

## OBITUARY

### ANN HECHT (1929-2021)

Many MLS members will remember Ann Hecht, a previous Editor of our *Newsletter*, who passed away in March at the Maryville Care Home in Brentford, London. Until suffering a stroke at the end of 2011 Ann had been a very active member of the Society, often joining us on trips overseas. Ann originally trained as an illustrator at the Chelsea School of Art and undertook graphic design work throughout her life, initially for small presses and advertising agencies. Through this she met Hermann Hecht (1923-1985) and they married in 1957.

Ann and Hermann together collected magic lantern slides and gave shows in their home in the 1960s and 1970s. After Hermann's death in 1985 Ann edited his seminal work *Pre-Cinema History: An Encyclopaedia and Annotated Bibliography of the Moving Image Before 1896* (British Film Institute/ Bowker Saur, 1993) and she contributed to *Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern* (MLS, 2001). Their slide collection is now in the Screen Archive South East at the University of Brighton, with many of its contents listed on Lucerna.

Ann's other passion was weaving. The discovery of a loom in the attic of the house they moved to in 1964 led to her learning to weave then teaching, researching, collecting and writing about textiles. She designed and edited the *Journal of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers*. Her collection of Guatemalan and Peruvian textiles is now in London's Horniman Museum.

In 2008 Ann 'downsized', moving from Kenley, Surrey, to London where she was nearer one of her two daughters and her grandchildren.

#### Ann and Hermann's daughter Ruth writes:

I grew up surrounded by my parents' collection of magic lanterns and magic lantern slides, not to mention other optical toys. When you're a child, there is, of course, nothing unusual about your parents' obsessions – it's just an ordinary part of family life! My parents kept their slides in a tiny box room in the eaves off their bedroom, which also contained old suitcases and various neglected bits and pieces. I loved going in there as a child and secretly pulling out slides and holding them up to the tiny window.

Throughout my childhood my parents gave magic lantern shows for friends and family. They'd hang a white sheet between our open plan dining room and sitting room and took it in turns to operate the lantern, sometimes using pre-recorded narration on an old reel-to-reel tape recorder. Mum would always provide a great buffet spread and the show would inevitably evolve into a party.

My mother's main interest was weaving, whilst Dad's was his research into pre-cinema history. It was a standing joke in our family that Dad would never finish the research because it was never ending. So when he died suddenly in 1985 in his early 60s, it was a real labour of love for my mother to get his research published, especially as it was done before computers, and was on hundreds (if not thousands) of typed A5 pieces of paper in dozens of ring-binders (all now in the BFI Archive). It was an incredible task for Mum to edit these and see the work through to publication – but she did, and I know how much *Pre-Cinema History* is now valued by collectors and academics.

The Magic Lantern Society was a really important part of Mum's life – partly, I think, because of the links with Dad and with people who knew both of them. I know she loved



going to the meetings all over Europe and always enjoyed watching shows. We were really pleased that Mervyn Heard gave a show at Mum's care home for her 87th birthday in 2016, and introduced magic lanterns to a new audience of care staff – which they still remember!

#### Mike Smith recalls:

I remember Ann and Hermann very well – both were regular attendees at the quarterly meetings in the early years of the Society. After Hermann died, of particular significance was an informal meeting at Ann's house in the early 1990s at which I was present. This meeting was to discuss Hermann's bibliography – a huge advance in scholarship in the complex field of pre-cinema. This meeting was to discuss how to take this enormous project from index cards to publication. The end result was *Pre-Cinema History* published by Bowker Saur in association with the British Film Institute in 1993. The Magic Lantern Society encouraged and guided Ann throughout this project which is a lasting and fitting testament to both of them.