

# 46TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

## THE MUSICAL MUSEUM, BRENTFORD, LONDON

Saturday 22 January 2022

Once again we were able to meet in person for the AGM, held at the Musical Museum in Brentford. Around 40 MLS members and guests, including some new members, gathered to enjoy a full programme and the last meeting with **Jeremy Brooker** as the Chair. The first section comprised a tribute to the work of **Stephen Herbert** who, along with **Mo Heard**, has become the latest Honorary Life Member of our Society. Stephen is well-known to many members for his research and technical expertise in early cinema and Victorian optical entertainments, his own books and others he published via the Projection Box – the company he ran with Mo – and his work at the much-missed Museum of the Moving Image (MOMI), the National Film Theatre (NFT) and other museums. Unusually Stephen combines scholarship with a practical approach.

The first speaker, **Nick Hiley**, emphasised this point with his tale of telling a prominent professor of film studies that he was interested in the practical difficulties of projecting in early cinema. The professor promptly suffered a 'brain burst' resulting in a severe nosebleed – and left! Nick recalled an



A reminder from Nick Hiley

excellent two-week course run by Stephen in 1995 on the very early days of cinema, with

an emphasis on the technicalities and physical survival of material. Stephen was then Head of Technical Services at London's MOMI and NFT. Nick showed a number of magic lantern slides projected in early cinemas alongside the film performance. For example, these announced a pause while the reel was changed, asked people to leave when they had seen the programme, reminded ladies to remove their hats (especially if under 45!) and, bringing us right up to date, advertised a 'germicide essence' spray to combat influenza.

Next **Stephen Bottomore**, who couldn't be present (Jeremy read his talk), sent his tribute about the 'men from Hastings' – **Harry Furniss** and **Stephen Herbert**. **David Robinson's** article (*NMLJ*, Vol. 6, No. 3, January 1992) described Harry Furniss's career but Stephen B. focussed on his film-making activities, first in the USA and then in Hastings – in a studio not far from Stephen H. and Mo's house.

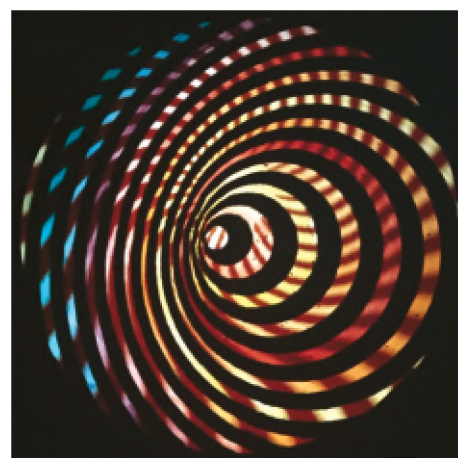
Furniss made light comedies – with himself in the cast – wrote articles and a 1914 book *Our Lady Cinema* on the subject. Turning to the other man from Hastings, Stephen H., Stephen B. said he had been an inspiration, through his publications, in researching people such as Furniss, showing the combination of art and technique in their pioneering work as well as highlighting their interesting lives beyond the cinema.

**Seoyoung Kim**, a curator at Kingston Museum, focussed on Stephen's passion for **Eadweard Muybridge** (1830-1904), the pioneer of moving image projection, whom she is studying for her PhD. As Stephen wrote: "The more that is discovered, the more interesting Muybridge becomes" (S. Herbert, *Eadweard Muybridge: The Kingston Museum Bequest*, 2004). Although he spent most of his working life in America, Muybridge was born and died in Kingston and left 3,000 items to the Museum including over 2,000 lantern slides and his unique Zoopraxiscope with its discs. Stephen first came across Muybridge in 1971 at the Barnes Museum in St Ives, Cornwall, from which time he became somewhat obsessed and is now a 'Muybridge guru'. Seoyoung picked out three aspects of Stephen's work in this area – the extensive information database he has compiled that is now available on his website, his advocacy of the importance and significance of Muybridge and his work, and his own work in promoting Muybridge at and through Kingston Museum, including the technicalities of the Zoopraxiscope – he built a working replica in Meccano.

Professor **Ian Christie** (of Film and Media History – but definitely not the professor in Nick Hiley's story) talked about Stephen and Mo at MOMI, and Stephen's very practical approach always questioning 'how does it work?' or even 'does or did it actually work?' Ian's project at MOMI was the reconstruction of the Soviet Agit-Train and he briefed the guides, although the films shown were not historically accurate. In the 1990s, to



Jeremy Brooker addressing his last MLS meeting as Chair



One of the chromatropes made by Pippa Stacey



Ian Christie and Nicole Mollett find interesting items on Martin Gilbert's stall





Two images from Lester Smith's slides for the Hughes Giant Choreutoscope

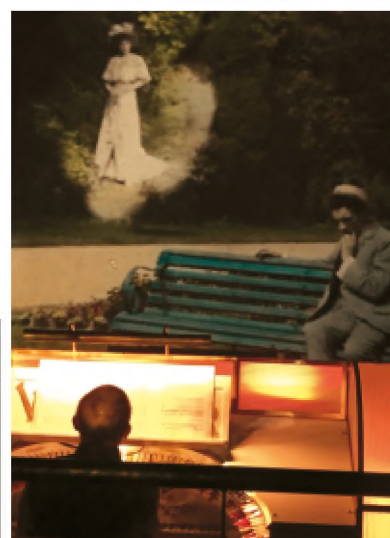


The 'Lantern Rays' column in the Kinematograph & Lantern Weekly

Finally Deac Rossell, who was told about the MLS by Stephen over 30 years ago, gave his first talk to us, supported by the audience with a refrain of "Professor Herbert, master of the magic lantern" when cued. After listing Stephen's many areas of activity and expertise, he revealed Stephen's 'true career' – as reflected by the refrain – in giving lantern shows to elite audiences. Drawing on rare fragments surviving from a 1996 show in a great house (allegedly on nitrate film) Deac painted the picture with éclat to back up his extensive (four minutes) research.

During lunch members enjoyed a tour of the Museum and some libations provided by the Committee, ready for the AGM. Jeremy reported on a good year for the MLS with face-to-face meetings restored and livestreaming, thanks to George Auckland and Frog Morris, for those not able to attend. He asked for comments on the extra Christmas meeting (see p.14). Mary Borgo Ton's work in getting back to monthly editions of *New Light on Old Media* was much appreciated. Jeremy highlighted the excellent resource of past meetings and shows, edited by George, and other information on the MLS website. He thanked Richard Crangle for his very successful stewardship of the MLS finances, Lester Smith and Martin Gilbert for the fantastic programmes we have all enjoyed, the Aucklands and Gwen Sebus for *TML* and the MLS Committee for their work. He also thanked Alexia Lazou who is stepping down (temporarily we hope) and urged members to think about serving on the Committee. Richard Crangle thanked Jerry Fisher, also stepping down from the Committee after 40 years, for his work as Membership Secretary, a role he is continuing. Richard reported 45 new members in 2021 (354 in total), possibly a record in recent times, and took us through the accounts. Mary Ann encouraged members to go on contributing to *TML*. Under 'any other business' John Townsend flagged up the publication of his brother Charles Townsend's book *The Magician's Secret* (with references to the magic lantern), that the Noakes Quad lantern was now at SAS (see p. 1) and the SAS auction on 26 April. Ian Christie (also Vice-President of Domitor) discussed his exhibition (now over) in London's Hornsey Library about Robert Paul. The AGM concluded with those Committee members standing again being re-elected, with the addition of Richard Feltham, the new Chair designate.

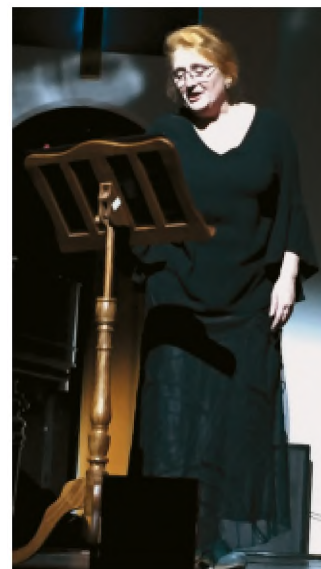
Jeremy said a few words about the MLS Awards (see *TML* 29) and then introduced us to the Metropolitan Poloptical Institution, a proposed successor to the Royal Polytechnic Institution. The plan arose in the early 1900s via the 'Lantern Rays' column in *The Kinematograph & Lantern Weekly* where features included quirky



Juliette Harcourt singing and Mike Wood playing the mighty Wurlitzer with 'Love me and the world is mine' (above) and 'Arrah-Wanna' (left) to finish the meeting

celebrate the centenary of cinema, he enlisted Stephen's help with the BBC TV series *The Last Machine* presented by Terry Gilliam. Ian also highlighted: the valuable facsimile of William Slade's film catalogues from the 1890s published by the Projection Box; Stephen's pioneering work in 'finding out by doing' illustrated by the *Race to Cinema* collection (available online); and Stephen's encouragement for Ian's own work on Robert Paul – although he did not always take Stephen's advice.

Next the presentation by Luke McKernan from the British Library was given by Richard Crangle. Luke recalled numerous adventures with Stephen including when, during a film show on the birth of aviation, Stephen launched a model aeroplane (another of Stephen's interests) across the heads of a startled audience at the NFT. For the centenary of cinema, Luke and Stephen were commissioned to work together on a book project that resulted in *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema* (British Film Institute, 1996). This aimed to challenge perceptions beyond citing the usual names and countries, contending that around 250 people (and a horse) at least contributed to the birth of cinema. In 2004 the site was converted into an online research resource, with extra features, updated until the end of 2020 – it remains as an archive. Luke attributed much of its success to Stephen's great ability for making knowledge both accessible and entertaining.



ideas such as Pepper's Ghost by kinematograph and lantern, and (mis)remembrances by Edmund Wilkie of the Polytechnic. Contributors put forward many ideas for the new institution, identified the target audience (lecturers, explorers and scientists) and met at Frascati's Restaurant in Oxford Street – but sadly the scheme came to nothing.

At the 'bring and show' we had a projection debut from a guest, Yi Li. Glass artist Pippa Stacey projected two of her beautiful chromatropes with transparent enamel providing permanent colour and Denis Bushell showed some American slides including Broadway and early Mickey Mouse adventures.

Lester Smith showed a 'pot pourri' of lantern slides featuring movement. This began with slides from the fabled Hughes Giant Choreutoscope. The device itself has never been seen in modern times but Lester showed us a drawing of the mechanism that would have

given the effect of continuous movement and then projected a 'dancing sailor' choreutoscope to show this. Further slides demonstrated a wide variety of types of movement with subjects including a train and coach, a singer and pianist, a long slide of a hunt, a web with spider eating a fly, an acrobat walking on his hands ... and, of course, man eating rats.

The final section began with our own wonderful Juliette Harcourt rising with the mighty Wurlitzer (played by Mike Wood), singing 'Love me, and the world is mine' accompanied by a Bamforth song slide set. Jeremy then showed a very different American set of a parody of the same song. Nick Hiley gave a fine rendering of 'Is there any room in heaven for a little girl like me?' Following a medley on the Wurlitzer, Juliette finished the day singing 'Arrah-Wanna', a strange Irish–American Indian matrimonial venture. The meeting closed with a message of appreciation from Stephen Herbert.