

# SPRING MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

## SWEDENBORG SOCIETY, LONDON

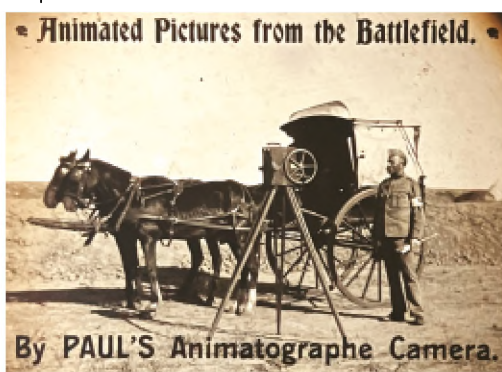
Saturday 22 April 2023

Nearly 60 members and guests came to some part of the Spring Meeting in April, including many from mainland Europe. Others joined us via the livestream. After a welcome from Chair Richard Feltham and the resolution of a slight 'technical hitch' in finding the controller for the black-out blinds, Lester Smith projected an eclectic selection of slides from his collection. These included Māori scenes, early flying pioneers, unusual street scenes, vendors of various types such as the first on-street chewing gum seller (1907), a range of vehicles such as early cars, magic lanterns with cinematograph attachments, and street parties. Some were particularly rare images, such as Robert W. Paul's Animatographe camera used in the Boer War.

Next Jeremy Brooker brought us the story of the demise of 'The Magic Lantern' – a venue for exotic dancers and a bar since the 1960s, located on route 20 at the Monson/Palmer border, Massachusetts, USA. The neon road sign was a local landmark, offered for sale for a buyer with a large garden and deep pockets (\$20k plus expenses). Jeremy composed an ode to this establishment illustrated with photographs and adverts for past acts such as Beverley Bliss, the Italian Stallion and Joanna with her 'dozen lovely lantern ladies'.



Richard Feltham – with Emanuel Swedenborg behind



The chewing gum seller and Robert Paul's camera from Lester Smith's presentation

taken. In 1902 *The Photogram* magazine distributed a lecture plus 60 lantern slides by Kelsey which sparked considerable interest. Allan projected a series of images of Kelsey's favourite subjects – East Sussex windmills, lighthouses, street scenes and well-lit buildings around Eastbourne, beachfronts and winter landscapes, Brighton's aquarium and railway station, and railway slides, all mainly taken at night. One of his most well-known prize-winning images was 'The Rescue' showing the schooner *Laura Williamson* and the local lifeboat going to the rescue in 1906. At the end Irene revealed a surprising fact about Ellis Kelsey – he liked dressing up as a woman! This might explain his preference for night photography.

After lunch Dick Moore gave us a pre-recorded presentation on Lapierre hand-painted circus slides often, depicting the most famous acts of the day. In 1848 Auguste Lapierre set up his shop in Paris making metal-bodied toy lanterns and handed over the business to his son Edouard in 1875. Their slides covered a wide range of subjects, including the circus, typically with green binding and clear backgrounds. To set the scene Dick gave a brief history of the modern circus starting in 1768 with ex-Sgt Major Philip Astley displaying equestrian acts in London and then adding jugglers, clowns, tumblers, dogs, etc., to form the circus we know today. Britain and France became the centres for early circuses. The slides often name the circus and that, along with the image, enables the acts to be identified. One of the best known and most thrilling was Andrew Ducrow, a man of many talents, famous for his 'Courier of St Petersburg' equestrian act, first presented in 1827 at Astley's Amphitheatre. Others included equestrienne Madame Rose Gourschmidt of the Cirque Napoléon, acrobat and horseman Jean-Baptiste Auriol of the Cirque Impérial and the clown Charles Keith. Dick ended with a 'parade' of slides showing a wide variety of acts – in France 'paraders' performed in the street to draw audiences into the circus. We were then able to talk to Dick in Connecticut 'live' via the internet for Q&As.



Lapierre slides from Dick Moore's presentation. (Top) Andrew Ducrow (with a comedy equestrian duo behind) and (bottom) the acrobatics of Jean-Baptiste Auriol



An East Sussex windmill and Eastbourne Pier from the Marriotts' presentation on photographer Ellis Kelsey

Allan and Irene Marriott then told the story of Ellis Kelsey, a photographer who worked mainly on the south coast of England and specialised in low-light, bad weather and night-time images. This followed on from their presentation for the virtual Autumn Meeting in 2020 (see TML 25). Ellis was born in Richmond, Surrey, in 1866 and began taking photographs in 1889, aged 23, as an amateur. His early images are of Richmond before the family moved to Lincolnshire where they part-owned a farm. When his father, a haberdasher, retired they moved to Eastbourne where most of his well-known images were

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Jeremy Brooker returned to tell us about the Hughes Giant Choreutoscope (see TML 34). The unusual mechanism took larger slides than other choreutoscopes,



(Left) Ine, Gwen, Ditmar, Dominique and Philippe – Annet tribute presenters at the meeting



From Rock of Ages (Gwen's set)



From Pussy's Road to Ruin

enabling highly detailed images of exceptional quality. A rare complete set of 24 from Helmut Wälde's collection is reproduced in *The Magic Lantern Dancer*. Each comprises a series of eight poses which can be changed rapidly backwards or forwards to create a form of animation. These feature fully-developed characters, mainly from the world of popular entertainment, such as circus performers, pantomime artists, music hall acts and even a minstrel troupe. With Helmut's permission, Jeremy had created animated sequences with music showing a comic orchestra conductor, a lovely Japanese dancer and fantastical Jack o'Lantern gliding around the moon. Also featured were some rare and unusual musical instruments – a giant double-bass known as an Octobass, a one-string 'Japanese' fiddle and a flute that could double as a walking stick.

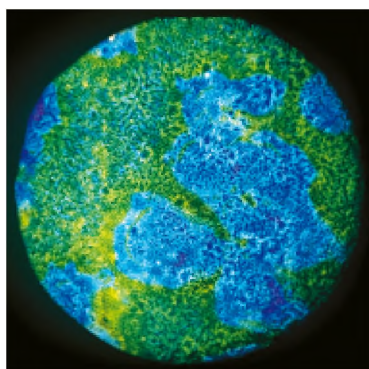
The Bring and Show section included astronomical slides from Aileen Butler, celebrating Earth Day 2023, followed by Charlie Holland with a slide of the Shoreditch dust destructor and electricity generation station (1900) and a call out for information on magic lantern slides in music hall acts. Alan Brindle took up the Earth Day theme to show slides of volcanos erupting, earthquake and tsunami devastation and geysers in New Zealand as well as a little-known early trip to the moon by a magic lanternist. Pippa Stacey followed with more of her wonderful glass art, using 'earth' based pigments to reflect the day. Using amberstone (the yellow in many stained glass windows) and silverstone she had produced stunning results.

The final session was a great tribute to Annet Duller (see TML 34) with all the items having a close connection with Annet. This started with Ditmar Bollaert's film of the special meeting to remember Annet held at Henk Boelmans Kranenburg's wonderful Toverlantaarnmuseum in Den Haag on 25 March. Dominique Santens gave a simultaneous translation from Dutch to English in the room. It began with Henk and the tale of Lord Isegrim, the wolf with new clothes who came to a sad end after consuming farm livestock. Dominique with Philippe Khazzaka then performed 'Give my Love to Scotland, Maggie'. Next Ditmar told the story of his father Herman's show from 1988. This was followed by a stirring rendition of 'Rock of Ages' with Ditmar and Philippe. Else Flim then told us about Annet's life and the beginning of the Dickens Theatre in Laren. Gwen Sebus and Michael van de Leur reflected Annet's love of cats with slides including cats fighting (with audience participation), skipping, washing and fishing in a fishbowl, finishing with the story of *Puss in Boots*. Olivier Havermans shared his recollections of helping Annet, particularly with music. Next Monique Wezenberg presented *Cinderella* – Roald Dahl's version! (She does not marry the prince.) The film concluded with some of Annet's stylish homemade slides including one of many pairs of moving eyes.



Two images from the Hughes choreutoscope slides – the Octobass (left) and one-string fiddle (right) (Jeremy Brooker)

Back 'live' we joined Dominique and Philippe in singing 'Rock of Ages' to Gwen's slides. Philippe sang to *Excelsior!* (by Henry Longfellow) with, near the end, Dominique joining in from the lantern. Then we all joined in 'Give my Love to Scotland, Maggie' (slides given to them by Annet). Next Gwen picked up the cat theme again, with Ine van Dooren sharing her recollections of both Annet and Gwen's mother, Joke Sebus, a good friend of Annet's and another prominent magic lanternist since the 1960s, who died earlier this year. They then gave us *Pussy's Road to Ruin* – with a few significant changes. Adrian Kok and Else Flim brought the programme to a close, on video, with 'The Ivy Green' from Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* with music by Henry Russell, accompanied by a 'rare' set of life model slides purchased from Mervyn Heard ... the rarity being that the images contained no actual life models!



One of Pippa Stacey's 'Earth Day' slides

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

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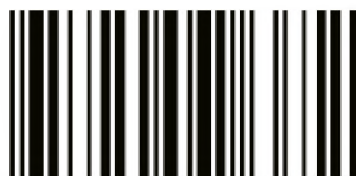
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The technical team – Frog Morris (right) and George Auckland (left) hard at work livestreaming and recording the meeting.