

## WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?

This is the start of a new series suggested by Lindsay Lambert. Many of us come across magic lantern slides where there is clearly a reference or joke that would have been obvious to our ancestors but is now obscure or lost. Send us images of any slides in your collection whose meaning has been lost in the mists of time, and your editors, with the help of Lindsay and Lester Smith, will attempt to enlighten everyone. If you have an unusual slide that you have successfully researched, please let us have that too – another member may well be puzzling over something similar in their collection. Of course, if you disagree with our interpretation, feel free to suggest an alternative.



Lindsay Lambert is starting the series with two fairly common slipping slides.

### The man in the bottle

We have all seen slipper slides of a man appearing in or jumping out of a bottle. This seems to have its origin in an 18th-century fraud which is described in Ricky Jay's *Learned Pigs & Fireproof Women* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1986).

A notice appeared in the *General Advertiser*, London, on 11 January 1749 announcing an extraordinary performance by a conjuror who would play music on a walking stick, identify masked persons and read the mind of any woman attending. He would also enter a wine bottle on a table in full view of the audience.

Despite the high ticket price, a full house waited in vain for the conjuror and, as the audience became impatient, a voice offered, for double the price, to get into a pint bottle. In the ensuing riot the theatre was destroyed, the takings stolen and various valuables pilfered from the spectators. The hoax is generally attributed to the Duke of Montague who set out to demonstrate human gullibility. It generated prints, pamphlets and references in many media – including magic lantern slides – that were still appearing a century later.



Slides provided by Gwen Sebus (*Harlequin in bottle*) and Mary Ann Auckland (*tailor*)



### The man in the cabbage

Another slipper slide shows a man with scissors who appears out of a cabbage. He's a tailor, and 'cabbage' is (or was) that profession's slang for the excess scraps cut away from the cloth. The figure of speech 'he has his work cut out for him' comes from the same source – the cut-out cloth is ready for the tailor to sew together.

Lindsay Lambert, Mary Ann Auckland, Gwen Sebus and Lester Smith