

BOOK REVIEWS

A LANDMARK IN PRE-CINEMA KNOWLEDGE

Pre-Cinema History, An Encyclopaedia and Annotated Bibliography of the Moving Image Before 1896, Hermann Hecht, edited by Ann Hecht, Bowker Saur, in association with the British Film Institute, £99.

The publication of Hermann Hecht's documentation of a life-time of research is a landmark in the study of cinema pre-history and a fitting monument to one of the most distinguished founder-members of the Magic Lantern Society. An inestimable debt of gratitude is due to Ann Hecht, who undertook what at first seemed the insuperable task of editing the vast mass of index-cards and notes, and to Bowker Saur and the British Film Institute who had the faith to publish it. The price of £99 may seem high, but in terms of the mass of information collected in one place it represents wonderful value.

Pre-Cinema History was one of only three works nominated for the book prize of the year in the British Film Institute's annual awards in September. The Foreword by David Robinson sums up the

book's qualities and importance. "It is," he says, "unique, because it represents the entirety of Hermann Hecht's research – every item that he noted and recorded and annotated in years of unceasing and diligent investigation. Ordinarily, scholars cautiously contain their research publications within precise and visible and controllable limits. Perhaps Hermann Hecht himself would have published something more confined and disciplined, had he been granted the time.

"In this form, though, there is much more sense of adventure. This remains a work in progress, always reaching out beyond the safely containable, to take in unconsidered ephemera, items reported and others still to be researched.

"The commentary has never the chill formality of a conventional bibliography. These are still Hermann's

personal notes and reflections. The reader shares his enthusiasm and delight as well as the fruits of his scholarship. The annotations are often miniature essays. Referring to some specific item, you find yourself moving from one to the other, reading on. Even the contents summaries make good reading – livelier, very often, than the original work to which they refer. Then there are the titbits you had forgotten, or never knew – the lanternist in "The Cricket on the Hearth", and Dickens' own boyhood shows in the 1820s, or David Livingstone's biblical lantern projections in darkest Africa, terrifying the tribesmen with Abraham's dagger. 'It was the only mode of instruction,' he reflected sadly, 'I was ever asked to repeat.'"

HOW THE PICTURES LEARNED TO MOVE

Optisches Spielzeug, oder, wie die Bilder laufen lernten (Optical Toys, or, How the Pictures Learned to Move), Georg Füsslin, Stuttgart, published by the author, 1993.



including a particularly beautiful series by the Austrian publisher Trentsensky, who also published cut-out sheets of shadow figures, and, in 1833, the discs for Stampfer's Stroboscope, which came out simultaneously with Plateau's Phenakistiscope. Füsslin illustrates a little-known English edition of the Stampfer discs. Another famous phenakistiscope series that has rarely been illustrated before is that of Purkinje of Breslau. Mr Füsslin has also found a complete series of Newton's rare Anorthoscope discs.

The illustrations are as comprehensive for all the other optical devices. In particular we are shown every variant and imitation of Reynaud's Praxinoscope, including ravishing photographs of both the rare steam- and hot-air-driven models marketed by the German toy firm of Plank. Finally, this meticulously researched book gives a list of the world's major collections of pre-cinema artefacts.

The Afterword emphasises the particular quality of the illustrations in demonstrating how even "while the technology was still in its earliest, exploratory stages, artists used it with skills and ambitions that are in no way inferior to those of the present day.

No modern animator has surpassed the three-dimensional movement achieved by Plateau in some of the earliest Phenakistiscope discs, or the characterisation of the figures in George Cruikshank's Zoetrope strips, or the subtleties of animation in every creation of Emile Reynaud."

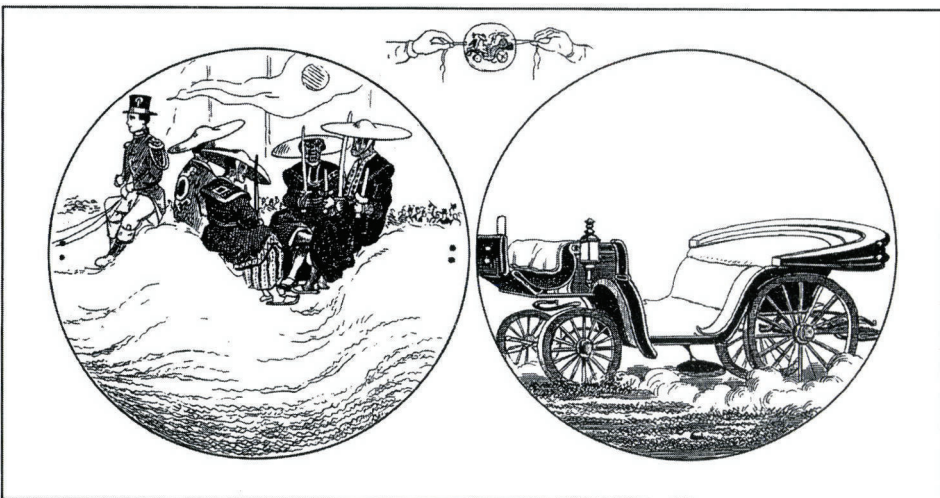
Optisches Spielzeug may be ordered directly from the author.



This handsome hard-bound book by Georg Füsslin, a German member of the Magic Lantern Society, is a must for every collector, even those who cannot read the German text. The 110 illustrations, many of them in colour, illustrate numerous toys and objects never previously reproduced. Some come from the remarkable reserve collections of the great Technical Museum in Munich, which Mr Füsslin seems to be the first to explore; others are from museums and private collections throughout Europe.

The book deals exclusively with devices that use the "persistence of vision" principle to produce the illusion of movement; though an "Afterword" by David Robinson demonstrates how such devices were linked with the magic lantern and photography, to arrive at the Kinetoscope and the Cinematographe.

The book has separate chapters on the Thaumatrope, the Phenakistiscope, the Zoetrope, the Praxinoscope and the Mutoscope. It contains material from several publications on the thaumatrope hitherto overlooked by pre-cinema histories,



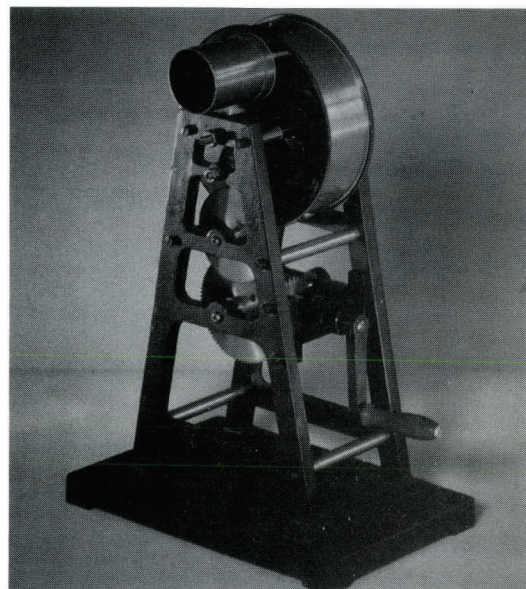
CORRECTING A PERSISTENT ERROR

Despite the extreme diligence of Georg Füsslin's research, Laurent Mannoni has pointed out an error of attribution. Füsslin, though, is in good company: the same mistake occurs both in Emmanuelle Toulet's *Cinematographe...* and in the Ariel catalogue.

On page 57 of his book, Füsslin reproduces a full-page colour picture of an elaborate and handsome device in brass, which is described in the caption, and in a paragraph on the facing page, as a Projection Phenakistiscope by Deyrolle of Paris. Perhaps Füsslin had his suspicions, for he notes that further information on the method of using the device is "unknown to the author".

The apparatus was originally discovered by the distinguished Parisian collector Maurice Gianati, from whom it was acquired first by Peter Ariel and finally by the Frankfurt Film Museum, where it now remains.

Subsequent research at the original manufacturers, who still exist in Paris, revealed however that the apparatus is in fact described in the firm's records as "Grand Phosphroscope de M. Ed. Becquerel, monté sur batis en fonte, socle en acajou. Système d'engrenages hélicoïdaux. Cet appareil sert pour l'observation des cristaux. Le premier appareil de ce genre a été construit par la Maison, en 1853, sur les indications de M. Becquerel. 450 francs." (Large phosphroscope of M. Ed. Becquerel, mounted on cast-metal frame, mahogany base. Helicoid gearing system. This apparatus is used for the observation of crystals. The first instrument of the kind was built by the firm, in 1853, to the design of M. Becquerel. 450 francs.) A wonderful find for a gemmologist, perhaps; but its attraction for pre-cinema collectors now appears distinctly limited.



THREE HUNDRED LANTERNS

The Lantern Image, Iconography of the Magic Lantern 1420-1880, compiled and with an introduction by David Robinson, Magic Lantern Society of Great Britain, 1992, £19.95.



Produced for the 1993 Convention of the Magic Lantern Society, *The Lantern Image* provides a comprehensive record of printed illustrations of the magic lantern before 1880, together with the earliest-known manuscript representations, which date back to the 15th century. Almost every one of nearly 300 images recorded is illustrated, where relevant in full colour.

The entries are arranged chronologically, each with a reference number, and a classification according to the type of illustration – for example, caricature, technical drawing, mythological and fanciful representations.

The result is a unique reference source, tracing the evolution of the magic lantern from a quaint "magical" toy to frighten the superstitious, to a sophisticated scientific device.

The Preface says that the book "is intended to be both enjoyable and useful – enjoyable as a vivid, visual survey of the evolution of the many-faceted device which is the most direct forerunner of the cinema, useful as a first point of reference for collectors and students endeavouring to identify an engraving or the progression of some particular style of lantern illustration."

The work has already received a warm welcome from international researchers and archivists; in a review which appeared in "1895", the journal of the French Association for Cinema History Research, Laurent Mannoni writes: "This kind of research among international collections is indispensable... The catalogue records 300 engravings. The author has no illusions though: this can only represent a part of what actually exists, but the work constitutes a very solid base for new research and provides a host of information... This marvellous catalogue... will delight collectors and historians, but also all lovers of painting and engraving."

The Lantern Image is available (post free to Society members) from John Finney, 61 Desford Road, Newbold Verdon, Leicester LE9 9LG. Telephone 0455 823952. Mr Finney can also supply a list of other Society publications, back numbers, badges, teddy bears, stickers, Christmas cards, etc.

FORTHCOMING BOOKS LANTERN IMAGES SUPPLEMENT

The introduction to *The Lantern Image* says: "We have aimed for completeness, knowing that we never could and never will attain it. ... Even while the final proofs were being corrected a score of hitherto unrecorded images turned up, and others will continue to do so. It is likely that if we could trace every printed image of the lantern from this period, the list would be at least twice as long as it

is now, but we have to begin somewhere and set down what we already know. ... It is intended to publish periodic supplements in *The New Magic Lantern Journal* and the editors will always be grateful for reports of errors and omissions and new discoveries so that these may be recorded."

The first supplement will be issued shortly, and we urge all readers who are aware of any lantern

images printed before 1880 which have eluded the book to report them, with photocopies if possible (preferably laser copies) where they are prepared to permit reproduction in the supplement. Any such additions and corrections should be sent to:

David Robinson, Flat 6, 96-100 New Cavendish Street, London W1M 7FA.