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Cover picture:

Images of the premises of lantern and slide suppliers are rare, but to find one on a lantern slide is even less common. This (1890s?) view of Temple Bar, London, captures the shop of Newton & Co., on the right behind the hansom cab. The shop sign, with the motif of a pair of spectacles, reads 'Newton & Co. Opticians to the Queen [illegible] 3 Fleet Street', and there is an interesting (but tantalisingly indistinct) sculpture above the shop fascia. Does anyone have any similar slides that accidentally show notable addresses?

The slide is numbered 54 and carries the text 'The Griffin Fleet St. / Aubrey & Wheeler' typed on a label pasted on the top edge. (Alan and Rene Marriott Collection).

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WHAT COUNTS?

Richard Crangle

ONE OF THE ABIDING QUESTIONS for all collectors, curators and scholars has always been 'what counts?' What do I decide to include in my collection – or museum, or ground-breaking academic study – and what gets left out for someone else (possibly the refuse collectors) to deal with?

This has particular relevance for the magic lantern in its traditional role as an item of 'pre-cinema history'. For most of the last 70 or 80 years there has been a reasonably constant view of which media 'count' (lantern, panorama, optical toys ...) as parts of this story, varying according to personal taste but broadly based on the collecting aims of Will Day, as refined and expanded by John and Bill Barnes among many others. Museums and private collections have come and gone, different aspects of the history have come to the fore and receded (the 1996 'centenary' of cinema being one focusing of interest), and there have always been variations between individual views, but the basic 'pre-cinema' outline has remained fairly steady.

The times, though, are a-changin'. This is particularly so in the academic world, and is well illustrated by the recent book *Multimedia Histories*.[1] This collection of essays is based on papers given at a conference and so reflects a wide diversity of approaches, some more engaging than others. But if you can live with the usual 'remediating' challenges of academic jargon (and, to be fair, *Multimedia Histories* is easier to read than some in that respect) the book offers an interesting snapshot of some of the directions in which study of 'the area formerly known as pre-cinema' is now moving. The regular 'Visual Delights' conference in Sheffield and its companion journal *Early Popular Visual Culture* are other indicators of the same trends, as is Thomas Weynants' remarkable *Early Visual Media* website: stage magic, the fairground, television, waxworks, body-building and many other activities, all now have a place in the picture.

Multimedia Histories does a number of interesting things: not all of them really succeed, but most have implications for a relatively narrow area of interest like the study of the magic lantern. For a start, the scope of 'what counts' is widened considerably and no longer depends on a perceived connection to the cinema as known in its mid 20th-century heyday. So there are, for example, essays on 'the cultural politics of social dancing' (dealing with illustrated manuals on how to do the latest dance craze), or the silent 'musical' works of John Cage in the context of the 1950s Cold War. It doesn't particularly matter whether you or I would relate those subjects directly to our own (personally, I wouldn't, but that doesn't mean they're not interesting or relevant). The important point is simply the fact that the scope is widening and becoming less predictable. This is, I think, a good thing – but also a challenge to those of us with specific interests, to demonstrate how and why 'our' media contribute to a new and ever-changing definition of the bigger picture.

The other important shift is the attempt to link the histories of optical and other media to what now tend to be known as 'new media'. These are the many entertainments and cultural phenomena of the digital world: computer-generated cinematic 'effects' and characters, the internet (compared to a 'curiosity museum' in one article) and computer games are among the examples tackled by contributors to *Multimedia Histories*. This works less well, mainly because the new media are developing at such an astounding pace that it's very hard to pin down how they fit into culture and history, and how (or if) they relate to 'old' media with which we're more familiar. The conference that gave rise to *Multimedia Histories* was in 2003, and some of its essays dealing with new media already look quite dated, when seen from the infinitely more complicated web world of Facebook, MySpace and Second Life.

We may or may not like these developments, but that's the way the world works – even in what we might have thought were relatively stable and well-defined areas like the media and events of (mostly) the past. But perhaps that's where the real interest lies in an area like lantern history: in spite of all our best efforts we still can't be sure of its precise size and shape, there's still room for debate and new ideas. The question of 'what counts?' is always going to be an open one that can never be finally and definitely answered.

Contributions to *NMLJ* are always needed: please send them to the editorial address given on this page. The next issue is expected to appear in Autumn 2008, but articles, illustrations, comments and all other contributions will be very welcome at any time.

1. James Lyons and John Plunkett (eds), *Multimedia Histories: from the magic lantern to the internet* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007). 275pp, ill. Paperback £15.00, ISBN 0 85989 773 0; hardback £47.50, ISBN 0 85989 772 3.