



Deac Russell on Stephen Herbert

AUTUMN MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY BIRMINGHAM AND MIDLAND INSTITUTE, BIRMINGHAM, UK

Saturday 14 October 2023

Christmas came early in Birmingham, where this was the theme for the MLS Autumn Meeting, complete with decorations and mince pies. After a short introduction from Chair **Richard Feltham**, **Deac Russell** remembered Stephen Herbert (see p. 8). Deac met Stephen when he arrived to run the National Film Theatre and Stephen was the Technical Director of MOMI – and he soon realised Stephen knew everything about projection. Deac brought some of Stephen's MLS, Projection Box and Routledge publications. He described Stephen's fascination with 'the origins of things', his wide interests and his many skills, including his capacity for friendship.

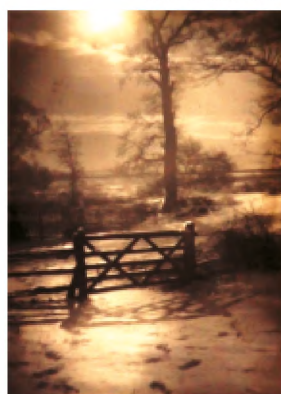
Richard Crangle talked about the next MLS publication that

is provisionally called *The Pedlar's Lantern* – he hoped it might be out in the first few months of 2024. This is a translation of Roger Gonin's book *Ces Savoyards, montreurs de lanterne magique* inspired by his chance discovery of an 18th-century pedlar's 'kit' complete with lantern, slides and box that the itinerant lanternists carried on their backs.

A seasonal offering from Holland and Flanders, presented by **Dominique Santens**, **Gwen Sebus**, **Philippe Khazzaka**, **Michael van de Leur** and the British



From *The Little Match Girl* (left) and *Annie and Willie's Prayer* (right)



The Frost Fair of 1851 (left) and *a photo of winter around Eastbourne*

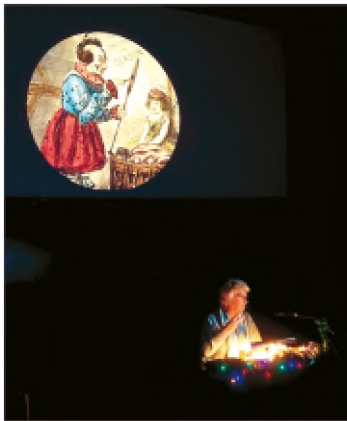
Thames of 1851 with a song composed by Charlotte Oliver. The poem *At Nine of the Night* by Charles Causley alongside photographic slides from the Eastbourne area in winter was followed by slides of children playing on the ice and snow and Santa Claus visiting on Christmas Eve. The 'Carol of the Field Mice' from Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* with slides of E.H. Shepard's drawings, some comic slides about the turkey and the song 'Please let me sleep on your doorstep tonight' (with audience participation) led to a glimpse of the Harlequinade characters and the carol 'While Shepherds Watched' (with added silver bells). The show

pianist **Phill Henderson** started off with two heart-rending stories – US sets of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Match Girl* followed by *Annie and Willie's Prayer* – a poem by Sophia P. Snow. They concluded with a life model set of *The Star of Bethlehem* (words by Fred Weatherly and music by Stephen Adams) with plenty of angels. All had musical accompaniment and were either recited or sung by Dominique and Philippe.

Rene and Allan Marriott (with **Suzanne Higgins** on the piano and vocals, helped by her partner **Sandy Robertson**) then offered a 'Christmas pudding mixture' beginning with slides of the frost fair on the River



Dominique Santens and other MLS members awaiting the next show...



Rene Marriott with Harlequinade's Clown and Columbine (note the lectern decorations)

concluded with 'Rindecella' and her 'slopped dripper' (i.e. Cinderella and her...) expertly read by Rene, and a selection of seasonal slipper slides.

The afternoon started with a 'local' show of Sutton Coldfield through the ages – from Iron Age settlement to shopping destination. Introduced by new MLS member **Zoe Toft** (later appearing as Vesta Tilley), **Michael Spencer** as a vicar of bygone days introduced a rich procession of well-known characters from the area including a medieval Countess of Warwick and Mr Pat Collins, the owner of the Sutton (Crystal) Palace. They were



Zoe Toft and Michael Spencer – in character

accompanied by **Andy Spencer** at the lantern and **Phill Henderson** on piano as well as actors **Patrick Hayes** and **Debra Meftah** playing various characters appearing on video alongside appropriate magic lantern slides.



The Harrods fire of 1883

Martin Elsbury – film editor and son of long-time MLS members **David** and **Eunice Elsbury** – then showed the complete version of his presentation *A Shimmer in the Dark*, using his parents' collection to tell the story of the magic lantern (see also p. 14). Aimed at those not 'in the know', this demonstrated a very wide range of lantern slides – stories, movement, dissolving views, hymns, adverts, etc. – with both on-screen commentary and remarks from Martin. The audience participated enthusiastically with sound effects for a set about the Harrods fire of 6 December 1883. Next **Lester Smith** showed his beautiful slides *Christmas and Christmas Customs*, made, he believes, by Edmund Wilkie of the Royal Polytechnic Institution especially for the Headmaster of West Downs, a boys prep school in Winchester that ran from 1897 to 1988.



Mr Pat Collins and his entertainments at the Sutton Palace

An early headmaster, Mr Kenneth Bassett Tindall, provided a handwritten commentary read by **Mary Ann Auckland** (see p. 12 and also TML 9).

We ended with a wonderful presentation of Christmas magic with **Martin Gilbert**, **Emily Douglas-Gilbert** and **Frog Morris** – the latter performed all the different voices of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* to Martin's superb slides, with audience sound effects. Apart from this classic we saw other seasonal gems including *A Child's Vision of Christmas* and ended with Philippe and Dominique with Phill on the piano leading 'Auld Lang Syne'. What a way to end!



'The Carol Singers' from Lester Smith's Christmas Customs set

From the final presentation: Scrooge shown the Cratchit family Christmas by the spirit of Christmas Present (above) and (below) a seasonal greeting for all our readers!

Our thanks to Philippe Khazzaka for some of the photographs in this report.

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