

# 47TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

## THE MUSICAL MUSEUM, BRENTFORD, LONDON

Saturday 21 January 2023

Around 60 members and guests had joined our meeting at the Musical Museum by mid-afternoon although attendance at the 'business end' of the AGM in the morning was somewhat lower (32). Here Chair Richard Feltham opened the session by observing the sad passing of some key members during the year, including prominent performers Pat and Ray Gilbert, Annet Duller and Peter Spencer. However, he also noted the arrival of many new – and younger – members that bodes well for the future of the MLS. Richard summed up the meetings held during the year and appealed for more volunteers to help with these and other MLS tasks.

Richard Crangle gave his report as Secretary and Treasurer. He began by thanking Jerry Fisher, the Membership Secretary, Keith Uttridge for despatching sold books and Richard Rigby for taking over as accounts Auditor. In fact Richard had audited the 2022 accounts by 4:00pm on 3 January – a new record! Richard Crangle flagged up that the MLS may need to change its status to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). He reported a challenging year financially with the cancellation of the Convention in April and increases in printing and postage costs. He also noted a worrying level of lapsed memberships and felt book sales could be boosted given the quality and price of those on offer. Commenting on the 2023 budget Richard pointed out that venue costs had increased but the subscription had effectively reduced by 10 per cent as the 'pandemic' rate was being maintained.

On behalf of Ine van Dooren, Richard Feltham reported an issue with the MLS archive that needed a new 'home'. Mary Ann Auckland reported on *The Magic Lantern*, encouraging follow up to articles when members have interesting information and material to add, and introducing the new series on the 'four seasons' (see p. 11). She also reported on *Connect*, the MLS online newsletter focussing on sales and wants run by George Auckland. This has now passed 80 issues and maintains a very high 'opening' rate among members. Juliette Harcourt said the Facebook page was 'ticking over' with 700 likes and urged members to post. Anastasia Kerameos reported that the number of MLS Twitter followers had broken the 1,000 mark. She also flagged up that the website was now 'secure' so had moved up the 'search' rankings.

In comments from the floor Mike Smith wondered whether livestreaming meetings deterred people coming in person given the poor turnout (at that point) and asked about MLS 50th birthday plans. Stan Roberts had been unable to attend for three years so valued the livestream. Some of those online (17 concurrent viewers at the time) also commented that they were unable to attend personally – including



*The Secretary, Chair and Vice-Chair (l to r) listening to the TML report* a member from New Zealand. The first organised meeting of the MLS was in October 1976 and the Committee would be looking at ideas for the 50th anniversary celebrations.

Under 'any other business' John Townsend showed his brother Charles's new book *The Magic Lantern* and reported that the issues over the Noakes quad lantern had not yet been resolved. The Committee was then re-elected with the addition of Jeremy Brooker.

George Auckland offered a bottle of red 'Les Frères Lumière' Côtes du Rhône wine (see p. 2), with one of the brothers operating a magic lantern on the label, in a free raffle (later won by Frog Morris).

Richard Crangle, Martin Gilbert and Jeremy Brooker presented the new MLS book *The Magic Lantern Dancer*. As Richard commented, the book is needed by both those who know anything about choreutoscopes and those who know nothing. It was available at the launch price of £20 (see p. 16). Jeremy pointed out it contained an unprecedented collection of images. Martin and Lester Smith then projected some choreutoscope slides, starting with a very rare Beale dancing clown (eight images). Then we saw slides – including the dancing skeleton, lively sprite and 'Friday and the bear' – using the six-image Steward mechanism and eight-image Hughes mechanism, as well as the only two known US slides that used the Briggs rotary mechanism, namely the dancing skeleton and dancing sailor. After a final dentist slide, orders for the book should have soared.

After lunch the Chair summarised the MLS Awards announced in *TML 33* and congratulated the winners – Miguel Herrero Herrero and the Annet Duller Troupers.

Andy Cook then discussed 19th-century lithophanes – 'shining stones' – his passion for around 30 years. These three-dimensional translucent pictures in porcelain were usually taken from paintings, engravings or, later, photographs. Andy described both the production techniques that enabled great subtlety in the images and their history, starting in the mid-1820s with probable industrial espionage. After a 'golden age' (1828-65) when they were very popular and used for many purposes such as screens, lampshades and cups, production declined until the 21st century when we have seen a revival with computer-generated images and modern translucent materials. He showed



*The new book and three editors – Jeremy Brooker, Richard Crangle and Martin Gilbert (left).*

*Andy Cook's lithophane (right) of Kaiser Wilhelm I on horseback – a 19th century production from the Plauke factory located in Plauke bei Arnstadt, Thuringia, Germany and with the backstamp 'ppm'. Behind the Kaiser are Otto von Bismarck and Helmuth von Moltke.*

pictures of examples from the main manufacturers including KPM (Berlin), Alexis du Tremblay (France) and Meissen (Saxony). The images included portraits, architectural subjects, natural phenomena, humorous scenes, a stunning example of Kaiser Wilhelm I on horseback and a photograph of Samuel Colt's home (of revolver fame) with a lithophane in every window!

Next another guest Raven Hurst narrated and sang her own story *The Keepers of Hearts* illustrated by lantern slides created from the illustrations in her book, projected by Allan and Irene Marriott. The story told of young Jack, the son of a drowned fisherman, and his journey to seek out the Sea Fairies of Hastings (who "swim with the tide") and mend his mother's broken heart. The slides, made by Allan, were an excellent example of modern slides.

Lester Smith then presented a 1907 film of the May Day Procession in Llandudno, Wales. As well as local worthies and the May Day Queen, other participants included chimney sweeps, milk distributors, brewery, laundry and theatre. Lester donated the original nitrate film to the National Library of Wales and this was a copy.



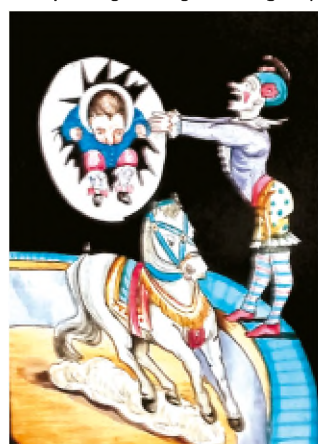
Gwen Sebus' 'Babes in the Wood'!

Sebus followed up with her own 'babes in the wood' slides (see TML 33) and some slides of circus animals including a rare elephant on a tricycle. Pippa Stacey projected some of the beautiful slides she made for her *Tales from the Glass Forest*. Sandra Lawrence showed her attempts at reproducing Ellen Willmott's early 20th-century photographs (now digital images) as magic lantern slides.

Lester returned with a rich variety of mechanical circus slides. These included clowns, acrobats, a low-wire act and a most impressive plate juggler as well as acts involving dogs, horses and balancing elephants.

Finally Frog Morris and Nicole Mollett, in their own inimitable style, evoked the excitement of Lord George Sanger (1825-1911) coming to town with his circus. Original coloured photographic slides showed the highly decorated wagons with exotic acts and exotic beasts rolling through the streets.

However a few of their own additions (as always) then made an appearance with Professor Porkus (a pig) and Madame Mawling, the oldest lion-tamer in the world, together with sideshows of the amazing bearded man and the mesmeriser. After a range of acts passing through the Big Top, the show ended with a grand finale of 'Professor Porkus and the High Wire of Hell', with the good professor crossing over skeletons and other phantasmagorical phenomena.



A great end to the day.

Well done Martin and Lester for a great programme!

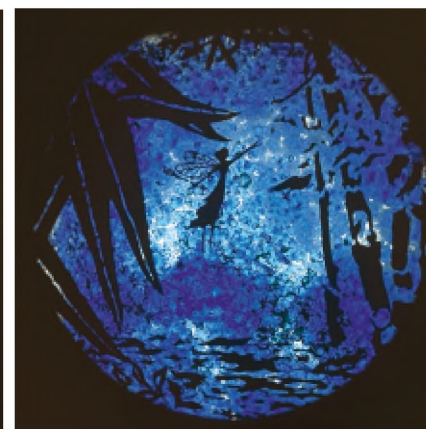
One of Lester Smith's circus slides (left). Nicole and Frog bring the circus to town (middle) (slide from the Fleur de Lis Museum, Faversham). Professor Porkus takes a bow (right)

After tea Lester projected a range of mechanical slides by Desch of Paris – one of the greatest French makers of lantern slides in the 19th century. These are often signed and dated, and before starting Lester demonstrated a typical Desch slide with a brass pull tab. Bulls and noses featured, skipping and shuttlecock-playing girls, and Lester's favourite – the transformation of a small man into a giant man.

The 'Bring and Show' section started with a selection of slides used in cinemas from the Musical Museum's own collection (of many thousands), presented by Stan Roberts. Gwen



Two images from Raven Hurst's *The Keepers of Hearts* (photo: Allan Marriott)



Two of Pippa Stacey's fairy slides. On the left the wicked fairy queen is hidden in the forest undergrowth and on the right she is flying through the glass forest with an arrow