

# The Magic Lantern

## 'SHIVER ME TIMBERS'

Martin Gilbert

Who says history doesn't repeat itself? Yo-ho-ho. At the end of January we gathered for the MLS AGM at the Musical Museum in Brentford, West London (see p.14). This museum is well worth a visit in itself and, it turns out, they have an extensive lantern slide collection – but that is an article for another day.

A few of us had arrived early to set up and the market stalls were starting to show signs of life. Peter and Delia Gillies, as usual, were putting out some lovely items for sale when I suddenly spotted a pair of slides titled *Pirates' Cave* on their table. I couldn't believe my eyes. These had to be from the



1. The Pirates' Cave. Peter and Delia Gillies, static slide number 1



2. The Pirates' Cave. Martin Gilbert Collection, static slide number 2, designed for the three string-driven moving panoramic effect slides (Figs 3-5) to be superimposed onto it



3. The Pirates' Cave. Martin Gilbert Collection, effect slide number 1

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same collection that we knew we shared together (see *TML* 32 p. 5) but had bought through completely separate routes.

I have owned four wonderful slides from an unknown *Pirates' Cave* (my name for them) set for over 12 years and had always been aware that number 1, at least, was missing. I initially presumed that this was a title slide and in fact the four together were sufficient to make the sequence work within a show. At that point I had no idea a sixth slide also existed that makes the set very special indeed.

The slides purchased from Peter and Delia comprised the 'missing' number 1 slide which, far from being a title slide, sets the scene in the cave with lookouts watching the sea and various pirates happily gathered around what we can only imagine is a barrel of rum (Fig. 1).

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4. The Pirates' Cave. Martin Gilbert Collection, effect slide number 2



5. The Pirates' Cave. Martin Gilbert Collection, effect slide number 3



Without giving away too many secrets of how dissolving view shows are created, the static slide number 2 (Fig. 2) has three blacked-out areas. These allow the panoramic moving images in effect slide number 1 (Fig. 3), which has the static slide picture area blacked out, to be projected in those three areas. These two slides (Figs 2 and 3) must be projected at the same time and the superimposition should be visually seamless. The effect slide shows the pirates fleeing from the cave with an abundance of loot, swag and plunder. The string-driven mechanism travels from left to right as seen above.

The same principle applies for effect slide number 2 (Fig. 4) which projects a seemingly endless procession of boats and ships. This is also superimposed onto the static slide number 2 and projected via the third lens of a triple lantern so it 'takes over' from effect slide number 1 (Fig. 3) once that one has come to the end of its procession.

The last panoramic effect slide, number 3 (Fig. 5) shows the pirates retreating. This is projected from right to left as seen above, the pirates being greeted by the British Royal Navy sailors. A sword fight between the pirates and sailors ensues, as seen within the panoramic effect slide. Again, this must be quickly projected on the screen once effect slide number 2 has finished its movement.

The final slide, static slide number 3 (Fig. 6) shows the sailors and pirates fighting for their lives within the cave ... and we will never know who won, but we can probably guess.

We now have a complete but highly complex six-slide dissolve set that can only be projected by a triunial lantern. This set would have been expensive to produce and perhaps

only a handful were ever made and sold at the time. This is probably the reason why we have never seen this set projected before.

These very high quality slides were produced by W.C. Hughes, London. Despite searching through W.C. Hughes' catalogues of the time, I cannot find any reference to this set. The probable date for the slides would be the late 1880s or early 1890s. We can only hazard a guess at what the correct title and the full description would have been. If any MLS member has any more information about the set or any reference to the set being projected, or perhaps even has the same set in their collection, please get in touch.

The AGM was a thoroughly enjoyable day for many reasons including this and I certainly came home with two slides that I will always call highly-valued treasure, never 'booty'.



6. The Pirates' Cave. Peter and Delia Gillies, static slide number 3