

SUMMER MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

LACEY GREEN MILLENNIUM HALL, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, UK

Saturday 19 July 2025

On a stormy summer day about 50 MLS members from Europe and the UK gathered in Lacey Green for a meeting with a difference. For the first time in many years we had a series of workshops, helping members out with various common problems. However, first our Chair **Richard Feltham** gave us an illustrated summary of the meeting in Girona (see *TML* 43). Later he asked everyone to put 9-11 October 2026 in their diaries for the next MLS Convention celebrating 50 years of the Magic Lantern Society. This will be held at the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham, UK – and promises to be an event to remember!

Then we dispersed to four parts of the room for the workshops, where five members shared their expertise. The audiences moved on to the next workshop every 15 minutes, at the sound of the klaxon.

Martin Gilbert gave some invaluable advice on projecting. He emphasised the importance of registration and demonstrated his technique using his triunial. His two registration slides (displaying lines) had a stop on the bottom for positioning in the lantern. One slide in the middle section is effectively 'fixed'. He then used the second slide in the top section and aligned it with the middle, repeating the process with

the bottom section. Next he explained that wood-framed slides came in different heights (e.g. Hughes and Steward 4½ inches, Newton and Carpenter & Westley 4 inches), but they must be matched for a professional-looking show. Martin adds strips of wood to the bottom (i.e. top of picture) of the shorter slides (obtained from good DIY stores) using hot glue and then planes off any extra wood. Sometimes strips of cardboard (e.g. picture-framing card) can help do the job. This is also useful for tightening up 3¼-inch slides in wooden frames so they stay in the correct place. Martin puts metal eyelets in the bottom of wooden slides and slide carriers to ensure the correct horizontal positioning in the lantern. For small adjustments the eyelet can be turned. Martin's final tip was to label every slide carefully.

Richard Crangle showed how to digitise slides 'the quick way' – a process he uses extensively for the *Lucerna* website. He uses an SLR camera, remotely controlled to minimise 'wobble', attached a stand positioned over a light pad with even lighting. The light pad illuminates the slide from below, highlighting the image. He also uses top lighting to show the labels and other information on the slide in the final image. He emphasised the

need to check for reflections and 'hot spots' in the illumination of slides, and to eliminate other lights (he used a black card in the Hall). He advised against setting up near a window. Finally Richard uses a computer program (e.g. GIMP) to fine-tune the captured image.

Richard Rigby and **Robin Palmer** looked at illuminants in the lantern, including the latest technology. Richard showed domestic-type LEDs that give a good even light, are dimmable with a reasonable beam angle and are readily available. This included a torch that works well with toy-sized lantern (as he showed on the BBC's *The Repair Shop*). Robin showed industrial-type LEDs including a 400W model used for theatrical stage lights, half the size of the old 100W LEDs. Using these a magic lantern projector gives a bright picture without any black-out. He even operated the lights via a tablet or phone.

Lester Smith demonstrated how to rebind a 3¼-inch glass slide. He removed the old tape using a sharp knife with care, cleaned the slide and rebound it using a single strip all round the edge, pressing down the corners. Lester recommended paper tape with water-based glue (i.e. 'lick to stick'). Tape of the exact size with pre-set fold lines is very scarce but modern equivalents can be cut and folded to size.

After lunch **John Townsend** took us on a round tour of England's Lake District – the country's largest National Park and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We visited coastline, lakes, fells, festivals and folklore, as well as the famous sites starting with the Fairy Steps in Arnside and the rocky outcrop of Humphrey Head where, allegedly, the last wolf in England was killed. There was Cartmel, a pretty village famous for horse racing and sticky toffee pudding. The lighthouse at Ulverston is dedicated to local man Sir John Barrow, who promoted Naval Arctic expeditions featured in many magic lantern shows. Passing by Furness Abbey, we came to the crab fair and gurning championships in Egremont. After a glimpse of



Richard Crangle's workshop



Martin Gilbert's workshop including the use of a long glass tinter and eyelets to position slides horizontally



Lester rebinding slides



The last wolf at Humphrey Head



Robin (top) and Richard (above) demonstrating illuminants



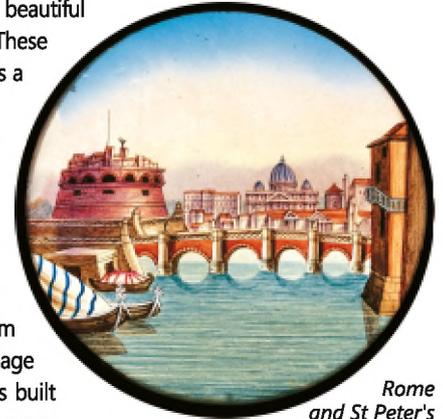
Lake Windermere (with artistic licence)



Volendam harbour in the Netherlands

Hadrian's Wall we arrived at Keswick, the heart of the lakes, with a fairy castle said to rise from Bassenthwaite Lake, and Lodore Falls. After some fell running, steamers on Lake Windermere and the story of Devil's Bridge, our tour came to an end.

Next **Dominique Santens** and **Philippe Khazzaka** brought us three presentations in one. First our projected lanternist discussed 'zooming in' using images of bridges – and 'hand' techniques. Then we went off to Rome as pilgrims to celebrate the new Pope, travelling by foot, elephant and camel. After a peep inside St Peter's and a look at the new Pope, we saw some of the attractions – fireworks at the Castel Sant'Angelo, the Colosseum and Forum – before going home ... backwards! The third part took us back to the countryside with a potpourri of beautiful pastoral scenes accompanied by Philippe on the guitar. These featured dissolving views and wintry landscapes as well as a waterwheel, windmill and several country dwellers.



Rome and St Peter's

Gwen Sebus and **Michael van de Leur** then told us about the construction of the Afsluitdijk (or 'Closure Dyke') in the Zuiderzee, the Netherlands. The story began in the 17th century following improvements in windmills that enabled effective drainage to reduce flooding and reclaim fertile land. Christiaan Huygens' father and grandfather invested in such a scheme. Steam engines in the 19th century enabled quicker drainage although windmills are still used today. Schiphol airport is built on reclaimed land. The great flood of 1916, when many drowned and ships were wrecked, led to the decision to go ahead with the Afsluitdijk, and work started in January 1927. In May 1932 the dyke was closed off to form the IJsselmeer, now a freshwater lake with beaches and sailing. Gwen and Michael told the story through historic maps, diagrams and photographic



Dominique projecting a winter scene

slides of the area, including fishing vessels (some possibly built by MLS member **Willem Hackmann's** forebears) and views of the dyke's construction using materials such as willow, clay and sand.

After delicious strawberries and cream, **Trevor Beattie** told us the story of James Ashbury (see p. 1). This was followed by a session introduced by **Jeremy Brooker** with **Elwyn** and **Merlyn Lear**, the two older sons of magic lantern legends **Doug** and **Anita Lear** (see p. 13). We saw two films made about the Lears and their shows on the canals, featuring acrobats, chromatropes, sequences such as a sea battle and space journey, and the 'man swallowing rats' as well as puppets. A lovely sequence showed Doug playing an oboe to a (real)

swan which then transformed into a watermill slide with swan. The films were interspersed with discussion. Elwyn described it as "a time of magic" for "two children in a really unusual environment" as they toured, with a show nearly every day. They talked about sticking up posters to publicise the shows when they arrived anywhere by boat and challenges like charging batteries with generators for the lantern illuminants (in pre-solar power days). All the family were dressed in Victorian costume. The Lears had 10,000 slides – most hand-painted and mechanical. Both were perfectionists in back-projecting complex routines with precision. A later promotional film described their subsequent land-based activities, making their own slides and using more modern technology. A final clip from an MLS meeting highlighted one of Anita's famous knitted jumpers. **Martin Gilbert** then projected some of the Lears' original slides. In the hall was also an exhibition of the Lears' magic lantern career, with members' items adding to Elwyn and Merlyn's archive. What memories!



Display about Doug and Anita Lear's magic lantern life

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The Lears' own slide of 'man eating rats' (above) and (right) Elwyn and Merlyn talking about their early life and lanterns

