

# Museum brings magic lantern slides back to life

Torquay Museum's **Veronika Valigurska** looks at how magic lantern slides have been brought back to use

**For most of a century, Torquay Museum's collection of magic lantern slides had been patiently waiting to be looked at and brought back to use.**

Finally, in 2019, their documentation and subsequent free access for the public was selected as one of the ways to celebrate the museum's anniversary and its historic links to research and education.

The collection of more than 6,500 lantern slides was created by Torquay Natural History Society and built-up through the early 20th century.

Many of the slides were donated by lecturers such as Hugh Watkin and A.W. Searley, who had used them for their talks in Pengelly Hall.

As such the collection reflects research of the past and the interests of the Museum Society who hosted the lectures.

The society still exists and runs a lecture series in the same lecture theatre.

This makes the collection very unusual as many similar institutions were subsumed by other institutes or universities.

To help the museum's staff with the documentation, four wonderful volunteers were found and trained and even though lockdowns and Covid restrictions have prevented them from volunteering for months, the museum would not



A selection of slides on display at The Secret Museum exhibition showing. Photos: TORQUAY MUSEUM

have been able to do the work so quickly without their help.

Before the documentation started we didn't know much about the slides or the subjects they covered but that's changed after months of cleaning, labelling and digitising.

The most interesting thing we've learned is that most of them were privately made and are therefore unique. We had known that many relate to Torbay, the UNESCO Geopark and Dartmoor but there's so much more.

Because the collection reflects academic interests of a learned society lecturing on a variety of subjects, the slides illustrate not only towns and villages in the South West but also many places around the world.

They relate to natural history, geology and botany as well as astronomy, archaeology and heraldry.

Hundreds of the natural history images have a strong correlation with the museum's regionally and nationally important natural sciences collection.

To make the collection accessible to the public, the museum has partnered with Lucerna – the Magic Lantern Web

Resource that will host the 6,500 slides on their website along with thousands of slides from other museums.

To search Lucerna, simply type [lucerna.exeter.ac.uk](http://lucerna.exeter.ac.uk) into your browser.

The museum has also transferred 800 lantern slides donated by Richard H. Worth to the Dartmoor Archive and they will be soon available to view on their website at [dartmoortrust.org](http://dartmoortrust.org)

The slides provide not only an amazing resource for exhibitions and social media but we can also use them as they would have been used in the past – for lectures.

The museum is hosting a day of talks on September 25 and local history author Phil Badcott is going to project the newly digitised magic lantern slides to illustrate his talk 'A History Tour of Torquay'.

There will also be presentations of slides on various topics running in-between the talks.

**To see a selection of slides in person and acknowledge the hard work of the museum's collections volunteers, visit The Secret Museum exhibition which is on until September 5**



Commercial slide of St Mark's Cathedral and Doge's Palace in Venice (PR37002)



Privately made slide of Bess's Cottage and the Walnut Tree in Cheshire (PR35709)

## A Star Is Born as electric theatre returns to Brixham

**Cinema is set to return to Brixham with the screening of A Star is Born starring Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga next month, writes SENGA WALLACE ROCHE.**

And when the new 'Electric Palace' in Brixham Theatre is fully up and running, the aim is to present one film a week and perhaps also a matinee.

The screening of A Star Is Born starts at 7.30pm on Wednesday, September 8, but doors will be open at 6.30pm in order to allow cinema goers the opportunity to socialise in the atmospheric ambience of the interesting Victorian auditorium.

A Brixham Theatre spokesperson said: "We hope residents and visitors will come and join us on this unique, historic occasion when Electric Theatre returns to Brixham.

"There will be a bar with alcoholic and soft drinks available. You can also treat yourself to a refreshing ice cream."

The Electric Palace originally opened in Fore Street around 1912.

According to the 1931 edition of the Kinematograph Yearbook, The Electric Palace, Sidmouth, was then also owned by Electric Theatre (Brixham) Ltd under the management of one Arthur O. Ellis. The picture house had a

single screen and a seating capacity of 488.

It closed on September 20, 1966, with a screening of The Rare Breed starring James Stewart and Maureen O'Hara. The building is now a branch of the Co-op.

Before lockdown, Brixham Theatre had hosted two movie nights employing a professional, pop-up cinema company to supply and operate the equipment needed to screen a show.

This was a relatively expensive undertaking, therefore, when the trustees started to think about the future of the theatre, it was decided that working in-house would prove more economically

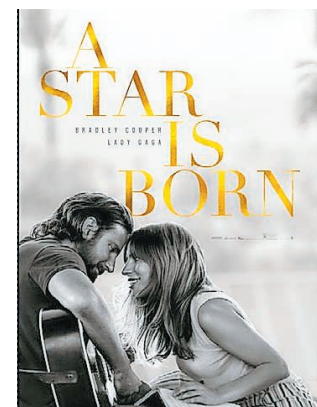
viable and allow the theatre to offer more films to the local community.

Having bought a screen, projector, and improved sound systems, the theatre is about to launch its first screening on September 8 with A Star is Born, starring Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga.

The theatre spokesperson said: "This is a 'must see' movie.

"The theatre is the perfect venue for a cinema being central, on public transport routes and next to a taxi rank. Brixham's main car park is a few minutes' walk from the theatre."

**For Movie Night tickets, call the**



A Star Is Born.

Photo: BRIXHAM THEATRE

**box office on 01803 415987 or log on to [www.brixhamtheatre.uk](http://www.brixhamtheatre.uk)**