

AUTUMN MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

SWEDENBORG SOCIETY, LONDON, UK

Saturday 19 October 2024

About 45 people, and more around the world online, gathered for the MLS meeting in October. After an introduction from Chair Richard Feltham the MLS social media team – Anastasia Kerameos, Sandra Lawrence and Nicole Mollett – encouraged us, with demonstrations, to post on X (Anastasia) and Instagram (Nicole). This is a great way to raise interest in the magic lantern. They also mentioned the MLS Facebook (currently under revision) and YouTube sites.

We then learnt about the extraordinary eight-hour multi-media spectacle *The Photo Drama of Creation* 'an education in one day', premiered by 'Pastor Russell' (Charles K. Russell), leader of the



Social media team – Nicole, Sandra and Anastasia

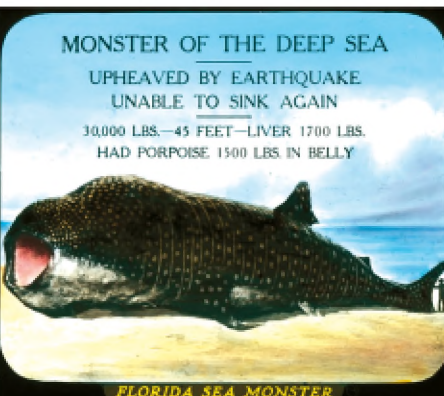
International Bible Students Association (antecedents to the Jehovah's Witnesses), in New York on 11 January 1914. Cathy Surowiec, who has been working on a book about it, set the scene. Comprising hundreds of magic lantern slides, miles of film and many phonograph recordings the show, taking 'creation' from the beginning to modern times (1914), toured to Britain, Europe, Australasia and even Fiji. By the time Pastor Russell died in October 1916 they estimated that between 8 and 16 million people had witnessed it. Ian Christie, whose father probably saw the show in Derry as a youngster, then talked about the film sections, making the point that such multi-media presentations were not uncommon, citing the Salvation Army's *Soldiers of the Cross* (1900) in Australia. He showed Pastor Russell's introduction, a glimpse of the 'starry heavens', Noah's Ark and Christ's miracles. The latter came from Pathé's *Life of Christ* – as did many religious clips used at the time. Jeremy Brooker then made the case for the format being a magic lantern lecture, with the film parts played to music. The lecture format would give Russell's ideas authenticity. He put together the show in great secrecy – he controlled everything tightly – and was without doubt short of appropriate magic lantern slides in places. Some were made 'in house' but most came from well-known makers including Newton in the UK and Briggs in the USA. A late source that filled gaps was La Maison de la Bonne Presse in France. These did not have the captions that characterised the other slides. Jeremy ended with a large panorama (carrier made by Martin Gilbert) of Christians being persecuted in Rome.



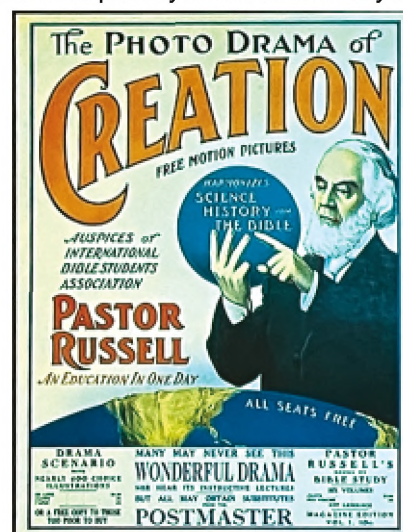
Slides used in the Photo Drama: a Maison de la Bonne Presse slide of the Golden Calf (top); Hell, by Joseph Boggs Beale, showing the typical caption (above left); and a well-known 'sea monster' beached and displayed at the time – and brought into the narrative (above right)

After lunch we went across 'the Pond' to Dick Moore and 'a proper porcine tail' of *Promener le Cochon* – Walking the Pig – chapter 5¼ of his *Once Upon a Time Tales* (sponsored by Dodge Grocery and Hog-Tone 'to build up your hog profits'). In this continuing saga of Puck and Pig – and Pig's wife Maple – the pigs were growing vegetables and, with their good little piglets, taking the produce to market. Pig's roving eye alighted on Gloria Stein-ham – pigfection thanks to Hog-Tone. Then the tale focussed on getting pigs themselves to market and Puck's idea of driving one pig at a time, thus avoiding congestion and enabling a 'best pig' and 'best pig-walking technique' competition. Different techniques included piggy-back, riding backwards, over the shoulder, on a leash, holding a leg and butchering the pig first – all had their drawbacks. Following a short spell in jail as a result, the 'tail' ended happily with Puck and Pig at home. After much verbal wit and some technical difficulties this chapter ended too.

Next we went back to 1897 with Miss Hettie Tufnell from *The Strand Magazine* (a.k.a. Sandra Lawrence), dressed in daring (we were told) yellow as part of her period outfit. After a sales pitch for her publication and describing how she made the slides with



Chair Richard Feltham ... and Emanuel Swedenborg (photo Anastasia Kerameos)



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careful snipping, Hettie told us about an article in the magazine featuring heroines. These were not the well-known ladies such as Florence Nightingale and Mary Kingsley but lesser-known heroines ("some even from the lower classes!"). They included Mrs Margaret Irving who saved a man from under a mail train, Miss Marie Evans who rescued three people from a capsized boat and Mrs Dorothy Pumphrey who saved a five-year-old girl from a well using an unreliable bucket. These were all true stories appearing in the magazine and tracked down by Sandra after being given the set of slides by Richard Rigby.



Pigs gardening (above left) and one of the problems in taking pigs to market (above right)

The Bring and Show section began with Gillian McIver from the team working at the Swedenborg flagging up their imminent event featuring Philip James de Louthembourg's eidophusikon, originally developed in the 18th century. Jon Weller then told us about his unique, he believes, set of slides made by the Baird Television Company in the late 1920s for marketing, training and other purposes. George Auckland projected a moving phantasmagorical skeleton using a recently-purchased mini-device. Richard Crangle treated us to a tongue-twister on a slide about Mr Alexander Shott and Mr John Nott, who fought a duel.

Melissa Ferrari and Matt Schnittker joined us online to talk about the recent Convention of the MLS of the US and Canada that was held on board the *Queen Mary* in Long Beach, California. This featured a mixed programme ranging from research and academic presentations to magic lantern and other performances. They contacted the 'magic lantern adjacent' communities, including puppetry, shadow theatre and stereoscopy, and the response was so great that they added an extra day. Each day ran from 8:00am to 9:00pm, with the first day comprising workshops on topics such as performance tips and animation. In the end there were only a few traditional lantern shows.



'Miss Hettie Tufnell' (above) and Miss Marie Evans (right) one of the heroines whose story she told from The Strand Magazine



The day ended with a wonderful show from Jeremy and Carolyn Brooker who began with a *pot pourri* of favourites such as a fountain, the bubble-blower, a lady on a swing and Cupid appearing from a rose – followed by a gardener stung by a wasp when pruning roses! After practising 'spontaneous' applause with the audience, they projected several sequences often featuring their amazing homemade slides. This section started with a parade of curious 'humanised' creatures that included a snake, a spider and even an elephant. Following a tale in a fairy garden we went on a balloon voyage into the solar system with shimmering



Carolyn and Jeremy Brooker (above) and the adventures of a cello (below)



shimmering sun. A sequence featuring a cello, mainly on horseback, led to a more familiar set of circus slides with clowns, jugglers, acrobats and animal acts. Then somehow we reached the man eating rats! What a great finale.



Pastor Russell's 'farewell' slide

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