

PICTURE THIS

From 'Burton Holmes Travelogues: the Greatest Traveller of his Time', Taschen, £29.99 £25.99 (plus £1.25 p&p) 0870 428 4112

From the day he bought his first camera aged 13 until his death some 60 years later, Burton Holmes saw and chronicled more of this earth over a longer period of time than anyone before or since. Between 1883 and 1958, he crossed the Atlantic 30 times, the Pacific 20, went around the world six times, shot half a million feet of film, took some 30,000 photographs and earned more than \$5 million. "Good to know," he declared, "that I have, in my own way, possessed the world."

Each summer, he set out to tour the world, capturing lively streetscapes and poignant scenes of rural life. From the boulevards of Paris to China's Great Wall, the construction of the Panama canal to the 1906 eruption of Vesuvius; Peking,

Delhi, Berlin, Moscow, Jakarta, Jerusalem... Holmes delighted in finding "the beautiful way around the world". He reserved the winter months for his "travelogues", carefully crafted verbal narratives timed to projections of hand-painted glass-lantern slides and some of the first "moving pictures". A brisk, immaculate man, elegantly tailored with a Van Dyke beard, his appearance was striking and his delivery "crisp". Zig-zagging across the US, he sold out theatres and concert halls, and performed up to six times a week, in a different city each night.

This book represents the best of the Holmes archive. Above all, it is an exceptional window on the world of 100 years ago: rosy, untrammelled, and before air travel or even

radio. Leaving through, it is hard not to feel regret at its passing. Belle Époque *flâneurs* stroll through ruined temples. Cows lollop in front of Mont-Saint-Michel. A glassy brook trickles alongside a jigsaw-perfect Wiltshire village.

His set of London pictures, though, is rather more familiar – traffic jams and drunks. "I have noticed them coming out of pubs, leaning against lamp posts for support or slouching along, usually in the middle in the street," is his comment on the picture of an East End pub in 1895. "I have astonished them by offering a greeting and an unexpected sixpence. They would look up a little dazed and say, oh good God, gov'nor – thank you!"

Lucy Davies

