

SOURCE INTO SLIDE: We open a further department of the *Journal* which we propose to devote to studies of the origins of lantern slide images – to which, as with all our existing departments, we would welcome future contributions.

THE PRIMUS ALICE IN WONDERLAND SLIDES

One of the most satisfactory pieces that the *Journal* has published was John Jones's modestly titled *Trying to date some long slides* (vol. 4, p. 75) which, equally modestly, he described as presenting 'some bits of information stumbled on in the course of meandering research' into a series of twelve slides in his collection. This research, occupying a period of some twenty years, had, among other things, uncovered many of the visual sources from which the slide images had been derived. While, in line with his ostensible purpose, it then became the *dates* of these images which were of importance, as, through them, he hoped to throw light on the dates of the slides themselves, he admitted to getting what he described as a 'disproportionate satisfaction from tracking down these original prints which the slidemaker was looking at two or three hundred years ago.' We, though doing none of the tracking down ourselves, were also readily able to share in this satisfaction through the fascinating series of source/slide comparisons the article presented and see that, in general, we have here a technique which could well be applied elsewhere – to a wide variety of slides – not necessarily those of great age or of obscure origin.

With these thoughts in mind, we present some observations on the Primus slides of *Alice in Wonderland* – a set chosen for its accessibility and the accessibility of its well-known source – deliberately moving to an area remote from that studied by John Jones, but, when possible, sharing his intention of, as it were, looking over the slide maker's shoulder as the process of converting source into slide is dealt with.

The *Camera House Price List* of 1911 (1), issued by W. Butcher & Sons, devotes a page to their *Alice in Wonderland* slides which provides us with the basic information concerning them. Being a part of the *Junior Lecturers' Series*, the story has been tailored to conform with the *Series* requirement that sets were issued in boxes of eight slides each, with longer stories in a series of *Chapters*, each also of this size. Sometimes this lead to the necessity of building up a set to make it contain the necessary multiple of eight slides. This happened with their version of *Tiger and the Tub* which, in the original, was a story told in seven pictures – and was brought up to quota with a decidedly limp final slide captioned 'After 12 months' absence they return and find every tiger with a tub on its tail', showing, nonsensically, *five* tigers with tubs on their tails! In the case of *Alice*, however, the problem was one of cutting down the original 42 drawings by John Tenniel to fit the pattern of 24 slides – following the decision to tell the story in three chapters.

Looking at what was left out we see the dropping of the four *Father William* pictures (to be expected, as this sub-story is easily detached), of many of the studies of individual characters (for example, the three separate studies of the Mad Hatter) and, with regret, of many of the most memorable images from the book's opening two chapters (the White Rabbit looking at his watch, Alice with her long neck, Alice and the bottle labelled 'Drink Me', among them). Also dropped is the famous picture of the Cheshire Cat disappearing, leaving only his grin behind. Given the constraints of the *Junior Lecturers' Series* this was inevitable – whereas elsewhere, in a series permitting dissolving views, it would have provided the natural centre-piece of the set.

Although rejected as the basis for individual slides, some of this material is incorporated into other slides which were wholly the work of the slide-makers. We can see an example of this in the title slide, as illustrated in the catalogue extract.

(Perhaps we should say *approximately* illustrated, for, in the published slide the figure of Alice is somewhat enlarged and the word *Wonderland* is angled above her head, as if to make room for her). This illustration, which has no Tenniel counterpart,



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LIST OF SLIDES.

No. 776.—Chapter I.

Down the Rabbit Hole.

1. Down the Rabbit Hole.
2. Curiouser and curiouser, cried Alice.
3. There was a mouse spalshing about.
4. She grew and grew.
5. That you won't, thought Alice.
6. There goes Bill.
7. An enormous Puppy was looking.
8. There was a large Mushroom growing near her.

No. 777.—Chapter II.

The Mad Tea Party.

9. Alice approached the Little House.
10. The door led into a large Kitchen.
11. Alice caught the Baby.
12. Alice saw the Cheshire Cat.
13. There was a Table under a Tree.
14. She saw them trying to put the Dormouse.
15. A large Rose Tree stood over the entrance.
16. Alice face to face with the Queen of Hearts.

No. 778.—Chapter III.

Who Stole the Tarts.

17. Off with their Heads.
18. Only the Cat's head appeared.
19. Very soon they came upon the Gryphon.
20. What sort of a dance is it?
21. The Trial's beginning.
22. Alice was growing larger again.
23. What do you know about this business?
24. And then the whole pack rose up into the air.

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2.

can be seen to make use of the rejected individual image of the White Rabbit (2) – though, unaccountably, converting his original umbrella into a walking stick and missing out the famous watch, which, though it could have certainly been shown, was, perhaps, omitted in order not to distract from the main purpose of the slide – to act as a title to the series. Another example, also concerning the Rabbit, is the incorporation of the rejected individual image of him with a trumpet into the trial scene (slide 21). Finally, in slide 3 (3), we have an image which combines elements from four separate rejected drawings. Paradoxically, this image produced by the slide maker, which might well be considered to be one of the least 'authentic' in the set, turns out to be closer to Carroll's original *Adventures Under Ground* – the precursor to the published *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* – than was that by Tenniel (5).

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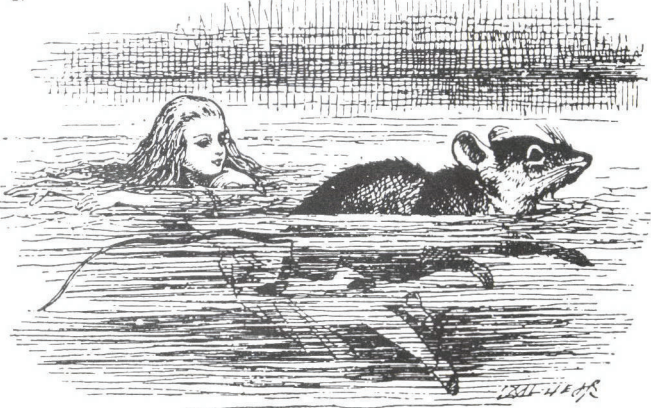
Turning to the slides themselves, perhaps our first comments must be on the addition of colours to the black and white originals. This, in the tradition of the Primus series (and that of lantern slides in general) is extremely gaudy. Alice, for example, wears a bright blue dress, trimmed with red and her white apron is also trimmed in red. She is also given stockings – not visible originally – like those she was shown wearing in her later adventure *Through the Looking Glass*, here coloured red, with the stripes in white. We can be certain that Carroll himself would have hated this colour scheme (and the colours throughout) for, following the success of the original *Alice*, he produced *The Nursery 'Alice'* (intended 'to be read by children from Nought to Five') for which 20 of the original drawings were reproduced in colour, and, on seeing the first edition of this, rejected it entirely, exactly on the grounds that its colours were too gaudy. He directed that none of the edition's ten thousand copies were to be sold in England and called at once for a second edition with colouring more to his liking, which, when it appeared in 1890, he considered 'a great success'. We can get some idea of his preferred colours by looking at the reprinting of this second edition, from whose introduction by Martin Gardiner, the above information is taken (NY: Dover, 1966). Alice's dress is there a pale yellow – exactly matching the colour of her hair – and her apron is trimmed in pale blue (indeed all the book's colours are pale). She is also given blue stockings and, in additions to the original drawings, a large blue bow at the back of her apron and a band with a small blue bow in her hair; almost, but not quite, the famous Alice band, which only appeared in *Through the Looking Glass*. As will be seen, Carroll's preferred colours would have been unsuccessful for lantern slides, and it is no loss to us that the Primus makers – doubtless, anyway, unaware of them – went their own way.

In comparing the slides with the original drawings we see that they differ from them to a considerable degree – in spite of the maker's claim that they were produced from the originals 'in a most perfect manner'. As was to be expected, the primary motivation behind a large number of these changes

6.



5.



was to produce square images from originals in a wide variety of shapes. One of the most extreme of such adjustments was that necessary to produce slide 12 (6) from the inverted 'L' shape of the original (7) – which seems to have been successfully achieved, although in the slide the magical Cheshire Cat has been made to look distinctly ordinary. At first sight it looks as if Alice has been moved to the right to fill the gap in the original composition but this is misleading, for the pair of figures has, in fact, been reversed side-for-side (thus retaining their positions relative to each other), while the tree has been redrawn, and it is *this* that fills the unwanted gap. (While difficult to describe, this is easily seen when the slide is viewed from the wrong side (8). The reason for the reversal is not apparent, though reversals in other slides seem to have been made to produce deliberate effects.)

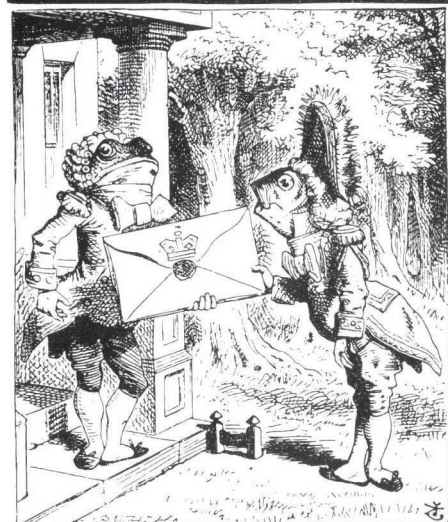
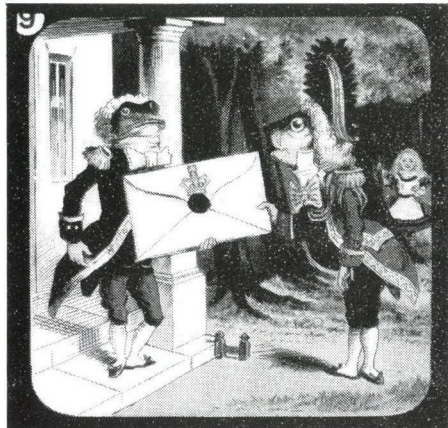
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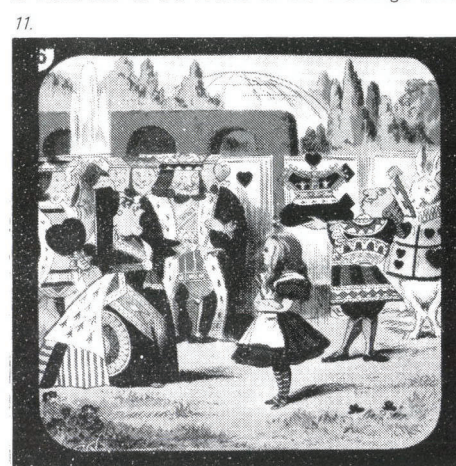
The redrawing of the tree also has the effect of making Alice more prominent (by placing her against a less distracting background) and in this we see the emergence of a secondary motivating factor behind many of the changes to be seen in the slides. For example, Alice is introduced into the background of two slides, on both occasions in exact agreement with Carroll's text. These are slide 9 ('she felt very curious to know what it was all



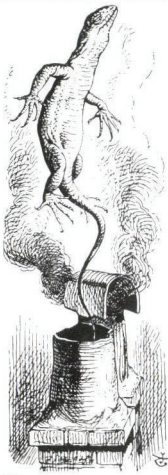
about, and crept a little way out of the wood to listen') (9) and slide 14 ('She got up in great disgust, and walked off. . . the last time she saw them, they were trying to put the Dormouse into the teapot') (10). In the age of films and TV adaptations this has a familiar ring to it: 'Alice is the star – the audiences' point of identification – therefore build things up around her'. But it also makes sense on a deeper level, since, through the extended text of the book we 'see' Alice's presence in every page, and do not, thus, need to see her to such an extent in the book illustrations. In the slide show, on the other hand, with its sharply abbreviated text, Alice becomes less clearly defined for us and, her increased visibility in the images compensates for this.

In parallel with the building-up of Alice, we note a similar building-up of the character of the White Rabbit – whose role in every scene in which he appears is enhanced. For example, in slide 16 (11), which seems at first sight to be a reasonably straightforward copy of the original (but for the cards missing from the foreground) we see the Rabbit as a fully drawn-out character – whereas in the original (12) his presence is only enigmatically revealed by a glimpse of his characteristically checkered jacket and a single foot, which appears from behind the Knave of Hearts. Moreover, in the slide, he is shown dressed in the uniform which, in the book, he only wears in later scenes.

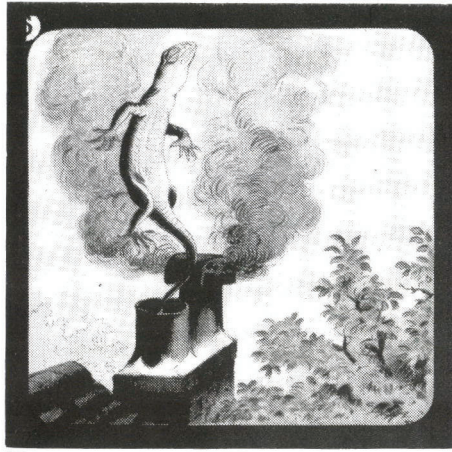
We can see both the above motivations at work in slide 15 (13). Alice is again introduced into a picture in which she was not originally present (14) and is introduced in such a way as to fill space at the right-hand edge – while the figure of the previously central gardener is moved to the left-hand edge to fill space there – thus squaring up an originally vertical drawing. Two other ways in which this result can be achieved are shown. Firstly, in slide 17 (15), in which a whole, fully-developed background is invented – including the cards making hoops, which one might have thought came straight from Tenniel – but, in fact, is nowhere to be found in his drawings (16).



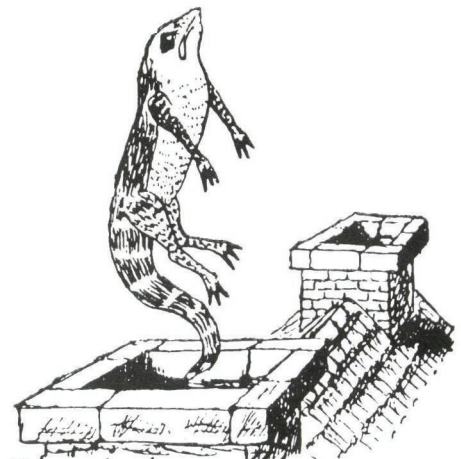
Secondly, in slide 6 (17), which provides a very severe test for a slide maker determined to produce square slides and no doubt *obliged* to produced them by a public which, if presented with an image occupying only one third of a slide (the natural and brilliant solution to the problem created by the original drawing (18)) would promptly demand two thirds of its money back. (Rather as, apparently, the majority of TV viewers – paying highly for their TV licences and sets – feel that they are not getting their money's worth when Cinema-scope films are shown on TV in their correct aspect ratio, with blank space at the top and bottom of the screen!) Neat as the slide makers solution to the problem is – the smoke billowing slightly more to the sides, the introduction of a bit of roof (interestingly, moving the image closer to Carroll's almost square original (19)) and the top of a tree – it produces a result which bears no comparison with the simplicity of the original, as poor Bill is shot into the sky like a rocket!



18.



17.



19.

The squaring up of *horizontal* originals requires different techniques, of which we can see three on offer. The first of these is seen in slide 4 (20), in which Alice is shown sitting up, in a partial attempt by the slide maker to fill what would otherwise be empty space – but there is still, alas, much of this left – which dissipates the claustrophobic feeling of Tenniel's original (21). In this connection it is interesting to see Carroll's original drawing (22) – which is as superior to Tenniel's as that of the slide maker is inferior to it. Here Alice fills the room to such an extent that no detail of it remains – her body



20.



23.



24.



25.



26.

pressing against its walls, which, with great economy, Carroll makes coincide with the frame of his drawing. Secondly, in slide 10 (23), which provides greater scope for adjustment, the squaring is achieved by moving Alice from the edge of the composition to its centre (24) – with appropriate minor adjustments to the other characters. (Again the wonderful cat of the original fares poorly in the transition!). Lastly we look at slide 13 (25). Here the desired horizontal compression of the image is produced by a simple change of viewpoint, which has the effect of closing up the gap between Alice and the others at the table (26). We notice that Alice is shown seated in a smaller chair – and see that the reason for this is to enable us to see over her shoulder – but cannot, similarly, see why the positions of the Hatter and the Hare should be interchanged (unless it is to show the straw around the Hare's ears, symbolising his madness, to better effect against the sky).

27.



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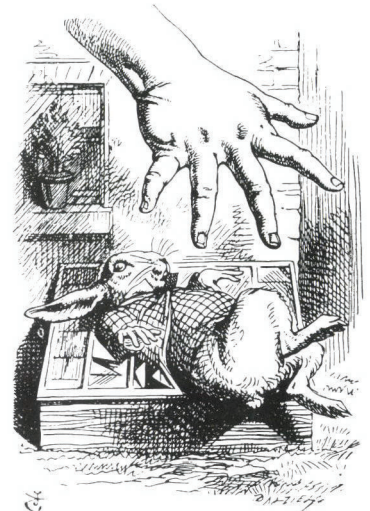
A change of viewpoint is also involved in slide 21 (27), but this time it is to open up the scene so that the jury box can be fully seen (it being only just visible at the right margin of Tenniel's drawing (28)) and to allow the witness box, which Tenniel does not show, to be introduced so that the Hatter and, later Alice (in slide 23) (29), can be seen in it. This, in one way, is an unfortunate change since it results in the loss of Tenniel's most elaborate drawing – which, as the frontispiece to the book, occupies a full page (the only one to do so) – but, in so far as it produces a lively image in three dimensions, from one perhaps too flat and theatrical, it may be said to be an improvement. We see too that this image is reversed side-for-side. The reason for this becomes apparent when we look at slide 23 (29) which follows it and the 'L-shaped original from which it derives (30). In this the King speaks to Alice in the witness box, which, though not shown, is out of the picture on the right. The Queen also is not shown, being replaced by the text which accompanies the King's gesture: 'Why, there they are! said the King triumphantly, pointing to the tarts on the table. Nothing can be clearer than *that*'. By reversing the image, which places Alice immediately on the King's right, he can speak directly to her – while the Queen, not important at that moment, can be unobtrusively lost at the right-hand margin of the slide which she now occupies.

Another side-for-side reversal occurs in slide 5 (31) in an apparent attempt on the part of the slide maker to improve Tenniel's continuity with the preceeding slide, which shows Alice with her arm out of the window pointing down to the *left* (20). This arm, in the reverse-angle view from the garden, Tenniel correctly shows pointing to the *right* (32) and the attempted 'correction' (if that is what it was) is thus uncalled for. Luckily lanternists who share this view have only to remember to project this slide 'backwards' to achieve the restoration of the original! Another difference we note is that in Tenniel's

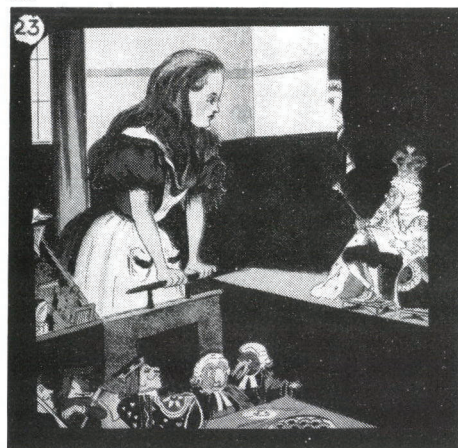
version Alice's arm, perhaps strangely, does not come from the window we see – but from one somewhere above it, out of the frame of the picture, whereas in the slide, the arm is shown clearly coming from the ground floor window. The figure of the gardener in this slide is not present in the Tenniel original and has clearly been introduced to permit a squaring of the image. He is Pat, who is Irish, and is shown in exact agreement with Carroll's description of him as 'digging for apples' – but given a form (as a guinea-pig?) of the slide maker's choice, Carroll, apparently, leaving this unspecified. Finally, we point out that these Alice slides can be found in two states. Those we have described above are firmly drawn, with deep rich colours, while in the other state, the drawing is rather perfunctory and the colours somewhat wishy-washy. In this set the title slide agrees with that shown in the published catalogue – having the word *Wonderland* printed in a straight horizontal line (not curved as in the other set) (33). The White Rabbit has a red (as opposed to blue) waistcoat – although in slide 5 a mistake is made, leaving it uncoloured. This carelessness about the second set suggest that it is the later version of the two perhaps redrawn hurriedly at a time when further stocks were called for and the original plates were no longer available. There are many details which confirm this relative dating. For example in slide 19, in what we might now call the 'old' version, there is a lobster-pot shown at the edge of the picture – which is copied, rather poorly, from one in the Tenniel original. In the 'new' version of the same slide this feature has been misread by the copyist and converted into a variation in shading of the background rock! In slide 22 – both versions of which we reproduce (34) – the 'new' slide omits the window present in the 'old' version, though it is present in the preceeding and following slides! Both details seeming to show a carelessness which could only characterise a later reworking.



31.



32.



30.



34.

