

SPRING MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

SWEDENBORG SOCIETY, LONDON

Saturday 27 April 2019

Over 60 members and guests gathered in central London for our spring meeting. Chairman **Jeremy Brooker** welcomed new members especially as, following the introduction of a trial reduction in membership fee, **Richard Crangle** was delighted to report that over three times as many people had joined in the first four months compared to 2018. The day began with an affectionate film tribute to **Jan Rigby** (1939-2018) (see *TML* 18) based on footage from her many shows with her husband **Richard** and an interview with **Kate Sandison** for Hope UK.



Next **Trevor Beattie**, *Medieval Charing Cross and Ischia, Bay of Naples, by E.H. Wilkie (Robin Palmer)*



Richard Crangle with good news!



The top-hatted harvester from the South Downs National Park (Trevor Beattie)

Next **Trevor Beattie**, Chief Executive of the South Downs National Park Authority, told us about the UK's newest National Park that extends from the edge of Eastbourne to the edge of Winchester, more or less following the South Downs Way. With more residents than any other, planning issues form a major part of Trevor's job – protecting the 'living landscape' and its 'breathing spaces'. Starting in Eastbourne the magic lantern slide tour took us to Jevington – smuggling centre of the area and home of notorious smuggler 'Jevington Jigg' in the 1780s – Alfriston, home of the first National Trust property, and Newhaven harbour with its ferry service to France since 1853 (and Lord Lucan left his car there). We saw hop pickers, a harvester

with top hat and waistcoat, estuaries, undulating landscapes and chalk cliffs. The short-lived 'Daddy-Long-Legs' that carried people from Rottingdean high-level pier to Brighton as part of Volk's Electric Railway was a real transport curiosity. Proving unreliable and subject to storm damage it only ran from 1896 to 1901. After stopping at historic Worthing and Midhurst – and village inns in between – we finally arrived at Winchester.

Gordon Casbeard then treated us to the first 'triple surprise' of the day. The first set was the *Painter's Dream* and told the tale of Cedric, the artist, who created such a realistic landscape that Fluff, his dog, attempted to jump into it – according to Gordon who composed the story in rhyme to fit the slides. Next was the story



Gordon Casbeard with the day's first 'triple surprise'

of **Martin Anderson** (1854-1932), known as Cynicus, a Scottish artist, political cartoonist, publisher, postcard and lantern slide illustrator. Starting out on the *Dundee Advertiser*, by the early 1900s he was employing over 100 staff and contributed to magazines such as *Punch*, but died in poverty. The slides showed examples of his cartoons in colour with captions including "The stockbroker in heaven – he plays the lyre" and "Waiting for the mails" with three eligible young ladies on a bench. The final element was a selection of Gordon's favourite slides including the Home Guard outside his local village hall (they weren't allowed in by a fierce female custodian because of their boots) sleeping road menders (a sight he remembered), a very striking portrait of a Norwegian tramp, and a slide used as a test piece by bank note engravers – the sector in which Gordon worked.

The afternoon began with another triple surprise – all focussing on **Edmund Henry Wilkie** (1857-1935) the slide painter, slide maker and lantern lecturer associated with the Royal Polytechnic Institution at the beginning of his career. **Martin Gilbert** began the story in 1988 when **Robin Palmer** bought some of Wilkie's slides found at his former home, 70 Dyne Road, at a Sotheby's auction. Martin recently purchased a book *Polytechnic Papers* dated 1889 and signed by Wilkie. The sellers were relatives of Wilkie living in Sheffield and Martin purchased most of the rest of Wilkie's collection from them. This included photographic slides of the family, hand-painted landscapes, a set of *Rumpelstiltskin* (11 slides), astronomical slides, programmes from the Polytechnic including the last shows before it closed in 1882 and posters. He has scripts annotated by Wilkie marking picture changes, etc, for *Lurline – the Rhine Maiden* and *Whyttington and Hys Catte* (see below). Martin projected an incredibly complex mechanical slide of the Transit of Venus (for which he has Wilkie's original designs) as well as a superb skull with moving mouth and eyes.



Robin Palmer and his triumphal

Robin Palmer then projected some of his Wilkie collection based on a trip *From Charing Cross to Candahar*, the actual Polytechnic syllabus of 2 January 1882, given by Wilkie (the programme was in *Polytechnic Papers*). After scenes of London we took the (moving) train from Charing Cross to catch the boat that gently steamed out of harbour on a beautiful animated sea. After storms in the Bay of Biscay and stops in Gibraltar and the Bay of Naples (with suitable effects), we visited Egypt and its antiquities. After a brief history lesson on Ferdinand de Lesseps we travelled down his



One of Lester Smith's 'windows' sets

Suez Canal, across the Arabian Sea and encountered the 'catamaran postman' nearing Bombay. After glimpses of India we reached Afghanistan via various passes and our final destination of Candahar's cloth market. Most of the slides were stunning hand-painted scenes, many with movement, and some were photographic, hand-tinted by Wilkie.

Lester Smith completed the trio with his exquisite hand-painted Wilkie slides from a collection Lester owns that Wilkie put together for a school near Winchester. Back we went to Egypt with two day/night sets. The first was the Palace of Casr Nasr, Cairo, with the windows lighting up. The second featured the Sphinx where the night scene included men lighting a fire (with animated flames and smoke) and the moon appearing. Later a panorama slide of the citadel in Cairo featured a night procession. Lester also showed another 'windows' set and two slides from a set of Christmas customs – Santa Claus appearing in a bedroom and a family with Christmas tree that lit up.



David Burder's viscope and demonstration with Bill Barnes' original strip



During the tea break David Burder set up a demonstration of his viscope, recreated from the 1896 patent as part of his quest to recreate every animation device. Examples of viscopes are extremely rare (see Bill Barnes' article, TML 15, p.10) – despite a glowing review in *Scientific American* at the time. Four are known, all slightly different, none exactly as the patent. Using an intriguing mechanism it accurately changes one picture to the next with no motion in between. The patent suggests a proscenium arch but the picture does move very slightly around the drum so the arch would have to move too. Lester Smith had copied Bill Barnes' original viscope strips and these worked after a fashion if you blocked out adjacent pictures. David suggested it was more like a choreutoscope and questioned the honesty of the system. Members were intrigued.

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Picking up from the Wilkie triple bill, Nicole Mollett and Frog Morris presented their own inimitable interpretation of *Ye Wonderfulle Tale of Whyttington and Hys Catte* based on the original 1877 Polytechnic rhyming script by Tifkins Thudd Esq. They used an eclectic mix of slides including some of Nicole's own creation. Young Richard from Gloucester finds dirt not gold on the streets of London but turns back when instructed by a dream. Taken in by a merchant he has two problems – he is in love with Alice the merchant's daughter and the rats in his bedroom (very handsome hand-drawn moving rats) keep him awake. He purchases a cat for one penny and, as the cat is his only possession, invests it in his employer's next trade



Nicole Mollett with her own 'feast' slides ... and her rat!



voyage. On distant shores, the cat solves the rat problem at the king's feast (complete with succulent cured crocodile), earning Dick a fortune – and the rest is history.

After such extraordinary riches the 'Bring and Show' had to be abandoned due to overrunning and we moved on to the grand finale – Mrs Zenobia Haskin-Davies (a.k.a. Juliette Harcourt), lanternist and chanteuse. She took us back to the countryside where we started the day and also featured rats. A series of slipping slides set the scene including a spider catching a fly in its web, a carnation blooming and country trades. To a rendition of 'I have 12 oxen' (with 'troubadour alert' to forewarn of Mrs H-D breaking into song) we saw cows drinking and boys in scrapes. Then came the rats featuring poorly 'Pa' swallowing rats with the novel addition of the rodents squeaking in his mouth. Following a series of Clara, the monkey, doing strange things, such as dunking a cat, we had a rousing rendition of the popular Victorian ballad 'The Holy City' with accompanying dream slides. The show ended with 'God Save the Queen' (with an image of young Victoria) and an exhortation always to use your vote.

What a day!



Mrs Zenobia Haskin-Davies, with suffragette rosette



A 'troubadour alert'!