

# SUMMER MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

MEMORIAL HALL, ST LUKE'S CHURCH, WELLSWAY, BATH, SATURDAY 18 July

Fifty-two members attended, eight apologies.

The centenary of WW1 inevitably brings with it a succession of rather depressing anniversaries. The spring of 1915 saw the second battle fought around the otherwise fairly insignificant Belgian town of Ypres, where 100,000 soldiers died and gas was first deployed as a weapon of war. With all these horrors, it is easy to forget the daily battles fought on the home front. The first zeppelin raids on London began in April 1915, and with the mobilisation of a civilian workforce and increasing food shortages, this conflict would affect everyone. Drawing on his extraordinary archive of lantern slides, **Andrew Gill** put a human face to this global tragedy. The grimy faces of munitions workers or the eager crowds lining up to volunteer for active service add a pathos and humanity, every bit as affecting as the usual litany of unimaginable statistics or the roll call of military victories and defeats.

On a lighter note (in every sense), we turned from zeppelins to *The Balloonatics of Bath* in the company of **Mervyn Heard** and **John Townsend**. This was a particularly fitting subject for this meeting, held just weeks before the International Balloon Fiesta in nearby Bristol. Now in its thirty-seventh year, this is billed as Europe's largest ballooning event. We saw some wonderful hand-painted slides, but surely the most delightful was one advertising Salom and Co's optical business in Princes Street, Edinburgh. The basket of the balloon was filled with boxes of slides and other related material, while a variety of chromatropes and lanterns hung precariously underneath. Mervyn showed a humble transfer slide of the eccentric Frank

Salom & Co., 98 Princes St, Edinburgh (John Townsend collection)



Frank Hodges Butler (Mervyn Heard collection)



Hedges Butler, calmly discussing the foundation of the Royal Aero Club with his friend Charles Rolls (of Rolls Royce fame) and daughter Vera. The party are quaffing bottles of champagne, which were then tossed overboard for collection by his long-suffering chauffeur.

**Peter** and **Delia** Gillies next shared another gem from their seemingly endless supply of Wilhelm Busch slides. *The Hostile Neighbours* is a personal favourite of mine, describing the unfortunate consequences of a musician and a painter sharing adjacent lodgings.

The day finished in style with *Wot' the Dickens*, presented by lanternist **Keith Uttridge** with delightful readings by **Jennifer Uttridge** and **Darren Crockett**. Dickens's stories really come to life when read out loud, as Dickens so ably proved during his own lifetime; here supplemented with Life Model slides. Most lantern enthusiasts will know the lovely York & Son slides which accompany the Christmas story *Gabriel Grub*, a tale which must surely have been written with the magic lantern in mind. Less familiar perhaps are the slides produced by the same company in 1881 for *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Subtitled *The Wanderings of Little Nell and her Grandfather*, this provides opportunities for such picturesque settings as a Punch and Judy show and a waxworks exhibition. The slides themselves can be seen on the Lucerna website, but be warned. Without wishing to spoil the ending, sufficient to say things don't turn out too well for poor Nell Trent ...

Jeremy Brooker



British Tommies in France (Andrew Gill collection)



London Recruitment Office (Andrew Gill collection)



Munitions worker (Andrew Gill collection)



Refreshments for the Troops (Andrew Gill collection)

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