

Illuminating the Heroic Endeavours of C.Y. O'Connor and Other Stories from the Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth.

The Kerry Stokes Collection is a vast private archive, which includes a rich photographic collection generally and an impressive lantern slides specifically, that recalls unique aspects of Western Australia's settlement and development. Collection curators, Emma-Clare Bussell and Erica Persak generously showed Chief Investigator, Jane Lydon and Research Fellow, Elisa deCourcy a sample of the collection.



Professor Jane Lydon with Kerry Stokes Collection curator, Emma-Clare Bussell

Lantern slides were central to disseminating the plans and displaying the mechanics behind Charles Yelverton O'Connor's ambitious project to pump water from the Mundaring Weir, just outside present-day Perth, five hundred kilometres to the inland towns of Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. O'Connor was an innovative and skilled engineer. He had migrated from Ireland to New Zealand in the 1860s, where he oversaw the construction of the Greymouth-Hokitika-Christchurch railroad that cut across the mountainous South Island. His work in New Zealand had earned the attention of Western Australian premier Sir John Forrest who appointed him as the Australian colony's Engineer in Chief in 1891. Over the next decade, O'Connor was deeply involved in overseeing numerous infrastructure projects including the new deep-set commercial harbour at Fremantle. The gold boom came to Western Australia belatedly, but spectacularly, in the late 1890s, funnelling in hitherto unlucky miners from the Eastern Australian and New Zealand goldfields into the state's hinterland. The largely arid mining outposts of Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie struggled supplying their burgeoning populations with water.

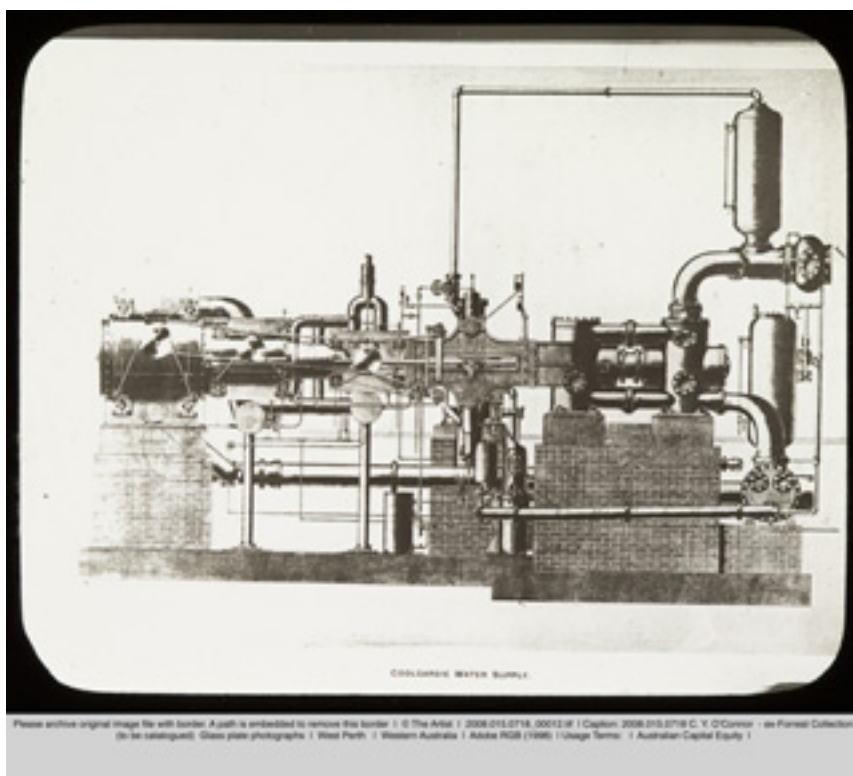
O'Connor's slides were acquired by the Kerry Stokes Collection as part of a larger Australiana archive,



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known as the Robert Muir Collection. The slide set shows the engineer's detailed plans for how water from the low-lying weir would be propelled up through a series of hydraulic arteries and pipes cross-country to the goldmining towns. There was much contestation over the ability for the pipeline to function effectively over such distance and because the water needed to move uphill. The *Inquirer and Commercial News* (Perth) argued on 10 May 1901 that should the pumps fail the backward motion of the water to the weir would be 'catastrophic' (p.9). Page numbers from the plans and typescript text can be discerned in the covered margins of some of the glass plates. It is possible that this set was shown in political or public forums in a bid to quell opposition to the project.



Drawing of the pump for the Coolgardie Water Supply, c.1900, Artist Unknown
(2008.015.0718.12) - Kerry Stokes Collection

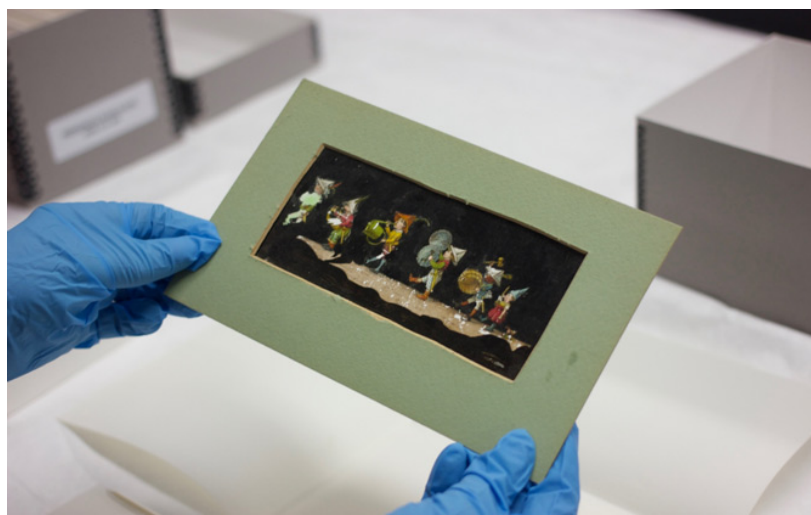
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Other slides, some of which are beautifully hand-coloured, show the progress of the project and labourers at work. The scheme employed hundreds of men. Yet, tragically, in 1902, after being lambasted by the press and amid mounting political pressure over the project's budget and management, O'Connor committed suicide. He never saw the conclusion of the pipeline in 1903, which was a resounding success that continues to transport water to Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie to this day.



Coloured Image of the Goldfields Pipeline, c.1900, Artist Unknown (2008.015.0718.17) - Kerry Stokes

Lantern slides have an extended and complex history of use and display, as the research for this project is uncovering. Early performances began in Australia in the mid-nineteenth century and slides were still being used as a form of education and entertainment after the Second World War. The vastness of the Kerry Stokes Collection captures much of this vital history. The collection includes a sweet turn-of-the-twentieth century hand-painted panoramic slide of a children's marching band, which has since been framed in thick card since its use. The colour of the figures as they marched across the screen 120 years ago would have been brilliant and mesmerising.



Erica Persak with panoramic slide of children's marching band

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Also part of the Kerry Stokes collection, are a mixed set of missionary slides – most likely from north-Western Australian missionary outposts and made in the mid-twentieth century. Many of these hand-painted missionary slides bear marked similarities in subject matter and finish slides to missionary slides in our Project database, especially those made contemporaneously and of Western Australian mission stations (see e.g. '[Kummunya children at play](#)'). Members of our team from the University of Western Australia are looking forward to working in the Collection to identify those slides linked to Western Australian beach and seaside culture. The Kerry Stokes Collection is an important resource for historians of Australian magic lantern culture.

Further reading:

W. Bede Christie, 'The Coolgardie Water Scheme. Some Difficulties. Conclusion.' *The Inquirer and Commercial News* (Perth), 10 May 1901 p.9

A.G. Evans, C.Y. O'Connor: *His Life and Legacy*, Perth: UWA Publishing, 2002.

Merub Harris Tauman, 'Charles Yelverton O'Connor (1843-1902)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/oconnor-charles-yelverton-7874>, accessed online 6 April 2017.

