 sets), and only beaten in that year by the market leaders Bamforth (545 new slides in 32 sets).

William Joseph Rider was born on 12 March 1866 in Chelsea, London, the son of Robert Rider (an engineer, though at William's baptism his occupation was given as 'Seafaring') and his wife Elizabeth. William was baptised at a local Methodist Chapel – a little unusually his parents were both baptised on the same occasion.² He was married no less than four times: in 1887 he married Sarah Hart, who died the following year; in 1890 Caroline Iles, with whom he had two sons and who died in 1910; shortly after Caroline's death he married Nellie Buss, whom he divorced on grounds of infidelity in 1931; and finally in 1932 he married Ada Watts, who survived him. After leaving his parents' home in Chelsea, Rider spent almost his whole life in or just outside south and south-west London. From the late 1880s until his third marriage he lived at several addresses in Wimbledon, a comfortable if not hugely wealthy suburb. During his third marriage (1910-30) he lived in several smaller towns in Surrey, returning to the south London suburbs after his fourth marriage. He died on 17 August 1944, aged 78, at which time he lived in South Norwood.³

Rider's career followed a familiar path for some in the 1890s slide trade – coming in from some other activity in the late 1880s, perhaps taking a chance in the hope of making money in a 'new media'

business. At his first marriage in April 1887 he was recorded as a 'Cheese Monger', but by his wife's death in May 1888 he professed to be an 'Artist'. Thereafter he was recorded as 'Artist on Glass' (1891), 'Slide Painter' (1901) and 'Artist' (1911). The transition from cheese seller to slide maker is a curious one, but not untypical of this period when the slide businesses were expanding rapidly and must have seemed a good opportunity for someone with the right skills and interests.

There are a few references to Rider in the Stationer's Hall photographic copyright records, now in the British National Archives.⁴ Rider registered images from two sets in 1890, claiming himself as owner of the copyright but citing George Truckle as the 'copyright author of the work', which indicates the actual photographer and suggests that Truckle was working for Rider. Rider registered five more sets in 1894, citing himself as 'copyright author', and a further one in 1897.⁵

Truckle collaborated in at least the early years of Rider's slide activity. Born in a Wiltshire village about 1842, he worked there as a shoemaker in 1861, moving to London in the 1860s and trading as a photographer in a partnership with addresses in Pimlico and New Bond Street. In the 1890s he had his own photography business in Wimbledon and it is easy to imagine Rider, as a newcomer to the image trade, going to his local photographer for help in creating images for his new business. It is unclear how long this arrangement lasted, or whether it was ever a formal partnership. No evidence has been found for Rider operating his own studio premises but Truckle operated his own business until his death in 1907, succeeded by his son.⁶

Rider filed a British Patent in 1919, for 'Improvements in Photographic Magic Lantern Slides'.⁷ His invention consisted of a way of inserting text into the body of a slide (the illustration in the patent shows changing days for cinema programmes), which suggests he was by then more concerned with advertising or announcement slides than Life Model stories. He remained in the slide trade until around 1930: 'W.J. Rider & Co., Photographic Slide Painters' were in London phone directories throughout the 1920s at addresses on Dean Street, Soho (which in itself could suggest a connection to advertising or the cinema) but disappeared between March and September 1930.

Tantalisingly the 1900 *OMLJ* advertisement promises a 'Detailed Catalogue' but no such publication has been found, so estimates of Rider's total slide production are very rough. From analysis of the Lucerna resource, however, at least 44 Life Model sets totalling over 780 slides are known to be by Rider (Table 1) and, as with the work of T.T. Wing, some of the 153 other 'manufacturer unknown' Life Model sets are probably also theirs.

Another clue comes from the 1900 advertisement's claim of the 'Sole Right' to make slides for services of song published by John Burnham (an arranger and publisher of evangelical texts from Brentford, west London) and Curwen & Sons (a publisher of religious works in the City of London). These exclusive rights must have been only temporary as slide sets related to Burnham and Curwen's output can be found by other makers. However this is a useful indication of the way in which Rider, and probably most of the British commercial slide trade, worked, with agreements and partnerships with other businesses for use of their property in slide form.

RIDER & CO'S LIFE MODEL LANTERN SLIDES,

Illustrating J. Burnham's and Curwen & Son's, Ltd., Services of Song, from whom they have received the Sole Right. Also other Slides, Comic and otherwise.

NEW LIFE MODEL SETS THIS SEASON.

Only a Gipsy.	24 Slides.	Frogge's Little Brother.	24 Slides.	Peter the Fisherman.	25 Slides.
Only a Waif.	23 "	Dot and her Treasures.	24 "	Blind Betty's Teat.	20 "
The London Attic.	8 "	Loved into Death.	28 "	Cabin Boy's Bible.	21 "
The Two Drunkards.	14 "	Drunkard's Wife.	8 "	Those Merry Balls.	22 "

The Cyclist and Tramp (Up-to-date), 12 Slides.

FROM SPECIALLY PREPARED DRAWINGS.

Five Sones (Up-to-date).	5 Slides.	Ten Little Nigger Boys	10 Slides.
A Tale of 1, 2, 3, and 4 Legs	10 "	(Wording on each Slide)	
(Wording on each Slide)		A Live Snow Ball (Wording on each Slide)	10 "
The Doctor's Revenge.	12 "	Very Comic Motions	22 "

Detailed Catalogue, Post Free, 1900-1. Slides made from Customers' Regatives.

W. RIDER & CO., Lantern Slide Makers and Colourists, MAIDENHEAD AND WIMBLEDON.

Please mention this Journal when corresponding with Advertisers.

1. Rider's advertisement in *OMLJ*, October 1900 page xv

VISUAL STYLE: HOW TO SPOT A RIDER SLIDE

If the identified slides are a reliable guide, Rider's Life Model work was almost entirely created in the studio – of their 376 slide images

Table 1. Life Model slides known to be by W. Rider & Co., 1890s-1900s

Lucerna Set ID	Set title	No. of slides	Main usage	Date
3004290	<i>The amateur whitewasher</i>	12	Story	unknown
3002823	<i>The angel of the tenement</i>	26	Service of song	ibf. 1904
3003411	<i>The baker and the tarred fence</i>	12	Story	ibf. 1909
3007603	<i>[Belle Belton and her bicycle adventure]</i>	12?	Story	unknown
3009023	<i>[Bicycle experiences of Tony Tompkins]</i>	12?	Story	unknown
3003131	<i>Blind Betty's text</i>	20	Service of song	1900
3002841	<i>The cabin boy's Bible</i>	21	Service of song	1900
3002818	<i>Caleb's curse</i>	24	Service of song	ibf. 1904
3001176	<i>Child of the toy stall</i>	28	Recitation	1894
3001177	<i>Come home, mother</i>	22	Story	ibf. 1896
3004310	<i>The comical whitewasher</i>	9	Story	ibf. 1897
3002843	<i>The cyclist and tramp: up-to-date</i>	12	Story	1900
3000617	<i>Dick and his donkey</i>	24	Service of song	1890
3004230	<i>Exciting adventures of a temperance lecturer</i>	8	Story	unknown
3006464	<i>A friend in need</i>	29	Recitation	1894
3002825	<i>Froggy's little brother</i>	20	Service of song	1900
3001179	<i>The gambler's wife</i>	8	Song	1894
3004199	<i>Honest Jack</i>	28	Story	unknown
3006742	<i>Hope on</i>	12	Story	unknown
3008425	<i>[Jack's treasure: the story of a London waif]</i>	12?	Story	ibf. 1905
3006757	<i>Little Bell's charge</i>	33	Story	ibf. 1909
3007103	<i>A lively time</i>	10	Story	ibf. 1909
3003112	<i>Loved unto death</i>	28	Service of song	1900
3003413	<i>The mischievous boys and the peashooter</i>	12	Story	ibf. 1913
3008346	<i>More haste less speed</i>	12	Story	unknown
3001390	<i>Music versus art</i>	12	Story	ibf. 1898
3007612	<i>Naughty Norman, or the boy who would not be photographed</i>	12	Story	ibf. 1909
3000232	<i>Nellie</i>	30	Story	unknown
3004311	<i>Not so easy as it looks</i>	10	Story	unknown
3007581	<i>Not the effect he wanted</i>	9	Story	ibf. 1909
3000618	<i>Only a bunch of cherries</i>	24	Story	ibf. 1890
3002826	<i>Only a gypsy: a Caithness story</i>	24	Service of song	1900s
3002821	<i>Only a pair of shoes</i>	30	Service of song	ibf. 1904
3002834	<i>Only a waif</i>	23	Service of song	1900
3003136	<i>Peter the fisherman</i>	25	Service of song	1900
3010167	<i>[Poor Tom, or a boy's struggle against temptation]</i>	12?	Story	ibf. 1905
3007969	<i>[Rain while you wait]</i>	12?	Story	unknown
3007583	<i>The rival bill-posters</i>	12	Story	ibf. 1909
3006750	<i>The rival's revenge</i>	10	Story	ibf. 1909
3003415	<i>A study in black and white</i>	12	Story	ibf. 1913
3004216	<i>A terrible Christmas Eve</i>	24	Recitation	1894
3003135	<i>Those merry bells</i>	21	Service of song	1900
3000233	<i>Tim</i>	24	Story	iaf. 1898
3001379	<i>Tom Atkins' armour</i>	10	Recitation	1894

KEY: ibf. = 'in or before'; iaf. = 'in or after'



2. A typical Rider title slide – slide 1 of *Not the effect he wanted* (Nicholas Hiley Collection)

3. 'Ship's cabin' background with props – slide 17 of *The cabin boy's Bible* (Nicholas Hiley Collection)



illustrated in Lucerna, only six are taken in exterior locations. Their photographs are clear and full of contrast, generally well composed, and when hand-tinted the colours are carefully applied. Their models show better 'direction' than some manufacturers managed to achieve, with poses looking less static or clumsy than some, though sometimes with melodramatic body language.

Title slides

Rider's sets usually include a title slide, with a distinctive style often based on a circular motif (Fig. 2). They can be quite elaborate and artistic, sometimes including drawn representations of scenes or characters from the story, sometimes with purely decorative embellishments. They appear to be professionally drawn, or at least created by a competent person with a sense of graphic design, and composed for the square slide format, not photographed from the title pages of books or other sources.

Studio sets

Rider obviously had access to a spacious and well-lit studio, and used backgrounds and props that would have needed time and space to set up. There is some repetition but also quite a range of different set-ups, indicating production evolving over several years. The painting style of the backgrounds is quite simple, using clear lines and stylised buildings rather than very detailed or realistic impressions.

Interior sets are fairly basic, with features like doors, windows and fireplaces fabricated or painted onto flat scenery boards. There are some more specific interiors, like the ship's cabin in *The cabin boy's Bible* (Fig. 3) but most of the sets are generic and reused in different slide sets – a 'parlour', a 'poor cottage', an 'attic bedroom' and so on.

One typical feature of Rider's sets is use of 'brick wall' and 'wooden fence' scenery to define the space in which stories take place – this is



4. Rearranging the furniture: some well-used props which appear in various Rider sets – (a) slide 9 of Peter the fisherman (left) and (b) slide 8 of Those merry bells (right) (both Hecht Collection, Screen Archive South East, photographs Ludwig Vogl-Bienek)

5. 'Respectable bedroom' with props, including (when magnified) an 1898 calendar on the wall – slide 20 of Tim (Nicholas Hiley Collection)

most noticeable in a group of comic sets where misfortunes befall people on opposite sides of a garden wall, including *A study in black and white* and *A lively time*. Rider's humour is slapstick: people fall into things, are sprayed with liquids and throw things at each other, and cyclists in particular experience hilarious mishaps.

Some of the props used are also useful visual identification points – a grandfather clock (Fig. 4) is used in several sets, along with other distinctive furniture, and a fine set of antlers adorn more than one wall. Some sets have been identified from pictures on the walls that appear in other already-identified sets, and in one case (*Tim*, Fig. 5) a calendar for 1898 means the set must have been produced in or after that year.

Models

As with all Life Model producers, some faces appear regularly among Rider's models and a few are seen often enough to give instant recognition of a Rider slide. One in particular – a shorter than average man with sideburns who favours a baggy style of trouser – appears so frequently that he is probably William Rider himself. He occasionally features as a principal, like the splendidly named Jeremiah Tweedlepump in *Exciting adventures of a temperance lecturer* (Fig. 6) or the title character of *The comical whitewasher* (Fig. 7) but usually fills supporting roles like a barman (Fig. 8) or a passer-by.

Other regulars include two 'naughty boys' who appear in several sets (Fig. 9) – from their apparent ages, and the way they recur, it is tempting to imagine these are William Rider's sons Isaac Newton Rider

(born 1892) and William Vincent Rider (born 1898). There is also an older man (Figs 4b and 10) with a long white beard who could be another family member or, just possibly, the photographer George Truckle. This identification is, of course, complete speculation – but it is always possible that photographs exist of these individuals in family collections and it would be interesting to pursue these connections through genealogical networks and resources.

Labelling

Rider's slides are not labelled with their name or a trademark, though some can be found with other companies' names (like the 'Euphaneron' mark of E.G. Wood in Fig. 8) which suggest they were supplied to order for specific retailers or hirers. Some Rider slides have printed title strips on the top edge showing slide number and title, and some have a title label on the mount showing the set title in capitals or the set title and '(Copyright)'. Some sets have slide numbers printed on small circular labels at the top right corner of the mount, but on the whole there are few consistent visual clues as to production to be found outside the slide image.

COLLABORATION WITH THEOBALD & CO.

At first it came as a slight puzzle to find the London slide maker Theobald & Co., known mainly for their extensive range of chromolithographic transfer slides created from drawings, offering readings for what they described as 'Life Model' sets (Table 2). However



6. Jeremiah Tweedlepump has a hilarious mishap with some spilled ink – slide 4 of *Exciting adventures of a temperance lecturer* (Mervyn Heard Collection)



7. Chimney sweep and whitewasher finally reach a sort of agreement – slide 9 of *The comical whitewasher* (Hecht Collection, Screen Archive South East, photograph Ludwig Vogl-Bienek)



8. The same familiar model appears behind the bar – slide 8 of *Come home, mother* (Nicholas Hiley Collection)



9. Two boys, a barrel and garden wall – what could possibly go wrong? Slide 3 of The mischievous boys and the peashooter (private collection)



10. Slide 3 of Naughty Norman by Theobald – the older model appears in a number of sets by Rider (Nicholas Hiley Collection)



11. Trouble with the neighbours – slide 7 of The artist and the musician by Theobald (Ilfracombe Museum Collection)

once examples of the slides were found the picture became clearer – from the attitudes of the figures (Fig. 10) they were clearly drawings based on Life Model photographs. Since the ‘man with sideburns’ appears repeatedly (Fig. 11), the Life Model originals for these sets must have been by Rider.

Theobald’s readings, and catalogue indications from other slide dealers, suggest that several batches were produced, probably in the mid-1900s. In several cases the Theobald versions provide the only evidence yet for the existence of the Rider original, which may or may not have had the same title.⁸

This throws another important light on the practices of the commercial slide trade. In spite of Theobald’s reputation as a sharp dealer,⁹ there are too many of these sets, and they are promoted too openly, to have been examples of piracy: this must have been an authorised reuse of the images with a trading agreement between the two businesses. Unless some documentation from either side miraculously appears, we (again) won’t be able to do much more than speculate about the nature of this arrangement, but both Rider and Theobald must have felt there was a market from which both could benefit for this type of lower-cost remake.

Table 2. ‘Life Model’ transfer sets by Theobald (all stories, 1900s)

Lucerna ID	Set title	No. of slides
3005744	<i>The artist and the musician</i>	12
3005753	<i>The baker and the tarred fence</i>	12
3005739	<i>Belle Belton and her bicycle adventure</i>	12
3005743	<i>Bicycle experiences of Tony Tompkins</i>	12
3005748	<i>The doctor’s boy and the whitewasher</i>	12
3005747	<i>Jack’s treasure: the story of a London waif</i>	12
3005837	<i>A lively snowball</i>	12
3005833	<i>Loved unto death</i> [two sets of 12]	24
3005834		
3005746	<i>Naughty Norman: or the boy who would not be photographed</i>	12
3005880	<i>Peter the fisherman</i> [two sets of 12]	24
3005881		
3005836	<i>Poor Tom: or, a boy’s struggle against temptation</i>	12
3005829	<i>Rain while you wait</i>	12
3005830	<i>The rival bill posters</i>	12
3005823	<i>The two drunkards</i>	12

NOTES

All slide images are from the Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, reproduced by permission. Photographs are by the author except as credited.

1. *Optical Magic Lantern Journal*, Vol.11, No.137 (October 1900), p.xv. The advert gives Rider’s location as ‘Maidenhead and Wimbledon’ but all records found so far only show addresses in Wimbledon and no reference to the business is known in street directories or local newspaper archives for Maidenhead.
2. Rider was baptised as Joseph William Rider and all genealogical records up to and including the 1881 Census give his name as such. At his first marriage in 1887 he reversed his two first names and thereafter seems to have preferred to be known as William Joseph Rider. He also seems to have changed his religious allegiance (always relevant in the slide trade), his marriages being registered in the Church of England rather than the Methodist persuasion of his parents.
3. The relevant genealogical references will be found in the record for Rider in Lucerna, ID number 6002497.
4. For more on copyright in slides see ‘Copyright’ in *Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern*, Magic Lantern Society, London, 2001. Copyright registration of photographs was common among 1890s Life Model slide makers, though even the largest only registered a few slides or sets from each year’s production, possibly because the cost was high and the effectiveness against piracy not certain.
5. The 1890 sets photographed by Truckle were *Only a bunch of cherries* (National Archives, COPY 1/400/260-263) and *Dick and his donkey* (COPY 1/401/392-393). In 1894 *Tom Atkins’ armour*, *Child of the toy stall*, *A friend in need*, *The gambler’s wife* and *A terrible Christmas Eve* were registered as COPY 1/424/717–721 respectively (these sets were advertised in the same year by the London dealer Chatham Pexton as though they were his own production) and in 1897 *The comical whitewasher* was registered as COPY 1/433/259.
6. An outline biography for Truckle with genealogical references is in Lucerna, ID number 6003848.
7. British Patent Application 138,822 of 1919 – the patent was probably never actually granted.
8. Theobald’s titles include *Belle Belton and her bicycle adventure* and *Rain while you wait*, not yet identified as Rider sets, *The artist and the musician* based on Rider’s *Music versus art*, and *The doctor’s boy and the whitewasher* which Rider titled *More haste less speed*.
9. See Mervyn Heard, ‘Court Report: R. v. Theobald’, in *New Magic Lantern Journal*, Vol.10, No.6, Autumn 2010, pp.108-111 – though to be fair to Theobald his conviction was for fraud rather than piracy and there is no evidence of his involvement in illicit copying of slides.