

AUTUMN MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY SWEDENBORG SOCIETY, LONDON

Saturday 23 October 2021

Nearly 'normal' numbers of MLS members got together for a highly entertaining programme at the Autumn Meeting, although members from across the Channel who usually join us for our London events were sorely missed. Jeremy Brooker introduced his final meeting as Chair and thanked Martin Gilbert and Lester Smith for putting together the programme as well as George Auckland and Frog Morris for organising the livestream so other members could join us.

Following an update on the Convention (see p. 2) Jeremy handed over to Gordon Casbeard who presented one of his lockdown 'bargains' – a hand-painted set of 12 mahogany-framed slides by Wrench of Wilhelm Busch's *Diogenes and His Tub* that he purchased online for £14, plus postage. This is probably the only Busch story based on a real person – the Greek philosopher and cynic Diogenes who lived in a wine jar or cask. Needless to say Gordon had rewritten the story with his customary imagination and wit.

Jeremy then introduced a unique slide 'The Rinker' by engineer John Beale, the inventor of the choreutoscope – which happens to be the subject of next year's Convention book. Beale produced this slide the year after the first indoor skating rink opened in 1876. Against the background of such a rink, the main figure has a painted face and shirt front but the rest in silhouette is, in fact, an intricate design of jointed brass pieces that can produce many, and not always predictable, forms of movement. Robin Palmer gave us a wonderful demonstration of his slide with increasingly daring 'moves'. As with the choreutoscope, the randomised movement produces a longer 'show' than slides and devices with cycles of images and effects.



The audience awaits ...



... as Robin Palmer and Jeremy Brooker operate the triunial



Diogenes in his tub



How to follow that? With an ingenious young animator who creates live action paper puppets using engineering techniques that Beale would appreciate. Zoom Rockman showed us some examples of his unique style of animating people such as politicians, including UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson (also known to skate on thin ice), singers well known and not so well known, *Pete and Dud* (Peter Cook and Dudley Moore), Greta Thunberg (to be shown at the COP26 climate conference) and his special treatment of online trolls. He gave us some fascinating insights into the complex world of this type of animation including one method he devised after he saw the 'Exeter Theatre Fire' show (*TML 28*) at our Summer Meeting. Watch out for Zoom's name in future.

Chloe Aridjis, Writer in Residence at the Swedenborg, next described her magic lantern 'journey' to her project with the Swedenborg's own collection of slides. Early influences were passages from Proust and Ingmar Bergman's iconic film *Fanny and Alexander* with its lantern show scene. Robertson and his phantasmagoria appeared in her postgraduate dissertation. So when offered the opportunity to look through the collection she accepted and, after sorting through hundreds of slides, one result was 'Stilled Shadows', the show she was performing that evening with Carolyn and Jeremy Brooker as part of the Bloomsbury Festival.



'The Rinker' – presented by Jeremy and Robin

After lunch, Lester Smith started with a quick trip around the world. After a steam paddle ship across the Channel we arrived in St Petersburg for a ride with coach and horses past some of the landmark buildings. Thence to China for a parade of mandarins and artisans, and on to Hong Kong for a 'sail past' of junks. Over the Pacific to America with a focus on the Native Americans and back home, we had a potpourri of some of Lester's favourites including a thirsty cat with its bowl moving away and neck stretching to reach it, a bird firing a cannon, rats invading a dinner party, ships going past an erupting volcano, a 'posh' skipping slide, a little girl with shuttlecock, some dog-themed slides such as the pipe smoker, a beautiful fountain and young Queen Victoria.

Next Richard Rigby presented London Underground-related slides, some of which were marked 'Publicity Officer, 55 Broadway' – the headquarters of London Transport from 1929 until 2015. To solve severe



Greta Thunberg and the sea turtle by Zoom Rockman



Two slipper slides from Lester Smith's 'potpourri'



One of Richard Rigby's early London Underground trains

son of D.W., and a demonstration of the legendary four-lens Noakesoscope, not seen since the 1970s. Frog Morris told us about his and Nicole Mollett's upcoming shows (see p. 9). Robin Palmer showed a fantastic moving slide of Cinderella going across a bridge to the ball in her crystal coach – even the wheels turned. Richard Rigby showed us a steam train emerging from a tunnel close up, then crossing a viaduct in the distance.



Cinderella goes to the ball



Two slides from Robin Palmer's tour of Italy: Castel Sant'Angelo (left) and Colosseum (right)

The meeting closed with a 'Transport of Delight' from Irene and Allan Marriott accompanied by pianist and singer Suzanne Higgins. They started with the clipper ship race across the world. An 1874 poem based on the 'Elegant' – a Liverpool pub – outlined the poor conditions for sailors aboard the ships. The next song was based on the story of the lifeboat survivors of the wrecked whaler 'The Two Brothers'. Turning to the air, we saw hot air balloons and sang along to 'Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines'. Next they told the story of the railways from Stephenson's Rocket to Dr Beeching's cuts. Trams – and the great Walthamstow tram chase of 1909 – motor cars and the London bus followed. The Marriotts projected an amazing array of slides illustrating all these many different modes of transport.



Slide from the Marriotts' show

Some members came back later to watch 'Stilled Shadows', a wonderful presentation by Chloe, Jeremy and Carolyn combining the Swedenborg collection with the Brookers' dynamic show.

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