



THE KOGARAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

F E B R U A R Y

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THE KOGARAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Sponsored by Kogarah Municipal Council.

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OBJECTIVES:

To promote interest in the history of Kogarah Municipality and Australia in general.

To give support to the preservation of historic buildings and other objects considered to be of historic value.

MEMBERSHIP:

Any enquiries regarding membership should be directed to the Hon. Secretary. Visitors are especially welcome.

Subscription:	\$1.00 per annum (plus 50¢ joining fee)
Senior Citizens:	.25¢ per annum
Students:	.25¢ per annum

MEETINGS:

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month, commencing at 8 p.m. in the Soldiers' Memorial Presbyterian Church Hall, Kensington Street, Kogarah. (Opposite The St. George Hospital).

CARSS' COTTAGE MUSEUM:

Open Sundays and Public Holidays from Noon to 6 p.m.
Admission 20¢ Adults, 10¢ Children. (Maximum 60¢ for one family).

DONATIONS FOR MUSEUM:

Donations of items of historical interest suitable for inclusion in the Society's Museum will be gratefully received by -

Mr. J.E. Veness,
6, Lance Avenue,
BLAKEHURST. 2221

'Phone: 54 3932

CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEWSLETTER:

Contributions of articles and information of local interest for publication in this Newsletter will be welcomed by the Editor -

Mr. P. Orlovich, 'Phone 587 0377
54, Culver Street,
KOGARAH. 2217

FEBRUARY MEETING:

The next meeting of the Society will take place on 8th February, 1973, in the Soldiers' Memorial Presbyterian Church Hall, Kensington St., Kogarah, (opp. The St. George Hospital) at 8 p.m.

Those members who attended our first meeting held on 12th March, 1970, will remember Mr. W. Foster, M.A., Vice President of The Royal Historical Society, giving us an address on the meaning of place names in the district together with points pertaining to the operation of an historical society. Mr. Foster will again be the speaker at our February meeting and the subject will be "The Royal Botanic Gardens", illustrated by slides. This will be a description of Phillip's Domain and its subsequent development (in part) as a Royal Botanic Gardens, and will be followed by a walk through the Gardens to see its monuments and memorials, rich in historical associations.

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On Sunday, 25th February, there will be a residential appeal by the National Parks & Wildlife Foundation, and a letter from Mrs. M. Thorpe, 'phone 54 1558 (Regional Chairman) was read at our January meeting asking for members support in this appeal which will be conducted in the Kogarah-Carlton area. Mr. K.R. Cavanough is the Area Chairman, 'phone 54 4158, and either of the above would be pleased to hear from any members who may be interested in helping.

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Competition prize for February meeting will be donated by Mr. W. Wright.

Volunteers are required for the supper roster for this year.

Museum roster:

18th February	- Mr. & Mrs. Gaskin
25th "	- Mrs. McOnie & Miss Foley
4th March	- Mr. & Mrs. J. Lean
11th "	- Mrs. Leahy and Mrs. Smith

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Subscriptions for 1973 are now due: Those who joined the Society from October, 1972, will not be required to pay a further amount as the year 1973 is also covered.

Last month Miss C. McEwen kindly compiled our Newsletter which was much appreciated, and also acted as Secretary for our January meeting in the absence of both Mrs. D.A. Hatton and Mrs. B. Butters, who were on holiday.

(Mrs.) D.A. Hatton,
Hon. Secretary

MOVING PICTURES IN BYGONE DAYS - PART ONE

BY V.S. SMITH

My first recollection of motion pictures is when, as a small boy, 65 years ago, my parents took me, on my birthday, to West's Pictures in the Glaciarium "opposite the new Railway Station" in Railway Square. The advertisement intimated that West's were "Best of All", "Unapproached and Unassailable" and that there would be a "magnificent programme unique in the history of cinematography". "A moving panorama of events outside our experience".

They asked the question "What will we see?" and very obligingly and modestly answered "The most Absorbingly, Interesting and Wonderfully Diversified Entertainment since the Application of Animated Photography".

Unfortunately, I cannot remember the "absorbingly interesting" "Training British Bluejackets" being a revelation to the uninitiated. This breezy subject, illustrated in a graphic and realistic manner, showed one early morning hour in the life of a sailor.

Bad luck too, that the "wonderfully diversified entertainment" of "Magnificent Animated Specimens of Prize British Poultry, Sheep and Goats" has slipped my mind.

There were eleven named pictures in the programme "and a host of others - humorous, novel and magic". In all this choice of entertainment I regret to admit that it is only one of the unfeared films that I can recall - "Fishing in the White Sea". How, I wondered, could a sea be white? What with the flickers, the poorly lit screen and the unsteady pictures, it was hard to tell.

After the films I was taken for a trip to Manly. I vividly remember boarding the enormous "Brighton" and went inside to admire the enormous engine that drove the enormous paddle wheels. After being taken for a ride on the Manly horse-tram, we returned on the equally enormous "Fairlight", and I clearly recollect that we were nearly wrecked by the enormous blue Pacific rollers that billowed through the Heads. Even during the distress of that near shipwreck (fortunately not noticed by the other passengers) I continued to think as the blue waters almost engulfed us, "How could a sea be white? Would the water resemble milk?".

So, apparently, I remained rather unimpressed by what was the real reason people flocked to the "moving" pictures. It was the fact that the pictures "moved" that was the main attraction, not the contents of the films. When, as was often the case, an advertised programme contained twentyfour named films, it is clear that the running time of each could only have been about five minutes and only the simplest of subjects could be dealt with in that time.

At first, in some of Sydney's regular concerts of the day, in which it was usual to show coloured slides to illustrate the songs, there was included as a novelty, "1000 feet of the latest moving pictures direct from London". No titles were given. It was sufficiently merely to refer to "moving" pictures to create an interest among intending patrons.

Then, with a flourish, the aforesaid, "West's Pictures" and their rival the "Spencer's Theatrescope Company", became the principal exhibitors with full film programmes. As an additional attraction the latter had the services of "Senora Spencer, the only lady operator in the world".

For a time "The Pennydom" in Pitt Street introduced half hour programmes. Commencing at 7.30 p.m. each evening, you could pay your 3d. and "enjoy" 30 minutes of the "Latest Humorous Motion Films and Two American Song Successes".

The exhibitors had one thing in common. They believed in advertising. The extravagant language associated with present day films had its beginnings way back in 1907 as is seen in the above references to West's pictures. Most films were not spectacular so usually reference in the advertisements concerned the programme as a whole. One was said to contain "Bright, Beautiful, Bewildering and Bewitching Novelties", while another had "Jags of Joy for Jaded Jacks and Jills".

As evidence that all had not been cinematic perfection is this extract from a 1908 advertisement. " 'Living-Picture' patrons are increasing in numbers every day and the reason is obvious. Only a little time ago, the pictures were unsteady and the onlooker came away with streaming eyes. There is nothing of this now. With an improvement in method, the result of experience, there is now an absence of the staggers".

This, surely, was pleasing evidence of an improvement. Just think - no staggers! But I must have been a difficult type because I did not become a regular patron until Waddington's in 1915 opened the "Palace Picture Show" on Parramatta Road, Petersham, on the site of a former skating rink. The premises consisted of a large marquee, painted to make it opaque. From inside, on a sunny day, it was a deep orange colour and was very hot.

According to their position in relation to the screen, the long wooden seats, with single rail back rests, were priced at 6d. and 1/- on Saturday nights and 3d. and 6d. at Saturday afternoon matinees. At the rear there was a gallery consisting of tiers of backless seats rising to near the hot roof. Boys would often squeeze under the gallery to search for pennies and articles dropped by the young patrons above.

The marquee was oval in shape and the walls were not so high as the screen. It was therefore erected at a distance from the wall to take advantage of the steep slope of the roof which was held up by two massive tent poles. The space behind the screen was not wasted. The screen was made of white cloth and consequently the pictures could be viewed through it from the cheap seats placed at its rear.

In those days of silent films the sub-titles were of great importance as without them it would not have been possible to follow the film. For those patrons sitting behind the screen (perhaps not from choice, but because of a large Saturday night crowd) the ability to read the back-to-front titles was something that only practice made perfect.

At the sides of the screen large frames were erected. The names of the films being shown were painted on cloth, pushed into slots, and illuminated from the rear

and if there were fewer than 12 films thus advertised, we knew we were being cheated.

At that time most films were still quite short. It was possible, (but not usual) to have to 1000 feet of film on a spool. The few films longer than that were called "two reelers". However, the vast majority comprising e.g. "gazettes" (later called "newsreels"), scenics and comics were only about 500 feet in length with a running time of about 8 minutes.

Saturday afternoon matinees were extremely popular with children, and boys (being boys), rushed to secure a seat at the rear of the screen or to swelter in the heat in the top row of the gallery. Almost invariably as an inticement, a small gift (such as a compass) would be presented to young patrons, but this seemed to me entirely unnecessary, as how could one possibly stay away?

After numerous episodes of "The Perils of Pauline" during which Pauline escaped, completely unscathed, from absolutely hopeless situations, we were now privileged to watch "The exploits of Elaine". Last week Elaine had been cunningly captured by the badies and we left her, tied hand and foot with thick ropes, across the rails, while an express train first seen as a tiny speck on the horizon but approaching at an enormous speed, rapidly growing larger and larger until it was almost upon poor Elaine. She was saved only temporarily by a title reading "Will Elaine's Head be Severed? See Episode 21 next week".

I dutifully attended again, paid my 3d. and received my gift, which this week consisted of a glass-faced tin about the same size as the compass, containing the brightly coloured face of a negro whose large eyes rolled around loosely. It required a steady hand and much patience to roll them into the proper places.

I watched through several reels of cowboys and indians, interspersed with others showing the exploits of the Keystone Cops. Then, breathless with anticipation, I saw what I had been waiting for all through the week. The hero, just in the nick of time, undid those thick ropes and snatched Elaine from the track as the express amidst clouds of steam rushed by. But Elaine's respite was not to be for long for in less than 200 feet of film those badies had caught her again.

Struggling violently, but helplessly, she was tied hand and foot with thick ropes to the bench in a sawmill. The badies pulled a switch and Elaine was drawn towards the fast revolving blade of a circular saw. Surely this is the end!, but once again at the very last moment she is saved by a title reading "Will Elaine be sliced to Death? See Episode 22 next Week".

When, after many weeks, Elaine had miraculously survived all the many horrors cunningly devised by the badies and married the hero in the final episode, on that very same Saturday afternoon they showed Episode No. 1 of "The Clutching Hand". I simply HAD to go the following week to see what happened to the poor girl, tied hand and foot with thick ropes to a stake in the centre of a snake pit, with an enormous python, its beady eyes fastened upon her in a cold hypnotic stare as it slithered into position to do its deadly work. For one week she was saved from death because on the screen there appeared an enormous hand which slowly closed on a title reading "The Clutching Hand". See Episode No. 2 next week". Need you ask how, as a boy, I was compelled to spend my Saturday afternoons?

It was during those days of silent films that I saw my first "talkie", although it wasn't given that or any particular name. Near the projection box a gramophone with a very large horn played a disc record which was synchronised very well with a short film of a lady singing. There had been many "stunts" of this nature over the years and as far back as 1908 the Lyceum advertised a "Chronomegophone". It was a method of synchronising a loud record of the singing of Harry Lauder with his picture on the screen.

Although a variation of this system of using disc records was adopted at first with some modern talkie films, it had certain fatal disadvantages. Where the picture is coming from one source (the projector) and the sound from another (the record) it is virtually impossible to make them synchronise. I have often had to use a silent film with the sound track on a tape recorder. Unless the sound comprises only a commentary it is impossible to correctly adjust them. The sound of a telephone ringing will be heard a few seconds after we have seen, on the screen, someone answering it. Or on the screen a car will leave the kerb and seconds later, or before, will come the sound of the motor starting.

There have been various inventions to overcome this point, but there are at least two remaining problems. One is the limited playing time of a record - and this is why I call the early attempts "stunts", because the records then ran for a maximum of about $3\frac{1}{2}$ minutes. The other problem is an accidental breakage of the film (quite common), when upon rejoining, at least a small piece and sometimes quite a long section of damaged film is removed. Over a period there are more and more breaks and synchronisation of picture and sound would then be impossible. To overcome this a different system was adopted and the soundtrack is now printed on the edge of the film.

It is undoubted that many of the early films were extremely crude when compared with present day talkies, but when now viewing them it is necessary to remember that these quick jerky movements which tend to make them even more laughable, were not present when they were screened as silent films.

Talkie films are photographed and screened at the rate of twenty four frames (separate pictures) per second. If a portion of an originally silent film photographed at 16 frames per second, is included with it and screened at 24 frames per second, this represents an increase of 50% in its original speed. No wonder movements seem jerky. If a talkie film were shown at a speed of 36 frames per second, it would look just as ridiculous.

But to return to Waddington's. As the "Great War" slowly progressed and the number of casualties increased, wounded returned soldiers, invalided home from France and the Middle East, began to be seen. They were admitted free of charge to the picture show, and I can well remember that when they appeared the whole audience rose and cheered and the orchestra played appropriate music. People were more demonstrative then, and in any case wasn't this "the war to end all wars?"

Waddington's Picture Palace opened only on Saturday afternoons and nights. Saturday night was "late shopping night" when brass bands played and crowds of late shoppers surged through the streets. In the absence of radio and T.V., there was no great inducement to remain at home and it was the custom to parade up and down the street and through the shops, which were brightly lit with gas

lamps. Most men worked long hours during the week, perhaps riding home after 6 p.m. on the footboard of an over-crowded tram. More work on Saturday morning left only the afternoon and night available for relaxation. There being not much choice of entertainment, many did their shopping early and enjoyed a night at the "flicks".

"Flicks" was an abbreviation for the flickers which in the early days were associated with moving pictures, and it was the flickers that caused mothers to scold their children "You'll ruin your eyesight, going to the pictures every Saturday afternoon"! "Moving" pictures are of course nothing of the kind. One foot of silent film containing sixteen separate pictures, passed through the projector in one second. The film travelled with an intermittent motion and each separate picture, while being screened, was stationary. Then, in an instant, it moved down and was replaced by the next picture. In that instant, the blade of a "fan" cut off the beam of light and so hid the motion. So, for sixteen times each second, the screen went black as the light was cut off. This however was not fast enough to deceive the eye and it saw the flickers. Later to hide this effect, the fan was fitted with three blades, thus cutting off the light once while the picture was moving down and twice while it was being viewed. This much faster flicker was not noticed by the eye and the expression "Flicks" went out of use.

Waddington's had an orchestra which entertained the audience before the commencement of the programme and again at interval. However, it was only a pianist who could ad lib through the programme, quickly changing the tempo of the music as the picture required.

Part two will appear in the March Newsletter.

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