

A MAGIC LANTERN SHOW

Inspired by an interview and filming with Mrs Marion Barrowclough, a Bamforth child star, in 1978

Carol Owens (Gregory)

In the Valley Meeting Hall, Holmfirth (later to become the Valley Cinema) there was an expectant hush. Thirty-two children between the ages of four and eleven sat on forms at the front of the hall, while behind them six rows of bentwood chairs had been set out for the adults. They all sat in their dark, uncomfortable Sunday best and waited for the Vicar, Mr Quainton, to rise to his feet. He was anxiously watching Mr Bamforth at the two lanterns as that gentleman and his assistant fiddled with the limelight equipment, keeping an eye on the Sunday School at the front who could not be relied upon to wait too long without fidgeting, but at last Mr Bamforth looked up and nodded.

Rev. Quainton stood up, rubbing his hands and beaming with a mixture of pride and relief. "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, welcome first of all to our meeting tonight. I know that we are in for a particularly interesting and edifying evening, as we are so fortunate as to be having a Lantern Lecture by a member of our own famous Bamforth family. Mr Teddy has very kindly come here this evening to show us a selection of slides from his marvellous catalogue, and I am sure that we will all find them most rewarding. Mr Bamforth ...?"

The Vicar thus handed over the reins of the meeting to Teddy Bamforth, who bowed slightly and smiled round the assortment of faces in the Meeting Hall from his place beside the magic lanterns at the back. "Hello everyone," he said, "You all know me, and you know my sister, Miss Jane Bamforth, who will be giving some of the readings tonight. Can I also introduce Mr James Blenkinsop, our other reader?"

"You should go forward now," he added to his two colleagues. "Very well, Teddy," Janey turned encouragingly to Mr Blenkinsop, who was new to Holmfirth, then led the way to the front of the hall, instantly provoking an outbreak of pushing among the Sunday School. "Hello Miss Bamforth" piped one child cheerily. "Be quiet, George", said the Vicar immediately.

Janey Bamforth tried to look sternly at the criminal, but just managed to twinkle in amusement as usual. She was very popular with the children but had her position to think of when their parents were present. She straightened her hat and sat down gracefully in one of the



two chairs borrowed from the Vicarage for the lecturers, as Mr Blenkinsop perched himself rather nervously in the other.

At the back of the Hall, Teddy clapped his hands together once. "I am now going to light the first lantern. May I remind you not to look directly at the limelight while it is burning. Our first item this evening will be *A Tour of the Lakes*, with Miss Jane Bamforth as our guide, and piano accompaniment by Mrs Arkwright. Thank you." He bent over the lantern and turned the valves on the limelight. There was a hiss, a pop, and a beam of brilliant white light poured down the lens and onto the screen at the top end of the hall. Immediately the first slide appeared, with the title surrounded by a colourful garland of leaves and fruit. The piano rolled into a version of the Pastoral Symphony, and Janey Bamforth stood up.

This was the 'B movie', if you like, that started off any magic lantern entertainment and would precede the main feature which was generally highly moral in tone and melodramatic in content. Favourite themes revolved around virtue rewarded and sin punished, particularly drunkenness, and were particularly approved of at the Band of Hope and Temperance meetings. This evening was a Sunday School treat, and indeed most of the audience went along for the entertainment rather than moral improvement. In these years at the very start of the twentieth century, it was all there was, apart from amateur dramatics and musical soirées for those fortunate to own an instrument or two.

As Mrs Arkwright tinkled the ivories, moving from Beethoven to Gilbert and Sullivan and back, Janey Bamforth introduced each of the beautifully hand-tinted photographic views and wove little stories



Bamforth 'song card' postcards for 'Daddy', c.1907, featuring Marion Leake and her father Sydney

around them for her spellbound audience. She finished with 'Sunset over Derwentwater' and a snatch of Wordsworth, then 'The End' slid across with a flourish.

The second lantern hissed into life as Teddy's assistant turned off the first, which clicked and popped angrily as it cooled. "And now," announced Mr Blenkinsop with a slight crack in his voice, "A comic song entitled 'The Chicken and the Stone'." 'Pom-ti-pom' banged the piano, and off they went. This time the slides were painted cartoons, quite a short series to Mr Blenkinsop's evident relief – and the Sunday School's disappointment. As the final slide came up, the singer sat down with a bump, and a small boy in the second row chortled loudly.

"George," admonished Mr Quainton, "Remember where you are please." He took off his spectacles, gave them a quick polish on a large red pocket handkerchief and set them carefully back on his nose. "Now children, we have a special surprise for you, so I hope you will all pay attention. Are you ready?" He turned to look at the far side of the hall. A tiny girl, with blonde ringlets tied in a ribbon and wearing her best green frock with the yellow dots, had appeared beside the piano. Mrs Arkwright had given up the piano stool to Janey Bamforth. She settled her music, smiled at the child affectionately, then played the introduction.

With both lanterns now working again, a series of photographic slides faded from one to the next, all showing the same little girl in the green dress in various tableaux and as they shone on to the screen, she sang the song they illustrated:

*"Lay your head on my shoulder, Daddy,
Turn your face to the West.
It is just the hour that the sky turns gold,
The hour that Mother loved best ..."*

She went on for four heart-rending verses, 'til "Dear Daddy, dear Daddy, goodnight, goodnight."

There were audible sniffs from the hall, and the Vicar blew his nose loudly on his red handkerchief. In the second row from the back, 'Daddy' was fairly bursting with pride as little Marion curtsied and disappeared behind the piano again.

"Thank you, Miss Marion Leake, for that charming rendering of 'Daddy'," said Janey Bamforth warmly, handing over the piano to Mrs Arkwright again. "I must hurry back to my place for the main item of the evening, the tragic and dramatic story of *The Bronze Statue*." 'Oohs' and 'aaahs' from the children on the forms, great activity around the hot and smoking lanterns, then the main feature began.

Unnoticed in all this, the bearded man in the second row from the back had slipped out and gone round to the side door of the Meeting Hall to collect his pretty daughter. She had managed to put on her coat but was having a bit of difficulty with the buttons.

"Here love, let me do it," he said, crouching down and struggling somewhat himself. The buttonholes were so tiny for his quarryman's fingers. At last it was done however, and he wrapped her little shawl over her head and round her shoulders.

It was a quarter to seven, and getting dark. Janey Bamforth had personally asked Marion's father if she could sing at the meeting tonight and had made sure it was all right for him to leave work early to fetch her. Mr Leake was always slightly bemused at finding his daughter was a Bamforth favourite, but she did look such a picture and he was really very proud of her. Just this once, he'd said, but he didn't really mean it. Anything that could do the little girl some good, he was happy about. "Come along Marion," he said, taking firm hold of her hand. "Mother's waiting for us, and it's time tha were in bed."

They crossed the bridge, pausing for a moment to watch the river gurgling over its grey stone bed, and set off up the steep hill towards home.

THE B-MAGIC EVENT IN MONS

Natalija Majsova and Nele Wynants

In November 2018, over 40 lantern scholars and enthusiasts gathered at the impressive exhibition space of the Mundaneum, a centre of knowledge conservation and distribution, in Mons, Belgium, for the second workshop organised under the EOS-funded *B-magic* project by the University of Louvain (UCL) team. The day focused on the iconography of lantern slides and how lantern practices constantly oscillate between **the real and the imaginary** – the workshop topic.



*B-magic workshop in Mundaneum, Mons
(photograph by Iris Luyckx) (above)*



One Gwen Sebus's Belgian dog cart slides

Gwen Sebus started the discussion with images of 19th-century Belgium, reflecting the main topic, recurrent themes in the slides (e.g. dog carts) and urban landscapes. Film scholar **André Gaudreault** from the University of Montreal (Canada) put the magic lantern at the centre of cultural developments that led to the first moving pictures. Then film historian **Marc-Emmanuel Mélon** from the University of Liège (Belgium) looked at different media and distribution technologies through the work of Belgian photographer Gustave Maurissiaux (1872-1929). Media scholar **Giusy Pisano's** (Louis-Lumière School, Saint-Denis, France) lecture drew attention to the importance of performance scripts, slide lists and repertoires. Senior *B-magic* scholars **Sébastien Fevry** and **Philippe Marion** talked about Paul Otlet to whom the Mundaneum is dedicated.

Following the morning lectures, the *B-magic* researchers discussed their first findings, aims, and aspirations. Six new *B-magic* doctoral students prepared posters, summing up their research. A seventh poster by **Dulce Gonçalves** presented the aims of the Utrecht University-led project *Projecting Knowledge – The Magic Lantern as a Tool for Mediated Science Communication in the Netherlands, 1880-1940*. The posters will be put on b-magic.eu. Senior *B-magic* researchers gave a brief overview on approaches to the magic lantern in Belgium, including as a travelling medium for spreading knowledge by **Iason Jongepier** and **Nele Wynants**. They showed how the lantern's geographical reach and impact can benefit from contemporary digital tools, such as GIS mapping. **Evelien Jonckheere** and **Kurt Vanhoutte** (*B-magic* project leaders) also focused on the lantern's travels and specifically on metempsychosis shows at fairgrounds. **Sabine Lenk**, **Nelleke Teughels** and **Natalija Majsova** then looked at lantern slides in Catholic education and the complexity of analysing religious slides due to the variety of contexts, uses and purposes. Other researchers joined the conversation, providing insights on lantern-illustrated songs (**Robin Cauche**, University of Montreal), photographic slide imagery and uses (**Amélie Van Liefferinge**) and the lantern in public initiatives in the Netherlands (**Nico de Klerk**, University of Utrecht).

In a final discussion **Patrice Guérin** emphasised that all research must be grounded in technical knowledge of the medium and its functions. The workshop was rounded off by Belgian film-maker **Françoise Levie**, who talked about Belgian phantasmagore Etienne-Gaspard Robertson, using excerpts from *Merci, Monsieur Robertson* (1985), directed by her father, the late **Pierre Levie**. These demonstrated clearly the eternal connection of the lantern to the worlds of science, technology, popular culture, art, and, of course, fantasy. (See page 1 for the next B-magic workshop.)