

SUMMER MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

ST DUNSTAN'S CHURCH HALL, CANTERBURY

Saturday 20 July 2019

A new venue for the Summer Meeting – the historic city of Canterbury. Over 50 members and guests made the pilgrimage for a full, varied and interesting programme – plus cake, strawberries and cream!

Jeremy Brooker, a local, gave us a quick guide to the sights and non-sights (Sir Thomas More's head is buried in the crypt of the church next door) before introducing **Peter and Delia Gillies** for the first presentation. This picked up the theme of stories that were once very familiar but are not now. *The King of the Golden River* was written by the art critic John Ruskin for 12-year-old Effie Gray in 1840 and not published until 1851. The set of 18 slides are of variable quality but this seems to accord with the 18 book illustrations being by various engravers. The story is a Cinderella-type tale of three brothers, the elder two getting their just deserts when



Setting up – how many members does it take to ...?



Setting up – the technical team

seeking a river of gold with elfin interventions. Next, an addition to the programme, local author **Peter Berg** gave us *Whymper's Scrambles with a Camera* based on two boxes of photographic magic lantern slides belonging to Victorian mountaineer Edward Whymper (1840-1911) that were given to the Alpine Club. At the age of 18, Whymper was inspired by attending Albert Smith's famous *Ascent of Mont Blanc* presentation in May 1858. In the years 1860-1865 Whymper travelled extensively in the Alps, mainly on foot. By 1861, aged 21, Whymper was elected a member of the Alpine Club. This was also the year he made the first of several attempts to climb the



From The King of the Golden River

unconquered Matterhorn (nearly 15,000 feet high), a solo attempt in 1862 nearly ending in disaster. Finally, he set out with a party of eight on 13 July 1865. They successfully reached the summit but tragedy struck on the way down when one slipped and the rope broke between Lord Francis Douglas and the main local guide resulting in four fatalities, including Lord Francis. The photographs appear to have been taken by Whymper in 1893 and 1895, then used for lectures, probably first at Davos in 1896.

Jeremy Brooker followed with an extraordinary film, to be found on YouTube. This came from *Flashbacks* (1938) – one of the last revues produced by Charles (C.B.) Cochran, the legendary theatre producer and impresario, telling the story of moving pictures from 1898 to 1938. The film *From the Magic Lantern's Development into Modern Movies* takes an extremely patronising tone towards the magic lantern ("anything less magic is hard to imagine") and nearly every 'fact' is wrong. Inexplicably the magic lantern part is silent but by the time you reach the 'modern' movies of the 1930s there is a full orchestra!

After lunch **David Francis** brought us 'newsreel' slides from World War I. David had only been aware of the sets of Tyler's topical slides (99 sets in Lucerna) in this genre and these date from around 1909-10 – Tyler himself died in 1909. The two WWI sets he had come across were from the Topical Press Agency (UK) and American Press Association. They raised a number of questions about why slides were made when Pathé were producing newsreels and where were they shown? However every cinema did have a magic lantern at the time. He suggested a government agency may have acquired and distributed the UK ones, possibly free, adding the text as propaganda. An explanation for 'why slides?' could be that film cameras were not allowed at the front so the slides substituted to fill a huge demand for news and images of the War. The US slides had named advertisers on them who may have distributed the slides. The USA was neutral until 1917 and had a large German population. The captions on these slides were neutral, pro-German or ambiguous. Members of the audience suggested the British slides may also have been produced for presentations at schools or local village halls.



The Matterhorn – Edward Whymper slide

The 'Bring and Show' proved a lively session. **John Holden** wanted some help with information on three arc lamps he had acquired (duly supplied): an Empire no.9 light (from Butchers Co. – catalogues in BFI Library), a Premier light (Robert Rigby) and a Gaumont. He is looking for a Borland scissor arc light. **Richard Rigby** then read out the caption "Gasworks, Westminster" before projecting the slide ... of the Houses of Parliament! **Nick Hiley** showed a lovely collection of local advertising slides, mainly from nearby Faversham. He then showed two magic lantern slide approaches to persuading patrons of a continuous cinema programme to vacate their seat when they had seen the full show. The first was a polite request and the second a story of a small boy using a hat pin – eventually returned to the hat of the lady who took the seat of the over-staying 'victim'. **Juliette Harcourt** showed two WWI slides including Belgian refugees on a boat on the Seine. **Allan**



One of David Francis' US examples from WWI 'newsreel' slides



One way of persuading patrons to move (note boy with hat pin)

Marriott projected a beautiful hand-painted set of WWI scenes at the front by C.H. Cobbold. Alan Brindle challenged a recent anniversary by proving that a magic lanternist had visited the moon long before Armstrong and Aldrin 50 years ago. Close-up views and a dangerous-looking volcano were conclusive. Mike Smith brought along a painting of an English fairground with peepshow and monkey.

Next Jeremy Brooker and Lester Smith celebrated Queen Victoria's (and Prince Albert's) 200th birthday in style (Jeremy gave a show at a recent conference at Kensington Palace, see page 8). The Queen, it seems, was media savvy and understood the power of images. She was very particular about the images made available but knew the propaganda value of family tableaux and projecting portraits more than life size – probably used at the end of a presentation with the National Anthem. Slides from early in her reign are rare, most of Victoria as a young woman date from the 1880s and 1890s with many 'life of ...' sets produced after her death in 1901. We saw slides from Victoria aged 6, through coronation, marriage, family, the Oxford assassination attempt, Great Exhibition, two Jubilees, to taking her body from Osborne House. A sequence of processions included a hand-painted long slide of a birthday parade with cake and Victoria in a carriage. The presentation finished with a 'Jeremy special' slide of Queen Victoria with magic lantern. This image could also be seen on the cake that we all happily consumed along with



Nick Hiley and Jeremy Brooker discuss the finer points of slide carriers

strawberries! A big 'thank you' to Carolyn and Liberty Brooker for a wonderful tea.

Stephen Herbert then introduced us to an extremely rare Dutch optical cabinet with 'feu d'artifice' or 'Chinese firework' effects, dating back over 200 years. Some museums have toy-sized optical boxes with revolving spiral-effect cylinders and perforated views but full-sized ones are 'super rare'. Werner Nekes once showed Stephen some original large perforated views but had no cabinet. One featured in the film that Stephen made and showed us at the meeting had been owned by a friend and, before selling it on, he made an exact replica. He also retained some of the views as there were 'extras' in addition to a full box. An illuminated coloured spiral-effect disc of translucent paper is revolved, using a clockwork mechanism, behind a perforated picture to give the effect. The two candles in the original cabinet were replaced by the reflected light of two LED lamps to give a diffuse lighting effect. The cabinet pre-dates the chromatrope (devised around 1840) but has similarities. A windmill scene,

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faithfully reproduced by Stephen, had the sails directly attached to the revolving mechanism. With some live musicians and a showman you could imagine this being developed as parlour entertainment.

Finally Nick Hiley took us back to World War I with some recruiting slides. From August 1914 to March 1916 – half the War – British recruitment was voluntary and the government ran an enormous poster campaign with 140 different designs and 5.7m standard posters. The images – mainly a happy soldier going off to war – were also used in lantern slides in cinemas. Commercial advertising slumped so advertising companies sent designs to the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, even using images that previously advertised other products, e.g. tobacco. This mix roused some criticism. However, the famous Kitchener poster was not official and had nothing to do with the government campaign. Nick then showed slides from a box of 45 that appear to have accompanied a recruiting concert in late 1915/early 1916, just before conscription. The songs tended to be about young men in love, implying that being in uniform would lead to more success in that regard. Songs included 'Blue Eyes', 'I'll Make a Man of You', 'Keep the Home Fires Burning', 'There's a Long, Long Trail' and 'Hello, Hello, Who's Your Lady Friend?' Juliette Harcourt and Nick led the singing with the audience joining in. At one point in the original concert "Mr Huckle-berry will sing and talk a little nonsense" – he was a professional comedian from London. The highlight was the song 'A Lovely Crop of Girls This Year' – rather questionable lyrics and an even more questionable image of a fruit arrangement with banana! The concert closed with 'Onward Christian Soldiers'. The start of conscription in March 1916 marked the end of the recruitment campaign and advertising focused mainly on selling War Bonds.

With that our meeting closed and all the happy pilgrims departed.

Two of Nick Hiley's slides

