

THE QUEEN VICTORIA CONUNDRUM SOLVED

Josephine Leeuwenhoek

In Jeremy Brooker's article 'The Queen on Screen' (TML 20), we read about the way in which Queen Victoria made her appearance on numerous magic lantern slides. On page 10 there are two examples of chromatropes featuring the purported image of Queen Victoria. However, Dr Brooker wonders whether the picture on the right (see Fig. 1) actually depicts the Queen, or somebody else entirely. Well, the answer is: Yes, it's her!



1. The two chromatropes shown in TML 20

This image is clearly taken from a very early painting of Victoria, commissioned when she was still a teenager – *Princess Victoria* by George Hayter from 1833 (Fig. 2) when Victoria was approximately 14 years old. Looking at a digital composite image, in which the glass slide is superimposed over the painting at a slight angle (Fig. 3), it becomes clear that this portrait forms the basis for the slide.



2. Princess Victoria by George Hayter (1833)

However, there is something odd about her hair, as Dr Brooker correctly observes. In the original painting, the young princess wears her hair in a then-fashionable braided knot at the crown of her head. For some reason – maybe fashion sense, or simply the space available on the slide – the creator has chosen to omit the knot and change the rest of the headdress into a tiara of some sort. He has also added larger earrings, and arguably made Victoria look a little bit older.

On the slide on the left in Mr Brooker's example – which I would personally say captures Victoria's likeness less successfully – she is clearly recognisable as the Queen. It might be interesting to mention that this slide is quite probably inspired by the many paintings (and copies) where Queen Victoria wears her Diamond Diadem, such as George Hayter's *Queen Victoria in her Parliamentary Robes* (1838) (Fig. 4), which was commissioned to be displayed at Madame Tussaud's waxwork museum, and portraits by Franz X. Winterhalter (1843 and 1859). Victoria traditionally wore the diadem each year at the State Opening of Parliament. The robes lined with ermine are also visible on the slide on the left. This is obviously a state portrait, meant to enhance her image as monarch in the public eye. It makes the slide on the left fundamentally different from the one on the right, which originally served as a more private depiction of Victoria.



3. Composite image of the painting in Fig. 2 and the chromatrope in Fig. 1

The question might be asked how the manufacturers of lantern slides got hold of the portraits on which to base their work. Even at the start of her reign, Victoria's image was omnipresent in the increasingly visual media culture in the form of many prints, engravings and (copies of) paintings. These were so common that they could be viewed by all but the poorest classes. The painting which hung at Madame Tussaud's museum was painted for that specific purpose. An exhibition of Franz X. Winterhalter's work, showing images of the royal family, attracted 100,000 visitors in 1847. Already in 1838, Richard Hengist Horne comically described a scene where a simple farmer thinks he has a grand total of seven monarchs because there are so many portraits of the Queen available and Victoria looks a little bit different in each one of them.

From the early 1860s onwards there were even collectable photographs of the monarch available for the wider public. These *cartes-de-visites* cost half of a common labourer's weekly wage and therefore were available to many. Millions of copies were sold. For the first time, British subjects could see and own an accurate likeness of their Queen. Therefore the notion that the Victorian masses encountered their Queen predominantly through the medium of magic lantern slides, as Dr Brooker states, is arguably only partly true. However, that should not stop us from enjoying the examples of magic lantern slides of the Queen that have survived until the present day.

Josephine Leeuwenhoek holds a MA-degree in German Language and Culture, and writes on her Dutch language blog – www.myinnervictorian.nl – on 19th century culture. In September 2019 she published a cookbook, *Aan tafel met Charles Dickens* (At the dinner table with Charles Dickens).



4. Queen Victoria in her Parliamentary Robes by George Hayter (1838)