

BILDERBOGEN PEEP-SHOW VIEWS, TRANSPARENCIES AND VUES D'OPTIQUE

Bill Barnes

Seventy kilometres north of Berlin lies the small historic town of Neuruppin. Although founded in the 13th century it was largely rebuilt between 1788 and 1796 by Friedrich Wilhelm II, the King of Prussia, after a disastrous fire destroyed two-thirds of the old town. Today it remains very much as it did when Friedrich rebuilt it, having escaped the ravages of World War II and been lovingly refurbished since its reunification with the rest of Germany.

Apart from King Friedrich, its fame rests largely on two of its most celebrated sons – the great German architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841) and the poet/novelist Theodor Fontane (1819-1898), author of *Effi Briest*, a novel filmed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder in 1974. Schinkel, I may add, constructed both dioramas and panoramas about which I have written elsewhere. More important for members of the Magic Lantern Society is the remarkable printing and publishing house of the 'Neuruppiner bilderbogen' (illustrated broadsheets) – coloured lithographs much in the style of the better-known French 'images d'Épinal' but founded a little earlier, in 1791 (Fig. 1). As in Épinal they were producing coloured lithographs of various kinds including news items, current events, topographical and pictorial scenes, biblical subjects, costume plates, children's games and stories, etc. (Fig. 2). What's more they produced bilderbogen for peep-shows, boîtes d'optique and vues d'optique.



1. The Bilderbogen Printing and Publishing House of Gustav Kühn in Neuruppin, 1840. The owner's name is above the windows on the ground floor – 'Gustav Kühn'

Shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 a special exhibition was mounted in the National Folkmuseum within the Pergamon Museum in Berlin entitled 'Signs, Pictures, Ballads', which ran from 25 September 1987 to 3 January 1988. In the illustrated catalogue appeared an article by Lisa Riedel, former Keeper of Prints at the Heimatmuseum, Neuruppin, on *Guckkastenbilder aus Neuruppin* ('Peep-show Pictures from Neuruppin'). In this she relates how in 1914 a private edition appeared in Berlin of *A Chronicle of 500 Years of the Kühn Family* originally written in 1866 by Gustav Kühn (1794-1868), the son of Johann Bernhard Kühn (1750-1826) a bookbinder and reputed founder/inventor of the Neuruppiner bilderbogen. His son's memoirs exist in fragments only and tell how his father, by the age of 25, ran a library in addition to his bookbinding business. After 1779, now independent and married, he had made an 'electric machine' which produced astonishing and beautiful effects. This attracted many spectators to his premises when he demonstrated it at evening time.

He also built a large peep-show with two peep-holes with lenses and charged the local people 5 thaler a 'peep'. Because of their circumstances they had not the opportunity to see such things before. Lisa Riedel goes on to relate how he also produced bilderbogen for use in peep-shows including ones with day and night effects and others with mirror-writing captions – these were almost certainly 'transparencies' for use in the boîtes d'optique and vues d'optique for the zograscope, as a peep-show does not use a mirror.

When in 1815 Gustav Kühn became a partner in his father's business and began printing and publishing bilderbogen, the peep-show pictures were included in his production programme (Figs 3 and 4) and in around 1841, probably with memories surviving from childhood, he published the delightful bilderbogen of the showman with his peep-show entertaining a group of young children (Fig. 5). Notice how he is manipulating the scenes inside by pulling the row of strings protruding from the side of the peep-show.

Like father, like son, Gustav Kühn's son Leopold, followed by a succession of proprietors, carried on the business which



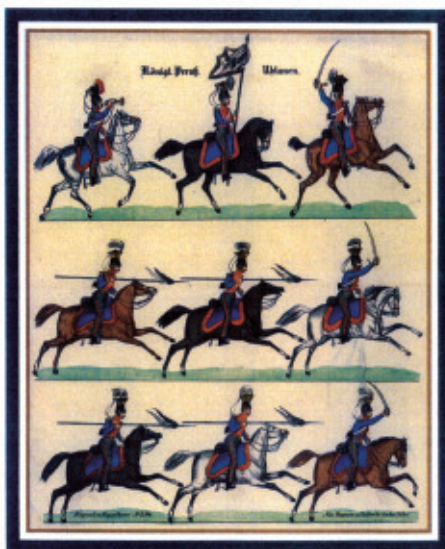
DIE GESTÖRTE KAFFEEGESELLSCHAFT
Firma Gehrig & Remschmidt, 1841/1842
colorierte Lithographie

(a) Die Neuruppiner Bilderbogen wurde zwischen 1810 und 1870 in der Werkstatt Neuruppiner gedruckt.

2. (a) A typical bilderbogen relating the tribulations of a billy-goat – not unlike a set of magic lantern slides (Heimatmuseum)

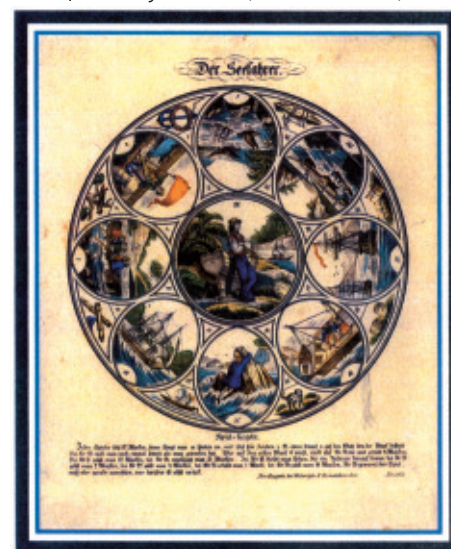
(b) A cavalry charge, Gustav Kühn 1848/49 (Heimatmuseum)

(c) A bilderbogen from 1840/41 suggestive of the glass roundel slides produced by Ernst Plank for his toy lanterns (Heimatmuseum)



KÖNIGLICH-PREUSSISCHE ULANEN
Firma Gustav Kühn, 1848/1849
colorierte Lithographie

(b) Die Neuruppiner Bilderbogen wurde zwischen 1810 und 1870 in der Werkstatt Neuruppiner gedruckt.



DER SEEFÄHRER
Firma Gehrig & Remschmidt, 1840/1841
colorierte Lithographie

(c) Die Neuruppiner Bilderbogen wurde zwischen 1810 und 1870 in der Werkstatt Neuruppiner gedruckt.

3. Peep-show views
(courtesy Lisa Riedel)

4. Peep-show picture by Gustav Kühn, 1843, of the Royal Opera House Berlin on fire, 18 August 1843
(courtesy Lisa Riedel)

survived World War II virtually intact with its hundreds of bilderbogen lithographic prints, litho presses and stones. Sadly under the communist government of the DDR the works were closed and much of its contents were disposed

of or destroyed. The litho stones were broken up for road material. Through the efforts of supporters of the local Heimatmuseum under the curatorships of two women, Lisa Riedel from 1958 to 1986 then Irina Rockel who succeeded her, a large collection of bilderbogen has been gathered from far and wide, and a litho press and stone (Figs 6 and 7). Although much of the hardware cannot be replaced, the collection of bilderbogen increases yearly but many more are still needed to complete the collection. An example in the Barnes Collection when offered was found to be already represented, but others that may turn up are always worth reporting. Each print bears a number and the place-name 'Neuruppin' so can easily be identified.

It was during my first of many visits to Neuruppin and its Heimatmuseum in August 1992 that I became acquainted with Neuruppin bilderbogen and the archive. On a subsequent visit I was lucky enough to recognise among the displays of lithographs one depicting the tragic Paris Charity Bazaar Fire of 1897 –

Bilderbogen no. 9531 'Der Brand des Wohlthätigkeits-Bazars in Paris am 4 Mai 1897'. Through the kindness of the then Keeper of Prints, Dr Peter Schmidt, I obtained a fine coloured facsimile which is reproduced here in a much reduced size (Fig. 8). This is the first time of which I am aware that this illustration has come to the notice of a film historian, although it has appeared in print twice previously – first in the book *Neuruppiner Bilderbogen* by Lisa Riedel (c.2000) and then in the second edition published in 2009. Both were published locally. The bilderbogen depicts graphically in colour the terrible moment of panic when over 120 people, mainly French aristocracy, lost their lives

as the venue in which they were watching a cinematograph show was consumed by fire. Irina Rockel, in her book *Zu Haben Bei Gustav Kühn – Zur Geschichte der Neuruppiner Bilderbogen* (1992), published for the first time an illustration of bilderbogen with captions in mirror-writing for use in the zograscope, although again this use is not specified in the book (Fig. 9).

So 'hats off' to two remarkable women who have done so much in bringing to notice to a wider public the magical world of the Neuruppin bilderbogen and their history, and through their efforts have helped to preserve an historical facet of Neuruppin history.

I would like to thank Monica Deininger, actress and town guide, and Günther Rieger, artist, local historian, photographer, author and publisher for their kindness and assistance during my many visits to their beautiful town.

NOTES

An original copy of the Pergamon Museum catalogue containing the article by Lisa Riedel is in the Lester Smith Collection and has been essential reading for this article, for which my gratitude.

Further reading:

Irina Rockel, *Zu Haben Bei Gustav Kühn – Zur Geschichte der Neuruppiner Bilderbogen*, Kunst & Bild GmbH, 1992, Berlin

Lisa Riedel, *Neuruppiner Bilderbogen*, c.2000, and second edition 2009, both published by Edition Rieger, Karwe N.D.



6. The Heimatmuseum, present home of the Neuruppin bilderbogen archive (photo: Lewkowicz)



7. Lithographic press with stone on display at the Bilderbogen Gallery in the Heimatmuseum (photo: Karin Siemoneit)



5. The peep-show man by Gustav Kühn, c.1840. A bilderbogen of a peep-show made for a peep-show (courtesy Lisa Riedel)



8. Bilderbogen of the Paris Charity Bazaar fire of 1897 (courtesy of Dr Peter Schmidt, Heimatmuseum)



9. Bilderbogen designed as vues d'optique for use with a zograscope. Note the captions repeated in mirror-writing (Heimatmuseum)