

Sydney Camera Circle, Methodist Missionaries, and the National Art Archive's Lantern Slide Collection

In December 2016 the supremely knowledgeable Eric Riddler, who is Visual Resources Librarian at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, guided Elisa deCourcy and Martyn Jolly through two significant magic lantern slide collections in the National Art Archive, housed at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. One collection has been in the Gallery for many years, while the other has just recently been acquired.



Eric Riddler in the National Art Archive with John Whitsed Dovey's magic lantern, and lantern slides by Henri Mallard.
Photo credit: Martyn Jolly

The first collection came into the Gallery in the mid 1990s as part of a gift from the family of Henri Mallard, a member of the Sydney Camera Circle, who were an elite group of Pictorialist photographers active from 1916 to the late 1970s. The lantern slide collection includes commercial slides of Australian subjects made by well know manufacturers and distributors such as T W Cameron of Melbourne, Stephen Spurling of Launceston and J W Beattie of Hobart. However most interesting are thirty-three slides made between 1933 and 1935 by Mallard. Mallard is best remembered today for his photographs of the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, but he was also a significant figure in Australian photography and

Pictorialism.



Lantern slide based on Henri Mallard's, 'Circular Quay' c.1930s. Image supplied.

According to their inscriptions the slides, although not zoological, were produced by the University of Sydney Zoology Department. Perhaps Mallard had a connection to the Zoology Department facilities through the Taronga Park Zoo for whom he did some photography. The slides cover standard Pictorialist subjects: landscapes, tree studies, images of the Archibald Fountain in Hyde Park, Sydney Harbour, and so on. Two of the slides, such as Circular Quay (c1930s), are also in the AGNSW collection as prints. Like many Pictorialists, Mallard experimented with different printing techniques such as bromoil, as well as toning, and there is evidence of similar experimentation in his lantern slides, one slide is toned a

deep blue, and several more are handcoloured. Eric Riddler discusses in fascinating detail a beach scene Mallard made at Collaroy in the section [‘My Favourite Slide’](#) of the Heritage in the Limelight website.

Amateur photographers regularly made lantern slides to show their best work to each other, and these slides indicate that the role of the magic lantern in Australian Pictorialism remains to be explored. (For instance in 1952 the Sydney Camera Circle arranged a testimonial evening for Harold Cazneaux, to which photographers from around the country were invited. The evening featured ‘Milestones’, a sequenced program of magic lantern slides made from his prints and toned to match. The projection was synchronized with an audio tape interview about the photographs between Cazneaux himself and the photographer Monte Luke. A version of ‘Milestones’, comprising 50 lantern slides and the tape recording, then travelled to camera clubs in Melbourne and Tasmania, before disappearing in Adelaide some time in 1953, just after Cazneaux himself had died.)

The National Art Archive has only recently acquired the collection a



John Whitsed Dovey, 'Street Barber' c. 1920-1930s. Image supplied

Methodist missionary, John Whitsed Dovey, who worked in China, Japan, Java, Tibet and the Philippines in the 1920s and 30s. The collection comprises over four hundred lantern slides, as well as hundreds of his negatives from which some of the slides were made. It also includes Dovey's personal magic lantern, a 'Reflectum', which like so many lanterns has been modified many years after it was manufactured to take an incandescent bulb. The lantern slides form a series of lectures he compiled out of commercial slides as well as his own extraordinarily interesting photographs. The lecture topics include Japan, China, Australia and the history of stamps. The other slides come from commercial and missionary sources. For instance many slides in the lecture on China come from the 'Lecture Department Laboratory' of the YMCA in Shanghai, China. The lectures are still in their original wooden travelling boxes, and largely in the order in which Dovey lectured from them. A now fading note placed by Dovey in one box still sternly admonishes us: 'These slides constitute one lecture, please do not disturb the order of the slides'.

Although the scripts to these lectures have been lost, their sequencing still illustrates Dovey's point of view on the places he visited. For instance the Australian lecture takes us on a geographical journey, from Captain Cook's landing point (of course), through the city, out to the Jenolan Caves in the Blue Mountains, then up to the Northern Rivers of NSW. As well as commercial slides, the Chinese lecture includes slides Dovey took of street life, such as people having their hair cut by street barbers, as well as evidence of the nationalist politics of the period. Some people look suspiciously at the camera. The Japanese lectures, of almost three hundred slides, many taken or manufactured by Takagi Teijiro, of Japanese culture and ceremonies.