

A PROMINENT MAGIC LANTERN WEBSITE

Gwen Sebus and Michael van de Leur

People often ask whether I know who made the Luikerwaal.com website, or whether I have the webmaster's e-mail address. If they ask me to give a magic lantern show, they often say "We have already seen the slides on the Luikerwaal site". My own interest was triggered by the statement on the site that it belongs to the (digital) cultural heritage of the Netherlands. It really was time to pay a visit to the Luikerwaal webmaster, Henc de Roo, who received me at his home in Huizen in the Netherlands. Here is his story.

As a boy, Henc was already giving shows with a small projector. He had bought his first magic lantern made by Johann Falk, at a flea market for what is now approximately £4 (or 5 euro).



2. A very odd 'modern' projector

At that time little magic lanterns like these were usually thrown away if they were not sold. Henc developed an interest – more lanterns and slides followed. His motto became: "Ik verzamel niet om te hebben maar om te bewaren" ("I do not collect in order to possess, but in order to protect"). Not all the lanterns and slides on the website are owned by Henc. Some are owned by friends. One of his favourite lanterns is Henc's own – a lantern made from a biscuit tin.

Henc's training and technical experience with the Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (the Dutch counterpart of the BBC) – from which he has now retired – gave him an advantage over most people in handling computers. As a consequence, Henc was one of the first to own a home PC which he began to use for creating a database of his collection. Then came the idea of making the database available to the public through a website, which he started in 1997 under the name 'Luikerwaal'. The name was derived from the show people originating from the area of Luik (Liège) in Wallonia, Belgium, travelling around with their magic lanterns and slides on their back.



3. The 'biscuit tin' lantern



5. Henc with his home-made light box for photographing the slides

Henc developed the website at first only in Dutch, but later decided to add English to make the website more accessible. He had not expected that the site would grow so much both in size and in renown. His website distinguishes itself from other magic lantern sites in its scope: postcards and trading cards showing magic lanterns, books, catalogues, self-made stories, magic lanterns and of course many lantern slides. Henc's wish is to create a virtual magic lantern museum and he especially enjoys the juxtaposition

between the antiquated techniques of the magic lantern and the modern techniques of television and computers. Every day he works on his website, sometimes the whole day, and tries to upload something new. He receives feedback from all over the world, from as far as Japan. Henc distributes a monthly newsletter with news and additions to the website.

Since the Royal Library (the Dutch National Library) stated in 2014 that the website would be recorded as part of the Dutch cultural heritage, the website's contents are uploaded every six months to the national digital archives. This ensures that there is always a recent copy in the archives, should Henc suffer a disastrous computer crash. Another landmark that made Henc very proud is that *Collector's Weekly* pronounced the Luikerwaal site to be the best collector's website.

Hopefully, Henc will remain among us for many years to come so everybody can enjoy the Luikerwaal website!



1. Henc de Roo in front of one of his magic lantern cupboards

NOTES (from page 12)

1. Karl Geiringer, *Musical Instruments. Their History from the Stone-Age to the Present Day* (trans. Bernard Niall), 2nd Edition, Allen & Unwin, London, 1945. Percy Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 10th Edition (revised), OUP, 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Music*, revised edition, OUP, 1997
2. I have to thank Lester Smith for this illustration of one of the earliest depictions of a hurdy-gurdy (a type known as an organistrum) from the 12th century Portico de la Gloria on the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Spain.
3. The players in Fig. 4 seem to contradict some historians who believe it was at this time used with a bow. However a bas relief found in the ruins of the abbey of St George at Boscherville in Normandy, dating back to the 11th century and now preserved in the Museum of Rouen, possibly shows the two types – one played with a bow and the other played by two people with a handle [ed.].



6. Henc's motto