

ZOOM ROCKMAN'S AUTOMATA

Mary Ann Auckland

At end of June, George and I set off for Shoreditch eagerly anticipating a tour round Zoom Rockman's exhibition *Automata: An exhibition of mechanical paper puppetry*. Since he first came to our Exeter summer meeting in 2021, MLS members have thoroughly enjoyed two talks by Zoom (see *TML* 29 and 31) showing the extraordinary way this inspired artist, cartoonist and animator has developed his more-and-more intricate paper automata and drawn inspiration from the ingenious mechanical movements in 19th-century magic lantern slides. For example, his transformation of John Beale's 1877 ice skater into Boris Johnson 'skating on thin ice' was nothing short of brilliant.

We arrived at the historic Briggs Building – once home to Thomas Briggs (London) Ltd, maker of sacks, bags, etc., and also sole tent maker for Her Majesty's War Office – by Regent's Canal and very close to where Zoom first lived. He and his mother Kate welcomed us at the door and led us to the studio down a cobbled courtyard. Inside were Zoom's architectural canvasses and copies of *The Zoom!*, the comic he launched in November 2009, aged 9, and privately published every six months. His main character 'Skanky Pigeon' – a bird who resonates with all Londoners – then migrated to *The Beano* when Zoom became that comic's youngest contributor, aged 12. From the age of 16 his cartoons began appearing in *Private Eye* and



The Briggs Building by Zoom Rockman



Some early works – The Zoom!



Greta Thunberg, et al.

he has now contributed over 100. His wonderful 'long slide' of the Queen's life, 'The Ascent of Ma'am', appeared on the front page of the Jubilee issue (No.1574, 27 May-16 June 2022). In the main area of the exhibition were several more familiar works that we had seen on video at our meetings, some as work in progress, as well as new projects. Greta Thunberg and the sea turtle (made for the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow), American blues guitarists and some of his other 'simpler' puppets were displayed on one wall. The more complex pieces were in separate cases but here we could operate the mechanisms and appreciate close up the sheer inventiveness of how Zoom has created intricate animation and expression through multiple, independently moving, cam-operated layers. Examples included The Beatles' rooftop concert, Kanye West and US Presidents Nixon and Trump. The latter two arose from Zoom illustrating Iain Dale's book *The Presidents: 250 years of Political Leadership* (Hodder & Stoughton, November 2021). What an inspiring visit!



The subtleties of Kanye West



Musicians' row



Presidents Nixon and Trump