



# THE ADSTOCK HISTORY CLUB and THE ADSTOCK SCIENCE CLUB



Moving images are, today, all around us. Mobile phones can capture, play and share them digitally, whilst advertising hoardings have leapt into the realm of science fiction, animating their once-static messages. We may take modern video for granted, but the first steps towards true motion pictures began with simple yet marvelous toys of optical illusion. In the days before the earliest forms of cinema were created by the Lumière brothers in 1895, Victorian optical toys provided an array of moving pictures. They were often simple in design and use but their names suggested fearsome technical complexity: [Phenakistiscopes](#), [Praxinoscopes](#) and [Choreutoscopes](#)

Mr Kevin Varty entertained both the History and Science Club members with a fascinating talk on Victorian Optical Illusions. As well as showing us many of the images that the Victorians developed with which to amuse themselves, he allowed us to handle and play with the various examples that he had brought with him: the stereoscopes, Chinese Mirrors and Magic Lanterns.



Charles Allan Gilbert drew the ambiguous optical illusion, picture shown on the left, in 1892, when he was 18 years old. It became famous after he sold it to *Life Magazine* and they reproduced it as a print. Look carefully: if you look at the overall image, you will see a human skull, but if you focus on the details of the picture, you will see a woman looking in her vanity mirror.

Now look carefully at the image on the right, and you will see either an old lady or a young woman.



The Chinese Mirror that Kevin demonstrated baffled all at the meeting. It was a small solid bronze disc, about 3 inches in diameter, and it was quite thick, probably about half an inch. One side had a polished convex mirror surface while the other had a carving of the signs of the zodiac. Looking closely at the mirrored surface there were no dents or blemishes, and the disc was solid and quite heavy. However when a bright light was shone onto the mirrored surface an image of the other side was projected onto the nearby wall! It was a puzzle to us all!

New members to the History or Science Club are always welcome. Phone 01296 712 561 for more details. Additionally, The Adstock Science Club has its very own website which can be found at [www.theadstockscienceclub.co.uk](http://www.theadstockscienceclub.co.uk)

*Jenny Stuart*