

# AUTUMN MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

BIRMINGHAM & MIDLAND INSTITUTE, BIRMINGHAM

Saturday 20 October 2018

Over 50 MLS members and guests gathered for an unusual autumn meeting featuring a cast of almost exclusively female presenters. The packed programme was full of interest and variety. After a short introduction, Chairman **Jeremy Brooker** handed over to **Ine van Dooren** who had organised the day.

**Ella Ravilius**, an operations curator from the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum in London, was first to speak. Her story began in spring 2017 when the Royal Photographic Society's collection moved from Bradford to the V&A. Of the 405 boxes of lantern slides, most were photographic but 10–15 were hand-painted slides. The collection also contained slipping, rackwork and panoramic slides as well as some Royal Polytechnic examples – notably an 1875 set of *Gabriel Grub*. All is now being catalogued. Ella also told us about the new Photography Centre in the V&A where the 'dark tent' shows films including one on magic lanterns to which **Richard Crangle** had contributed.



Sarah Dellmann and Gwen Sebus



Dutch women at work

picked up the latest technological innovations for show business and advertised 'changing pictures', ie magic lantern shows, as well as panoramas. Their theatre had 200 gaslights and took 800 people at a time.

The morning's session finished with **Monique Wezenberg** and her daughter **Jessica** taking us to pantomime and fairytale land. What was billed as '16 glass slides and one glass slipper' turned into 38 very beautiful and entertaining slides ... and a glass slipper. After an introduction of slipping slides the first tale, *The Rose and the Beauty*, told of a merchant with three daughters who set off to find jewels for the eldest two and just a rose for the youngest. Finding a magnificent palace he picked a rose only to be challenged by a bear who pointed out a notice saying that anyone touching the flowers would be executed. Saved by his youngest daughter who agreed to marry the bear, we had the *Beauty and the Beast* scenario except that the older sisters ended up as stone statues. Next they showed *Cinderella*, traditionally told but with the addition of extra fairy godmothers and Ministerial advisers to the Prince on a search strategy, as well as the revelation that the glass slipper was possibly created in the magical cave at the Elgin Glass Mine in Scotland.

After lunch **Janet Tamblin** took us around the world and into the heavens with twenty magic minutes of exquisite slides including chromatropes, dissolving views and many special effects. We saw London streets, rural scenes, mirages in the desert, a puppeteer in China,



One of Janet Tamblin's dissolving views



Ine van Dooren – with hat, bells and whistle



Monique and daughter Jessica



The Rose and the Beauty



The glass slipper

life on the ocean wave, a lake scene with a harp-playing angel and moonlight effects, and a ghostly visitation to the occupant of a magnificent four-poster bed, among other highlights.

This was followed by **Carolyn Brooker** who had been inspired by the occasion to turn a book for pre-readers, that she made 29 years ago as part of a teacher training course project, into magic lantern slides. Narrated by her then seven-year-old son (now 36), *A Faerie Trail* took us across a garden with beautiful flowers, a snail, insects, a small girl and day and night effects. The images were made from 1970s magazine adverts, Victorian scraps and gardening magazines. The effect was original and inspiring – we should all try it!





Two of Carolyn Brooker's slides

forebear Sir Erasmus Ommanney was second in command and found the first traces of Franklin. But how do you keep up morale during a cold dark winter, iced in? Keep everyone entertained. The expedition offered a theatre, casino, soirées, masked balls, educational lectures, two newspapers and, of course, magic lantern shows including "grand phantasmagorical magical figures". There was no shortage of 'women' – even Erasmus played Mrs Crank in one theatre production. The two Pats – **Pat Gilbert** and **Pat Spencer** – then related the tragic story of the Brontë family beginning with father Patrick's birth in Ireland and his marriage to Maria Branwell. Maria died, leaving six children, within a year of moving from Thornton to Haworth, where Patrick was appointed perpetual curate. All six predeceased their father and only Charlotte found fame in her lifetime with *Jane Eyre*, the only Brontë manuscript receiving a favourable reception with publishers. Poet Robert Southey had warned them that writing could never be a profession for a woman!

At the 'Bring and Show' **Judi Sissons** told us the exciting news that the Royal Opera House had commissioned a short version of her magic lantern opera for August 2019 and Lester Smith showed the slides reproduced on p.17. We then remembered **Anita Lear** and the Lears' Magic



Nicole Mollett with long slide, and wild woman of Sheppey towing ships for repair



**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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**Alexia Lazou**, alias Miss Lanternaia, presented a selection of lantern slides from the Lucerna database (all bar one) to the accompaniment of Gloria Gaynor's classic *I will survive*. Using slides from life model sets, cartoons, comic sets, photographs, song slides, and even a temperance slide, Alexia had edited the images brilliantly to fit the lyrics.

Things took a political turn when Mrs Zenobia Haskin-Davies (alias **Juliette Harcourt**), dressed in the colours of the Women's Suffrage Movement and in fine voice, sang us four songs with an interesting selection of lantern slides. The first concerned women at work on low pay – we saw factory workers and fruit pickers – and the second nail makers. The third was *The March of the Women* by Dame Ethel Smyth, composed in 1911 and adopted by the Women's Suffrage movement. Dame Ethel was detained in HM Prison Holloway and is said to have conducted the women singing this in the courtyard from her window, with a toothbrush. Slides from *The Lost Chord* seemed to comprise most of the accompanying images. The final song was recent, by Helen and Lucy Pankhurst.

**Ine van Dooren** and **Sarah Dellmann** – with hats and 'Sisters in Spirit' banner – then returned to the stage to give us a 'bells and whistles' alternative version of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Match Girl* with the Bamforth set of slides. Most of us had not noticed our heroine's Valentino yellow bag nor the receipt of a text from the #MeToo movement before. However her angels/friends came to the rescue after too good a night out so all ended happily with an image of redoubtable ladies – in hats!

Next **Mary Ann Auckland** took us to the Arctic in 1850 on board an expedition in search of Sir John Franklin. Mary Ann's forebear Sir Erasmus Ommanney was second in command and found the first traces of Franklin. But how do you keep up morale during a cold dark winter, iced in? Keep everyone entertained. The expedition offered a theatre, casino, soirées, masked balls, educational lectures, two newspapers and, of course, magic lantern shows including "grand phantasmagorical magical figures". There was no shortage of 'women' – even Erasmus played Mrs Crank in one theatre production. The two Pats – **Pat Gilbert** and **Pat Spencer** – then related the tragic story of the Brontë family beginning with father Patrick's birth in Ireland and his marriage to Maria Branwell. Maria died, leaving six children, within a year of moving from Thornton to Haworth, where Patrick was appointed perpetual curate. All six predeceased their father and only Charlotte found fame in her lifetime with *Jane Eyre*, the only Brontë manuscript receiving a favourable reception with publishers. Poet Robert Southey had warned them that writing could never be a profession for a woman!



The 'little match girl' (note yellow bag)



Ship in the ice in the Arctic

Lantern Narrowboat Theatre (see *TML* 16, p.13) with **George Auckland**'s video tribute. Following that **Jan Rigby** told us some ups and downs from the many years that she and **Richard** have put on shows up and down the country. What had the lantern done for them? Made friends, allowed them to "dress up and show off" (Laurence Olivier) and kept Richard out of mischief. They had taken over in emergencies and appeared in TV programmes (eg *Mr Selfridge*, *The Repair Shop*, *Great British Railway Journeys*) – and once driven home 50 miles in dense fog in fancy dress with virtually no lights. Jan's sage advice on living with a collector – what you see is not necessarily all there is.

Next **Carol Owens** showed a film she made nearly 40 years ago as her degree film at Leeds University, on the advice of past MLS Chairman John Jones, about Marion Barraclough – a child model at Bamforth's, appearing in magic lantern sets such as the song *Daddy*.

**Nicole Mollett** and **Frog Morris** put on the final show about the *Wild Women of Sheppey*. The Isle of Sheppey in the Thames Estuary, where the sea witch frightens children with jellyfish, also turned out to be where women who couldn't find suitable husbands and produce lots of children (the norm) were taken from the streets and set free in the countryside. However when the men left to fight the war (WWI) and blew up the ships, the women took over the jobs and the wild women of Sheppey returned to mend the ships.

Well done Ine for a fantastic day and thank you **Martin Gilbert** for providing the triunial. We all went home entertained and inspired.