

A 1950s MICKEY MOUSE CHOREUTOSCOPE? (‘Not to be confused with Magic Lanterns’)

Stephen Herbert

If the choreutoscope seems to be a very Victorian device, as detailed and illustrated in the Society’s wonderful new book *The Magic Lantern Dancer* (p.16), I recently made a ‘discovery’ which I suggest might be considered, with a little licence, to be a 1950s plastic version.

In 1962 a schoolfriend and myself purchased from our local toystore, for seven shillings and sixpence (search with your favourite search engine), a small plastic projector for little loops of perforated 16mm film, each featuring some 39 static images in black and white line, of cartoon films – some specially prepared, some based on Walt Disney movies. The projector, by Bell Toys, was first brought onto the market in Britain around 1950. Our ‘show’ comprised a Sinbad story, and we were unable to obtain more loops so the toy soon languished.

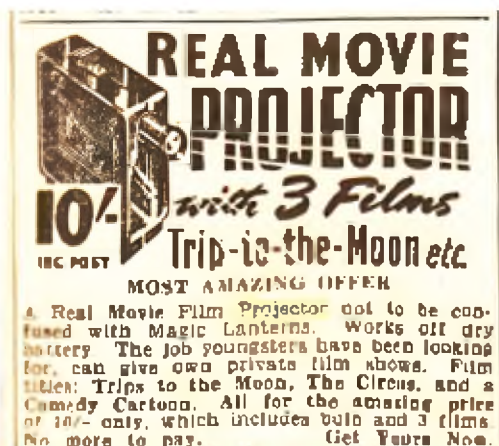
Unbeknownst to us, Bell had also made a Mickey Mouse Home Cine version, also apparently for static images. However, it had ‘Cine’ in the name, and advertisements sometimes referred to it as a “Real movie projector” – “not to be confused with Magic Lanterns”. I took this to be hyperbole typical of toy manufacturers and sellers (see note). However, while researching the whole subject for a post on my blog *The Optilogue*, ‘My First Projector’, I examined several of these strips, acquired later and stored away for decades in my collection, to discover that some had short sequences ‘suggesting’ movement. This was



1. Bell Toys’ version of the projector; there were several other versions in the 1950s, by Bell and by Merit Toys.



2. The Bell projector for short 16mm loops, with moulded Mickey design



3. A December 1950 advertisement for the Bell Projector, by Headquarter & General Supplies, London (British Newspaper Archive)

A key question: was it possible to rock these sequences to and fro, and so repeat this action *ad infinitum*, as with the choreutoscope? Not an easy question to answer. The original versions had a slider knob on top that advanced the strip by friction, in one direction. Attempts at a ‘quick change’ would have been – and I can testify, were – difficult. A later, larger model had a sprocket and crank handle, and it may be that this could be used to (carefully) reverse the action when required. The bulb was turned off automatically by a leaf switch between pictures, so any screen ‘animation’ would have been very flickery. Investigations are continuing. Items shown here are from my collection.

NOTE

Other toy projectors of the period, the NIC from France, Dux from Germany, and the MiniCine from Britain, had two-phase and four-phase animation, but this is well recorded. For an introduction to these and other toy projectors, see the *Optilogue* blog, the optilogue.wordpress.com.

4. Mickey Mouse in Bell Toys’ *The Champ* (left). This four-picture sequence from a longer ‘animated’ scene gives some idea of the limited animation (with black screen in between each picture) that could be shown.

5. A short ‘animated’ sequence from the Bell Toys film loop *The Circus* (right) (Stephen Herbert, January 2023)

