

BEST LAID PLANS, AND OTHER STORIES

Richard Crangle

CONTENTS

Editorial	
Richard Crangle	18
The Brenograph in Action	
Mark Butterworth	19
The Ghost Illusion on the Birmingham Stage, 1863–1900: Part 2	
Allan Sutcliffe	23
Trade Marks and the Lantern	
Michael Pritchard	26
More on Harry Bow	
Ian Mackley	30
Review: <i>Licht und Wahrheit</i>	
Deac Rossell	33
Bits and pieces	34
That's the way to do it!	
Review of <i>Phantasmagoria</i>	
Richard Crangle	36

Cover picture:

'How the Optical Lantern is used on Cleethorpes Sands', illustrated in the *Optical Lantern and Kinematograph Journal* of November 1906 (Vol. 3, No. 1, p.19). An accompanying quotation from the *Primitive Methodist Leader* describes the show – see our 'Bits and Pieces' item in this issue.

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Thanks for assistance with this issue go to all its contributors, everyone involved with its design, editing and production, and to Lester Smith for help with contributions.

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Origination and printing for the Society by Dave Morgan, London

Published by the Magic Lantern Society,
South Park, Galphay Road, Kirkby Malzeard,
Ripon, North Yorkshire HG4 3RX, UK.

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THE OBVIOUS PLACE TO START this editorial is with a profuse apology for the very long time it has taken this issue to reach something that passes for completion. Originally intended for the spring, it finally appears with the dateline of Autumn 2006, and late autumn at that. The delay perhaps highlights two basic truths: firstly, like all aspects of the running of our Society, our *Journal* depends on the availability of spare time to produce it; and secondly, it is most unwise, under any circumstances, to wish for 'a more interesting working life'. In this case these two facts are connected: 2006 has been, to put it mildly, a busy and demanding year in your Editor's 'real life', and time for soliciting, writing and editing contributions has been one of the casualties. My sincere apologies to all our readers and contributors.

At the same time, the Society Committee has decided that there may be some virtue in necessity, and in future the *Journal* will appear once per year rather than the biannual schedule attempted (and achieved, though with some difficulty) for Volume 9. This has the advantage of allowing a slightly less pressurised and potentially rushed production schedule, together with an expansion of the content of each issue (this one runs to 20 pages rather than the previous 16, and that will be the target in future), allowing at least one more main article per issue. There should also be a benefit for the Society as a whole, in that the time and finance released will allow resources for more 'occasional publications' like supplements to our previous books, pamphlets, reprints, DVDs and so on.

The articles in this issue show the usual variety of approaches and interests, but all reflect the common factor of the dedication of individuals to researching the history of the things they find in front of them. Mark Butterworth's excellent account of first-hand experience in the practical use of a rather special lantern is as important for scholarship as for general interest: our understanding of the history of media and equipment depends on accounts 'from life' of how they actually worked in the real world, and these don't come along very often. There's also a good example of how a reference made in passing can give rise to another, more substantial, piece of work: Ian Mackley's follow-up of the contemporary lantern account mentioned in relation to the cover illustration of our last issue is a good example of how there is often more to say or more to learn by digging a little deeper. The many hours of archival work that lie behind articles such as Michael Pritchard's very welcome survey of lantern trade marks, or the second part of Allan Sutcliffe's survey of ghost effects on the stages of Birmingham, illustrate real commitment to the project undertaken. Sometimes a researcher can wonder if it's all worth it, to produce just a few pages of article as the result of many months of digging, but the quality of these pieces demonstrates how fruitful that process can be.

The two books reviewed in this issue are also the results of painstaking research projects, both being based on their authors' PhD theses on two very different areas. As I suggested in my editorial in the last issue, in which among other things I was wondering where the future of 'lantern studies' might be found in the academic world, the interesting work on the history of the lantern is tending to be done in academic areas other than the film studies which we once assumed were its natural home. There is, of course, no real need to pigeonhole work under traditional subject headings if it doesn't help the work itself, but the interaction between more traditional areas of study like 'history of photography' or 'performance arts' and our own interests can only be to the benefit of both, as the Ruchatz and Heard examples demonstrate.

Perhaps the richest potential for 'taking the lantern seriously' in the academic world at the moment is the impressive work being done at the University of Trier, in Germany, which I hope to feature in a future issue. This project – using the images of poverty in British lantern slides, particularly Life Model images, as a sidelight on a much larger academic project about the history of the poor and other 'outsiders' in European society – shows the kind of imagination and originality that fires all true researchers. If we can follow examples like this, by drawing on the high quality of work that is driven by the personal enthusiasm of individual researchers and bringing it into contact with the networks and other resources that exist in universities, libraries, museums and other institutions of learning, then the future of our subject will be all the brighter.

Contributions to *NMLJ* are always needed: please send them to the editorial address given on this page. The next issue is expected to appear in autumn 2007, but articles, illustrations, comments and all other contributions will be very welcome at any time.