

MAGIC LANTERN AWARDS and the winners are...

We're happy to announce the winners of the first ever Magic Lantern Society Awards. Winners will receive £300 and a book of their choice from the Society's publication list. We also look forward to finding out more about their work at one of our meetings or in a future *TML*.

In total, we received 15 submissions for both our awards, all of which were very impressive. We were honestly overwhelmed and a little surprised – as well as delighted – by the reaction. It was very difficult for the judges (Lydia Jakobs, Jeremy Brooker and Richard Crangle) to choose from such strong fields.

After careful discussion, two clear winners emerged. The inaugural **Mervyn Heard Award** for research will go to **Yana Agafonova**. Her proposal on public readings with magic lanterns in late Imperial Russia impressed us both with its originality and scope. Her work proposes to add knowledge about lantern history from a country that is still somewhat of a blank spot on the map in magic lantern research.

The first ever **Dick Balzer Award** for artwork or performance goes to **Oona Libens**. The artist submitted her performance *Soma* (2019), a journey into the insides of the human body, which features different kinds of projectors, multiple layers of screens and mechanical elements.

You can get a taste of her work from her promo video on Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/340090704>.

To honour the overall quality of the projects submitted, we decided to award additional Special Commendations of £100 each to two candidates from each category. For the **Dick Balzer Award**, we selected **Nicole Mollet**'s proposal for a reinterpretation of the seven deadly sins in hand-painted slides, which will surely be a sight to behold. Another commendation went to **Pippa Stacey**, a glass artist and new member, who is starting out on a journey of projecting her artwork with the magic lantern. For the **Mervyn Heard Award**, we choose four researchers from Portugal – **Márcia Vilarigues, Ângela Santos, Vanessa Otero and Beatriz Rodrigues** – who represent an innovative research project that studies the chemical composition of the colours in hand-painted 18th- and 19th-century slides. And our final commendation goes to **Peter Domankiewicz**, who proposes to rewrite completely the story of Henry Heyl's Phasmatrope in Philadelphia.

Unfortunately, we couldn't recognise all the deserving contributions, but we hope to repeat the awards next year and will notify members of the call for submissions in good time. Finally, we would like to thank everyone who submitted their work. Reading about your research and art practice was a real treat for us and it was fascinating to discover the range of subjects being worked on.

Lydia Jakobs

A SLIDE WITH A STORY – *TURBINIA*

Bill Barnes

In the Lester Smith collection there is an anonymous 3¼-inch square magic lantern slide of a small steamship travelling at speed. There are no tangible clues as to its identification – no name of the photographer nor where and when it was photographed, nor for that matter the identity of the ship.

However, not only is it a very striking photograph, it is also a very notable one. The lantern slide is a copy of a photograph taken by Alfred West of the world's first ship propelled by a steam turbine engine. Called the *Turbinia*, it travelled at 35 knots and was the first vessel to do so. This is the first photograph taken of it at that speed.

The *Turbinia* was the brainchild of Sir Charles Algernon Parsons (1854-1931). The son of the famous astronomer William Parsons, Charles was born in London and studied in Dublin and Cambridge. In 1884, at the age of 30, he developed a high-speed turbine engine and in 1897 the first turbine-driven ship – the *Turbinia*. It was built on the River Tyne in Newcastle and first publicly demonstrated at the Spithead Naval Review of 26 June 1897 in celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. This is where West witnessed it for the first time, steaming at full speed between the lines of Royal Navy vessels.

Alfred West (1857-1937) was a partner, with his brother George, in the well-known photographic firm of George West & Son, Southsea, on the south coast of England, celebrated marine photographers. Alfred was responsible for developing the cinematic side of the business, having carried out his first experiments with cinematography in 1897 with the Royal Naval Torpedo School, Portsmouth. This prepared him for his later involvement in show business when he set up on his own to form 'West's Our Navy' – a travelling combined magic lantern and cinematograph show of *Life in the Royal Navy, Ashore and Afloat*. This was honoured by royalty and highly praised by the big-wigs of his day.

In his unpublished autobiography – a copy of which was kindly presented to the author by his great-grandson, David Clover – West relates how he visited Parsons after seeing the *Turbinia* performing at the Naval Review and asked his permission to photograph it at its top speed. Parsons was rather sceptical about whether this could be done but agreed for West to attempt a photograph the very next day at noon precisely. The result is the fine photograph depicted in the magic lantern slide.

Addendum: When Lester's slide was being photographed for this article, on closer inspection he discovered that West's name was on it with the number '67' but quite faint, also the name of the vessel 'the *Turbinia*' was on the top outside edge. The



The Turbinia magic lantern slide (Lester Smith Collection)

number would suggest that this slide formed part of a programme of slides, probably West's *Our Navy*.

Readers will know that Bill Barnes sadly passed away this summer (TML 20). Lester Smith used to visit Bill taking slides from his collection – Turbinia was one of them. Lester adds: "This slide was a favourite of Bill's. There is plenty of information about Sir Charles Parsons online and the EMI archives owns 'the loudest playing gramophone' invented by him c.1906, called the Auxetophone Compressed Air Gramophone. This employed compressed air and a pneumatic amplifier to amplify the recorded sound. It was believed to be capable of producing sufficient volume to broadcast public music performances from the top of the Blackpool Tower and loud enough to cause people to vacate the front rows of seats in an auditorium. It was sold in the United States as the Victor Auxetophone."

NOTES

For a full history of George West & Son, and of Alfred West in particular and West's *Our Navy*, see John Barnes, *Pioneers of the British Film*, Bishopsgate Press, 1983 and republished as Vol.3 in *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England* series, University of Exeter Press, 1996. See also www.ournavy.org.uk.