

SUMMER MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

WEST BLATCHINGTON WINDMILL, BRIGHTON AND HOVE, UK

Saturday 27 July 2024

A first for the MLS – a meeting in an historic windmill. Around 60 members gathered at the beautifully-restored West Blatchington Windmill near Hove on the south coast for our Summer Meeting. After a welcome from Chair **Richard Feltham, Rene and Allan Marriott**, who had suggested the venue, gave us a brief history. The village comprised a single working farm, manor house and church, owned by the Neville family (the Earls of Warwick) until the 20th century when it was sold to the council for housing with the proviso that the windmill must be kept. The windmill, originally a dovecote, was built in 1822 but ceased working in 1897 due to storm damage. It served as a navigation aid from the English Channel and was involved in a little smuggling. In 1979 the Friends formed and restored the windmill. Allan spent some of his childhood in the council-owned manor house until it was demolished, and the Marriotts married in the church nearby.

Gwen Sebus and Michael van de Leur began with slides of a few British windmills and a stunning day/night dissolving view with circulating insects, then took us to 'windmill land' – the Netherlands. The first Dutch mill shown, dating from 1621, was near the house built in 1641 by the father of Christiaan Huygens, inventor of the magic lantern. The young Huygens made models of windmills – another connection! Gwen and Michael showed numerous interesting examples of windmills of all types and sizes, from the earliest post mill to the highest stage mill (23m). Many were used for drainage and water management but there were also saw mills for timber, and industrial mills for grain ('grist'), oil and mustard. We learnt their sails always turn anticlockwise and about the language of stationary sails.

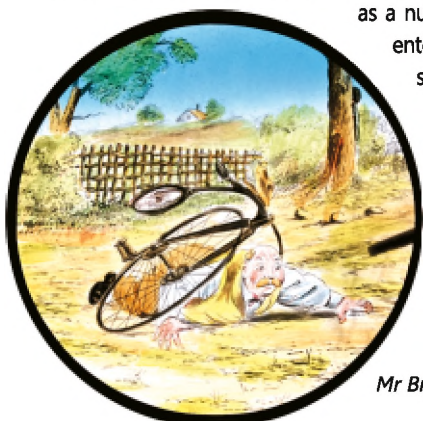


Henderson's slides of Brighton beach with entertainers including muscle men (right)

Next **Alexia Lazou and Dan Robertson** (Curator of Local History and Archaeology) from Brighton and Hove Museum showed Alexander Lamont Henderson's photographic slides of Brighton. Henderson (1838-1907) was born in Edinburgh and, with his chemist brother, became a well-known photographer with studios in London and Amersham. He was a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, developed new processes and wrote many articles. He visited Brighton in 1890, and he made the magic lantern slides for his private collection of around 5,000 slides. Of superb quality, they showed bathing machines, boats, children buying 'penny licks', local landmarks such as the West Pier, the racecourse (from a balloon) and 18th-century Stanmer House as well



Dissolving view with insects and windmill near the Huygens home



Mr Brown and his velocipede

as a number of well-known seafront entertainers. These included sword swallows, muscle men, 'Professors' 'flying the foam' (e.g. by bicycle), divers, tenor 'Blind Harry' Vowles and ex-circus performer James Doughty and his canine stars.

Following a windmill-related 'Bring and Show',

Goulder singing 'The man who put the engine in the chip shop'. The *Cabby's Difficulty* highlighted the problem and expense of transporting a portly gent. The alternative demise of Sherlock Holmes revealed that, while arguing over opening or closing the window on a train, he and Dr Watson fell out of the door. A life model set *Harry's First Skates* ended in the inevitable tumble, and the adventures of Mr Brown with his new penny-farthing velocipede had an even more painful outcome. The show ended with a seaside donkey behaving in 'typical' fashion.

Gordon Casbeard then showed a rich variety of slides used for advertising in cinemas. He started with film star William Powell (1892-1984) starring with Carole Lombard in the 1931 film *Man of the World*. They married when the film was released and divorced when it finished its run in 1933. Among the acts advertised were Leon Cortez a.k.a. 'Alf



Cinema advertising slide (top left); Winchester High Street (top right) and our Hovarian snazzy cloggie Ine (left)



'Awkins' the Cockney comedian, Maurice Colleano 'the Acrobatic Funster' and Don Ross's Circus. Don Ross founded the British Music Hall Society that is still going today. Among the musical acts were Ronnie Munro and his orchestra, singing star Ann Rich and Australian Albert Whelan, famous for his whistling. Members recognised 'Big Hearted' Arthur Askey and Gladys Cooper who was appearing in *Excelsior* at her own theatre The Playhouse. Ventriloquist Raymond Smith, fictional 'Jane' of the *Daily Mirror* and 'The Mummy's Dream' performed by the Sado-Cairo Trio of trick cyclists also featured.

Next, Hovarian Ine van Dooren revealed some personal secrets while recounting her journey to the seaside with suitable magic lantern illustrations.

Born in the Netherlands – land of tulips, Friesian cows and cyclists (and windmills) – where some of the country is famously below sea level (so a mermaid?), Ine in fact comes from the south-east of the country ... where there are hills. She first encountered the sea aged ten and she was "cold, hungry and miserable". However she was later 'sea spoiled' when she worked for the Netherlands Film Museum in North Holland, and then in 1995 was lured to Brighton and the Screen Archive South East, took off her clogs and enjoyed the seaside.

Frank Gray then discussed the Hove screen pioneers George Albert Smith, Laura Bayley and James Williamson. George Albert Smith (1864-1959) was a stage hypnotist, magic lanternist and film producer who managed a pleasure garden in Hove with his wife, Laura Bayley (1862-1938), who came from a theatrical family and co-produced his films. Frank highlighted three magic lantern shows performed by Smith at the Brighton Aquarium in 1897. The shows went to the heavens with astronomical slides, under the ocean with Jules Verne (played by Smith) and around the world with a trip to the colonies, then back to 'animated photographs' of Brighton. An 1897 Smith film *The Miller and the Sweep* made at nearby Race Hill Mill bears a striking resemblance to lantern sets

of a similar title, and demonstrated that Smith edited sequences. James Williamson (1855-1933), a chemist and X-ray pioneer, focussed on everyday life and comedies. His film of a fire from 1901 has a similar storyline to the slide set *The Fireman's Wedding*. We saw wonderful examples of their films.

After tea with strawberries and cream, Bob Holt took us on an expedition to Tibet. He had been given a box of 120 slides by 102-year-old Freda McBride, and had joined the MLS without knowing anything about magic lanterns. The box contained cuttings about Lt Col. Sir Francis Younghusband who led a 1904 expedition to Lhasa, Tibet. At the time Russia, China and the British Empire were all vying for control of Tibet. The slides showed some characters who appear in known Younghusband slides, but a woman appears frequently and there were none on the expedition. One slide is captioned 'the Amphitheatre Club' and that did not exist in 1904. After more research Bob believes the slides are of Lt Col. G.K. Gregson and his wife Margaret – the search is on for more information.

Next Stan Roberts took us on a whistlestop tour of the ancient metropolis and capital of Winchester with a mix of slides. Entering via the East Gate and River Itchen we went up the High Street to the West Gate, back to the Cathedral and Close, past Winchester College (founded 1382) and out via the 12th-century hospital ('hospitable') of St Cross where wayfarers can still ask for a drink and bread. Highlights included the statue of King Alfred who made the city his capital, the clock on the High Street that came from a previous Guildhall and the 15th-century market cross with William the Conqueror's Chapel nearby, a traditional stopping point for newly-appointed Bishops. We looked around the Cathedral, resting place of mediaeval kings and Jane Austen, and a memorial for William Walker, the diver who saved the cathedral from sinking by installing a total of over one million concrete blocks, bricks and bags of cement over five years (1906-11).



Lady and dog in 'Younghusband' slides

Finally Trevor Beattie took us on a fictional 1897 journey from Cairo to Brighton with 'Ignatius', some amazing slides and plenty of laugh-or-groan jokes. Why Cairo? Could it be that Trevor had some fine Carpenter & Westley slides of Egypt? Following an angelic visitation our hero went by sea to Southampton via Gibraltar and by horse to Brighton. Here he observed different bathing machines and Martha Gunn the Brighton 'dipper', a performing bear in Victoria Gardens and a Punch and Judy show, eventually ending up, via a pub with the bear, at St Ann's Well Gardens in Hove, run by cinema pioneers Smith and Bayley – the aim of his quest. Then Ignatius drifted into a gentle psychedelic haze of superb chromatropes.

All day Charlotte Oliver played appropriate songs, with audience participation. Thanks to Rene and Allan, Trevor, Frank, Alexia, Ine and the other 'locals' who made it a very special meeting.



'Ignatius' and his angelic visitation in Cairo

THE MAGIC LANTERN is edited, designed and produced by Mary Ann Auckland and Gwen Sebus, assisted by Richard Crangle and George Auckland.

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