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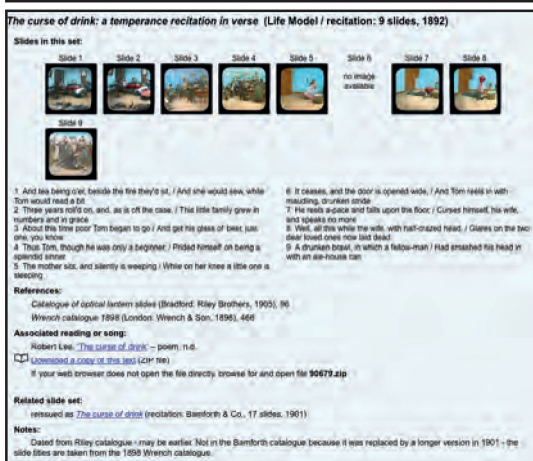
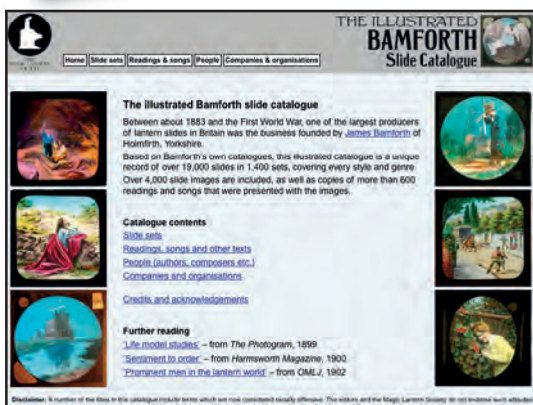
THE ILLUSTRATED BAMFORTH Slide Catalogue



The Illustrated Bamforth Slide Catalogue
DVD-ROM

London: Magic Lantern Society, 2009

£25.00, available from the Society at www.magiclantern.org.uk



IMAGINE WORKING FOR YEARS in virtual darkness, trying to sort through boxes of slides, desperately trying to work out what is there and what might be missing, and then finally someone turns on the light. For those like me who have always been fascinated by Life Model slide sets, this wonderful DVD is the light and Richard Crangle, Robert MacDonald and Dennis Crompton have just turned it on.

As collectors will know, a surprising number of Bamforth sets are still around, but the problem has always been trying to understand them. What story is being illustrated? How many slides were in the set? When was it issued? Where is the associated reading? These are some of the questions that this DVD sets out to answer for the Bamforth company, and it answers them magnificently.

During some 30 years of slide production James Bamforth and the family company that he developed produced around 1,400 slide sets, containing more than 19,000 individual slides. This DVD lists every set that Bamforth included in its catalogues, with information on the release date and the number and captions of the slides. There are in addition clear images of more than 4,000 slides – a fifth of the company's output – plus the readings and songs that accompanied more than 600 sets, two-fifths of the total number.

At last it is possible to put the surviving sets back into context. The DVD arranges the data so that the user can view separate listings of sets; of readings and songs; of people; and of companies and organisations. There is no search facility across all listings, but each can be viewed in a number of ways, leading you quickly through to the images and texts themselves. The DVD design and production team are to be congratulated for creating such a simple and uncluttered set of pages.

The scale of Bamforth's output is remarkable, and the release of this DVD does not mark the completion of the Bamforth cataloguing project, which is ongoing and daunting in its scale. The company was founded in Holmfirth, Yorkshire, by James Bamforth, a studio photographer and former painter and decorator. He began producing slides around 1883, when he was about 40, and the business was so successful that in 1898 he built a large extension onto his studio to permit slide manufacture on an industrial scale. The 1901 Bamforth slide catalogue ran to 234 pages, and production continued until the First World War.

Some sets had just a few slides, but the DVD lists an astonishing 103 'Services of Song', some lasting over two hours and containing more than 60 slides. It is difficult to estimate how many copies of an average set were produced, but three contemporary articles, included in the DVD, provide some suggestive figures. In 1900, for example, it was claimed that Bamforth's stock could include 2 million slides in sets, plus hundreds of thousands of individual slides. That seems plausible, given that in 1902 a single storeroom was said to contain shelf room for 1.5 million slides.

As the DVD suggests an average of around thirteen slides per set, these figures indicate that at certain times of year Bamforth's factory in Holmfirth held an astonishing 150,000 slide sets in stock, presumably around the October start of the new lantern season. The DVD booklet notes that some slide readings were produced in runs of 500 copies, but these figures suggest that, over several years of distribution, Bamforth would in fact have sold many thousands of the most popular sets. As the DVD catalogue reveals, a number of sets were so popular that they were revised and expanded over the years, indicating continuous demand.

The method of distribution took these sets to an even wider audience. Bamforth did business with hirers as well as retailers, and the DVD booklet acknowledges that the hire trade was 'one of the principal distributors of Life Model sets'. Many surviving Bamforth sets show signs of having come from hire stock, with numbered boxes and stickers identifying those known to be cracked. Some of the slide sets on the DVD show variations in colouring and mask type, which are probably due to the replacement of individual slides during a hire set's life.

Gratitude is due to the institutions and collectors whose slides were photographed for this DVD, as it is the volume of material which makes this such a valuable resource. It is hoped that collectors will come forward with other Bamforth sets missing from the catalogue, so that the project can be completed. But the outline catalogue of Bamforth's output is already complete, and this DVD can be strongly recommended as both a research tool and a marvellous way of experiencing the full range of a single slide manufacturer.

Nicholas Hiley

