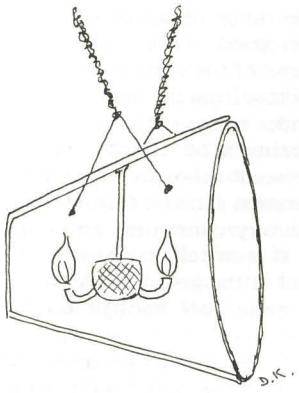
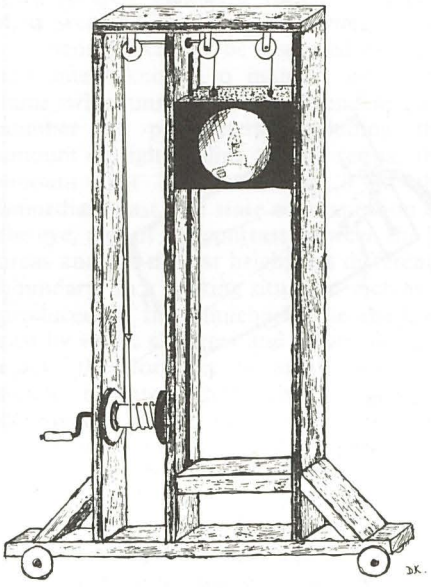
Some Historical Moonboxes

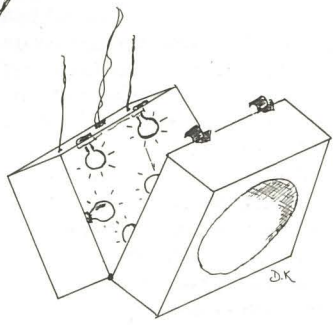


Oil moon lamp circa 1816



Adjustable moonbox used behind transparency or casement. Oil or gas. Circa 1860

1929—Electric moonbox



Contemporary electric moonbox

appear that we have a simple choice. Light can be either silvery and bright or it can be suitably dim, but unsilvery. There seems to be no middle way. Or is there?

If we want a high contrast scatter free effect, we should look for a single, compact source, almost a pinhole, with fine enough control of the beam to allow it to cover a large irregular area but nevertheless, be capable of being masked off areas we wish to remain unlit. If it is a diffuse effect that we are looking for, then a number of small fresnels placed close together to simulate a large single source work well. (It is worth remembering that two killowatts worth of light in the form of eight 250 watt lamps will redden considerably less than 2k in a single envelope). A variation of this which can produce a beautiful soft pearly effect, quite impossible to achieve by any other means, is to direct a number of small profiles onto a reflector. Using a diffuse, white-painted reflector produces a very dim, difficult to control effect which can be quite breathtaking. A specular reflector brings out a brash, hard, shiny effect, easier to control with french flags, etc., while if the reflector takes the form of a piece of plastic mirror stretched not too tightly inside an approximately hyperbolic former of chicken wire, and hung in such a way as to be capable of very slight random movement in the breeze, the effect is that of an unreal, out-of-this-world, magically shimmering moonlight. Indirect lighting techniques were pioneered in the twenties by David Belasco and Louis Hartmann on Broadway, and in London by Basil Dean. The technique has largely fallen into disuse, but reappears from time to time.

It would be nice to be able to use conventional filtering from a straightforward source, setting the desired colour and beam quality to taste, and then to find a way of fading down to the degree of selective visibility that we require, without introducing warmth or degrading the beam. Conventional dimming methods seem inappropriate: other means that could be considered are mechanical shutters or louvres, well out of the focal plane, (which are only of use on a profile lantern), a dense series of spill rings, or a pair of crossed polaroids. My own pet theory is shown in fig.1, and consists of a high quality colourless neutral density filter in combination with a Linnebach projector of high intensity.

This particular version of the Linnebach is a lensless, reflectorless box about 500mm square and about a metre long, black painted inside, constructed (or converted) from almost anything. It has runners at the one open end for colourless filter material which may be painted on to mask out areas required not to be lit. It need not be particularly heatproof and needs no ventilation, as, where it differs from the standard Linnebach is that its light source is external to the box, and connected to it by means of a thick bundle of fibre optics. What is inside the box is a circular