

# Transmitting images and sound: John Logie Baird's lantern slides of early television at the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences



Martyn Jolly and Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences' curator, Campbell Birkerstaff looking through a set of chromatrope inserts.

The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences' (MAAS) stacks are an avenue through Australia's audio-visual past. Walking along the inner corridor you pass the likes of duplicating cameras, Kodak folding cameras, gramophones, early EMI televisions and primitive early projectors. Many of these objects were collected by one of the institution's early twentieth century directors, Arthur de Ramon Penfold, who saw part of the role of the museum as a place to demonstrate new technologies. His near thirty-year tenure (1927-1955) at the helm of the museum coincided with the twilight years of the magic lantern and the burgeoning of television. Martyn Jolly and Elisa deCourcy were lucky enough to be shepherded through highlights of the magic lantern collection by the energetic and knowledgeable, Campbell Birkerstaff.

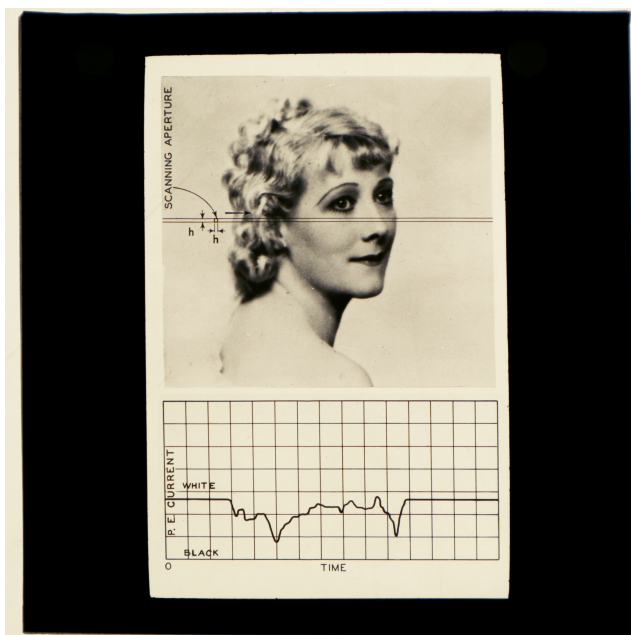


The stand-out collection of slides we saw was one made in Britain in the mid-1930s and brought to

Australia by inventor, John Logie Baird for the 1938 World Radio Convention. Baird opened the Convention at Science House in Sydney on 12 April lecturing to these very slides about his much-heralded invention: the television. In a quaint historical synergy with the format of his lecturing material (the age-old combination of lantern slides and script), Baird spoke initially about his first mechanical television system that also operated on two platforms: the radio transmission of sound and the scanning and sending of an image by a separate radio signal. The scanning aperture broke the image down into 28 lines to be transmitted.

His lecture then showed an updated, now electric, receiving television (as seen in the lantern slide below). It was a tall vertical box with the cathode ray detection technology stretching down the length of the structure. The cathode ray image was reflected into the room by a mirror at 45 degrees mounted in the lid of the television set. It was an intimate experience of visual culture with only a selection of viewers being in vantage of the tiny projection at any one time.

It was interesting for us to see how in making the slides for his lecture (or having them made for him), Baird had been forced to cheat in the presentation of the cathode ray set. Campbell explained to us that the low resolution, slippery image of the Baird television would not have resolved well at a distance, as it does appear to have in the mid-shot of the television unit below. Baird had manipulated the image, during the slide's production, collaging against the lid a clearer version of the woman's face ostensibly projected from the mirror. This is a truly fascinating collection of slides that sits of the cusp between technological invention. Baird's radio wave television would be superseded by the 1940s by more efficient EMI televisions, that combined image and sound in one unit. Nevertheless, he remains significant to the Australia media landscape acknowledged by the annual television awards that bear his name.



The MAAS has vast and significant holdings of lantern slides within which the Baird slides from 1938 is but one set. They hold a range of chromatopes, mechanical and rackwork slides, used in education programs at the Sydney Observatory, street photography of early Sydney made into lantern slides and a range of beautifully hand-coloured travel and missionary slides from China. They are also an extremely important collection, in the GLAM landscape because they hold a large range of lantern slide ephemera, including a case of lantern slide binding strips, masks and unused-plates from Max Dupain's Sydney studio.