

SUMMER MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

LACEY GREEN MILLENIUM HALL, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, UK

Saturday 23 July 2022

Over 40 people gathered for our summer meeting in the rural setting of Lacey Green. There was much interest in the trading stalls and the growing display of dissolving views needing clarification and partners. Chair Richard Feltham welcomed everybody – old members, new members and visitors.



Sandra Lawrence

Trevor Beattie started the programme with a fascinating perspective on the changing qualities of the hero from Victorian to Edwardian times (see p. 1). Then Sandra Lawrence talked about Ellen Ann Willmott (1858-1934) the well-known horticulturalist, friend of Gertrude Jekyll and Queen Mary, photographer and magic lanternist. A colourful character, she was born to wealthy middle-class parents and received £1000 each birthday (around £90,000 in today's money) but spent it all and ended up bankrupt. However she was famous among gardeners for growing exotics although none of the three world-class gardens she created survive intact. She was also a prolific photographer from the 1880s to the month before she died – reportage, portraits, still life, as well as the plants and gardens she loved. Miss Willmott "exhibited in the lantern" and at her death she had four magic lanterns and hundreds of slides, but all were sold in a 1935 auction. Sandra has seen about 100 slides in the History of Science Museum, Oxford, lodged there before 1934, and is searching for more (marked 'EW' or with her full name). She is also salvaging Ellen's extensive but rotting archive of papers and photographic prints – but no magic lantern slides there.

Sandra also began the 'Bring and Show' section asking for advice on creating slides from digital images. Andrew Gill then showed a slide box with heating compartment (see p. 2) to avoid condensation and perhaps also the slides cracking in cold weather when heated too quickly by the lamp. John Holden unveiled a superb carbon arc lamp with clockwork motor by Jules Duboscq (1817-88) dating from the 1870s or later. John has located 16 of the 509 made. Lester Smith showed a slide of the Royal Polytechnic – or possibly not. Martin Gilbert finished with an unusual French 'skipping' slide from around 1856 that showed the young lady skipping from the front ... and back.



Lester Smith's angry man and multi-movement clown

Peter and Delia Gillies brought to life their fascinating article on the world of hop picking in Kent (see TML 30) with many more slides and interesting tales. Lester Smith followed with a tantalising dip into his amazing collection. Many of the long slides were at least 200 years old, beginning with nursery rhymes and a beautiful *Cinderella*, then moving on to monkeys carrying out human activities such as smoking (see also p. 9) and a curious range of characters with large noses. Slides by Archer and Desch (a beautifully painted angry man), along with a rare cricketing long slide and an outline of Napoleon formed by trees followed. An extraordinary slide, shown at the Royal Polytechnic, of a clown with eyes that moved separately, moving eyebrows and mouth that stretched both ways was a real highlight.

Next Martin Gilbert updated us on progress in reuniting the dissolving views members had brought along (see p. 5) before we enjoyed strawberries and cream with our tea thanks to Ine van Dooren, Ester Roosmaa, Juliette Harcourt and Richard Crangle. Then Andrew Gill brought a wonderful day to a fitting conclusion with 'Lantern Magic' beginning with a puzzle slide and comprising a cornucopia of mainly life-model slide sets to elicit every emotion, plus a caption competition. We enjoyed a Victorian gent's trousers sticking to a park bench in *Wet Paint*, the near-tragedy of *The Signal Box* and the tear-jerker of Albert and his toy horse and cart in *The Doctor's Fee*. Then we sang along to Bamforth's song set of *The Bonnie Banks O'Loch Lomond* and laughed at *Poor Pa's Trousers*. A dramatic set of *The Loss of the Titanic* (with the song 'Be British') was followed by the scary and salutary tale of *Roger's Ghost* before the show



John Holden and his carbon arc lamp

and day concluded with the Bamforth's song set of Sir Arthur Sullivan's magnificent and very popular *The Lost Chord* composed in 1877.

See p. 15 for some more images from the MLS meeting.



From Andrew Gill's set *The Signal Box*

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 – 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



IMAGES FROM SUMMER MEETING



Delia Gillies presenting 'Opping

These are a few more images from the
MLS Summer Meeting in Lacey Green
(see p. 16)



From Andrew Gill's Loss of the Titanic



*Lester Smith and two images from
his long slides c.1800-20*

Answer to teaser on p. 2: This is an image created by Stable Diffusion, an open-source artificial intelligence program that converts text to images (not a search engine). The words put in were 'magic lantern projector'.