

# The Magic Lantern

## A LOCKDOWN LANTERN DISCOVERY

*Martin Gilbert*

During these strange days of lockdown I was able to purchase and get delivered a very rare lantern indeed. Without being able to see it before buying, I had to assume it was as described – a magic lantern. The black wooden box arrived with original-looking hooks on top and to the side. The lid would originally have had simple pin hinges made from bent metal but these were missing. Inside was a tray with side handles enabling the lanternist to reach down and lift it out. Once removed, this revealed a carefully painted interior with border pattern and a bullseye-lens magic lantern.

The lantern is very nearly complete – only one lens element and the rear carrying handle are missing.

Bernd Scholze helped me to identify it as dating from around 1800, possibly a few years before, and made in Fürth, just outside Nürnberg, in Germany. A few of these lanterns are known but the box is extremely rare and this could be the first travelling show set originating from Germany that has come to light in recent times. *TML* readers may remember the Savoyard box with lantern and long slides found in the roof of a house in France described by Roger Gonin (see *TML* 8), and a Dutch example is also known. *(continued on page 3)*



The editors of *The Magic Lantern* wish all our readers the very best 'compliments of the season'. We hope everyone will find a Covid-free way to celebrate and trust that 2021 will bring many more magic lantern shows than has, alas, been possible in 2020.



*from Gwen Sebus' collection*

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(from page 1)



Inside the box. Looking down (note the border pattern) (left) and with the tray lifted out (right)



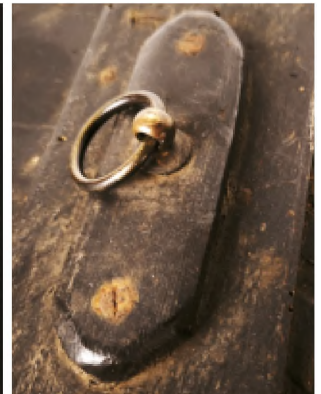
The lantern still holds some secrets. Unlike Roger's example, there were no slides in the box. The lanternist would almost certainly have projected long slides at this time and you might expect these to be stored in the tray at the top of the box. However, no known format of long slides produced in Germany or nearby at that time appear to fit easily into the tray. One possibility is that the tray was used for other equipment and the slides were carried separately.

On the other hand, the hooks perform exactly as expected. The set on the top can be used with a single leather strap to anchor down the lantern, a necessity as the box was carried around by the travelling lanternist.



This is the familiar image from contemporary prints, statuettes and lantern slides (see the image of Mike Smith's statuette on page 1 and the slide image, right). The hooks on the sides are designed to accommodate leather carrying straps. The box itself is made from pine, a relatively lightweight wood.

This early lantern is an exceptionally rare survivor and has already taken many journeys of its own. Hopefully this will set us off on a new journey of discovery and learning.



A travelling showman from a Dutch long slide c.1800, and detail of the hook