

AUTUMN MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

SWEDENBORG SOCIETY, LONDON

Saturday 22 October 2022

Around 50 MLS members and guests enjoyed a programme of rich variety at the Swedenborg Society. After an introduction from Chair Richard Feltham and a heartfelt round of applause for Martin Gilbert who organised the meeting despite recent sad events (see p.12), Jeremy Brooker started the day with a Life Model set *The Story of a Crime*, a 'Gordon League ballad'. The Gordon League was set up after the death of General Gordon at Khartoum in January 1885 and probably continued until World War II. Under the patronage of Princess Louise, they put on free entertainment for poor people and encouraged the involvement of women. The ballads were written by Mrs Clement Nugent Jackson under the pseudonym 'Jim's wife, Annie Hyde'. Jeremy described Life Model sets as 'problematic' for modern-day performance, with recitations no longer part of our culture and issues with the language describing the dark stories often depicted. Our story told of a mother turning to drink and killing her young son with a copper shovel. Although "true in every word" it appeared to be rather loosely based on an actual case in Lambeth, London.



Chair Richard Feltham, closely observed by Emanuel Swedenborg

Next Gordon Casbeard showed a set *The Power of Music*, with 'revised' reading, featuring

'Yehudi' playing his violin to a crocodile among the pyramids with disastrous results – for the crocodile. He then showed an amazing variety of slides advertising musicians and other turns, some well known, some largely forgotten. Billy Cotton and his band, Anne Shelton and Tessie O'Shea were in the first category.



From Gordon Casbeard's *The Power of Music* – 'Yehudi' playing for the crocodile

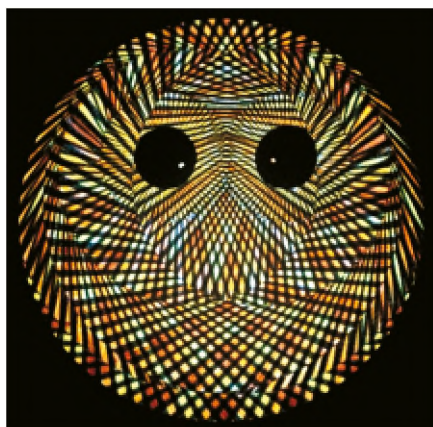
However Scott and Foster 'as modern as tomorrow', Gladys Church 'the whistling songstress' and Kitty Iris 'Prince of all Principal Boys' more the latter, despite Gordon's excellent research into all of them. In this centenary year of the BBC, perhaps 'Big Bill Campbell and his Radio Cowboys and Ranch Girls – melody and mirth in the Old Log Cabin – direct from the BBC' is overdue a revival.

Jennifer Tucker then brought us *The Pageant of America*, an extraordinary and ambitious Yale University project from the 1920s and 1930s. The aim was to make social, economic and labour history in schools (with a focus on 11- and 12-year-olds) more interesting and entertaining through visual means – magic lantern slides. Between 1925 and 1929 Yale University Press published 15 books, each with around 900 images and a set of slides of paintings, exhibits, maps, places, etc. Jennifer introduced us to the main drivers behind the project – founder of American Studies at Yale Ralph Gabriel, local Connecticut teacher Mabel Casner, leading proponent of audio-visual education in social studies Daniel C. Knowlton and Editor of Yale University Press Albert Brook. The University has over 1,000 of the slides stored, some of which will, Jennifer hopes, be displayed in a new History of Science Gallery. If you know anything about the project please get in touch with Jennifer.

After lunch Richard Crangle, Jeremy Brooker and Martin Gilbert (the three editors) gave us a preview of the MLS's new book *The Magic Lantern Dancer*. Coming soon, this will be the definitive publication on the choreutoscope and related devices. These mechanical slides, invented by John Beale (see *TML* 29), have a series of up to 12 images arranged on a wheel or linearly that progress to give movement. The book will be well-illustrated throughout, largely drawing on the wonderful collections of MLS members.



From the selection of skipping slides (see overleaf), left to right: Lester Smith's Harlequinade characters (Clown, Harlequin and Pantaloone); Nick Hiley's unusual variation on the subject; Dick Moore's pig and parrot; Mary Ann Auckland's 'dandy'



Pippa Stacey's 'owl' chromatrope

Clown and the policeman as well as Mr Punch – all these would have been instantly recognisable to the contemporary audiences for the slides.

The 'Bring and Show' section included Pippa Stacey showing three of her beautiful hand-made chromatrope-based slides – two featuring star shapes and the third, the 'owl', with an astonishing asymmetrical movement that mostly resembled an owl's face. Richard Rigby showed the lamp used successfully in his lantern for the Bristol meeting (p. 14) that cost an exorbitant £6.99! Richard also showed a slide carrier for 35mm slides and suggested projecting these could bring a new lease of life for the magic lantern – and lanternists.

After tea Lester Smith delved into his collection for slides with royal connections, starting with an extraordinary set of long (around 2 feet or 60 cm) slides depicting the Coronation parade of King William III and Queen Mary that took place on 11 April 1689. Featuring dignitaries such as the Closet Keeper of the Chapel Royal, the Master of the Jewel House, the Lord Great Chamberlain and the Gentlemen and Ladies of the Bedchamber, the slides probably date from around 1690. Lester then showed slides of various British monarchs, several by Carpenter & Westley, including Henry VIII, William IV and Victoria (and Prince Albert). A final family photograph showed the late Queen as a child – thus winning the prize on offer (a 1977 Silver Jubilee teatowel) for a magic lantern slide of Queen Elizabeth II! Lester finished with slipper slides and other unusual slides with movement.



Ghostly images and St Dunstan and the Devil (below right) from Reg Bosley's show

Robin Palmer then talked about the background story of *The Children in the Wood* (that became *The Babes in the Wood*) (see p. 1) and, with Richard Rigby narrating the original ballad, projected the full set of slides by Edmund Wilkie (once of the Royal Polytechnic Institution).

Lester Smith and Mary Ann Auckland presented a variety of skipping slides (or 'jump rope' for our US members). With contributions from other members as well as from their own collections the 'skippers' and 'rope turners' ranged from Mr Pickwick and Robinson Crusoe in the literary world to 'the countryman', military figures and various animals. Several featured the Harlequinade characters – Harlequin, Pantaloon,



Lester Smith's slide of Henry VIII by Carpenter & Westley



From Lester Smith's long slides of the Coronation of William and Mary: the King and Queen (left); the Gentlemen and Ladies of the Bedchamber (right)

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Finally Reg Bosley, with a suitably-clad Frog Morris narrating, presented a seasonal show on the subject of ghosts – illusions, hallucinations, apparitions and pranks. This was based on a famous lecture 'Gossip About Ghosts' from the 1890s by George R. Tweedie, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry and lecturer at the Royal Polytechnic Institution. Stories included the 'Hammersmith Ghost', illustrated by William Blake, the 'Drummer Ghost', described by Walter Scott, Macbeth, the 'Tapestry Room Ghost', 'St Dunstan and the Devil', and the 'Spectre Wife of Bavaria'. After many tales of spectral phenomena, magic, necromancy and alchemy, we left well prepared for Hallowe'en!



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@magiciantern.org.uk

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