

AN UNUSUAL MAGIC LANTERN

John Hyett

Some time back I visited an antique/collectables/junk shop as I had been told he had just purchased a collection of 4,000 magic lantern slides. He didn't have them on the premises and at that stage was not prepared to split the collection at an asking price of AU\$60,000 (roughly £33,450 at the current rate of exchange). This being slightly outside my budget I settled for what he told me was a magic lantern for the grand sum of AU\$50. It didn't look much like a magic lantern to me but had a long brass tube and a lens (Fig. 1). It was put to one side in my collection for a few years until I decided to investigate further.

It is, of course, a projector, but missing the condenser lens and light source, and of a design I had not seen before. Hours searching the internet produced a somewhat similar design (Fig. 2) by Radiguet & Massiot, French manufacturers, successors to Molteni.¹ There are many differences in design and manufacture. The obvious similarity is the lamp house, evidently designed for the use of an electric light source, with no chimney to allow the escape of gases produced by combustion light sources.

The most striking difference is in the length of the tube between the slide holder and the objective lens. The minimum length of the tube is 20cm, which increases to about 38cm when fully extended (Fig. 3). There is



2. Radiguet & Massiot lantern

no rack and pinion for adjusting the length or any mechanical device to adjust the focus, all focusing is done by sliding the tube in and out by hand. A notable difference between this lantern and other lanterns in my collection is that there is only one objective lens.

The slide holder also differs from a more conventional lantern in that the slot into which the slide is placed is only 6mm, precluding the use of any slide thicker than about 5mm. There is a piece of sprung steel at the base of the slide holder, presumably to maintain the correct height of the slide for projection. It would appear that the slide would have to be around 10cm in height, 4 to 5mm thick and over 13cm in length. The operator would also have to ensure that any slide had been removed before sliding the tube back to the minimum length as the inner tube in that position protrudes into the slide holder.

The reason for the long tube extension escaped me as I find with my more conventional lanterns that the further away the screen is, the shorter the distance between the slide and the objective lens and vice versa, the closer the screen the longer the distance between the slide and the objective lens. Not having a condenser lens that would fit the lantern I had a wooden sleeve turned to hold a smaller, spare lens allowing me to project a slide. Using a 9cm by 28cm Ernst Plank slide (a poor fit but it does the job) I found that with the tube fully extended the image was focussed at about 5m from the projector, casting an image around 70cm in height.

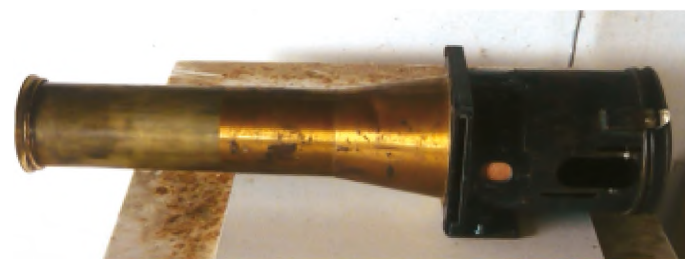
There are no maker's or manufacturer's marks on any component of the lantern but it is well engineered. The unusual slide size and the long tube make me think that the lantern was manufactured to suit a special purpose – but what that purpose could be still eludes me.

1. www.diaprojection.unblog.fr/2011/02/15/radiguet-massiot-successeur-de-molteni/. Accessed 13 April 2020

One of our resident experts suggests this might be an early 'gobo projector'. Much loved by lighting directors, these are designed to project a single image, such as a stencil or a scene, as a stationary lighting effect.



1. The lantern



3. The lens at full extension

THE MAGIC LANTERN is edited, designed and produced by Mary Ann Auckland and Gwen Sebus, assisted by Richard Crangle and George Auckland.

Letters to the Editors can be sent by email to: editor@magiclantern.org.uk

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Our usual quarterly meeting report does not appear in this issue – our planned summer meeting did not take place because of the public health situation in the UK. We plan to resume this regular feature as soon as we can.