

## A NEW DISCOVERY

### French Magic Lantern and Stand, circa 1790-1800

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This is a 'one-off', totally extravagant, magic lantern and stand, probably created to decorate a fashionable French home. I had not seen or heard of this lantern in the past, and its discovery is as exciting as the Noakes Quadruple reported in *The Magic Lantern* earlier this year (*TML* 30) – the only difference being that the Noakes lantern had been seen, photographed and used in public in earlier years.

This lantern and stand are made from mahogany, decorated with Wedgwood porcelain plaques mounted in gilt bronze frames, with other gilt decorations. The lantern is octagonal, its height can be adjusted and it also revolves on its axis. The lantern would have been illuminated with a small oil lamp (now missing) and the lantern body has a metal lining to protect the woodwork from the heat of the lamp. There is ample evidence to show that the lantern has been used.

The stand, which is the original stand for this lantern, comprises four curved feet linked by a domed crosspiece. Two patinated and gilt bronze neoclassical figures on mahogany plinths surmount the feet.



Detail of a neoclassical figure and a Wedgwood plaque



Adjacent to the figures there is a compartment that is opened with a flap and above there is an octagonal platform with drawers decorated with more porcelain plaques. The lantern and stand are 58¾ inches (150 cm) tall and 15 inches (38 cm) wide.

All the parts were made in France, but the design shows a strong English influence enhanced by the presence of the mounted Wedgwood plaques. It is characteristic of the taste and style of Dominique Daguerre (c.1740-96) who specialised in the importation of English furniture and Wedgwood plaques, for which he was, from 1787, the exclusive French agent.

Both the lantern and stand are in the Directoire style, a period in the decorative arts, fashion and especially furniture design in France concurrent with the Directory (1795-99), the later part of the French Revolution. According to Wikipedia, the Directoire style: "uses Neoclassical architectural forms, minimal carving, planar expanses of highly grained veneers and applied decorative painting" and represents a transition between the fashionable styles of Louis XVI and the Empire.

The lantern and stand are in a private collection.

Photography by Guillaume Benoit