

Tasmanian heritage, global trade and Old World nostalgia at Narryna House, Hobart

In early December, last year, Martyn Jolly and Elisa deCourcy visited the knowledgeable, Scott Carlin and members of his energetic team at Narryna House, Hobart, to discuss the homestead's amazing living-history collection which includes two lanterns and some very beautiful slides.

Narryna sits on the headland that overlooks the Salamanca Place and the Derwent, which was Hobart's Harbour. Built in 1835-40, it was initially the home of the merchant trader, Captain Andrew Haig who established the warehouses on the docks. Haig was a charismatic entrepreneur. His personal narrative tracked through the channels of the Chinese export trade from Calcutta to Canton, to Hobart and onto Chile, before he came to Hobart. His circuitous route to Tasmania, and his temporary settlement there, highlights just how interconnected Australia's southern-most colony was to global networks of trade and commerce.

Narryna was a foundational building in the colonial settlement. It can be seen tucked into the leafy grove on the right-



Charles Burrell Cumberland, 'Hobart town Drawing', watercolour on paper, 1840-1850, Held by: Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, SD_ILS:86347.

hand side of Charles Cumberland's watercolour of the 1840s. Regal yet unpretentious, it was home to merchants, learned professionals and their servants for over a century. Narryna's collection of couture, crockery and ceramics, not to mention, daguerreotypes, canvasses, slides and magic lanterns, are objects accumulated by the Founders of the Van Diemen's Land Memorial Folk Museum in the mid-1950s and gathered from colonial families across Tasmania. The house is a capsule for Hobartian lives and entertainment. Its contents reflect settlers' desire to feel a connection to an imagined, far-flung homeland in Britain but its overall design and commissioned art also positioned it as a beacon of a nascent colonial modernity.

Scott showed us a tiny hand-held phantasmagoria lantern which, rather remarkably, still contained its original oil burner and wick. This beautiful, although relatively cheaply-made, japan-tinned structure would have been carried around for mobile projections, perhaps of a ghoulish nature. It is probably a mid to late-nineteenth century piece but it is impossible to say to whom it belonged. Narryna also has some beautiful wooden-framed, hand-painted slides of the Holy Land, produced by [London optician, J. Barnard and Sons after the 1860s](#). These slides may have been shown later in the nineteenth century. By this point, Hobartians would have been well acquainted with the magic lantern. Early public performances in the colony commenced as early as the 1840s. These were staged by itinerant travellers like J.W. Newland who, in 1848, showed dissolving views of British cathedrals and European religious monuments

at Hobart's Theatre Royal. Much like the later Barnard slides of the Holy Land, Newland's dissolving views were intended to inspire feelings of connection and belonging to a wider pan-imperial Anglicanism.



Left: Phantasmagoria lantern, Narryna House Collection, Hobart Tasmania.
Above: J. Barnard and Sons, 'Pool of Siloam', 1860-1890, manufactured in London by J. Barnard and Sons held at Narryna House, Hobart. Below: Scott shows Elisa the placard made to commemorate Davenport-Hoggins' Dickensian lantern lectures.

The magic lantern has a dynamic history in Tasmania, evidenced both at Narryna and in the artefacts from lantern lectures in the general vicinity, which have been absorbed into its collection. When the homestead opened as a Folk Museum in 1957, a placard was exhibited that belonged to early twentieth-century lawyer, C. Davenport Hoggins, who had presented lectures on Charles Dickens to locals. Davenport Hoggins' life-model slides were a [favourite in the 1900s](#), with his repertoire including, 'Oliver Twist, Pickwick and David Copperfield' performances in Narryna and at the Town Hall. His slides were imported from the Lincoln manufacturer, A. H. Vidler, who specialised in the life-model format and are testament to the highway of trade in lantern material that funnelled from Britain to Australia in this period. It is interesting to ponder the kinds of meanings these Dickensian narratives of 'rags to riches' would have had for Tasmanians, still caught between the cultural erasure and memorialisation over the continent's convict past but similarly exposed to moral movements about waif and orphans fundraising for British and Australian campaigns in the colony.



Narryna House highlights how the lantern was a device for inspiring wonder, compassion and nostalgia. Alongside a raft of other house-hold goods that travelled to this location for over a century from far afield, it was became part of a composition of colonial modernity, being used and collected in accord with its immediate surrounds.