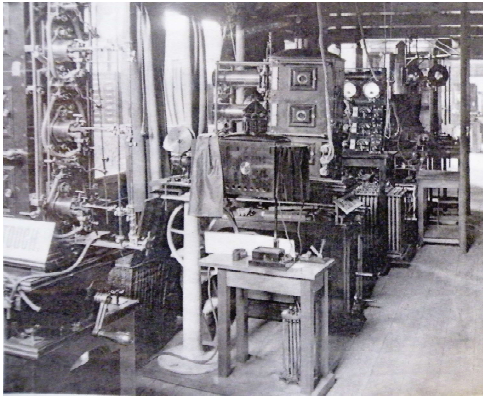
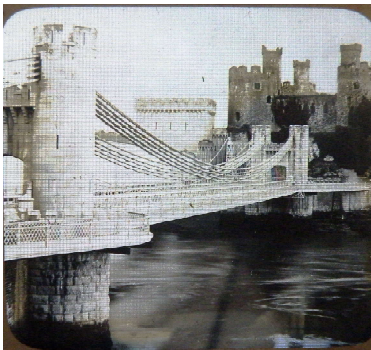

The Mystery of the Magic Lantern Slides

The magic lantern was an early form of slide projector. It was first developed in the 17th century but became especially popular in the mid 19th century when more powerful, and safer, light sources meant it could be used for large audiences. It will probably come as no surprise to learn that David Lionel Salomons was an enthusiast.

For him it was a serious scientific instrument, used in the study of optics. In 1892 he gave a talk to the Royal Institution on 'Optical Projection', explaining its use as a projection microscope, and in experiments on the polarization of light. It was typical of him that he also sought to improve the operation of the machines themselves, patenting a method of ensuring the exact registration of images from lanterns with multiple lenses.

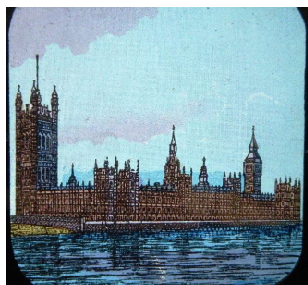


But it was also a useful tool for sharing his scientific discoveries and enthusiasms with a wider audience. The picture, left, shows the projection gallery at the back of the Science Theatre at Salomons – including two three-lens lanterns. Sadly none of this equipment survives. What we do have is a single-lens lantern (I have no idea whether it works), and boxes of lantern slides, which are intriguing in their own way.



They are made of glass, to a standard format, $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches square. Some are photographs, many are coloured drawings. Some of them address sensible 'educational' subjects such as classical sculpture, the sights of London, and picturesque views of North Wales.

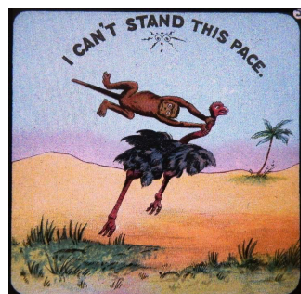




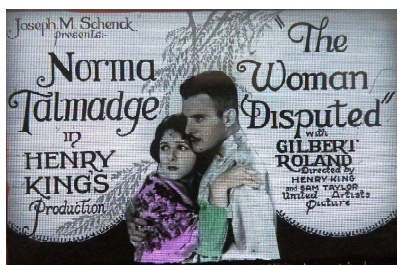
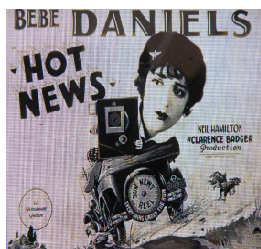
Some of them come in pairs – the same scene during the day and at night – presumably two lenses were used to fade slowly from one to the other.

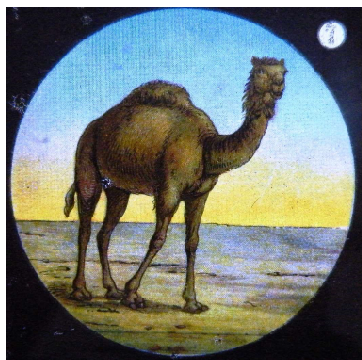


There are also some rather silly stories, like ‘Never Ride a Strange Horse’ - about a monkey who takes a ride on an ostrich, and ends up losing his tail (and, from the same supplier, ‘Gag-Jag the Rejected’ though this reflects an Edwardian world-view that would be offensive today). These were produced in about 1900, and appear to be in their original boxes, so they might well date from the time of David Lionel.



But there is also a box of slides that advertise silent films of 1928. They are wonderful souvenirs of the period but it is difficult to tie them into the Salomons story. When and where were they used? And more amateurish ones too that advertise Xmas Holiday Attractions at the Café Tudor (and a New Years Eve Dance featuring





Mr J Hooker, ‘the famous banjoist’). The year isn’t indicated, but perhaps they date from the Second World War. Was the Café Tudor, perhaps, the Cadena Café on Mount Pleasant hill in Tunbridge Wells?

Some of the slides are stored in an old Complan box (with a use-by date of February 1971) so perhaps they were collected by someone when Salomons was a

convalescent home or NHS training centre. I know that members of the David Salomons Society were in contact with the Magic Lantern Society in the 1980s, but their interest seems to have been more with the optics experiments, than with images of Bebe Daniels and Ronald Colman. Does anybody out there know where these slides came from? **CJ**



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