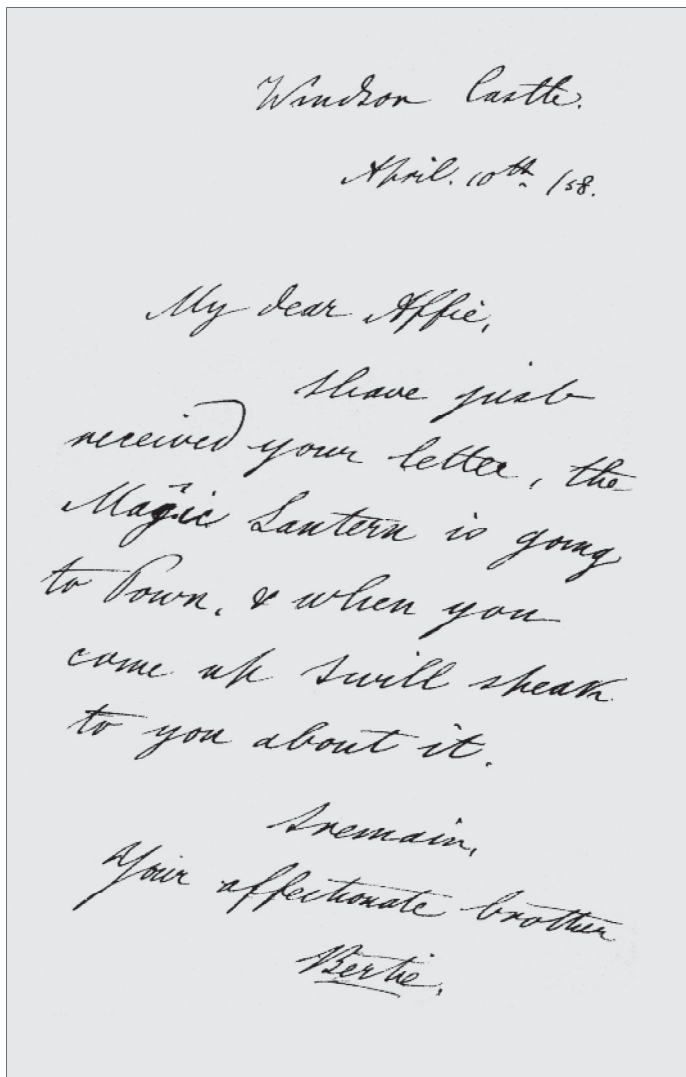


# BITS AND PIECES

## A ROYAL LANTERN



This intriguing letter from the mid nineteenth century has come to light in a private collection:

The text reads:

Windsor Castle  
April 10<sup>th</sup> / 58

My dear Affie,

I have just received your letter, the Magic Lantern is going to Pown, & when you come up I will speak to you about it.

I remain,

Your affectionate brother

Bertie

In itself this little scrap of communication would be unremarkable, except for the fact that 'Bertie' was Albert Edward, the Prince of Wales (1841–1910), later King Edward VII. The letter was written to his younger brother Prince Alfred (1844–1900), later created Duke of Edinburgh. In April 1858 'Affie' was aged thirteen and Bertie was sixteen. The identity of the recipient of the lantern, 'Pown', is not entirely clear: this may be a family nickname for another brother, either Prince Arthur (1850–1942), later Duke of Connaught, or Prince Leopold (1853–1884), later Duke of Albany. Leopold's birthday was three days before the date of the letter, though at five years old he might have been a bit too young for a magic lantern.

Perhaps this is a case of 'putting away childish things' as Bertie moves into his late teenage years and a nursery toy is passed on down the line of children. Maybe Affie had his eye on a favourite instrument and had been enquiring about who might be its next owner; one hopes he was not too disappointed that it went to his younger brother.

More to the point, this hurried note shows that in the 1850s the lantern was accepted as an accessory for the younger members of even the best households. It is, unfortunately, not likely to be possible to find any further information about this lantern, though it would be fascinating to know what it was, which of the various manufacturers claiming Royal patronage supplied it to the Royal Household, and how it was used by the young Prince. It is even tempting to imagine it still hidden away in some corner of a forgotten attic in the Castle – perhaps someone should keep a watching brief on jumble sales in the Windsor area ....

RC

## THE LANTERN IN LITERATURE

The indefatigable Amy Sargeant supplies a couple of further references to the lantern from the works of well-known English authors. In the first, H.G. Wells shows that recycling is not a new idea, using dissolving views as a metaphor for social changes some 25 years before the reference from *The Shape of Things to Come* that appeared in a recent issue (see *NMLJ*, Vol. 9 No. 3, p. 47):

*The new order may have gone far towards shaping itself, but just as in that sort of lantern show that used to be known in the village as 'Dissolving Views', the scene that is going remains upon the mind, traceable and evident, and the newer picture is yet enigmatical long after the lines that are to replace those former ones have grown bright and strong, so that the new England of our children's children is still a riddle to me. The ideas of democracy, of equality, and above all of promiscuous fraternity have certainly never really entered into the English mind. But what is coming into it? All this book, I hope, will bear a little on that.*

H.G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (1908), pp.12–13.

Ten years earlier, Kenneth Grahame (best known, of course, as the author of *The Wind in the Willows*), used the lantern show as a simile for a sequence of memories angrily called up in a nursery quarrel between two children:

*The female tongue is mightier than the sword, as I soon had good reason to know, when Selina, her riven garment held out at length, avenged her discomfiture with the Greek-fire of*

*personalities and abuse. Every black incident in my short, but not stainless, career – every error, every folly, every penalty ignobly suffered – were paraded before me as in a magic-lantern show. The information, however, was not particularly new to me, and the effect was staled by previous rehearsals.*

Kenneth Grahame, *Dream Days* (1898), p.115.

Perhaps the fact that the stream of invective was 'not particularly new' and familiar to the point of staleness, while not a direct description, gives a subconscious suggestion of the author's recollection of the nursery lantern show – something rather overfamiliar and less than completely impressive. Metaphors and similes can work in both directions!

RC, with thanks to Amy Sargeant.

## A BULL'S-EYE FOOTNOTE

An earlier reference to the use of the term 'bull's-eye' in relation to a lantern has turned up since the appearance of my article in the last issue. Note 3 of that article mentioned citations in the Oxford English Dictionary from 1839 and 1851. But in Tiberius Cavallo's *The Elements of Natural or Experimental Philosophy*, published in four volumes in 1803 by T. Cadell and W. Davies, of The Strand, London (Vol. III, page 273), appears this description:

*On the fore part of the lantern there is a thick double convex lens C D, or a plano-convex (usually called a bull's eye) of short focus. The lantern is closed on every side ...*

The bull's-eye describes the lens rather than the whole lantern, but are there any earlier references still to be located? *Deac Rossel*