



THE KOGARAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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PRICE: 5c.

Registered for posting as a Periodical, Category C

THE KOGARAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Sponsored by Kogarah Municipal Council.

President:

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BLAKEHURST. 2221

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Hon. Treasurer:

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Hon. Secretary

Mrs. D.A. Hatton,
15, Annette Avenue,
KOGARAH. 2217

'Phone 587 9970

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, 54, Culver Street, <u>KOGARAH.</u> 2217	'Phone 587 0377
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MEMBERSHIP

We are pleased to announce that we now have 158 members.

OUR MARCH MEETING

On the 8th March, 1973, we will have our Annual General Meeting and election of officers at 8 p.m., in the Kogarah Soldiers' Memorial Presbyterian Church Hall.

As a reward for getting through the important business efficiently and smartly - if you do - we will screen an interesting and entertaining colour film of the Australian outback "The Cattle Carters". You'll enjoy it!

OUR FEBRUARY MEETING

We were indeed fortunate to have our friend, Mr. W. Foster M.A., as our Speaker, and his talk concerning the Royal Botanic Gardens, which was illustrated with colour slides, was most interesting. Many members expressed their appreciation and all will be happy to know that Mr. Foster has consented to give another talk later.

NEXT EXECUTIVE MEETING

In view of the fact that the most interesting Exhibition of Australian Jewellery will be held on Thursday 29th March, at 7.45 p.m., in the Sea Scouts' Hall next to Carss Cottage, our usual Executive meeting will be held a week earlier (on 22nd March) so that members may attend the exhibition.

MUSEUM ROSTER

February	18th Mr. & Mrs. Gaskin
"	25th Mrs. McOnie & Miss Foley
March	4th Mr. & Mrs. J. Lean
"	11th Mrs. Leahy & Mrs. B. Smith
"	18th Mr. & Mrs. K. Cavanough
"	25th Mrs. Hatton & Dr. Hatton
April	1st Mr. & Mrs. J. Lean
"	8th Miss Coxhead & Mrs. Gould
"	15th Mrs. Gilmour & Mrs. Johns
"	21st Mr. & Mrs. V. Smith
"	29th Mrs. Grant & Mrs. Butters

We would appreciate volunteers for Easter Monday - 23rd April; and Anzac Day - April 25th. Please contact Mrs. Kelly, 587 6986.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1973

This is just a reminder that any subscriptions not yet paid are TWO MONTHS OVERDUE. The subscriptions of new members who joined in October, November and December 1972 will carry them through until 31st December, 1973.

SPECIAL TOUR OF CAMPBELLTOWN AND DISTRICT

At 9.15 a.m. on Sunday 8th April, we will leave, from outside the Kogarah Civic Centre, Belgrave Street, Kogarah for a tour of historical buildings and points of interest in the Campbelltown district.

We will be met by representatives of the local Historical Society and conducted through this area which is so historically rich.

A charge of \$2.00 (adults) and 50¢ (children) will be made and bookings may be arranged through Mrs. Butters by phone (57 6954) or at the General meeting on 8th March.

AN ATTRACTIVE AND UNUSUAL FUNCTION

A social night has been arranged at the Sea Scouts Hall on Thursday 29th March at 7.45 p.m. This will be a combined effort with our members and the auxiliary members of the Sea Scouts.

AN EXHIBITION OF AUSTRALIAN JEWELLERY by Mr. & Mrs. Hans Buhn will be on display and Mr. Buhn will provide a comprehensive lecture on his travels and show his collection of COLOUR SLIDES.

The jewellery is elegant and of unusual designs as the basic materials used are an assortment of shed leaves, seeds, pods and cones from Australian native trees lacquered with liquid nylon, set in delicate gold filigree.

An admission fee of only 50¢ for adults and 10¢ for children will be charged and we do hope that you will not miss this most interesting function.

Tickets will be on sale at the Annual General Meeting on 8th March. Please see me.

SYLVIA KELLY

Although our admission charges for Carss Cottage are very low, and during 1972 several organized school groups were admitted free, it is very pleasing to note that the total income from this source exceeded \$500 for the year.

Do you think our profit for 1972 would be \$6.00 or \$60.00 or \$600.00? The Hon. Treasurer's Financial Statement is printed in this Newsletter. Have a look!

STATEMENT OF INCOME & EXPENDITURE, 1972

<u>INCOME</u>		<u>EXPENDITURE</u>	
Subscriptions	\$ 149.25	Petty Cash	\$ 82.55
Museum Admissions	504.43	Stationery	99.13
Museum Sales	251.74	Telephone	56.88
Commission - Pottery	23.78	Electricity	16.62
& Painting		Bulk postage	54.48
Adv. Comm. Booklet	34.50	Insurance	71.92
1971		Easter Hamper Exp.	54.40
Easter Hamper	105.30	Xmas Hamper Exp.	30.12
Competitions	85.08	Street Stall	4.00
Pool Party	57.50	Don. Sea Scouts	20.00
Slide Evening	23.55	Subs. to Societies	41.30
Candle Demon.	11.00	Hire P.A. System 1971	34.50
New U Demon.	37.00	Tours	344.95
Coty Demon	64.36	Xmas Party	175.06
Tours	414.75	Art Soc. Painting sold	25.50
Theatre Parties	40.00	Theatre Parties	19.50
Street Stall	250.00	Ball Tickets	8.00
Xmas Hamper	64.82	Delegates fees	12.00
Xmas Party	177.10	(RAH Soc.)	
Xmas Raffle	24.70	Reimbursement S.Zimeris	25.00
Ball Tickets	8.00	Jam	154.21
Donations	7.00	Purchase, Museum	335.00
Sale of Matting	14.00	Exhibits	
Sale of Painting	25.50	Maintenance	98.92
Bank interest	9.62		<u>\$1764.01</u>
		Excess Income	
		over Expenditure	618.97
	<u>\$2382.98</u>		<u>\$2382.98</u>

SUMMARY

Cash receipts, 1972	\$2382.98
Cash payments, 1972	1764.01
Surplus for 1972	<u>\$ 618.97</u>
Bght. fwd. from 1971	222.51
Net Cash Bal. 31.12.72	<u>\$ 841.48</u>
Secretary's Petty Cash	<u>\$8.86</u>
in hand	

P. Briancourt,
Hon. Treasurer.

Audited and found correct
V. Smith,
Hon. Auditor.

MOVING PICTURES IN BYGONE DAYS - PART TWO

BY V.S. SMITH

Perhaps it was the pleasant memories of boyhood days at the "flicks" that made me say "yes" when, in 1918, a friend invited me to be operator in his newly-acquired "Empire Picture Palace - Where the Good Pictures are" at Bankstown. This "Palace" was erected on land which sloped up from the screen, which was much better for viewing than was the flat floor of an ex-roller skating rink.

The building was constructed of timber and galvanised iron and the roof covered about one third of the area, the remaining portion being open to the sky. The floor in the roofed portion was composed of bricks. At first the seats were plain wooden planks with single back rails but later, some of the seats in the roofed portion, were padded and the price of these was increased from 6d. to 9d.

The screen was made of flat galvanised iron, painted white, and when wet with rain, each sheet reflected the picture at a slightly different angle and the result was not very satisfactory.

One might think that on cold winter nights patrons would shiver in this partly roofed "palace", but nothing could be further from the truth. During the late afternoon coke fires had been lit in six oil drums. Each drum had been pierced with many holes and set on three legs. By 8 p.m. they had become red hot and were then moved up among the audience. During the time I was there nobody was incinerated - a remarkable piece of good luck!

The patrons, and all living over a considerable adjoining area, had to contend with the continual puff-puff-puff of the gas engine used to generate the electricity. The proprietor also conducted a confectionery business next door and on Saturday nights his was the only shop in Bankstown lit by electric lights.

The picture show was erected on a corner block and from the side street there was an entrance into a "bike shed" behind the screen. For the payment of a weekly rental, people who rode into Bankstown to catch a train to Sydney, could chain their bicycles to supports and collect them again on the way home. Bankstown was then at the end of the railway line and many of our patrons came from further out - all equipped with kerosene hurricane lamps to light their way home through unlit streets and bush. I cannot think of any instance where persons came by car.

Built high up on an inside wall, there was a small platform with a piano. On each Saturday night, at 7.55 p.m. a girl played a rousing overture and from then until about 11 p.m. (with a 10 minute interval for the sale of sweets and ice cream) she accompanied the silent films. Another loud overture brought the patrons back to their seats after interval. Without music, and with no idea as to what change of mood would suddenly appear in the picture, this girl's playing always seemed to be just right for the particular scene or event being depicted.

For her services she received five shillings, out of which she paid her train fare from Campsie.

There had been a big improvement in the quality of films since my 1915 visits to Waddington's and our programmes usually comprised an Australian Gazette (newsreel) a feature, scenic, interval, overseas gazette, feature and comedy. Such a programme would run until about 11 p.m. The only films in colour were scenic. In the titles of some feature films it said "Colour by Technicolor" but only black and white copies were imported into Australia.

At first, we had only one projector, which was the usual practice in suburban picture shows. A spool of film would hold a maximum length of 2,000 feet (but usually had much less) and after showing that it was customary to project a slide reading "Just one moment please, while the operator changes the spool". Providing the "moment" was not too long, the audience did not object, but the pause was unfortunate because it spoilt the mood created by the film. So we acquired a second projector from the German Concentration Camp when it closed after the war.

With the aid of a boy assistant I was, after a little practice, able to switch from one projector to the other without the change being noticed by the audience. Thus, the programme could be screened without pauses for spool changes - a procedure then almost exclusively confined to city theatres.

In the very early days of films, the city exhibitors purchased their films from the overseas producers and after showing them until their popularity waned, they sold them to travelling exhibitors who toured suburban and country districts. This situation was changed when West's Pictures opened a "film exchange" and became a "distributor". It bought the output of certain overseas producers and rented the films to local exhibitors. West's eventually sold out to Spencer's Theatrescope Company and at about the time I became an operator they sold to Australasian Films which, with its Union Theatres, became by far the largest distributor of films in Australia.

At this time there were a sprinkling of feature films being made in Australia although, compared with the number of imported films, they were relatively scarce. One such Australian film, a copy of which is still in existence, and has no doubt been seen by some readers, was "The Sentimental Bloke" based upon the poem by C.J. Dennis. Lottie Lyall, Australia's most popular female star of the period, appeared as Doreen and Arthur Tauchart, a vaudeville artist, took the part of the barrowman known as "The Kid".

One fairly successful producer of Australian films at that time was E.J. Carroll whose principal male star was Reg (Snowy) Baker. Baker was a very well known athlete who excelled in almost all branches of sport. Football, swimming, diving, fencing, riding, boxing were all dominated by him - and he was also a good actor.

The Snowy Baker films I can remember screening, all with attractive sounding titles, were "The Man from Kangaroo", "The Jackeroo of Coolabong" and "The Shadow of Lightning Ridge". They were popular with Bankstown audiences.

In 1918, the picture show proprietors were still truly independent. They were not "tied" to any one film exchange and could select their programmes from various sources. For the Empire, this selection soon became by job. The procedure was, with free admission tickets, to attend "trade shows" and the city theatre where a particular film was being screened and judge its suitability for inclusion in our programme.

One one occasion I selected "The Man from Kangaroo" and upon entering the one-man Carroll film exchange to book it, I found a very worried new manager with 1,000 feet of that film tangled around the floor in tight coils. It was not until much later that films were kept on spools. In those days, after a film was shown it was wound on to the projecting centre of a disc and then, with a quick reverse turn of the handle, it was slipped off. If the film had been wound tightly all was well and up to 1,000 feet would easily retain its tightly wound shape and could be stored in a flat cardboard box. But if it had been wound loosely, and then lifted from the box by its edges, in a horizontal position, the middle would fall out and the result was too horrible to think about.

But this poor man, completely inexperienced, just had to think about it for the film tangled around his feet was due to be sent by rail for a country screening. He appealed for my help but took a lot of convincing that I should cut his precious film into lengths, unwind the twists, and join it together again. One and a half hours later that film was restored to its original shape, just in time for dispatch by a country train.

Two of these up to 1,000 feet rolls of film would normally be joined together on a standard size spool for screening. Then, if only one projector was being used, it was necessary to have a pause and change the spool as stated above. At this time a friend was operator at the Imperial Pictures in what is now Princes Highway at Rockdale. It had a novel method of avoiding the need for a spool-change with only the one projector.

The "Imperial" was constructed of brick and was of a much higher standard than the "Empire Picture Palace", but it had no operating box. Its one projector was placed (illogically and dangerously) in the centre aisle of the gallery without any enclosure whatever. Supports had been erected to hold a very large spool on which could be wound all the films in the programme. Because of the ever present danger of fire, there was a rule that only 2,000 feet of film could be exposed at any one time, but this was ignored.

Instead of standing, as was customary, the operator sat in a comfortable chair and his usual duty was only to make an occasional adjustment to the arc-lamp to ensure that it gave a pure white light. One night he drifted off into restful sleep. The unattended arc-light went a pale reddish colour and the film broke. Eventually, amidst loud cries of dissatisfaction from the audience, the manager came upstairs to awaken him so that he could more clearly hear his dismissal notice.

Sometimes, film programmes would need to be shared by two picture shows. This was called "switching". Bankstown normally switched with its nearest neighbouring show at Campsie. Each picture show collected one half of the programme from the

film exchange and employed a "switch-boy" whose duty it was to take portions of the film, as screened, to the other show and to bring back parts of the other film it had screened. Trains ran at 15 minute intervals and made this operation quite simple.

On one occasion the film we were receiving from Campsie was the long and dramatic "Auction of Souls". It was the first "seven-reeler" we had screened and its well-advertised city screening had been in the Sydney Town Hall. A week before our screening, the proprietor and I had stealthily gone around, late one night, posting advertising posters on fences and as a result of this extra advertising the Empire Picture Palace was packed to the doors. To make matters worse, in the circumstances which followed, my Chief Clerk from the Bank had expressed a desire to see the inner workings of a projection box and he was present at this, which was my only screening when things went wrong.

The Campsie switch-boy had brought the first 2,000 feet of "Auction of Souls" and as I watched the quantity of unscreened film get less and less I became increasingly anxious concerning the non-arrival of the next spool. I opened the door and looked out. The beam of light shone down on the audience and there I saw the face of our switch-boy who had forgotten to go to Campsie and was enjoying the film.

There was nothing else I could do. After having shown 2,000 feet of heavy drama, I could only interrupt that film and show what was probably the most hilariously funny Charlie Chaplin film ever made - "Shoulder Arms". This was a film we were not "switching". Then, as more film came from Campsie, we had the remaining 5,000 feet of "Auction of Souls". Many of our patrons had come by train from Punchbowl and Lakemba. The last train went at 11.15 and the pictures ended at 11.20. We arranged with the friendly Station Master to allow people to travel by a later train from Sydney, which usually returned, empty, to the carriage sheds which were at Canterbury.

A lone operator in a projection box, with no one to confer with in an emergency, often had a worrying time. One slight emergency, was a not uncommon break in the film. The good-natured audience seemed to be just waiting for this to happen and would immediately start to "count out" the operator. As the "one-two-three" commenced, with growing loudness, it was my endeavour, (speeded up by constant practice) to thread a new length of film through the projector and re-start before the deafeningly loud "eight-nine-OUT" was reached. Another risk was the possibility that the assistant would accidentally allow the middle to fall out of a roll of film, as described above. Because of the time needed to correct such a happening, it could easily have lead to the cancellation of a show.

The serious emergency, which all operators took care to avoid was the danger of a fire. "Safety-film" was not yet in use and the burning of cellulose nitrate used in the celluloid film of the day, more resembled an explosion than a fire. The instructions to all operators was clear - "In the event of a film fire, GET OUT". To partly guard against the consequences of a fire, the walls, ceiling and floor of the Bankstown operating box were lined with sheets of iron, which made it very noisy in use.

At about this time, 1921, the number of film exchanges in Sydney had greatly increased. Sometimes an independent distributor would import even one good film which, while exhibitors were also independent, represented unwelcome competition with the films of Australasian Films (generally known as "the Combine"). The latter controlled eight Union Theatres in the city and this fact made it very difficult for owners of rival films (including those made in Australia) to arrange for city screenings. That was why "Auction of Souls" had been screened at the Town Hall.

If a particular film was not shown in the city, and the screening well advertised it remained unknown by the general public and was consequently not in demand by suburban and country exhibitors.

A "trade war" developed and Australasian Films went all out to induce suburban and country exhibitors to contract to make "block bookings" with it. It had sufficient films to enable it to supply three changes of programme each week.- a thing no other exchange could do. Practically all exhibitors relied on Australasian Films for at least part of their films and no other exchange would have been able to furnish this number if the supply was withheld. Consequently, with promises of an assured supply of films at a reduced rental, and the threat that no films might be available for those who did not sign a contract, the Empire unwillingly joined the Union Theatre chain. It thus lost its right to select its own programmes which, thereafter, were notified to it by Australasian Films eight weeks in advance of screening dates.

The Empire was now opening on Wednesdays and Saturdays and occasionally had a special programme on Fridays. This was becoming too much for me. On one Friday night we had trouble with the gas-engine and I remained up all night to assist the expert called in to remedy the defect. The next morning, at work in the Bank, I fell asleep, so I was forced to decide about my future. Would it be in the picture show or in the Bank? Fortunately for the Bank I resigned from the Empire Picture Palace. This great loss to the film industry passed almost unnoticed. Even at the Empire the proprietor (but who knows with what difficulty and tears) carried on for nearly a further year, before he sold out.

Generally speaking, things were now becoming much more difficult for existing exhibitors. With the tying up of so many picture shows in the Union Theatre chain, other exchanges were forced to encourage the building of new and better theatres as outlets for their films. Thus, many of the half open-air shows became obsolete and could not hope to compete with the much more elaborate theatres which were appearing. In the city large orchestras were installed.

Radio broadcasting now commenced and this had an adverse effect on picture show attendances. It is interesting to recall that one commercial station linked land lines to city theatres and we became familiar with announcements such as "we are now crossing to our No. 3 orchestra" and then over we'd go to e.g. the Lyceum Theatre. The orchestras were quite good, but the music being played was arranged to match the various moods in the films being screened and was not satisfactory for listeners who were not viewing the films.

Then, to entice people away from their "wireless sets", an added expense was incurred. City theatres and some in the suburbs (such as the Kogarah "Victory")

installed expensive Wurlitzer and Christie organs. In some, the console would rise from the depths into a blaze of spotlights and the lone organist would displace an orchestra of many musicians. Then came "talkies" with expensive new projectors and sound equipment and those organs were suddenly of no further use except before the programme and during interval. In due course Cinemascope, with its wide screens, extra sound equipment and new projector lenses, were an added expense.

We'd come a long way from those happy days when we were content to sit on a sixpenny seat (a plank) in a galvanised iron half open-air picture palace and watch silent films to the sound of piano music, while enjoying the warmth of a red hot oil drum.

Then, for a great many exhibitors came disaster. T.V. was introduced. In a short time theatre audiences dwindled to practically nothing. People remained at home and in their own lounge-rooms sat in T.V. chairs eating T.V. dinners from T.V. trays while they enjoyed watching those films of cowboys and indians that had amused the boys and girls in bygone years. That far-seeing man who had saved these films for all those years had unfortunately failed to preserve "The Perils of Pauline" and "The Clutching Hand" or the T.V. viewers would certainly have thrilled to good entertainment. Or would they?

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Incidentally, during about the same period that the Empire Picture Palace flourished, there was a half open-air picture show in Derby Street, Kogarah. It was opposite the present site of Flemings, next to Brett's Hall which adjoined the lane. It was in the premises previously known as the Kogarah Amusement Palace and Skating rink. I can well remember the screen being placed so that patrons could view it from the plank seats which were bolted to the flat concrete floor of the former skating rink. It had only one projector and a slide often begged us to wait "just one moment while the operator changes the spool".

PRESIDENTS REPORT.

Twelve months of Society activity have gone by and we are at the Annual Meeting again. I have been fortunate in having a dedicated group of office bearers who have been of great assistance in the administration of the Society.

Our membership has continued to increase and the interest shown by the public in our museum has been very rewarding.

Throughout the year we have had a number of speakers address our meetings on a wide variety of topics all of which have been of great interest.

A further interesting group of speakers has been arranged for the coming twelve months, so members may be assured of continuing interest for each meeting.

Our Social Committee has been particularly active throughout the year and already a number of functions have been arranged for the coming year. A programme of bus trips both half and full days is intended for the ensuing twelve months. The efforts of the ladies, Mrs. Hatton in particular in the preparation and presentation of the

stall in Kogarah was most rewarding to the Society and we are most grateful.

Our Newsletter each month is always welcomed by members and we have to thank Mrs. Hatton for the typing involved, Mr. Smith and Mrs. Burghart for the printing, assembling and posting.

The historical feature each month is always interesting and although there have been times when we were rather at a loss for topics, we look forward to a continuing of items with a greater content of local interest.

We are now legally in possession of Carss' Cottage, the lease having been signed and our rent paid for the full term of 15 years.

Again I would thank all office bearers for their assistance and all members for their continued support throughout the year, it is most encouraging to see a good attendance at meetings and good support for the outings and functions. Do come along to the March meeting and give your support to the Annual Meeting to ensure the increase and improvement of the Society.

J.E. VENESS

MUSEUM REPORT:

Our museum continues to attract visitors in sufficient numbers to make our efforts worthwhile. The exhibits continue to increase in number and the method of presentation is being updated to give a greater amount of information on the particular subject to the viewer. The first results of this re-arrangement will be visible in the near future in the clothing and ladies wear display and the kitchen display.

A discussion has been held with the Council in regards to the garden area and this is being re-arranged to give a more attractive display.

The application for permission to erect a stable building is with Council and we await their decision.

The past year has enabled us to settle into Carss' Cottage and to get used to the running of a museum, to get to know what is wanted of an exhibit and what may be expected of the public. We have learned a lot in this period and with this behind us we can look confidently ahead in our plans for the museum, its exhibits and its surrounding area.

The Potters group and the Art Society have contributed to the effectiveness of the display by their work and it is expected that this will be even more outstanding in the future.

To the members who have attended the museum throughout the year, to those who have assisted in the preparation of exhibits, Mr. & Mrs. Lean, to Mr. Wright for his assistance each Sunday in ensuring that someone is on duty, I give my sincere thanks and I feel sure the Society would also have me thank you all.