

# SPECIAL EXTENDED SPRING MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

## BIRMINGHAM AND MIDLAND INSTITUTE, BIRMINGHAM

Saturday 30 April to Sunday 1 May 2022

Around 70 MLS members from the UK and overseas managed to travel to Birmingham and take part in this extra special two-day meeting of the Society. The excitement and pleasure of gathering in person was palpable. Not only that, we had a superb programme of excellent and varied presentations to enjoy.

Our new Chair, Richard Feltham, welcomed everyone warmly and introduced the first item – from our former Chair Jeremy Brooker, along with Carolyn Brooker on the lantern, Nick Hiley narrating and live cello accompaniment. The fantasy, concerning a child prodigy cello player, was created for the occasion from largely homemade slides featuring a young Jeremy and son Sam. As the child prodigy ended up in the circus we were treated to some original equine circus slides, all including a cello.



Our new Chair, Richard Feltham – a man of many waistcoats!



Zoom Rockman's Boris Johnson skating on thin ice, as 'the Rinker'

Next to take the stage was a familiar figure in Professor Ignatius Rumsby (alias Richard Feltham) who regaled us with the life story of his 'brother Arbuthnot' whose unsuccessful career as estate agent, barber/dentist, fisherman, horse and pig rider, pork and rat eater and dreamer of nightmares until he finally fell apart (literally), was accompanied by some strangely familiar slipping slides.

Zoom Rockman made a welcome reappearance following his talk at the Autumn meeting (see TML 29) where he saw John Beale's 1877 skater slide 'The Rinker' – and ingeniously transformed this into Boris Johnson "skating on thin ice". Zoom took us through how he has developed his amazing paper puppets since October with increasingly complex paper mechanics, from a full range of muscular movement in their faces to conversion into automata using first one, then several, cams, drawing on magic lantern slide mechanisms. Singers B.B. King, R.L. Burnside, Bob Marley and the Wailers and rapper Kanye West all featured.

Jacques Prenez was unable to come so Richard Crangle gave Jacques' presentation to celebrate his 50 years of collecting. He had selected 10 unusual objects, all extremely rare, for different reasons. They comprised a phenakistoscope, a children's camera obscura, an ivory head of Pope Pius VII that could be seen from four angles, an optical box in the form of a building, a watercolour of a peepbox with hidden erotic depths, a leather screen with monkeys giving a magic lantern show, a 200-year-old cardboard lantern, a selection of slides including a Lapiere slide advertising the optician Moussier (the possible inventor of bifocals) and a stunning lighthouse magic lantern labelled 'M. Kohorn'.



Jacques Prenez (there in spirit!) with his lighthouse lantern

Adrian Kok and Else Flim then gave a presentation about Charles Dickens and the magic lantern, showing how the lantern influenced his work and how they highlight this at their Dickens Theatre in Laren (see p. 4).

Mike Smith then introduced his new book *Show People Portrayed*, the third – and last – in his series of books showing how magic lanternists and peepshow exhibitors were portrayed in the art world (see review, p. 8). This volume covers media not in the other two on sculpture and paintings – from the more predictable items such as magic lantern slides, tapestries and porcelain, to the more unusual such as fans, a gingerbread mould (c.1800) and clocks ('pendules fantaisies'). Mike ended by showing a pocket watch with a 20-carat solid gold presenter and peepshow illustrated on the back.



An Arctic resident

After tea Mary Ann Auckland and Gwen Sebus took us to the Arctic in search of Sir John Franklin. No fewer than 42 expeditions went after the doomed 1845 expedition to the Canadian Arctic, and eventually the wrecks of HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror* were found by Parks Canada in 2014 and 2016. The talk began with their film inside the wreck HMS *Terror* (but no magic lantern was visible among the artefacts seen there). However magic lantern shows were recorded on some of the search expeditions and, accompanied by hand-painted slides from their own collections and lent by Annet Duller and Peter Gillies, Mary Ann and Gwen mapped out how the story of the search for Franklin unfolded.



David William Noakes, creator of the 'quad' and lantern lecturer



*In the theatre and market room: 1 Carolyn Brooker at the lantern; 2 Mike Smith; 3 Annet Duller and Philippe Khazzaka; 4 Lester Smith; 5 Annet, Else Flim, Adrian Kok and Jean Louis Coicault; 6 Frog and Nicole's lanterns; 7 A technical difficulty!*

*With thanks to the photographers: Mary Ann Auckland, Stephanie Delazeri, Else Flim, Anastasia Kerameos, Philippe Khazzaka, Gwen Sebus and Ine van Dooren*

Richard Crangle followed up his article on the 'quad' lantern (TML 30) with a closer look at the man behind it, David William Noakes (1859-1934). The son of a hay merchant and Greenwich wharf owner, Noakes was given a toy lantern at age 8 but always "wanted something better still". After reaching the top of the range he began making his own adaptations. In 1887 he set up an optical business as part of the family business in collaboration with C.W. Locke (1849-1925). Together they made and developed lantern hardware, sold and hired out lantern slides, and also worked as jobbing lanternists and lecturers. They were resident lanternists at the Crystal Palace and Royal Albert Hall. Focusing on the hay business, Noakes sold up in 1897 but continued with lantern lectures until c.1924.

Next we were privileged to have a public reading from no less a person than Charles Dickens himself (Adrian Kok) with his lanternist (Else Flim). We were reminded of Mr Dickens' connection with and popularity in Birmingham and that in 1869 he



*Nicole Mollett's stunning handmade slide of Gandalf with moving eyes and mouth*

was President of the BMI. Mr Dickens sketched out the development of his first novel *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (a.k.a. *The Pickwick Papers*) and the characters in it, such as Sam Weller. He then read the hilarious, but near tragic, ice skating – and ice sliding – story from the book (Chapter 29) accompanied by a beautiful set of black and white slides.

Keeping up the Birmingham theme the day ended with a highly entertaining celebration of Brum. First the Spencer family took us on a musical tour of the 'city of 1,000 trades', starting with a sing-a-long 'Round and Round Spaghetti Junction'. This included the canals and railways, a



*Mr Dickens returns to Birmingham*

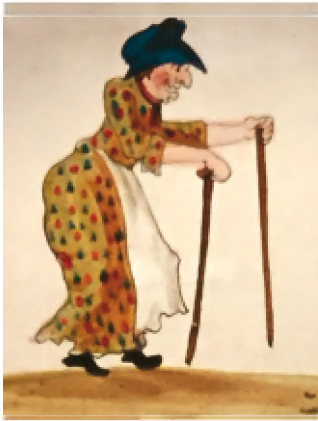


*A skating scene from The Pickwick Papers*

blacksmith, plus a few recreational activities, finishing in Hall Green at Sarehole Mill – much loved by local resident J.R.R. Tolkien. He was the central character for the magical and fantastical final adventure with Frog Morris and Nicole Mollett. Following the (real) story of his childhood, the mature Professor Tolkien met up with his friends the dwarfs and Gandalf, the wizard, in central Birmingham. Following dinner at a bear-run balti house they set off to retrieve the dwarfs' treasure (to pay the bill) from a dragon occupying a factory south of the city. After finding various items in the canal, including Gollum, a conversation with a tree, and an encounter with goblins, members of the audience helped project the final showdown in the factory and



*The fight with the dragon – with help from volunteer projectionists from the audience*



From a Fürth slide (Bernd Scholze)



A slide from Aladdin and The Wonderful Lamp

defeat the dragon. The handmade slides, especially the talking Gandalf and eco-conscious tree, were stunning – what a finish to the day!

Sunday began with Jeremy Brooker setting the scene for David Jones's discussion of phantasmagoria by making the case for this type of show continuing well into the 19th century with Carpenter's moving phantasmagoria lanterns of 1850, Pepper's Ghost (and Henry Dircks's more sophisticated version) and Henry Morton's spectacular lectures in Philadelphia (1868-70). David Jones then looked at the spread of phantasmagoria through the arts and to Spain.

He pinpointed the exact location of Robertson's 'Fantasmagorie' shows as the refectory in the cloisters of the abandoned Capuchine convent in Paris. Here Charles Nodier saw and was influenced by the shows, including the imagery in his novels. In turn he influenced Victor Hugo who wrote a poem and Louis Boulanger, a painter and lithographer, who produced *Le Ronde du Sabbat*, a hugely popular work. Boulanger's figures appear in magic lantern slides found in Spain and in 1844-48 audiences were enjoying – but not being terrified by – the optician Dalmau's shows in Barcelona, accompanied by beautiful music.

Bernd Scholze then presented his meticulous research that explained why German slides were very common in England from the end of the 18th century onwards. John Scott, an English colourman, took his blue dyes to exhibit at the 1790 Spring Fair in Frankfurt and certainly saw the 'philosophical toys' – such as magic lanterns and optical toys – from that city and Nürnberg at the fair. These were unknown in London then but Scott placed an order with a factory in Fürth, near Nürnberg, and from 1791 to 1806 sold these lanterns and slides in London. Trade stopped

between 1806 and 1813 (the Napoleonic Wars) but then continued through other importers to the 1850s. Using slides from his and Martin Gilbert's collections Bernd explained the distinctive styles of slides, colours, bindings and labels that showed they were without doubt from Fürth and Nürnberg, but sold exclusively in England.

Next Sergi Buka and Martin Gilbert presented magic shadows. Sergi began by 'playing his fingers' (see photo) then presented an ever-changing parade of historical figures in silhouette. With his hands he created a variety of animals, birds and people including a dog, cat, stag, rabbit, kissing couple and Elvis. His swan not only fed from the water but preened its feathers – Sergi's head! Martin then showed a series of articulated silhouette slides including a boxing kangaroo, dancing sailor and courting couple with unexpected addition. The session concluded with Martin challenging Sergi with slides depicting how to make shadows – but nearly always, Sergi's were far superior.

Following tea, a rare treat – slides from the Royal Polytechnic Institution of London presented by Lester Smith and company. Jeremy Brooker began with an introduction to the Polytechnic and how the building – and slide shows – developed to accommodate a mass audience



Sergi Buka 'playing' his hands and creating a stag



Tower Bridge (above). Martin and Nicole contemplate the aftermath of their final show!

**THE MAGIC LANTERN** is edited, designed and produced by Mary Ann Auckland and Gwen Sebus, assisted by Richard Crangle and George Auckland.

Letters to the Editors can be sent by email to: [editor@magiclantern.org.uk](mailto:editor@magiclantern.org.uk)

Material from this publication may not be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without the written permission of the Editors.

Printed by Stormpress, Exeter – [www.stormpress.co.uk](http://www.stormpress.co.uk)

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

[www.magiclantern.org.uk](http://www.magiclantern.org.uk)  
© 2022 The Magic Lantern Society  
ISSN 2057-3723



in a special theatre with four lanterns projecting the enormous slides. We were then treated to two slide sets – *The Lady of the Lake*, based on Sir Walter Scott's poem, narrated by Juliette Harcourt, and *Aladdin and The Wonderful Lamp*, narrated by Nick Hiley. The show finished with two stunning Polytechnic chromatropes.

In the last show Martin Gilbert, ably assisted by Nicole Mollett, showed us all how it was done – a fantastic feast of beautiful hand-painted slides, dissolving views, chromatropes, stunning visual effects, parades and movement of all types. We went into space, through the seasons, saw auroras, earthquakes and polar volcanoes, witnessed a naval battle, went through Tower Bridge, experienced the Exeter Theatre Fire, shivered in a graveyard and finally took a balloon trip high up in the sky. A wonderful finale!