

THE MAGIC LANTERN WITHIN

My only purchase at the Birmingham meeting (see p. 14) was the 'Goodnight' slide shown here. This was a good buy at £5 but I suspect the vendor may not have spotted the triple lantern on the man's knee. I knew the image immediately as I have it already – and eventually I found my original version at home. That turned out to be the matching 'Welcome' slide (also shown below). I was delighted to have the pair! Both slides were produced by W.C. Hughes.

My first thought – did it show Professor Malden with the 'Miniature Malden Triple' that was produced by W.C. Hughes in 1892? They claim it measured only 22 inches tall, 8 inches long and 7 inches wide. Well, it's a possibility, although the triple looks nothing like the 'Miniature Malden Triple' in the catalogue. My other thought – was it actually W.C. Hughes himself holding a lens and depicted as an optician?

I contacted Richard Crangle about this and here are his thoughts:

"I can certainly believe that the figure on the right is supposed to be Hughes – it's maybe not the greatest likeness, but he's got the same straight nose, the hairline looks similar, and the lantern



W.C. Hughes slide already in Martin's collection



Detail of 'Hughes' figure



Photograph of W.C. Hughes



W.C. Hughes slide purchased in Birmingham

and lens mean that he's definitely supposed to be read as an optician.

"The figure on the left looks female to me. I'm no expert on classical mythology but my guess would be that she's supposed to be one of the Muses (see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muses) – perhaps Calliope, the boss of epic poetry, since she seems to have a writing tablet and stylus. However, I am not sure what the palm frond in her left hand is supposed to represent.

"Overall I would read this as a modest piece of self-promotion by Hughes – i.e. he's 'the Muse of optics', on a par with the gods(!). The small size of the lantern would fit with that, standing for a symbol of his powers (in the same way as Calliope's writing tablet shows one of the 'tools of her trade') rather than being meant as a realistic representation of an actual lantern."

Martin Gilbert