

AUTUMN MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

THE SWEDENBORG SOCIETY, LONDON, UK

Saturday 18 October 2025

Around 50 people gathered at the Swedenborg for our Autumn meeting. Chair **Richard Feltham** opened the programme and reminded everyone about the Convention next year. He gave an update on the MLS moving to CIO (charitable incorporated organisation) status and asked for more volunteers to join the audiovisual team – tuition given!

Nicole Mollett showed the short film she entered in the 'under a minute' category at the Absurdah Film Festival in Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey, off the coast of Kent. This surrealist piece – not narrative style but more like stepping into a dream – was based on insect slides (cracks featured positively!) and made with the help of her son Luc, using his *TikTok* skills, and **Frog Morris**.



G.R. Sims's *Billy's Rose*

Nick Hiley gave us a suitably sad and tragic rendering of *Billy's Rose* by G.R. Sims. We returned to Sims later in the day.

A guest, **John de Lucy**, introduced by **Jeremy Brooker**, then showed some extraordinary slides from his family archive. The first half dated from 1910-20 and focused on the

100,000 Chinese men recruited to help the British in World War I (40,000 were recruited to help the French). John's grandfather, William J. Hawkings, worked for British American Tobacco in Shanghai. In May 1917 William set off with the Chinese labourers, round the Cape of Good Hope, and they formed the Chinese Labour Corps in France. The slides started with their recruitment in Weihai, Shandong Province (where the men are known for being tall and strong), being fingerprinted, inoculated and washing in the sea. The recruits were seen making roads, repairing railways and dealing with empty shells and other munitions. There was a great deal of illness so they had their

own hospital – with a pagoda. Around 2,500 died. Some of the slides showed lighter moments where they were making music, wearing costumes, performing gymnastics and flying kites, as well as mixing with local French people. After the War, they were not allowed to stay in the UK, largely because of Union opposition. The second half of John's presentation comprised slides by his great-grandfather Edward Selby Little. He went to China as a missionary in 1885. The slides were partially hand-coloured photographic slides and showed fascinating pictures of everyday life and special occasions, including farming scenes, temples, festivals and funerals, and a famous opera singer.

Before breaking for lunch **Richard Rigby** and **David Soanes** talked about Robin Palmer's new ultra-powerful miniature LED illuminants (see p. 14) demonstrated at the Summer Meeting (see *TML* 44) and how it

came to their rescue for a show in a too well-lit room at Whepstead Community Centre where the promised blackout failed to materialise. Despite bright sunshine on the screen the slides could still be seen easily – and the reading and slide sorting was no problem in broad daylight.

After lunch **Jeremy and Carolyn Brooker** started with the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 – the most powerful ever to hit Europe, resulting in 30,000 deaths. The 1906 San Francisco earthquake was possibly the first natural disaster widely covered by visual media, including film and magic lantern slides. The Brookers' panoramic slides of the event were an interesting cross-over. Their show included images before, during and after the catastrophic event. This linked to the subject of their fourth collaboration with the University of Dundee, following *Frankenstein Phantasmagoria*, William McGonagall and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The latest subject is Robert Duncan Milne (1844-99) who emigrated from Scotland to San Francisco where he worked as a science journalist and science fiction writer, with tales featuring a torpedo, brain transfer and spiritualism. He is little known today, probably because all the newspapers he wrote for were obliterated by the earthquake.

Next **Tonnvane Wiswell** told us about the show she has been developing after she won the Dick Balzer Award in 2024 (see *TML* 41). Tonnvane started the London Lovecraft Festival in 2018 celebrating the American author of fantasy/horror, H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) and the show is based on his most famous story about a tentacled monster

The Brookers' earthquakes: Lisbon (left), San Francisco (right)



Frog Morris who organised the technical side for the day

Behind the Scenes of Magic Lantern "Call of Cthulhu"



Cthulhu – ‘The Magic Lantern Call of Cthulhu’. Tonnvane takes on the persona of Miranda Carter, female adventurer, and the show is her first ‘cavalcade of wonders’. She told us about her journey of acquiring a magic lantern and suitable slides (Cthulhu played by a *pelagic nudibranch*). Watch out for her show at the AGM in January.



Martin Gilbert's stall



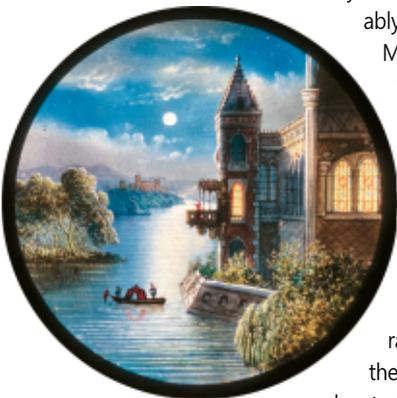
Tonnvane Wiswell as Miranda Carter (above) and the original Cthulhu (left)

Nick Hiley and Sandra Lawrence then presented Dick Moore's *How the Poor Live* using George R. Sims's original texts for his set of slides (see p. 3). The 'Bring and Show' section included Alexia Lazou who gave away some interesting booklets and asked for help with a lantern focussing device, and Sandra Lawrence who promoted her show at Charlton House, near Greenwich, featuring dissolving views with Martin Gilbert. Stan Roberts with help from Juliette Harcourt led the singing of 'Throw out the Life-line' to a set of slides featuring lifeboatmen, although Stan pointed out its other meaning as a warning against excess drinking and its resulting use by the Band of Hope. Jean Louis Coicault showed a beautiful moonlit balcony scene slipping slide that he had recently acquired.

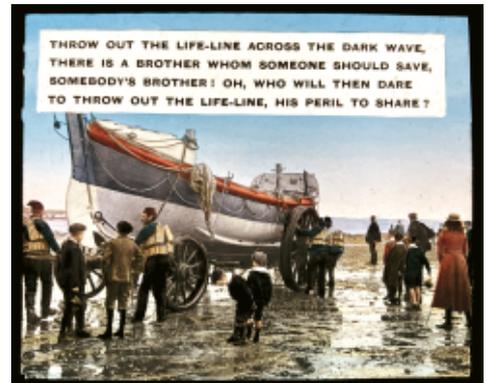


Nick Hiley and Sandra Lawrence present How the Poor Live

The day ended with a spectacular show by Martin Gilbert and Sandra Lawrence, ably assisted by Jeremy and Carolyn Brooker. The theme was the Lord Mayor's Show (due to take place in 2025 on 8 November). From 1213 when the City of London came into being it was allowed to choose a leader for one year only provided they swore allegiance to the monarch in Westminster Hall. For many centuries it was easier to travel there by river, and each livery company had its own gilded barge. Some beautiful long slides from the early 1800s showed us the parade on the Thames. This led to the story of the most famous Lord Mayor of all – Dick Whittington ... and his cat. A wonderful slide collection, including two versions of 'man eating rats' and a storm at sea sequence, told the tale. Martin then updated us on his Edmund Wilkie research. He has located five slides from the *Lurline – the Rhine Maiden* script in Wilkie's 'Polytechnic Papers'. The other script there is *Ye Wonderfule Tale of Whyttington and hys Catte* – and he has located around six of these in museums. The magnificent Lord Mayor's Day slide is 13 inches wide and 11 inches tall with a



Jean Louis Coicault's slide



A verse from 'Throw out the Life-line'



Martin Gilbert's slides of the Lord Mayor's Show showing the golden coach still used today and the gilded barges of the City of London's livery companies



3-foot long moveable parade. Back in the projected Show, by the 19th century the river was getting crowded so the parade took to the streets – and we saw some exquisite long slides including the golden coach still used today. We finished with William Harris & Co.'s wonderful river parade slides from the early 19th century. What an experience!

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

Letters to the Editors can be sent by email to: editor@magiclantern.org.uk

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