

44TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

THE MUSICAL MUSEUM, BRENTFORD, LONDON

Saturday 25 January 2020

A large number of members and guests gathered for the 'new look' AGM in January, featuring a full morning programme and Society 'business' confined to one hour after lunch. The Museum offered special tours and a Japanese crew were filming for an NTV (Nippon Television) programme – *Path of Dreams*.

Following an introduction from our chairman, **Jeremy Brooker**, **Bernd Scholze** started the day with some "rare wonders" from late 18th-century Nürnberg. Peter Friedrich Catel established the modern philosophical toy trade (replicas of scientific and educational devices in toy form) in Berlin (see *TML* 1), but following his death in 1791 the focus moved to Nürnberg. Here Georg Hieronymus Bestelmeier proved a marketing genius, setting up a warehouse with showroom, advertising in popular publications, distributing illustrated catalogues, sending sub-dealers to trade fairs and separating the making of the toys from their distribution. Three local makers – Brunner, Burucker and Gütle – were somewhat shocked and put out their own catalogues, but all three later appeared in Bestelmeier's along with the output of Rose. However, while the Rose slides can be identified, the other three are more difficult to distinguish. Bernd showed how the elaborate paper used on some boxes points to Burucker and the different styles do suggest different workshops. Bernd then projected some of his slides dating from around 1790, ranging from groups of panoramas, sea battles to Venetian carnival figures.



Bernd Scholze's Nürnberg slides, including the baker's tale (middle)

lanternist". The baker cheats the people by using sub-standard ingredients and starves them by charging high prices. But the devil, holding a pineapple, drags him off to hell ... and somehow a guinea pig was involved!

The 'bring and show' section produced a rich variety. **Robin Palmer** showed his latest LED light for a single lantern with built-in controller. **Allan Marriott** projected a lovely slipper slide of a customer tipping a hansom cab driver and an amusing skipping slide featuring a rather rotund beret-wearing skipper. **Pippa Stacey**, a glass artist, showed us some of her experiments of painting on glass including fused leaves, a woodblock pattern, fired paint that resembled a planet's surface, and finally a magnificent owl. **Jeremy Brooker** showed a slide similar to those created by Rudge of a headless figure with two disembodied boys' heads under its arms – achieved by careful blacking out. Reg Bosley showed a strange 'Milton Keynes' (famous for cow statues) slide of cows' heads on monuments and Lester Smith showed a colour optical illusion. Aileen Butler then concluded with an account of a 1903 magic lantern show by Canon Southwell in Cornwall based on his experiences in the Boer War. Aileen showed her own action-packed Boer War slides.

The business session began, unusually, with Miss Lanterna (Alexia Lazou) and her brilliantly selected slides from Lucerna to the accompaniment of Gloria Gaynor singing 'I Will Survive'. The Chairman then thanked various members for their contribution to the Magic Lantern Society, including **Martin Gilbert** and **Lester Smith** for the excellent meeting programmes throughout 2019. He encouraged members to think about contributing to meetings, Facebook and Twitter, and *The Magic Lantern*. He thanked your *TML* editors (**Gwen** and **Mary Ann**) and **George Auckland** for recording the meetings, editing and publishing the shows, as well as *Connect* and *New Light on Old Media* our online publications. He announced that **Mary Borgo Ton** has taken over editing *New Light* from January 2020. **Richard Crangle** reported as Secretary and Treasurer giving a generally healthy picture with more new members in 2019 – a total of 33 compared with 20 in 2018 – probably due to the reduced-price introductory membership offer suggested by **Andrew Gill** at the last AGM. Richard thanked **Jerry Fisher** for his work as Membership Secretary. Sales of publications were down, leading **Mike Smith** to suggest trying to sell more in relevant museums, etc, around the world. However the marketing role is currently vacant.

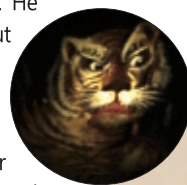
Lester Smith then showed an extraordinary chromatrope from his collection – the extremely rare 'royal' chromatrope from around 1901. This comprised cut-out shapes that could be positioned in front of a conventional chromatrope. The first shape was a royal insignia with 'ER' suggesting Edward VII (reigned 1901-10). We saw Britannia, George and the Dragon and a 'good luck' horseshoe among others.



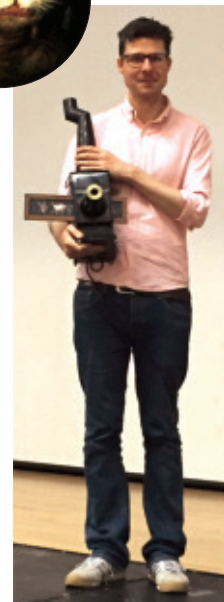
Lester Smith's amazing chromatrope

Next **Phillip Roberts** gave us a highly entertaining show with his portable phantasmagoria lantern. Introduced by a talking tiger (with moving eyes) we were asked to imagine living in the Upper Calder Valley (West Yorkshire) in 1816, with the Napoleonic Wars over and an economic depression adding to the darkness. Over the moor comes a man with tatty clothes who calls a general meeting – even though it is illegal – to see a magic lantern show. The lanternist was able to wander around the country, show images and say things nobody else could – a source of political agitation and propaganda.

We saw the mouse king (from the people) triumphing over the cats (from Parliament) who were then beheaded or hanged in a row. Phillip finished by singing along to a version of *Pull Devil, Pull Baker* (a tale that had already appeared in Bernd's slides) using "real words by a real



Phillip Roberts and his alter ego





Award winners (from the top): Nicole Mollett, Pippa Stacey and Peter Domankiewicz

The Chairman presented MLS Award Certificates to winners (see *TML* 21) who were present at the meeting – the two commendations for the Dick Balzer Award, **Nicole Mollett** and **Pippa Stacey**, followed by the commendation for the Mervyn Heard Award, **Peter Domankiewicz**. Nicole then showed us some of her work in an ‘experimental’ use of those arguably boring slides – fading, damaged, black and white, of nothing particularly interesting – that we all keep in boxes (under the bed in Nicole’s case). To combat the current depression, Nicole brought colour, joy and happiness back into the images, accompanied by a magical piece of music by Dominik Eulberg. Nicole’s cousin Bettina translated her correspondence with the composer and his enthusiasm for her project. We saw richly embellished skies, land and sea, brightly coloured half-timbered houses and exotic hand-painted additions to townscapes and seascapes.



Pippa Stacey’s owl and Nicole Mollett’s hand-painted embellishment

Next **Gwen Sebus** and **Mary Ann Auckland**, assisted by **Monique Wezenberg**, took us in search of Sir John Franklin’s doomed expedition of 1845. Using beautiful Arctic slides from both Gwen’s and **Annet Duller**’s collections the talk outlined the many expeditions sent in search of *HMS Erebus* and *HMS Terror* from 1848 onwards. These included the 1850-51 expedition under Austin and Ommanney (Mary Ann’s ancestor) that found the first traces, McClure and *HMS Investigator* that completed the North West Passage (partly by sledge) in 1854 and McClintock and the *Fox* that found Franklin’s final message in 1859. The show concluded with Gwen’s stunning day/night dissolving view of a ship seen through ice cliffs with the Northern Lights twinkling through the suspended stalactite-like icicles.



Gwen showing the Arctic dissolving view



The day ended with an extraordinary show from **Martin Gilbert**, assisted on his triurnal lantern by **Monique Wezenberg**. In a ‘rolling start’ we enjoyed some stunning astronomical and astrological slides, with an earth-moon emphasis, accompanied by NASA Mission Control from Apollo 11 and music. Back down to earth, an extended *Village Blacksmith* featured beautiful day/night, summer/winter dissolving views with the bellows operator and blacksmith beating time to a brass band. The next section of *Natural Phenomena* brought lightening, earthquake, the *aurora borealis* and an unusual volcano in icy regions. *The Exeter Theatre Fire* (not a portent for the summer meeting we hope) gave us more billowing smoke and flames as an elegant interior was reduced to a burnt-out shell despite the fire brigade’s best efforts. *The Four Seasons* featured more exquisite dissolving views of day, night, moonlight, rainbows and the four seasons with a variety of country scenes including Constable’s *Hay Wain*. A fierce sea battle between two ships in *Naval Squadron* involved an impressive array of missiles and gunfire until one ship was burnt out in the fading light and an angel appeared. The final scene was Tower Bridge with a ship passing through. Each new section was introduced by some wonderful chromatropes but the finale was a feast of them projected to nautically-themed music. What a superb treat to end a marvellous day. Some of us heard Martin mutter that this was his “last show” – but we’re not going to let that happen!

Three of Martin Gilbert’s dissolving views (from the top): Polar volcano, Naval Squadron, Village Blacksmith

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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Printed by Stormpress, Exeter, UK – www.stormpress.co.uk

Published by:

The Magic Lantern Society
17 Dean Street
Exeter EX2 4HH, UK

www.magiclantern.org.uk

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ISSN 2057-3723

