

## SOME LESSER-KNOWN LIFE MODEL SLIDE MAKERS

### No. 5 – A few of the others

Richard Crangle

The articles in this series have introduced four little-known British slide makers whose work included Life Model images, deliberately ignoring the two largest producers of this type of slide – Bamforth & Co. and York & Son – whose work has been treated in detail elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> This final part of the series rounds up some of ‘the others’ – Life Model manufacturers whose work can be identified in one way or another, but who (as far as we currently know) did not operate on the same scale as Wing, Piggott, Rider or Mason.

Identifying slide manufacturers (as opposed to dealers, who labelled their stock with their names and trademarks quite freely) remains a rather inexact science. Often the best guide, other than contemporary catalogues and advertisements, is that a slide ‘looks like’ one by an identified maker, particularly in aspects like labelling or mounting, or shows a location, background or person also found in another set whose maker is known. But this may be not much more than guesswork, and there are other complications like different versions of sets with the same title, replacement of slides by others over the years, and so on.

Among the slide makers discussed here as ‘minor’ Life Model makers are some of the largest and most influential firms in the British slide making business, including Newton, Riley, Tyler and Valentine. This suggests, perhaps, that making Life Models was not an avenue every major slide maker would consider. Perhaps it was a specialism in which a relatively small number of makers had cornered the market, and it was easier to turn to one of those organisations than to set up one’s own production.

There is also an underlying question ‘What is a Life Model slide?’ – several makers, as we shall see, produced slides using posed models in costume, but not for the more mainstream purposes of illustrating stories or popular songs. For example, some of the most attractive work by Graystone Bird consists of models posing in costume and could reasonably be classed as Life Models, but those slides are picturesque ‘genre studies’ for the sake of artistic photography, rather than illustrations to a narrative.

To save space I will not list the various makers’ Life Model output here. Full lists (which will change from time to time as more sets are identified) can be found by searching for slide sets in the Lucerna Web Resource (<http://lucerna.exeter.ac.uk>) using ‘manufactured by’ a selected organisation and with the ‘main type of image’ *life model*.

#### WALTER TYLER, LONDON

Tyler was one of the leading companies of the British slide trade between the mid-1880s and around 1912. Led by the energetic Walter Tyler himself (apparently a larger-than-life figure not shy of self-promotion) they were regular and prominent advertisers in the trade press, offering a huge stock of slides and apparatus made by themselves and other manufacturers.

Around the mid-1890s Tyler made at least 21 Life Model sets (277 slides), illustrating stories, songs, recitations and services of song. Their sets were mostly quite short (between four and 20 slides), with only two extending to 30 slides or more. Their

image style is distinctive, with a slightly ‘rough’ look, combining over-contrasty photos, crudely painted backcloths, rather obviously posed models, and a limited palette of bright colours often not applied very accurately or with any subtlety. Examples (Fig. 1) include the song *Sally in Our Alley* (Lucerna 3000721) and the temperance recitation *A Rill from the Town Pump* (Lucerna 3000624).

Some of Tyler’s output has identifying labels on the slide mount (usually the slide set title above the image, with ‘FROM LIFE MODELS’ below), sometimes with the helpful additional wording ‘Copyright. W.T.’. The scenic backgrounds and props seem to have been reused relatively frequently, meaning that once one set has been identified others can often be spotted from the reappearance of a poster, chair or other item.

The overall impression is of work done with less care than some other manufacturers, perhaps with an eye to holding down production costs and boosting profits. This may fit with a general perception of the Tyler business (reading ‘between the lines’ of contemporary accounts in sources like *OMLJ*) as a somewhat noisy searcher for a quick pound or two, in the image of its huckster proprietor. This, and the fact that Tyler seem not to have made more Life Model sets after around 1897, perhaps indirectly suggests a limiting feature of Life Model production: it must have been time-consuming and quite expensive to make slides this way, and if one could make as much profit by photographing existing drawings or paintings, why go to the trouble?

#### RILEY BROTHERS, BRADFORD

Riley’s main business success lay in retailing or hiring slides by other makers, in which activity they amassed a range of over 40,000 different slides by 1914 – like most major dealers, they claimed a stock of hundreds of thousands, which must mean they held several copies of the more popular sets. They also made slides themselves (just over 14,000 slides, or about 35 per cent of their total stock), but those were mostly lecture slides (10,179 in 210 sets) or drawings illustrating stories, songs, religious and comic subjects (2,815 in 163 sets).

However they also produced Life Model subjects, and these can be identified with some confidence because of their practice of marking slide sets in their catalogue with code letters for different manufacturers: letter ‘A’ is Riley themselves. The catalogue also allows dating of the sets, since each year’s additions were simply added to the end of a



1. Walter Tyler: (a) Slide 6 of *Sally in Our Alley*, a typically rough-edged Tyler image (Nicholas Hiley Collection) (left); (b) Slide 9 of *A Rill from the Town Pump* – better production values, but not very natural posing (Philip & Rosemary Banham Collection) (right)



2. Riley Brothers: (a) Slide 12 of *A Soldier's Son*, a typical Riley 'interior' (left); (b) Slide 11 of *That Fellow Jones* (right) – this background and models appear in a number of Bamforth sets, for example *Queen of Angels*, *Lucerna 3003599* (both Hiley Collection)

numbered sequence, so Riley are known to have produced 489 Life Model slides in 19 sets between 1898 and 1914. These mainly illustrate services of song and stories, including some by Willie Riley himself (under the rather transparent pseudonym 'W. Rye Leigh'), and generally cover the standard fare of religious and temperance propaganda. Examples include *Stony Ground*, *Niggardly Ned* and *The Harbour of Heaven*.

Riley slides can be recognised from their labelling, which often includes their 'RB' monogram (Fig. 2) in a triangular label at the top left corner. Typically the slide set title is included as a printed label at the top of the mount, sometimes with the slide title on a similar label at the bottom. The slides generally show models posed against painted studio backgrounds, although in the few sets where slides survive there are also examples of exterior location work, often showing shop fronts and other street scenes presumably taken in Riley's native Bradford.<sup>2</sup>

One intriguing feature of a few Riley Life Model subjects is use of painted studio backgrounds by Bamforth, for example Fig. 2b. It is well known that these two companies worked closely together – Bamforth supplied roughly 20 per cent of Riley's total slide stock, or 38 per cent if only fictional subjects are considered, and they made a series of 'Riley and Bamforth' short films around 1900. But this suggests a further degree of collaboration: possibly Bamforth allowed Riley access to their studio facilities, or perhaps Riley bought or borrowed images from Bamforth's stock to insert into their own sets as convenient.

### CHATHAM PEXTON, LONDON

Pexton was another large London retailer and, like Tyler, a regular and prominent advertiser. None of their own catalogues are known to survive and other clues as to their slide production are rather confusing and inconclusive. They advertised several groups of Life Model sets as their own production but some of these can be identified as made by others (common practice in the slide trade, which always had a wholesale/retail demarcation in which retailers claimed bought-in goods as their own exclusive offerings). In particular a group of 'Pexton' Life Model sets (listed as such in the 1888 *Indispensable Handbook to the Optical Lantern*) overlap precisely with some of Bamforth's early Life Model work.<sup>3</sup>

Another group of sets (465 slides in 17 sets) were advertised in 1893 and 1894,

based on stories published in the series *Horner's Lantern Readings*. However the titles of these correspond closely to sets that appear in a list issued by Piggott of Leighton Buzzard (see *TML* 19).<sup>4</sup> Whether these were slides made by Piggott and marketed by Pexton, or the other way round, is difficult to say without further evidence. It's also possible that both firms independently made sets for these stories but that seems less likely.

These sets have a distinct visual style, and were certainly produced by the same maker, who for shorthand we can name as Pexton, though maybe the photography was done by a sub-contractor. A recurring feature is a basic studio set consisting of two right-angled 'flats' photographed obliquely, giving a view of a

'room corner' (Fig. 3a) – the same set-up, dressed very differently according to the story being told, appears often in these sets. Other scenes show crude scenery, like the obviously paper 'brick wall' in Fig. 3b. The slides shown here share a common style of mounting and labelling, but there seem to have been other styles as well.

The exterior views in Pexton's sets (46 out of 393 slides with digital images) suggest a maker based in north London, which could indicate a link to the work of 'Maker 3' discussed a little later. For example Slide 16 of *Flossie's Little Shoes* (Lucerna 3000917) shows an exterior scene at Harringay railway station; Pexton did operate a 'factory' in Holloway, close to that location, although several other slide makers and lantern trade operators were also based around that area of London.

### NEWTON AND CO., LONDON

Newton were the longest-surviving and most prolific British slide producer, responsible for at least 75,000 different slides, and it might be surprising that they produced few Life Model sets. Over 40 such sets appear in Newton's huge two-volume 1912-13 catalogue, but most are by York & Son, whose business they took over in 1912, and only 12 sets (173 slides) have been identified as by Newton themselves.

No surviving slides have yet come to light for these, so it's not clear whether they can be called 'true' Life Model subjects, but they seem unlikely to have been created in the same way as the more mainstream Life Model makers. Certainly five of the 12 sets, a series of *Humorous Scenes from Pickwick*, are described in Newton's catalogue as 'scenes portrayed by Mr E.H. and Miss E.M. Lucas, whose impersonations of Dickens' characters are so widely and so favourably known' – in other words, photographs of a stage act consisting of performed scenes or



3. Chatham Pexton: (a) Slide 9 of *Father Come Home* (Banham Collection), showing the typical 'corner' arrangement; (b) high-quality scenery in Slide 2 of *The White Slaves of London* (author's collection)



4. Alfred Pumphrey: (a) Slide 5 of *Diogenes and the Boys of Corinth* – life models channelling Wilhelm Busch (Banham Collection) (left); (b) Slide 6 of *The Unlucky Present* – a valiant attempt to recreate a drawn image from an earlier version of the set (right) (Hiley Collection).

tableaux.<sup>5</sup> Others, to guess from their catalogue titles, may comprise stock photos arranged to illustrate a story rather than posing of models in original images. One example is the set *An 'Extra' Barrel for You* (Lucerna 3004224), which includes generic slide titles like 'The Railway Station', 'The Country Lane' and 'Chickens in the Run'.

### JOSEPH LEVI & CO. ('LEVIATHAN'), LONDON

Little detail is known about this business, partly because they operated at a wholesale level and (despite prominent use of the trademark 'Leviathan' in advertising) may not have identified their work on the actual slides. There were also other businesses with similar names (S.J. Levi & Co. of London, Lévy et ses Fils of Paris) which confuse the picture a little further.

The Riley Brothers catalogue identifies seven Life Model sets (151 slides) by the code letter 'J' which, by correlation with other references, can be taken as Levi's production. However no slides for these sets (titles include *The Dying Band of Hope Girl*, *The Dream of Eugene Aram*, *The Last Shilling* and a version of *Jessica's First Prayer*) have yet been identified in current collections, so it's not possible to describe what a Levi Life Model slide might look like. Levi probably made more sets – they were a relatively long-lasting business – and some of these may be among the heap of 'maker unknown' Life Model sets.

### ALFRED PUMPHREY, BIRMINGHAM

Alfred Pumphrey, initially trading as Pumphrey Brothers, made a few Life Model sets among several thousand slides made by photographing illustrations from books (they claimed to have pioneered that as a new technique in the early 1870s). Their Life Model output was so small – so far only 33 slides in six sets – as to be insignificant, but some interesting examples do survive.

One of these is *Diogenes and the Boys of Corinth* (Lucerna 3005272), which poses two boys and an older man in crude imitations of the drawings by Wilhelm Busch which are the source for other sets for this tale – even the costumes imitate the 'ancient Greek' garb of Busch's illustrations (Fig. 4a).<sup>6</sup> Many Life Model subjects were based on book illustrations or other engravings but this is an unusually faithful attempt to recreate drawn originals using human models. It is also a very early

example of the genre: the set appears in Pumphrey's 1872 catalogue (described as "from Life – in appropriate Costume") and probably predates the earliest known examples by York & Son which are attributed to the mid-1870s.<sup>7</sup>

A later group of Pumphrey Life Model sets includes *Give Me a Penny, Sir* (Lucerna 3005331) and *The Unlucky Present* (Lucerna 3010807, Fig. 4b) – the latter itself a remake of an earlier set photographed from engravings. These show rather clumsily posed models in exterior locations or with basic studio backcloths, and are distinguished by titles stamped on labels or the slide mount in mauve ink.

### G.W. WILSON, ABERDEEN, AND JAMES VALENTINE & SONS, DUNDEE

These two businesses, following similar paths in two neighbouring cities, were giants of the photographic publishing trade. They produced photographic prints in various formats, running to tens of thousands of subjects over the second half of the 19th century, and expanded their production into sets of lantern slides from the 1880s onwards. These were almost all topographical views arranged as travel and history lectures: over 3,000 slides by Valentine and over 9,000 by Wilson.<sup>8</sup> However both produced tiny numbers of slides that can now be called 'Life Model', though again there is a question over whether these are 'true' Life Model images or just stock photographs used to illustrate a story.

Only one short Life Model set is so far known by 'GWW': *The Posting of a Letter* (Lucerna 3010763), a short narrative in which a friendly policeman helps a small girl to ... er ... post a letter (Fig. 5a). Two sets are known by Valentine, identified from their style of labelling (some slides include the handwritten acknowledgement 'J.V.'): *The Village Blacksmith* (Lucerna 3000550) and a set whose title is unknown (Lucerna 3010735 – see Fig. 5b, an image which appears in both of these sets). Wilson and Valentine slides are identifiable from the makers' initials included in their labelling and it would be interesting to discover other examples of this rare output. Presumably both businesses were doing well enough from their lecture sets not to bother with new ventures like Life Model storytelling.



5. G.W. Wilson: (a) Slide 3 of *The Posting of a Letter*, doing its best to portray naturally an everyday street scene (left). Valentine & Sons: (b) Slide 6 of a set whose title is unknown; the same image is used as Slide 6 of *The Village Blacksmith* (right) (both Hiley Collection)



6. 'Maker 3': (a) Slide 8 of Silver Lilies – the London General bus is on a route from Wood Green to Charing Cross (author's collection) (left); (b) Slide 24 of The Two John Brents, at the corner of St Margaret's Avenue and Wordsworth Parade, London N15 (Mervyn Heard Collection) (right)

### UNITED KINGDOM BAND OF HOPE UNION (UKBHU), LONDON

The UKBHU was a major slide distributor, running a London operation supplying slides on hire to local branches throughout Britain. In 1891 they released a catalogue of their stock (mainly made by others), running to 426 pages and listing 31,455 slides in over 1,000 sets. They regularly advertised stock additions throughout the next two decades.<sup>9</sup>

The UKBHU also made slides themselves, mainly photographs of drawings but including two (*Molly's Mistake* and *Worth His Weight in Gold*) described as Life Model sets. If they did make such sets it seems unlikely that they made only two, so probably some of the 'maker unknown' sets or those by the next two manufacturers discussed below could also be attributed to the Union.

What is not known yet is whether these slides were actually made by the UKBHU itself or subcontracted to an established Life Model maker. The one set for which images exist in Lucerna is a standard evangelical tale, *Molly's Mistake* (Lucerna 3003159).<sup>10</sup> Some aspects of the style are reminiscent of Life Model makers like Wing or Piggott, but there is no conclusive link to a known maker. One unusual aspect of that set is that all the known slides were photographed on location in streets or interiors of actual buildings. This might suggest that the maker had no easy access to a studio with scenery and props.

### 'MAKER 3' AND 'MAKER 22'

These two manufacturers are referred to here by their provisional identifications in Lucerna, representing groups of sets clearly made by the same as-yet-unidentified producers. It is, of course, possible that either or both of them are among the companies already discussed, using variations in image or label style.

'Maker 3' produced at least 179 Life Model slides in six sets, identified by matching the code letters in the Riley catalogue with those for two sets where we have digital images. These sets (*The Two John Brents* and *Silver Lilies*, Lucerna 3004487 and 3003449) are clearly connected: their labelling is the same, some models and props appear in both, and the photography and colouring are similar. A distinctive feature is the use of exterior locations, some identifiable as places in Harringay, north London (Fig. 6). Incidental details in those views (wall posters and

theatre advertisements on the bus) allow dating of these sets to 1908, meaning that 'Maker 3' was relatively late in making Life Model slides.

'Maker 22' made at least 83 Life Model slides in five sets, which can be linked by their visual content and style (Fig. 7). Their work is mainly studio-based, but with a relatively high proportion of exterior locations (31 of the 83 known slides), some reused in different sets and probably local to the business, though they are mainly generic street and garden views with no location clues. Other recurring aspects include rather crude studio sets (those showing 'respectable' middle-class rooms are more elaborately decorated) and recycled models and props (including some distinctive pictures on the 'walls'). This seems to be a well-resourced maker, and the few sets so far identified are probably not the full extent of their Life Model work.

### 'MAKER UNKNOWN'

Finally it's worth mentioning one of the largest British Life Model makers, 'maker unknown'. In the Lucerna listing there are currently 152 sets (2,914 slides) identified as Life Models from a catalogue or other reference, but for which either no slides have yet been digitised or slides are known but unidentified (Fig. 8). Many of these must have been made by the makers covered here and in the rest of these articles. A tiny detail – a label, a familiar face of a model or a distinctive prop – may be all it takes to pin down the maker, date and context of a whole range of slides. We just have to look carefully at the slides in our collections and try to think, 'where *have* I seen that before?!

These articles have not been intended as a definitive list, and other minor or occasional Life Model makers can be identified – in effect, anyone could make such slides if they had a camera, an idea and some 'volunteers'. Life Model sets not listed in Lucerna do turn up regularly, and always bring a few more questions than they answer. As with all aspects of slide history, we're still only at the start of trying to work out 'who made what, when?', not to mention 'why?', and however much we do discover about Life Models or any other genre of slide, however much we think these images are routine or typical, the main thing we should learn from them is *how little we really know*.

(Continued overleaf)



7. 'Maker 22': (a) Slide 9 of Willie's Whistle – this maker seems only to have owned three pictures to enliven the walls of their studio sets (Banham Collection) (left); (b) Slide 4 of The Worth of a Baby, using a background that appears in much of this maker's work (Hiley Collection) (right)



8. Maker unknown: (a) Slide 5 of Beautiful Grandmamma, Lucerna 3009766 (Hiley Collection) (left); (b) Slide 8 of Molly's Grudge, Lucerna 3006740 (Heard Collection) (right)

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

All slide images are from the Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, reproduced by permission. Photos are by the author.

1. Bamforth's history and slide production is covered in the booklet accompanying the DVD-ROM *The Illustrated Bamforth Slide Catalogue* (Magic Lantern Society, London, 2009), available from the Society. The definitive work on York remains the exemplary research by David Henry which appeared in the Society's journal over 35 years ago: see David Henry, 'York & Son: part 1', *NMLJ*, 3.1, February 1984, pp.12-17, and 'York & Son: part 2', *NMLJ*, 3.2, December 1984, pp.13-18.
2. The numbers of known slides are too small to draw conclusions about Riley's working practice, but for example their set *Stony Ground* (Lucerna 3003188) includes five slides (17% of the set of 30) photographed in the streets, although two of these are generic stock views not including characters in the story.
3. Walter D. Welford and Henry Sturmeay (compilers), *The 'Indispensable' Handbook to the Optical Lantern*, Iliffe & Co., London, 1888. The Bamforth sets cited as by Pexton are *The*

*Gipsy's Revenge* (p.293), *Jack the Conqueror* (p.302), *The Mallee Scrub* (p.306) and *Neddie's Care* (p. 309).

4. Pexton mentioned the sets in two groups in prominent double-page display adverts for several months at the start of the 'lantern season' of 1893 and 1894. See for example *Optical Magic Lantern Journal*, vol. 4, no. 52, September 1893, p.xii-xiii, and vol. 5, no. 63, August 1894, pp.viii-ix.
5. Newton & Co., *Catalogue of Lantern Slides. Part I*, London, 1912, p.170. The individual sets are Lucerna IDs 3004382-3004386 inclusive.
6. For comparison see a set of the same subject by Wrench & Son (Lucerna 3000464).
7. Pumphrey Brothers, *Catalogue of Photographic Transparencies for Lantern Slides*, Birmingham, 1872, p.14. The original is in the collection of the Kent Museum of the Moving Image. The earliest Life Model set by York may be *Gabriel Grub* (Lucerna 3000430) which first appeared around 1875 (possibly a year or two earlier).
8. The known figures so far are 78 sets (3,124 slides) by Valentine and 151 sets (9,297 slides) by Wilson; these are certainly underestimates.
9. UK Band of Hope Union, *Complete Catalogue of Lantern Slides, Dissolving Views, Magic Lanterns, etc.*, London, 1891. The original is in the collection of the Kent Museum of the Moving Image. The content consists of reprints of the catalogues of ten different British slide makers, and is an important resource for slide identification and dating; the full content is listed in Lucerna, item 4003666. UKBHU presumably did not actually own examples of all the sets listed, but would order them from the makers if requested.
10. The slides accompany a service of song arranged by John Burnham and (probably) published by Nicholson & Sons of London; no copy of the reading has yet been found. The slide images suggest a story of a prodigal son reunited with his mother through the actions of her servant (Molly).