

RICHARD KEARTON'S LANTERN TOURS

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Richard Kearnton, a pioneer of wildlife photography, delivered his first public lecture at Elstree in the autumn of 1897. It was the golden age of magic lanterns, when the lecturer wore a dress suit and an audience applauded any especially attractive picture. Richard's wife, Ellen Rose, spent hours tinting the slides.

Richard, who died in 1928, aged 66 years, used to say that he had lectured in every town and village of any size in England. He also lectured in America, where he was the guest of "Teddy" Roosevelt, and in Paris and Berlin.

He was the son of a gamekeeper living at Thwaite, in the upper valley of the Swale. Richard was introduced to a wider world than the Yorkshire Dales when Sidney Galpin, one of the founders of Cassell, Petter and Galpin - which then was the largest publishing house in the world - was impressed by his knowledge of natural history during a grouse shooting visit to the Swaledale moors. The weather being misty and the sport poor, Richard obligingly brought in some cock birds by imitating the calls of hen birds.

Richard was offered a job in the publicity department of the firm in London and in due course was joined by his brother Cherry. Richard's interest in bird photography began with a simple camera and a thrush's nest. Soon, he was visiting the wild places of Britain and Ireland and, taking advantage of the new half-tone method of printing photographs, which had just been introduced from America, he produced some of the world's earliest natural history books illustrated "direct from nature".

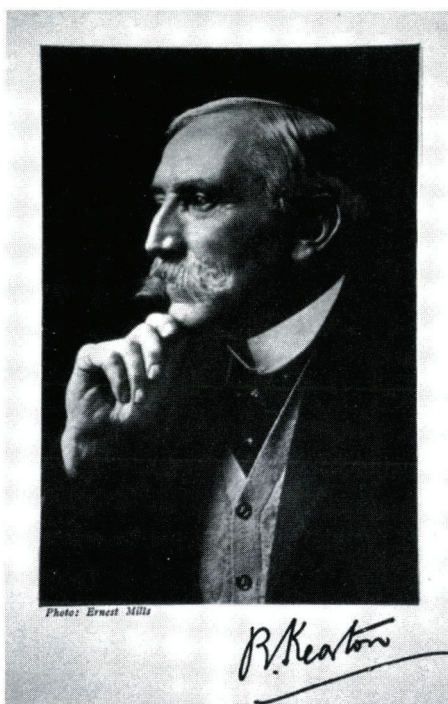
In 15 years, Richard and his brother Cherry travelled over 30,000 miles and exposed over 10,000 photographic plates using a 5x4 field camera with a 9-inch rectilinear lens and a roller-blind shutter. An expedition which stimulated my love of natural history was that concerning St Kilda, the remote Scottish island, which the Keartons visited by way of a steamer sailing from the Clyde.

Richard was an ardent self-publicist (as indeed he had to be if he wished to be noticed). I have a collection of letters he wrote to Frank Lowe, a young Lancashire naturalist who had aspirations to become a lantern lecturer. The standard Kearton letterhead incorporated "Opinions of Mr Kearton's Lectures", including mention of "a graphic and racy lecturer" (*The Scotsman*). Prof. Gregg Wilson, of Belfast, was quoted as saying: "Mr Kearton shows the fairyland of living things."

Grace Kearton, his daughter, informed me (through the good offices of her daughter, the mother being then old and infirm) that she helped him with lecture appointments and with the development of photographs. Grace accompanied him on some of his expeditions. She recalled helping him to take a picture of primroses at Caterham, their Surrey home, by pressing a camera bulb while Uncle Cherry set light to a magnesium ribbon for the flashlight exposure. This was to celebrate the start of the 20th century, the photograph being taken at midnight.

Richard had a lame left foot - he fell out of a tree while bird-nesting in boyhood - and it was supported by a large cork boot. He found scrambling up hills somewhat arduous. "Few people ever knew he was so lame," said Grace, "From a swinging walk he used I could tell his step on the path as he returned about 1am, by the last train from an engagement near London. Although I am over eighty, I can still 'hear' in my mind my father's distinctive tread and the hooting of owls in the distance." Richard's son, who was named Cherry, had to see that the cork boot was efficiently polished before his father set out on his innumerable lecture tours.

Lecturing occupied him through the winter. Grace told me: "My father loved his audiences, particularly in the north, and when invited to broadcast by the BBC he declined. He liked to work a lecture to a point of climax, and he felt he could not put it over in the same way on radio. When he returned in the winter from several weeks touring, I had several boxes of a hundred or more slides to repair and clean." Richard took up cinephotography, though not for long. He



did not think there was a future in it! He did offer lectures in which both slides and film were used.

Consider one of his slide-only productions, which he entitled *Nature at Work and Play*. He was a first-rate "copy-writer", keeping the interest of his reader. Here is his own description of the contents:

"Experiments by which the lecturer has proved that the cuckoo easily imposes upon birds its victimises - why a young snipe is clothed in down and a young sparrow is not - Does a sparrow hawk build its own nest? - Strange behaviour of a frog - Do frogs cry out when they are frightened? - Why rabbits make nests and hares do not - How to distinguish the track of a hare from that of a rabbit - The intelligence and mother-love of a seagull - Sexton beetles at work burying a dead rat - Do young birds go to school? - A bird that puzzled Gilbert White, and how the lecturer photographed a member of the species in a field tenanted by a mad bull."

Richard's son, John (generally known as Jack), became a photographer and lecturer. In 1925, his proud father wrote to Frank Lowe: "Glad to hear you are doing so well on the platform. Jack is doing excellently and bids fair to oust his old father. He has a good voice and uses it well." In 1926, Richard informed Frank that Jack had not made up his mind yet what he would do next season. "He was told on Sunday at Bristol that there are now about 20 lecturers in the field on Natural History subjects..."

In 1909 Richard's brother, Cherry, had gone to tropical Africa to photograph big game. He used both still and movie cameras and was probably the first man to project on to the screen the wildlife of Central Africa. His wanderlust led him to India, Burma, Borneo, Malaya, Canada and the Rockies. Cherry died just after broadcasting in "Children's Hour" on BBC radio in 1940. He was 68 years of age.

W R Mitchell, who edited *The Dalesman* magazine for over twenty years, has been interested in the Keartons for almost twice that length of time.

The Nature Conservancy Council has a collection of bird photographs and some lantern slides which belonged to Richard Kearton. Some of his cameras are at the Science Museum in South Kensington.

"PRIMUS" AND "KLIMAX" BINDING STRIPS.

For use with the "Primus" lantern slide binding clamp (of which a notice appeared in a recent issue), or for binding slides in the old way, Messrs. Butcher supply binding strips in ten-yard lengths, neatly and conveniently rolled, as indicated in the illustration. The binding strip is made of tough paper, well gummed, and the binder can be relied upon not to come off when once it has been properly affixed. It is supplied at 3d. per reel. Messrs.

Butcher and Sons also supply the "Klimax" title binding strips.



These strips, which are in cut lengths, are supplied in boxes with little strips of white gummed paper and a supply of spots. The strips can be relied upon as being of standard length and covered with strong adhesive. The outfit complete for one hundred slides costs 1s. per box.

