

***EDINBURGH THEATRES, CINEMAS  
AND CIRCUSES  
1820 - 1963***

*by*  
***GEORGE BAIRD***

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*The prime and humble duty  
of the student of contemporary  
history is to establish the  
elementary record before it is  
dissipated.*



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*N.B. Hotel.*

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## ***FOREWORD***

### **George Baird 1893 – 1967**

My father served his time as a painter but had to give up the trade in 1940 following a long spell of being unemployed and off work sick in the late 1930's. His deteriorating physical condition was caused by being wounded at Gallipoli in 1915: extensive shrapnel wounds to his left arm and osteo-arthritis in his right ankle, due to its being broken at Gallipoli, and in his left hip, which developed as a consequence of the ankle break. As some insurance against the future he secured a post in the Apprentice Housepainters' and Decorators' Evening Classes in 1935. The income from this source helped to augment his small wage as a labourer in St Cuthbert's Bakery, where he worked from 1940 until 1947 when he was forced to retire at the age of 54. Belatedly, he was awarded a 100 per cent. War Disabled Pension in September 1948.

In 1945 he compiled a *Dictionary of House Painting Terms* which I set in *Word 97* in 1998; Edinburgh's Telford College kindly undertook to make it available to Colleges of Education within Scotland. In the 1950's and 1960's he wrote a history of his Trade Union, *The Operative House Painters of Scotland*; *Ancient and Modern Greenside*; *Greenside Parish Church* and his *Reminiscences*, all of which are deposited in the Central Library, Edinburgh.

The words on page iii tell us that he realised the importance of recording some facts about the growth in the number of cinemas in Edinburgh before it was too late: their numbers fell dramatically in the late 1950's and early 1960's due to competition from Television and Bingo. His fondness of the cinema possibly stemmed from his attending Sunday School Magic Lantern shows, which were followed by his father taking him to the Operetta House 100 years ago. An abiding memory I have of him is when he was off work in 1938. In order to give my mother some time to herself in the afternoon, he would clear out of our Lochrin Terrace house to go to the King's Cinema round the corner in Home Street; his waistcoat pockets bulged with spent stubs (halves of cinema tickets).

His primary aim in writing the History was to report the emergence of 'houses of entertainment', by quoting the first advertisement relating to the opening of the theatre or cinema; the price of admission; and what was being presented for the entertainment of *Edinburry* folk. The main sources for doing this were: *The Scotsman*, *Edinburgh Evening News*, *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, *Edinburgh Courant*, *Leith Burghs Pilot*, *Leith Port Annual*. Some houses did not advertise in the Press, but used Window Bills, handbills, examples of which he was able to examine in the Edinburgh Room and the National Library. Another useful source of establishing which cinemas were in existence were the 1915 and 1954 *Kinematograph Year books*, still held by the National Library, unfortunately the 1938 *Cinema Buyers' Guide* is no longer available.

He started work on the History in October 1959 and from the outset he received practical support from the City Librarian, Mr.C.M. Minto, and his ever willing Edinburgh Room staff who turned up references for him, provided him with back copies of local papers, typed the History (the top copy is held by the Edinburgh Room, I have the carbon copy), indexed the entries (more thoroughly than I have been able to do) and bound the three volumes. The importance of checking his sources was paramount and he was scathing of sloppy work by

journalists who cut corners in order to meet some deadline. As he put it, “Facts and Diamonds have this in common – one must dig for them in their respective habitats. In this case facts are to be found in Libraries. That, however, is not the whole story, for, without the skilled Librarian to help, one would be like a traveller trying to cross a desert with no knowledge of map-reading, nor of navigation. My grateful thanks to the many Librarians who have assisted me over the years in my search for facts of a historical character.”

Background information was included where he thought it would be of interest to the reader, for example the House of Lords’ decision of 1771 to prevent building on the south side of Princes Street above pavement level. His sources for this were J.C.Dibdin’s *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage*; James Grant’s *Old and New Edinburgh*; William Baird’s *Annals of Duddingston and Portobello*; William Hutchison’s *Tales and Traditions of Leith*; Councillor Wilson McLaren’s *Reminiscences*; and *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*. He brought some light relief to the story with his reminiscences about such places as the *Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street*; when I typed these it was as if my father was speaking to me in his beautiful clear voice - I laughed at his wry humour and shrugged my shoulders when he engaged in some invective.

The other end of the scale, establishing when a ‘house’ closed, was fraught with problems; as he put it, it was “an almost impossible task to state when a cinema closed down. ...when closing dates are known they have been recorded, and that is as far as I can commit myself to this aspect of the story or history on Cinemas in particular”

It was a tragedy that as he was nearing the completion of the History he fell ill in January 1964 with a cerebral spasm. After a few weeks’ rest he returned to the fray and completed the Skating Rinks chapter in March 1964. Alas, he suffered a massive stroke in April 1964. As a consequence he was unable to compose a foreword to the History.

When the idea of making the History available to a wider readership, e.g. people doing research in Archives and other Libraries, took root last year, I thought it prudent to enquire from the Edinburgh Room whether it was still being consulted. They confirmed that it was frequently used and that they expected that that would continue to be the case. I therefore took on the rather daunting task of re-setting the history in *Word 97*, in A4 format. Keying the 180,000 words has made me realise the enormous task undertaken by my father in transcribing most of the text from source material – photocopying machines did not become generally available until the late 1960’s. I have taken the liberty of re-ordering some of the text in chapters 25, 26, 28, 29 and 30; numbered the chapters and added a summary of the contents at the start of each of them; and included a few personal comments in square brackets.

I would like to acknowledge the support and encouragement given to me by Bob Bain of the Scottish Music Hall Society during the nine months it took me to re-set the History.

George F. Baird  
9 July 2000

## 1: 19 NICOLSON STREET FROM 1820 TO 1892

*Ducrow's Circus, 1820; Andrew Ducrow; Phillip Astley and his London Circuses; Royal Amphitheatre, 1830; James Thorpe Cooke's Circus, 1846; Pablo Fanque's Amphitheatre, 1853; Dunedin Hall, 1854; Cooke's Royal Circus, 1858; Sanger's Circus and Hippodrome, 1859; Southminster, 1863; Hengler's Circus, 1863; Three Fires; Southminster fire, 1875; Queen's Theatre, 1875; Queen's Theatre fire, 1877; Two Queen's Theatres; Weldon's Circus, 1877; Watson's Grand Cirque, 1879; Newsome's Circus, 1879; Newsome's fire, 1887; Newsome's re-opened, 1888; Site of Newsome's Circus acquired by H.E. Moss, 1890; Moss' Empire Palace of Varieties opened 1892.*

The many changes which took place on that site from **1820** until **1892**, are not unlike the various stages which a butterfly passes through before it blossoms out as a beautiful creature to delight those who are fortunate to see it in all its glory.

The analogy of the butterfly is, I think, an apt parallelism in regard to the *Empire Theatre* which opened its doors to a wondering public on Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup> 1892. Without doubt it was the most gorgeous man-made place of entertainment in all of Scotland.

Having said that I will try and paint a word picture of that famous area which has catered for many generations of Edinburgh citizens. Writing in January 1963 it is approximately 143 years since 19 Nicolson Street first became prominent as an entertainment site.

### Ducrow

The name Ducrow is first mentioned in 1820 in connection with circus life in that area and was known as ***Ducrow's Circus***. Little or nothing but the name Ducrow was mentioned in local history in connection with the circus or the area. It is well, therefore, that some reference be made about one of the 'greats' in the circus world.

### Andrew Ducrow, 1793 - 1842

Andrew Ducrow was born at the Nag's Head, in High Street, Southwark, on October 10<sup>th</sup> **1793**. His father Peter was a Belgian, known as the **Flemish Hercules**. At the age of seven Andrew appeared before King George III. In **1808** he was chief equestrian and rope dancer at ***Astley's*** (details about whom are given below) at a salary of £10 per week. On the death of his father in **1815** Andrew made himself responsible for his brothers and sisters all of whom became members of his troupe, and for ten years toured the continent, returning to England in **1825**.

In **1830** Davis' lease of *Astley's* expired and while Davis hesitated, Ducrow with William West for his partner, came forward and held the lease until his death. In appreciation of Ducrow's performance of *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*, Queen Adelaide presented him with £100.

The number of persons employed at **Astley's** in Ducrow's time exceeded 150; the **weekly expenses** were seldom less than £500. In common with most circuses the season at the **Amphitheatre** was not continuous; in my time **Cooke's Circus** in Edinburgh had a Winter Season in the city and travelled throughout Scotland the remainder of the year.

On June 8<sup>th</sup> **1841** there was a **third fire at Astley's Circus**; Ducrow collapsed from this blow; body and mind gave way and on January 27<sup>th</sup> **1842** he died. He left a fortune of £60,000. In his will he directed that £800 should be expended on a monument over his grave in Kensal Green and that the interest on a further £200 be spent annually on flowers for its adornment.

The following is an extract from the Encyclopaedia Britannica about **Astley's Circus**:  
"The popularity of the circus in England may be traced to that kept by Phillip Astley in London at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Astley was followed by Ducrow, whose feats of horsemanship had much to do with establishing the traditions of the circus....."

The following short history of **Phillip Astley** is extracted from *The New York Clipper* of February 19<sup>th</sup> **1910**: "Phillip Astley was born in Newcastle-under-Lyme about **1742**. In time he became a sergeant major in General Elliot's Troupe of Light-Horse while serving abroad.

His first performances were in a field in Halfpenny Hatch, Lambeth, enclosed by a rope and stakes. His revenue, the voluntary contributions of passers-by. In time a fence replaced the rope and stakes, on the site now occupied by Waterloo Station. Seats were 1/-, standing 6d. Madame Astley took the shillings at the gate and beat the big drum which served as an orchestra.

He prospered (that brings trouble to anyone – anytime – anywhere). Astley was no different in that respect. The patent holders in respect of the theatres grew jealous and lodged information against him.

His Majesty King George III most opportunely crossed Westminster Bridge on a restive horse. The alert Astley showed his skill and presence of mind. The king was pleased with the manner in which Astley conducted himself, and, while it is not stated in the above account, there can be little doubt that Astley whispered in the king's ear – suffice it to say Astley got a Royal license, which effectually silenced his rivals. (So much for chance)

In **1770** Astley lent £200 on the mortgage of a piece of waste ground at Westminster. The owner disappeared, Astley foreclosed and walked into a fine site well stocked with timber. Using the timber he very soon became the proud possessor of a riding school.

In due course he put a roof over the arena; this caused comment. Nothing loth Astley had the dome painted to represent the branches of trees, renaming the riding school the **Royal Grove**. At first there was no system of artificial lighting. A scheme of candles was devised, and Astley was able to advertise that he could "perform evenings, wet or dry". London streamed to the new entertainment. Feats of horsemanship, more especially by himself, were advertised to the number of fifty. Young Master Astley, aged five, was the hero of *Billy Buttons Ride to Brentford*.

Phillip Astley prospered but fell foul of the authorities – by carrying on business under the pretence of a Royal Warrant; he was sent to jail. Lord Chancellor Thurston, whose daughters he had taught to ride, befriended him, and he got a licence. In **1794** the **Royal Grove** was

burnt down while Astley was with colours in France. Obtaining leave of absence he hurried home to rebuild his circus, which was ready within 12 months. The Prince of Wales and the Duke of York patronised its opening and in 1798 he got permission to use the style *Astley's Royal Amphitheatre*.

In **1803** Astley's was again destroyed by fire at an estimated loss of £25,000. Forthwith he laid the first stone of a new house, which opened at Easter **1804**. He entrusted the management of the new building to Young Astley. He died in Paris, then occupied by the Allies, in **1814**, at the age of 72. His body lies in *Pere la Chaise*. Astley's son and heir survived him no more than seven years; he died in the same bed and is buried in the same grave". The short article continued thus: "It was upon Ducrow that the kingdom of the circus descended".

I now return to the Nicolson Street story.

In **1830** *Ducrow's Circus* was renamed *Royal Amphitheatre*; it will be observed that in **1798** Astley's *Royal Grove* was renamed *Royal Amphitheatre*.

From **1846** we are indebted to *The Scotsman* for many pieces of information about the history of 19 Nicolson Street:

*The Scotsman* November 11<sup>th</sup> **1846** "Mr **James (Thorpe) Cooke** has opened a neatly fitted up and commodious circus at the back of the York Hotel, Nicolson Street, which has been remarkably well attended. Mr Cooke seems to have ample resources for the entertainment of all who delight in the exhibitions of dexterity or fine training, either in man or beast".

Ducrow said of Cooke, "I have only seen one rider, and that is James Cooke". Cooke died in Edinburgh aged 58 and was buried in the Dean Cemetery.

The following is extracted from Dibdin's *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage*.

"During an operatic season in the *Theatre Royal, Shakespeare Square* (The G.P.O. now occupies the site of the old theatre) in **1853**, Bruce Norton and Gomersal along with several of the old company and some additions from the *Adelphi*, Broughton Street, joined together and flitted to *Pablo Fanque's Amphitheatre*, Nicolson Street. The *Adelphi* burned down in **1853**.

There the combined artistes performed the pantomime, *Harlequin Dick Whittington*. The *Amphitheatre* was a wooden structure, in ruinous condition. On one occasion snow fell on the audience during the performance.

The *Theatre Royal* members of the improvised cast were glad to return to the comfortable quarters of the Royal about the end of January **1854**."

In the year **1854** the name was changed to *Dunedin Hall*. It appears that the *Dunedin* was used in much the same way as the *Waverley Market* that is, let for various types of entertainments and exhibitions since it was covered in, in **1877**.

*The Scotsman*, Friday May 16<sup>th</sup> 1856

“The Circus. The French company of equestrians who now occupy the *Dunedin Hall*, Edinburgh, are very well worth a visit. It is seldom we see in the arena a lady performing fearlessly and uncircled, on a bare-backed steed, as **Madame Marietta Shelton** does, or such graceful dancing on horseback, as Mademoiselles **Emile Lambert and Anois Rimbert** exhibit. We observe that the Lord Provost, the Magistrates and Town Council gave the company their rapt attention this evening.” The Lord Provost was **Sir John Melville**, appointed for three years in 1854.”.

*The Scotsman*, Thursday March 11<sup>th</sup> 1858

“*Cooke’s Royal Circus*, Nicolson Street

The proprietor of this popular piece of amusement continues to cater zealously for the entertainment of his patrons. Variety and novelty are, as far as possible, made prominent features in the performances, which, from the ability of the company, whether clowns or equestrians, are always either amusing or entertaining. This evening, it will be observed, is to be a ‘fashionable box-night’, the entertainment being under the patronage of the learned Sheriff of Midlothian.”

Editorial Footnote. It was at the celebrated *Astley’s Circus* that William, James and Thomas **Cooke** all made circus history. The most famous members of the family being John Henry and his cousin Alfred Eugene. **John Henry Cooke** established a permanent circus when **Hengler** went to institute his circus in Glasgow, in which each undertook to respect the other’s territory.

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday December 14<sup>th</sup> 1859

“*Sanger’s Circus and Hippodrome*, Nicolson Street

On Friday evening , December 16<sup>th</sup> 1859,

A brilliant box night under the immediate patronage and presence of the Right Hon. James Moncrief, Lord Advocate for Scotland, and Adam Black, Esq., M.P.

The Messrs Sangers have much pleasure in informing the Nobility, Gentry etc., that regardless of expense, they have succeeded in making arrangements for the appearance of

THE SALAMANDER WAR HORSE

THE FIRE KING

Due notice will be given of their first appearance in Edinburgh

Advertisement”

The following is quoted from *The Scotsman* footnote and *New York Clipper* of February 1910.

**Sangers.** There were three noteworthy brothers Sanger – George, William and John, the sons of an itinerant showman with a large family.

Showmen from their youth upwards their first circus was the historic *King's Lynn Fair* on February 14<sup>th</sup> 1854. The admission was 1d., Reserved Seats 3d. They prospered, and in course of time became lessees of the *Agricultural Hall, Islington*. “**Lord**” **George Sanger**’s name and fame became household words by the 1860’s.

One of the great spectacles was *The Congress of the Monarchs* which they sold to the **Barnum’s Circus** for £25,000.

From 1874 until 1885 the George Sanger show toured the Continent. Before 1871 it had tented throughout the British Isles with increasing success. In 1871 “**Lord**” George bought the most famous of all circuses – **Astley’s**, in the Westminster Bridge Road from Batty’s widow for £11,000. The enterprise also included the building of circuses in Aberdeen, Bath, Birmingham, Bristol, Dundee, Exeter, Glasgow, Liverpool and Plymouth. “**Lord**” George Sanger died in 1911

*The Scotsman*, Saturday September 13<sup>th</sup> 1862

#### **“Dunedin Hall**

Dunedin Hall had been used as a circus, a theatre, a concert room, a hall for exhibitions of waxwork and dioramic views – as a place of worship. It was never a very comfortable place to sit in despite the fact that a considerable sum had been spent to secure the comfort of the public. It was well patronised, owing to its being the only place of amusement in the city. It was owing to the approaching closure of the lease of the Dunedin Hall, which prompted Mr William Paterson to obtain a suitable site in the vicinity in which to build a comfortable hall.”

The “comfortable hall” was situated at 50 Nicolson Street and was named the **Princess**, which is the site of **La Scala Picture House** as I write in January 1961. In Dibdin’s *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage* there is a short article entitled “**Southminster**” in which reference is made to the **Alhambra Music Hall**. The name “Alhambra” was given to it by Mr W. Paterson who occupied it for some time previous to moving to the **Princess**.”

*The Scotsman*, Saturday September 13<sup>th</sup> 1863

“The following is a description of the **Southminster Theatre** and its opening on the evening of March 7<sup>th</sup> 1863, which comes under the heading **Hengler’s Circus**.

The magnificent building which has been erected on the site of the **Dunedin Hall** has now been completed and will be opened as a circus by Mr **Charles Hengler** of Liverpool, this evening.

The roof is tastefully ornamented and surrounded with the flags of all the nations, and from it are suspended eight large and small chandeliers, which, when lighted with gas, will give the interior most magnificent appearance.

Dimensions of the building.

120 feet long by 90 feet broad and the ring is 43 feet in diameter; it will hold about 3,000 people. Dean of Guild, Mr Gibbons, reported that it is perfectly substantial and secure, however much it may be crowded. The building was designed by Mr O'Hara, architect of the establishment. Messrs. Beatie & Sons, were the builders. Messrs. Robertson and Cairns installed the gas-fittings."

*The Scotsman*, Monday March 9<sup>th</sup> 1863

**"Hengler's Circus** This new place of amusement was opened to the public for the first time on Saturday evening when it was filled in every part – except for a few reserved seats." The rest of the item was devoted to the excellence of the performers."

The following is extracted from *The New York Clipper*, fifty-seventh Anniversary, February 19<sup>th</sup> 1910.

#### ***"Henglers' Circus***

Hengler, the rope dancer, for years with Ducrow, founded a family famous in the annals of the circus through three generations. His three sons, Edward, Henry and John Milton, he instructed in his own art. Charles, deemed too tall for an artiste, was made the business man of the family. When he died he left nearly £60,000.

From Messrs. Price and Powell, who were in difficulties, the brothers – Edward and Charles Hengler- bought a circus which, after years of patient endurance, enabled Edward to retire and Charles to establish himself more or less permanently in Liverpool – this in the Spring of 1857.

Charles Hengler abandoned tenting altogether and adopted the plan of erecting circuses, visiting them in turn. His first season in London in 1865, at ***Cremorne Gardens***, then run by E.T. Smith, a policeman, eventually a money lender, and at one time or another manager of almost every place of amusement in London.

In 1871 Hengler acquired a building known as the ***Palais Royal***, in Argyll Street, London, and transformed it into a circus which still [1910] bears his name. At the outset it was not a success, but Hengler persevered, and in course of time secured sufficient patronage for his venture."

*The Scotsman*, Monday December 20<sup>th</sup> 1869

**“*Southminster Music Hall*  
*Nicolson Street***

**The Lothians  
or Prince Edwin and the Fairies of the Thistle**

**now being nightly performed at the Southminster – Nicolson Street**

**Modern Athens (by gaslight)  
Grandest scenic effects ever seen in Scotland**

**Mr Levy has great pleasure in announcing to his numerous Patrons that everything in  
Dramatic Enterprise has been studied to render the Production worthy of its title and  
Public Patronage.**

**Admission Prices: Notwithstanding the increased expenditure  
Boxes, 2s.; Stalls, 1s.; Pit, 6d.; and Gallery, 4d. ”**

### **Three Fires**

In **Dibdin’s** *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage*, he tells of three fires and a new theatre.

“The ***Theatre Royal***, Broughton Street, was burned to the ground on Saturday, February 6<sup>th</sup> 1875. This was the third fire on that site. The manager of the ***Theatre Royal*** made arrangements with Mr Mapleson of the ***Southminster Theatre***, Nicolson Street, to give three nights of opera commencing March 4<sup>th</sup> 1875; but on Sunday March 14<sup>th</sup> 1875, the Southminster was gutted by fire, while much of the surrounding property, including Balcarras’ Old York Hotel, was completely destroyed.

In the short space of nine months it (the ***Southminster***) was rebuilt in a more substantial manner, and on Monday, December 13<sup>th</sup> 1875, Mr J.B. Howard re-opened the new theatre which was called the ***Queen’s Theatre***, with a performance of *La Sonnambula*, in which **Albani** appeared, the company including **Zara Thalberg**, and other noted artistes.

After being occupied as a theatre by J.B.Howard, the records show via *The Scotsman*, that the building was closed from March 23 1877 to April 4<sup>th</sup> 1877 – there being no advertisements for those dates for the ***Queen’s Theatre***.

The ***Queen’s Theatre*** was destroyed by fire on Wednesday, April 14<sup>th</sup> 1877. One of the walls of the ***Queen’s*** crashed and an onlooker was buried in the debris. In about 10 minutes the man was fortunately rescued by a number of citizens. Damage amounted to £8,000.”

There is also a reference to the fire in *Edinburgh in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*:

Page 152, 1877 Edinburgh Theatre Destroyed – On 4<sup>th</sup> April the ***Queen’s Theatre***, Nicolson Street, was totally destroyed by fire.

## **Two Theatres named *Queen's***

To avoid any confusion about the two theatres named *Queen's* in Edinburgh it is as well to clarify when they were opened and where they were situated.

In **1855** the *Queen's Theatre and Opera House*, Broughton Street, was opened on Wednesday December 19<sup>th</sup> 1855, and retained that name until June 25<sup>th</sup> **1859** when it adopted the name *Theatre Royal*. The original *Theatre Royal* opened on December 9<sup>th</sup> **1796** in Shakespeare Square and closed on May 25<sup>th</sup> **1859** so that the General Post Office could be built, the foundation stone of which was laid by the Prince Consort on Monday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> **1861**.

The *Queen's Theatre*, Nicolson Street, was opened on Monday, December 13<sup>th</sup> **1875**, exactly 20 years after the Broughton Street *Queen's Theatre and Opera House*.

## ***Weldon's Circus*, Nicolson Street**

Within seven months from the time the *Queen's Theatre* was destroyed by fire on Wednesday, April 4<sup>th</sup> **1877**, a new building was erected as reported in *The Scotsman*, October 20<sup>th</sup> **1877**.

“The building was opened as *Weldon's Circus*. It was constructed by Thomas Baird; decorations by Mr Corneilous; upholstery by Cranston and Elliot. Accommodation for 3,000.”

From a programme dated Wednesday, January 1<sup>st</sup> **1879**.

**Weldon's Circus**  
**Two Performances Daily**  
**Precis of Programme**  
**Doors open at 7 o'clock, to commence at half-past**  
(starting time of the other performance was not given)

There were twelve turns on the programme, including:

No. 6 The Laughable Equestrian Pantomime *Ride-a-cock horse to Banbury Cross*  
in which twelve artistes took part

No. 7 The Fire Horse *Salamander*.

No. 11 Vaulting extraordinary by *Funny Ferns*

Prices: Reserved, 3s.; Boxes, 2s.; Pit and Promenade, 1s.; Gallery, 6d.

Equestrian Director, Signor **Romeo Qualglieni**.  
General Manager, Mr. **Weston Gibbs**.

## **Watson's Grand Cirque**

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, June 30th 1879 carried an advertisement that **Watson's Grand Cirque** would appear at **Weldon's**. Another advertisement in *Scotsman* stated that **Watson's Grand Cirque** would appear from Thursday July 31<sup>st</sup> to Saturday, August 30<sup>th</sup> 1879.

## **Newsome's Circus, Nicolson Street**

The first intimation of **Newsome's** entry into Edinburgh as circus proprietors was in *The Scotsman* of Monday, September 8th 1879.

The following information about the **Newsome's** was extracted from the *New York Clipper*, 57<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, February 19<sup>th</sup> 1910.

"After the third fire at *Astley's Amphitheatre* in 1841 **Batty**, the most important of the provincial circus proprietors, came post-haste from Dublin, and arranged for the rebuilding of the Amphitheatre, which was opened in 1843.

A popular rider at **Batty's** was young **Newsome**, who married **Pauline Hinne**, also an equestrienne. In time **Newsome** became a prosperous circus proprietor, and *Madame* continued in popularity.....but the last days of the old people were sorely oppressed."

It is on record that **Newsome's** owned the Circus in Nicolson Street and that **H.E. Moss** bought the premises in the late 1880's.

## **Newsome's Circus, Nicolson Street**

### **Programme, May 4<sup>th</sup> 1883**

#### **Pansterorama of Passing events**

#### **Across the Atlantic**

#### **120,000 miles in 120 minutes**

#### **Harry H. Hamilton's Excursions**

(a few of the 35 scenes included in the Programme)

1. Leaving Euston Station.
6. Departure of the steamship "Germanic".
8. Broadway, New York.
17. Falls of Niagara – American side.
23. City of San Francisco.
29. The Capital of Washington.

**Sole proprietor and originator – Mr Harry Hamilton."**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, November 7<sup>th</sup> 1885

**“Newsome’s Hippodrome and Circus, Nicolson Street, Edinburgh**

Will open for the Season on Monday, November 9<sup>th</sup> 1885. Mr **James Newsome** announces the re-opening of the above establishment ....artistes of the highest reputation in Equestrian and Gymnastic Profession have been secured. Constant changes in the Programme will be made. The Building has been thoroughly renovated and the comfort of the Patrons received every attention.

Interesting Ceremony – On the Opening Night, precisely at 7.30 p.m., the Gates of the Arena will be thrown open, when Madame and Mr J. Newsome will have the pleasure of appearing, surrounded by the principal members of the Company, to make their first box on reappearing in Edinburgh.

An enormous cast – *The Arabs*, 10 men and 2 women the Greatest Troupe of Acrobats ever seen in this country, the largest Staff of Mirth Provoking Clowns combine Mirth without Vulgarity.

Mid-day Performances every Wednesday and Saturday at 2.30 p.m.

The special train containing Stud and Company will arrive in Edinburgh at 12 o’clock on Monday morning, November 9<sup>th</sup> 1885 by the Caledonian Railway, Princes Street Station.

The Noble Stud Horses on view daily from 2 p.m. till 5 o’clock.

Admission: Private boxes from £1. 1s.; Reserved Seats 3s.; Boxes (Select), 2s.; Pit and Promenade, 1s.; Gallery, 6d. Children under 10 years: Reserved Seats, 1s. 6d.; Boxes, 1s.; Pit and Promenade, 6d.; Plan of Reserved Seats at Paterson and Sons, Music Sellers to the Queen, 27 George Street.

Doors open at 7 p.m., performances to commence at 7.30 p.m.

Half-price at 9 o’clock to all parts except Gallery.

Directress (to whom all business communications must be made) Madam Newsome.

Sole proprietor: Mr **James Newsome.**”

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday September 14<sup>th</sup> 1887

**“Fire at Newsome’s Circus, Nicolson Street**

**Destruction was Complete**

Nothing remained but the brick walls, in parts broken. ....One could see through a gap from Nicolson Street to the Potterow. .... The United Free Presbyterian Church in College Street

was also damaged. ....Several members of the Company lost money etc., they were busy yesterday looking among the ruins to see if anything was spared.

### **Four Half Sovereigns Fused**

One member of the Company discovered the framework of a bop, and sifting the ashes he found four half-sovereigns fused into a single piece of gold.

Mr **E.H.Moss** of the *Theatre of Varieties* (No. 5 Chambers Street) who had rented the circus from the proprietor Mr **Newsome**, and had almost completed negotiations for a three years lease of it, was in Newcastle on Monday night (12.9.1887), and on returning yesterday morning he telegraphed to Mr Newsome at Blackpool asking him to come to Edinburgh. Mr Moss who had been at the expense of erecting a stage in the circus, fitting it up as a place of entertainment and providing the arena with chairs, has sustained a loss amounting to about £400. Mr Moss, it may be added, has obtained the *Waverley Market* from the Town Council for an entertainment on Saturday night (September 17<sup>th</sup> 1887) on behalf of Mr **Hague** and his Company. The circus, it is understood, was insured with the *Phoenix Company*."

See also *Edinburgh in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* : "Circus Burned. *Newsome's Circus*, Nicolson Street, while in the occupation of **Hague's Minstrels**, was burnt September 12<sup>th</sup> 1887."

*The Scotsman*, Saturday September 17<sup>th</sup> 1887

### **"Programme of Artistes appearing At Benefit Concert in Waverley Market**

**Sam Hague's Minstrels**, for one night only. Benefit for Company who suffered such severe loss on Thursday September 13<sup>th</sup> 1887, by fire.

**Band of Seaforth Highlanders** from Edinburgh Castle, by kind permission of the Officers.

**John McNeill**, Champion Highland Dancer with **Mary McNeil**.

**J.G. Milne**, Indian Club Performer.

**Leon Prevost**, Celebrated Post Horn and Cornet Soloist.

Admission to all parts – 6d.

Advertisement"

*The Scotsman*, Monday September 19<sup>th</sup> 1887

**“John Henry Cooke’s Circus**

**Sam Hague’s Minstrels**

Will reopen on Tuesday First, September 20<sup>th</sup> , 1887

Mr **Sam Hague** most respectfully begs to express his extreme thanks for the sympathy of the public in supporting himself and his troupe on the occasion of their benefit at the **Waverley Market** on Saturday.

He also thanks Colonel Kelsey and officers at the Castle, the **Band of the Seaforth Highlanders**, the numerous Artistes and others for their valuable assistance, and lastly, his friend Mr **H. E. Moss** for the handsome receipts of £250 without any deduction for expenses whatever.

**Cooke’s Circus Free of Charge**

**Hague’s Minstrels** have been enabled to procure a new wardrobe, etc., and only by the kind benevolence of **John Henry Cooke**, Esq., who has given the use of his circus free of charge, they will reproduce their Popular Versatile Entertainment on

Tuesday Night September 20<sup>th</sup> 1887 and following Evenings

Advertisement”

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday October 4<sup>th</sup> 1887

**“Newsome’s Circus, Ingram Street, Glasgow**

**Sam Hague’s Minstrels**

**Every Evening at 8**

Advertisement”

Note: It appears that Sam Hague was the guest of John Henry Cooke for about a fortnight.

**Reopening of Newsome’s Circus**

**H.E. Moss’s Fourth New Year Carnival, Waverley Market** was held between December 24<sup>th</sup> 1888 and Saturday, January 5<sup>th</sup> 1889. In the programme, which cost one penny, it was advertised that **Newsome’s Circus**, Nicolson Street, would commence on Monday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1888, with **Sam Hague’s Minstrels**. Thus within 15 months of the destructive fire on Tuesday, September 13<sup>th</sup> 1887, **Newsome’s Circus** had re-opened for business.

*The Scotsman*, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1889, also carried an advertisement for **Sam Hague’s Minstrels** at Nicolson Street.

The Newsome story is drawing to a close as the following letter from **H.E.Moss to John Henry Cooke** shows. The original letter, in holograph, is held by the Edinburgh Room, Central Library, Edinburgh.

“Moss Theatre of Varieties,  
Chambers Street,  
Edinburgh August 8<sup>th</sup> 1889

John Henry Cooke, Esq.,  
Cooke’s Royal Circus,  
Fountainbridge’  
Edinburgh

Dear Sir,

Referring to our arrangement regarding the use of *Newsome’s Circus*, Edinburgh, of which I am at present tenant, and the use of your circus in Edinburgh for certain periods of the year, I have now much pleasure in putting in writing and confirming the arrangement come to between us, which is as follows.

That **1** I shall not let **Newsome’s Circus** to be used as a circus for the ensuing winter season and **2** and that after you have terminated your ensuing winter season at your circus in Edinburgh that you shall not let or allow your circus to be used for the purposes of variety entertainments in any way similar to the entertainments given by me at the *Gaiety* and that for the period from the termination of your ensuing winter season at which date this agreement terminates.

I shall be glad to receive a letter from you in similar terms confirming the arrangement.

I am, yours faithfully,

(signed) H.E. Moss”

In a letter dated February 26<sup>th</sup> 1963, David Simpson, Secretary of Moss’ Empires Ltd, 3 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, informed me, *inter alia*, “The title deeds of the Edinburgh Empire property show that Sir Edward acquired the site of *Newsome’s Circus* on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1890.”

Building of the *Empire Palace of Varieties* started in 1891. The architect was **Frank Matcham**, who was responsible for the plans of most of the theatres in *Moss’ Empires Group*. As is brought out in the following chapter, the Empire was opened on Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup> 1892.

## 2: THE STORY OF MR H.E.MOSS (LATER SIR EDWARD) AND, IN THE MAIN, HIS ACTIVITIES IN EDINBURGH

*Born near Manchester, 1852; Myriorama operator at the age of 16; Manager of a theatre in Greenock; Moved to Edinburgh in 1875 and became tenant of the Gaiety, Chambers Street; Bought No. 5 Chambers Street and opened Moss' Theatre of Varieties (Gaiety), 1877; Set standards for clean fare; Notoriety and Marie Lloyd; Waverley Market Carnival, 1885; Princess Theatre, Leith, 1889; Closed Gaiety and opened the Empire Palace Theatre of Varieties, 1892; Bought Tabernacle, Greenside Place, 1894; First Moving Pictures in Edinburgh shown in Empire, 1896; Extracts from Moss' Empires Limited Jubilee Brochure, 1889 –1949; Knighted in 1905 and his other Honours; Empire fire May 1911, death of Lafayette; Temporary Home in Theatre Royal, Empire reopened August 1911; A popular Landlord; Keen Free Mason; Died at Middleton Hall, 1912.*

From the start of his career until his death I will quote many sources, which will be named. By this method I hope to present a complete picture of his Edinburgh activities.

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, November 25<sup>th</sup> **1912** . (Sir Edward died on Monday November 25<sup>th</sup> 1912)

“Sir **Edward Moss**, J.P., D.C., Chairman of **The Moss Empires (Ltd.)** was the son of James Moss a theatrical manager in a small way. Sir Edward was born near Manchester in **1852**. At the age of 16 he started his career as a myriorama entertainer with a young companion. His second venture was as a conductor of a diorama, a simple form of amusement, for which in the later decades of the last century there was plenty of country patronage. He next proceeded to Greenock, where he undertook the management of a theatre which his father had taken over. Here he remained for 5 or 6 years, acquiring the valuable experience which enabled him to develop his instinct for gauging public taste.

The real foundation of his fortune was, however, laid in Edinburgh. Towards the close of **1877** he leased a small hall in Chambers Street, Edinburgh, known as the **Gaiety Theatre**. It was in a condition by no means flourishing. The new lessee revolutionised the type of entertainment, which had previously been on no high level.”

Little has been handed down regarding his activities after his second tour – mentioned above - until he came to Edinburgh. Despite exhaustive research regarding the approximate date when Mr Moss arrived in Edinburgh, I had no success. True, the late **Councillor Wilson McLaren**, who was on “speaking terms” with Mr Moss, wrote about the time when Moss bought the **Gaiety Theatre** and some property above the theatre and on each side of it. This unsupported evidence can, I think, be accepted from a reliable witness such as the Councillor.

It must be remembered, however, that the Councillor, in most of his articles on Old Edinburgh, was in reminiscent mood, which differs from factual history.

### **Moss moved to Edinburgh 1875**

*Weekly Scotsman*, Friday, June 30<sup>th</sup> **1934** (A precis)

The writer of the article said, *inter alia* "...that young Moss migrated from Greenock in **1875**, in which year he became tenant of those premises at No. 5 Chambers Street, which was described in the Press as being the property of **The Hall Company Ltd.**"

### **Moss' First Theatre**

*The Scotsman*, Monday, December 24<sup>th</sup> **1877**

#### **"Moss' Varieties (Late Gaiety) Chambers Street This evening and during the week**

The Programme

**Bradley's Burlesque waxwork; Pashur Nimrod; Madam Donti; Messrs Graham and McBride; Mr and Mrs Warriner; Misses Sandforth and Smith; Mr J. Pullard; and a host of other artistes.**

Admission: 2/-; 1/-; and 6d. Half Price at 9 o'clock"

*The Scotsman*, Monday, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1877**

Moss had this to say in his second week: "Gigantic success of opening, patronised by the respectable and intelligent." Advertisement

### **A tough struggle**

In the next year or two Moss passed through a stormy period. The type of audience which frequented No. 5 Chambers Street was not to his liking; hence the advertisement in *The Scotsman* of December 31<sup>st</sup> 1877. The vulgar, indecent type of *artist* fed the appetite of those whom he did not want to attract, so much so that the hall was shunned by respectable people. True, the so-called young bloods from the University across the road frequently visited the hall for a 'lark'. Some of those 'larks' ended up in near riots.

### **Moss bought No. 5 Chambers Street 1877**

On or about the 24<sup>th</sup> December **1877**, Mr Moss took over the lease of **The Hall Company Ltd.** He purchased the entire block of buildings, comprising the theatre, the University Hotel above the theatre, and several shops on either side of the *Gaiety*, all for the sum of £15,000,

As the boss of the newly acquired theatre, Mr Moss forthwith set about making alterations which he thought would be in the best interests of respectable patrons.

## Change of Name

His first step was to change the name from the *Gaiety Theatre of Varieties* to *Moss' Theatre of Varieties*. The name did not suit many of the patrons who continued to call it by its old name.

His second, and most important step, was to **clear out the undesirable element** from his house. The struggle was long and bitter; indeed, failure stared him in the face. He was resolved that the Music Hall, if it was to prosper, must be clean and acceptable for respectable people who could bring their children without taking a red face.

His father came to his assistance and very soon young Moss weathered the storm and a blow was struck for clean wholesome entertainment in all future Moss Empires. The stand Moss took for clean fare in his first Music Hall, was probably the corner stone upon which he ultimately amassed an enormous fortune. Furthermore, he earned the gratitude of the community on account of the great contribution to the sum total of good and popular entertainment.

## Moss, Notoriety and Marie Lloyd

The following story contributed by **James Adair** brings into sharp focus one of the few mistakes of judgement Moss ever made.

Mr Adair, for many years a well known elocutionist in Edinburgh, was a shop-walker with Patrick Thomson in the Bridges. He was also the Edinburgh correspondent of *The Stage*.

When he asked Mr Moss why he never engaged Miss **Marie Lloyd**, Mr Moss replied to the effect that she had gained a reputation for being *risque* (the expression in my younger days was *blue*) and he did not think his audience would care for her, and that the Capital of Scotland disliked vulgarity.

However, Mr Moss reconsidered his decision, and Marie came to Edinburgh in September **1900**. On her first and subsequent appearances she was received with acclamation. Mr Adair said that Mr Moss admitted to him that by not engaging Marie sooner he had made one of the few mistakes of his life in matters connected with notoriety. Mr Moss later stated that he had never admired an artiste more than Marie Lloyd.

In passing, let it be said Mr Moss carried out his high ideals until he retired, tired, burnt out, in **1904**.

## To the point

“Mr Moss was straightforward in all his dealings, and, gifted with a sense of fair play, could always appreciate the point of view in any transaction in which he was engaged. His capacity for rapid decision,” continued *The Scotsman* of November 26<sup>th</sup> **1912**, “and his remarkable soundness of judgement, might have seemed instinctive had it not been that he was always able to adduce closely-reasoned arguments of his views.”

Mr Moss was never at rest, he was always scheming to open another place of entertainment, ever reaching for the Stars: it was this continual struggle against the clock which ultimately sapped his strength.

### ***Moss's Waverley Market Carnival***

One of the most remarkably successful of the minor enterprises of Mr Moss was the annual Christmas and New Year Carnival in the ***Waverley Market***. Consequent upon a visit to Sunderland, Mr Moss conceived the idea of a covered-in show. He opened his first show in the Waverley Market on Monday, December 28<sup>th</sup> **1885**, and called it *Ye Olde English Fayre*.

Moss continued to prosper. About this time he changed his home address from St Patrick Square to No. 8 Minto Street.

### ***Music Hall, Kirkgate, Leith***

Moss's next venture took place in Leith; the circumstances were:

The Old Kirkgate United Presbyterian Church moved to Henderson Street in **1886**. Attached to the church was a hall wherein various functions were held, including music-hall turns from Moss's Gaiety Theatre, Chambers Street. The old church premises were converted into a Music Hall, which had a very short life; the premises were completely destroyed by **fire** on Friday, March 2<sup>nd</sup> **1888**. Damage was estimated at £1,000

In the following year (**1889**) a Mr William Edgar leased the site to H.E.Moss who built the ***Princess Theatre*** on the site; it had accommodation for 1,000 in the Pit and Gallery. This opened on Monday, December 30<sup>th</sup> **1889**.

The first play presented in the ***Princess*** was entitled *False Nights*.

### **The last of the old *Gaiety or Theatre of Varieties*, Chambers Street**

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, November 1<sup>st</sup> **1892**.

"After a run of popularity as a music-hall extending over close on twenty years, fifteen of which have been under Mr Moss' management, the ***Moss Theatre of Varieties*** entered upon its last week as an entertainment of this class, to be superseded by the palatial new ***Empire Palace of Varieties*** in Nicolson Street, which has now all but reached completion."

From **Councillor McLaren's** Story, which was included in *The Edinburgh Evening News*, Saturday, September 2<sup>nd</sup> **1944**.

"The old ***Gaiety***, Chambers Street, closed its doors on Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup> **1892**.

The following artistes appeared during the last week: **Marie Loftus; Spry & Austin; James Hewson; George McCulloch; Ernest D'Almain; Gale St John & Arthur Picardo; Lillie Sweeney.**"

The old *Gaiety* was soon afterwards renamed the *Operetta House* and remained in business until December 31<sup>st</sup> **1939**. For some years thereafter it was used as furniture store. The site was bought by Edinburgh University and the building was converted into National Health Offices which were opened by **Nye Bevan** in **1948**. The university built **Adam House** on the site in 1954-1955.

### **Opening of the *Empire Palace of Varieties* Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup> 1892**

At last, the proudest day in Moss' life dawned on Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup> **1892**, when the first of his 33 super theatres opened. The residents of the *Sooth Side* had something to be cocky about – and no wonder.

Everybody who had a 'pull' was present that evening. That part of Nicolson Street was thronged with sightseers who had come along to see the bright lights and watch the favoured few drive up in their carriages to enter the *Palace*, as indeed it was. When all the lights went on inside the theatre the huge audience broke into a spontaneous cheer.

*The Scotsman*, November 7<sup>th</sup> **1892** Advertisement.

### **"Opening of the Empire to-night Doors open 6.45 Commence 7.15"**

The **programme** included the following 14 items:

God Save the Queen; **Miss Cora Stewart**; **Mr Albert Christian**, baritone; **Miss Givlia Warwick**, soprano; **Mr Ben Nathan**, comedian; **Performing Cockatoos**; **Miss Kate Cohen**, contralto; **Professor Marvelle** and his canine wonders; **Harry Atkinson**; **The Brothers Poluski**, grotesque comedians; **Evans & Luxmore**, Musical Eccentrics; **The Craggs**, acrobats; **The Argyll and Surtherland Highlanders**, under the command of **Colonel Charter**; and the **Carabiniers**, under the command of **Colonel McGeorge**.

### **Admission prices**

During the first week prices at the *Empire* from Monday November 7<sup>th</sup> to Saturday November 12<sup>th</sup> **1892** were: Boxes – private, £1.11s. 6d.; Grand Circle, 3s.; Stalls, 3s.; Upper Circle and Promenade, 2s.; Pit, 1s.; Gallery, 6d. Every-day prices operated from Monday, November 14<sup>th</sup> **1892**: Stalls, 1s.6d.; Boxes, 1s.; Pit and Promenade, 6d.; Gallery, 4d.

Admission Prices in **1907** were: Stalls, 2s.; Dress Circle, 1s 6d.; Upper Circle, 1s.; Pit, 6d.; Gallery, 3d.

The entrance to the Gallery was through a pend off the Potterow, then up a **long** flight of stairs to the GODS – Happy Days pre 1914.

**The Tabernacle bought by H.E. Moss**  
*from the Councillor McLaren story*

In **1894**, 17 years after Mr Moss had entered upon the lesseeship of the *Gaiety*, Chambers (December 24<sup>th</sup> **1877**), he made another bold plunge. His many visits to London had whetted his appetite to build in Edinburgh a theatre similar to the London Theatres. Frequently, at the doors of the *Gaiety*, Chambers Street, 'House Full' notices indicated that he had the patronage if he could find the seating capacity. The Gaiety had a seating capacity of 740 (the Empire in **1963** seated 2,016).

Alas, as I write in April **1963**, the 'House Full' notice boards are but museum pieces, so far as the entertainment world is concerned; indeed Moss' *Empire*, Edinburgh, ceased to exist as a music hall in February 1962 – but more anon on that part of the story.

At that time, **1894**, the huge building in Greenside Place, known as the *Tabernacle*, was offered for sale. Mr Moss was quick to see the possibilities of the site as a central one between Edinburgh and Leith; he purchased the building with the object of erecting a handsome theatre on the site.

The Moss scheme, however, did not materialise. The *Tabernacle* had passed through many vicissitudes, and, by the irony of fate it was destined to remain for another 33 years a blot on the landscape, familiar to the many citizens who passed it every day, but nonetheless ugly in the extreme. See the item on *The Playhouse*, where the full story of the *Tabernacle* is told.

**First moving pictures in Edinburgh**  
**April 13<sup>th</sup> 1896**

*Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, Thursday, August ? **1946**

"It is claimed that Edinburgh was the first city in Scotland to show moving pictures. This took place on Monday, April 13<sup>th</sup> **1896**, at the *Empire Palace of Varieties*, Nicolson Street. Announced as 'the greatest novelty of the age and the latest scientific triumph, the rage of London and Paris, showing animated pictures', the *cinematographe*, as it was then called, was billed as an 'important engagement for six nights, and Saturday Matinee'."

The following day it was described in *The Scotsman* (Tuesday April 14<sup>th</sup> **1896**) as "a kind of electric lantern, by which instantaneous photographs of Edison's wonderful *Kinetoscope* are thrown onto the screen.

The *cinamatographe* has been a wonderful success at the *London Empire*, and Mr Moss is to be congratulated on his enterprise in securing the first performance of it in the provinces. Unfortunately, in Edinburgh last night the exhibition somewhat missed fire.

These instantaneous photographs are, it may be recalled, painted on celluloid ribbon which, in the *Kinetoscope*, was made to fly across the lens by means of an electric motor. Underneath was a powerful electric lamp which rendered the celluloid quite transparent, and a sharp, silvery vision was the result.

In the *cinematographe* used, the light seemed not to be powerful enough to render the celluloid sufficiently transparent, and a somewhat indistinct picture, in consequence, appeared on the screen

The dancing and pugilistic scenes were too funereal in character. The best sequences were those featuring a shoeblack, a policeman and a sailor. A cock-fight was also exceedingly good.”

Mr **T. More Howard**, who showed the scenes, apologised for the hitches which had occurred, but claimed at the same time for the indulgence of the audience on the grounds that the *cinematographe* was only in its infancy and that it would take several months to perfect.”

On the same bill as the *cinematographe* were a number of variety turns.

The *Dispatch* article continued, “The **Brothers Lumiere** (France), pioneers in the *cinematographe*, later sent their instrument to Edinburgh, where [eight] pictures were shown at the ***Empire Palace Theatre*** in the week beginning June 1<sup>st</sup> 1896, ‘for the first time in Scotland.’”

The Eight Films shown were entitled:

Dinner Hour at the Factory	The Arrival of the Paris Express (a Lumiere classic)
Children Playing	A Practical Joke on the Gardner
A London Stage	Trewey’s Hat (M.Trewy was the manager of the show)
A Small Life-Boat	Bathing in the Mediterranean

This mammoth programme was supported by a star variety company.

The *Lumiere cinematographe* was hailed as an outstanding success and retained for another week.

*The Scotsman* critic said the movements of the photographs were wonderfully natural and the audience was so enthusiastic in their applause that the curtain was raised and a beautiful seascape in the moon-light, the waves dashing on the rocks, was shown.”

In the middle of the Gay Nineties my father [the author was born in 1893 G.F.B.] took me to see the moving pictures at the ***Empire***. I can never remember the ***Empire*** being called anything else but – the ***Empire***.

### **Mr Moss stepped up the Tempo**

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the business commitments of Mr Moss increased to such an extent that he had, perforce, to step the tempo to a very high degree. The ever-restless spirit of the man could not remain at peace for a single moment. “On Stanley On”, seems to be the slogan of those who set out to break records or to do something not hitherto done by man.

The following information was extracted from **Moss Empires Limited 1899-1949 Jubilee Brochure**.

**“No. 4431 Certificate of Incorporation**

I hereby certify that “Moss’ Empires Limited” is this day incorporated under the Companies Acts, 1862 to 1898, and that this Company is Limited.

Given under my hand at Edinburgh this fifteenth day of December, One thousand eight hundred and ninety-nine.

Reginald MacLeod  
For Register of Joint Stock Companies.

Fees and Deed Stamps:	£51. 5s.
Stamp Duty on Capital:	£2,500.”

**How it all began**

On December 15<sup>th</sup> **1899**, Moss’ Empires Limited was incorporated. The Company was originally formed to amalgamate ten smaller companies: The Edinburgh Empire Palace Limited, The Birmingham Empire Palace Limited, The Newcastle Empire Palace Limited, The Sheffield Empire Palace Limited, The Glasgow Empire Palace Limited, The Cardiff, Newport and Swansea Palaces Limited, The Liverpool, Leeds and Hull Empire Palaces Limited, The Nottingham Empire Palace Limited, The London Hippodrome and The London District Empire Palaces Limited.

The above companies owned music halls and variety theatres corresponding to the company names, with certain additional properties which included the ***Operetta House*** (previously known as the ***Gaiety Variety Theatre***) Edinburgh

***London Hippodrome***

**Grand Opening Night, Monday January 15<sup>th</sup> 1900**

**At 8 and Twice Daily at 2 and 8 o’clock**

**The Man who began it**

After he finished building the London Hippodrome, he was chairman controlling ten companies and 23 places of amusement, besides other property. The enterprises represented a capital of £1,450,000 was successfully launched, and the association became the famous **Moss’ Empires Limited**.

Mr (later Sir Edward) H.E. Moss was created a knight in **1905** and was Chairman of the Company from its inception until his death on November 25<sup>th</sup> **1912**.

### **Advised to rest**

In **1904** Mr Moss had been medically advised to spend at least a portion of each winter abroad, and to give up his position of Managing Director. Since then his health has not been robust.

This reference to his state of health is borne out by this further extract from *The Scotsman*, Tuesday November 26<sup>th</sup> **1912**

“ Whenever the strain of work began to tell, he came to Scotland for a few days’ shooting or golfing. London and Edinburgh were his two favourite places of residence. He acquired the residential estate of Middleton, Gorebridge, near Edinburgh. In London and elsewhere he was frequently associated with benevolent schemes. He subscribed largely, also to funds raised for the relief of unemployment.”

### **His Honours**

It was in December **1905** that his name was found on the Royal honours list as one of the new knights then created by King Edward VII.

In April **1912** it was announced that the French Government had conferred on Sir Edward the distinction of *Officer of Public Instruction*.

He also held the *Persian Order of the Lion and the Sun*.

### **Back into harness**

At the beginning of **1911**, however, acting under a supreme sense of duty to his shareholders, Sir Edward reassumed the position of Managing Director on the retirement of Mr Oswald Stoll (later Sir Oswald), who was Managing Director from 1899 to 1910.

### **Lafayette’s Death in Theatre Fire**

*Weekly Scotsman*, Saturday May 2<sup>nd</sup> **1942**

“The Man

Though presumed to be an American, the illusionist’s real name was **Siegmund Neuberger**. Born in **1870** of Polish-Jewish stock, his earlier years were given to art, which he studied in Bavaria and Italy. Later, he migrated to Western Mining Camps of the United States where he first developed his talents as a showman.

His initial appearance in England took place at *The Alhambra*, London, in **1892**, as a ‘crack’ archer. Returning to America Neuberger built up a show, mainly featuring illusions. He brought this show over to the *London Hippodrome* in **1900** (the year it opened) and, as the Great Lafayette, he forthwith established a reputation for himself in presenting the most lavish and spectacular act ever billed in ‘the halls’.

Technically, as a creator and a presenter of mystifying illusions, Lafayette was judged to be several degrees inferior to that renowned Scot, **David Devant**. However, his expert

knowledge of stagecraft, his mastery of colour of colour effects and gorgeous displays, his acute intuition on what the public desired, and, not least, his strong personality, all combined to give him his undisputed supremacy in his own particular sphere.

He demanded and received an average salary of £350 per week, the highest remuneration ever paid then to an illusionist, and stipulated that fortnightly engagements must accompany his bookings. His indomitable will was reflected in his clean-shaven features, cold grey eyes behind glasses, thin severe lips and chin square and thrusting.

#### Lafayette the Eccentric

He lived as a recluse and repulsed all approaches from brother illusionists save from one, **Harry Houdini**, the man who could escape from all man-made jails, etc or so it was claimed. Houdini gifted him a bull terrier which was named *Beauty*; **Lafayette** lived solely for this dog. A likeness of the dog appeared on all its master's stationery, receipts, and cheque forms, the latter being his sole method of making payment, even for a penny! A collar of pure gold, studded with diamonds, permanently encircled the dog's neck. On the lintel of his London residence Lafayette had engraved these words:

"The more I see of some men, the more I love my dog."

He had his staff salute like soldiers, and inspected their bank-books regularly. His travelling Pullman cost £6,000 in which he travelled with pomp and vanity.

Was he a bit mental?

On Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup> 1911, his dog *Beauty* died. He had it embalmed and tried to have it buried in a cemetery. When approached, several companies refused his request. Ultimately, the Piershill people consented on the distinct assurance that Lafayette himself would be buried in the same spot, no matter in whichever part of the world he might die. *Beauty's* grave, a white-tiled vault and memorial stone cost £260.

#### Day of Tragedy

On Monday, May 1<sup>st</sup> 1911, **Lafayette** opened his engagement (at the **Edinburgh Empire**). On Tuesday, May 9<sup>th</sup> 1911, the awful fire took place. In all ten people, including Lafayette, perished in the flames – all members of the staff. Mr **C.B. Fontaine** averted a panic by having the safety-curtain lowered.

#### Territorial Assist Police for Crowd Control

On the night of the disastrous fire, it may have been fortuitous that the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the Royal Scots Territorials were on evening manoeuvres. The police authorities approached the respective commanding officers for the co-operation of the troops for crowd control, which was immediately granted."

Note: I joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots in March 1909 and was at the landing of the Dardanelles on Sunday April 25<sup>th</sup> 1915.

*Edinburgh Evening News*, Wednesday May 24<sup>th</sup> 1911

Lafayette's Estate  
Intestate Artiste's Big Fortune

..... valued at £120,000 will go to the deceased's brother who was at the funeral, was the only heir. Lafayette having been unmarried, the bulk of his money was invested in Stocks.

***Empire's Temporary Home  
At Theatre Royal, Broughton Street***

*Edinburgh Evening News*, Wednesday, May 24<sup>th</sup> 1911

**"Empire Re-opening at  
Theatre Royal on  
Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1911  
6.40 Twice Nightly 8.50  
Madame Ella Russell, etc., etc.,**

Prices: Boxes, £1. 1s. and 10s.6d.; Stalls, 1s.6d.; Dress Circle, 2 s.; Pit Stalls, 1 s.; Family Circle, 1 s.; Upper Circle, 6d.; Gallery, 4d".

*Edinburgh Evening News*, Monday May 29<sup>th</sup> 1911

***"Theatre Royal  
Empire Palace Season Under the Management of Moss' Empires  
Madame Ella Russell, etc. etc."***

*Edinburgh Evening News* Saturday, August 5<sup>th</sup> 1911

**"Empire  
Grand Re-opening  
  
Monday First, August 7, 1911,  
  
6.40 Twice Nightly 8.50  
  
Le Roy, Talma & Bosco  
Bioscope, etc. etc.**

Prices: 10s. 6d.; 2s. 6d.; 1s. 6d.; 1s.; 6d.; and 3d."

It will be seen, therefore, that the destruction caused by the fire was repaired in just three months, that is, from May 9<sup>th</sup> to August 7<sup>th</sup>.

Continuing the article in *The Scotsman*, Tuesday November 26<sup>th</sup> **1912**

“The fatal fire at the Edinburgh *Empire* in **1911** affected Sir Edward Moss considerably, and some time later he had to undergo an operation for appendicitis. His concern for the interests of the company again led him to re-enter business too early, and he had to undergo an operation of another kind in the Spring of this year (1912). He was able to travel to his residence, *Middleton Hall*, Gorebridge, in July last. At first there was a flicker of hope that he might rally, but it was not sustained and he bore a severe illness with great fortitude. Sir Edward is survived by his second wife, Lady Moss, two sons and two daughters by his first marriage, and one daughter by his second marriage. Sir Edward was buried in Portobello Cemetery. A handsome monument marks the place of his repose.”

The following particulars were given in Sir Edward’s Death Certificate:

Edward Moss, K.T., D.L., J.P., aged 60, Chairman, Moss’ Empires Ltd.  
Died at 6 a.m., November 25<sup>th</sup> 1912, at Middleton Hall.  
Father: James Moss, Music Hall proprietor, deceased.

*The Scotsman* article of Tuesday November 26<sup>th</sup> **1912**, concluded as follows:

#### “A Popular Landlord

Our Gorebridge correspondent writes that Sir Edward was extremely popular with all classes in the Gorebridge district. It was surprising the amount of interest he evinced in local affairs considering the little time he had to spare. Sir Edward was strongly attached to Middleton, and it is understood that it was at his own express wish, with consent of his London physicians, that he came North to Middleton, as he hoped to recover in a large measure his lost strength. His relations with his tenantry were always of the most cordial nature, and they regarded him as a just and upright landlord. He played a moderate game of golf

#### A Keen Free Mason

He was a Free Mason, being an initiate of Greenock St. John.

When it was decided to establish a Lodge at Gorebridge, Sir Edward was chosen as its first Master. In May **1908**, he was duly installed Right Worshipful Master of Lodge Gorebridge Dundas No. 1039 on the occasion and the consecration of the Lodge by Colonel Hope, Depute Provincial Grand Master of Midlothian

Sir Edward was also a member of Lodge Dramatic and Arts, No. 757.”

Thus ends the story of Sir Edward Moss and his Edinburgh activities, as far as I could gather; much remains, however, to relate about the *Empire* before it finally ceased to be a Music Hall.

### 3: SOME OF THE MUMMERS WHO PLAYED AT THE EDINBURGH EMPIRE

*The Show Must Go On; Saturday Night at the Empire; the author marries Daisy Fraser; The Edinburgh Room and the National Library help with the author's research; Booed Off – Intolerance; Some of the Mummies seen by the author: Charles Chaplin, Lottie Collins, Florrie Forde, Gertie Gitana, Albert Wheelan, Chirgwin, Little Tich, Eugene Stratton, Gracie Fields, Will Fyffe, Albert Chevalier, Cinquevalli, Jackson, Harry Weldon, Vesta Tilley, Charles Coburn, Tommy Lorne, Dave Willis, Harry Gordon, Mark Sheridan, George Robey, Harry Lauder; Hail and Farewell; Tolerance; Thanks for the Memory*

At one time or another during my life the undermentioned 'played' the *Empire* *In toto*, they gave untold pleasure – literally to many millions in its 69 years as a Music Hall.

#### 1892 - 1961

As in the Armed Forces and the Political World a few 'stand' high above their comrades or colleagues. That was – and is - a feature in the Theatrical World, whether 'straight' or 'variety'.

#### The Show Must Go On

Neither the burning down of a theatre nor the death of a popular Star closes a show permanently. As we have seen every endeavour is made to repair a building or to replace an artist.

It was from the 'gods' of the Empire that I saw the majority of the pre 1914 favourites. On returning from the Hearts' home games at Tynecastle, it called for a quick tea and a short discussion on how Bobby Walker had played that afternoon; then off post-haste to the Empire. The seats were hard boards, without backs, what mattered that, it was the show we went to see. It was always the First House I went to; the price for the Gallery was 3d.

I was serving my apprenticeship as a house painter during the first decade of the century. Saturday was the day of all days. Three pence for the boys' gate at Tynecastle; 3d. for the Empire; and perhaps a visit to the Waverley Market Saturday night concerts, cost 3d., that is if I and my chums were not skint.

The happy days at the Empire lasted until August 1914. Being a Territorial in the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots – Edinburgh 'Blacks' - I 'fell in' at the first toot of the bugle; that, I am afraid, put paid to the on goings with a vengeance. The care-free days were beyond recall; we jumped in one go from youths to manhood. The world never seemed to be the same again.

I returned to civvy street in March **1916**, following ten months in Military Hospitals as a result of being wounded at Gallipoli on 5 May 1915. I, like many others, tried to pick up the broken threads and my goodness they were not only broken, they were in bits and pieces. I missed my comrades, many of whom are still there [Gallipoli].

I paid a visit to New York in the Autumn of 1916 and returned home on January 1, 1917. As I stepped off the ship at Yorkhill quay, Glasgow, I saw the News Bills intimating that **Harry Lauder**'s son had been killed in action; nevertheless, with a near broken heart Harry carried on.

Both the War and the Show carried on.

In July **1920** I married the beautiful **Daisy Fraser** from Forres, Morayshire. Together we paid a weekly visit to the Empire until we started a family. We often speak of the happy days we spent at the Empire during our courting days and early married life, which goes back 43 years as I write in 1963.

Unfortunately, in the early 1920's my physical condition deteriorated rapidly, through War wounds. Without the assistance, gladly given, of the Edinburgh Room of the Central Library and the National Library of Scotland, I could not have compiled the necessary data for the history of the Empire and Edinburgh Cinemas.

We cannot do much by ourselves. Of what use is a beautiful house unless it is occupied with people to make it a home? In like manner the palatial Empire also required people to bring it to life, namely, the management, staff and audience, on the one hand, and the artistes on the other hand. It was the artistes who brought 'life' into the building. It was well, therefore, that those who hit the headlines in life and brought joy into the lives of countless thousands, should be remembered in such a history as this – and take their final bow.

Not every artiste made the grade; many were good, but that wee bit short of the *Top Spot*. Some were downright unfortunate, as I will now relate.

### **Booed Off**

One night in **1920** my wife and I experienced a most unusual incident at the Empire. Arising out of a crushing criticism in the local Press on the Tuesday night, certain members of the audience went on the Wednesday night, first house, determined not to give the unfortunate artiste a hearing – they succeeded. When he came onto the stage the booing started and grew in volume. The artiste stood in the centre of the stage and, after a few moments, he walked back to the wings, without uttering a word. It was the worst form of intolerance I had ever witnessed in Edinburgh. Is this what Burns meant when he wrote "...Man's inhumanity to man..." ? It was a common saying that if an artiste was "received" in Edinburgh, he could make the grade anywhere

I find this part of history writing is somewhat like trying to remember the players of my favourite team, even six weeks back. True, a few players stand out whom one can never forget; just so with the artistes who appeared at the Empire. A comedian who screwed up his face in an 'exclusive manner'; a quick-fire talker, like Mark Sheridan; a droll singer like the father of George Formby; Nellie Wallace with her scraggy – very scraggy – fur, which she kept whirling round her neck. All of the above were well nigh inimitable and they were welcomed to the Empire year after year.

### **Charles Chaplin**

Having given the subject some thought regarding who, in my opinion, should come first, my choice fell on the little man with the bowler hat, the cane, the quarter-to-three feet and the

wee tash – yes, Charlie Chaplin, born on 16<sup>th</sup> April **1889** and still with us as I write in the Spring of 1963. I saw Charlie Chaplin in **Fred Karno's** *HummingBirds* a year or two before the 1914 War. Chaplin never looked back. During April 1914 he joined the **Keystone Film Company**. The stage saw little of Chaplin from that date onwards. He became the world's most loved comedian – and could be understood in any country.

#### **Lottie Collins**

She made her debut in the Empire in 1900; I first saw her in the second half of the 1900's. She and her theme song *Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ayill* long be remembered. Lottie was the mother of one of the most beautiful women in the world – **Jose Collins**, who was the number one among *Principal Boys*. I frequently saw Jose at the old Theatre Royal, Broughton Street.

#### **Florrie Forde**

A tribute was paid to Florrie Forde in the *News* of December 8 **1953**, which I have much pleasure in quoting: “A native of Melbourne, Miss Forde came to Britain at the age of 18. Some time later she took part in the first Royal variety show in 1912 at the **Palace Theatre, London**. She retired from pantomime in 1931, having played Principal Boy 35 times. In 1937 she returned to pantomime at the **Theatre Royal** Edinburgh in a production of *Aladdin*

Heading the bill at the Theatre Royal for the week commencing November 16 **1939**, this real Edinburgh favourite made her last appearance in the city with a medley of old-time popular songs.

Miss Forde was playing at the **Tivoli, Aberdeen**, in April **1940**, and it was on the 18<sup>th</sup> – after entertaining wounded and sick sailors in a naval hospital – that she collapsed in a taxi returning to Aberdeen and died a few hours later in a nursing home.”

During the First and Second World Wars Florrie Forde was in the front rank in maintaining the morale among civilians and the Armed Forces; she died in harness. It was my pleasure to hear in the Empire before and after the First War.

#### **Gertie Gitana**

I had the pleasure of hearing Gertie Gitana sing her favourite song, *There's an Old Mill by the Stream, Nellie Dean*, many times in the Empire. She was a great Edinburgh favourite. During the **1959 Edinburgh International Festival** her husband, Mr Ross, of Neldean, Haverstock, London, gifted a seat to Edinburgh in her memory. This was placed in Princes Street. The inscription on the plaque reads:

“In Loving Remembrance of  
Gertie Gitana  
Music Hall Artist  
There's an Old Mill by the Stream, Nelly Dean”

Note: The spelling ‘Nelly’ on the plaque should read ‘Nellie’.

#### **Albert Wheelan**

I remember when Albert Wheelan made his debut in the Empire. He was, I think, the finest dressed man on the stage – apart from **Vesta Tilley**. On his entry from the wings he whistled *The Jolly Beggar's Waltz* while he divested himself of his evening cloak, tile hat, and white gloves; lastly he placed his cane, just so, on top of his clothing. His song about *Daniel in the Lion's Den* always provoked a round of applause. He had another song about the *Bear and*

*the Tree* which ended thus: “Oh Lord, if you can’t help me, for goodness sake don’t help that bear.”

On the completion of his songs and patter, he commenced his whistle, meanwhile donning his clothing. His was a most popular turn. I believe his ‘whistle’ was the first *Signature Tune* ever to be used on the stage.

### **Chirgwin**

*The White-Eyed Kaffir*, played a one-string fiddle. His chief song was *I am but a poor Blind Boy*. This song went the rounds at the New Year parties and was always sure to produce a few tears from the tender-hearted ladies

### **Little Tich**

Tich first appeared for **H.E.Moss** in the old *Gaiety, Chambers Street*. When I first saw Tich he must have been near the end of his stage career. Reports had it that he had a hard life as a child which stunted his growth. His act, in the main, consisted of a fantastic dance which was performed while he wore exceptionally long soled boots, perhaps 18 or 20 inches in length. Mr Moss took Tich ‘under his wing’ and saw to it that he would always be looked after.

### **Eugene Stratton**

He was, in those far off days, one of the first American artistes to appear on the British Variety stage. He was billed as the original *Coon Singer*- which is not correct as the **Christy Minstrels** gave their first morning entertainment in the Waterloo Rooms, Waterloo Rooms (now Railway Offices) on Monday February 9 **1863**, according to *The Scotsman* of that date.

### **Gracie Fields “Our Gracie”**

Miss Fields made her first appearance in Edinburgh in **Archie Pitt**’s production of *Mr Tower of London*, which played in the *Alhambra* in Leith in **1920/21**. The production was subsequently booked on Moss’ Empires Circuit and was presented at the Edinburgh Empire.

For over 40 years Gracie brought untold joy to many lonely hearts, especially in the 1920’s and 1930’s to the home-bound, whose only means of hearing her was on the old Steam Radio. Like many who made good in the profession she had a humble beginning. As a mill girl she gave impromptu concerts to her work mates and soon “Our Gracie” had arrived.

Two of her most famous songs will go down the line as long as songs are sung:

*I took my Harp to a Party* and *The Biggest Aspidestra in the World*.

I believe she last appeared in a concert in Edinburgh on Wednesday November **1949**. As a write in the Spring of **1963** Gracie is enjoying a well earned retirement in Capri. At least we have her records.

### **Will Fyffe**

A native of Dundee, Will Fyffe was the breezy type. Off the stage he was a lump of good nature. When he played the Empire in the 1930’s he always stayed with Mr **Charles Wood** of Eyre Crescent. I occasionally met Wullie at that address. Host and guest usually organised a fishing holiday during those weeks of his period at the Empire.

For many years his ‘song’ was that popular ditty *Twelve and a Tanner a Bottle*. Alas, that was many years ago as the 1963 price tag of £2.2s.6d. will indicate. In my boyhood days the

*cratur* only cost 2s.6. a 'boattle'. Does Time March On? Or is it just the price? In any case, it's an awfu' loat to spend on a drappie o' medicine. [My father was a life-long teetotaller G.F.B.]

Will Fyffe's most famous song will last as long as St Mungo straddles the Clyde, *I Belong to Glasgow*

### **Albert Chevalier**

His greatest hit was *My Old Dutch*, which like many other old songs 'will go right down the line'.

### **Cinquevalli**

Cinquevalli appeared at frequent intervals during the first and second decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. His act was unusual, perhaps the only one of its kind in the world. The tools for his act consisted of two billiard cues and an ivory billiard ball. He would pick up the ball with the two cues and allow the ball to run up and down between the two cues in a controlled manner. I cannot recall whether Cinquevalli used more than one ball, between the cues, at the same time.

It was said that it took him seven years to perfect his act, and I can well believe it. On occasion I try to lift an object or a piece of newspaper, crushed into a ball, with my two walking sticks. I always make a poor show of the 'act'. Try it sometime!

### **Jackson**

The trick cyclist. He never uttered a word during his act, nor did he smile. He dressed like a woe-begone tramp. Today, in the 1960's, his act is a regular feature on television, but it was relatively new when I first saw it in the *New York Hippodrome*; the star of that show was the incomparable ballet dancer, **Pavlova**

### **Harry Weldon & Co**

His main skit was the very funny *Stiffy the Goalkeeper*. I am afraid that during the period of Harry's reign, many a goalkeeper in every town and city throughout the country earned the nick-name *Stiffy*, if he had let in a 'soft' goal. It was all good fun

### **Vesta Tilley**

She later became Lady de Freece, but she was always referred to as Vesta Tilley; never as Vesta.

On stage she was The Perfect Gentleman, or the finest looking Soldier on Parade. From the glossy tile hat, evening dress, shining shoes, gloves and cane, she was the perfect 'man about town'. Three of her First War hits were: *Jolly Good Luck to the Girl Who Loves a Soldier*; *The Army of Today's All Right*; *Following in Father's Footsteps*

### **Charles Coburn**

His real name was Charles Whiton McCallum. He will always be remembered for his rendering of the songs *The Man Who Broke The Bank at Monte Carlo* and *Two Lovely Black Eyes*.

### **Tommy Lorne**

The moment Tommy Lorne walked on to the stage was the signal for a spontaneous burst of laughter. On one occasion I saw him dressed as a Boy Scout, complete with pole and frontier hat and short, very short, trousers. Ye gods, what a sight for sair een. Nae wonder the audience laughed. He spoke in a squeaky, high-pitched voice, and when he said “I’m in the Boy Scouts and I hate it”, the house exploded with laughter. He died in April 1935 at the age of 44.

### **Dave Willis**

Early in **1939** Dave Willis made a name for himself, firstly by growing a **Hitler** type moustache, and taking the ‘mickey’ out of Hitler, so much so, that a directive came from the British Foreign Office. not to make a fool of the head of a Foreign State. Secondly, his song *An Airy-plane, An Airy-plane, away, way up a Ky* was sung by every child – of every age-throughout the length and breadth of Britain.

Dear Old Dave, he is still a grand comic. He, along with a crowd of the Auld Yins, was in the *King’s Theatre* during the first week of April **1963**, as I write.

### **Harry Gordon The Man from Inversnecky**

I first saw Harry Gordon at the *Beach Pavilion, Aberdeen*. I frequently saw him in Edinburgh, not, perhaps, at the Empire.

Like Will Fyffe, he was a character actor. He and Dave Willis were partners at the *King’s Theatre*, Edinburgh, *Half-Past-Eight Show* for several seasons.

### **Mark Sheridan**

He was probably the fastest speaking wise-cracker in the business. His song *I Do Like To Be Beside The Seaside* has not been heard for the last time.

### **George Robey Prime Minister of Mirth**

He affected a peculiar style on the stage. His eyes were, I think, the most notable feature of his make up. His eye-brows, probably false, were arched to a very high degree and looked ludicrous, which I suppose was his aim. He dressed like a broken down curate, his head gear was a cut down bowler and, to complete the curate likeness, his coat was cut in the ‘short-long’ style. In all truth he looked a “queer” guy, but, as I will show, he was anything but “queer”.

His name was Wade. He was trained as a scientist and engineer, and took his B.A. degree at Jesus College, Cambridge. A brilliant painter in water colours and oils, he exhibited with great success, gaining diplomas at the Royal Academy and the Royal Institute of Painters. He had an intense knowledge of Egyptology and Assyriology. For Great War Service he was created a Commander of the British Empire – not a bad record for a Variety Mummer.

### **Harry Lauder**

To settle any argument that may be still the rounds, Harry Lauder was born in Bridge Street, Portobello, on August 4 **1870**; his full name was Harry McLennan Lauder. He died on February 26 **1950**, aged 79. Note: Portobello did not become part of Edinburgh until **1896**.

Harry had a splendid singing voice and his rendering of *Oft in the Stilly Night* brought out to the full the richness of the baritone in full song. [In a post-script my father added "Perhaps the song was *Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep* G.F.B.].

### **His first fee was 7s.6d.; first professional appearance in Edinburgh**

Councillor **Wilson McLaren** remarked in his reminiscences: "He was booked as an unknown singer for one of the *St Mary's Street Hall* concerts at a fee of 7s.6d. Out of this sum the comedian had to pay his return fare to Glasgow which was 2s.6d." Contrast his fee with what he received for an hour's 'stand' on the Radio in the **1930's** when he received £1,500.

Harry got the name of being mean. However, theatre employees held a different opinion; I would rather accept the word of a theatre worker who was 'close' to Sir Harry, than the unsupported word of a carping critic.

His song *Keep Right On to the End of the Road*, was outwith the type of song that made him famous as a Scots Comedian. It was a song for the sick, the physically tired who were broken in body, to those whose burden was almost too great to bear and to the bereaved. The song sounded the note of courage. I discussed the song with a number of people, all of whom agreed that it helped them *though the road is weary* they gained the courage *to journey on*. All of the songs which Harry Lauder composed carried a story. As the years roll on Lauder Tunes are in greater demand than ever for Old Time Dancing.

The secret of his success was he kept the 'party' clean. That, I think, is the highest tribute which could be paid to his memory. Both Sir Henry Moss and Sir Harry Lauder eschewed and outlawed vulgarity.

### **Hail and Farewell**

For many artistes who strode across the 'broad acres', alone in the desert of the Empire stage, it was Hail and Farewell. Some literally died of stage fright; and thus it became their farewell. Many of them made their bows and, to the plaudits of the audience, like the Arabs they packed their tents and moved on, perhaps never to be seen again. While others climbed to the giddy heights of stardom. Almost without exception the whole army of artistes, Variety and straight, did a noble piece of work. In writing this short history of the Empire in particular, it is as well to record a collective vote of thanks to all the artistes who trod its boards and elsewhere in our country.

It would be a poor world without the **Mummers**.

In the course of my life I have come across a certain type of individual who delighted 'to hand it out', on any occasion, in the office or workshop. He tried to act 'big'; at heart he was a coward and a bully; in short, he *is* the type who would, without any compunction, 'push his granny off the bus'. I have seen this type reduced to utter impotency, a fish out of water, or a cornered rat, by a simple action. For example, the chairman at a social gathering has asked Mr C. to 'say a few words...' On rising to his feet, C became rooted to the floor, his face blanched, helpless; the 'life and soul of the party' a moment ago, the Smart Alex who always had a cutting or caustic remark on the tip of his tongue, was unable to say a word. You may have met him. You may, then, have some consideration for a 'first time artiste', trying to earn a living the hard way.

The person who coined the phrase “Don’t shoot the pianist, he’s doing his best”, certainly had a point; or, should I say in **1963**, “he was with it”.

### **Tolerance**

Tolerance, in any walk of life, in high places or in the factory or workshop, is a gem wherever it is found. “I’m all right Jack”, these few words sum up what too many people accept as the correct attitude in life; the perpetuation of the Jungle, Kill or be Killed. I am glad to say I did my stint in the firing line at the Dardanelles. There it was all for one, and all for each. A man’s social status or religion did not count; it was the man, first and last.

It was not an isolated incident when both H.E.Moss and John Henry Cooke went to the assistance of Sam Hague on Tuesday September 13 **1887**. Members of the entertainment profession are always in demand to open bazaars, giving their time and services, all too often free of charge, for some charitable object,

Intolerance is as old as civilisation but it is an evil that is acquired since no man was born with it.

In the words of the ageing song *Thanks for the Memory*.

#### **4: THE EMPIRE: CHANGE AND DECAY, 1927 - 1962**

*Theatre closed from November 12<sup>th</sup> 1927 to September 29<sup>th</sup> 1928 for reconstruction; Re-opened on 1 October 1928 with a production of 'Showboat'; New Policy – spaciousness and comfort; New Wing added to South Side, 1938; Luxury Waiting Rooms, Eliminating Congestion, Lounges, Car Park; Death of Ma Ladley, supervisor of female staff; Death of G.H.Elliot; Christmas and New Year Season, 1961/'62; Last performances of 'Oklahoma', given on January 27<sup>th</sup> 1962; Sale of Empire to Mecca Bingo, 1963; New Empire Casino opened March 1963*

On Saturday, November 12<sup>th</sup> 1927, the 'old' *Empire* closed down for internal alterations and did not open for business until Monday, October 1<sup>st</sup> 1928. We have seen in earlier chapters that some theatres or places of amusement had been burnt down to the ground and, within the space of nine months they had opened their doors to the public. It would appear, therefore, that the *Empire* alteration was something out of the usual.

#### **Intimation of Re-opening**

*News*, Saturday September 29 **1928**

#### **"EMPIRE THEATRE EDINBURGH**

#### **GRAND RE-OPENING MONDAY FIRST (OCTOBER 1, 1928)**

#### **DRURY LANE'S GREAT SUCCESS *SHOWBOAT***

**Once nightly at 7.30 p.m., matinees Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2.30 p.m.**

**Prices, including Tax: Stalls 7s., 6s.6d., 5s.9d., 5s., Pit Stalls, 3s.6d.,  
Circle, 5s.9d., 4s.9d., Balcony, 2s.4d., 1s.3d.  
All of which are bookable in advance (no booking fee)."**

*News*, Tuesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> **1928**

#### **The Empire Re-opened**

"There was no Official opening; it was a reconstructed theatre". So wrote the scribe in his report.

#### **The new policy**

"When it was closed it was put into the hands of builders and decorators, who have converted the old building into a modern structure. The new policy, for a time at all events, is the production of a succession of musical plays, all first class, all attractive. Part of the new policy is booking for all parts of the house.

### **Spaciousness and comfort**

Without going into too much detail, it may be mentioned that the promenades on the North and South sided of the old auditorium have been taken away, with the width of the building being increased from 57 feet to 88 feet; this conveys the *spaciousness*.

The building is on three floors: stalls, circle and balcony. The decoration is carried in delicate grey shades, with blue and silver relief, and the upholstery is *Rose du Barry*.

**Mr R.H.Gillespie**, the managing Director of Moss' Empires, filled in the short interval of waiting, with a few observations of felicitous character, with particular reference to the architects, the contractors and the staff'.

The rest of the article dealt with production of *Showboat* and the company of 110 artistes, of these 31 were principals.

### **New wing added to South Side of the Empire in 1938**

*Dispatch*, Wednesday February 16<sup>th</sup> 1938, (a precis)

#### **“Luxury Waiting Rooms - £10,000 Scheme**

Next week will see the bringing into general use of the new wing, built near Nicolson Square, which will provide needed rooms for waiting queues, which formerly stood on the verge of a very busy street.

#### **Eliminating Congestion**

The public waiting to see the show will be admitted direct to the new lounges, thus saving congestion. A new Box-Office, constructed to the left of the vestibule, equipped with a row of windows will reduce the rush to a minimum, if not wipe it out entirely. Let it be said the new addition to the Empire's equipment is something in the nature of a sumptuously furnished lounge.

#### **Lounges and Car Park**

The tessellated floor is covered in the centre by a large carpet, and doors of polished walnut wood lead to the auditorium and to a new lounge bar. The sparkle of glassware is reflected in the black glass topped bar and glass fronted shelves. Immediately above the Stalls waiting room is similar accommodation for Circle patrons, but smaller, and a note of luxury obtains in the appointments of the lounge and bar.

Outside the theatre, where once a block of tenements stood, is now a wide open space which will probably be used as a parking space. A new exit to Nicolson Square and a new entrance to the theatre at this point may be made to relieve pressure at the main box-office.

The former yard of the theatre is in process of being roofed in with a canopy of glass and concrete which will mean that crowds awaiting admittance to the balcony will stand under cover and will be further sheltered by the theatre and surrounding buildings.”

#### **“Ma” Ladley**

Mrs Ellen ‘Ma’ Ladley, who was buried on Tuesday, February 15<sup>th</sup> 1944, in Morningside Cemetery, was for some years in charge of the female staff of the Empire Theatre.

### **Diamond Jubilee 1899 – 1959**

Moss' Empires celebrated their Diamond Jubilee – 60 years as a limited liability company in 1959.

### **G.H.Elliot**

*Press Notice.* *The Chocolate Coloured Coon*, whose favourite song *The Lily of Laguna* will long be remembered, died in November **1962**, aged over 80. He left £20,911.

Little more remains to be told about the *Empire Palace of Varieties*. It started on the last mile as shown in the *News* of Saturday December 16<sup>th</sup> **1961**:

### ***“Empire Theatre* Christmas and New Year Season**

**For 6 weeks commencing Monday December 18<sup>th</sup> 1961”**

*News* Saturday, January 27<sup>th</sup> **1962**:

### ***“Empire Theatre* Last two performances, Today at 5 and 8 p.m.**

### ***Oklahoma***

**Kevin Scott \***  
**Don McManus**  
**Susan Irvin**  
**Jerry Dane**

**Nita Croft**  
**Paula Hendrix**  
**Charles Yates**  
**Laurie Webb**

**Prices: 3s.6d. to 10s.6d. Box Office Open Now, ‘Phone NEW 6834 –5”**

\*Only American in the Cast.

***The Empire Monday November 7<sup>th</sup> 1892 to Saturday January 27<sup>th</sup> 1962***

The Empire opened and closed during my life. It existed for almost 70 years as a variety theatre, during which time many millions of patrons enjoyed the clean fare within its walls.

**OFF WITH THE OLD - ON WITH THE NEW**

### **The New Regime**

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, February 20<sup>th</sup> **1963**

### ***“25,000 want to join Casino Club***

The new *Empire Casino Club* in Edinburgh, which will open its doors to the public in about two weeks' time, has tapped unsuspected reserves of bingo enthusiasm in the city. Already its membership application roll stands at 25,000; substantially more than ten times the capacity of the hall. (Note: the actual seating capacity is 2,016.)

The auditorium has not been altered, so that it could still be used for theatrical purposes. It will, in fact, be the home of a Budapest Ballet Company at the next (1963) *Festival*.”

*News*, Wednesday, February 20<sup>th</sup> 1963

**“25,000 members enrol for new *Empire Casino***

In two weeks, on March 5<sup>th</sup> (1963) the new ***Empire Casino Club*** in Edinburgh will open, with a membership of 25,000 – more than ten times the capacity of the hall.

The general manager, Mr **T. Proctor**, told the *News* today that the club was more than just a place for gambling. “It is a social centre”, he said, “with a little flutter thrown in. We are providing all possible amenities for our members, including seven new buffets, and we will be putting on Charity Shows. During the *Festival*, of course, we will be hosts to the Budapest Ballet, and any theatrical productions during the Festivals which can use the theatre, for we have not interfered with the stage in any way, and still seat 2,016 people.”

As a prelude to the opening of the club, **Michael Miles** is to record a T.V. production of *Take Your Pick* on March 4<sup>th</sup> (1963). Tickets are not available at the Empire, and must be ordered through A.T.V. in London.”

**Sale of Empire**

*Scottish Daily Mail*, Wednesday March 6<sup>th</sup> 1963

**“Sale of Empire to Mecca  
£160,000 For Bingo**

**Mecca Bingo, Head Office, 76 Southwark Street, London, S.E.1”**

## 5: MOSS' CARNIVALS IN THE WAVERLEY MARKET

*Town Council took over vegetable market from North British Railway, 1869; Waverley Market opened 1877; Town Council approved the Waverley Market being used for concerts, 1880, and gave H.E.Moss food for thought; How H.E.Moss came to pioneer the Waverley Market Carnival; His first New Year Carnival, 1885-'86; Full programme for the Third Carnival, 1887 -'88; Carnival opened 12 hours daily; The Gallery as a Grand Stand; Author's reminiscences of the Carnival; Rent of Waverley Market for the Carnival; Attendances at Carnival; Carnival Christmas Tree; Death of Sir Edward Moss in 1912, end of an era.*

### *EDINBURGH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*

Page 145 **1869** "The Waverley Market - This market, built by the North British Railway as a vegetable market, was on 1<sup>st</sup> March handed over to the custody of the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council." At that time the market was simply an enclosed piece of ground, open to the sky.

Page 153 **1877** "WAVERLEY MARKET PROMENADE - Lord Provost Falshaw, accompanied by Lady Falshaw, on 18<sup>th</sup> June formally opened the promenade on the top of the Waverley Market formed by the city covering in the Market."

### **The Waverley Market becomes a Concert Hall**

**Miss H. Armet**, the City Archivist, furnished me with the following item, "On 17<sup>th</sup> February **1880**, the Town Council agreed that music should be provided in the Waverley market for two or three Saturday evenings as a trial."

### **How H.E. Moss came to devise a Carnival**

As Mr H.E.Moss occupied the Old Gaiety in Chambers Street for several years prior to the institution of the Town Council concerts, the fact would have been filed for future use. He got the idea of a Carnival while on a tour seeing how English fairs operated. It was in Sunderland, Councillor **Wilson McLaren** wrote his **Reminiscences**, that Mr Moss saw a diverse collection of 'show-ground' amusements housed under cover. The idea 'clicked' and in course of time the citizens of Edinburgh were introduced to a new type of entertainment, that is a covered in show-ground.

### ***H. E Moss' Enterprise or Ye Olde English Fayre***

This was how the first New Year Carnival was described in the play-bills. It commenced on Monday, December 28<sup>th</sup> **1885** and closed on Tuesday, January 5<sup>th</sup> **1886**. Note: Mr Moss did not, in the first instance, introduce the Christmas 'holiday' as an added money making lark; December 24<sup>th</sup> **1888** saw the first Carnival taking in Christmas.

The choice of the Waverley Market as the locus for the first carnival was a happy one for our country cousins, in those far off days, with the railway station practically under the Market.

Furthermore, for Edinburgh citizens virtually the whole of the tram service converged on the Market.

Mr Moss certainly picked a splendid and lucrative spot on which to rest his caravan for a week or two each year. A familiar feature of any fair-ground, namely the roundabouts, was included in the list of amusements. Steam engines were used to drive the 'hobby-horses'. This called for the roof of the Market being pierced to allow a sheet metal steel smoke stack to carry off smoke and the exhaust steam. In turn, the services of a stoker was required to keep up a head of steam

**Moss' Third New Year Carnival**  
*Programme*

**“Commencing Monday, December 26<sup>th</sup> 1887**

**For 12 days only**

**Positively terminating, Saturday, January 7<sup>th</sup> 1888**

**Programme One Penny**

**Open Daily at 11 a.m., closing at 11 p.m.**

**Under the personal supervision of Mr H.E.Moss**

**Decorations executed by Messrs. Cranston and Elliot, North Bridge**

**Stage Programme**

**The Parisian Grotesque; Brothers Avone, Horizontal Bar Performers; Madame Carlini, her Leaping Dogs and Blondin Monkey; The Bird King, Leoni Clarke, Pigeons, Seagulls, etc; Mdlle Senide, and her colossal Den of performing Lions, Bear and Panther; Mr Harley will introduce Crown Elephant. The Champion Rifle expert Buffalo Jim Webb, with his clever dog, à la William Tell; The Mexican Wonder, Frank Maura, marvellous foot-balancing feats etc.; The American Marvels, Crossley and Elded; John Sanger's Duplicate Herd of Six Performing Elephants, introduced by Mr Hartley”**

**Admission** was 6d., the exception was on New Year Day and later on Christmas Day, when the admission charge was 1s.

**Carnival open 12 Hours daily, from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.**

The stage show was free for all those who cared to stand during the performance. However, a portion of the floor area was enclosed by a strong wooden barrier; said enclosure was reserved for seating accommodation, at an extra charge. The wooden barrier had this in its favour: those who 'knew the drill' would edge up to the barrier in time to claim a space which assured them a good lean during the stage show.

## The Gallery as a Grand Stand

I remember when the Gallery was the No. 1 place to view the stage performance. Places were occupied along the whole length of the Gallery long before the performance started. In time, however, the police authorities deemed the Gallery was unsafe to carry such a number of patrons; thereafter, it was closed as a 'free' stand for *any* type of show or exhibition which occupied the Market.

The conception of the Carnival as I knew it in the pre First World War days was shattered when I learned that the Carnival had become a show of two parts, namely, in one part 'side-shows' and in the other a stage show was held, the performance of which was screened off from the promenaders. No longer did the spirit of H.E.Moss, nor his conception of *Ye Olde English Fayre* hover over the premises.

The Carnival I remember as a schoolboy and as a young man is like yesterday's *News*, as dead as the Dodo. My impressions, however are, I think, worth recording.

The stage performances took pride of place. There were also a number of varied side shows for which a small charge was made to view: *The Fattest Lady in the World*; *The Smallest Married Couple in the World*; *The Mind Reader*, who told you what was in your wallet, the number of your watch, etc.; *The Bearded Lady*; *The Siamese Twins*, and so on.

There were a number of popular games where a patron could test his skill or strength: *Hoop-La*; *Roll the Penny*; *Shooting Clay Pigeons*; *Bouncing Ping Pong Balls*, which were kept aloft on top of a spray of water; *Co Co Nut Shies*; *Ring The Bell*, where a heavy hammer was used to strike a pin a hard blow, which, in turn, sent a metal weight up a 20 foot slide – hoping to *Ring The Bell* at the top of the slide; finally, there was the *Numbers Game*, which was probably the grandfather of what is now called *Bingo* as I write in the Spring of 1963.

Everyone became aware when the stage show was about to commence; a hush descended over the Market when the organs on the roundabouts were silenced. These organs had a fascination for me in my schooldays. To watch the beautifully proportioned mechanical painted figures, each of which played its appointed instrument was, indeed, something to glue a youngster to the spot.

The buskers also had to keep silent during the stage show. Incidentally, this gave the stall holders an opportunity to get a meal and replenish the shelves which held the 'prizes'. The high-powered salesmen of the 1960's had nothing on their forebears who worked in open air show grounds or indoor Carnivals. Their persuasive tongues could worm the last penny out of most pockets. True, the vast majority went to the Carnival to enjoy themselves. The Carnival was no place for skinflints who had money in their pockets but hated like Hell to part with it.

To see the look of pleasure on the faces of those who had won anything, from the little coloured monkey, made from a pipe cleaner, to the more gaudy, cheap quality ornaments, glass ware and china, was a sight I have remembered with pleasure. To win a 'prize' was a demonstration of your prowess with the rifle, or skill in throwing a ball at a coconut, clay pipes, or whatever caught your fancy – provided, of course, that the player had enough 'lolly' to carry on to win a given object or prize.

### **Rent of Waverley Market for the Carnival**

When Mr H.E. Moss rented the Waverley Market for his first Carnival in **1885**, he was charged £160. The City Chamberlain of that period knew Moss was on a ‘good thing’ and in a few years the rent was raised to £2,000.

### **Attendances at the Carnival**

During the three weeks of the **1897** Christmas and New Year Season some 215,000 persons paid to enter the Market and, in the 26<sup>th</sup> year of Moss’ tenancy in **1910-11**, 40,000 passed through the paid turnstiles in a single day.

### **Carnival Christmas Tree**

There is plenty of evidence that Mr Moss cared for others. He loved children and in the 1890’s he instituted an Annual Christmas Tree. The first 1,000 children entering the Market, by the Waverley Steps, at opening time on Christmas morning received a gift of substantial workmanship. During my schooldays my sisters and I received several gifts from the Moss Christmas Tree.

### **End of an Era**

Had Sir Edward Moss lived another month he would have celebrated his 28<sup>th</sup> tenancy of his Annual Waverley Market Carnival. It was decreed otherwise as the Pioneer of the Carnival died on Monday, November 26<sup>th</sup> 1912.

Thus ends the story of the ***Empire*** and the ***Waverley Market Carnival***, and of the man who made those enterprises possible. The story is about Edinburgh, and anything about Edinburgh has a big place in my make up.

Elsewhere in this History I include further information about the Waverley Market and the many uses to which it has been put over the years.

I make no apology for giving the ***Empire*** pride of place in the History.

**6: THEATRE ROYAL, SHAKESPEARE SQUARE**  
*Now the site of the General Post Office*  
**DECEMBER 9<sup>th</sup> 1769 TO MAY 25<sup>th</sup> 1859**

*Foundation Stone laid 1768; First in Scotland to be granted a theatre licence; Opened 1769; Visit by King George IV 1822 for a performance of Rob Roy MacGregor; Management accused of paying insufficient salaries to performers, 1822; Mrs Henry Siddons' patent of Theatre Royal ended in 1830; Article by John S. Clarke on Sir Henry Irving; Theatre closed 1859 - compulsorily bought by Government to build the General Post Office which opened in 1866*

The *Theatre Royal* while not the oldest Edinburgh theatre had certain features which are worth recording. It is not my intention, however, to give an extensive history of this theatre; for those who care to pursue the subject anent the Theatre Royal, I recommend **J.C.Dibdin's** *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage* and **James Grant's** *Old and New Edinburgh*.

**First Theatre Licensee in Scotland**

**David Ross** became the first person in Scotland to hold a theatre licence. This was awarded on March 16<sup>th</sup> **1768**, on the occasion of the laying of the foundation Stone of the Theatre Royal in Shakespeare Square. In the stone was laid a silver plate inscribed:

“The first stone of this new theatre was laid on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of March, in the year of our Lord **1768**, by David Ross, patentee and first proprietor of a licensed stage in Scotland. May this theatre tend to promote every moral and every virtuous principle, and may the representations be such.

*To make Mankind in conscious virtue bold,  
Live on each scene and be what they behold.”*

The new building was insured for £4,000. Prices of Admission: It is proposed to make the boxes 4s.; the pit 3s.; the first gallery 2s.; and the upper 1s.

The theatre was opened on December 9<sup>th</sup> **1769**, at the total expense of £5,000, and at the then rates of admission, a full house takings amounted to £140.

In the 1960's the expression *Jobs for the Boys, Aye, and the Girls* is frequently heard. That *cairy oan* will last just as long as the mass prefer 'sleep' to minding their business. Today there is a polite expression for 'sleep', namely, **APATHY**. So long as the sleepy heads have enough for the Gee Gees, the Dogs, Bingo and a Pint, they are content to let the rest of the world go by. Juvenal coined the phrase *Panem et circenses* in writing about the citizen of the first century A.D. “Only two things does he worry about or long for - bread and the big match” . The tragedy today is that the game of Kidology still flourishes in the 1960's. The Smart Boys get away with it – so..... In the following extract from Dibdin's *Annals*, pages 299 and 300, a perfect analysis of the 'racket' is revealed.

Copy of Play Bill

**“Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, Shakespeare Square  
Tuesday, August 27<sup>th</sup> 1822**

**Rob Roy MacGregor**

**In the presence of the King”**

The performance had, presumably, been arranged to co-incide with a “Visit of King George IV, who arrived in Leith Roads on August 14<sup>th</sup> 1822, on the Royal Yacht *George*.

*A precis* “The crowd began to collect about noon for the pit and gallery, by two o’clock it was dense. The doors did not open until six, all the while it rained heavens hard. Those who had waited longest to get in were lofted from their feet and carried about without being able to move a muscle to help themselves.”

Some of the *Rob Roy* cast and their weekly salaries were as follows:

	£. S. D.		£. S. D.
Andrew Fairservice, by Aitin	1 1 0	McStewart, by Lee	1 10 0
Sir Frederick Vernon, by Munro	Not Given	Dougal, by Duff	Not Given
Rashleigh Osbaldistane, by Denam	Not Given	Helen MacGregor, By Mrs Renaud	3 3 0
Francis Osbaldistane, by Huckel	Not Given	Martha, by Miss J. Nicol	- 15 0
Captain Thornton, by Murray	Not Given	Hattie, by Miss Nicol	1 5 0
Major Galbraith, by Weeks	3 3 0	Hostess, by Mrs MacKay	Not Given
Rob Roy, by Calcraft	3 3 0	Jean McAlpine, by Mrs Nicol	2 0 0
Bailie Nicol Jarvie, by MacKay	4 0 0	Diana Vernon*, by Mrs Siddons	Not Given
Owen, by Roberts	Not Given		

Salaries for this night only £12. 0s.0d.

\* A **Mr W.H.Murray** (brother of Mrs Siddons) the theatre manager was accused by *The Edinburgh Dramatic Review*, just a few months in circulation, that the management was paying insufficient salaries to the performers. Murray did not deny that £60 was a fair nightly drawing. A very long controversy disclosed that Murray’s salary was £4 per week, with an allowance of £100 per year “for any additional fatigue my duties of manager may put upon me.” Mr Murray and his sister, Mrs Siddons, playing the Brother and Sister Act might well have had as their signature tune, *We’re in the Money*.

From **Grant's Old and New Edinburgh**

**“Mrs Henry Siddons, 23 Windsor Street, 1827**

In the year 1827, Windsor Street, was a handsome thoroughfare, built of white freestone, in a simple but severe style of Greek architecture, with massive fluted columns at every doorway. Previously Mrs Siddons had resided at No. 63 York Place, and No. 2 Picardy Place.

Three years after she came to Windsor Place, her twenty-one years patent of the old Theatre Royal (Shakespeare), which she carried on with her brother W.H.Murray, as stage manager, came to a close, and on the 29<sup>th</sup> March **1830**, this popular and brilliant actress took her farewell of the Edinburgh stage.

She was a beautiful woman, and a charming actress of a sweet tender and pathetic school. When she took up residence in Windsor Street the ground was nearly all (but not quite) meadow land, from there to Warriston Crescent.”

*Daily Express* Glasgow Edition, December 12<sup>th</sup> **1943**

An article by **John S. Clarke** “If you are passing this way”

**“Sir Henry Irving**

When Sir Henry Irving was a lad of 19 (1857) he was playing small parts in the *Theatre Royal*, Edinburgh. This was his second engagement with a stock company, having entered the theatrical profession just six months previously. His address was 17 Elder Street, kept by Mrs Roberts, and conveniently near the Royal (Shakespeare Square).

Irving had been playing at Sunderland, and the contrast between the coally and industrial English town and romantic Edinburgh impressed him. Writing to his parents' old friend, Mrs Wilkins, he says: It (Edinburgh) is indeed a city of poetry, I can hardly conceive a more beautiful unity of art and nature, town and country.”

He describes his first tour: The Palace of Holyrood, Scott Monument, the Castle, ‘some dilapidated streets erected centuries ago’, John Knox’s House, and Jeannie Dean’s cottage, ‘a pretty little house enclosed by trees.’ At night, Irving, from some elevation, looked down upon the illuminated city and thought it ‘most singular and beautiful.’ The letter is one of several he wrote to this lady, who had been a second mother to him, all of which are signed

J.H.Brodribb”.

It was my good fortune to see Sir Henry Irving playing the lead in *The Bells*, in the *Theatre Royal*, Broughton Street, when I was a schoolboy. It was my further good fortune to be a student under **John S. Clarke**, F.R.S., ex M.P. During a walking tour Mr Clarke said to me , learn.” “Baird, if I should live to be a 1,000 years old, I will still die ignorant; there is so much to learn.”

### **Sir Henry Irving**

Was at the opening of the *Lyceum Theatre, Grindlay Street*, on September 10<sup>th</sup> 1883. He was knighted in 1895 and thus became the first actor to receive a knighthood for services to the stage. He died in Bradford on October 13<sup>th</sup> 1905, aged 67.

**Grant's** *Old and New Edinburgh*

### **“Theatre Royal, Shakespeare Square, Sold**

Sole Lessee, R.H. Wyndham, 95 Princes Street. Final Closing of this Theatre on Wednesday, May 25<sup>th</sup> 1859”

**J.C. Dibdin**, *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage*, pages 468, 469

“The admission prices to the Theatre Royal during the last week of its existence had not changed very materially over the 90 years.

Prices: Boxes and Stalls, 5s.; Pit, 2s.; Lower Gallery, 1s.; Upper Gallery, 6d.

The first gallery had become the Lower Gallery, while the Upper retained its name, and half the price, from 1s. to 6d.”

### **Theatre Sold; Closed May 25<sup>th</sup> 1859**

The Government had acquired the entire property of Shakespeare Square on which was built the General Post Office. Considerable difficulty was encountered by the arbitrators between the Commissioners of H.M. Works and the Trustees of the Theatre regarding the price.

At the time of purchase of the building, Wyndham was paying £1,000 rent. The Crown offered £25,871. 10s. 0d. for the property, being £9,000 less than it was estimated had been paid by the proprietors to Jackson's estate. The proprietors, on the other hand, wanted £49,600 in addition to 50 per cent. for the sale being a compulsory one, making in all nearly £75,000. The feu-duty paid was £10 and the insurance at the time of closing was £108. The actual sum accepted by the proprietors was £30,000, with interest from May 26<sup>th</sup> 1859 to time of paying. The entire space occupied by the building, without portico, was 912 square yards.

**Grant's** *Old and New Edinburgh*, Volume I, page 358

### **“General Post Office**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1861, the foundation stone of the new General Post Office was laid, on the east side of the North Bridge, by the late Prince Consort, amid much state and ceremony, the letter-carriers, all clad for the first time in blue in lieu of their old scarlet, being drawn up in double rank within the galleries which occupied the site of the old Theatre and which were crowded by a fashionable audience. This was almost the last act of Prince Albert's public life, as he died two months subsequently (From typhoid fever on December 14<sup>th</sup> 1861 G.B.). At his suggestion the crowning row of vases was added to the façade.

As finished now, it stands behind a pavement \* of Caithness slabs forty-three feet broad, and is from designs by the late Mr Robert Matheson, of H.M. Board of Works in Scotland. Built of fine white stone from Binny quarry, in the neighbourhood of the city, its style of

architecture is moderately rich Italian type. It presents an ornamental main front of 140 feet to Princes Street, and another equally ornamental front, or flank, of 180 feet to the North Bridge, with a rear front, which is also ornate, of 140 feet, to the deep valley where the North Loch lay. (The last part – 140 feet- has been considerably extended to the Low Calton. G.B.)

The flank to the Waterloo Place Buildings is somewhat plainer than the others, and measure 160 feet. The edifice rises in the central part of two stately storeys above street level, and has corner wings, or towers, a storey higher, and crowned with rows of massive and beautifully sculptured vases. On the south front it descends to a depth of 125 feet from the summit of these towers, and thus presents a very imposing appearance. This office, the chief one for all Scotland, cost, including the site, £120,000, and was first opened for business on 7<sup>th</sup> May **1866.**”

\*For the record, the pavement maintained its great breadth until April 1951; The *Evening News* of Saturday April 14<sup>th</sup> **1951** published a photograph of the pavement, depicting workmen re-laying slabs, minus four feet of the original. The *News* of Monday April 9<sup>th</sup> **1962** included a photograph showing another twelve feet being snatched from the once broad pavement, now reduced to twenty-seven feet. The sixteen feet ‘lost’ was in the name of Progress ?, to make another traffic lane to ease the ever growing volume of motor vehicles which clutter the roads.

Perhaps the story of the G.P.O. is a little off the beam, but remember, the sale of the *Theatre Royal* was a forced one by the Government of the day.

## 7: BROUGHTON STREET SITE: THE HOME OF MANY THEATRES FROM 1788 TO SATURDAY, MARCH 30<sup>th</sup> 1946

*Jones and Parker's Circus, 1788; Edinburgh Equestrian Circus or Amphitheatre, 1790; Saddler's Wells, 1793; New Theatre Circus, 1795; Jones' Royal Circus, 1796; Royal Circus, 1797; Corri's New Rooms, 1803; New Theatre Royal, 1809; Reverted to Corri's Rooms, 1812; Pantheon, 1817; Caledonian, 1823; Adelphi, 1833; Five Fires, 1853, 1865, 1875, 1884 and 1946; Queen's Theatre and Opera House, 1855; Theatre Royal, from 1859 until Saturday, March 30<sup>th</sup> 1946*

Much of material for the **Broughton Street Site** was extracted, or dug, from **Dibdin's Annals**. He was not an 'easy' writer to follow; having a penchant to jump from date to date and back again. Thank goodness for the many 'on the spot' *Scotsman* reports over the ages, without which Edinburgh's history would have been all the poorer.

### Alpha

In writing history it is with a feeling of satisfaction if one can name the precise date of the opening of an enterprise; in this case it was the date when the Broughton Street Site was first developed. The circumstances, as far as I could find out, are as follows.

Messrs **Jones and Parker** proprietors, who had tenanted a temporary wooden structure at the corner of Broughton Street for some time prior to **1788**, advertised in the August of that year for subscriptions to build an amphitheatre on the same spot. A sub-tack and assignation was granted for 199 years from Candlemas **1789**, entered into between **Walter Ferguson**, writer, and **Robert Inglis**, mason, there and to the subscribers to the Circus and Amphitheatre. This deed was dated 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> July **1790**, granted in favour of nine trustees, any three of whom could form a quorum and any two of them convenors. The amount subscribed was £2,200.

*The Amphitheatre or Edinburgh Equestrian Circus*, was opened on January 25<sup>th</sup> **1790**. Prices; Boxes, 3s.; Pit, 2s.; Gallery, 1s. During the season riding lessons were advertised to be given in the Circus, "no gentlemen being admitted during the ladies' hours of riding."

An advertisement in *The Courant* of December 3<sup>rd</sup> **1790**, stated that constant fires had been kept going for five weeks previously, "so that the most delicate constitution may not have the smallest apprehension of cold or damp."

In November **1793**, the name of the establishment was changed to *Saddler's Wells*, **Jones** still being the lessee or proprietor. A large company was advertised including Mr and Mrs **Ducrow** ( the name Ducrow is mentioned in 1820 under Ducrow's Circus, Nicolson Street.)

In **1795** the *New Theatre Circus* was opened by **Jones** on February 21<sup>st</sup>, with similar performances as given in the previous year **1796** saw the opening of *Jones' Royal Circus* on January 26<sup>th</sup> and in February of **1797** it was advertised as the *Royal Circus*, with a ballet dance called *Nosegay* by Mr **D'Egville**.

In **1798** no performances were advertised, although a steady business seems to have been done in **horse sales**.

In **1799** equestrian performances were resumed. Prices: Boxes, 2s.; Pit, 2s.; and Gallery, 1s. But after that we hear no more of the Circus until **1803**, when, on January 14<sup>th</sup> the premises were converted by **Natali Corri**, who was a dealer in music and musical instruments, and named **Corri's New Rooms**. The interior had been entirely re-arranged, so as to make it suitable for concerts etc. A medical report was published to the effect that the building was not damp

A ball was held on the opening night. Although **Corri** was an enterprising man and an excellent musician, he never came successfully out of his many ventures. He was heard to say he was so unlucky that were he "to turn to baker, people would stop eating bread."

The first dramatic production staged by Corri was on July 28<sup>th</sup> **1806**, when **Ingleton and Bartley** gave an entertainment called *Hospitality* or the *Harvest Home*, assisted by **Horn** at the piano; admission was 3s. The Corri concerts continued year by year and during January **1808**, Master **Gattie** appeared as solo violinist

The **New Theatre Royal**, Leith Walk, was opened under His Majesty's Patent on Tuesday November 14<sup>th</sup> **1809** with the Comedy *Honeymoon*.

The following comments about the new theatre are taken from the *Monthly Mirror* November **1809** issue in which it records "The **New Theatre Royal** is finished. It is in the Gothic style." A few months later the following appeared, "A house which was formerly a Circus, and later Concert Rooms, has been fitted up with tolerable neatness,..... the access to which is excessively bad, one must take a complete circle of the house ... up a few stairs before arriving at the box lobby. The music has been very much improved." In an advertisement it says, *inter alia*, "It is requested that no carriage will come by St James' Square, that road being reserved for chairs."

Mrs **Siddons** received a benefit and made her last appearance in the Theatre as **Belvidera** in *Venice Preserved* on Tuesday, April 10<sup>th</sup> **1810**. Sir **Walter Scott's** *Lady of the Lake* was produced on January 15<sup>th</sup> **1811**.

The **New Theatre** was re-transferred to its original state, and was again known as **Corri's Rooms**: concerts, card and dancing assemblies starting in January **1812**.

On December 8<sup>th</sup> **1812**, Corri re-applied for permission to perform operas, after his first application in October of that year had been turned down by the Lord Chamberlain. He was again unsuccessful. Sometime in **1813** **Henry Johnstone** made a similar application to perform operas; without any success.

Although Corri's concerts were discontinued in **1814**, the card and dancing assemblies went on.

From *EDINBURGH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*, pages 60 and 61

“MUSICAL FESTIVAL A grand musical festival was commenced on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October **1815** and lasted the remainder of the week.

The morning performances took place in Parliament Hall (now the site of the High Court), and the evening in *Corri's Rooms*. The city was crowded with visitors on the occasion, and the performances were attended ‘by the largest assemblages of beauty and fashion ever seen in the city.’

The principal performers were Madame **Marconi**, Mrs **Salmon**, Mr **Braham**, and Mr **Smith**, a bass singer. There was a chorus of between fifty and sixty voices, and an instrumental band. The programme included performances of the *Messiah*, *The Creation* (curtailed) and pieces by Pergolesi, Mozart, Beethoven and Cherubini. The sum realised, after paying all expenses, for distributing among public charities was £1,500.”

Note: The 1962 Edinburgh Festival was in the Red to the tune of £18,000.

On Wednesday, February 12<sup>th</sup> **1817** the *Pantheon* opened under the management of Mr **Bannister**. On February 11<sup>th</sup> **1822**, **Matthews** appeared at the *Pantheon*, giving his ‘at home’ entertainment. The charges were raised to 5s.; 3s.; and 1s. This, with the exception of some circus performances, closed the existence of the *Pantheon*

On January 11<sup>th</sup> **1823**, the premises opened as the *Caledonian Theatre*. By now, **Corri** was dead; the new lessee was **Henry Erskine**. The *Caledonian* opened with a performance of *Gilderoy*; prices: 4s.; 2s.6d.; and 1s.

The *Caledonian* was not opened during the winter of **1823-24**. A new tenant, **Charles Bass**, re-opened the *Caledonian* on June 13<sup>th</sup> **1829**. Later in **1829** the trustees in bankruptcy of Mr **Corri**, sold the place to a body of shareholders, and it ultimately became known as the *Adelphi* which opened on May 25<sup>th</sup> **1833**. **Murray**, formerly stage manager of the *Theatre Royal, Shakespeare Square*, in a rhyming address made reference to the death of **Kean**

On May 18<sup>th</sup> **1853**, **Gourlay**, who had been starring since March **1853** took his benefit, playing the *Heart of Midlothian*.

#### **Five major fires at the Broughton Street Site**

At this stage I give a list of all the fires which took place at the Broughton Street site. For quick reference, dates and brief particulars can be seen in *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*. In all, five major fires took place, the first to the *Adelphi*, the remainder to a series of houses all named *Theatre Royal*

Year	Page	Theatre
1853	50	Adelphi
1865	52	Theatre Royal
1875	54	Theatre Royal
1884	55	Theatre Royal
1946	57	Theatre Royal

*The Scotsman*, Monday April 1<sup>st</sup> 1845

Advert

***“Adelphi Theatre***

The public is respectfully informed that the above theatre, having been duly licensed for theatrical entertainments, will be opened today, Saturday, June 28<sup>th</sup> 1845, when the amusements will commence with the favourite drama *Lure The Labourer*.

Boxes, 4 s.; Pit, 2s. 6d.; Gallery, 1s.”

*Dibdin*, page 470

**“Adelphi – Burned to the ground**

On the evening of May 24<sup>th</sup> 1853, at 5. 15 p.m., a workman saw smoke and flames at one of the private boxes next the stage. In an hour’s time the building was in ruins. Four days previous to the fire **Mrs Wyndham** had given birth to a son. The manager’s house was above the Theatre – mother and son were carried to safety. It was fortunate the fire did not start in the evening.”

Note: Part of St Mary’s Roman Chapel was also destroyed by the fire

*The Scotsman*, Saturday May 14<sup>th</sup> 1853

**“Edinburgh Theatre to re-open**

The ***Theatre Royal*** (Shakespeare Square) whose doors have been twice disastrously closed within a year, has again found a lessee, and one, we are happy to say, who will undoubtedly do his best to redeem the position and fortunes of the establishment. **Mr Wyndham**, manager of the ***Adelphi***, has just concluded terms with the proprietors of the Theatre Royal, which will be re-opened under his management in September next. Mr Wyndham will thus hold both theatres, as did the late Mr Murray for many years. The playgoers of Edinburgh cannot extend sufficient patronage to two theatres open simultaneously summer and winter, has been pretty clearly shown by the experience of the last two years; and now that both houses are again united under one management, it must be a matter of general satisfaction that the double charge devolves on a manager so spirited and deserving as Mr Wyndham.”

*Dibdin* “The new theatre was let to James Black, a Leith merchant and a large shareholder.”

***Queen’s Theatre and Opera House***

Black opened the new theatre on December 19<sup>th</sup> 1855. *Love’s Sacrifice* was the title of the first production.

Black’s venture had proved a failure, notwithstanding the excellent programmes and companies he had provided. On June 26<sup>th</sup> 1857, he announced his farewell benefit, when *A Cure for the Heartache* and *The Jacobite* were played. Exit Black, a sadder, and perhaps a wiser, but certainly a poorer, man.

*The Illustrated London News*, February 14<sup>th</sup> 1857

***“The Queen’s Theatre and Opera House, Edinburgh, Broughton Street***

This newly-built theatre, designed by Mr **Bryce**, reflects the taste of the architect, both outside and inside. The house seats about 1,700, having three tiers of boxes and galleries. There are two stage boxes on each side. The dress circle consists of open boxes, seated for 260; the second tier seats about 400; and the third circle consists of a capacious gallery, which seats about 600 patrons. The stalls and pit seats about 500 and fill the wide area below, along with the orchestra. ( Stalls, 150; Pit, 350; Boxes, 300; Upper Boxes and Gallery, 1,000. The stage was 58 feet long by 62 feet broad, and the proscenium 32 feet.)

The stage can be seen from every part of the house. An Actor or vocalist can be heard distinctly in every corner. (Alas, as I write in the Spring of **1963**, the vocalists require a ‘mike’ on which to lean.).

The work of the painting has been executed by Mr D.R.Hay; and the fitting up of the dress circle, stalls, etc., has been entrusted to Messrs. Potts, Cairnie & Ray. The proscenium curtain and the act drop have been painted by Mr Grieve.”

A picture of the Queen’s Theatre accompanies the article, and at the right or north of the theatre can be seen part of St Mary’s Roman Catholic Chapel (it became a Cathedral in 1878), which was opened in **1813** and cost £8,000.

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday July 1<sup>st</sup> 1884

***“Theatre Sold***

In **1857** the theatre was sold to Mr **John Brown** of Marlie, subject to a perpetual annuity of £2 to each of the shareholders, who have since been known as the rentallers”

*Dibdin*

***Change of Name from Queen’s Theatre and Opera House to Theatre Royal***

In the previous chapter on the *Theatre Royal, Shakespeare Square*, it was pointed out that the theatre was closed down on Wednesday, May 25<sup>th</sup> **1859**, to make room for the present G.P.O., which was opened on May 7<sup>th</sup> **1866**. The name, *Theatre Royal*, was transferred to the Broughton Street Theatre, but not until a proper set to between the Yes-No brigade was finally settled.

The first season of the new name, under Royal letters patent opened on June 25<sup>th</sup> **1859**, and the first production was *Everybody’s Friend*. During the season **Irving** played in a great variety of parts. *The Colleen Bawn* was played for the first time in Edinburgh on June 24<sup>th</sup> **1861**.

**Second Fire, 1865**

*Dibdin*

“About 3.45 p.m. on Friday January 13<sup>th</sup> **1865**, during the lighting of the stage, the Gas man, who used a long pole to ignite the gas-jets, accidentally set the scenery on fire. Despite

efforts by several theatre employees to put the fire out, the theatre was a raging furnace in 15 minutes.

A large chimney, without warning, crashed through the roof of St Mary's Catholic Chapel, killing several men who were trying to remove valuables from the altar. Dean of Guild **Lorimer** was killed along with a man he was trying to save"

*The Scotsman*, Friday, January 13<sup>th</sup> **1865**, reported the pantomime, *The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*, was running.

*The Scotsman*, Monday January 16<sup>th</sup> **1865**, devoted many columns about the fire and many letters to the Editor were printed about new sites for the theatre, etc. A short, but revealing, précis is given below:

"The particulars of those killed in the fire are:

George Sweeney, aged 67, 15 Leopold Place,  
John Clark, aged 66, 4 Middle Arthur Place,  
Thomas H. Leeke, aged 26, 51 Broughton Street,  
John Taylor, aged 55, 4 St James' Square,  
Bernard Mc Vie, aged 36, Baxter's Close, Lawnmarket,  
Dean of Guild Lorimer, aged 54

The Lord Provost's Committee resolved that the expense of burying the working men who lost their lives should be defrayed from the public funds, and that the funeral of the Dean of Guild should be of a public character.

#### Church Members Move

The congregation of St Mary's Roman Catholic Church were yesterday (Sunday January 15<sup>th</sup> 1865) accommodated in St Patrick's Church, Cowgate, where there were special services, in addition to those at the ordinary hours for the congregation of St Patrick's."

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, January 24<sup>th</sup> **1865**

#### ***"Theatre Royal Fire Site for the new Theatre***

Letters to the Editor:

Sir,- I earnestly hope that no portion of the Prices Street Gardens will be given as a site for the new theatre and I humbly suggest that the east end of Princes' Street, on the north side, now occupied by two hotels, would prove a good situation. If the building is constructed in a style of architecture worthy of the city of Edinburgh, it will prove an admirable pendant to the new Post Office.

The position of the late *Theatre Royal* is inconvenient: but instead of becoming a vegetable market, I hope our Roman Catholic fellow-citizens will, when rebuilding St Mary's, require the entire space.

I am, etc. C.H."

Note 1: Had C.H lived long enough he would have seen a place of entertainment erected on the spot adjacent to the hotels he mentioned, namely, *The Palace Picture Theatre*, opened at 15 Princes Street on Wednesday December 24<sup>th</sup> **1913**, and closed on February 5<sup>th</sup> **1955**.

Note 2: Had C.H. lived a bit longer he would have learned that his fellow-citizens, the congregation of St Mary's chapel, ultimately bought the site of the old *Theatre Royal*

As Ripley [A Sunday Express columnist G.F.B.] would have said, "Believe It or Not."

"Edinburgh, January 13 1865,

Sir,- Is it not the case that the erection of a theatre in Princes' Street Gardens is allowed by Act of Parliament? If so, our authorities have no difficulty in the matter. They could arrange to take the present site in exchange, and make a vegetable market of it. Thus, the Railway Company could get more room, and public safety would in every way be insured.

I am, etc. J.D."

Note: I wonder what 'side' J.D. would have supported anent the proposed East End of Princes Street Gardens' Underground Car Park in the early 1960's?

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, July 1<sup>st</sup> **1884**. Part of an article anent the *Theatre Royal*.

The work of rebuilding the *Theatre Royal* is now drawing rapidly to a close, and there seems to be no doubt that the opening will take place on Saturday week as advertised – Dean of Guild, Mr John Shennan, stated on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1865 that the new theatre will open on Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> **1865**.

It is little more than six months since the removal of the wreck of the former building commenced. The building is seated for 2,591 persons, being an increase of 900 over the former house."

*The Scotsman*, November 24<sup>th</sup> **1865** Advertisement

### ***"Theatre Royal***

The Elegant and Commodious Theatre will open on Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, under the management of Mr and Mrs Wyndham.

The great care taken in the construction of this Beautiful Theatre, both as regards the safety and comfort of the audience, will, it is hoped, at once secure for it the confidence and support of the Public.

### **Mr David McGibbon**

Under whose supervision the works have been carried out, and to whose untiring energy the present early announcement of the opening is due.

Mr R. Hutcheson, Mason and Builder; More and Rutherford, Plumber Work; Mr Slater, Slating, etc.; Sanderson & Muirhead, Joiners; Mr D. Cassie, Gas Engineer, laid the gas

fittings; Purdie, Bonnar & Carfrae, Decorative Painting and Gilding, John Russell, Clerk of Works.

On Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1865 the performance will Commence with An Opening Address, followed by a Favourite Comedy and other Entertainments.”

*Dibdin* page 482 stated, “The opening plays were *London Assurance* and *Aunt Charlotte’s Maid*. Prices: 3s.; 2s.; 1s. 6d. and 6d.

*The Scotsman*, Monday December 18<sup>th</sup> 1865. Advertisement

**“Great Christmas Pantomime  
Robin Hood  
Or, Harlequin Little John & the Merry Men of Sherwood Forest”**

Continuing *The Scotsman* article of Tuesday July 1<sup>st</sup> 1884

“The theatre which opened on Saturday December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1865 ....cost £17,000 to build, was, in 1874, sold for £11,000 to the late Mr W.H. Logan.”

**Third Fire, 1875**

Again, exactly ten years after the second fire, the *Theatre Royal* was burned to the ground on Saturday, February 6<sup>th</sup> 1875.

*Dibdin*, page 488.

“Theatre Royal, Broughton Street, was burned to the ground. The manager of the Theatre Royal made arrangements with Mr **Mapleson** of the *Southminster Theatre*, Nicolson Street, to give three nights of opera commencing March 4<sup>th</sup> 1875; but on Sunday, March 14<sup>th</sup> 1875 the *Southminster Theatre* was gutted by fire.”

1875 was quite a year in the theatrical world. On July 5<sup>th</sup> 1875, the *Gaiety Music Hall, Moss’ Theatre of Varieties*, opened in Chambers Street. Subsequently it became the *Operetta House*. The site is now occupied by Adam House. On December 20<sup>th</sup> 1875, there opened in Castle Terrace the *Edinburgh Theatre, Winter Garden and Aquarium Company*, for short the *West End Theatre*. In time it became the *Synod Hall*.

Reverting to *The Scotsman*, Tuesday, July 1<sup>st</sup> 1884

“Mr **W.H.Logan** bought the theatre for £11,000 in 1874, and on its being burnt down in February 1875, sold the site for £5,000 to a company he had been the means of forming. The house just destroyed having then been built at the cost of £12,500, was leased to Messrs. **Howard and Logan** at the rent of £1,500 a year.

Designed by Mr **C.T.Phipps**, and erected in the space of three months, the new theatre, a commodious and well-appointed house, capable of accommodating 2,300, was opened on January 27<sup>th</sup> 1876, with the first performance in Edinburgh of **Boucicault’s** *Shaughraun*.

The house was carried on under the joint management until, a break occurring in the contract, and some disagreement having taken place between the partners, a new lease for fourteen years was obtained by Messrs **Logan and John Heslop** in May **1883**, at the rent of £2,100; Mr **Howard**, as a competitor for the tenancy, not having seen his way to offer more than £2,000.

Mr Logan died in December **1882**, and the theatre since the commencement of the new lease in May **1883**, has been carried out by Mr Heslop as sole lessee. The house, we believe, stands insured for its full value of £12,500.

The propriety of the theatre is a limited company of thirty shareholders, with a capital of £3,100 fully paid up, the property being burdened with a heritable debt and debenture bonds. In addition to the general insurance, a number of shareholders, it is said, are insured to the amount of their respective shares. (Did some, or all of the shareholders, have a very good crystal which kept showing the month of July 1884?)

The insurances are understood to be distributed over the *Queen, Royal Exchange, London and Provincial, Scottish Provincial, Fire Association, Caisse General, Phoenix, and Scottish Union & National*, the two last-mentioned having only nominal amounts to cover shareholders or debenture interests.”

*Dibdin* page 482

“Mr **Howard** severed his connection with the Royal and, as is well known, in conjunction with Mr **F.W.Wynham**, opened the *Royal Lyceum* on September 10<sup>th</sup> **1883**.”

#### **Fourth Fire, 1884**

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday July 1<sup>st</sup> **1884** A précis

“Yesterday on June 30<sup>th</sup> **1884**, the *Theatre Royal* was destroyed by fire.

About 12 o'clock a Mr Paterson, a bookseller of 15 Broughton Street, was passing down Catherine Street \* and smelt fire and observed smoke from the theatre. Mr Paterson hastened to St James' Police Station and raised the alarm

\*Catherine Street extended from the steps leading from Leith Street Terrace, at Burton's the tailor, to the corner of Little King Street, north end. The name was changed in **1892** – See Street Directories for **1892-1893**.

Altogether Mr Heslop estimated his loss at £4,000, only one-third of which is covered by insurance. He told his friends he was ruined. The theatre is said to have cost £12,000, at which figure it had been insured. Adding altogether it may be roughly estimated that the damage to the theatre and the adjoining property will not be less than £18,000.

The last company to play just prior to the fire was the **Majilton Company** with their *Round The Clock*, that was from Wednesday, June 26<sup>th</sup> **1884**. **Sarah Bernhardt** and her French Company occupied the stage on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> of June **1884**.”

## A Helping Hand

*Weekly Scotsman*, Saturday, May 27<sup>th</sup> 1933 It will be remembered that Mr Howard severed his connection with the **Theatre Royal** and lined up with the *Lyceum Theatre*.

“It so happened that the first production of *Rob Roy* in the **Lyceum** was in July 1884. The proceeds (over £200) was handed over to Mr **John Heslop**, lessee of the *Theatre Royal*, which was destroyed by fire on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1884.”

*Dibdin* page 482

“Mr **Cecil Beryl**, of the *Princess*, *Glasgow*, obtained the lease and the newly built theatre was opened by him on Monday, December 29<sup>th</sup> 1884, six months after the Theatre Royal was burned down. During 1887 a Mr **W. Hatton** joined Mr Beryl as co-lessee.”

And so, a period of 99 years has been traversed from 1788 to 1887. It was a hard road so far as the many places of amusement were concerned. At least, some of them were not allowed to grow old as some humans do. Another fate was reserved for them: Devastating Fire.

I am grateful to both **J.C.Dibdin** and *The Scotsman* without whose support there would have been no history anent the Broughton Street Site From 1887, which was Dibdin’s last entry anent the Broughton Street site, a long period of peace and tranquility descends on the old *Royal*, that is free from disaster etc.

## Irving in *The Bells*, Theatre Royal, Broughton Street

Well over 60 years ago, writing in 1963, I had the good fortune to see and hear Sir Henry Irving in *The Bells* at the *Theatre Royal*. It came about in this manner. Friday nights were generally slack so far as home lessons were concerned and it was usual to play around the Gallery entrance of the *Royal* with, it must be pointed out, **an end in view**. It was customary in those far off days to issue Pass-out Checks to those patrons who desired to cross the road to **Drummond’s Bar** at the head of Greenside Place (Now **Greisl’s**, as shown in the 1963 ‘phone book.) Indeed, an electric bell was installed in the pub to warn patrons that the curtain would rise in a minute or two for the next act.

That particular night I was lucky to get a pass from a disgruntled patron who said, when he handed me the pass, “Ach, its rotten son, ye’ll no like it.” True, I only saw the last act but in course of time I realised that Sir Henry gave me my first lesson on how the English language should be spoken. Yes, it differs from the way *Youse Yins* speak a lovely language.

## *Theatre Royal* **Handsome Scheme of Reconstruction**

*Evening News*, Thursday, July 25<sup>th</sup> 1935   Précis

“The *Theatre Royal* reopened on Monday July 29<sup>th</sup> 1935 after 10 weeks on reconstruction work. The cost is stated to be £15,000.

New seating, lighting and the introduction of amenities has done much to raise it to first class service for its patrons. The manager, Mr Collins, is proud of the individual seating introduced in the gallery, which was his idea, and also the carpeting throughout the theatre. There is a new stalls’ bar and also retiring rooms for both sexes. The bar, about the biggest outside of London, is underground which called for clever engineering. The floor of the bar is covered with leather, having a quaint pattern of violins and musical notes.

The large stage boxes and the pit have disappeared, which has made more room for the stalls. Thousands of costumes and many ‘props’ are now housed systematically indexed in what was once a tenement (Little King Street), comprising 30 old one-roomed houses.

Some of the Contractors on the job were: Messrs Lamarra; J.F.Foggo, Castle Street, Edinburgh; Alex Morrison, Edinburgh; and W. Arnott McLeod, Edinburgh.”

The completion of the above alterations showed that the management looked forward to a long life in the ‘business’. The Kaiser and his hordes between 1914-1918 failed to close the *Royal* and, a little later in history, Hitler and his gang of thugs also failed, between the years 1939 – 1945, to close the Old Lady of Broughton Street.

It appeared, very rightly, that the *Theatre Royal* had mastered the *fire jinx*. Alas, after a period of 62 years, that is since the fourth fire of June 30<sup>th</sup> 1884, the ugly monster once again struck a deadly blow.

### **Fifth and last fire at the Broughton Street site**

*The Scotsman*, Monday April 1<sup>st</sup> 1946   Précis

“The *Theatre Royal* was gutted by fire on Saturday, March 30<sup>th</sup> 1946.

DAMAGE ESTIMATED AT £75,000  
FIRE STARTED IN GALLERY

The fire started about 11.15 p.m., 35 minutes after the close of the performance *Hail Caledonia*. Mr Wark, resident manager, estimates it would cost £100,000 to build a modern theatre”

Over a number of months a great deal of correspondence had passed between the Town Council Planning Committee and the owners of the *Theatre Royal*. As all wars ultimately end, so did the long and bitter controversy between the opposing factions. Two and a half years later the **final decision** was reported in the Press.

*The Scotsman*, Friday, September 17<sup>th</sup> 1948

## “EDINBURGH’S THEATRE ROYAL

### PERMISSION TO REBUILD REFUSED

The appeal made by the owners, **Edinburgh Varieties Ltd.**, for permission to rebuild the *Theatre Royal* at Broughton Street has been dismissed by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

In issuing his decision, however, the Secretary of State for Scotland has said that he regards the provision of a new theatre in the area as desirable in the public interest, and has indicated to the Corporation that he will be glad if they will take steps to make a new site available as soon as possible.”

The above **decision** is the perfect example of *Double Talk*, and is to be expected from such a person as **Woodburn**, who was, at that time, Secretary of State for Scotland.

### The Ban Remains Despite...

Despite the rescinding of the ban by the Town Council on Friday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1950 – see the Local Press- by 36 votes to 13, the theatre remains a burnt out shell as I write in the Spring of 1963. Tomorrow, April 25<sup>th</sup>, is the anniversary of the landing at the Dardanelles, where 48 years ago I met Johnny Turk. The Dardanelles, like the *Theatre Royal*, is but a memory.

Soon, work will commence, in earnest, on the demolition of St James’ Square, Place etc., but there is no sign, nor is there likely to be any sign, that a site will be reserved for a new *Theatre Royal*. Not likely, when an acre of ground costs £5,000, along, of course, with many others exposed for sale the same day, at the same price. That was in March –April 1963.

As I write, 11 a.m. on Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup> 1963, the T.V. has started with the preliminaries prior to the wedding of H.R.H. Princess Alexandra of Kent and the Hon. Angus Ogilvy. One eye on the wedding, the other on the script – there is so much to be done and so little time left in which to do it. In the following chapter I give my reminiscences of *Pantomimes* given in the *Theatre Royal* along with comments on the decline in popularity of the *Pantomime*

## 8: EDINBURGH PANTOMIMES

*Theatre Royal pantomimes in the 1890's; the **Grand** Pantomime, 1904; Pantomimes during the 1914 –1918 War, in 1939-1940 and in 1945 for the Home Coming Warriors; decline in the number of theatres suitable for presenting pantomimes; Pantomimes -then there were some, now there are none in the 1962-1963 Season!; The Space Age.*

From my earliest recollections, extending over 67 years as I write, the **Theatre Royal** pantomime was the main source of entertainment in the city during the New Year Festivities – later, it included a Christmas season. The sum total of amusement places in the city during the Gay Nineties were: Theatre Royal, Cooke's Circus, Moss' Carnival (Waverley Market), Iona Street Shows and the Lyceum Theatre; all have gone with the wind except the Lyceum. True, there is a Carnival of sorts in the Waverley Market in the Season, but it is a travesty these days.

*Lone is the house now and lonely the moorland;  
The children are scattered, the old folk are gone.  
Why stand I here like a ghost and a shadow?  
'Tis time I was moving: 'tis time I passed on.*

We were assured during the 1962-1963 Season that Pantomimes for present day children are just bunk. Maybe, but those who are young in 1963 nay not, 50 or 60 years hence, have the joy of recalling Pantomimes which, like the Theatre Royal, Cooke's Circus, etc. have gone forever. I am happy to recall the happy days of the 1890's and the first decade of the 20th Century and my visits to the Pantomimes – Once A Year. Like the Sunday School Trips and Soirees, they also were something to look forward to and something to remember.

But, when in Rome, do as the Romans do.

The visit to the **Royal** was a yearly event as was the visit to **Cooke's Circus**, which is the site on which the **Palladium Theatre** stands. Whole families and neighbours would make a night of it- bags of apples, oranges and sweeties for the children – all happy in the 'gods', that is the gallery, with its hard wooden benches, without backrests. It was only in 1935 that 'tip-up' seats were installed in the **Royal's** gallery. In the humid atmosphere the smell of oranges was overpowering, only death can blot out these happy memories.

The **Tivoli**, Stockbridge, opened in November **1901**, but re-opened as the **Grand** on Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup> **1904**, with the pantomime *Cinderella*, starring Miss **May Martin**, Miss **Millie Engler**, Miss **Fanny Wright** and Miss **Vera Schlesinger**, along with Mr **George Taverner**. Miss Wright was a regular visitor to my home and invited my mother, sisters and myself to a performance.

The persons who delight in spreading stories to children of tender years, in the 1960's, "There is no Santa Claus, that Pantomimes are a lot of hooey and just bunk, etc. should be classified as virtual criminals with intent to corrupt the morals of children. In support of this

statement, Vital Statistics show that there is an ever growing tendency for 13 year old girls to have children. For such children there can be no happy memories 20, 30, or 40 years hence.

### **The 1914-1918 War**

It is on record that the following pantomimes were produced during the **1914-1915** Season:

*Cinderella* at the **Royal** and *Jack and the Beanstock* at the **King's**.

In the 1915-1916 Season three pantomimes were produced:

*Little Boy Blue* at the **Royal**; *Dick Whittington* at the **King's** and *Mother Goose* at the **Gaiety**, Leith.

Soon after the Armistice on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918, King Pantomime was again in full cry with:

*Puss in Boots* at the **King's**; *The House that Jack Built* at the **Royal** and *Aladdin* at the **Alhambra**, Leith Walk

### **The 1939-1945 War** **The Show Must Go On and Did Go On**

Although at times Hitler was a damned nuisance, The Show Went On. In the winter of **1939-1940** **Gene Gerrard** and **Bobby Comber** appeared in *Humpty Dumpty* at the **King's**; and **Jack Radcliffe** and his company appeared in *Babes in the Wood* at the **Royal**.

For the Home Coming of the Warriors in **1945**, four pantomimes were produced:

*Sleeping Beauty* at the **Palladium**; *Jack and the Beanstock* at the **Gaiety**; *Mother Goose* at the **King's** and *Babes in the Wood* at the **Royal**.

The Alhambra (as a cinema) closed during March **1958** and the Leith Gaiety closed in February **1957**. The only theatres still capable of putting on pantomimes in **1963** are: The **Lyceum**; **King's**; **Palladium** and the **Gateway**.

For the first time in my life the word "Pantomime" is missing from Press Advertisements during the **1962-1963** Season; then there were some, now there are none! The following shows were advertised under "Theatre Amusements" in *The Scotsman* of Monday, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1962**.

**Lyceum:** *Fol de Rols*. Prices- 10s. 6d.; 7s.6d.; 5s.6d. and 3s.

**King's:** *A Wish for Jamie*, starring Jack Milroy, Fay Lenore and Charlie Sim.  
Prices – 10s. 6d.; 9s.; 5s.6d.; 3s.6d. and 2s.6d.

**Palladium:** *Lex McLean Show*. Prices- 5s.; 4s. and 3s.

**Gateway:** *The Little Minister*, starring Frank Wylie and Janet Michael. Prices – 7s.6d and 4s.6d.

The **Theatre Royal**, burnt out on Saturday, March 30<sup>th</sup> **1946**, still stands a forlorn shell – the last of its race – midway through **1963**.

## The Space Age

Did the dawn of the Space Age on Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup> **1957**, when Russia launched the first Satellite, also herald the appointed day when all childish things must be discontinued? It is just a thought.

It would appear that the *Sleeping Beauty* will never wake up, either in the near or distant Space Age, nor will it be worthwhile for *Jack* to climb the *Beanstalk* on the look out for *Dick Whittington*.

Has *Cinderella* been to her last *Ball*?

Will the *Babes in the Wood* wake up and go in search of *Little Boy Blue*?

Has *Mother Goose* laid her last egg?

Will *Mother Hubbard's Cupboard* be filled to overflowing?

Will *Humpty Dumpty* become a Spaceman?

Will *Puss in Boots* marry the *Old Woman Who lived In A Shoe* and go to live in a Council house?

The *Cow and the Moon* , that has virtually been accomplished . What next?

Has the *Good Fairy* been turned into a *Square*, is she *Without It* (1963), or has she gone over to *Bingo*?

Will the *Bad Baron* become a *Goodie*?

[My father would have been pleased that the Pantomime has made a comeback; *Cinderella* was presented at the **King's** during the **1999-2000** Season G.F.B.]

## 9: 50 NICOLSON STREET

*New Royal Alhambra, 1862; Princess's Theatre, 1863; Royal Princess's Theatre 1868 to 1886; Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street, now the Salvation Army's Congress Hall; La Scala Electric Theatre, "Ye Olde Princess Theatre" 1912.*

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, September 13<sup>th</sup> 1862, published before the opening of the theatre.

### *"The "New"Alhambra*

Mr Paterson, whose lease of the *Dunedin Hall* expired a few days ago – first week in September 1862 see page 5. He gave the name "Alhambra" after the popular place of recreation in London.

The *Dunedin Hall* had been used as a circus, a theatre, a concert room, a hall for exhibitions of waxwork and dioramic views – and as a place of worship. It was never a very comfortable place to sit in, despite the fact that a considerable sum had been spent to ensure the comfort of the public. It was well patronised, owing to its being the only place of amusement in the city. It was owing to the approaching closure of the lease of the *Dunedin Hall* which prompted Mr Paterson to obtain a suitable site in the vicinity in which to build a comfortable hall.,

A short distance from the *Dunedin Hall* on the opposite side of the street, a site was procured. Mr D. McGibbon, architect, prepared the plans. The new hall was fitted by Messrs Sanderson and Muirhead, who were the contractors for the building, with tiers of boxes and gallery, stage boxes, dressing rooms, orchestra etc. all on the same scale, and after the same model as the *Royal Queen's Theatre*, Broughton Street (see page 51). The roof was broken into panels and decorated with stars on a blue ground. The proscenium and fronts of the galleries were ornamented in relief in blue and gold. A large crystal chandelier, furnished by Messrs Robertson and Cairns, was suspended from the ceiling, and smaller ones set round the boxes, so as to give an abundant supply of light to all parts of the house.

It had seating for 1,500 which was a little smaller than the *Queen's Theatre*, Broughton Street. The only drawback is the entrance. For a short time the access to the hall was through a courtyard between Nos 48 and 50 Nicolson Street. The passage was roofed over, and a portico on the line of the street was erected, so that the public entered from the street, under the covered passage. Refreshment rooms were fitted up for gallery and boxes and the theatre has all the requisites of a first class theatre. It was the intention to carry on the same type of entertainment as had been given during the late winter season at the *Dunedin Hall*."

*The Scotsman*, Monday, September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1862

**“Grand Opening  
New Royal Alhambra, Nicolson Street  
On Monday, September 29<sup>th</sup> 1862**

Proprietor: Mr W. Paterson, 10 Hill Square, will open this evening with a  
**GRAND DIVERSIFIED ENTERTAINMENT**  
Supported by some of the First Artistes of the Day

The Company

The following Ladies and Gentlemen are already engaged, and will have the honour of appearing: Miss Fanny Edwards, Mrs Richards, Mademoiselle Floria Fabia, Miss Jackson, Miss E. MacGregor, Miss H. MacGregor, Mrs Aitken, Miss French, Mr Brenner, Mr Hiller, Mr Elijah Taylor, Mr Tom Handford, Mr Harry Whitfield, Mr Harry Baker and Mr P. Aitken

The Orchestra

Will be full and efficient, and under the able leadership of Mr Edwin McCann.

The Band

The Band will be composed of the following Gentlemen: Leader and Conductor, Mr Edwin McCann; First Violin, Mr Tait; Second Violin, Mr Wood; Viola, Mr Kindersign; Basso, Mr Chadwick; Flute, Mr Powel; Clarionet, Mr Maguire; First Cornet, Mr Tricehurst; Second Cornet, Mr Shannon; Trombone, Mr Murray; Drums, Mr McLean.

**Novelties will be produced in rapid succession**

Combining the Choicest Production in Painting, Poetry and Music

**A magnificent New Drop Scene**

Painted by Mr Edwin Yarnold, late of the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden, London

The New House will be Gorgeously Decorated Under the immediate Superintendence of Mr  
W. Paterson

**The Scenic Department**

Will be under the immediate Superintendence of Mr Arthur Henderson, Principal Scenic  
Artist to the Establishment, from the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, London

The Extensive Gas-Fittings and Splendid Crystal Chandeliers, by Messrs Robertson and  
Cairns, Nicolson Street

The Upholstery Department will be executed by Messrs Porteous and Brown

The whole of this Substantial and Elegant Building has been erected by Messrs. Sanderson  
and Muirhead

The Boxes will be Elegant and Commodious. The Pit Stalls will be furnished with backs, and comfortably cushioned. The Gallery will also be very conveniently seated, affording

ample space for each visitor, and allowing a perfect view of the Stage. The Stair to the Gallery is of easy ascent and entirely built of stone.

Prices of Admission: Front Boxes, one shilling; Pit, sixpence; Gallery, threepence. Private Boxes may be had by applying to the Box Book-keeper.

Doors open at Seven o'clock – Performance to commence at Half Past Seven punctually.

N.B. A limited number of Season Tickets may now be had on very moderate terms."

### *The Princess's*

"It seems", writes **Dibdin**, "impossible to say when this building was first started as a place of public entertainment. About the year **1860** it would appear to have been used as a music hall, and at that period it was rented by W. Paterson, formerly property master at the Royal (Shakespeare Square)."

As Dibdin's book was not published until **1888**, it is disappointing to find that he could, to use American jargon, "have read all about it." In two issues of *The Scotsman* on Saturday September 13<sup>th</sup> **1862**, and, anent the opening of the Princess's on Thursday July 2<sup>nd</sup> **1863**. I have come to the conclusion, long syne, that without *The Scotsman* reports over the ages, we would have been very short of Edinburgh history in particular, on many subjects.

*Evening Dispatch*, March 13<sup>th</sup> 1963

"Mr **J.C.Dibdin**, Author of *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage* was, in his business life, concert manager of Messrs **Paterson's** (1887) the leading house in Edinburgh. Mr Dibdin founded the *Musicians' Society* at a meeting, held in the saloon bar of the Windsor Hotel, 100 Princes Street, on Saturday, March 19<sup>th</sup> 1887. Mr **Edmund Edmunds**, doyen of the profession, was elected the first president of the newly formed Society. Mr **John Tainsh**, one of Edinburgh's top concert singers, presided at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner."

It will be seen that Mr Dibdin made the profession, the stage, his hobby. We are greatly indebted to him for the publication, which is a text book.

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, July 2<sup>nd</sup> **1863** Advertisement

### *Opening of the Princess's Theatre (Late New Alhambra)*

*On Saturday next, July 4<sup>th</sup>, will be produced for the first time in Edinburgh  
The great French Historical Drama, entitled:*

### *CARTOUCHE*

With New Scenery, Machinery and Startling Mechanical Effects

Mr **Fraser Jones** will make his first appearance here on Monday next  
in the *Porter's Knot*

Prices of Admission: Centre Boxes, 2/-; Side Boxes, 1/6d; Pit, 1/-; Gallery, 6d.  
Second Price at nine o'clock to all parts of the House  
Doors open at 7 o'clock. Commences at Half-past 7.  
Saturday commences half-an-hour earlier.

A new, elegant, and commodious Box Entrance has been constructed leading  
from Nicolson Street.  
Pit and Gallery Entrances in Hill Street."

*Dibdin* from pages 482-487

"Although Paterson seems to have been a conscientious and careful manager, his venture did not pay, and in **1867** the building was again opened as a music hall, with **T.J.Poole** as manager, and a few months later, **William Stephens** became lessee, the variety business being still carried on".

"On Monday, September 14<sup>th</sup> **1868**, the *Royal Princess's* opened its doors under the new management of **A.D. McNeill**. The opening piece in 1868 was *Ruth* with Miss Kate Saville as the heroine." Note the change of name from *Princess's* to *Royal Princess's*".

"On Monday, February 8<sup>th</sup> **1869**, Mr McNeill produced a piece from his own pen, entitled *The Gloamin' and the Mirk* or a *Story of Modern Athens*."

"The **Carl Rosa** produced *Mignon* for the first time in Edinburgh during September **1879**."

"On Monday, August 25<sup>th</sup> **1884**, the house was reopened after extensive alterations and decorations, but on Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup> **1884**, Mr McNeill died, and the management of the theatre passed into the hands of his son **W.A.McNeill**, who continued the concern against the most powerful opposition. The last piece to be produced was *The Gloamin and the Mirk*."

The house finally closed its doors on May 22<sup>nd</sup> **1886**.

*Evening News*, Saturday January 21<sup>st</sup> **1933** An article by "P.H.", which drew on *Dibdin*

"Advertisement, *The Scotsman*, Wednesday May 19<sup>th</sup> **1886**

**Benefit Night**  
***Royal Princess's* Theatre**  
**Friday, May 21<sup>st</sup> 1886,**  
**For the benefit of Mr. W.A. McNeill**  
**Special Attractions**

**Box plans now ready at Wood and Co's, 49 George Street,  
and Exhibition, Stall 1103, Court 3"**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1886 Advertisement

**“Last Night of *Royal Princess’s Theatre*,**

**This Evening (Saturday) 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1886. 7.30**

(Last advertised programme; note mistake “21” instead of “22” G.B.)

**THE EVER POPULAR DRAMA  
THE STORY OF EFFIE AND JEANIE DEANS**

**JEANIE DEANS .....MISS RYDER”**

There was no comment in the Press, of any kind, anent the closure of the *Royal Princess’s Theatre*.

All that remains to be told about the *Royal Princess’s Theatre* are extracts from letters or articles which appeared in the Local Press.

*Evening News*, Saturday January 21<sup>st</sup> 1933, by “P.H.” referred to above.

“...a Mr R.B.Stewart led a small but efficient orchestra.” . He also thought that the famous s International Exhibition held in the Meadows gave the death blow to the old *Princess’s*.”

Notes: *Edinburgh in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, 1886

Page 166, “INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION. The Edinburgh International Exhibition was opened in the Meadows on May 6<sup>th</sup> 1886, by Prince Albert Victor.”

Page 165 “The *Evening Dispatch*: the first copy of this new evening newspaper was issued on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1886.” (The files for both *The Evening News* and *The Evening Dispatch* only go as far back as 1900 in the National Library of Scotland. *News* files only go as far back to 1927 in Central Library, George IV Bridge. There are no back copies of the *Dispatch* in the Central Library.)

*Evening News* Saturday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1937 Article by **Councillor Wilson McLaren** A precis.

**“UNIQUE VOLUMES RECALL MANY IDOLS OF THE MUSIC HALL**

**Peter Higgins**, born in Edinburgh in 1860, acquired the tavern in his early years which formerly belonged to **Andrew Wilson**. It was situated between the Gallery door entrance sand the stage door entrance to the old *Princess’s Theatre* in Hill Place. It quickly became known as the *Football Arms*, and was the resort of the most noted actors and actresses who trod the boards of that famous little South Side Theatre.

Peter’s father, **Henry Higgins**, was a typical Irishman, who had a great fund of humour and had the happy knack of making friends with everybody, particularly the ‘pros’ of the old stock companies, whose shows were drawing crowds to the old *Princess’s* and the *Theatre Royal*. It may be added the Peter Higgins compiled a large number of autographs of many famous artists, the end product became known as *Peter Higgin’s Autograph Book*”

*Evening Dispatch* of January 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 1923 (Tuesday to Friday) The length of each instalment was about a whole column. The article by “J.N.U.” dealt mainly with

productions during the life of the *Princess's*; from that point of view it was an excellent article, hence my reason for giving the dates, so that anyone interested may know which file of *The Dispatch* to peruse in The National Library of Scotland

**“THE OLD PRINCESS’S THEATRE  
HEYDAY OF A POPULAR PLAYHOUSE  
AN EDINBURGH MAN’S MEMORIES**

**RING DOWN THE CURTAIN  
1868 TO MAY 22<sup>ND</sup> 1886**

After its manager died, (November 7<sup>th</sup> 1884) the theatre, though kept open for some 18 months by his son, Mr **W.A.McNeill**, itself became moribund. It lay for long untenanted, and one can fancy the dust thickening in the darkness over its gaudy gildings and gaily painted scenes.

It came at last, in the turn of fortune and the years, to be rebuilt internally as a stronghold of the **Salvation Army**. The walls that so often re-echoed laughter and applause now gave ear to sounds less cheerful and there is no harm in adding, less artistic.”

Note: I tried to find out, through the medium of old Street Directories, when the Salvation Army occupied the old Princess’s, but was unsuccessful.

***Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street***

The **Salvation Army**, however, took possession of the old *Cinema House*, 1911 to 1930, in the year 1935. On April 5<sup>th</sup> 1935, **Lady Sands**, wife of **Lord Sands**, a Senator of the High Court of Judiciary, opened Congress Hall. **Lord Wark**, also a Senator of the High Court, was the Chairman at the above meeting.

*Evening Dispatch*, Tuesday, March 21<sup>st</sup> 1950 A precis

***“The Royal Princess’s now the La Scala***

How many of the patrons of the *La Scala*, (opened December 24<sup>th</sup> 1912) realise that the building is an old playhouse with an honourable history? Under Mr **A.D.McNeill**, an Edinburgh man, who was much respected in the city and a fine actor; his performance of *Rob Roy* was outstanding.

Under his management plays, pantomimes and **Gilbert and Sullivan** operas flourished. An interesting play-bill of McNeill’s pantomime for 1875 is still preserved at the cinema.”

And so, another facet of the *Sooth Side* has been told, before it is largely demolished. Many of the dreadful tenements have gone in the late 1950’s and the 1960’s, but much remains to be done, before God’s fresh air can circulate freely in the district

## 10: THE CASTLE TERRACE SITE

*Edinburgh Theatre, Winter Garden and Aquarium Company, Castle Terrace, 1875 or, for short, Edinburgh Theatre, sometimes known as the West End Theatre; Theatre closed in 1877 and building bought by United Presbyterian Church, Synod Hall, 1877; Synod Hall bought by Edinburgh Corporation, 1902; Oldest Synod Hall tenant, Edinburgh Geological Society, 1885; Three Play-Bills relating to other branches of the Poole family; The start of Poole's in the Synod Hall; Poole's brochure, "100 Years of Showmanship, 1837-1937"; Last of Myriorama shows, 1928; Harmony Nights, 1928; Poole's became permanent tenants of the Synod Hall, 1929; The Talkies, 1929; John Poole on Early Cinema Days; How Talkies Came To Town; Poole's pioneer work on the Talkies; "The Singing Fool", 1929; Kinematograph Year Book for 1915 - Colin Bennett on 'Technical Progress of the Year'; J.K. Stafford Poole on How Things Have Changed Since the Myriorama; Poole's, Synod Hall, closed in 1965; The Castle Terrace Site occupied by the Saltire Court, an office block, in October 1991*

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, December 17<sup>th</sup> 1874

### “Proposed West End Theatre for Edinburgh

No observant citizen can have failed to notice the rapidity with which Edinburgh has of late been increasing, not only in respect of wealth and social well-being, but also in respect of population.”

Note 1. The 1871 Census showed the population of Edinburgh to be 196,979.

Note 2. “In respect of wealth”? See *Scottish Painters' Journal*, February 1956, Volume 10, No. 2 in the Central Library, Scottish Room. Wage Fluctuations in the Painting Trade from 1824 to 1956 (by the writer) 1874, first week in May, 7d. per hour, for a nine hour day (May 1963, hourly rate, 5s.9d.) “Wealth” is a relative term. The 1874 rate applied to the Building Trade in general.

“It is, however, somewhat remarkable that while such development and progress necessarily imply an increased demand for means of amusement and recreation, no public effort has to the present time been made adequately to meet such requirements.

We have still, as our grandfathers had half a century ago, our principal theatre at the east end of the city (*Theatre Royal, Broughton Street*), and although, during that period, the site has been altered and the building more than once renewed, the present edifice is by no means sufficient for the community as now existing.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to hear that a number of influential gentlemen (One of the chief promoters was Lord Provost **James Cowan, 1872**) have combined together to promote the erection of the *West End Theatre*, which should be at once worthy of

Edinburgh in respect of its appointments and conveniently situated for the growing population of the western and southern districts.

We understand that, as a first step, the vacant stance in the centre of Castle Terrace has been fixed upon as the most suitable site. The ground in question measures 300 feet in length by 150 feet in width, and thus affords ample space for the erection of a theatre capable of accommodating 3,000 persons, besides providing for other desirable public purposes. The site is not only readily accessible to the whole West End, but is in immediate communication with Princes' Street and Lothian Road, and so with the main routes of traffic.

It is, we believe, proposed to erect in connection with the new theatre an aquarium, and a winter garden which might be used of horticultural and other exhibitions, as also a great music hall, which would be available for concerts or other similar entertainments. If anything wanting to popularise such a scheme, it would, we are sure, be found the possibility there is that, in the event of the new theatre becoming a *fait accompli*, it may open its doors under the management of Mr and Mrs Wyndham, who have so long rendered acceptable service as caterers of dramatic entertainment."

*The Scotsman*, Thursday December 16<sup>th</sup> 1875 and Monday December 20<sup>th</sup> 1875

***"Edinburgh Theatre, Castle Terrace***

**Manager, Mr Wybert Reeve**

**Will Open for the Season Tonight (Monday)**

**20<sup>th</sup> December 1875**

**Numerous and Talented Company**

The respected Lessee of the late Theatre Royal and very Popular Actor, Mr R.H. Wyndham, will appear in one of his favourite characters

At Half-past Seven, the Entertainments will commence with *God Save the Queen*, sung by the Company. An Opening Address by Mr Wybert Reeve.

To be followed by the Admired Comedy, *Used Up*,  
after which the Laughable Farce *Last Legs*

*O'CALLAGHAN*.... Mr R.H. Wyndham

Concluding with the Farce of *Brother Sandy*."

On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday December 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>

Shakespeare's Beautiful Comedy of

***AS YOU LIKE IT***

In which Mr Reeve has the pleasure of announcing the following members of the Haymarket Company, Mr Compton and Mr and Mrs Chippendale will appear.

To be followed by the Farce *Cool as Cucumber*

Plumper ....Mr Wybert Reeve

Doors open at 7, to Commence at 7.30

Box Office at Messrs. Wood & Co., 49 George Street.”

*The Scotsman*, Monday, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1875

**“*Edinburgh Theatre* Architects**

Messrs. Pilkington & Bell, and the Exterior Designs by Mr James Gowans

Stage and Machinery constructed under the Superintendence of Mr Syme. The Curtain and Act Drop painted by Messrs George Gordon and Harford, of the Gaiety, Queen’s, and Prince of Wales Theatres London. Decorations and Modelling by Messrs. Campbell and Son of London and Edinburgh.

Figures Sculptured by Mr Stevenson, Castle Terrace. Furnishings of the Auditorium by Messrs. W.R. Clapperton & Co. Edinburgh. Scenery by Messrs. Morris and Maltby of the Haymarket and Globe Theatres London. Gas and Lime Arrangements by Messrs. Brechin & Co. London and Edinburgh and Hydraulic Machinery by Messrs. Brown, Engineers, Edinburgh.

Prices: Stalls, 5s.; Dress Circle, 4s.; Upper Circle, 3s.; Pit Stalls, 2s.6d.; Pit, 1s.6d.; Amphitheatre, 1s.; and Gallery, 6d.

Proscenium Private Boxes, from £1.1s.0d. to £2.2s.0d

Private Boxes in Dress Circle, from 16s. to £1.10s.0d.

**No smoking allowed**

N.B. Tramway Arrangements have been made to have Tramway Cars for Leith, Morningside and Newington, in waiting at North (Princes’ Street) end of Castle Terrace at the Close of the Performance each evening.”

*Dibdin* page 489

**“The Edinburgh Theatre, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1875 to April 14<sup>th</sup> 1877**

The Promoters of the *Edinburgh Theatre* were not the only people who looked forward with confidence to the financial success of the undertaking. If a magnificent building, handsome appointments, and the most elaborate machinery for working everything on stage, could have made a success, the *Edinburgh Theatre* would probably have been still in existence.

It was opened on Monday, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1875, under Wybert Reeve, whose management cannot be recorded as brilliant. He engaged a stock company, (Theatre, piece, play, etc. one

which forms part of a repertoire; a company who regularly act together at a particular theatre, 1761, G.B.) which included R.R. Pillans (low comedian), W.H.Hallat (juvenile lead), E.T.Webber (walking gentleman), Hilton (old Man), Miss Kate St Ange (light lead), Rosie Saker, Blanche Coleridge, Mrs Bickerstaff (old woman), and Miss Adeline Stanhope (lead). M.Daly was the director of the orchestra and H. Dambmann, leader.

On the Opening Night, after *God Save the Queen* and an address by Wybert Reeve, *Used Up* was played. After which *His Last Legs* [given as *Last Legs* on page 69 G.F.B.] and the farce *Brother Sandy*.

After the playing of *MacBeth* on Wednesday, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1876, the house closed down and reopened on Monday, August 14<sup>th</sup> 1876 for the Autumn Season. On 17<sup>th</sup> August 1876\*, the Queen unveiled the Albert Memorial in Charlotte Square and in the evening some of the Royal suite visited the theatre.

The **Carl Rosa Company** occupied the boards from Monday, February 19<sup>th</sup> 1877 to Saturday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1877 during which period were produced *Pauline*, *Fidelio*, *Zampa*, *Flying Dutchman* and *Siege of Rochelle*.

#### Ring Down the Curtain

On Monday, April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1877, Mr **Stirling** announced a twelve nights engagement, and with the last performance on Saturday, April 14<sup>th</sup> 1877 (*Masks and Faces*), the history of this splendidly equipped theatre comes to a close.

The building was shortly afterwards exposed for sale by public roup, and eventually knocked down to a dissenting body of Scottish Presbyterians, who paid about one fourth of the original cost. The entire fittings, furniture, etc., were sold off by auction, and, in the process of time, the place after an extensive process of rebuilding, was opened as a

#### **Synod Hall and Offices of the United Presbyterian Church**

\* *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*, page 152, gave the date of the inauguration as August 16<sup>th</sup> 1876

Extract from City Records, supplied by Miss H. Armet, City Archivist

“The **Edinburgh Theatre**, or **West End Theatre**, Castle Terrace, built in the year 1875, at a cost of £65,000. It was purchased on the failure of the Company by the **United Presbyterian Church** in 1877 for approximately £16,3000”

Extract from 1960-1961 *City of Edinburgh Financial Review*, page 183

#### **“Synod Hall**

The Synod Hall Buildings, originally used as an opera house, and situated in Castle Terrace,, were acquired by the Corporation in 1902 from the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland at a cost of £30,570. These buildings consist of a large hall (Synod Hall) which is seated for 1,450, a smaller hall (Pillar Hall) with a seating capacity of 400, a number of rooms which are let as offices, studios, etc., and two basements occupied as a Winter Bowling Green and a Miniature Rifle Range.”

It will be seen the Churchmen of yesteryear were “Slick Guys” both in the purchase of and in the selling of the Synod Hall. A Profit, both fore and aft.

### **Oldest Synod Hall Tenant, 1885**

On 26<sup>th</sup> February 1963 I sent a letter to the Secretary of the Edinburgh Geological Society, 14 Castle Terrace, asking when the Society first occupied the Synod Hall as tenants. The following are extracts from a reply I received from the Secretary, Mr More, on 4<sup>th</sup> March from **Royal Scottish Geographical Society**, 10 Randolph Crescent, Edinburgh 3:

“The Large Hall in the Synod Hall was first used by the Society for lectures in **1885**.”

“So far as I can trace, the ***Usher Hall*** was first used for lectures in **1919**. From **1919 to 1941** some were held in the Usher Hall and some in the Synod Hall; from **1942** all lectures were held in the Usher Hall.”

The reason for introducing data anent the Geographical Society is: when Messrs Poole became tenants of the Large Hall (Synod Hall) they had, by the terms of the let, to vacate the premises one night each quarter, between Monday and Friday. This meant a loss of revenue to Messrs Poole four nights in the year and disappointment to numerous patrons who arrived at the Synod Hall only to find that there was no picture show on that particular evening. I was disappointed several times.

The City Archivist advised me: “The Geographical Society first rented the Synod Hall for Offices in **1908**.”

*The Scotsman*, Friday March 8<sup>th</sup> **1963**, in one of its potted Anniversaries commented:

“Edinburgh Geological Society was instituted in **1834**”

Thus another facet of Synod Hall history is almost complete. In another year or two it will be no more, as it is due for demolition to make room for another Opera House.

### **First Entertainments in the Synod Hall**

Who were the first entertainers in the Synod Hall has been a sore point in Edinburgh down through the ages. I will append the highlights on this subject from **1900** culled from the *Evening News* files, held in the National Library of Scotland. It is to be presumed that the former occupiers of the Synod Hall, the U.P. Church, would frown upon such *ongauns* as they actor folks and moving pictures, except, of course, they could be vouched for as being *Naice* People. In support of the contention I mention the shindy that went on in **1946** when Mr **A.G. Anderson** donated what became known as the ***Gateway*** to the Church of Scotland; see item on the ***Gateway*** page 160.

News Monday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1900

*“Synod Hall, Castle Terrace*

**Fisk Jubilee Singers and  
Animated War Pictures from China and South Africa”**

News Thursday January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1902

**“Synod Hall  
Fisk Jubilee Singers and Animate Pictures  
Prices: 6d.; 1s.; and 2s.”**

### **Poole’s in Edinburgh in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

I am indebted to Miss Linton of the National Library of Scotland for bringing to my notice three Poole’s Play-Bills of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; but the Poole of the Play-bills was not directly related to Poole’s Enterprises of the Synod Hall as Mr J.K. Stafford Poole confirmed at a meeting I had with him on October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1962 that his branch of the Pooles did not arrive in Edinburgh until about 1889.

Play-Bill No. 1

#### **Poole’s Operetta House, Waterloo Place**

Monday, April 10<sup>th</sup> 1876, and eleven following evenings at eight o’clock

#### **Poole and Young’s**

Twice Daily, Afternoon at 3, evenings at 8

Grand National Melodies by the Quartet String Band

Under the Direction of Mr C. Horton

Guide, Mr Oscar J. Hartwell, who will introduce his humorous Anecdotes and Songs.

Play-Bill No 2

#### **Poole’s Mammoth Diorama Monday, April 7<sup>th</sup> 1884**

Illustrating the World and the late War in Egypt

Return visit of Messrs. Poole (late Poole and Young), after 7 years’ absence in the

**Albert Hall, West Princes Street, Edinburgh  
For a Short Season Only**

Commencing Monday, April 7<sup>th</sup> 1884

Matinees every Wednesday and Saturday at 2.30

Every Evening at 7.30

Admission: Stalls, 3s.; Second Seats, 2s.; Third Seats 1s.; Gallery, 6d.

Children under 10 and Schools over 10 in number, half-price to all seats except Gallery

Family Tickets to admit Five to Stalls 12s.

Second Seats to admit Five 8s.

Through Messrs. Wood and Co., George Street

Agent in advance.....Mr. J.A. Brittain

Sole Proprietor.....Messrs. Poole

Business Manager, to whom all accounts should be made.....Mr. J.J. Taylor

Note. The *Albert Hall* was erected in 1876 and named the *Albert Institute of Fine Arts*. It was situated in Shandwick Place.

Play-Bill No. 3

**Mr Joseph Poole's Royal Jubilee Myriorama**

**Positively the First Visit of Poole's No 2 Myriorama**

**Newsome's Grand Circus,  
Nicholson (*sic*) Street**

**For Short Season Only**

**Commencing Monday, March 7<sup>th</sup> 1887**

**Every Evening at 8**

Prices: Private Boxes (for 6 persons), £1. 1s. 0d; Stalls, 3s.; Unreserved Seats, 2s.;

Pit and Side Galleries, 1s.; Promenade, 6d.

Half-price at Nine o'clock, 6d. seats excepted.

**Fairy Tales or Facts**

Fairy Tale writing is but a figment of the imagination; however, as a child I loved to read *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, over and over again. In time, I learned that Fairy Tales and factual history could not solder.

For as long as I can remember Poole's Synod Hall has been glamourised and clothed in what amounted to mysticism regarding its origin. [My father was disappointed that the Poole's 1837-1937 Anniversary Brochure referred to on page 79 made no mention of when the Poole family arrived in Edinburgh. GFB] I am loath to 'burst the bubble' regarding the so-called popular person or an old institution, but to maintain a myth is to disregard facts. *Facts are chieftains that wanna ding*, and whether it be Poole's or the most humble picture house ever in Edinburgh, only the factual information can give a true picture regarding the origin of each.

For example, in reporting about all houses of entertainment I show the First Advertisement anent the opening date, its address, price of admission, etc. Only in a few cases there is no advertisement; in such cases I have had to depend on old residents who lived in districts wherein Picture Houses were sited. One or two which I remember clearly were The *Penny Scratcher*, which was the *Waverley Picture House*, 6 Infirmary Street and the *People's Picture House*, 19 Blackfriars Street; both, however, are mentioned in Trade Books .

### **The Start of Poole's in the Synod Hall**

*News*, Saturday December 22 **1906** Preliminary Advertisement  
*News*, Tuesday, December 25<sup>th</sup> **1906**

**“Synod Hall, Edinburgh**

**Today, Tuesday, at 2.30 and 7.45**

**Three performances New Year's Day, 11.30, 2.30, 7.45**  
**Book at Paterson's, George Street**

**First Visit of Charles W. Poole's Myriorama**

**An Entertainment of Unparalleled Brilliance and Refinement**

**A marvellous Combination of Panorama, Diorama, Pausereorama, Marinorama and Militariorama, depicting scenes of World Wide Interest, Illustrating Incidents which make the History of Nations and Continents**

**Just added at a cost of £1,000 a marvellous Series**  
**Illustrating the Great Battle of Waterloo**

**In Seven Great Tableaux**

**To the Myriorama is allied Poole's Company of Entertainers**

**Introducing 10 pleasing Specialities,**  
**10 picked from Thousands for their Talented Refinement,**  
**including Woolford's Ponies, Clever Dogs and Donkeys,**  
**and the famous Avondale Four, Comedy Vocalists of Wonderful Humorous Ability**

**The Whole Accompanied by Poole's Scarlet Band**

**Please Note. This is no ordinary Picture Entertainment. Guaranteed 50 people in Company**

**Established 1837**

**Now Greater, Grander And Better Than Ever”**

Note: The following anecdote throws some light on Poole's First Synod Hall Show. On October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1962 I paid a visit to Mr J.K.Stafford Poole at his Synod Hall office. I was shown a photograph which carried the caption:

**“1907**

**Poole's Motor Car**

Photographed outside the Synod Hall Edinburgh, during the Xmas 1906-1907 season,  
where they played to 250,000 people.”

The Registration Number of the Motor Car was R62. The car was surrounded by the entire staff including, as it transpired, Poole's Scarlet Band in uniform. There was nothing in the photograph to indicate that it commemorated Poole's First Show. It was good fortune to come across the Advertisement of December **1906**, which cleared up the story behind the picture.

*News*, Tuesday, January 1<sup>st</sup> **1907**

The Tuesday issue of the *News* has always been the day on which one could find the Criticisms of all the local shows, Theatres and Cinemas. I give an extract from the issue dated above:

**“Opening Show**

.....There are also a number of interesting cinematograph films and a first class variety programme.”

I have no doubt the reference to “cinematograph films” in this criticism will come as a surprise to the elderly citizens of Edinburgh (see page 19 for item on “First moving pictures in Edinburgh” ,1906)

*News*, Saturday, January 19<sup>th</sup> **1907**

**“Poole's Synod Hall**

**Last Two Performances, 2.30 and 7.45”**

Note: I take no responsibility for the figures – 250,000- which appeared on “Poole's Motor Car, 1907”. I think C.W. Poole must have been as good a fisherman as he was a showman. After all, I never heard a barker – outside a cinema- shouting “Worst Show in Town now Showing”, nor a fish-wife shouting “Herring – Stinking Herring” [Given that the show ran from 25<sup>th</sup> December 1906 to 19<sup>th</sup> January 1907, with two shows per day, three on 1<sup>st</sup> January, there would have been a total of 47 performances, and with a capacity of 1,450 seats, the total number who could have seen the show would have been 68,150 GFB]

In the March of Progress, Showmanship has become a casualty. Bluff and Chancing Your Arm, are but two of the terms applied to showmanship, and, if the credulous ‘fell’ for it, no great harm was done.

The Synod Hall story will, from time to time, show that other entertainers rented the Hall, other than the Poole Family.

News, Thursday October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1907

**“Synod Hall**

**First Visit of Ralph Pringle’s North American  
Animated Picture Company**

**Enormous Attraction for Short Season”**

News, Tuesday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1907

**“Last Week of R. Pringle’s North American  
Animated Picture Company”**

Note 1: Much more will be told about the above **Ralph Pringle** in connection with Grove Street and Elm Row Picture Houses in Edinburgh.

Note 2: Neither Poole’s nor Pringle’s advertised Price of Admission to their shows mentioned above.

News, Monday, December 30<sup>th</sup> 1907

**“Poole’s Colossal No. 1 Myriorama**

**Popular Guide – John R. Poole”**

Note: This is the first intimation of Mr **John R. Poole** appearing in Edinburgh. In every sense of the word Mr Poole was ‘colourful’. He was the No. 1 showman in Edinburgh, he was a good mixer. In time he became a member of the Town Council and later a magistrate. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr Poole on several occasions.

**City has no record of Poole’s first application to rent the Synod Hall**

It will be appreciated that every ‘short let’ for the Synod Hall, over a number of years, would not be kept over the proverbial ‘for ever and a day’. Unfortunately, in the two major Wars many City records were pulped to help the War effort. It can, I think, be accepted that the above date, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1906, as the date when the Corporation first rented the Synod Hall to Messrs. Poole.

In a letter from the City Archivist, Miss **H. Armet**, dated 14<sup>th</sup> February 1963, on this subject, she wrote, *inter alia*, “The Synod Hall was taken over by the Town in 1902 and there is no record there of Poole’s first application to rent the hall. On 30th April 1907, Mr **J.R.Poole** was given permission to erect a sign outside the building during the tenancy of the Hall at the next Christmas and New Year holidays, and in 1908 allowed the use of the Hall for the purpose of his Myriorama Etc. ”

*News*, Thursday, December 24<sup>th</sup> 1908

**“Poole’s Tonight at 8**

**Prices- 6d. to 3s. Children, Half-price”**

Note: this advertisement receives prominence simply because it was the first Poole advert. intimating admission prices.

*News*, Friday, January 26<sup>th</sup> 1912

**“Synod Hall**

**Saturday at 8 p.m.  
Stella Carol, Soprano  
Fraser Gange, Basso  
Dorothy Webster, Contralto  
Miss Lilian Foulis, Violinist  
Clement Harvey, Pianist**

**Tickets: 2s.6d.; 1s.; and 6d.  
1,000 seats at 6d.”**

*News*, December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1920

**“Poole’s, Synod Hall**

**Opens Monday, December 27<sup>th</sup> 1920**

**For Three Weeks**

**A Fine Panstereorama of Westminster Cathedral  
The Unknown Warrior etc**

**Prices: Ordinary Doors  
Adults: 3s. 6d.; 2s. 4d.; 2s.; 1s 5d.; 9d.  
Children: 1s. 10d.; 1s. 3d.; 1s. 1d.; 9d.; 9d.”**

It will be noticed that Poole’s were still operating on a Seasonal basis.

*News*, Monday, August 15<sup>th</sup> 1921

**“Synod Hall, All Week**

**DEMPSEY V CARPENTIER**

**Prices: 1s. and 6d.”**

This was not a Poole’s Advertisement. At no time during my extensive research did Poole’s fail to append their name to an advertisement.

**My meeting with Mr John Kenneth Stafford Poole,  
Governing Director of Poole's Entertainments,  
On Monday October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1962**

I had a most enjoyable meeting with Mr Poole in his Synod Hall Office, 14 Castle Terrace. In the course of 40 minutes many topics pertaining to the entertainment world were discussed. Mr Poole showed me a number of old "Poole Bills" for various parts of England. During the conversation Mr Poole assured me his forebears came to Edinburgh about **1889**, and that this year, **1962**, Poole's would celebrate their 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as entertainers

Mr Poole very kindly gave me a **brochure** entitled *100 Years of Showmanship Poole's 1837- 1937*. He signed the brochure. I told him that it would be lodged in the Edinburgh Room, Central Library. I refer on page 76 to the photograph of the Poole's Motor Car, 1907, which I saw during my visit

*News*, Saturday, December **1923**

**"Pooles's – Synod Hall**

**For Three Weeks**

**Opens Monday, December 24<sup>th</sup> 1923**

**John R. Poole offers the "C.W." Poole's 1923-24 Production**

**Now Luxuriously Reseated and Redecorated"**

The purpose of showing this is to draw attention to the reseating.

*News* Monday, February 16<sup>th</sup> **1925**

**"Synod Hall  
Catlin's Pierrots"**

This item is given to indicate that 'strangers' were still invading the Synod Hall in the mid 1920's. They were, however, virtually the last of their race. Poole's season was extending, only closing down for a short period during the summer.

*News*, Thursday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> **1928**

**"Poole's Announces Opening of a Picture Season**

**Monday, August 27<sup>th</sup> 1928**

**Poole's New Orchestra**

Poole's New Orchestra of Solo Performers will be under the direction of  
**Samuel Rodgers**, late Musical Director Theatre Royal Cinema, Manchester, etc."  
For the 1928-29 Season a New Proscenium and New Orchestra have been installed,  
together with new Kinema Machinery and Lighting Effects,  
the whole costing nearly £1,500"

I remember Mr Rodgers; indeed the orchestra was a big attraction.

*News*, Saturday September 1<sup>st</sup> 1928

**“POOLE’S SPECIAL NOTICE**

**HARMONY NIGHTS EVERY THURSDAY AND FRIDAY**

**Commencing Thursday First, September 6<sup>th</sup>, when the Orchestra will discourse half-an-hour’s Programme of the Latest and Brightest Selections and Novelties.**

*News*, Saturday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1928

**Monday, December 24<sup>th</sup> 1928  
For Two Weeks Only  
Poole’s Myriorama and Entertainers”**

It will be seen from the News Advertisement of August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1928, that a New Proscenium had been installed. That cast a shadow, namely, in the December 15<sup>th</sup> advertisement that the Myriorama Show would last only two weeks. So, it came at last – Myriorama was on the way out. The greatest feature of the Poole bag of tricks, which had entertained countless thousands, had reached the end of the road. Poole’s never again staged the grand old show – MYRIORAMA. The TALKIES had taken over.

*News*, Saturday, May 25<sup>th</sup> 1929

**“POOLE’S – SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

Mr Poole has arranged for the very latest Sound Equipment to be installed in the Synod Hall in the early autumn at a cost of nearly £6,000, to enable him to present Super Talkies. He has transferred Silent Pictures to May, June and July.

**POOLE’S WILL NOT CLOSE THIS SUMMER”**

These announcements indicated that Messrs Poole and Family had become permanent tenants of the Synod Hall. In any case, J.R.Poole can now step out with the Big Boys in the Cinema Industry. They had **arrived**.

*News*, Monday, July 29<sup>th</sup> 1929

**“Poole’s  
2.30 – Continuous – 10.30**

**100 Per Cent Talkie Programme**

**with the Fox 100 Per cent Dialogue Melodrama**

*Speakeasy*  
(Night Club)  
with Lola Lane and Paul Page

George Bernard Shaw in an Intimate Talk  
British Movietone News, the 'sound' News Reel

And *The Diplomats*, Talkie Comedy, Time Permitting

The above programme will be for two weeks

Poole's Orchestra Director, Samuel Rodgers  
With 15 Minutes' Harmony at 6.15 & 8.30

No Advance in Prices"

That the Synod Hall has been bought by Mr Meyer Oppenheim (trading under the name "**Grant**" furniture), is recorded; that the Synod Hall will be demolished, soon after I write in May 1963, perhaps early 1964 is certain; but that will not become history until *after* the event.

I give below items of interest anent the Poole Family and the early days of Talking Pictures.

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, January 14<sup>th</sup> 1939

**"Early Cinema Days**  
**by Councillor John R. Poole**

In proposing the toast of the *Edinburgh Cine Society* at their 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Dinner Mr Robert W. Heriot presided over a company of about 60 in the R.B. Hotel on Friday, January 13<sup>th</sup> 1939.

The Society, said Mr Poole, were blazing the trail for amateur cinematography as the professionals had done 40 years ago. Continuing, Mr Poole said, the cinematograph had been invented simultaneously by the **Lumiere Brothers** and Mr **Robert W. Paul** of London. He had known Mr Paul as a boy. Mr Paul's machine was known as the cinematograph. Mr Poole said he had later used the Lumiere machine which was both a camera and a projector.

Among the first of the moving pictures, said Mr Poole, was the **Fitzsimmons V Jeffries** fight, and, while he turned the handle he gave a running commentary – from the front of the Circle.

First Talkies

Continuing, Councillor Poole said, in 1902 came the first talkies. Sound from gramophones was synchronised with the film. Sir **Harry Lauder** singing *I Love A Lassie* was one of the first. As there were no close-ups at the time, synchronisation did not need to be exact.

Talking films in 1926

Mr Poole referred to the first talking film in 1926. In that year he brought the De Forest-phono-films to Edinburgh. Concluding his remarks Councillor said, "When he first came to Edinburgh (see item on page 77 dated December 30<sup>th</sup> 1907) as an exhibitor there were only three or four cinemas. Now (January 1939) there were about forty, with seating accommodation of over 30,000."

*News*, Saturday August 28<sup>th</sup> 1943

### **"How Talkies Came to Town**

#### **Part 1 of An Article**

In 1912 (should read 1913 as the *Tron* did not open until April 17<sup>th</sup> 1913) the first attempts at mechanical synchronisation of vision with sound were made in Edinburgh. I was in the *Tron Picture House*, High Street, where a gramophone was installed that was worked in conjunction with the film, though the timing was dependant on the human element. The person in charge of the gramophone had to endeavour to keep his machine running at the same speed as a moving clock-hand which could be seen turning round one corner of the screen."

*News*, Tuesday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1913 The advertisement gives verifiable proof of a presentaion of Talkies

**"*Silver Kinema\**, 30 Nicolson Square  
Edison's Kinetophone Talking Pictures"**

\*Later *The Lyric*

*News*, Saturday, August 28<sup>th</sup> 1943 Part 2 of Article

### **"Poole's, Synod Hall Pioneer Work on the Talkies**

The film makers issued a record with each short film; this innovation was very successful. One picture showed a man bouncing a hard ball on the floor, and each time the ball struck the floor the sound was heard instantaneously. However in the autumn of 1920, such a film appeared in the *Albert Hall*, the tune *Moonlight and Roses* was played, the while a ball bounced from word to word.

A great pioneer of talking pictures in Edinburgh was Mr **John R. Poole**. Before the advent of **Al Jolson** telling the world about *Sonny Boy*, the *Synod Hall* had been the scene of many experiments to make the screen live.

Frequently Mr Poole engaged good artists to do the singing parts when such were appropriate between his films. One such film of the First World War depicted three Tommies emerging from the debris of a shell burst in which they had been buried. The soldiers began to sing *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, it was a pleasant surprise to hear the words sung, even if they did not all accord with the lip movements.

About the same period Mr Poole appeared on the screen and addressed the audience. In the course of his remarks he said, “And next week we shall present **Graham Moffat** and his Company in a *Scrape of the Pen*.”

*News*, Thursday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1949

### **“Poole’s - Synod Hall**

#### **Introduces “Real Talkies” to Edinburgh**

Poole’s is credited with introducing the first “Real Talkies” to Edinburgh named, *Till the Bells Ring*, a *Phonofilm* production commencing Monday October 11<sup>th</sup> 1926. It featured **Graham Moffat’s** Company, in a Scots Comedy, and lasted 45 minutes.”

*News*, Tuesday, August 6<sup>th</sup> 1949

### **“First Talking Picture in Edinburgh**

#### ***The Singing Fool*, starring Al Jolson**

**June 10<sup>th</sup> to July 13<sup>th</sup> 1929**

The chief operator at the *New Picture House* at 1929 was Mr **Fred Mitchell** who, in an interview with a Press correspondent, had this to say about the “First Talking Picture”.

Before the opening of the 1929 show in Edinburgh he was rushed off to London for a week’s training in sound technique, and for five weeks after that (June 10<sup>th</sup> to July 13<sup>th</sup>) he had to listen to Al Jolson for nearly 12 hours a day.

Recalling his experiences, Mr Mitchell said the “speech” was on a gramophone disc...”

The rest of the above story is given under the *New Picture House*

As so many unauthenticated statements have been made anent the advent of the **first talking pictures**, it is as well, I think, to read the voice of authority on the subject: the 1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* The following extracts are taken from pages 33 – 40.

### **“TECHNICAL PROGRESS of the YEAR**

**by Colin N. Bennett, F.C.S.**

#### **“Talking Pictures**

Since the 1914 Year Book went to Press the public have had an opportunity of judging one more kinematograph photo synchronising device, the **Edison Kinetophone**. Referring to some words I penned last year, before I had listened to the Kinetophone in operation, I see I laid stress on the necessity for a phonograph or gramophone capable of doing better justice to

the human voice than any then in common use. I am glad I said as much as when I did, for as far as the synchronisation itself goes the Edison device appears perfect. Only I do not think the sound production in itself, and judged apart from all question of synchronisation, is better than hitherto. Therefore, while fully admitting the wonderful precision in mechanical tonal reproduction of sound, however, and wheresoever this is as yet unrealised, scientific miracle shall make its appearance.

### **Photographed upon Kinematograph Film**

Meanwhile in his own quiet way, M. **Eugene Lauste**, an elderly French experimenter and former assistant to Edison himself, has succeeded in constructing a wonderful apparatus whereby sound waves may be photographed upon a Kinematograph film in such a way that the kinematograph record is capable of being made to reproduce the original sound again, not through contact of any needle or sapphire, but by the simple action of light acting through it upon an electrically energised resistance cell. When you have seen and heard *Temptation Rag* played to you in rousing style through the means of an arc light, a kinematograph film, and a couple of telephone receivers you begin to realise something of what **Shakespeare** had in mind when he wrote:

*There are more things in Heaven and earth  
Than are dreamed of in your philosophy"*

When I read that I thought I knew when 'Talking Pictures' were born.

### **Fairy Tales Accepted As Facts!**

In any age a new industry is beset by too many 'historians'. In the early days the Cinema history was made too fast and there were few or none with the time, knowledge and inclination to observe with exactitude what was passing.

This has resulted in a variety of misstatements being so frequently repeated that they have now almost come to be regarded as facts. And not a few professional journalists are too eager to get a 'fast buck', and who continue to 'tell the tale'. It will now be apparent why I have hit those people who were too lazy to give a little time to the subject.

*News*, Friday, July 21<sup>st</sup> **1961**

### **“ “Things have changed since Myriorama”**

#### **Mr J.K. Stafford Poole speaking at a Presentation**

Mr J.K.S. Poole, director of the company, recalled some of the events which had marked the development of the cinema since the days of Myriorama. The question was posed: 'Does anyone still remember the days when the Myriorama show was the great attraction in Edinburgh; when crowds flocked to Poole's Synod Hall to be held in enthralled amazement as the pictures flashed before their eyes?' Among the first of the talkies which Poole's presented was one called, inaptly, *Speakeasy*. "I doubt if you could hear more than ten words in the whole hour-and-a-half film" said Mr Poole. (Note: I saw *Speakeasy* and it was not nearly as bad as Mr Poole tried to make out.)

In **1928** a young lad named **William Campbell** joined the staff of Poole's and set off on a career in which, to date, July **1961**, he has seen more than 35 million feet of film of all kinds. Mr Campbell, now the Head Projectionist at the Cinema, and two other serving employees received gold watches and a cheque to mark their association with the company.

Mr **Ramsay Hoggard** joined the Synod Hall staff as a second operator two years after Mr Campbell and when the *Poole's Roxy* opened (Monday December 20<sup>th</sup> 1937) Mr Hoggard was transferred there as chief projectionist.

#### Backroom Boys

'Their life story is the story of two backroom boys. I don't think the public realise what goes on behind the scenes at a cinema. During their working lives Mr Campbell and Mr Hoggard must each have seen something like 6,700 miles of film'

The third member of staff to receive a presentation was Miss **Jean Hull**, who has 23 years' service."

#### The Approaching End of the Synod Hall And of the Castle Terrace Story

**Will it see the end of family entertainment in that area, which the Poole Family so ably carried on for nearly 60 years?**

*Evening Dispatch*, Thursday, May 11<sup>th</sup> 1961

#### "No decision yet by City on the future of Synod Hall

Edinburgh Corporation will not make a statement on the future of the Synod Hall, Castle Terrace, before the end of the week.

Last month Mr **Meyer Oppenheim**, the *Lyceum Theatre* 'boss' announced he planned to convert the Synod Hall into a £700,000 theatre to grand operatic standards, with work beginning by the end of the summer. But Mr **J.K. Stafford Poole**, governing director of Poole's Entertainments, the firm which leased the building from the Corporation, denied that work would start so soon. He said the lease had still three years to run. "We shall be operating as a cinema this time next year. Mr Oppenheim was due to discuss his plans for the area with the Lord Provost's Committee of the Corporation and yesterday was the first date on which they met since he announced his plans. But the proposals were not discussed."

City Treasurer **Duncan Weatherstone** said, "No meeting will be held, or decision made on this matter while the Lord Provost is away; and Lord Provost Mr **J. Greig Dunbar** will not return from his visit to Munich until the end of the week."

To summarise the known history of the Castle Terrace site:

Edinburgh Theatre	1875 to 1877
United Presbyterian Church	1877 to 1902, when the Corporation bought the premises
Poole's	1906, still there 1963

[My father added a postscript "Closed 30<sup>th</sup> October 1965". The Castle Terrace site was demolished during the period 1965-1969. Building of the Saltire Court, an office block, started in 1988 and was completed in October 1991 G.F.B.]

## 11: LYCEUM THEATRE, GRINDLAY STREET

*How the area lying to the east of Lothian Road was transformed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century; Article on the new Lyceum Theatre; Opening of Lyceum Theatre on 10 September 1883, with Irving and Terry appearing in “Much Ado About Nothing”; Comparison of Opening Night prices with those charged for “Rob Roy” in 1963; Eva Moore, Christmas 1915, and some famous players of yesteryear; Moving Pictures in the Lyceum, 1912; Benefit performances for the “Titanic” widows and orphans, 1912; Royal Visits: King George V, 1931; Queen Elisabeth, 1955; King Olav of Norway, 1962; Reconstruction Scheme, 1935; Tribute to John Masterton, manager of Lyceum, 1929-1939; Sir John Martin Harvey; “Worlds Without End”, 1946; What does the future hold for the Lyceum?; Proposal for a Civic Theatre, 1961; Edinburgh Corporation reached agreement with Mr Meyer Oppenheim on the terms for redeveloping the Lyceum-Castle Terrace site, 1963*

In the island site contained by Lothian Road, Cambridge Street, Castle Terrace, Spittal Street and Grindlay Street, there stands, as I write in May 1963, three of Edinburgh’s largest Halls: The **Synod Hall**, Castle Terrace, where the Edinburgh Theatre was built in **1875**; the Royal **Lyceum Theatre**, opened in **1883**, in Grindlay Street; and the **Usher Hall**, opened on March 6<sup>th</sup> **1914**.

Lothian Road Public School, as it was then called, was demolished to make room for the Usher Hall. A new Board or Public School was built in Ponton Street, Tollcross on the site of the old Slaughterhouse. Tollcross Primary School was the last Corporation School to be built before the start of the 1914-1918 War.

**Cooke’s Circus**, established in **1835** near the site now occupied by the Railway Goods Yard at the south west corner of Lothian Road. In the winter of **1876-1877** the Cooke Brothers took possession of their new circus in Grindlay Street and remained there until the site was taken over on where the Lyceum Theatre now stands, which opened on Monday, September 10<sup>th</sup> **1883**.

In time John Henry Cooke found a site and built a new circus in East Fountainbridge, which opened to the public in **1886**. This circus closed down on Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup> **1911**. The premises became known as the **Palladium Picture House** and, in **1933**, after alterations, it opened as the **Palladium Theatre**.

One account (page 93) anent the Royal Lyceum Theatre states it has seating accommodation for 2,500; it does not, however, convey that impression when one is there as a patron; rather, it has always seemed to me to be a cosy house. [*The Scotsman* article of 28 August **1883**, which follows, brings out that there was accommodation for 2,550: Orchestra Stalls, 121; Pit, 600; Circle, 209; Amphitheatre, 620; Gallery, 1,000 G.F.B.]

During its 80 years it has escaped the Fire Bug and, to the best of my remembrance, it has never required a major alteration as had both the *Empire and King's Theatres* respectively in **1927-28 and 1951**. It had, however, a £4,000 reconstruction scheme in October **1935**.

That its days are numbered will be shown at the end of this chapter.

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, August 28<sup>th</sup> **1883**

### ***“The Lyceum Theatre***

Within a fortnight from the present date an important addition will be made to our resources of public amusement in the opening, under the management of Messrs. Howard and Wyndham, of the *Lyceum Theatre*. The new house has been about six months in course of construction, and now the interior is ready for inspection of the licensing Justices, it may not go amiss to give some account of a building which, for completeness of appointments and convenience of arrangement, may fairly challenge comparison with any similar establishment in the country. Embodying in its design, the work of Mr C.J.Phipps, London, the fruits of experience gained in planning nearly forty theatres, the structure has been erected by Messrs. W. & D. McGregor, in a thoroughly substantial and purpose-like style; while the cost has been kept down to a figure, within £17,000, which compares favourably with the large expenditure incurred in a former West End theatrical venture. (Note. The reference is to the *Edinburgh Theatre*, Castle Terrace, opened in **1875** at a cost of £65,000.)

The site selected, at the corner of Grindlay Street and Cornwall Street, affords the advantage of ample room and complete isolation. Bounded on two sides by spacious thoroughfares and on a third by a wide lane, it is separated on the fourth side from the nearest houses in Grindlay Street by a considerable width of vacant ground. The architect had thus at his disposal facilities for lighting and ventilation, ingress and egress, which have been turned to capital account. With a view to attain the utmost possible security, the building has been designed in three parts, practically cut off from one another. The auditorium, with its entrances and staircases, forms one block; the stage and its appurtenances another, divided from the former by means of a solid brick wall and iron curtain; while the third block, outside the main walls that enclose the other two, is occupied with the dressing-rooms and workshops. Another special feature of the design is the duplication, in all parts of the house, of entrances and exits, so as to ensure the safety of the public frequenting the theatre.

From the suitable configuration of the ground, it has been possible to ensure stage arrangements of an unusually satisfactory character. Occupying the north end of the building, the stage has a depth of 44 feet from the footlights to back wall; the width, including a spacious scene dock on the east side, being 78 feet. The height to the gridiron, a framework for supporting scenery, is 60 feet; and there being underneath the floor an available depth of 20 feet, it will be understood that whole scenes can be readily raised or lowered out of sight. The basement floor is concreted, so as to exclude damp; the carpentry, designed by Mr Syme, and constructed under his supervision, comprised all the latest improvements in stage machinery. In the ample space under the floor there have been provided on one side a master carpenter's room and orchestra room, and on the other a gas engineer's workshop.

Lighting and ventilation are here obtained by means of windows opening into the lane, while a door affords ready exits for employees in case of accident. The iron curtain for closing the proscenium opening is an elaborate piece of work, consisting of two complete screens of

boiler-plate metal, placed eight inches apart. It weighs three tons, but is so counterpoised that it could easily be raised or lowered by a single man, in the event of the hydraulic apparatus provided for the purpose of getting out of order. In the lighting of the stage, whether with gas or limelight, no pains have been spared to secure the utmost of efficiency: and what with this and the general completeness of the appliances, the management will have every facility for the production of imposing spectacular effects.

In close proximity to the stage, on the side next Cornwall Street, are a hand property room and carpenter's shop; the same floor affording, nearer Grindlay Street, space for a large property-making room. In every case due provision has been made for lighting and ventilation by means of windows opening to the street. Over the workshops are dressing-rooms, 24 in number, occupying four floors, with windows to Cornwall Street. These are reached by a staircase solidly constructed of concrete and corridors running parallel with the street. The rooms are of different sizes, one and all being fitted with fire-places, wash-hand basins, and other appliances calculated to promote the comfort of the theatrical *corps*.

At the south end of one of the corridors is a commodious and tastefully appointed green-room; while at the north end of the range, with outlook towards the Castle, there are provided, on several floors, a manager's room, a wardrobe and a ballet room, on the furnishing of which latter, no little pains have been spared. Care has been taken to secure ample daylight in the staircase, and indeed, wherever it can possibly be rendered available, thus ensuring, it is calculated, a saving of gas to the amount of £150 per annum.

#### THE AUDITORIUM

In front of the stage, is a sunk space for a large orchestra; this enables patrons to have a clear view of the stage. There are five rows of Orchestra Stalls, to give **121** seats, 50 more than the *Theatre Royal, Broughton Street*. The seats are constructed on the swing principle and completely cushioned. There are 17 rows in the Pit, seating **600** in armed chairs, suitably upholstered. The entrance is from Cornwall Street by a 6 feet wide corridor, and another spacious corridor for exit to Grindlay Street, through a room fitted as a bar.

There are no proscenium boxes, the Dress Circle takes a different form from what we have been accustomed to. Adjoining the proscenium, on either side, are three private boxes, with front projecting as an independent curve. The central portion of the frontstage shows the horse-shoe outline; and the corresponding section of the Circle is fitted with seven rows of arm chairs of the architect's registered pattern, covered with peacock blue velvet; accommodation being thus provided for **209** persons.

Access to the Circle is had by a swing door direct from a staircase exclusively appropriated to this part of the house. In the Amphitheatre, whose front recedes to the extent of four or five feet at the centre line of the Dress Circle, the two foremost rows are set apart as stalls, comprising **120** divided seats. The remaining space will seat **500** persons, who will enter at the back from a spacious and airy corridor or promenade, which also communicates with a refreshment bar, accessible on another side to the Gallery audience. The entrance to this part of the house is from Grindlay Street by a concrete staircase 6 feet wide, duly furnished with iron handrails; a similar stair, intended for egress, being provided on the other side. From all parts of the Amphitheatre a good view of the stage can be obtained; and the same can be said of the Upper Gallery, which has been constructed with a gentler slope than is commonly adopted, yet so as to accommodate about **1,000** persons.

## DECORATIONS

The decorations were carried out by Bailie Hill (whose place of business was in George Street) the ceiling forms a dominating feature. This is constructed in a circular form; the space, which is flat, being divided into panels enclosing tasteful ornament in relief, the circumference taking the shape of an elegant cornice. The ornamental details are left of a pleasing ivory-like tone the remainder of the surface being treated with gilding and delicate colour. The coving which connects the ceiling with the proscenium is diversified with gilt ornament; and in a lunette over the proscenium opening is a painting by **Ballard** a French artist resident in London, of *Apollo and the Muses*. To the opening itself which measures 28 feet square, there has been given the character of a picture frame, the surfaces being relieved with dainty scroll work of Renaissance type, and the whole enriched with gilding. A corresponding style of decoration has been employed on the fronts of the Dress Circle, Amphitheatre and Gallery, the material employed here, as in the ceiling and elsewhere, being fibrous plaster.

For the private boxes, close by, are provided hangings of claret-covered plush

## LIGHTING WITH ELECTRIC LAMPS

Like the *Savoy Theatre, London*, acknowledged to be the best of Mr Phipp's creations, and, like the Savoy, the Lyceum is to be lighted with incandescent electric lamps, enclosed in ground glass globes, which will reduce pollution caused by gas. Gas fittings are, however, introduced to provide against any derangement of the electrical apparatus, which includes:

Two Twelve Horse Power Gas Engines fitted up in a small building adjoining the theatre. Both systems, Gas and Electricity, will be applied to the footlights, which have been so arranged that red, green or white light can be turned on or shut off instantaneously.

(Note The Public Electricity Supply was switched on for the first time on Tuesday, April 11<sup>th</sup> **1895**, when the lamps in Princes Street were lighted. The first generating Station was in Dewar Place.)

## THE EXTERIOR OF THE LYCEUM

The external appearance of the building takes its character from the internal arrangement.

The elevation towards Cornwall Street presents rows of plain windows, the only ornamental feature being contributed by a few *Corinthian pilasters*. In the main frontage facing Grindlay Street, the three doorways, protected by a glazed vestibule, are surmounted by a balcony, over which rise two square and two rounded columns with *Corinthian capitals*, separating the round-headed windows on the ground floor, arched doorways, higher up, square-headed windows, those of the second floor having small pediments; pitched mansard roof, diversified with dormers.

The walls are faced with **Stuart's** cement concrete, and material by the same firm has also been largely employed in the construction of the staircases which has thus been rendered fireproof."

## THE FOREGOING ALL FOR £17,000

Note. As a boy, I remember when the huge slate paving slabs were removed and "**Stuart's Granolithic**" formed the pavements. At regular intervals, brass plates with the words

“Stuart’s Granolithic” were inserted in the cement, which were kept shining by the scuffing of countless boots and shoes. [Slate paving was extremely slippery in wet weather, particularly in Leith Street; Stuart’s paving was designed to be non-skid. G.F.B.]

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1883

**“PRELIMINARY NOTICE**

**NEW LYCEUM THEATRE  
GRINDLAY STREET, EDINBURGH**

**Proprietors and Managers: Messrs Howard and Wyndham**

**Designed by C.J. Phipps, Esq., F.S.A.**

**Mr Henry Irving  
Miss Ellen Terry**

**And the entire London Lyceum Company, previous to their immediate departure for  
America**

*Much Ado About Nothing*

**Box Plan will be ready, and full particulars may be obtained on Monday first, 27<sup>th</sup> inst.,  
at Paterson & Sons, Music Publishers, George Street**

**Note: Seats will be allocated in priority of application.”**

Note the “New” in the title of the theatre.

*The Scotsman*, Monday, September 10<sup>th</sup> 1883

“.....

**Prices during Mr Irving’s Engagement**

Dress Circle, 10s.6d.; Orchestra Stalls, 7s.6d.; Amphitheatre Stalls (Numbered and Reserved), 6s.; Pit Stalls, 4s.; Special Tickets, 5s.; Amphitheatre, 2s.; Gallery, 1s.

Doors Open at 7, Commence at 7.30

**Special Late Trains  
Caledonian Railway – Lothian Road**

To West Calder and Intermediate Stations

Tuesday, September 11 and 18, Thursday, September 13 and 20, at 11 p.m.  
Saturday, September 15 and 22, 10.30 p.m.

**North British Railway – Waverley Station**

To Dalkeith, Musselburgh and Intermediate Stations

Tuesday, September 11 and 18, Thursday, September 13 and 29, at 11 p.m.  
Saturday, September 15 and 22, at 10.45 p.m.

### **Edinburgh Tramway Company**

Special Late Cars will meet the close of the performance and run to the following districts:  
Morningside – Haymarket – Portobello and Leith

Cars will stand on the Main Lines in Lothian Road, opposite Grindlay Street

Ordinary Fares only will be charged.”

Note by author: HORSE TRAMS. The first rails were laid between Haymarket and Bernard Street on 6 November 1871. The last Horse route, between Tollcross and Craiglockart, ceased to run on 24 August 1907. During the Horse Car period, fares were 1d., 2d., and 3d.

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, September 27<sup>th</sup> 1883

“**PRICES.** The Management have decided upon the following Prices of Admission (as the Ordinary Scale)

Private Boxes, £2.2s.0d.; Dress Circle, 4s.; Orchestra Stalls, 3s.; Pit Stalls, 2s.; Amphitheatre Stalls, 2s.; Amphitheatre, 1s.; Gallery, 6d.”

It will be noted that for the Irving /Terry visit no mention was made of the charge for Private Boxes. For comparison the Lyceum admission prices, as given in the *News* of Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup> 1963, for *Rob Roy*, starring **Jimmy Logan** as Baillie Nicol Jarvie, were:

12s.6d.; 8s.6d.; 5s.6d.; and 3s.

For the Edinburgh Ballet Theatre, for the week commencing May 20<sup>th</sup> 1963, they were:

9s. to 2s. Saturday Matinee, 2 seats for the price of one.

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, September 11<sup>th</sup> 1883

### **“Criticism of the Opening Night**

Note: The write up took two and one-third columns. The Scotsman reporter who covered the first night at the Lyceum must have been the No.1 man in his profession. *The Scotsman* tradition has been maintained throughout the succeeding decades to 1963, and is likely to be carried on as long as newspapers continue to be printed. The following extract is not a verbatim one, but is greatly in excess of a precis report, for example, I have left out the Address given by Mr Howard.

## “Opening of Lyceum Theatre

Mr Irving and Miss Terry in

### *Much Ado About Nothing*

The opening last night of the Lyceum Theatre may fairly claim to rank as an event of some consequence in the annals of the Edinburgh Stage. Noteworthy as a second attempt to domicile the drama in the West End of the city (the first being the short-lived Edinburgh Theatre, 1875- 1877) the new enterprise was inaugurated with an *eclat* which, if one believed in omens, might well be accepted as a guarantee for future success. To the zest of the novelty, associated with the well appointed and comfortably furnished house, there was added the interest of a specially important engagement, in which the actor who has made the name *Lyceum* a name to conjure within matters theatrical, appears with recent laurels fresh upon him, and on the eve of submitting to a Trans Atlantic verdict the reputation so fully endorsed by all classes of his countrymen. One way and another, the occasion had evidently been looked forward to with keen anticipation. In spite of the high prices, the demand for places fully equalled the capacity of an auditorium seated for 2,500 persons, and alike in the composition of the assemblage and in the good will which is manifested towards their spirited venture, the management seemed to have every reason for congratulation.

Thanks to the well-directed efforts at once of contractors and of the theatre staff, everything was found in a state of readiness not always met with on an opening night. It was pleasant to pass through the spacious vestibule, with its mosaic floor and warm-coloured walls, to the still more richly decorated foyer, where colossal busts of Mr. Irving and Miss Terry (executed by Mr. D.W.Stevenson, A.R.S.A.) might be regarded, for the time at least, as representing the *genii loci*; and thence to the house itself, in which architect and decorator had conspired to secure a more than ordinarily attractive ensemble. From the opening of the doors at seven o'clock all parts of the theatre filled rapidly, and before the rising of the curtain, not only was the sitting space taken up, but standing room available in pit and amphitheatre had found many contented occupants.

Mr. and Mrs. **Wyndham**, formerly of the *Theatre Royal, Broughton Street*, occupied seats in a private box, where they received the congratulations of their numerous friends. For a while the audience found themselves vis – à – vis of the iron screen, which will no doubt help to give a sense of security to those frequenting the house; but after an interval, during which the exuberant spirits of the gallery had found vent to choral singing, the screen was raised to disclose a handsome maroon curtain. At the same time the orchestra took their places; and forthwith to a selection of Scottish airs the curtain was withdrawn, and revealed the effective drop scene, consisting of a group from **Alma Tadea**'s picture of *Sappho and Alcaeus*, reduced in monochrome, and enclosed within a painted drapery of blue, touched with yellow. The general aspect of the chastely decorated interior was now remarkably fine but on this there was no time to dwell, for the drop scene presently opened and Mr Howard, stepping forward amid the cheers of the assemblage, proceeded to deliver the following address: (because of its length, one third of a column, it is omitted.)

At the conclusion of the Address Mrs Howard was here led forward, and welcomed with cheers and a shower of bouquets. Mr Dangerfield was likewise introduced, to receive his meed of applause as painter of the act drop.

This closed the preliminary proceedings, and after a brief pause the curtain rose for the opening scene of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the play Mr Irving proposes to present during the first five nights of his engagement. Of this production, first seen in London nearly twelve months ago, and here produced with the same setting, and as nearly as possible the same personnel, it seems too much to say that never before did Shakespeare's delightful comedy receive an interpretation so adequate in essentials and in every detail so artistically complete. It is not merely that the leading characters are rendered with an efficiency rarely equalled and probably never excelled; for no less noteworthy is that attention to minor parts, which has all along formed a feature of Mr Irving's management, and, with the taste he has brought to bear on stage arrangements, has in no small measure contributed to his success.

In *Benedict*, the distinguished actor has found a role which fits him well, as giving less occasion than some he had tried, for the unwelcome obtrusion of certain peculiarities of gesture and utterance. He has entered into the character *con amore*, and plays it with a zest that bespeaks at once thorough understanding and genuine sympathy. At times, last night, one was tempted to think that Mr Irving's mode of declamation lacked the easy fluency appropriate to *Benedict's* bantering talk. But, in the main, his renderings, even in this respect, left little to be desired; while, alike in dialogue and soliloquy, he so informed his words with racy meaning that any little drawbacks of the kind hinted at were readily forgotten. So was it also in regard to action. While it was impossible not to feel that a more graceful style of movement would have better fitted the courtly gallant, yet, so successful was the actor in getting reality to his creation, and fixing attention on its essential characteristics, that little attention was left to spare for little oddities of gait or bearing. Whether in speech or in expressive by-play, the veritable *Benedict*, shrewd and witty, and much too good a fellow to prove at bottom the woman-hater he professed to be, was made to live before us. Miss Terry in having assigned to her character of *Beatrice*. While every requirement of the part seems well within this charming actress's compass, it is, at the same time, of a nature to give scope for the freshness and spontaneity in which lies so much of her charm. The *Don Pedro* of Mr **Terris** was a well-considered performance, full of appropriate animation.

At the close of the comedy, a loud burst of applause testified to the hearty appreciation it had met with; and these expressions of approval were renewed when Mr Irving leading Miss Terry by hand, came forward to acknowledge the hearty homage which had been paid to their performance. The curtain fell, but immediately afterwards was raised to discover the whole company ranged in a semi-circle on the stage. Mr Irving with Mrs Howard being on one side and Mr Howard with Miss Terry on the other.

The National Anthem was then sung, Miss **Kate Sherry** leading off with the first stanza as a solo, and the audience joining in the chorus. Mr **J. Robertson** sung the second stanza, with the audience again joining in the chorus.

A loud cheer signalised its conclusion, and cheers were again raised as Mr Howard led the architect of the theatre and other gentlemen who had had a hand in its successful opening. These, however, gave place to calls for a speech by **Mr Irving** and in deference to the wish generally expressed, Mr Irving, who was again enthusiastically greeted, spoke as follows."

(As the speech was a bit rambling, I append only a few lines)

"The event tonight reminds me of an event which occurred 25 years ago in Edinburgh, and in which I took part. That was the closing night of your old *Theatre Royal* \*, a theatre

associated with the traditions of the Scottish Stage. Tonight the event is a more cheerful one.”

- The *Theatre Royal, Shakespeare Square* closed on May 25<sup>th</sup> 1859

In the course of the evening a special playbill, printed on fine paper, and adorned with medallions of Mr Irving and Miss Terry, was distributed in commemoration of the event.

### **Supper to Mr Irving** a precis

In commemoration of the opening of the theatre by Mr Irving, a large company of gentlemen had been invited by Messrs. Howard and Wyndham to meet the eminent actor at the Windsor Hotel, (Princes Street) at the close of the performance in the theatre.

A portion of the company had assembled shortly after half past eleven; but it was quarter past twelve before the sound from without the hotel announced the arrival of the guest of the evening. They soon sat down to supper.

Mr Howard was in the chair and Mr Wyndham was vice-chairman. A long list of names appeared. I mention three, namely, Lord Young, Mr Robert Chambers, and Mr A.D.McNeill of the Princess's Theatre. After supper had been served, which was not till two o'clock this morning, Mr Howard proposed the toast 'Henry Irving' ”.

The reporter concluded, “The proceedings were still going on when we went to press.” It must have been quite a party.

In the course of my research anent *Edinburgh Amusements* I picked up innumerable bits and pieces of data. In many cases they were simply jotted down to be brought out as an occasion demanded. One small item of interest in connection with the opening night of the Lyceum is to the effect that, “William Fowler, Registrar of Selkirk, was first in the Gallery.”

### **Rob Roy, 1884**

The first production of Rob Roy in the Lyceum was in July 1884. The proceeds, over £200, were handed over to Mr **John Heslop**, lessee of the *Theatre Royal, Broughton Street*, which was destroyed by fire on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1884; see page 56.

### **D'Oyly Carte Opera Company**

The Company paid its first visit to the Lyceum in November 1884 and presented *Patience*, *Pinafore* and *Pirates of Penzance*.; and in 1886, *The Mikado* , *Gondoliers* etc.

### **Damaged Goods, pre 1914**

*Damaged Goods* was, I think, the first of the 'naughty' productions to appear, not only in Edinburgh but in the Lyceum. The subject dealt with venereal disease.

### **Eva Moore, Christmas 1915**

When I was a patient in Edinburgh Castle Military Hospital, 1915-1916, I had the good fortune along with a number of comrades to be the guest of Miss Eva Moore, who was appearing in the Lyceum in *Floradora*.

Miss Moore took time off to say a few words to each disabled member of the Armed Forces. Each guest received from Miss Moore a postcard bearing her likeness and inscribed: "Christmas Greetings, from Eva Moore 1915."

### **Some famous players of yesteryear**

Although not an ardent Drama fan, I nonetheless had the pleasure of seeing and hearing many of the following famous personalities who played the Lyceum:

Sir Henry Irving, J.L.Toole, George Alexander, Charles Wyndham, Edward and Fred Terry, John Hare, Edward Compton, Forbes Robertson, Beerholm Tree, Wilson Barrett, Osmond Tearle, Lewis Waller, Matheson Lang and Sir Martin Harvey.

### **and a few delightful women**

Mrs Kendal, Mrs Patrick Campbell, Dorothea Baird, Gertrude Elliot, Mary Moore, Winifred Emery, Evelyn Millard, Lily Brayton, Violet and Irene Vanbrugh, Marie Lohr, Miss Fortescue, Marie Compton, Mrs Tree, Julia Neilson, and Fay Compton who is still going strong on T.V.

*The Scotsman*, Christmas Day, 1962

### **"Obituary**

**Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson**, (57), an actress famous for her ethereal, ever young roles, died yesterday in London. She was the wife of Andre Van Gyseghem, with whom she played in the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, in 1941, in the play **Berkeley Square**, which was one of her ventures into management.

Probably Miss Forbes-Robertson will be best remembered for her role as *Peter Pan*, the boy who never grew up, which she played in no fewer than nine productions. Her final appearance in the role was in 1938.

Born in 1905, Miss Forbes-Robertson was one of the famous family of Sir Johnson and Lady Forbes-Robertson. She realised an ambition at the age of 29, when she became Britain's youngest actress-manager, presenting her own productions in London."

### **John Henry Brodribb, Known as Sir John Henry Irving, 1838-1905**

He was born on February 6<sup>th</sup> 1838 at Keinton. At the age of 19 years he played small parts at the *Theatre Royal, Shakespeare Square*, and took part in the closing performance of the theatre on May 25<sup>th</sup> 1859. He appeared at the opening of the Lyceum Theatre in 1883. In 1895 he became the first actor in Britain to be knighted for his services to the Stage. He died at Bradford on October 13<sup>th</sup> 1905, aged 67 years. His father, Samuel Brodribb, was a staunch Methodist. An article by **John S Clarke** about Sir Henry Irving is given on page 44; this appeared in the *Daily Express*, December 12<sup>th</sup> 1943. On page 56 I describe how I, as a schoolboy, came to see Sir Henry in *The Bells* when he appeared in the *Theatre Royal* around 1900.

*Evening Dispatch*, Wednesday, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1961

**“Moving Pictures in Lyceum Theatre**

A change was in the offing. By the turn of the century, the moving pictures had captured the imagination of thousands. Though many scoffed and predicted it as a flash in the pan, it had come to stay. The Lyceum was not slow to realise its possibilities, but determined to keep the live theatre to the fore.

In April 1912, posters appeared all over Edinburgh:

**“Charles Urban’s Live Motion Pictures in Kinemacolour”  
in actual colours of nature  
with our King and Queen through their tour of India in 1911”**

The picture show ran for two weeks to packed houses. An original poster of the above show is in the possession of **Jimmy Leadbetter**, chief electrician at the Lyceum Theatre.”

*News*, Monday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1912

**“Royal Lyceum Theatre  
Kinemacolour**

The entire receipts of Monday Evening’s performance was given to the Mansion House Fund for the Widows and Orphans of the Sailors of the *Titanic*.”

*News*, Thursday, April 25<sup>th</sup> 1912

**“Royal Lyceum Theatre  
The S.S. *Titanic***

**Saturday Next Benefit Matinee**

**For the Widows and Dependants of the Crew  
who lost their lives on the S.S. *Titanic***

**Patrons: The Rt. Hon. Sir W.S. Brown, Lord Provost  
Rt. Hon. Earl of Roseberry**

**Boxes, £1.1s.0d.; Stalls, 3s.; Dress Circle, 2s.6d.;  
Family Circle, 1s.6d.; Pit, 1s.; Gallery, 6d.”**

Note: All places of Amusement and Churches raised funds for the *Titanic* Appeal.

**SOME ROYAL VISITS**

**First Royal Visit to the Lyceum, Replica of Admission Ticket**

**“ROYAL LYCEUM THEATRE  
1931**

**In the presence of  
THEIR MAJESTIES THE KING AND QUEEN**

**SATURDAY EVENING, 11<sup>th</sup> JULY 1931, at 8 o'clock.**

**Robert Fenemore In association with  
Howard Wyndham, Ltd.**

**Presents THE MASQUE THEATRE  
In  
*THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON*  
By  
J.M. BARRIE**

**The proceeds of the performance will be handed to  
the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary Bi-Centenary Extension Appeal**

**ORCHESTRA STALLS £3.3s.0d.**

**ROW M No. 3  
To be seated by 7.45 p.m.”**

*The Scotsman*, Friday, May 13<sup>th</sup> 1955

**“Royal Lyceum Theatre**

**Jean Anouilh’s Play**

*Time remembered*

**In the presence of H.M. the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh**

**In the evening of Wednesday, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1955**

**Prices: Grand Circle, £5.5s.0d.; Stalls, £4.4s. 0d., £3.3s.0d.; and £1. 1s.0d.; Upper  
Circle, £1.11s.6d.; and £1.1s.0d.; Balcony 10s.6d. and 7s.6d.”**  
Cost of admission to the Gallery was not mentioned

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, October 18<sup>th</sup> 1962

**“ROYAL LYCEUM THEATRE**

***ROB ROY***

**In the presence of Their Royal Highnesses  
King Olav of Norway, H.M. the Queen and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh**

**Last night.”**

**Silk programme printed in City by R. and R, Clark**

### **Two thousand programmes were made**

These were made of stiff white silk woven in Dunfermline by Winterthur Silks, fringed and folded into a gold coloured Wallet. Government Guests received a copy last night, but other members of the audience had to pay 10s. for the programme.”

To use the current phrase of the Young Folk, the ‘other members of the audience’ were not ‘with it’.

*News*, Saturday December 15<sup>th</sup> **1962** Excerpt from an Article by G.R.Knight

“It was gratifying to learn that Mr **Meyer Oppenheim**, proprietor of Edinburgh’s Royal Lyceum Theatre, had presented his profits on the recent production of *Rob Roy*, a cheque for £500, to the Lord Provost (Sir John Dunbar) who accepted the gift on behalf of the Festival Society.”

### **The State visit of King Olav of Norway Tuesday, October 16<sup>th</sup> 1962**

My wife and I watched the brilliant spectacle from 10 a.m. until 12.35 p.m. on T.V. Without any doubt it was in this Century, Edinburgh’s Greatest Day. Including the shortest Royal Train Journey on record, from Leith. For those who are interested *The Scotsman*, *The Edinburgh Evening News* and *the Evening Dispatch* all carried pictures of the State Visit

**Dimbleby**, the old man, excelled himself that day, despite one or two ‘Foxes Pauses’, he put on a brilliant show. From the leaving of the Royal Train at Leith to Princes Street Station, thence along Princes Street, up the North Bridge, then down the High Street and Canongate to the Palace of Holyrood House.

N.B. There **was** brilliant sunshine throughout the day.

### **Lyceum Theatre Re-construction scheme, October 1935**

“They had the space, the men, and the money too”  
but not the “know-how”  
How to use that vacant space

The under-noted ‘re-construction scheme’ was somewhat belated, in this respect, that a perusal of the item dated August 28<sup>th</sup> **1883**, relating to the ‘spacious basement’ with its carpenter’s and gas engineer’s workshops along with the orchestra room. In course of time this ‘spacious basement’ became redundant, gathering cobwebs, and the vacant space, for years and years, contributed its quota in City Rates, without any return.

After all, you know, those people who banded themselves into companies and called themselves *Business Efficiency Experts or Organisation and Method Experts* or what have you, have done and are doing a good job of work. Owners of property have been brought to

realise that **every** square inch of a building must be made to yield profit, which means that machinery must be used to the utmost capacity

*News*, Wednesday October 9<sup>th</sup> 1935

### **“Lyceum Theatre Reconstruction Scheme to cost £4,000**

#### **Increased Amenities for Patrons**

Structural alterations are at present being carried through at the Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh. The whole scheme is a most ingenious job, which will not only provide more amenities for the patrons of the Grindlay Street house, but will also add to the comfort of the staff of the theatre.

The three most notable innovations which will result are a commodious cloakroom immediately off the foyer of the theatre, a charming retiring-room for lady patrons of the Stalls, and a new and enlarged bar on Pit level. In addition, there will be a rest room or mess room for the stage hands, several new lavatories, and a newly constructed interior staircase from the Stalls to the Pit and from the Pit to the Dress Circle. While the scheme is being carried through, the opportunity will also be taken to improve the ventilation of the theatre by constructing extra fresh air inlets with equipment to carry off the vitiated air.

#### **LADIES’ RETIRING ROOM**

Not the least notable feature of all this work is that it means additional structures in the strict sense of the term, but the new additions are being constructed by the opening-up of certain sections of the building’s interior and the re-construction of other rooms.

For instance, an old property room and the carpenter’s office are being ‘swept away’, and in their place will be the Stalls’ retiring room for the ladies, with lavatories adjoining, fitted up in the most up-to-date manner. In the retiring room will be elegant dressing tables, couches, chairs and mirrors, while the rubber covered floor will also have a tastefully designed carpet.

The new cloak-room off the foyer and facing the entrance doors has been made possible by the clearing-out reconstruction of the ‘floor-space’ beneath the Pit. Some clever excavation was also necessary, and when completed there will be a most convenient cloak room about 40 feet long and 18 feet deep, with three large entrances and exits.

#### **NEW INTERIOR STAIRCASE**

Access to the new interior staircase from the Stalls to the Dress Circle will be gained from the left-hand corridor leading to the Stalls, and also direct from the Pit. At the Pit level on this staircase will be the new entrance to the new Lounge Bar, which will be about 30 feet long by 22 feet wide, and will be decorated after the style of the Stalls’ bar in the *King’s Theatre*. Here again, there will be rubber floorcovering of striking designs, and tables at which tea, coffee or ices may be served. This bar has been made possible by taking over a portion of the scenery store, and the alteration will also result in an improvement in the compartment housing the scenery ‘packs’ and ‘stacks’. Incidentally, the shelves, counter, and tables of the new Lounge Bar will be ‘topped’ with fireproof bakelite.

Some time will elapse before the whole scheme, which will cost in the region of £4,000, is completed. In the meantime, at certain times night shifts have been, and will be, necessary in order to carry on the work without interfering with the normal business of the theatre and dress rehearsals.

Messrs. W.S.Cruickshank and Son are the Contractors, with Mr J. Cameron in charge.”

**Tribute to Mr. J. Masterton  
For Ten Years Manager of the Lyceum  
An Edinburgh Farewell**

[Exceptionally, my father did not give the source. G.F.B.]

“On Saturday evening the 14<sup>th</sup> January **1939**, in the North British Station Hotel, there gathered a goodly gathering of Edinburgh citizens to pay tribute to Mr. **John Masterton**, Manager of the ***Lyceum Theatre***, who was on the point of taking up a position as a Manager in a London Theatre.

The Chairman was the Rt. Rev. **Dr. Black** (St. George’s Church, West), the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The Moderator said, *inter alia*, “We want to thank these two charming people (including Mrs. Masterton) for all they have meant to us in Edinburgh for many years.” (Applause) Mr. Masterton had been a charming institution in the city, and when they heard of his promotion to London they wanted to show their affection for him and Mrs Masterton. (Applause)

**Lord Wark**, a Senator of the High Court, on behalf of many friends presented Mr Masterton with a wallet of notes and Mrs Masterton with a handsome brooch and a dressing-table set

Mr Masterton suitably replied.

Mr **Tom Curr** also paid a tribute to Mr Masterton”

Note: Mr Curr, M.B.E., J.P., former Bailie of Edinburgh, a brilliant artist and cartoonist, Captain of the Boys’ Brigade, etc, died on Sunday, September 7<sup>th</sup> 1958, aged 71 years.

Need for a National Theatre in Scotland

Mr **Erskine Blackburn** said, *inter alia*, “There was a need for a *National Memorial Theatre* in Scotland, and Edinburgh was where it should be, and he knew no better man round whom the thought of that could gather than Mr Masterton. They might have it as a ***Barrie Memorial Theatre*** to give expression to their Scottish drama, and some day when that idea took form, they knew where to find the man into whose hands they could commit that great venture.” "Applause

I include this item anent Mr Masterton as we were approaching the end of an era, 1939, with its false peace. Then six years of War.

News, Saturday, April 5th 1939

**“Sir John Martin Harvey  
His Farewell performance in Edinburgh**

On Monday, April 17<sup>th</sup> 1939, Sir John commences his farewell season in the *King's Theatre*. Sir John is no stranger to Edinburgh, it was in 1883 that he appeared with his mentor, Sir **Henry Irving**, at the opening of the *Lyceum Theatre*. In Sir John unveiled the tablet to the memory of Irving.

Civic Honour

The City paid a high compliment to Sir John when he became the guest of the Lord Provost and his Committee to lunch in his honour. Sir John recalled that among his plays was **Maeterlinck's** own masterpiece, *The Burgomaster of Stilemonde*. A wartime play and a “plea for peace”, was first produced in Edinburgh, at the *Lyceum Theatre*, during October 1918.”

Note: Sir John Harvey: Born, June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1863; Knighted in 1921; Received Honorary L.L.D from Glasgow University in 1938; Died at East Sheen on May 14<sup>th</sup> 1944.

**Worlds Without End**

**Edinburgh Premiere**

This was one of the first Post War Plays put on in the Lyceum on Friday, October 5<sup>th</sup> 1946

I mention it as it is the work of an Edinburgh man and the subject was the atomic bomb and its potentialities in a farcical vein.

The *Wilson Barrett Company* provided the cast and the author, **Alexander Reid**, was an Edinburgh journalist, who found theatrical work among the most attractive occupations with which a varied career had given him. He joined the *Evening News* staff from Heriot's School, and after five years he became the *S.M.T. Magazine* editor.

During the War he did a good deal of work for the B.B.C., including special reports, broadcasts and scripts for feature programmes. Now, at 32, he is secretary to two city companies.

His first full length novel, based upon life in Germany during the War, is due to appear next month. Two volumes of poems, one of which in children's verse, are also on the way, as well as other plays.

## **The Lyceum and Synod Hall**

### **On the Way Out or The March of Progress**

Despite rumour and counter-rumour, the fact is that denials could no more stop the advance of Big Money, than could King Canute stop the advance of the tide. I can but append the essential factual statements relative to the two houses of entertainment and the immediate neighbourhood.

*News*, Friday, September 15<sup>th</sup> **1961** An Extract

“The Highland or Gaelic Church, Cambridge Street, was bought a few years ago at a cost of £40,000, to be converted into Festival Society Offices.”

*Scottish Daily Express*, Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup> **1959**

“The ticket campaign will be launched on Wednesday, March 18<sup>th</sup> 1959, when editors and music critics from London and overseas come to hear Sir Ian Johnson-Gilbert speak about the plans for the three-week Festival from August 23<sup>rd</sup> until September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1959” (This coincided with the opening of the new Offices.)

*Dispatch*, Monday, October 10<sup>th</sup> **1960**

### **“Theatre Owners Deny City Rumour**

#### **The Lyceum is Not for Sale**

#### **Show is Booked**

A spokesman for Howard and Wyndham Ltd. said in London: “There is no truth in the rumour that we are to sell the theatre. We have a Christmas show all booked up. We are definitely not selling.” It had been reported that an unknown buyer was negotiating for the purchase of the Lyceum. Hence the above denial.

The statement added: “Howard and Wyndham firmly believe that the theatre will continue for many years ahead, to play a distinguished part in the life of the city.” In city business circles no one could shed any light on the name of the mysterious buyer. Said an official of Murrayfield Real Estate Co.Ltd., “I have no idea who it could be. Perhaps it’s a new firm.” ”

And so on.

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, October 11<sup>th</sup> **1960** A precis

### **“Oppenheim Behind Lyceum Moves Has Submitted Sketch Plans for Development of Area Car Park included in £1m.Project**

Mr **Meyer Oppenheim**, the well-known Edinburgh business man and managing-director of James Grant & Co. West Ltd., (Furniture) admitted last night that he was the man behind the plan to transform the site in central Edinburgh which includes the *Usher Hall*, the *Synod Hall* and the *Royal Lyceum*. The Usher Hall would not be affected by the plans.

“....but if the present plans are put into effect the scheme will cost in the region £1 million. Included in the plans are an underground car park for more than 100 vehicles and Festival Inquiry and Administration Offices and a suite of conference rooms at ground level....which would be made available to visiting bodies. (This would mean scrapping the 1959 £40,000 Festival Offices – formerly the Gaelic Church)

Mr Oppenheim is also chairman of Argyle Securities Ltd., who are at present carrying out several important redevelopment and building projects in the West of Scotland."

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, May 19<sup>th</sup> 1961

### **“John Croall’s Taken Over**

### **£300,000 Oppenheim Bid Successful**

### **Changes in Board**

Mr **Meyer Oppenheim**, chairman and managing director of Argyle Securities is to become chairman of John Croall & Sons Ltd, garage proprietors and Undertakers, Edinburgh.

Yesterday the Argyle Securities offer to buy the whole share capital of Croall’s had been declared unconditional ... the acceptance date extended to May 25<sup>th</sup>. It was also stated that Mr Robert E. Croall, Mr R. Douglas Croall and Mr J. Morrison Inches are resigning from the Board in favour of Mr Oppenheim. Mr Edgar R. Grime, and Mr D.M. Young. Mr Conquer will continue as director and secretary.

Mr Oppenheim’s bid for Croall’s last month was £300,000. It was the fourth offer for the company, others having been made by Rossleigh, Eastern Motor Company and Highland Engineering.

Croall’s premises are within 200 yards of the Lyceum Theatre which Mr Oppenheim secured at the beginning of this month.

### **FURTHER EXPANSION**

The family business of John Croall & Sons dates back to **1820** when, under the name of Scott, Croall Co., they operated as funeral undertakers. Nine years later they were making carriages and mail coaches. By **1900** they were making car bodies and in **1906** they became special retailers for Rolls -Royce.

This association won them world-wide renown and they expanded further in **1910** when they bought up J.H.Mulliners & Co. Ltd. Mulliners, unsurpassed for quality craftsmanship, remained under their control until July **1959**, when they were taken over by Rolls-Royce.

The firm was one of three in Edinburgh which were original founder-members of the **Scottish Motor Trade Association**. At the end of last years (1960) a modernisation programme, costing more than £15,000 was completed.”

True, the item above on Croall’s does not come within the history of the Lyceum Theatre, however, they are close together and the same person, Mr Oppenheim, bought them.

*The Scotsman*, Friday, September 15<sup>th</sup> 1961

### **“City To Buy Proposed Theatre**

Edinburgh Corporation will buy the *Civic Theatre* planned for the Lyceum-Synod Hall site, Lord Provost J. Greig Dunbar said last night. The price is expected to be more than £700,000.

The Lord Provost said that after the theatre was built, “the Corporation will purchase it from Mr Oppenheim at an agreed figure”. Mr Dunbar added, “I would be surprised if anything could be done within the next year,”

The new theatre will hold approximately 1,780 people on two tiers, but details of the internal arrangements are still incomplete. Mr Kininmonth, architect, and Mr Oppenheim plan to visit several post-War theatres and opera houses on the Continent, accompanied by technical and artistic advisers closely connected with the contemporary theatre.”

All that remains to be done to complete the *Lyceum Theatre Story* is the Entry of the Gladiators with their crowbars and bulldozers. In 1883 that noble pile cost £17,000 to build; in the 1960’s, 80 years after, a figure of over £700,000 is mentioned whereby to build a Civic Theatre.

In the last ten years I have not known a big Civic Contract to be paid off at the contract price. Will the proposed New Theatre be any different in that respect? At the end of the day, this year, next year, .... will it end as it started on Monday, September 10<sup>th</sup> 1883 with *Much Ado About Nothing*? Or will the citizens shrug their shoulders and say... So What?

*The Scotsman*, Friday, June 28<sup>th</sup> 1963

### **“Agreement Reached On Lyceum Development**

#### **Hopes of new theatre by 1966**

Agreement has been reached between Edinburgh Corporation and Mr Meyer Oppenheim on terms of the redevelopment of the Lyceum Theatre- Castle Terrace site, incorporating a new theatre and office block. This was reported to the Town Council yesterday by Lord Provost Duncan Weatherstone, who expressed the hope that the theatre would be completed by May 1966, when his term of office expires.” .... “As revealed by the Scotsman a few months ago, the terms are that the site should be leased to Mr Oppenheim for 99 years at a premium of £300,000. He would then build a Civic Theatre which he would sell to the Corporation for about £700,000.” Etc. etc.

**12: THE GAIETY, KIRKGATE, LEITH**  
**Saturday, November 6<sup>th</sup> 1886 (start of Concerts)**  
**to Saturday September 15<sup>th</sup> 1956**

*The Kirkgate United Presbyterian Church, 1775- 1886; Carters' Incorporation, attached to the U.P. Church, used as an auxiliary Music Hall by H.E. Moss in the 1880's; Concerts in Old U.P. Church 1886; Old Church destroyed by fire 1888; Leith Pilot Annual; Moss opened Princess' Theatre 1889; Theatre reconstructed and opened as the New Gaiety Theatre, 1899; Electric Light installed, Chalmers Cinematograph shows, 1900; Gaiety Sunday Concerts, 1903-1911; Structural alterations to Gaiety, 1913, when it virtually became a picture house; Gaiety reverted to 'live theatre', 1944; Depopulation lead to Gaiety being closed, 1956*

In years to come, the **House** that once stood in the Kirkgate, Leith, will, I think, always be referred to as the **Gaiety**, tho' it was first of all known as a Music Hall and later as the **Princess' Theatre**.

The few writers who have attempted to write "stories" anent the **Leith Gaiety** and the **Edinburgh Gaiety**, later the **Operetta House**, Chambers Street, never had time, nor, indeed, did they bother to hunt up any data. Some were content to note what their grannies told them about the theatre *doon* the street or what a workmate had to say about the old Gaiety, in every case without dates. True, such information is most interesting and no one likes to hear it more than I do, but alas, it is **not** history from the factual point of view. As a consequence, the 'end-product' was invariably a botch and a caricature of the place of amusement the writers tried to portray.

It is rather disturbing that such criticism can be levelled practically every week anent 'articles' in the Press, particularly those on places of amusement. And, it is bad, mighty bad, when professional journalists palm off stuff which cannot bear strict investigation.

As I write on Saturday, May 25<sup>th</sup> 1963 (which is Cup Final Day between Leicester City 1 v. Manchester United 3) the old **Gaiety** has disappeared from the sight of man. On both sides of the roadway, near the site of the theatre, not one stone stands upon another. The fresh air blows over a cleared space large enough, at the moment, to hold half a dozen football pitches. Many more tenements wait their turn like cattle in a slaughter house for the death blow. Soon, after a long, long wait a start will be made on that part of Leith by the builders to erect the *Promised Land*.

Leith, against the wishes of her citizens, was railroaded into amalgamation with Edinburgh on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1920. It is a *Long Lane which has no turning.* or, *Live Horse....*

**Short History of the Old Kirkgate  
United Presbyterian Church  
(Extracted from the *Leith Pilot Annual*, 1889)**

It was built in the year **1775** and could seat 1,050 people. It was rebuilt in **1801**, and re-seated in **1829**. Altogether it was used as place of worship for 111 years.

**The Congregation Decides on a Move**

The congregation of the Old Kirkgate U.P. Church decided to move to another site, and, on September 12<sup>th</sup> **1885**, the Memorial Stone of the new Church was laid by Provost Pringle. The new Church in Henderson Street, Leith, formally opened on October 5<sup>th</sup> **1886**.

Attached to the Old Kirkgate U.P. Church was the **Carters' Incorporation**, instituted in the year **1555**. Whether the Carters' Incorporation functions in the year **1963** I do not know. Its contribution to the *Gaiety* story is that, in the **1880's** it was used as an auxiliary Music Hall, the 'turns' being supplied by the enterprising showman, **H.E. Moss** who owned the Gaiety, 5 Chambers Street, Edinburgh. The distance between Chambers Street and the Kirkgate would be over two miles; to enable the artistes to make good time horse cabs were laid on, that being the fastest mode of travel in the city at that time. Councillor **Wilson McLaren** relates in his reminiscences that the lot of the artiste in those days was far from a bed of roses; it was common for the Star Turns to make six appearances each evening.

The Old Kirkgate Church changed its mode of Service from the *Spiritual* to the *Secular*

Very likely many church members would 'patronise' the new form of service. Let us not beat about the bush. In those far off days amusement was obtained much on the same principle as *Do-It-Yourself* in the Post Second War period. So that, the coming of a Music Hall to the main artery of the Port, namely the Kirkgate, was like the coming of Radio in 1924 to the masses. True, in those early days of vaudeville, the language used was not that heard in Sunday Schools. It can be said of **H.E. Moss** that he fought a hard battle to clear out the doubtful artiste and thereby made it a place where the entire family could spend a happy evening; see page 15.

The first announcement that the **Old Kirkgate U.P. Church** would be used as a place of entertainment appeared in the *Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, October 30<sup>th</sup> **1886**, the month in which the congregation formally opened their new church in Henderson Street. So little time was lost in putting into practice, *Off With The Old, On With The New*. The advertisement read as follows:

"ENTERTAINMENTS FOR THE PEOPLE

A SERIES OF CONCERTS WILL BE HELD  
IN KIRKGATE (OLD) U.P. CHURCH

BEGINNING ON SATURDAY 6<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 1886

PROVOST PRINGLE IN THE CHAIR  
DETAILS IN FUTURE ANNOUNCEMENTS"

Future details appeared in the *Leith Burghs Pilot* on Saturday, November 6<sup>th</sup> **1886**, as follows:

“Mr James Lumsden, Vocalist and Comedian, Edinburgh  
and a Strong Company of Artistes

Prices of Admission: 3d. and 6d. Children, 2d. and 3d.  
Doors Open at 7; Concert Commences at 7.30  
Come! And Bring Your Family and Friends”

From time to time advertisements appeared in the *Leith Burghs Pilot* anent **Entertainments for the People**.

*News Advice*, Tuesday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> **1953**

“Leith Theatres that are no more  
Old Kirkgate U.P. Church Sold

We learn that a Mr **Edward Edgar** bought the old Kirkgate Church premises and some adjoining houses soon after the congregation moved to their new church on October 5<sup>th</sup> **1886**, all for the sum of £1,500.

#### Licence Refused

The Dean of Guild Court, however, refused to license the church premises as a proper Music-Hall until certain alterations were carried out. The building was licensed only for the lower part of the hall, the gallery being closed. The theatre, however, had a very short life as the premises were completely destroyed by fire. The damage amounted to £1,000 to the Music Hall.”

An account of the fire is given in this extract from the *Leith Pilot Annual*, published in **1889**:

“**1888** Alarming Fire. Fire broke out on the night of Friday, March 2<sup>nd</sup> **1888**, in the old U.P. Church, Kirkgate, destroying the whole building.

From the near proximity of the houses in Coatfield Lane, distressing scenes occurred among the inmates, many of whom were paralysed with fear, although no serious accident occurred. The origin of the fire remains a mystery; but the building had been let to a marionette entertainment, and it was supposed to have originated in connection with it.”

#### *THE LEITH PILOT ANNUAL*

At this stage it is as well to point out that the *Leith Pilot Annual*, as its name indicates, was published once a year at a cost of 2d. per copy. It was first published in the year **1888**, with data culled from the weekly paper *The Leith Burghs Pilot* of **1887**. The second publication of **1889** contained a precis of **Leith History from 320 B.C. to 1889**, on pages 39 to 61 inclusive.

The last Annual was published about **1904**; I say ‘about’ as there is not a complete list extant; probably their cost, 2d., had something to do with fostering the idea, “tuppence, its hardly worth keeping it.”

There are no copies in Leith Library. Some kind friend or friends donated a few which are in the custody of the Edinburgh Room, Central Library, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh.

### **The Old Kirkgate Church Is Leased to Mr H.E. Moss**

In **1889 Mr Edgar** leased the burnt out site to Mr H.E. Moss who built thereon a theatre. The first advertisement anent the newly built theatre appeared in *Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday December 21<sup>st</sup> **1889**

#### **“New Princess’ Theatre, Kirkgate, Leith**

**Sole Lessee                      Mr. H.E. Moss  
Director and Manager      Mr Frederick Wright**

**Grand Opening on Monday, December 30<sup>th</sup> 1889  
Doors Open at 7 o’clock; Commence at 7.30**

**Morning Performance on New Year’s Day 1<sup>st</sup> January 1890  
Doors Open 1.30; Commence 2 p.m.**

**Messrs. H.E. Moss and Frederick Wright, feel that in providing Leith with a handsome and complete Theatre of its own, they will be supplying a long-felt want. The above Brick and Stone Building is fitted with every convenience at a very heavy outlay; and the experience gained during many years’ management will be brought to bear on its being conducted as a first-class refined theatre and on strictly business principles.**

**Mr Fred. Wright will be remembered as the popular and successful lessee and manager of the *Southminster Theatre*.\***

**Prices will be: Balcony Stalls, 1s. 6d.; Balcony and Promenade, 1s.; Pit, 6d.”**

\*See page 5.

In a later advertisement it was announced that the *Princess’ Theatre* opened with the play *False Nights*. The theatre had accommodation in Pit and Gallery for 1,000.

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, February 25<sup>th</sup> **1899**

#### **“Princess’ Theatre, Leith**

**Sole Lessee and Manager    Julian Malvern**

**General Manager    Charles M. Julian”**

I include this advertisement to show that Mr Moss was no longer the lessee of the theatre. Mr Malvern's private address was Fillyside Manor House, Seafield.

It is not my intention to append a list of plays and artists who appeared on the boards of the Princess'; that is something I will reserve for the closing days of the Gaiety,

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, October 21<sup>st</sup> 1899

***"New Gaiety Theatre, Leith*  
Sole Lessee    Julian Malvern  
General Manager   Charles M. Julian**

**The Theatre has been reconstructed on the site of the old Princess, the size of which has been extended by over 40 feet**

**A STAGE SECOND TO NONE IN SCOTLAND**

**REPLETE WITH ALL MODERN IMPROVEMENTS**

**CAPABLE OF PRODUCING THE LARGEST  
AND BEST LONDON PRODUCTIONS**

**The Theatre has been tastefully Decorated and beautifully upholstered, the comfort of the audience having been carefully studied, which will enable Visitors to see the whole**

**Stage in every part of the Building**

**GRAND OPENING NIGHT – MONDAY, OCTOBER 30<sup>th</sup> 1899**

**Admission: Private Boxes, 15s.; Private Circle, 2s.; Balcony, 1s.; Orchestra Stalls, 1s.6d;  
Pit Stalls, 9d.; Pit, 6d."**

*The Leith Observer*, Saturday, January 6<sup>th</sup> 1900

***"New Gaiety Theatre, Leith***

**Sole Lessee    Julian Malvern  
General Manager   Charles M. Julian  
Acting Manager    J.L. Jackson**

**Grand Installation of the Electric Light**

**And Chalmers Cinematograph**

**Monday, January 8<sup>th</sup> 1900, and five following nights MONSTER VARIETY CO.**

Special engagement at enormous expense of the  
CHALMERS CINEMATOGRAPH,

With all the latest pictures of the War in the Transvaal;

Miss Kate Devere, Coon Impersonator;

Miss Rosa Ernest, Juvenile Vocalist;

Le Warren, the Ventriloquial Pole;

Miss Minnie Freeman, Comedienne;

Most expensive engagement of the celebrated

VALENTINE BENSON'S ANGLO AMERICAN MARIONETTES;

To conclude with a comical absurd Pantomime, in which all the artistes of the day will  
be cleverly represented

Monday, January 15<sup>th</sup> 1900, *The Soldiers of the Queen*

Admission: Private Boxes, 15s.; Private Circle, 2s.; Balcony and Orchestra Stalls, 1s.;  
Stalls, 9d.; & Pit, 6d.

Early Doors, 6.30

Ordinary Doors, 7 p.m."

This advertisement draws attention to the introduction of **Electric Light** and the first occasion of the **Cinematograph** in the *Gaiety*. That, I think, should settle any future argument as to when.

#### ***Gaiety Sunday Concerts***

I simply record several dates and a **decision** so that these concerts may be referred to; and, possibly, settle any arguments regarding the dates and how long the concerts were put on at the *Gaiety*.

The first programme I noted during my research, but certainly **not** the first advertisement, was extracted from the *News*, Saturday, February **1907**.

"New Gaiety, Leith

**GRAND CINEMATOGRAPH EXHIBITION  
of all the latest ANIMATED PHOTOGRAPHS"**

News, Saturday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1910

**“NEW GAIETY THEATRE  
EDINBURGH SUNDAY SOCIETY  
SUNDAY FIRST  
CINEMATOGRAPH & ORCHESTRAL QUARTETTE  
*THE SIGNALMAN’S DAUGHTER*  
*A CRUISE IN A STORM*  
VOCALIST – J.C. BRIEN, LIVERPOOL”**

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, November 1911 page 4

**“EXIT THE SUNDAY CONCERTS**

The *Gaiety Sunday Concerts* which had carried on for 8 years, must henceforth cease and determine, if, as stated by the Clerk to the Magistrates, the **Sunday Society** never had a Licence. The payment for admission to the theatre is the rock on which the Society’s case split.”

News, Friday, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1912

**“LEITH GAIETY  
TONIGHT TONIGHT  
GRAND BENEFIT PICTORIAL CONCERT**

**To clear Legal expenses in connection with the recent attempt to stop the  
SUNDAY EVENING CONCERTS**

**R.M. Williamson Junior Secretary Secretary’s Office 18 Hanover Street Edinburgh”**

I did not observe any further Advertisements in connection with *Gaiety Sunday Concerts*.

**Minor Alterations at the Gaiety**

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, December 27<sup>th</sup> 1913, page 3 News Item

**“Gaiety Theatre, Kirkgate**

For some time past alterations have been proceeding at the *Gaiety*, which will be inaugurated during the course of next week. Two shops, one on either side of the main entrance to the *Gaiety*, have been acquired. These have been transformed into new parts of the House, Gallery, Pit and Circle, entering from the Kirkgate main entrance. There will be no waiting outside on the street for the second house.”

Coinciding with these alterations, the *Gaiety* virtually became a picture house. I received the following information from Percy Charles Tabel during October 1962: Mr Tabel became manager of the *Gaiety* Theatre in the Kirkgate on Monday January 4<sup>th</sup> 1932, until July 1944, when he left to become manager of the *Palace* Picture House, 15 Princes Street. He spent eleven happy years at the *Palace* until it closed down on February 5<sup>th</sup> 1955. The site is now occupied by Messrs **Woolworth**.

### ***Gaiety* reverts to “Live Theatre”**

The departure of Mr Tabel from the *Gaiety* in 1944 coincided with the re-introduction of “Live Theatre”, as the following *Evening News* advertisement of Saturday, July 1<sup>st</sup> 1944 confirms.

#### ***“Gaiety Theatre , Kirkgate***

#### **Grand Re-Opening as a Variety Theatre on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1944.**

**Opening Ceremony will be by Will Fyffe at 6.15.**

**With Tommy Hope; Cliff Stetson; Rita Cardie;  
8 Calder Girls; Billie Brown and Billie Dunlop”**

In 1946 **Claude Worth** managed the *Gaiety* for the proprietors who were registered as **Leith Entertainers Ltd**. The seating capacity was given as 1,611

For the next ten years the programmes alternated between moving pictures and stage shows. The whole area had long since been designated as a Slum Clearance Scheme, and plans were ready for the demolition of a once prosperous district. Although new shop fronts were put up the whole length of the Kirkgate, it could not disguise the fact that the hinterland was a shambles

Tenants to whom I have spoken on the subject told me they were glad to leave the unsanitary houses – but they were sorry to leave ‘Sunny Leith’, the place where they were born, where they belonged, where they had good neighbours and many friends. Their roots were planted in the Port many generations ago – long before the advent of *Stage Shows and Cinemas*. They had a communal spirit and strong territorial pride and loyalty. That then, is but an insight into the lives of those who were proud of being ‘Leithers’.

### ***The Lonely House***

*Lone is the house now and lonely the moorland;*

*The children are scattered, the old folk are gone.*

*Why stand I here like a ghost and a shadow?*

*‘Tis time I was moving; ‘tis time I passed on.*

This verse from the *Lonely House* sums up the Kirkgate area of Leith. It explains the decline and ultimate demolition and complete extinction of a one time proud theatre, *The Gaiety*.

[My father also used this verse on page 59. I remember him listening to John McCormack singing it in a radio broadcast during the Second World War. G.F.B]

*Dispatch*, December 29<sup>th</sup> 1953

**“Dick Wade of the *Gaiety***

At the age of 75 years Dick Wade has been a stage hand in the *Gaiety* for nearly 50 years and thought of taking it easy in 1953. He recalled the time when the theatre was called *The Princess*.”

Old Kirkgate residents told me a Mr **Renouf** was at one time manager of the *Gaiety*. The sands of time .... How true.

Inexorably the Kirkgate and the *Gaiety* were marching together – right out and off the stage, into oblivion. The two advertisements which follow confirm that view.

*News*, Monday, August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1955

**“*Gaiety* Reopened with  
Jack Milroy in the lead”**

Re-opened is the operative word in the advertisement..

The final *Gaiety* bill appeared in the *News*, Saturday, September 8<sup>th</sup> 1956

**“Last week of a grand Festival Show**

***LAUGH OF A LIFE TIME***

**Produced by Jan Morrelle  
with Tommy Loman; Johnnie Beattie; 4 Kordites and a wonderful cast”**

*Laugh of a Lifetime*, who, I wonder, had the Last Laugh?

In chorus, I imagine I hear the cast of the last *Gaiety* show singing: “*Why Stand I here...*

*Gone with the Wind* was the name of a Big picture which was going round the world in the 1940’s and, like a dust storm, the dust and the debris of the Kirkgate and the old *Gaiety* is perhaps still circling the world and will only fall to earth when the Building Programme is completed in the Kirkgate area.

For those old Leith citizens who incline in the belief that the above mentioned state of affairs is, or was, the work of the Edinburgh Town Council, who practically forced amalgamation on Leith on August 4<sup>th</sup> **1920**, this is not very far from the facts.

In a short history (see page 205) of the area where the *Coal Hill Picture House*, later the *Magnet*, stood, I refer to how the Provost of Leith drew attention in **1877** to the crowded and central area lying between St Giles Street and the Coal Hill, which was in an insanitary condition; see page . Suffice it to say, I saw the above mentioned St Giles Street, Leith, standing in all its rottenness early in 1963.

### **The Funeral Notice**

The last Press announcement anent the Old *Gaiety* virtually amounted to a funeral notice. It will be remembered that Mr **Edgar** leased the site to **H.E. Moss** who built the *Princess' Theatre* in **1889**. For most of its 68 years it remained a theatre

*News*, Thursday, February 21<sup>st</sup> **1957**

### **“Gaiety by a *News* reporter**

There was disappointing news today for Edinburgh theatregoers. The Gaiety Theatre in the Kirkgate, Leith is to be sold. The Gaiety is one of the oldest theatre in Edinburgh. It has, however, been closed since last year's Festival.

A spokesman for the theatre told the Evening News: 'I understand there are a good few thousand people away from the vicinity of the Kirkgate. It used to be a thriving centre, but it is now almost a dead-end. It is unfortunate that the Gaiety will have to be sold, but it is not economically possible to keep it open.'

Mr **Dan Campbell**, manager of the *Palladium Theatre, East Fountainbridge*, said today that going through Leith in these days was like passing through a 'deserted village'. Much of the population had been rehoused in Moredun and the Inch and as a result, the *Gaiety* audiences had dwindled. Mr Campbell expressed the hope, however, that with the rebuilding that was scheduled for the Port, Leith's population would increase and, if another theatre was opened, it would be well patronised.

The closure and the proposed sale of the *Gaiety* means a serious blow to entertainment in Edinburgh."

Note: I also express a hope or two, namely, that the street name 'Kirkgate' be retained and, that in the event of another theatre being built at, or about the same spot, it be called the *Gaiety*.

I have finished my short history about the *Gaiety*; in many respects I enjoyed writing it. A minister friend of mine [The Rev. Henry Heath, minister of Chalmers Church, West Port. G.F.B.] once said: "God must have loved the common people, He made so many of them." In all truth the *Gaiety* did not claim to cater for the gentry; had the theatre depended on the gentry, I venture to say it would have had a very short life.

The various proprietors of the ***Gaiety*** did a splendid job by providing amusement for the masses. The Epitaph might well be culled from the last Bill in September **1956** – *Laugh of a Lifetime* or *Died Laughing*.

*News*, Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> **1962** I append a verbatim extract from the *News* which purports to give a ‘short history’ of the ***Gaiety***, without its stating when the ***Gaiety*** came into being.

### “**Gaiety, Leith**”

Theatre-goers will remember the old ***Gaiety***. Originally a Music Hall, it was built on the site of the old Kirkgate U.P. Church. It was destroyed by fire in **1888**. In the following year it was leased as a theatre to H.E. Moss, and after being rebuilt it was opened on December 30, **1889** as the ***Princess Theatre***, but came to be known as the ***Gaiety***.

Margaret Adams”

In the next chapter which deals with the ***Gaiety, Chambers Street***, followed by the ***Operetta House*** on the same site, I will name and expose a professional journalist anent the ***Operetta House*** and other places of amusement.

### 13: 5 CHAMBERS STREET

*Chambers Street formed in 1870 to link George IV Bridge and the South Bridge; The Gaiety, opened Monday, July 5<sup>th</sup> 1875; Moss' Theatre of Varieties opened December 24<sup>th</sup> 1877, closed on Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup> 1892; Sunday Night Meetings, 1875-76; Operetta House opened Monday December 26<sup>th</sup> 1892; Moving pictures shown in the Operetta House, 1900; Debunking of statements made about when moving pictures were first shown in the Operetta House; Operetta House closed on Saturday December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1939; Operetta House converted to National Health Insurance Office, 1948, and demolished in 1950 to make way for Adam House, opened in 1955.*

The following is an extract from page 146 of *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century* “**1870** Chambers Street – In the course of the summer, North College Street, Brown Square and Adam Square were cleared away to make a new thoroughfare between the South Bridge and George IV Bridge, to be called Chambers Street.” The University was already there on the south side of the Street and was linked to the Royal Scottish Museum by a bridge. On the north side of the Street work began on several buildings in the 1870's, among which, at Number 5, was *The Gaiety Theatre*, opened in **1875**.

#### **THE GAIETY AND THEATRE OF VARIETIES, JULY 5<sup>th</sup> 1875 TO SATURDAY NOVEMBER 5<sup>th</sup> 1892**

It may seem peculiar to start a chapter, in this case *The Gaiety*, by taking an excerpt regarding its closing week as contained in *The Scotsman*, Tuesday, November 1<sup>st</sup>, **1892**. “After a run of popularity as a music hall extending close upon twenty years....” When I read this I thought I had had got my dates wrong which meant, in this case, a great deal of needless research as the actual dates are as shown above, which is, of course, 17 years.

It is not like the *Old Lady of Cockburn Street*, now of the North Bridge, to nod. Without *The Scotsman* Edinburgh would be without a great deal of 19<sup>th</sup> Century history. I will show the excerpt in its entirety in the appropriate place in the story, see page 123.

The first announcement regarding the opening of the *Gaiety Hall* appeared in *The Edinburgh Courant*, Thursday, July 1<sup>st</sup> **1875**.

**The Gaiety Hall , Chambers Street, near the College**

**Proprietors - The Hall Company**

**General Manager - Mr. G.J. Cruvelli**

**This New and Magnificent Hall will be Opened  
with a Select and First-Class Company early this month**

**Full Particulars will shortly be announced”**

*The Edinburgh Courant*, Friday, July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1875

**“The Gaiety, Chambers Street, near the College, Edinburgh**  
(Note “Hall” has been dropped)

**Proprietors – The Hall Company (Limited)**

**Manager – Mr G.J. Cruvelli**  
(who was the proprietor of the *New Star Music Hall, Leith* in January 1874)

**This Elegant Hall will be Opened on Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> July,**  
**with the following First-Class Company**

**Important Engagement, and for Six Nights only of**  
**LADY DON, the great Soprano Vocalist,**  
**from the principal London and Provincial Theatres**

**First appearance in Edinburgh of Mr Alexander Bogel,**  
**the Popular and only African Tenor Vocalist in this country**

**Engagement of Miss Townley, the Eminent Soprano Vocalist,**  
**In conjunction with Mr. W. D’Almaine, tenor vocalist,**  
**in their celebrated Operatic Recitals**

**Engagement of Six Nights only of Mr Henry Lee and Miss Emma Roberts**  
**Duologue Artistes and Vocalists**

**First appearance in Edinburgh of Mr J. Rake, Characteristic Comique, Vocalist and**  
**Grotesque Dancer**

**Engagement for Six Nights only of Messrs. Bell and the Eccentric Juba,**  
**Negro Comedians, Burlesque Artistes and Dancers**

**First Appearance in Edinburgh of Miss Marion Constance,**  
**Serio-Comic Vocalist and Skipping-Rope Dancer**

**Overture *Fra Diavolo* by the Band, Chef d’Orchestre Herr A. Redner**

**Doors open at Seven To Commence at Half-past Seven**

**Prices of Admission:**

**Front Balcony, 3s.; Side Balcony, 2s.; Upper Tier and Promenade, 2s.;**  
**Orchestra Stalls, 2s.; Stalls, 1s.; and Back Seats, 6d.**  
**Half Price at Nine O’Clock: Front Balcony, 1s.6d.;**  
**Side Balcony, Upper Tier and Orchestra Stalls, 1s.; and Stalls, 6d.”**

The Criticism anent the above Show of its Opening Night is the most daring I have ever read. The Reporter simply did the job of work for which he was paid. That he pulled no punches I have no fault to find - he called a spade a spade and was not mealy mouthed about it.

In retrospect, it would appear that the cast for the Opening Night was **not** up to standard – despite all the nice things said about the artistes in the first advertisement. Possibly this First Night set the trend for the steady deterioration of the *Gaiety* as a music hall and which Mr **H.E. Moss** had to contend with when he took over on Monday, December 24<sup>th</sup> **1877**.

### Criticism

*Edinburgh Courant*, Tuesday, July 6<sup>th</sup> **1875**

“Opening of the *Gaiety*. This finely finished hall in Chambers Street was opened last night by a company of musical and other performers, who went through a varied entertainment in the presence of a large audience. With regard to the company, it cannot be said that the selection is in every case successful, but those who can be spoken of with favour are really talented artistes.

**Mr D’Almaine and Miss Townley** gave an operatic recital from *Maritana*, which called forth loud and deserved applause. Both vocalists have melodious, powerful, and highly-trained voices, and created an exceedingly favourable impression. **Mr Henry Lee and Miss Emma Roberts** were equally successful in a ‘domestic scene’ which provoked the almost continuous laughter of the audience. **Mr Alexander Bogel**, the African, sang well. Messrs **Bell and Juba** went through a clever and amusing ‘nigger’ performance. Miss **Marion Constance** appeared as a serio-vocalist, but her artistic and skilfully executed dances were more enjoyable than her songs. The other comic performers lack much of the liveliness of those who take a high position in that line of entertainment.

**Lady Don**, who received a loud round of applause, ... Her Ladyship sang two selections, but unfortunately her voice appears not to have the compass of former days, and was not heard distinctly in the back portion of the hall, which was filled principally with the lads such as usually go by the denomination of “The Gods” in the theatre. Lady Don sang an encore and was proceeding to acknowledge the compliment with another song, when she was interrupted by some thoughtless and unmannerly youths. Her Ladyship did not attempt to sing further, but stated that she had sung before in Edinburgh in the *Queen’s Theatre* (Nicolson Street) and in the *Theatre Royal* (Broughton Street), now in ruins; how she had sung in New Zealand, how she had gone twice round the world and met Scotchmen who had informed her they had never heard their songs sung as she could sing them and she had never been insulted as she had been that evening. “Hear, hear”, and her Ladyship left the stage amid mingled cheers and hisses. (Then as now, it is a crime to be old, hard luck on Lady Don and her colleagues.)

A good orchestra is led by Herr **A Redner**.”

Today as I write, July **1963**, those who are known as “Pop” singers, *sic*, could not be heard behind the proverbial newspaper if they were ‘robbed’ of their mikes. To see them draped over a ‘mike’, without which they would drop down in an apparent state of exhaustion, and, without a ‘mike’; they too could **not** be heard at the back of a small hall, such as the *Gaiety* was to my knowledge, when it became the *Operetta House*.

**PANTOMIME TIME AT *THE GAIETY***

*Edinburgh Courant*, Saturday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1876

***“The Gaiety, adjoining the College***

**Grand Illuminated Morning Performance Today at 2 o’clock**

**Doors Open at Half-Past One**

**THE GRAND PANTOMIME**

***BEAUTY AND THE BEAST***

**Reserved Seats, 2s. each, may be secured for the Morning or Evening Performances on application to Mr Cruvelli**

**Children Under 12, Half-Price.”**

**A CHANGE OF PROPRIETOR**

*Edinburgh Courant*, Tuesday, May 30<sup>th</sup> 1876

***“Gaiety Theatre of Varieties***

**Promenade and Lounge, Chambers Street, Edinburgh**

**Open every Evening**

**Lessee G. H. Grant**

**Acting Manager and Secretary A. C. Windsor**

**Great Success of Re-opening  
Crowded Nightly**

**Tonight May 30<sup>th</sup> and every Evening during the Week, will be produced the greatest Variety Entertainment ever offered to the Public of Edinburgh**

**30 Star Artistes, including the Great Annie Anderson, Victor Liston, Jolly Little Lewis**

**Prices: Private Boxes, 10s.6d.; Front Balcony, 2s.; Side Balcony, Stalls, Promenade & Lounge, 1s. each; Upper Tier, 6d.; and Gallery, 4d.”**

**1877** dawned, all was quiet on the Chambers Street front, for example, the advertisement anent the *Gaiety* which I saw in the *Courant* of September 21<sup>st</sup> **1876**, appeared to be the last. A careful scrutiny showed that no advertisement appeared up to and including Saturday, December 30<sup>th</sup> **1876**. This did not indicate, however, that the *Gaiety* had closed down. In the *Foreword* I describe the various ways in which theatres advertised what was on offer, but there has been such a diversity of opinion regarding the year when the *Operetta House, Chambers Street*, first started showing moving pictures that **now** is the time to put the record right, once and for all time, see page 127.

I could not pin down the date of the final performance in the old *Gaiety*, which was during then ‘back-end’ of **1877**. During the second half of **1877** almost weekly advertisements appeared in *The Scotsman* for *The Gaiety, Glasgow*.

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> **1877**

**“MOSS’ VARIETIES (LATE GAIETY) CHAMBERS STREET**

**GRAND OPENING NIGHT**

**ON MONDAY FIRST**

**A MONSTER COMBINATION OF HIGH-CLASS CELEBRITIES”**

*The Scotsman*, Monday December 24<sup>th</sup> **1877**

**“MOSS’ VARIETIES (LATE GAIETY) CHAMBERS STREET**

**THIS EVENING AND DURING THE WEEK**

**BRADLEY’S BURLESQUE WAXWORK**

**PASHUR NIMROD**

**MADAM DONTI**

**MESSRS. GRAHAM AND Mc BRYDE**

**MR AND MRS WARRINER**

**MISSES STANDFORTH AND SMITH**

**MR J PULLARD**

**AND A HOST OF OTHER ARTISTES**

**HALF-PRICE AT NINE O’CLOCK”**

Note: *The Scotsman* did **not** mention *Moss' Varieties* the following day, Tuesday December 25<sup>th</sup>, **1877**, in what is known as *The Criticism Column*, although **Moss** made the claim that the Press and Public had acclaimed the show as an 'Unparalleled Success' in *The Scotsman*, Wednesday, December 26<sup>th</sup> **1877**.

### **Prices of Admission**

In *The Scotsman*, Monday, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1877**, the prices of admission to **Moss' Varieties** were advertised as: 2s.; 1s.; and 6d. In this advertisement Moss claimed that the "Gigantic Success of the Opening" was due to its being patronised by the **respectable and intelligent**.

Moss continued to prosper but the life of Moss' Varieties or the Old Gaiety slowly drew to its close. Its owner, Mr Moss, had prepared a House on an Hill, in Nicolson Street, which became the first of his chain of **Super Theatres** throughout Britain; see pages 18, 20 and 21.

### **Last Programme of Moss' Theatre of Varieties**

Like most of his Press advertisements Moss' last programme followed the pattern, just a few lines. His *Empire* Advertisements, however, were on the grand scale.

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, October 29<sup>th</sup> **1892**

#### **"Last two weeks of Moss' Theatre of Varieties**

**Overflow Tickets issued on Saturday Night will be available  
Any evening of this week**

**Dan Leno; Spry and Austin; Tom White's Street Arabs**

**And other great attractions"**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup> **1892**

**"Moss' Theatre of Varieties, Chambers Street Edinburgh**

**LAST WEEK**

**SPECIAL ENGAGEMENT OF MISS MARIE LOFTUS**

**THE GREAT LONDON STAR SERIO-COMEDIENNE**

**SUPPORTED BY A STRONG VARIETY CAST"**

I append the full cast which appeared during the last week of Moss' Theatre, which appeared in the *Evening News*, September 2<sup>nd</sup> **1944**:

**Marie Loftus; Spry and Austen; James Hewson; George McCulloch; Ernest D'Almain;  
Gale St. John; Neauda Dwight; Arthur Picardo and Lillie Sweeney**

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, November 1<sup>st</sup> 1892

### “Criticism

***The Theatre of Varieties*** After a run of popularity as a music hall extending over close upon twenty years, fifteen of which have been under Mr Moss’ management, the ***Moss’ Theatre of Varieties*** last night entered upon its last week as a place of entertainment of this class, as in the course of the next week it will be superseded by the palatial new ***Empire Palace of Varieties in Nicolson Street***, which has now all but reached completion.. As was natural, the patrons of the place turned out in large numbers to bring to a fitting termination the career of a house which has proved so popular with the public, and in its day has held such an important position as a place of public entertainment in Edinburgh.

Miss **Marie Loftus**, an old Edinburgh favourite, had the honour of being the leading ‘star’ during the closing week, and though there was not the same phenomenal rush for places as during the previous fortnight’s engagement, when Mr **Dan Leno** proved such a success, there was still a good reception waiting for her when she appeared on the stage. In all her songs she was as pleasing as ever, and had to favour a delighted audience with no fewer than eight ‘turns’

Messrs **Spry and Austen** also proved a success with their speciality entertainment, and met with a hearty reception. The other items on the programme as a rule gave satisfaction to the audience.

That then is the story of ***Moss’ Theatre of Varieties***, formerly known as the “***Old***” ***Gaiety***, Chambers Street. Each theatre had a life span of 17 years.

### Sunday Concerts in the Old Gaiety

*News*, Saturday, September 6<sup>th</sup> 1941 This extract from an article by **Walter McPhail**, a former Editor of the *News*, was concerned with Sunday Meetings0

“Sunday Night Meetings were first held in the ***Old Gaiety*** by Professor **Henry Drummond** in the winter of **1875-76**. It was the offspring of the **Moody and Sanky** Campaign of **1873-74**. Drummond was filled with zeal for every evangelical work. He was even seen at the Register House distributing tracts [ Perhaps this should read ‘tracts’ G.F.B.]. There was nothing, Moody said, that Drummond would not undertake to do to spread evangelical work among his friends in the University.”

*News*, Thursday, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1902

**“Operetta House**  
**Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup>**  
**Grand Sacred Concert**  
**By the Edinburgh Madrigal Choir**  
**Prices: 3d.;6d.;1s.; and 2s.2**

That Sunday Concerts continued throughout the years can be seen from the following advertisement.

*News*, Saturday, March 16<sup>th</sup> 1912

**“The Labour Orchestra**  
**Conductor, Mr G.W. Crawford**  
**Operetta House**  
**Sunday Night (Tomorrow) at 6.30**  
**Chairman: Mr Andrew Young, M.A.**  
**Admission: 3d.; 6d.; and 9d.”**

Note: Mr **Gerald Crawford** was for many years a member of the Edinburgh Town Council. He did much to foster ‘good’ music among the younger citizens. He served with distinction in the First World War. By profession he was a Civil Engineer. He was an able administrator and was respected by all members of the Town Council

Mr Crawford died at his home at 21 Windsor Street on Thursday, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942.

***OPERETTA HOUSE, CHAMBERS STREET, EDINBURGH***

**Monday, December 26<sup>th</sup> 1892 to Saturday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1939**

Around 1892 new industries were springing up, for example, Electricity, the greatest single force in the land was beginning to make itself felt. Likewise, the Cinema industry was emerging and passing through the teething stage. History, anent the Cinema, was being made too fast and there were few or none with the time, inclination, or experience to observe with exactitude what was passing before their eyes

This has resulted in a variety of misstatements being so frequently repeated that they have now almost come to be regarded as facts.

*Every man has a right to his opinion, but no man has a right to be wrong in his facts*

**Bernard Baruch**

More balderdash has been written about the *Operetta House*, affectionately known as the *O.P.*, than about any other Edinburgh theatre or cinema. In due course, each wrong statement will be quoted along with the source and date. There was never a better time than the present to correct those blunders. My main sources of information are given in the *Foreword*.

We have seen that Mr **H.E. Moss** quit the *Theatre of Varieties* in Chambers Street on Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup> 1892. The premises did not remain vacant for long. The Preliminary or first advertisement anent the opening of *The Operetta House* appeared in *The Scotsman*, Tuesday, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1892.

***“Operetta House (late Moss’ Varieties)***

**Monday, December 26<sup>th</sup> 1892**

**For A Short Season**

**Montague Roby’s Famous Midget Minstrels”**

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, December 27<sup>th</sup> 1892 Second Advertisement

***“Operetta House (Late Moss’ Varieties)***

**3 Performances This Day, at 12, 3 and 8**

**Montague Roby’s Famous Midget Minstrels**

**Grand Holiday Programme Special Day Performances**

**Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 3  
Every Evening at 8**

**Prices: Grand Circle, 3s.; Side Circle, 2s.; Balconty and Pit Stralls, 1s.,; Pit, 6d.**

**Booking at Wood and Co’s Music Warehouse, George Street.”**

## PICTURES COME TO THE *OPERETTA HOUSE*

I had the good fortune to receive, on loan, the First Electricity Test Book for Edinburgh, from **David Baird**, who was for some years an Official with the Edinburgh Electricity Department. Mr Baird was transferred to S.S.E.B. in 1948, at which time Electricity was Nationalised. He took the book with him to the new office. An entry in the book reads:

“**1898**. 30 Amp Lamp Installed in Operetta House, 5 Chambers Street. Tested on February 21<sup>st</sup> **1898**.”

I extracted many ‘firsts’ from the book, for example, Messrs **Baildon**, chemists, at Nos 73 and 144a Princes Street, were the first business premises in Edinburgh to have electricity led in; this was tested on May 7<sup>th</sup> **1895**.

Note 1: Electricity was switched on as a Public Service in Edinburgh on Thursday, April 11<sup>th</sup> **1895**, by Mrs Mac Donald, wife of the Lord Provost, from the Princes Street Station Hotel.

Note 2: The first Moving Pictures in Edinburgh were shown in the *Empire Theatre, Nicolson Street*, on Monday, April 13<sup>th</sup> **1896**.

*News*, Tuesday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> **1900**

*“Operetta House*

**Tonight and for 5 Nights**

**The popular Comedian, Mr Willie St. Clair**

***THE BREACH OF PROMISE*”**

*News*, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1900**

*“Operetta House*

**For a Short Season Only**

**Edison’s Animated Pictures**

**CHINA AND BOER WARS**

**BAND OF THE ROYAL SCOTS, Q.R.V.B.**

**Prices: 2s.; 1s.; and 6d.”**

This advertisement pinpoints when pictures were shown in the *O.P.*

*News*, Wednesday, July 1<sup>st</sup> 1903

“O.P.

**ANIMATED PICTURES “SIGHTS OF A LIFETIME” ”**

Then apparently closed until the *News*, Saturday, November 14<sup>th</sup> 1903 announced:

“Redecorated & Embellished

“The Wonders of the Deep”

“The Kingdom of the Fairies”

“Don Quixote, the Deserter”

Other houses and halls which advertised in the *News* that they were showing Animated Pictures at this time were:

Monday December 31<sup>st</sup> 1900: *Synod Hall, War Pictures*

Monday December 15<sup>th</sup> 1902: *Pavilion Theatre, Hillcoat Pictures*

Thursday January 1<sup>st</sup> 1900: *Forrest Road Hall, Animated Pictures*

Saturday, September 1901: *Central Hall, Tollcross,*

In *The Scotsman* of December 20<sup>th</sup> 1897 the *Queen’s Hall, Queen Street*, advertised *The Analyticon*.

Others could have been included in this list; it is there to confound some of the local historians. For the moment, suffice it to say I saw *Moving Pictures* in the *Operetta House* prior to the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The house was affectionately known as the *O.P.* throughout the city.

**Debunking Misstatements**

*News*, Wednesday, November 11<sup>th</sup> 1959 Extract from “The Turret Window”

“The first hall in Edinburgh to become devoted exclusively to cinema entertainment was the *Operetta House* in Chambers Street. In 1903 the management were advertising “Great excitement, great excitement, hundreds turned away nightly.” The cause of the to-do was *Edison’s Animated Picture Scenes* from the Delhi Durbar and the Morocco War; Everything new; Black Watch, Queen’s Royal Rifle Brigade, etc.; leaving St Giles’ Cathedral at midday on Sunday; scenes from the Powderhall Handicap

We have seen from the *News* of December 31<sup>st</sup> 1900 that *Edison’s Animated Pictures* were advertised for the *Operetta House*

*Dispatch*, Monday, February 9<sup>th</sup> 1953

“Edinburgh’s first cinema was the *Operetta House* in Chambers Street. Short performances were given in the *Operetta House* in 1904 and 1905. Regular and continuous shows of pictures began in the cinema in 1906.”

Note: I had left school by 1907 and long ere 1907 ‘came our way’ I had ceased going to the *O.P.*

*News Advice*, Thursday, April ? 1951

“*Operetta House* opened for pictures 1904 & 1905 and by 1906 was presenting regular cinematograph shows.”

It will be noticed that the dates in the *News Advice* coincide with those in the *Dispatch*.

Someone said “The person who wrote the most nonsense about Edinburgh Cinemas was **Albert MacKie** in his *Daily Express Column* of Thursday April 30<sup>th</sup> 1959, the heading of which was in large type “**THOSE INJUNS HAD THEIR FLING IN 1904**”.

MacKie avers he was invited by **Norman Wilson** of the *Edinburgh Film Guild* to “Give us a talk on early reminiscences of Edinburgh picture houses”.

As I write in July 1963, Mr Mackie is approximately 58 years old, that is born in 1905. I would ask the reader to look up the meaning of “reminiscences”.

Mr MacKie contends that “Theatres and the Waverley Market Carnival in 1904, were faced with the severe competition of the rising cinema trade.”, which is a lot of stuff and nonsense. Neither Mr MacKie nor anyone else could make that statement stick. Cinema shows were shown in halls in 1904 which had been altered to suit the medium of moving pictures. Indeed, the first place in Edinburgh to be built exclusively as a cinema was probably *The Haymarket, Dalry Road*, which opened on Friday, December 13<sup>th</sup> 1912.

Mr MacKie states the *Operetta House* was a cinema from 1902; the reader has only to go back a few pages to learn the correct date. Says Mr MacKie, “November 1904, both the *Operetta House* and the *Grove Street Pringle’s* were showing *Comata, the Sioux*, the story of an Indian’s constancy. Strange, but the *News*, Monday, November 9<sup>th</sup> 1908 shows that *Pringle’s, Grove Street*, did not open until November 16<sup>th</sup> 1908.

According to the *News* of October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1907, *Pringle* was showing pictures in the *Synod Hall*.

Mr MacKie says “*The Silver Kinema* in Nicolson Square was actually showing talkies in 1914.” Whereas, the *News*, Tuesday December 13<sup>th</sup> 1913, shows a different date; see page 82.

Skipping over pages at random is hardly to be reckoned as *Research Work* in connection with any kind of work or particular study. MacKie’s contribution was an excellent *Fairy Tale* but hardly a contribution to serious history.

*Dispatch*, Wednesday, February 25<sup>th</sup> **1953** Reply to reader

**“Operetta House** closed down on Saturday December 23<sup>rd</sup> **1939.**” Like a number of Edinburgh cinemas before and after it, the Operetta House became a furniture store.

### **The “O.P.” Becomes Edinburgh Headquarters For National Health Insurance**

After extensive alterations, the old **Operetta House** became the Headquarters for the National Health Insurance for the Edinburgh Area on July 1<sup>st</sup> **1948.** On this date the **Welfare State Services** became operative. **Nye Bevan**, Minister of Health, who piloted the scheme through Parliament, formally opened the new premises.

### **University of Edinburgh Adam House**

On 16<sup>th</sup> July **1963** I received the following Press Notice from Mr R.M.Young, The Secretary’s Office, Old College, South Bridge, Edinburgh:

“*Adam House*, the new Examination Halls at 4-6 Chambers Street, of the University of Edinburgh, is to be informally opened on Wednesday evening, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1955, by the Principal, Sir Edward Appleton.” The name ‘Adam House’ is a graceful tribute to the memory of Robert Adam whose home was in Adam Square, demolished to make way for Chambers Street. In turn, the old Operetta House building was demolished in the summer of **1950** to make way for *Adam House*.

“The new building, comprising four storeys, basement and sub-basement, rises 66 feet from Chambers Street and extends 105 feet towards Hastie’s Close in the Cowgate, where its height is 94 feet. Each storey contains a large hall; and in the basement is a small and very modern theatre/cinema with room for an audience of 218, and with a removable fore-stage as well as the 25 feet wide main stage.

The first floor has been equipped with a special ballroom floor and the top storey has been fitted for use also as an Art Gallery. Throughout the building it is hoped to display the *Torrie Bequest* of paintings and bronzes, made to the University by Sir **James Erskine** in **1824.**

The housing of examinations is, of course, the chief function of *Adam House*, but the University intends also to hold some of its classes and public lectures.

The theatre and other four halls provide accommodation for a total of over 1,400. The large modern kitchen will be used when the University holds balls and dinners.

Architects: Messrs Rowand Anderson, Kininmonth & Paul, 16 Rutland Square.

Main Contractors: Wm. Gerrard & Sons, Building; A.C. Wood & Son, Painting; Adam Currie & Sons Ltd., Joiners; W. Allan Smith, Electrical Engineers; D. & J. Borthwick, Plasters; McDonald & Creswick Ltd., Bronze Finishers;

Clerk of Works, Mr F.B. Adair, 6 Hermand Street, Edinburgh”

Note: When *Adam House* closes for the night, I have no doubt the ghosts of the Old Gaiety will strut across the stage and that Charlie Chaplin will chase some of the lovelies of the screen. The Old Gaiety and Operetta House have a fitting memorial in the shape of the theatre/cinema within *Adam House*.

#### **14: ST. STEPHEN STREET SITE**

*Tivoli Theatre opened on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1901; The Grand Theatre opened on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1904; Building used as a Riding Academy prior to the opening of the Grand Picture House on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1920; The Grand Cinema closed in 1960.*

*News, Saturday November 9<sup>th</sup> 1901*

***“TIVOLI THEATRE  
ST STEPHEN STREET, STOCKBRIDGE***

**Lessee Mr Weldon Watts**

**WILL OPEN ON MONDAY NEXT, NOVEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> 1901**

**With C. and F. Renad’s World Famous Comedy**

***The Swiss Express***

**The theatre is constructed on the most modern up to date and improved lines  
Lighted and ventilated throughout by Electricity. Also perfect Hearing System.**

**Will be run on first-class lines at Popular Prices.**

**Absolutely one of the Safest Theatres in the Country**

**Doors Open at 7 o’clock. Commence at 7.30.**

**(Early Doors – 6.30)”**

*News, Tuesday, November 12<sup>th</sup> 1901*

**“Popular Prices: 2s.; 1s.; and 6d. Half Price at 9 o’clock**

**Seats can be booked at the Theatre, 10 till 3 .”**

*News Advice, Thursday, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1956*

Question: “....I have been informed that the *Grand Picture House*, St Stephen Street, was once a theatre, and that **Florrie Ford** played the Principal Part in the Pantomime *Cinderella*.”

Reply: “The *Grand Theatre* was opened on Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup> 1904, with the pantomime *Cinderella*. Principal parts were played by Miss **May Martin**; Miss **Millie**

**Englet, Miss Fanny Wright, Miss Vera Schlesinger. Miss Florrie Ford** did not appear in that Pantomime. Before being opened as the *Grand Cinema* on January 1<sup>st</sup> **1921**, the building was used as a *Riding Academy*” [See page 59 for my father’s reference to his seeing *Cinderella* in **1904** G.F.B.]

Note: I below that it was named *The Grand Picture House* and that it opened on Friday, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1920**, at 6 o’clock.

“It was”, continued the Reply, “opened in November, **1901** (no date given) as the *Tivoli*.

On Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup> **1902**, the theatre was closed for redecoration. It re-opened on Monday, July 28<sup>th</sup> **1902**, for twice-nightly performances. The early show was from 7 to 9, and the late show between 9 and 1045.

Artistes on the re-opening Bill were: **Nishihama Matson Group of Japanese Jugglers; Harry Bold; Bros. Huxter; Charles T. Crawford; Adeline and Lucy; Mons D’Musto;; Clotilde’s Performing Cockatoos; and Bonnie Goodwin and her Piccaninnies**

Prices of Admission: 1s.; 6d.; and 3d.”

As I did with the Chambers Street site, namely, *Gaiety/Moss’ Theatre of Varieties/ Operetta House*, so I will treat the St. Stephen Street site in the same manner, and follow on with the *Grand Picture House*, as extracted from the *News*, Monday, December 27<sup>th</sup> **1920**.

**“THE GRAND PICTURE HOUSE**

**ST STEPHEN STREET, STOCKBRIDGE  
(FIVE MINUTES FROM PRINCES STREET)**

**TO BE OPENED AS A FIRST-CLASS, UP-TO-DATE SUPER-CINEMA.**

**With a Double Feature Continuous Programme  
of the World’s Latest and Best Pictures**

**ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31<sup>ST</sup> 1920  
AT 6 O’CLOCK**

**Watch Papers for Full Particulars re Programmes, etc.”**

News, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1920

**“THE GRAND**

**Orchestral Music under the personal direction of Mr Tom C. Miller**

***The Vengeance of Durand* – 7 parts – featuring Alice Joyce**

***Bill Apperson’s Boy* – 5 Reels – featuring Jack Pickford”**

*The 1954 Kinematograph Year Book*, pages 415-416

“**Grand**, St Stephen Street, Edinburgh

Proprietor: Grand (Stockbridge), Ltd., 144 Renfield Street, Glasgow.

Seats: 1,650”

Mr **George Webster** was manager of the ***Roxburgh Picture House*** in Drummond Street, from the Spring of 1922 until December 1923. He was the manager of the ***Grand, Stockbridge***, from January 1924 until May 1944. Mr Webster became manager of ***The State Picture House***, Great Junction Street, in May 1944 and is there as I write on July 16<sup>th</sup> 1963. He is the longest serving Cinema Manager in Edinburgh. I will have more to say about Mr Webster under Roxburgh Picture House.

News, Tuesday, May 24<sup>th</sup> 1960

The ***Grand Cinema***, Stockbridge, was among a list of cinemas which had closed. Others in that category were: ***Alhambra, Carlton and Beverley***.

## 15: KING'S THEATRE, LEVEN STREET

*Ground for Theatre obtained from Thomas J. Malcolmson, grocer, 1905; King's Theatre opened on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1906; Two houses nightly from 1911; Theatre acquired by A Stewart Cruickshanks, 1928; King's Theatre not to be a cinema, 1936; Bertha Cassie, Only Ofemale Switchboard Operator in Edinburgh, 1917-1937; Canopy changed at Main Entrance, 1950; Alterations to theatre seating, 1951; Memories of George Trotter, King's carpenter, 1906-1953; Retiral of Leonard de Renzi, manager of King's Theatre, 1963; 60 more seats for the King's, 1963*

*News Advice*, Tuesday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1951

“The ground on which the **King's** is built was taken from Thomas J. Malcolmson, grocer and wine merchants, 2 Leven Street in **1905**, and building began in the latter part of the year.  
Memorial Stone

Dr **Andrew Carnegie** laid the memorial stone of the **King's Theatre** on Saturday, August 18<sup>th</sup> **1906**. Copies of the current *Evening News* along with a handful of coins were placed under the stone.”

### Preliminary Opening Notice

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, November 27<sup>th</sup> 1906

“**KING'S THEATRE**

**LEVEN STREET EDINBURGH**

**MANAGING DIRECTOR MR. R.C. BUCHANAN**

**THIS MAGNIFICENT THEATRE WILL OPEN ON**

**SATURDAY, 8<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER AT 7 p.m.**

**With the GORGEOUS PANTOMIME**

***CINDERELLA***

**Produced by arrangement with Mr Robert Courtneidge (father of Cicely)**

**The Company includes Mr Dan Rolyat (in reverse it spells Taylor, his correct name)  
And Miss Phyllis Dare (at that time aged 17 years)**

**Prices of Admission: Private Boxes, £2.2s.0d., £1.11s.6d., and £1.1s.0d;  
Dress Circle, 5s. & 4s.; Orchestra Stalls, 4s.;  
Family Circle, 2s.; (if reserved 3s.); Pit, 1s.; Gallery, 6d.**

**Early Doors to Family Circle, Pit and Gallery, 6d. extra  
Matinees Saturday at 2.**

**The plan at Mr R.W.Pentland, Music Seller, Frederick Street”**

The Pantomime *Cinderella* ran for 14 weeks.

Note: The Managing Director, Mr **R.C. Buchanan**, was a Treasurer of the City of Edinburgh Town Council. He owned a ‘string’ of cinemas in the city, including the *Coliseum*, 1911 Fountainbridge, *Palladium*, 1912, East Fountainbridge; *Princess Cinema*, Princes Street, etc. He also had large London interests.

*The Scotsman*, Monday, September 18<sup>th</sup> 1911

### **“KING’S THEATRE**

### **IMPORTANT NOTICE**

**On and after TONIGHT there will be  
TWO HOUSES NIGHTLY at 6.50 and 9 o’clock**

**WEE GEORGIE WOOD, HAMPTON AND BAUMAN  
DAVE CARTER**

**KING’S BIOSCOPE (i.e. Cinematograph or movies)**

**Prices: Orchestra Stalls, 2s.; Pit Stalls, 1s. 6d.; Dress Circle, 1s.6d.;  
Family Circle, 1s.; Pit, 6d; Gallery, 3d.**

I have shown this advertisement to record the admission prices.

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, April 21<sup>st</sup> 1945 I have selected from the article “Theatrical Jubilee”, the part dealing with the *King’s Theatre*.

“The *King’s Theatre*, Edinburgh, built by W.Stewart Cruickshank & Son (Duff Street Edinburgh) was opened on December 8<sup>th</sup> 1906, and acquired in 1928 by **A. Stewart Cruickshank**, who had been a partner in the building firm and had entered upon management at that theatre, then becoming managing director of **Howard & Wyndham**.

Mr A. Stewart Cruickshank and his son are on the board of companies controlling the **Stoll** group of theatres and a number of theatres in London.

In February of this year Mr Cruickshank was appointed Chairman of Howard & Wyndham (established 1895).

*Dispatch*, Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup> 1936

### **“King’s not to be a cinema**

An announcement was made to the Press that three of the theatres in the **Howard & Wyndham** circuits, including the King’s, are being wired for taking films, does not mean the end of the stage shows or that of the theatres will be converted into super cinemas. It was stated at the **King’s Theatre**, Edinburgh, last night, Friday, June 5<sup>th</sup> 1936, that although plans had been made for the wiring of the theatres, this did not indicate a change of policy but was the means of preparing for an emergency.

During the past season several theatrical productions had been cancelled, and the theatre had been in difficulties to find suitable productions. On such occasions, and possibly during the summer and at other times, it would be useful if the theatres were wired for the presentation of talking films.

It was stated that the wiring of the theatres might be done, in the case of Edinburgh, during the close period, but no definite arrangements had yet been made”

*People’s Journal*, Saturday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1937 A precis

### **“Only woman Switchboard Operator in Edinburgh**

This unique honour fell to Mrs **Bertha Cassie**, popularly known as Bertha.

Mrs Cassie started in the King’s as a cleaner in 1917. At the end of six months **Mr Taylor**, the chief electrician, told her he was going to promote her to the perch – the little balcony in the wings from which the spotlight is worked. Her first week coincided with the appearance of the famous (ballet dancer) **Pavlova**. (I saw **Pavlova** in the *Hippodrome. New York*, in 1916, a few months after my discharge from the Army.)

Bertha was going full steam ahead at the Switchboard at the end of 1937, having by that time, 20 years’ experience behind her.”

*News*, Wednesday, June 28<sup>th</sup> 1950

### **“New Look**

The entrance to the **King’s Theatre** has taken on a new look in the past day or two. Workmen have removed the canopy which for more than 40 years has served to provide shelter for patrons arriving by cab or taxi, and the metal pillars at the pavement’s edge have gone.

A new canopy will be constructed on the cantilever principle, thus giving a more spacious appearance to the entrance. The work is scheduled to be completed before the beginning of the *Festival*. The balconies at the entrances to the Pit and Gallery have also been removed and will not be replaced.”

*Dispatch*, Saturday, May 12<sup>th</sup> 1951

### **“The King’s Ready for the Festival**

#### **To be open in time for the Glyndebourne Opera**

The top Gallery will no longer exist. The final plan for the Upper Circle will not be completed.

The owners regret the inconvenience that will be caused by the elimination of the many cheaper priced seats.”

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup> 1951

### **“Extensive Alterations at the King’s**

With the exception of the *1951 Edinburgh Festival* period, the **King’s** was closed for structural alterations for almost ten months. It opened on Friday, December 14<sup>th</sup> 1951, with the pantomime *Puss In Boots*.

The “Gods” or Gallery was eliminated

The alterations were carried out in the Upper Circle section of the house, which has an extended upper section of some 300 seats now known as the Family Circle, separated from the Upper Circle by a broad gangway.

This was the first major alteration in the theatre since it opened in December 1906. The total seating capacity is just over 1,500, 300 less than it was in its old form.

The Architects were: Rowand Anderson, Kininmonth and Paul”

*Dispatch*, Tuesday, December 29<sup>th</sup> 1953

### **“The King’s Carpenter Has Memories**

**George Trotter**, carpenter at the King’s has memories of helping to carry the great and at that time frail, **Sarah Bernhardt** on to the stage in one of her last appearances in the city.

He joined the staff of the theatre in 1906, its opening year, and has remained there ever since except for a three-year spell in the Army. His work has brought him into contact with many leading players through the decades, among them: **Matheson Lang; Seymour Hicks; Ellaline Terris; Dame Sybil Thorndike** he regards as ‘one of the best’.

One of his duties is working the trapdoor on which **Bruce McClure**, the genie of the lamp, appears in the *Aladdin* pantomime. Mr Trotter pays tribute to the way in which Mr McClure is always ready on the trap, facilitating the rise dead on cue.”

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, January 30<sup>th</sup> 1963

**“Manager of the King’s Theatre To Retire**

Mr **Leonard de Renzi**, who will have spent 50 years in the theatre world by the early part of next month, is to retire as manager of the *King’s Theatre*, Edinburgh, at the end of the present run of *A Wish For Jamie*.

Mr de Renzi has been manager of the *King’s* for 12 years.”

*Dispatch*, Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup> 1963

**“More Seats for King’s**

A warrant to carry out alterations to the *King’s Theatre*, Edinburgh, has been granted to **Howard & Wyndham, Ltd.**, at the Dean of Guild Court in Edinburgh.

The main alteration will be the provision of two rows of seats, about 60, at the back of the Grand Circle.”

**16: GROVE STREET THEATRES  
FROM MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15<sup>TH</sup> 1897 TO SATURDAY JUNE 4<sup>TH</sup> 1921**

*NewPavilion Theatre opened 15<sup>th</sup> February 1897, later entitled “Pavilion Theatre”; Moving Pictures shown in Pavilion Theatre, the “Piv”, 1902; Prince of Wales Theatre of Varieties, opened 12<sup>th</sup> March 1906; Alhambra Theatre of Varieties, opened 1<sup>st</sup> October 1906; Pringle’s Picture Palace opened 16 October 1908; Garrick Theatre opened 31<sup>st</sup> December 1917; Entertainment Tax introduced during 1914-18 War; Garrick Theatre destroyed by fire 4<sup>th</sup> June 1921; Martin’s Bakery on the old Theatre Site*

It will be seen that **Grove Street** was an amusement centre for 24 years. I feel, however, that it is necessary to correct a statement that appeared in *News Advice*, Thursday, April 6<sup>th</sup> 1961.

“Name of an old Edinburgh Theatre

M.M.J. writes: “Following the reference in your columns to the *Pavilion Theatre* in Grove Street, am I not correct in saying that the correct name of this theatre was the *Garrick*?”

Reply: “ The building was for some time used as a cinema. Between **1897 and 1906** it was known as the *Pavilion Theatre*. In **1906** it became the *Prince of Wales Theatre of Varieties*, after which it was changed to the *Alhambra Theatre of Varieties*.

The theatre was taken over in **1913-14** by **Pringle’s Picture Palaces Ltd.**, and in **1917** it was opened by **Edinburgh Varieties Ltd.**, as the *Garrick Theatre*.

The theatre was destroyed by fire on Saturday, June 4<sup>th</sup> **1921**.”

My research into the ‘Grove Street Houses’ differs somewhat from the *News Advice* account. I will record the five Houses in chronological order, giving source and date of opening in every instance.

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, February 11<sup>th</sup> **1897**

**NEW PAVILION THEATRE, GROVE STREET EDINBURGH**

**INAUGURAL PERFORMANCE MONDAY, 15<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY,**

**GRAND OPENING ATTRACTION**

**SPECIAL ENGAGEMENT OF**

**JOHN L. LUNDIE’S**

**GREAT ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN COMBINATION**

**In the Enormously successful Antipodean Drama**

***THE GREAT BANK ROBBERY***

**Popular Prices: 4d. to 3s.**

**Doors Open at 7 (Early Doors at 6.45) Commence at 7.30**

**Box Office at Theatre, 11 to 1 daily.”**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, May 29<sup>th</sup> 1897

**“Pavilion Theatre - Grove Street**

**To-night *Greed of Gold* To-night**

**After this Evening the Theatre will be Closed until August,  
to allow of Finally Completing the Building.”**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1898 This is included so as to give details of the Theatre Personnel.

**“Pavilion Theatre - Grove Street**

**Proprietors                                      Edinburgh Pavilion Ltd.**

**Managing Director                          P. Sturrock Campbell**

**Assistant Business Manager and Musical Director  
T. Ellis, A.C.V.**

**Scenic Artist                                  A. Middlemiss**

**Property Master                              Claude Dicken**

**Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1898  
And during the Week**

**TWO GRAND PIECES**

***CALLED BACK* and**

***ROBBING ROBIN HOOD & BABES IN THE WOOD***

**Doors Open 7 Commence at 7.30**

**Admission: Balcony Chairs, 2s.; Orchestra Stalls, 1s.; Balcony, 1s.; and Pit , 6d.”**

Note: “New” has been dropped from the title of the Theatre; also the change in Admission Prices.

News, Monday, July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1900

**“Pavilion Theatre  
Closed for Summer Vacation  
Re-opening Early in the Autumn”**

News, Monday, August 13<sup>th</sup> 1900

**“PAVILION THEATRE  
MONDAY, AUGUST 13, 1900, and ONWARDS  
*THE STRESS*”**

**CINEMATOGRAPH COMES TO THE PAVILION**

News, Monday December 15<sup>th</sup> 1902

**“PAVILION THEATRE  
HILLCOATS’ FAMOUS CINEMATOGRAPH  
AND  
GRAND VARIETY”**

Many other ‘Bills’ could have been given about the *Pavilion Theatre*. This is given simply to draw attention to **Moving Pictures** being shown at an early date, in, what was known in the Grove Street district, as the *Piv*, in the same manner as the *Operetta House*, *Chambers Street*, was known as the *O.P.*

Time brings the inevitable change and, after nine years, a new name appeared above the door.

News, Tuesday, March 6<sup>th</sup> 1906

**“PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE OF VARIETIES  
GROVE STREET - EDINBURGH  
WILL OPEN ON MONDAY, MARCH 12<sup>TH</sup> 1906  
With  
POWERFUL VARIETY COMPANY  
NEW MANAGEMENT NEW SCENERY  
FULL AND EFFICIENT ORCHESTRA”**

*News*, Friday, March 9<sup>th</sup> 1906 Gives the above, plus the Cast and Prices.

**“Adelina; Geo.S. Adams; Fred Collins; Vaudevilles; Blanch Gerard; Ougenco;  
The Percys; Kathleen Maria; Geo. Bohee**

**Doors Open at 7, Commence 7.30  
Half an Hour Earlier on Saturdays**

**Prices of Admission: 4d.; 6d.; 9d.; 1s.; 1s.6d.; and 2s.6d.**

**Half Time prices at 9 o'clock: 6d.; 9d.; and 1s.6d.**

Someone once said, “Changes are Lightsome....” In the case of the Grove Street Theatres that appears to have a certain amount of truth, for example, we learn from the *News*, Saturday, September 28<sup>th</sup> 1906:

**“After a period of Six Months the Name is Changed to**

***ALHAMBRA THEATRE OF VARIETIES***

***(LATE PRINCE OF WALES)***

**GROVE STREET - EDINBURGH**

**NEW MANAGEMENT**

**COMMENCING, MONDAY, OCTOBER 1<sup>ST</sup> 1906**

**TWICE NIGHTLY AT 7 AND 9**

**MONSTER PROGRAMME**

**3 ZARACS, LILIAN TRAVELLI, ANDY FAGAN, SWAN AND HUNTER, SAM  
DACTRON, THE LADDERITIES, NATALLIE AND SISTERS TERRY**

**First House      Doors Open 6.30, Commence, 6.50  
Second House    Doors Open 8.45, Commence, 9**

**People's Popular Prices: 3d., 6d., 1s., and 2s.”**

Two years after the opening of the *Alhambra* the time had come for a complete change, that is, from the **Live Stage** to the **Silver Screen**, and that the change over was highly successful for a number of years was proved to be correct. The new name was ....

News, Monday, November 9<sup>th</sup> 1908

**“PRINGLE’S PICTURE PALACE**

**LATE ALHAMBRA - GROVE STREET**

**GRAND OPENING**

**MONDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER (1908) and  
DURING THE WEEK**

**RALPH PRINGLE’S ANIMATED PICTURE COMPANY**

**ENTIRELY RE-DECORATED AND UPHOLSTERED**

**Prices: Gallery, 2d., Circle, 3d., Pit 4d., Stalls, 6d.**

**Early Doors; “ 3d., “ 4d., “ 6d., “ 9d.”**

**Ralph Pringle** was no stranger in the entertainment business as is shown in the advertisements in the *News*, Thursday, October 3 **1907** and Tuesday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> **1907**, given on page 77. **Ralph Pringle** was mentioned in the *News*, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1910**, in connection with *Pringle’s Picture Palace, Elm Row*, which is another story.

In the *News*, Thursday, January 5<sup>th</sup> **1911**, there were advertisements for both the Pringle’s establishments, Grove Street and Elm Row. This may have happened frequently; I simply give a specific instance.

**Wrong Dates in the Press**

As a rule the Press are very careful about giving dates; however, a person may retain a cutting such as that from the *News Advice*, page 140, and get into senseless arguments about this or that being the correct date (in particular the *News* advising that *Pringle’s Picture Palace* opened in **1913-14**, whereas the correct date was November 9<sup>th</sup> **1908**), when obviously it is simply the mistake of a cub reporter, in the first instance. Well, who else is there to blame?

**Still another name to complete the cycle – Why?**

*Pringle’s Picture Palace* had shot its bolt late in **1917**.

The First World War (started August 4<sup>th</sup> **1914**), had still to undergo its worst fighting when, in March **1918**, **Field Marshal Haig** said, “Our Backs are to the Wall.” It was a grim period; that we won the Last Battle is in the History Books. Yet, once again – December **1917**, was the time selected to change the name of the Grove Street House.

Had *Pringle’s* pictures lost the power to attract? Or was it that too many men had left the district to join the Colours? Or was it because a number of new picture houses had been built just prior to the First War in **1914**? I will mention a few:

*Haymarket, Dalry Road, 1912; Tivoli, Gorgie Road, 1913; Four in Princes Street – The Picture House, at No. 111, 1910, Princess’, at No 131, 1912, The New, at No 56, 1913, The Palace, at No 15, 1913*

As well as a number in the *Sooth Side*.

Then again, what was suitable in the Gay Nineties and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, simply did not measure up thereafter. In any case, a New Theatre did open...

*News*, Monday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1917.

**“GARRICK THEATRE**

**GROVE STREET HAYMARKET**

**OPENING MONDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1917**

**6.50 AND 9**

**MATINEES AT 2.30 O’CLOCK ON NEW YEAR’S DAY  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 2, AND SATURDAY JANUARY 5 1918**

**The Edinburgh Varieties Ltd., late Lessees of the The Theatre Royal, now control the above theatre, which has been entirely resealed, tastefully decorated, and well appointed, and they hope, by giving their patrons the same class of Variety Entertainment as they have given to the public for the last four years, to earn their continued patronage and support**

**THE REVUE OF THE MOMENT**

**Mr H.J.Sinclair and Miss Queenie Crase  
Present the New and Up-to-Date Revue**

***HULLO BABY***

**In three scenes**

**Scene 1 - PICCADILLY CIRCUS**

**Scene 2 - A HOSPITAL WARD I FRANCE**

**Scene 3 – INTERIOR OF VICTORIA STATION, LONDON**

**The soldiers who appear in the Hospital Scene and Victoria Station are all convalescent or discharged Soldiers who have done their bit overseas.**

**THE THREE KILTY GIRLS**

## THE FOUR ROYAL GORDONS

**Prices (Including Tax): Orchestra Stalls, 1s.10d.; Circle, 1s.3d.; Pit Stalls, 8d.”**

Notes: As an ‘Old Soldier’ the crack about ‘convalescent’ Soldiers is just a bit of *Flannel*. To describe Grove Street, which runs North and South between Fountainbridge and Morrison Street, as being in Haymarket, was simply a piece of *Kidology*.

### ENTERTAINMENT TAX,

It will be noted that the price of admission included “Tax”. This was Entertainment Tax which had been levied to help pay for the **1914-18** War; the Tax did not stop until May 30<sup>th</sup> **1954**. The following table shows how the Gross Admission Price was whittled away by Taxes; these are but a sample.

Gross Admission	Tax	Trade Levy	Net to Exhibitor
9d.	½d.	¼ d.	8 ¼ d.
1s. 0d	2d.	¼ d.	9 ¾ d.
3s. 0d.	1s. 3d.	¾ d.	1s. 8 ¼ d.
5s. 0d.	2s. 4d	¾ d.	2s. 7 ¼ d.
10s. 0d.	4s. 8 ½ d	¾ d.	5s. 2 ¾ d.
13s. 0d.	6s. 1d.	¾ d.	6s. 10 ¼ d

How each penny from 9d. to 2s. increased in Entertainment Tax

9d.	½ d.	¼ d.	8 ¼ d.
10d.	1 d.	¼ d.	8 ¾ d
11d	1 ½ d.	¼ d	9 ¼ d.
1s. 0d	2 d.	¼ d.	9 ¾ d
1s. 1d.	2 ½ d	¾ d.	9 ¾ d
1s. 2d.	3 ¼ d.	¾ d.	10 d.
1s. 3d	4d.	¾ d.	10 ¼ d
1s. 4d.	4 ½ d.	¾ d.	10 ¾ d.
1s. 5d.	5 ¼ d.	¾ d.	11 d.
1s. 6d.	6d.	¾ d.	11 ¼ d.
1s. 7d.	6 ½ d.	¾ d.	11 ¾ d
1s. 8d.	7 ¼ d.	¾ d.	1s. 0d
1s. 9d.	8d.	¾ d.	1s. 0 ¼ d.
1s. 10 d.	8 ½ d.	¾ d.	1s. 0 ¾ d.
1s. 11d.	9 ¼ d.	¾ d.	1s. 1d.
2s. 0d.	10d.	¾ d.	1s. 1 ¼ d.

The Tax might well have been known as the *Power of the Farthing* which, incidentally, ceased to be a coin of the Realm on January 1<sup>st</sup> **1963**.

Little more remains to be told about the Grove Street Houses. The building was destroyed by fire on Saturday, June 4<sup>th</sup> **1921**. The site is now occupied by **Martin**, the firm of Bakers.

### 17: OPERETTA HOUSE, 23 WATERLOO PLACE

*William Howard's Operetta House, 1861; Prince of Wales Operetta House; The Christy's Minstrels, 1863; The Theatre closed about 1878*

Strictly this theatre belonged to Mr **J.C.Dibdin**'s sphere of interest. I will content myself by listing some extracts from local newspapers. For the above reason this is one of the few Theatres I did not trace to its source. Fifty years of pain is slowly taking its toll [My father was a 100% War Disabled Pensioner, as a result of being wounded at Gallipoli in May 1915. G.F.B.]

*Dispatch*, Tuesday, March 21<sup>st</sup> 1950

#### “WILLIAM HOWARD'S OPERETTA HOUSE 23 WATERLOO PLACE

Previously the **Waterloo Reading Rooms**, it was acquired as a Theatre in 1861. [The site was first occupied by the **Waterloo Hotel**, which was erected in **1819**, the first large purpose made hotel in the city. In the wing was the long Ionic-columned dining room, later adapted as an operetta house – it was partitioned off as the North British Railway office in **1894**. The building is now (**2000**) a City of Edinburgh Office. Sources: A.J. Youngson's "The Making of Classical Edinburgh" and Gifford, McWilliam and Walker's "Edinburgh THE BUILDINGS OF SCOTLAND" G.F.B.]

The auditorium of the *Operetta House* was upstairs. It was a long room, not very wide, with a semi-circle of raised seats at the back. It had a small stage – where **Christy Minstrels**, dioramas, and variety concerts of all kinds were produced. It was a family house, that is, anything of an objectionable nature on the stage was discouraged.

The entry in the Street Directory for **1868/69**, for 22 Waterloo Place was "*Prince of Wales Operetta House*." Originally called *William Howard's Operetta House*, it was later named the *Prince of Wales*.

It ceased to function as a Theatre about **1878**. The **Signet Library** possesses an interesting collection of its old Play Bills.

Reproduced in *The Scotsman*, February 11<sup>th</sup> **1963**, originally published in *The Scotsman*, Monday, February 9<sup>th</sup> **1863**

*"The Christy Minstrels* On Saturday the Christy's Minstrels gave their first morning entertainment in the Waterloo Rooms in the presence of a crowded audience. The performance was most successful and was deservedly rewarded with hearty applause. The troupe are to continue their performances during the present and ensuing week."

"Footnote: The troupe originated by **Edwin P. Christy**, a Philadelphian, were first called the **Virginian Minstrels**. Their success when they came to London set the fashion of that form of time, and at the head of his profession, as a master in providing the public with that

peculiar and now almost non-existent type of entertainment known as the blackface or negro minstrelsy.”

I reproduce on page 73 an **1876** Play Bill relating to *Poole's Operetta House, Waterloo Place*.

## 18: ST. MARY'S STREET HALL

*Production of 'Shaughraun', 1878; How Willie Sangster, pianist, caused a free for all by playing 'Boyne Water'; Harry Lauder's first professional engagement at a Saturday Night Concert; The Star Picture House, 'The Starry'.*

I first came across the *St Mary's Street Hall* in the *Edinburgh Courant*, Tuesday, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1878.

### "ST MARY'S STREET HALL

**Reproduction of the *Shaughraun* by the**

**Dramatic Association of the Catholic Young Men's Society**

**Tonight, Tuesday and Tomorrow**

**Doors Open at 7 o'clock. Commence 7.30.**

**Prices of Admission: 2s.; 1s.; and 6d."**

I made enquiries about when the Hall became the property of the Roman Catholic Church, from the Very Rev. **Roger Canon Gallagher**, of St.Patrick's Church, 40 High Street. Unfortunately he could not give me the information I sought. However, I append some of Councillor **Wilson McLaren**'s reminiscences about the Hall.

"It (the area) had a predominantly Irish population and, very naturally, the audiences who frequented the Hall were adherents of the Catholic faith

#### The Pianist's Joke

The orchestra consisted of a piano, played by a blind man named **Willie Sangster**; although blind he was a bit of a wag. On this occasion he had just finished playing the *Overture* and before the stage performance began, Willie, out of sheer devilment, played *Boyne Water*. This was too much for the Irish audience, and the balloon went up. A free fight followed and at any time that could mean real trouble."

Mr McLaren, who was present at the time of the incident, tipped off the money-taker to make a run for it, which he did, with his pockets filled with coppers. That finished Mr McLaren's tenancy with the St Mary's Street Hall.

When reading McLaren's reminiscences, one had to jot down likely 'bits' for future reference. Such a one is anent the one and only

### **HARRY LAUDER**

**Harry Lauder** got his first 'professional engagement' in *St Mary's Street Hall*, at one of the Saturday Night Concerts. Lauder was booked as an unknown singer; his fee was 7s.6d. Out of this sum the comedian had to pay his own return fare to Glasgow, which cost 2s.6d. Contrast the above 7s.6d. when for an hour on the radio in the 1930's, he received the then unheard of fee of £1,500.

Through the decades the Hall has been used to house many functions, such as amateur drama, dancing, concerts and boxing

### ***STAR PICTURE HOUSE, 16 St MARY'S STREET***

I never saw an advertisement in the Local Press for the *Star*, but ample evidence exists to show that it was, indeed, a picture house. The Street Directories from 1914-15 to 1924-25 inclusive, bear mute testimony to the fact, and, if further proof were needed, I quote an extract from the **1915** *Kinematograph Year Book*.

"Proprietor: "Star Picture House Co.  
Seats: 700."

In the neighbourhood it was known as *The Starry*. Its close-down was greatly missed by many of the older residents to whom I spoke at various times. One old lady remarked, "It was cheaper to spend a night in the *Starry* than in the pub."

As I write in July, **1963**, the Hall is still the property of the Roman Catholic Church.

## 19: CENTRAL HALL, TOLLCROSS

*The West End Mission Services in The Albert Hall and Synod Hall, 1888-1901; Central Hall, Tollcross, opened 1901; First Cinematograph Show in Central Hall, 1901; Problems posed by an outside exhibitor, 1907; New Year Concert and Cinematograph, 1912; Author's memories of singing in the Central Hall Choir, 1910 to 1915, and of the Rev. Frank Benson; Popular Saturday Concerts.*

*News*, Saturday, September 21<sup>st</sup> **1901**

“The Rev. **George Jackson** and his coadjutors in the West End Mission have been going from success to success since the Mission began in the *Albert Hall* in November **1888**. From 1890 services were held in the larger in the *Synod Hall*.

The *Wesleyan Methodists* purchased ground from the Corporation, and on 17 October **1901** will take possession of their new premises.

The site cost £20,000. Building and Furnishing will add £30,000. It is reckoned that about £25,000 applies to the shops, leaving £25,000 to be found.

There are seats for 2,000: 1,200 in the Area, 700 in the Gallery and 100 on the Platform. The Lecture Hall seats 350 and is to be used for the Sunday School

First Sister was **Emmeline Todd**, who resides along with the caretaker on the top floor.

The stone is from Doddington Quarry near Wooler.

The Principal Contractors: Messrs. S.&R. Slater, masons and joiners; David Fisher, plasterer; Knox & Sons, plumbers; Muirhead & Sons, painters; Finlay & Co., electricians, who also fitted up the projectors.

Architects: Messrs. Dunn & Finlay.”

## **Opening Services**

*News*, Wednesday, October 16<sup>th</sup> 1901

### **“Public Notices**

#### **Wesleyan Methodist Mission**

### **Opening Services**

**Thursday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 11 a.m. Dedicatory Service**

**Preacher: Rev. Dr. Robertson Nicol**

**6 p.m. Addresses by Representatives of other Churches.  
Rev. Dr. Cameron Lees; Rev. Principal Rainny; Rev. Canon Ellis**

**Chairman: R.W. Perks, Esq., M.P.**

**Evening 7.30 Great Public Meeting**

**Revs. J. Williams Butcher, Dinsdale T. Young and others**

**ALL SEATS FREE**

**£5,000 urgently needed. Donations thankfully received by  
Rev. George Jackson, 34 Newbattle Terrace.”**

### **First Moving Pictures at Tollcross**

*News*, Saturday, September 21<sup>st</sup> 1901

### **“Central Hall, Tollcross**

#### **Cinematograph**

**Fraser’s and Elrick’s Royal Cinematograph**

**To-day at 3 and 8**

**Prices: 2s.; 1s.; and 6d. at Fleming’s, Earl Grey Street.”**

It will be seen that the Rev. George Jackson lost no time putting into execution his plans for showing moving pictures in the Central Hall.

The Hall was **not** to be confused with a Cinema House. From time to time during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, moving pictures were shown in the lovely Tollcross Mission Hall.

The Hall is mentioned in the **1915** *Kinematograph Year Book*, page 468:

“Tollcross, Central Hall  
Proprietor: **C.T. Nightingale**”

Mr Nightingale was a solicitor and was Secretary to the Trustees who had responsibility for the property comprising the Central Hall Mission.

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, January 1<sup>st</sup> **1912**

### **Cinematograph Exhibitions**

The Saturday Concerts were not the only form of entertainment in the Hall. There were “cinematograph exhibitions” which appear not to have been completely trouble free. An outside exhibitor leased the Hall for performances but the Leaders eventually stopped them in **1907** after difficulty in collecting the rent and concern about “the nature of the entertainment”. They did resume in **1909** under more direct control of the Mission and after the Hall had been altered to meet the provisions of the new Cinematograph Act. In **1903** weekly Gospel Lantern Slide Lectures were held for a time but there is no indication of the popularity of this event. [This paragraph was extracted in March **2000** from “For The Making of Good Men and Women The story of the Edinburgh Methodist Mission 1888-1988”, by kind permission of the Rev. **David Cooper**, Superintendent of Central Hall, Edinburgh G.F.B.]

### **“Central Hall, New Year Concert and Cinematograph**

Entertainments. Artists taking part: **Philip Malcolm**, baritone; **Augustus Beddie**, elocutionist.”

Note: Philip Malcolm was for a time an assistant to his father, a blacksmith, whose place of business stood where the Boys’ Brigade Headquarters in Victoria Street now stand. I had a number of singing lessons from Mr Malcolm at his home in Grindlay Street, top flat.

I have happy memories of the ***Central Hall***. I sang in the choir from May **1910** until I left the Marine Gardens in March **1915** for the Dardanelles.

‘Daddy’ **Caie** was the conductor of the choir and his son Tom was the organist. Tom never lived to achieve his ambition, namely, to play the mighty ***Usher Hall*** organ. A plaque to his memory is affixed to the organ structure. In the early days the organ manual was on the platform, at the right side. A number of years ago (writing in July **1963**) it was transferred to the floor of the Hall, dead centre and facing the choir.

The Rev. **Frank Benson** was the Superintendent of the Mission when I first became associated with the Central Hall. He was, in every sense of the word, huge; as a preacher he had few equals. There were two such men in the city at that time: The Rev. **John Kelman** of St. George’s, Shandwick Place and Mr Benson.

Both had the same approach when expounding the **Message**. They would open the **Book** and read the **Text**; thereafter, they closed the **Book** and forthwith proceeded with their sermons, without notes, or as we would say today, *Off the cuff*.

Not only did both those great preachers preach; they taught. A common phrase which both used was *For example*, and would then go into detail about an abstruse subject. I learned a great deal from those men of the **Cloth**.

During the first half of the second decade, that is up to **1915**, seats were at a premium in the **Central Hall** on Sunday evenings. It was the rule to bring chairs from the Lecture Hall to accommodate the overflow.

When I lay in Birmingham 17<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, within the University Buildings, Mr tough Benson paid me two visits in June **1915**. He had been transferred to *Brum* in **1913**.

The *Popular Saturday Concerts* carried on during the **1920's** but a falling off started with the introduction of Radio. The following are some of the artistes I remember with affection: **Robert Burnett**, baritone – he was the No. 1 in Scotland; **Catherine Mentiplay**, contralto; **Agnes Bartholemew**, elocutionist; **Scott Skinner**, ‘Scotch’ violinist, who always appeared in full Highland costume.

Many Institutions and Associations hold meetings in the Hall because of its central position in the city. For a number of years *The Store* (St Cuthbert's Co-operative Association) has held their Members' Meetings in the Hall.

## 20: 41 ELM ROW

*Pre 1911, a Roller Skating Rink; Pringle's Picture Palace opened 1911; Disorder in and theft from the Picture Palace, 1914; A benevolent door-man; Atmospheric Theatre, 1929; Pringle's Theatre, 1931; The Studio Theatre, 1932; Repertory Theatre, 1933; Festival Theatre, 1935; Broadway Theatre, 1936; Gateway Theatre, 1946*

Prior to the site becoming a picture house, it had been a ***Roller Skating Rink***, known as the ***Belle-Vue***; see Chapter 33: Skating Rink. ***Pringle's Picture Palace*** was a household name in Leith Walk for close on 20 years; and even in **1963** I hear ***Pringle's*** mentioned by some of my cronies. While I was never in ***Pringle's***, I have a soft spot for it, as it was there that my mother and a few of her neighbours paid a weekly visit, without fail, until she migrated to Kansas in **1919**.

*News*, Saturday December 31<sup>st</sup> **1910**

### “PRINGLE’S NEW PICTURE PALACE

ELM ROW, LEITH WALK

OPENS MONDAY JANUARY 2<sup>ND</sup> (1911)

POPULAR PRICES: 2d.; 4d.; and 6d.

BIG PICTURE SHOW

*THE ENGINEER’S DAUGHTER*

*ANARCHISTS & THE LONDON POLICE & SCOTS GUARDS*  
*AT HOUNDSDITCH* (Churchill was Home Secretary) *LEADING THE ATTACK*

*THE BANKER’S DAUGHTER*

*THE SEPOY’S WIFE*

-----

NELLIE WATSON, THE FAMOUS SONGSTRESS

SANDY AND CARL, PANTOMIME FAVOURITES

HOLIDAY PROGRAMME

Monday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> at 2, 4, 7 and 9

Tuesday, January 3<sup>rd</sup> at 3, 7 and 9

Wednesday, January 4<sup>th</sup> at 3, 7 and 9

Thursday January 5<sup>th</sup> at 7 and 9

Friday, January 6<sup>th</sup> at 7 and 9

**Saturday, January 7<sup>th</sup> at 3, 7 and 9”**

For the record I append a few extracts from the **1915 Kinematograph Year Book**.

Page 90, “ May 1914 New Companies Registered in 1914  
Elm Row Palace, Edinburgh (1914) Ltd.  
Capital, £10,000 in £1 shares.”

Page 468 “***Pringle’s Picture Palace, 42, Elm Row***  
Proprietor: Elm Row Palace (Edinburgh), Ltd.  
Seats: 850.”

Page 195 “Disorderly Persons  
Edinburgh Police Court: A youth was charged and convicted with scattering  
A noxious powder causing the audience to sneeze in the Elm Row Theatre.

Admonished and placed under a £2 caution – January 19<sup>th</sup> **1914**, page 29.”

Note: The date January 19<sup>th</sup> **1914** is, in turn, an extract from a *Cinema* publication where the case was reported in full.

Page 202 “Picture House Passes  
At Edinburgh, Hugh Donaldson and William Ronaldson were fined £2 (or 29 days) for stealing passes from ***Pringle’s Picture Palace***, and selling them.”

Yes, we had our bad lads in those far off days; indeed, they are present in every generation.

**Like a Field Marshall**

The door-man at ***Pringle’s*** was dressed like a Field Marshall. He was a huge man, handsome and kindly; many an old comrade he passed in on the ‘nod’.

*News*, Monday, January 6<sup>th</sup> **1930**

**“ATMOSPHERIC THEATRE, ELM ROW”**

This was ***Pringle’s*** disguised by the above name; and was so named during **1929**.

*News*, Monday, February, **1931**

**“PRINGLE’S THEATRE**

**ELM ROW, LEITH WALK**

**6.45 TWICE NIGHTLY 8.45**

**THE NEW ROAD SHOW**

***PUNCH AND PEP***

Featuring  
CARR AND FINCH, COMEDIANS  
TWO CARRS, REAL DANCERS  
NELLIE FORBES, COMEDIENNE  
THE SIX VICTORIA GIRLS  
AND SUPPORTING COMPANY

Prices: 6d. and 1s.”

*News*, Saturday, February 20<sup>th</sup> 1932

“THE STUDIO THEATRE, EDINBURGH

COMENCING TUESDAY, 1<sup>ST</sup> MARCH,  
AND DURING THE WEEK AT 8 P.M.

*THE INFINITE SHOEBLACK*

BY NORMAN MacOWN

Prices (including Tax): 3s.; 2s.; 1s. and 7d.

Box Office: 10 to 9. ‘Phone 27288”

Note: Miss **Millicent Ward** made her first appearance in Edinburgh with her Company at the *Studio Theatre*. I feature Miss Ward in the chapter dealing with the *Palladium Theatre*.

*News*, Thursday, December 21<sup>st</sup> 1933

“REPERTORY THEATRE

ELM ROW at 8

Prices: 3s.; 2s. and 1s.3d.”

This was the first Advertisement to appear about the *Repertory*.

*News*, Saturday, October 12<sup>th</sup> 1935

**“FESTIVAL THEATRE  
ELM ROW      LEITH WALK**

**LESSEES: THE FESTIVAL THEATRE (EDIN.) LTD.**

**OPENING WEEK  
COMMENCING MONDAY, 14 OCTOBER 1935  
FOR SIX NIGHTS**

***YOUTH AT THE HELM*  
BY RUPERT GRIFFITH**

**Prices: Reserved: 3s. and 2s.    Unreserved: 1s.**

**Councillor Will Y. Darling will perform the Opening Ceremony”**

Note: **Will Y. Darling** was in business as a Draper at Nos. 124 and 125 Princes Street. He was M.P. for South Edinburgh. He had a term as Lord Provost of Edinburgh. In his will he left a sum of £2,500, the accrued interest to be gifted to an Edinburgh citizen who had done most for the city. A panel was set up to choose such a citizen

*News*, Friday, November 27<sup>th</sup> 1936

**“FESTIVAL THEATRE  
CLOSES TONIGHT”**

*News*, Saturday, November 28<sup>th</sup> 1936

**“BROADWAY THEATRE  
(LATE FESTIVAL THEATRE)**

**TONIGHT 6.50 AND 8.50**

***PLEASURE BOUND***

**With HOPE AND LANG**

**Next Week at 7 and 9, Saturday 6.50 and 8.50**

## **THE MILTONIANS OF 1936**

**Tommy Loman, Bert Mack, Lex McLean** (still going strong as I write in July 1963),  
**Jimmy Reid, Reg White, Douglas & Evans, Royallan, Carr & Vane**

**Miltonian Girls and Miltonian Boys**

**At Cinema Prices: 6d., 9d., 1s. and 1s.6d.**

**Children Half Price**

**'Phone 22657'**

## **THE GATEWAY THEATRE**

**OPENED THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17 1946**

**FOR BUSINESS ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 21 1946**

*News*, Friday, October 18<sup>th</sup> **1946** From *Our Turret Window*

### **"The Gateway, Elm Row**

Donated to the Church of Scotland by an Edinburgh business man, Mr **A.G. Anderson**, will open to the public on Monday, October 21<sup>st</sup> **1946**. It is handsomely appointed, with the emphasis on the patron's comfort, even to the extent of the provision of a promenade café. The **Gateway** will be used as a cinema to show commercial films and as a theatre for the presentation of plays of a high standard. The Christmas attraction will be a new play written by a well-known Scottish playwright and presented by a distinguished cast. Adjoining the Theatre is a Youth Centre, also donated by Mr Anderson with the theatre project, which will be run for the benefit of the young people of the district."

On page 5 of the same issue of the *News*, there appeared a photograph of the platform party, which included Mr **Joseph Westwood**, Secretary of State for Scotland, who formally opened the **Gateway Cinema**.

*News*, Wednesday, October 16<sup>th</sup> **1946** First advertisement

**"The GATEWAY 41 ELM ROW**

**OPENS MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1946**

**FILM PROGRAMME ONCE NIGHTLY - 7.30**

**OUR TOWN AND WE OF THE WEST RIDING ETC.**

**PRICES: 2s.3d.; 1s.6d. AND 1s. BOOKING IN ADVANCE**  
**BOX OFFICE, 10 to 6., SATURDAYS, 10 to 1. Telephone 22657"**

## **“Church cinema opened**

### **Good wishes for the new Edinburgh venture**

**The Gateway** the Church of Scotland’s new cinema and theatre in Elm Row Edinburgh, was opened yesterday amid the good wishes of representatives of the Church, the State, the City and the Film Industry.

“We hope to show films that will be just a little different, “ said the Rev. Dr. **W. White Anderson**, convener of the Church of Scotland Home Board, who presided. “They would not be purely religious films, and they would be entertaining and of a high moral tone.” He expressed the thanks of the Church to the donor, Mr. **A. G. Anderson**, of Edinburgh, whose gift also consisted of a Community Centre for Youth.

In declaring **The Gateway** open Mr. **Joseph Westwood**, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland, welcomed the venture as a sign that the Church, whose attitude to the Film Industry had at one time been negative rather than constructive, was not afraid to grasp an opportunity of using the stage and screen for its own purposes. It had “noted the shortcomings of the cinema”, he said, “without adapting for its own needs the advantages of this great popular medium. The film was what one made of it, superficial or deep, according to the purposes one served and the inspiration with which one served them.”

The Very Rev. **A. T. Campbell**, who represented the Moderator, wished *God Speed* on behalf of the Church of Scotland, and emphasised that the experiment was being watched with interest all over Scotland.

Lord Provost Sir **John Falconer** said, “that the Cinema might be an instrument of real social advancement if the Church could direct public taste and desire to a drama and literature which was stimulating, elevating, and cleansing.”

Mr. **A.S. Albin**, of the Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association, offered the support of the East of Scotland section of which he is Chairman.

The Rev. **George Candlish** is to be Director of **The Gateway** and the manager is Miss **Sadie R. Aitken**.”

The Rev **Candlish** wrote to me on April 8<sup>th</sup> 1963, and said, *inter alia*, “...The gift consisted of shops, houses, a billiard saloon and **The Broadway**. Its value was not stated or estimated at the time of the gift, nor is it at present known accurately. The only way to get it would be to ‘test the market’ which we do not intend to do!

The gift came into the possession of the Church of Scotland about a year and a half before the Opening Date.”

There is no reason I know of why **The Gateway** should not be a Cinema/Theatre in the year 2000 and beyond . G. B.

## **21: PALLADIUM THEATRE, EAST FOUNTAINBRIDGE**

*Building opened by John Henry Cooke as a Circus in 1886; Used mainly as a Circus until it closed in 1911; Used as a picture house from 1911 to 1932; Pinder's Royal Circus, 1932; Millicent Ward and friends transformed the premises into a theatre in 1933; Dan Campbell appointed manager of the Theatre in 1942*

The present building known as the *Palladium Theatre* was built for, and opened as, a *Circus* on Monday, November 8<sup>th</sup> **1886** by **John Henry Cooke**. The Circus closed on Saturday, February **1911**, and almost overnight became a *picture house*. In turn, it ceased to be a picture house as shown in the *News*, Saturday, August 13<sup>th</sup> **1932**:

### **“PALLADIUM, EAST FOUNTAINBRIDGE**

**5.30 to 10.30**

***MISCHIEF & THE SKY SPIDER***

**ADDED ATTRACTIONS -**

**PETE MARSH AND HIS AEOLIAN DANCE BAND**

**VARIETY – JACK ROSS, DAME COMEDIAN”**

(This was the last “Picture” advertisement for the Palladium, known in the district as the *Pall.*)

*News* Tuesday, December 27<sup>th</sup> **1932**

### **“PALLADIUM**

**PINDER’S ROYAL CIRCUS**

**Beautiful Horses, Acrobats, High Stilt Walkers, The Funniest of Clowns, etc**

**Prices: 6d., 1s.6d., and 2s.1d.**

**Telephone 27874**

**NO CONNECTION WITH THE LATE JOHN HENRY COOKE”**

In years to come the above advertisement could be the basis for a trick question, “In what year did the Circus close down in East Fountainbridge?”

In a footnote on page 156 I mention Miss **Millicent Ward** in connection with the *The Studio Theatre, Elm Row*. She was the driving force behind the *Palladium Theatre* venture.

On Thursday, October 18<sup>th</sup>, **1962**, I had coffee with Miss Millicent Ward and her husband Mr Bruce in their home at 40 Montpelier, Edinburgh, when I received the following *gen* about the start of the Palladium Theatre:

Early in **1932** an attempt was made by a number of persons who were interested in the “Stage” to transform the premises into a theatre; unfortunately the project fell through. It may be added the persons who were interested in the project were not Troupers!

#### Miss Millicent Ward

For some 18 months Miss Ward and her Company appeared at the Studio Theatre, Elm Row; “The Show Must Go On”. After the failure in 1932 Miss Ward was invited to ‘have a go’ to complete the job. Miss Ward was fortunate that two of her friends were prepared to back the venture. The entire Company, along with some professional assistance, succeeded in building the stage and much needed dressing rooms. The seating accommodation was altered to conform with theatre standards.

During the alterations Miss Ward applied to the Corporation to install a gas heating system. The Corporation turned down her plea; as a consequence, the Palladium Theatre opened on Saturday December 30<sup>th</sup>, **1933**, with the temperature near freezing point. The venture was almost killed at birth. Nothing daunted, Miss Ward made another application to the Corporation to install a gas heating system; this was a successful.

Miss Ward and her Company remained at the Palladium until she left for a season at Her Majesty's Theatre, Carlisle, on Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> April, **1935**.

Miss Ward gave me a brochure containing the information anent her season in Carlisle. The brochure has a number of photographs of the cast and Miss Ward kindly autographed it. In due course it will be lodged in the Edinburgh Room.

*News*, Thursday, December 21<sup>st</sup> **1933**

#### **“PALLADIUM THEATRE, FOUNTAINBRIDGE**

#### **EDINBURGH’S NEWEST AND MOST COMFORTABLE THEATRE**

**OPENING SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1933.**

**TWO MATINEES, MONDAY AND TUESDAY AT 2.30**

**MILLICENT WARD and her repertory players  
With full LONDON COMPANY**

***LORD RICHARD IN THE PANTRY***

**Prices, including Tax: Orchestra Stalls, 3s., Stalls, 2s.,  
Circle, 1s., and Side Circle, 7d.”**

***PALLADIUM THEATRE***

**Mr Daniel Livingstone Campbell**

Better known as Dan, he is a good mixer, both among theatre people and in Women's Guilds. He was with the 9th H.L.I., one of the first Territorial battalions to land in France in November **1914**.

Early in the **1930s** he formed his own company of 12 artistes touring Scotland from north to south.

In **1942** he became manager of the *Palladium*, since when he has made life more pleasant for those on and behind the stage. He always has a cheery word for patrons.

Many well-known Scots comics have been before the Footlights of the *Pall*, among whom were: **Alec Finlay, Dave Willis, Andy Stewart** and **Duncan MacCrae** who frequently appeared in straight plays. The record for the longest period of top box-office returns was made by **Lex Maclean** - 25 weeks.

**22: TRAVERSE THEATRE CLUB**

**JAMES COURT, LAWNMARKET**

**OPENED JANUARY 2<sup>nd</sup> 1963**

It will never become a full-blown theatre; the space is so restricted that there is no room for expansion. It is well to record it, so that its future progress may be kept under review.

The above may be termed Omega? as I know not of any other such theatres which are, or may have existed, in Edinburgh.

A special feature, however, will be made of Leith Theatres of which there were quite a number in the days that have gone. Alas, as I write in **1963**, July, not one is left standing.

## 23: CHURCH TO BE THEATRE

### MORNINGSIDE HIGH CONVERSION AGREED, 1963

[Subsequently entitled *The Church Hill Theatre* G.F.B. ]

*The Scotsman*, Friday 26th July 1963 page 13

“The adaptation of a disused Edinburgh church as a theatre and art centre, at a cost of over £70,000, was approved by Edinburgh at Town Council yesterday. The former Morningside High Church, bought last year after the *Little Theatre* (Pleasance - University Settlement) ceased to be available, will be converted to a 440 seat theatre suitable for amateur and professional productions.

When bought, it was estimated that the capital expenditure would be £50,000, including the purchase price of £6,500. A scheme was submitted but at an estimated cost of £80,607. A revised scheme with an estimated cost of £70,607 which would provide the theatre, a hall suitable for bazaars, badminton and dancing, and a modern three-bedroom house for a caretaker, was put forward to the Council for approval by the Lord Provost’s Committee.

Councillor **R. Smith** moved remittal, which was withdrawn when Lord Provost **Duncan Weatherstone** said the scheme did not exclude what might happen at a later date. Mr **James Gallacher**, chairman of the Arts Centre of Edinburgh Ltd. - a company set up by amateur groups in the City - expressed delight at the decision and predicted it would bring fresh life to the amateur theatre in the city.

Mr **W. Gordon Smith**, a BBC's television producer and vice chairman of the Arts Centre, said the decision was virtually the ‘last chance’ for amateurs in Edinburgh.

## 24: COOKE'S CIRCUS

### THE STORY OF COOKE'S CIRCUS IN EDINBURGH

1835 to 1911

*Meeting with Cora Ledingham, grand-daughter of John Henry Cooke, 1963; Article on John Henry Cooke's notable career, 1917; Cooke's Circus, Lothian Road, 1835; Cooke's Circus at Nicolson Street, 1846 and 1858; Cooke's Equestrian Palace, Grindlay Street, 1877 – 1883; Itinerary undertaken in 1881; Cooke's Royal Circus, Fountainbridge, 1886; Recollections of John Henry Cooke in Aberdeen, 1917; Cooke's Circus in Arbroath, 1897; Cooke's Hippodrome, Glasgow, 1903; Visit by children from Poorhouses, to Cooke's Circus, 1897; Cooke's Circuses in Leith, see also Chapter 32; Reminiscences of Leicester Alfred Cooke, 1936; Death of Leicester Alfred Cooke, 1954; One of Cooke's last programmes, 1910; Cooke's Circus used as a picture house, 1908 and by Poole's Myriorama, 1898; Circus closed on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1911 – opened as a picture house later that year; Memorial Seat to John Henry Cooke in Princes Street.*

I had the pleasure to meet Mrs **Cora Ledingham**, daughter of Talbot William Cooke, and granddaughter of John Henry Cooke, at her home, 52 Broughton Street, on Monday, 14th January, **1963**. Over a cup of tea I learned a great deal about the Cook family which has never been published.

While the story, or history, deals in the main with the circus, the spotlight is drawn on the driving force – Mr CIRCUS -, namely

**John Henry Cooke**  
**Born in New York, Wednesday, 27th January, 1836**  
**Died in Edinburgh, Wednesday, August 2 1917**

It was during the first World War, I had only recently returned to Civvy Street after a mauling from the Turks that John Henry Cooke died.

The Press although hard-pressed for space through shortage of newsprint nevertheless, gave a great deal of space to the most notable and charming figure in the Circus profession, who had been in the ring for over 70 years. His passing left a void which has never been filled in Scotland. His name will be remembered along with the Greats of the Sawdust Ring.

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1917

### **“The late John Henry Cooke**

#### **Circus proprietor's notable career**

John Henry Cooke, the well-known circus proprietor, died yesterday at his residence in Edinburgh (31 Gillespie Crescent) after a long illness which had confined him to his house for over three years. His career was a notable one. He circus ancestry which went back to the time of his great-grand-father, who founded the business which for many generations was recognised as something akin to an Edinburgh institution. The founder of what came to be a famous name in the entertainment world was Mr Thomas Cooke.

Each succeeding generation of the family was associated with the circus business, and the father of John Henry Cooke had a long and popular career in where he lived and worked and gained the high esteem of inhabitants for many years.. And John Henry, himself, who has now passed away at the ripe old age of over 80 years, was also a much respected citizen of the Scottish capital. As far as Edinburgh was concerned, the circus business of the Cookes started on the site of the Caledonian Station Hotel in Princes Street, was carried on later in Nicolson Street, where the Empire Theatre now stands, then in Grindlay Street, where the Lyceum now is, until it found its headquarters in East Fountainbridge, where it remained for something like a quarter of a century. Of the whole Cooke family, John Henry had perhaps the most varied career. Like his father and other ancestors, he was born in the profession, and he early displayed a love of daring and adventure. He was born in New York in 1836, and at the age of five was an expert tight - rope walker. Brought up among horses and ponies, he soon became, and continued to be, an adept equestrian for half a century.

He visited many countries, including the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Till well over 70 years of the age he was actively engaged in the management of the circus establishment, which toured practically the whole of Scotland. Mr Cooke, who was of a most genial and sociable disposition, always spoke in kindly terms of the people of Edinburgh, and his house of entertainment was frequented by folks in all classes of society; high and low, the rich and poor, old and young. Many members of the Scottish nobility and aristocracy were included among his patrons, and of the members of royalty before whom he performed were Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at Buckingham Palace, and Emperor Napoleon III, Empress Eugenie, and the Prince Imperial, in Paris. He had a large experience in dealing with animals, which he treated with great kindness and patience, and Queen Victoria sent horses to be trained by him on several occasions. His widow, who also was in the profession, survives him, and three sons and two daughters, all of whom were associated with him in the circus business in Fountainbridge.”

Note: In all the circus had a five different names: first Cooke's; then Cooke's Circus Royal ; next Cooke Brothers' Circus; then Cooke's Royal Circus and finished in 1911, as John Henry Cooke's Royal Circus

*Evening Dispatch*, Thursday, August 9<sup>th</sup> **1917**

Extracts from a long article on the life of John Henry Cooke.

**“With Hengler’s and Sanger’s**

He commenced travelling with his father, and was with Hengler’s and Sanger’s companies through England Scotland, and Ireland. He was altogether 12 years with Mr Charles Hengler,.... and it was while on a tour in Glasgow with this show that he made a name for himself as a pugilist. He has been all over the world, with the exception of a Russia and China, and visited America no less than nine times. For over two years he was principal artist and equestrian director at the Cirques D’Ete and d’Hiver, Paris

**Cooke’s Racing Colours**

Lord Roseberry was often a visitor at Grindlay Street. On one occasion Cooke was riding in a jockey act, and as he was showing Lord Roseberry round the stables one night he remarked, “My Lord, you are a racing man. Will you allow me to race in your colours?” “Certainly”, replied his Lordship. “And that is why” Cooke used to tell his friends, “I made use of Lord Roseberry’s racing colours for years.”

*Evening News*, August 8th, **1917**. In a tribute to John Henry Cooke said, inter alia,

“...After an illness which confined him to the house for over three years, will recall to thousands many a pleasant of hour spent in that popular place of entertainment in the East Fountainbridge. Mr Cooke was quite a personality in the City for a long period, and he was held in much esteem. Evidence of that was given in the readiness with which the public subscribed to the testimonial after his retirement when he was presented with a handsome sum.

He is survived by his widow, who was also in the circus profession and by his three sons, Leicester Alfred, Talbot, and Douglas, and his two graceful daughters, Ernestine Rosa and Edina Marion.”

From the Showman’s Paper, *The World’s Fair*, Saturday, February 7th, **1914**

**A famous circus proprietor, John Henry Cooke**

**Stories of interesting circus career**

John Henry Cooke has troops of friends, young and old and middle-aged, and there is not one of them, we’re sure, who can bear to think of him in want. The appeal that is being made by several well-known citizens of Edinburgh, therefore, will not fall upon unheeding ears, but, we are certain, will be responded to most generously by everybody in the City of Edinburgh who has pleasant thoughts of his genial personality for over half a century. The knowledge that in his old age he has found himself in financial straits will stir all classes to contribute of their means to place him in a position of comfort, says the *Edinburgh News*.

### Showing his mettle

Hengler's had taken up position in Glasgow Green, and around the show were the usual booths and stands. One morning before the show began John Henry happened to be in one of the sporting booths when a Londoner entered with a swagger, described by Cooke as that of one who was 'going to raise creation'. Seeing the men about he began to challenge all and sundry and to call them opprobrious names,

As no one appeared willing to accept a challenge, the Cockney approached Cooke, who was sitting quietly by, and offered him a shilling if he would stand up against him. . Cooke replied that he did not want to fight, and at that intruder called him a coward.

"I thought I could not exactly be killed," said Cooke afterwards, "so I accepted the challenge and put on the gloves."

In the meantime the Cockney ordered the attendants to bring a basin of water and a sponge, for the young man would need them.

Cooke at this time was exceptionally fit. The constant exercise of the ring, added to his pursuits in the various departments of sport, had hardened his muscles to an altogether unusual extent. He sparred lightly at first with his opponent, who soon became irritated at his inability to get home a blow. At last, seeing his chance, the Londoner made a lunge and hit Cooke on the head, the blow making Cooke's teeth jar. This roused the circus man. Always the essence of politeness, he quietly remarked, "Oh! It's a fight you want," and with that he went into his opponent with a vigour and enthusiasm which soon had the Londoner helpless. Cooke called for the water, and going up to the prostrate fighter, bade him drink it, and then dashed it all over him with the remark, "It is you who needs it after all."

That was 50 years ago, and it helped wonderfully in his success. (The fight would have taken place according to the date of publication of the World's Fair in, in or about the year **1864**, when Cooke was aged 29 years.)

The last paragraph read, "The Cooke family is now represented by the sixth generation, and there are over 200 lineal descendants of the original founder of the circus scattered all over the earth. Alas, despite that huge number of descendants at 1914, the Cooke's Circus died on Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup> **1911** when it closed its doors in East Fountainbridge."

The foregoing pages feature the man - John Henry Cooke. From time to time as the story unfolds other bits and pieces will come to light anent his good deeds.

## THE CIRCUS WILL SOON BE HERE

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, September 5th, 1835. Price 7d.

### *“Cooke's Circus, Lothian Road.*

Most of the citizens are perhaps aware that a pavilion is at present in the course of erection at the South East [South West? G.F.B.] corner of the Lothian Road, for the purpose of being used as a circus, or an arena for equestrian exhibitions. We looked *en passant* the other day, and were much pleased with the indications which it gave of the future splendour of the building; it is only in progress yet. It occupies a square of about 80 feet. It is built of wood, in the most substantial and elegant manner. The diameter of the Ring is about 36 feet. The stalls for the horses are conveniently arranged on the north and south sides of the building, communicating with the circle, but separated from it by wooden partitions. There are also several dressing rooms adjoining the circle. The boxes seem to be situated at the front of the building, west side. A long gallery is erecting on the east side, and seats being fitted up all round. Gas is also introduced, and from the appearance the whole house exhibits at present we believe that it will be found, when finished, to combine ample accommodation with elegance and comfort.”

### Criticism of opening

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, 26th September, 1835

“Since the opening of *Cooke's Circus in Lothian Road* each division of the house has been crowded almost to suffocation.

Mr Cooke has operations in the city by an act which does high honour to his high honour and liberality, and which cannot fail to be duly appreciated by the citizens. He devoted the proceeds of Wednesday evening to that you humane institution, the *House of Refuge*

£70. 2s. 6d. donation

The dress boxes overflowed on the occasion with a brilliant assemblage of beauty and fashion, and the charity was also confessed he and aided by generous efforts of those visitors whose means enabled them to crowd to other parts of the circus, to the very ceiling. The handsome sum of £70. 2s. 6d. accruing on from this evening's performance, has been handed over to the treasurer of the House of Refuge. We may add, that the splendid fitting up of the circus excites universal admiration.

### Asylum of the Blind

Every article of furniture, we understand, such as matting, etc, was purchased from the Asylum of the Blind, as a further means of benefiting our charitable institutions, and we need scarcely repeat, that superior public talent such as is here exhibited, directed by charitable and humane management, is sure to meet its reward.”

The following advertisement includes the cast and the prices of admission: *The Edinburgh Evening Courant*, Monday, September 14th, 1835

**“Under the Special Patronage of their Majesties  
By Permission of the Lord Provost, Sir James Spittal**

**Cooke’s Royal Equestrian Establishment,  
that had the distinguished honour of performing before  
THEIR MAJESTIES  
who were graciously pleased to Patronise Mr Cooke’s Equestrian Representations given  
at the Brighton Pavilion and at which their Majesties expressed their highest  
gratification.”**

Mr Thomas Cooke, proprietor, respectfully informs the Nobility, Gentry, and Inhabitants of Edinburgh, that his

**Circus  
Lothian Road, Edinburgh  
Will open this present evening - (Monday September 14th, 1835)**

The whole of the entertainment in the Three Kingdoms. The performers will be produced with the utmost grandeur and peculiarity of effect, embodying, in the same evening, the most unequalled tax in the Circle and acrobatic evolutions of manly agility; extra-ordinary Horsemanship by Messrs. J. Cooke and **G. Woolford** first rate riders of the present day, who will appear is some choice Scenic Acts; together with the full display of the abilities of the beautiful stud of Horses, and wonderful Group of Burmese Ponies, with the astonishing performance of the Equestrian Prodigies; and a succession of Novelties which constitute one of the most varied, animated, and interesting spectacles ever presented to the British public.

For full details of performances, see Hand Bills.

Prices: Dress Circle, 3s.; Side Boxes, 2s.; Pit, 1s.; Gallery, 6d.

Children under 10 years of age: Dress Circle, 1s.6d.; Side Boxes, 1s.; No half-price to Pit or Gallery..

The Box Office is open daily, from the 11 to three o'clock, for the purpose of securing places.

Doors open at Half Past Six, and the performances commence at Half Past Seven o'clock precisely.

Season tickets may be had on the application at the Box Office, between the hours of 11 and 3.

Tuition in the Art of Riding given daily at the Circus; Cards of the Terms to be had at the Box Office.

Riding Master, Mr Smith”

Circuses - like the Sawdust Ring - also go round the country and the Cooke family did so in the 1800's, even as **Smarts' and Bertram Mills** did in **1938**, and **Chipperfields** which came to Edinburgh – see Chapter 32.

After the opening at Lothian Road in **1835** the next we hear about Cooke's Circus is related kept on page 3 of this book, when Cooke's Circus appeared at Nicolson Street during November, **1846**. Their next appearance that we read about is also at Nicolson Street, during March, **1858**, see page 4..

I show on page 173 one of Cooke's itineraries - as stated above, this was and is a feature of circus life.

We read in *The Edinburgh Courant*, Monday, February 12<sup>th</sup> **1877** (Preliminary Advertisement):

**“Cooke's Equestrian Palace  
(Grindlay Street)  
Lothian Road**

**Grand inauguration, Saturday Evening 24th February 1877**

**Seats can be booked on after 14th February, 1877”**

Second advertisement. *Courant*, Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup> **1877**

**“Special Notice to Advertisers.** A few spaces to let both in the Programmes and on the Walls of the Booking Offices. . All particulars to W. Gibbs, Business Manager, Royal Cirque. Lothian Road.”

*The Edinburgh Courant*, Saturday, February 24<sup>th</sup> **1877**

**“Cooke's Royal Circus**

**Grindlay Street,Lothian Road, Edinburgh**

**Grand inauguration**

**Saturday evening, 24th February, 1877.**

**The Brothers Cooke have great pleasure in announcing that they will open their Grand Equestrian Palace this evening, with the company of artists, horses, ponies, etc, far superior to any that have ever appeared in Edinburgh. Prominent in the list of names will be Messrs French and Harris, and Mlle. Rose, the Magnificent Russian Skaters, David Abbey Seal, the champion leaper of the World.**

**\*John Henry Cooke, the celebrated equestrian.**

**Herr Gustave Scaffer, The Extraordinary Russian Rider.**

**Van de Velde and Leven, The Classic Athletes.**

**\* Harry Welby Cooke, The Great Bareback Rider.  
Signor Alberto, The Wondrous Air-Bounder.**

**Alvaro and Alveno, The Wonderful Gymnasts.**

**\* Alfred Eugene Cooke, The Well-known Scenic Equestrian.**

**Rollando, The Lightning Tumbler.**

**\* Leicester Alfred, The British Foxhunter**

**Eureka, The Marvellous Contortionist.**

**D.A. Seal, The Refined Wit and Jester**

**\* Ernestine Rosa, The Pet of the Public.**

**(All those marked with an \* were members of the Cooke family.)**

**The comfort of the audience has been studied in every particular, and will be found perfect.**

**Doors open at 7. Commence at 7.30.**

**Illuminated Day Performances, every Wednesday and Saturday.  
First matinee, Wednesday, 28th February.**

**Doors open at 2. Commence at 2.30.**

**Carriages may be ordered for the Evening at 10.15, and Day at 4.15.**

**Reserved seats can be secured in advance either at Messrs Woods, George Street, or at the Box Office of the Circus, open from 11 to 3 Daily.**

**Prices of Admission: Stalls, 3s.; Boxes, (select) 2s.;  
Pit and Promenade, 1s.; Gallery, 6d.**

**Half- price to Stalls and Boxes only.**

**Secretary, C H Reid  
Business Agent, Weston Gibbs  
Director of Amusements, J. H. Cooke  
Ring master, H. Channon  
Sole Proprietors, Brothers Cooke."**

It was the custom for Cooke's Circus to have Weekly Programmes printed at a charge of one penny. Not only was the of current 'Bill' in full, but 'Next Week's' programme, in part, was included. Cooke frequently resorted to what might be termed a gimmick in the 1860s., namely, the appearance of some of well-known personality would be advertised as, I expect, the guest of the 'house'.

I append extracts from such a programme:.

**“Cooke's Royal Circus  
Grindlay Street, Lothian Road ,  
Established 125 years  
Programme - No. 56. 24.12.1878.**

- 1. The Flower Girl, by Madame Elvira**
- 2. Gems of Ireland - Leicester Alfred and Ernestine Rosa.**
- 6. Caroline Ray - with her Arabian horse, *El Cid*.**
- 7. Comical August's Performing Jerusalem Steed, *Cuckoo*.**

**The matinee will conclude with the fairy spectacle *Cinderella*”**

Friday evening, 27th December, **1878**. On same programme.

**“Grand fashionable Bespeak,  
Under the distinguished patronage and presence of  
Sir John Woodcock, Bart. and Party**

**Monday evening, 30th December, 1878.  
The performances will be honoured by the  
patronage and presence of  
the Honourable Bouverie Primrose and Party.**

**Sole Proprietors , The Cooke Brothers**

**Number 56 Turner and Co, Printers, Lothian Road, Edinburgh. 24.12. 78”**

*Edinburgh Courant*, Tuesday, 12th April **1881**

I show part of the Bill from Cooke' Royal Circus, Grindlay Street

“Last night of the Season  
And benefit of Alfred Eugenie Cooke.

The circus will close after Tuesday, 12th April, **1881** and will take a complete tour of Scotland with their Mammoth Pavilions, a combination the greatest on earth.

***Cooke's Great Circus and Strasbourg's Monster Menagerie***

Thursday April 14<sup>th</sup> (1881), Dalkeith

Saturday April 16<sup>th</sup> , Peebles

**Error! Bookmark not defined.** Tuesday April 19<sup>th</sup> , Galashiels  
20<sup>th</sup> , Selkirk

Thursday April 21<sup>st</sup> , Melrose

Saturday April 23<sup>rd</sup> , Jedburgh

Friday April 15<sup>th</sup> , Penicuik

Monday April 18<sup>th</sup> , Innerleithen

Wednesday April

Friday April 22<sup>nd</sup> , Kelso

Monday April 25<sup>th</sup> , Hawick”

*Edinburgh Courant*, Friday, February 2nd, 1883

**“Cooke Brothers  
Royal Circus  
Grindlay Street, Lothian Road, Edinburgh.  
Tonight, Friday, 2nd February, 1883  
Positively the last night of the present season  
When will take place the complimentary benefit of John Henry Cooke  
Under the distinguished patronage of the Lord Provost of Edinburgh,  
George Harrison and Magistrates.**

This was indeed the last night of Cooke’s Circus in Grindlay Street.

Although I made an exhaustive search for a criticism of the above show, billed as the “Last Night”, none was to be found, **and**, in view of the fact that the Lyceum Theatre opened for business on Monday, 10th September, **1883**.

From the time of the “Last Night” of the Circus, it only left seven months in which to demolish the Circus, clear the site, erect the handsome buildings and have it open for Monday, September 10th, **1883**.

Note: It is a great pity the ghosts of those old builders could not give the 1960’s builders an injection - HOW TO DO IT. G B

To make room for the *Lyceum* in Grindlay Street, Cooke’s third and last Edinburgh Circus was built.

*The Scotsman*, Friday, 5th November, **1886**. Preliminary notice.

**“John Henry Cooke’s New Royal Circus  
(off Lothian Road and Downie Place, Edinburgh)  
John Henry Cooke begs respectfully to announce that his  
Renowned Equestrian Establishment will  
Open on Monday, 8th November, 1886.**

**Under the patronage and presence of the right Honourable the Lord Provost and  
Magistrates of Edinburgh.**

**John Henry Cooke’s Great Company**

**Comprises the leading artists in the equestrian, gymnastics, and athletic professions.  
James H. Lee, Continental Somersault Rider; Leicester A. Cooke; Virginia – H. Gale -  
Fountainbleau – M Leotard - Henrietta - Carl - Belvina - T. Leotard - W. Leotard -**

**Caroline - Mr Ethridge - Josephine – Louis. Ernestine Rosa Cooke, Scotland's premier equestrienne. The talented and celebrated Jee family from Paris. Edina Marion Cooke, the infant Horse Breaker, aged 4 ½ years, on her pet pony, *Bon Accord* .**

**A beautiful stud of thoroughbred and highly trained horses and ponies, dogs, pigeons and goats.**

**A special feature will be the *Patent Ring Mat*. Most visitors to circus entertainment will at times have experienced annoyance from the mould or sawdust having been thrown up by the horses as they galloped round the arena . This will be avoided in John Henry Cooke's New Circus, as the entire Ring will be covered by a patent Mat, manufactured expressly, at great cost, by Messrs Treloar, of Ludgate Hill, London.**

**Illuminated morning performances every Wednesday and Saturday.  
First morning performance, Wednesday, 10th November, 1886.  
Doors open at 2; commence at 2-30; terminating at 4.15.**

**Doors open Every Evening at 7; commencing at 7.30. Terminating at 10.15.**

**Prices: Stalls, numbered and reserved, 3s.; Unreserved Chairs, 2s.; Amphitheatre, Balcony, and Promenade, 1s.; Gallery, 6d.  
(Entrance in High Riggs, leading from Tollcross and West Port)**

**Children under 12 years, half price to all parts (Gallery excepted )**

**Carriages to set down with horses' heads towards Spittal Street.**

**Carriages to take up with horses' heads towards Lothian Road .**

**Booking office at Messrs Wood and Co., George Street.**

**Second Price at 8.45, to 2s. and 3s. seats only.**

**SMOKING STRICTLY PROHIBITED.**

**Sole proprietor John Henry Cooke."**

**Criticism of the opening of Cooke's Circus**

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, November 9th, 1886

"Mr John Henry Cooke's success and enterprise as a caterer of public entertainment was seen by the programme he presented last night in the well-appointed Circus in East Fountainbridge

The occasion was the opening of the new building and there were present the Lord Provost Sir Thomas Clark and Lady Clark, surrounded in the stalls by a considerable representation of the members of the Corporation and not a few leading citizens and their friends. Exactly at half past seven, the ring master Mr **J P Butler**, and the assistants, stepped into the arena amid loud cheers. The band, under Mr **G Spencer** struck up the National Anthem. After which Mr **Harry Dale** came forward and recited the prologue, prepared by the business manager Mr

**Weston Gibbs**, Mr Cooke and his son. Leicester Alfred Cooke then appeared amid great cheering, and juggled. Miss Ernestine Rosa Cooke, who received more than one basket of magnificent flowers, as did the younger sister, Edina Marion Cooke, aged 4 ½ years.

Towards the close of the evening's entertainment Mr John Henry Cooke returned thanks for the support he had received."

An **appreciation** from one old friend of John Henry Cooke.

*The Aberdeen Daily Journal*, August 24 **1917**. Page 2

"Old Times and recollections, an old friend of Mr Cooke writes:

In the early **1850's**, Mr John Henry Cooke's father had his Circus in Market Street at the corner of that street and Hadden Street, and for several seasons ran most successful entertainments there on the usual circus lines. Mr John Henry Cooke was then a boy in his early teens, and with his brothers took an active part in the performances. It was also when the circus was in Market Street that Mr Cooke, senior, drove it single-handed through the streets a huge car (containing the band) pulled by sixty horses and ponies – more diversified in colour than in a double rainbow.

Cooke afterwards erected a more commodious and more permanent structure a little farther southward at Market Street and Guild Street. For several years great success attended Mr Cooke's efforts to instruct and amuse the public. Among his spectacular performances were: *St George and the Dragon*, the *Wild Horse of the Steppes* and also classic scenes from the Greek history. The Cooke family were always great favourites in Aberdeen and received unstinted patronage from the Aberdeen public."

I append a few extracts from the *Arbroath Guild*, 18th September**1897**.

"Cooke' Circus: Mr **John Henry Cooke** has a splendid programme on at the Circus this week. Mr **Andrew Whelan**, Miss **Agnes Senga**, Mr **Leicester Cooke** and his Fire defying Mustang *Phoenix* continue to provide delightful entertainment. New features are introduced. The **Brothers Leotard** have astonished large audiences by their performances as humorists and acrobats. The boxing display is splendid; but for astonishing cleverness the staircase performance excels anything of the kind ever seen in Arbroath. Talbert the Clown, takes a creditable share in this week's programme. As *Simple Simon* he is as diverting as usual.

The prettiest thing in the evening's entertainment, however, is *Little Red Riding Hood's* "Fairy Garden Party". The younger Miss Cooke plays the part of the Fairy Queen with most charming grace and skill.

Amongst the newcomers for a week will be **David Abbey Seal**, an old Arbroath favourite. As one of the cleverest jesters and most agile jumpers that ever appeared in the circus ring. Mr Seal made his name famous throughout the circus world.

His old friends are likely to give him a hearty reception, next week".

I quote from an old Cooke's programme, **1903**. This was a combination of four Stage turns and seven Ring turns.

***“Cooke's Hippodrome – Glasgow***

From Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee

Overture by Hippodrome Orchestra, Musical Director – H. Wamba  
Del-A Montanas, Comic Lions. Stage  
Um- Borella, Artistic Comedy Juggler. Stage  
Talberto and Douglas (Cooke's) New Continental Absurdities. Stage  
Rex Hecto, Remarkable Feats of Strength.  
Display of Intelligence and Cutreness of well trained pony, *Regent*. Ring  
“La Marquise de Pompadour”, A high Class Act, Miss Ernestine Rosa. Ring  
Comical Interlude, Clown Leo. Ring  
“Westward Ho and Homeward Bound” on Horseback, Leicester Alfred Cooke. Ring  
An Unapproachable Champion Principal Bareback . J.H. Swallow, Clown ...Benham. Ring  
Miss Iona Ginnet, in a Dashing Hurricane Hurdle Act. Ring  
Sensational Equestrian Act, by Entire Company in the Ring

***THE BRIGANDS***

Note: Autumn Holiday – Friday, September 18<sup>th</sup>. Special Day Performance, at 2.30”

Only Glasgow advertisements appeared in the programme

*The Scotsman* , Tuesday January 19<sup>th</sup> **1897**.

***“Cooke's Circus, Fountainbridge***

There was a large audience at Cooke's Circus last night, when the spectacle *Jack the Giant Killer* entered upon another week

By the kindness of Mr **Richard Clark**, Chairman of the Parish Council, the children in Craigleith (now Western General Hospital) and Craiglockhart (now Glenlockhart Hospital or Corporation Home) Poorhouses on Saturday last witnessed the entertainment at the circus. The performances afforded the children much enjoyment and they were afterwards driven back to Craigleith and Craiglockhart Poorhouses in brakes.”

Note: The above mentioned Poorhouses came under the wing of the state in July **1948**.

Details are given on page 12 of the circumstances under which John Henry Cooke loaned his Circus free of charge to ***Sam Hague's Minstrels*** in **1897**. On page 13 is a letter from H.E. Moss to John Henry Cooke setting out a Business Agreement between them . Mrs Ledingham gave me the original letter which I have lodged with the Edinburgh Room.

**COOKE'S LEITH CIRCUSES See Chapter 32**

**REMINISCENCES OF LEICESTER ALFRED COOKE**  
**IN AN INTERVIEW WITH A NEWS REPORTER**  
**RECALLS CIRCUS SPECTACLES**

*News* Saturday, December 26<sup>th</sup> 1936. The interview took place between shows at the *Kelvin Hall*, Glasgow.

**“THE MAN ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE**

“And here is something very few know “said Mr Cooke. “That very popular song about the man on the flying trapeze was composed expressly for my uncle, Alfred Eugene, when he was performing in Nicolson Street over 70 years ago. The chorus is the same today as it was then, but the verses have been altered.

**£1,000 CHALLENGE ACT**

His uncle, **Harry Welby**, and his father, **John Henry**, combined in one of the greatest circus tricks: a double juggling act on horseback. “My father stood backwards on a horse on which my uncle stood facing him. With plates on sticks, rubber balls, and various other articles, they juggled as the rode, throwing the objects from one to the other. That was a £1,000 Challenge Act, for that was the sum they offered to any other riders to perform the feat. The Challenge was open to the entire profession throughout the world. It was never taken up. In later years my father and I did it, and the challenge was still open.”

**FAMOUS WATER SPECTACLES**

Leicester Alfred himself is modest about his achievements, but admits that he cannot give up circus life. “When I am away from the horses”, he confessed, “I become irritable, and the only thing that can cure me is the ring.”

He was, writes the *News* reporter, responsible for the famous water spectacles which were seen for the first time in Edinburgh and which created a tremendous sensation.

“When we produced the water scene, the water was only a foot and a half deep. The scene was a comedy called *ALLY SLOPER’S HALF HOLIDAY*; it was picturesque and went down well with the crowd. From an island in the centre of the water two arched bridges stretched to the ring fence. We had half a dozen swans, a dozen geese, and two dozen ducks disporting themselves in the scene.”.

**A REAL STEAMER**

“The flooded ring was something new for the people, and they simply flocked to see it. The water was stored in tanks on the roof, and, when they were opened, it gushed down through two foot pipes and flooded the ring in 20 seconds. A steamer which looked enormous

in the ring, sailed about a under its own power, carrying about 10 passengers, and, in addition, there were five or six rowing boats and canoes.

That was only a start, however, of the water spectacles. We introduced the sinking ring, which gave us water 10 feet deep. The sinking ring had been used in Paris shows, but not for the shows we put on. In Paris, if they used water, it was only to let people swim in.

I can still remember the thrill of the first deep water spectacle. It was entitled *THE SCALP HUNTERS*. People came from all over to see the fight between the Cowboys and the Indians. The villains' lair was built about 16 feet above the ring. The scene was brought to a close when a dam in the hills was 'dynamited'. The stronghold and everything in the vicinity were swept away by the tremendous rush of water that followed. That scene was among my greatest triumphs, but it gave me more trouble than any other. The 'stage buildings' had to be erected 'stone by stone', and at Christmas and the New Year season, when there were several performances a day, it just took us all our time to be ready. No fewer than 40 men were in the squad of 'builders'.

The water scene went on year after a year, always different, of course, but it was not deserted by the children as they grew up. It was an attraction for everyone."

"The Scottish people were keen on the Circus." said Mr Cook. "When my father ran his circus his headquarters were in Edinburgh. After a good season there, the company went on tour, visiting Greenock, Perth, Aberdeen, Dundee and Paisley. Some of the places had permanent circus buildings, and a great feature was a canvas top which could be opened in a hot weather."

### **Death of Mr Leicester Alfred Cooke**

*The World's Fair*, Saturday, May 15<sup>th</sup> 1954

#### **"A circus veteran**

Circusdom will learn with deep regret of the passing of Mr Leicester Alfred Cooke, the eldest son of the late John Henry Cooke. After several years of indifferent health, Leicester passed away at his home in Glasgow on Wednesday, 5th May, **1954**, at the age of 88.

Leicester joined up with Messrs Schuman for a time and it was while presenting his strenuous jockey act, which he closed with a leaping over his three chargers, that he ruptured his heart.

His abilities as an outstanding rider gained him no mean degree of fame and proud was Leicester when he performed before royalty at Copenhagen in **1896**. The audience on that auspicious occasion included the King and Queen of Denmark, the Crown Prince and family, the Prince of Wales, the Czarina of Russia, the Duke of Orleans and the Crown Prince of Siam."

The Fairy Story of Cooke's Circus is almost told. I have at hand one of the last of Cooke's Programmes, dated for Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1910.

**“TEXAS  
A MEXICAN VADDETTA**

**IN ACTIVE PREPARATION.**

**THE GREATEST OF ALL THRILLING AND  
SPECTACULAR PRODUCTIONS**

**TEXAS  
DEALING WITH THE RISING IN THAT COUNTRY”**

The programme itself took up little space, 5” X 7”; the whole measured 15” X 10”, with two folds. The front panel 10 ½ “ X 5”, showed at the top a picture of John Henry Cooke, with the caption “Head of the Great Circus Organisation.” At the bottom of the panel was a picture of the façade, which is now the Palladium Theatre. In all 16 advertisements appeared in the Programme:

INMAN'S - THE LARGEST CHEMISTS, now amalgamated with Boots' Pure Drug Company (which, of course, dates the amalgamation)

HENDERSON - RINGS - 29 SOUTH BRIDGE

TAYLOR, ROYAL CIRCUS BAR, 161 LOTHIAN ROAD (Corner of Downie Place)

NIXON LTD. BILLPOSTERS FOR EDINBURGH, 30 ELDER STREET

FRY'S CHOCOLATE,  
ETC., ETC.

So that, in advertisements, there is History.

The programme in full:

**“JOHN HENRY COOKE'S CIRCUS – OFF LOTHIAN ROAD  
SATURDAY, 3<sup>rd</sup> DECEMBER 1910, AND DURING FOLLOWING WEEK**

- |    |                        |                                    |
|----|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. | SELECTIONS BY THE BAND | Conductor, Lieut. Harry Wamba      |
| 2. | MONS HARRY             | Hurricane Hurdle Act               |
| 3. | ALBINI                 | Acrobatic Grotesque                |
| 4. | FLORENCE LEONARD       | WHIMSICAL WALKER, THE KING'S CLOWN |
|    |                        | Equestrienna                       |
| 5. | LA BELLE SYLVIA WEST   | Dainty vocalist and Dancer         |
| 6. | HORTON AND ONDA        | Chinese Comedians                  |
| 7. | IONA GINNIT            | With Tiger Horse <i>Rajah</i>      |
| 8. | AUSTIN BOYS            | Bumpkin Fools                      |
| 9. | LYAL AND BERT          | Versatile Vaudevillians            |

- |     |                      |  |
|-----|----------------------|--|
| 10. | GEO. AND HARRY       | World's Champion Riders                        |
| 11. | THE TWO QUERIES      |  |
| 12. | LEO, THEA AND EDDIE  | Equilibrists and Jugglers                      |
| 13. | EDITH TUDORA         | And Wonderful ponies                           |
| 14. | ROSSANA              | Stilt Dancer                                   |
| 15. | FLORENCE LEONARD     | Continental Lady Jockey                        |
| 16. | SILLY ALBERT         | In Vocal Interlude                             |
| 17. | LILY AND ELSIE JUDGE | And Their Wonderful Cockatoos                  |
| 18. | THE FOUR WATSONS     | Society Musical Marvels                        |
| 19. | GILBERT EDWARDS      | Equestrian Sketch, <i>Point to Point Races</i> |
| 20. | "GOD SAVE THE KING"  |  |

MATINEES – WEDNESDAY AND SATURDAY. OPEN AT 2; START 2.30. EARLY DOORS 1.30

NIGHTLY AT 7.30. OPEN AT 7. EARLY DOORS, 6.30  
CARRIAGES AT 10

SEAT BOOKINGS AT METHVEN SIMPSON'S, PRINCES STREET

SOLE PROPRIETOR AND DIRECTOR: JOHN HENRY COOKE  
EQUESTRIAN DIRECTOR: LEON DOUGLAS COOKE  
MANAGER: TALBOT COOKE"

### **COOKE'S CIRCUS BECOMES A PICTURE PALACE IN 1908**

For many years there was a firm belief that it was only after Cooke's Circus closed down in **1911** that it became a Picture House; that such is not the case is shown in the following *News* advertisements.

*News*, Friday February 21<sup>st</sup> **1908**

**"Cooke's Circus  
Closing Saturday Evening Next  
14<sup>th</sup> and Last Week – Present Season"**

*News*, Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup> **1908**

***"Cooke's Circus***

***Picture Palace***

**Twice Nightly 7 and 9**

**THE ORIENT LIFE MOTION PICTURE CO.  
And VAUDEVILLES**

**GENERAL MANAGER AND CICERONE: W.C. BURNS**

**PRICES: Box Seats, 1s. 6d.; Tip-Up Seats, 1s.; Ring Chairs and Balcony, 6d.;  
Side Pits, 4d. Children Half Price. High Riggs, 3d. Children, 2d”**

Note: The *Silver Screen* was suspended from the ceiling about mid-centre of the Ring. This meant that the High Riggs patrons in particular saw the back of both the pictures and the caption of the *Silent* movies.

*News*, Thursday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1908

**Cooke’s Circus – Picture Palace**

**30<sup>th</sup> Week - Last Week but one of the Season,  
Commencing Saturday, November 21<sup>st</sup>.  
Last Week devoted to Competitions for Children. Prizes, £5. 5s. 0d.**

**Friday, October 30<sup>th</sup>,  
Gigantic Benefit to Mr Burns, Manager”**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, September 17<sup>th</sup> 1898

**“Cooke’s Royal Circus**

**Last Week**

**Positively Closing To-night, September 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Charles Poole’s Royal Myriorama**

**Gordon Highlanders at Dargai Etc,  
Every Evening at 8 p.m.  
Matinees Saturday at 3 p.m.  
Prices: 3s.; 2s.; 1s.; and 6d.”**

**The Saddest Day in the History of the Cooke Family**

I do not require to give *News* date of the closing – it is like one’s own birth date. I have appended a “near last programme” on page 180 in which there was no hint of the impending close down.

Despite it being the sixth generation of the Cooke’s in Circus Life, and a pool of over 200 lineal descendants, it was of no avail.

This was one case where “The Show Did Not Go On”. As we have seen, the old chief, John Henry Cooke, retired in poor circumstances and for the last three years of his life he was confined to his home in Gillespie Crescent, Edinburgh. I have happy memories of the Circus

when I was a boy 65 years ago. I also went there as a youth as I lived in the Tollcross area from **1910** to the outbreak of War in August **1914**.

Almost immediately after the Circus closed down on Saturday February 11<sup>th</sup> **1911**, it re-opened as a Picture House with our old friend **W. C. Burns** installed as manager. I append an extract from the *Kinematograph Year Book*, **1915**, page 500

“Picture Companies and Theatre Proprietors

The R.C. Buchanan Circuit, London Office  
9 Little King Street, Strand, W.C.

Edinburgh Office: Palladium, Edinburgh.

Managing Director: **R.C. Buchanan**.

General Manager: Bertram C. Grant.

Houses:

*Palladium*, Edinburgh

*Coliseum*, Edinburgh

*Princess Cinema*, Edinburgh”

Mr Buchanan was also identified with the King’s Theatre etc.. He was Treasurer of Edinburgh Town Council at the above period, or thereabouts. It was during **1911** that Mr Buchanan turned Cooke’s Circus into a picture house; well, at least, a place where moving pictures were shown.

### **Farewell to a Well Remembered House**

#### **Princes Street Memorial Seat to John Henry Cooke**

It is pleasing to record that one of the many seats gifted to the City is in Princes Street and carries the following inscription:

“John Henry Cooke,  
Cooke’s Royal Circus,  
1836 – 1917”

“1837” should, of course, read “1836”.

## 25: LEITH AMUSEMENTS FROM 1790

*'Tales and Traditions of Leith'* William Hutchison; *Decline in Leith's population, business and amusements; Greenside Village;*

**Theatres**, some of which became picture houses: Amphitheatre, Leith Walk, 1790; Assembly Rooms, Leith, 1864; Theatre, Junction Street, 1865; New Theatre, Bangor Road, 1887; Leith Music Hall, Market Street, 1865; Leith Theatricals, Bonnington Road/Junction Street, 1865; Leith Royal Music Hall, St Andrew's Street/Tolbooth Wynd, 1867; Theatre Royal MacArte's Temple of Varieties, South Junction Street, 1867; Whitfield Hall, 65 Leith Walk, 1874; New Star Music Hall, Foot of Leith Walk, 1874; Gaiety, Kirkgate, 1886, see also Chapter 12: The Gaiety, Kirkgate; New Theatre, Bangor Road, 1888; Iona Street Theatre, 1899; Alhambra Theatre of Varieties, Leith Walk, 1914 – closed as a cinema in 1958; Meetings with William Merrilees and James Cousins, 1963;

**Picture Houses in alphabetical order:** Alhambra, Leith Walk – see under Theatres; Allison, Laurie Street, 1944, see under Laurie Street Picture House; Cadona's Pictures and Varieties, Coalhill, 1912; meeting with Tom Oswald, M.P., 1962; ; Capitol Picture House, Manderston Street, 1928 – became a Bingo Club in 1961; Central Kinema, Hope Street, 1920; Cinema House, Tolbooth Wynd, 1913, briefly known as Leith Cinema; Empire Picture Palace, Henderson Street/Tolbooth Wynd, 1917; Falconer's Picture House, Jane Street, 1899; Imperial Electric Theatre, 123 Kirkgate, 1911 – later named Imperial Picture Theatre; Laurie Picture House, Laurie Street, 1931-1934, see under Laurie Street Picture House; Laurie Street Picture House – Named Leith Picture House ( 1911-1931 and 1934-1944), Laurie Picture House (1931-1934), Allison (1944); Leith Cinema, Tolbooth Wynd, The Cosy House, 1913 – see under The Cinema House; Leith Picture House, Laurie Street, 1911-1931, 1934-1944; Magnet, Parliament Street, 1913, formerly Cadona's Picture House; History of Coalhill area; Paddy's Coal Fauld, Paddy Faulkener's Picture House, Dudley Bank, 1908; Palace, Foot of the Walk, 1913; State Cinema, Great Junction Street, 1938; George Webster, manager of State Cinema; Swallow's Booth, Iona Street Show Ground – see under article on James Salvona

*Iona Street Shows, 1891; Meeting with James 'Willie' Salvona, 1963.*

**Circuses in Leith**, see Chapter 32: Circuses and Showgrounds

A few paragraphs from *Tales and Traditions of Leith* by **William Hutchison**, Leith. Charles Drummond, Printer, 133 Kirkgate. 30<sup>th</sup> April 1853.

**The Kirkgate (That was)** page 97

That the Kirkgate was 'something' in what might well be the beginning of time, can be seen in the next few minutes. That it was a street where, at least, one king and a number of nobles rubbed shoulders is 'kind o' hard' to believe as I write in the year 1963. It will, therefore, be like one of those films which winds back, meanwhile viewing the centuries as they slip by:

“Lord Balmerino formerly lived in the interesting Old House at the corner of Coatfield Lane in the Kirkgate. The original name was ‘Coitfield’, and referred to a piece of ground set apart for the game of *quoits*. There was a fine open space, part of the ancient garden, between it and Constitution Street

A sculptured stone is built into the east front of the house, next to Coatfield Lane, with armorial bearings and the date **1631**. The house was built by John Stewart, Earl of Carrick, second son of Robert, Earl of Orkney, natural son of James V in **1631**.

The Earl of Carrick sold the house and grounds on 13<sup>th</sup> September **1643** to John, Lord Balmerino. On Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> July **1650**, King Charles II lodged in the above house. In turn it was sold in **1755** to the Earl of Moray.

It passed through various hands and was eventually sold, in **1848**, to the Roman Catholic body for the purpose of being converted into schools. Previous to its purchase by the Roman Catholics the old house was sub-divided amongst a multitude of tenants of the poorest class.”

Note: I remember seeing a quoiting pitch to the north of Franklin Cricket Club at Leith Links. [ My friend, **David Robertson**, has advised me that **Quoits** were still being played at Leith Links in **1948**; and that there was another quoiting pitch at Ballantyne Road. GFB]

### **Oldest House in Leith, in the Kirkgate page 112**

“Although the historian of Leith claims for a building, in the classic region of Sheep’s Head Wynd, the honour of being the oldest house in Leith, on the authority of a nearly obliterated inscription, we think, with Mr Wilson, that a building, which formerly stood in the Kirkgate, has more legitimate claims to this honour. It was a narrow strip of a house, and is now numbered 129 Kirkgate, being converted into a handsome shop, the property of the occupant, Mr John Robertson; previous to its demolition, in 1842, it presented a very unique appearance to this leading thoroughfare. On the lintel of the door was engraved in deeply cut out characters the words “JHESU MARIA”, immediately above this was a niche in which a statue had evidently been placed, in all probability that of the Virgin, but it would, of course, either be removed or destroyed at the time of the Reformation. Above the niche there was another small aperture in which it was customary to place a taper, after nightfall, in order that passers by, and more especially strangers, might be able to notice that shrine of the Virgin, and pay it the homage that was expected and required.”

“The Old Grammar School of Leith also stood in the Kirkgate”

## DECLINE OF LEITH HOUSING – BUSINESS – AMUSEMENTS

### Population of Leith at the 1961 Census

Wards	Acres	Persons 1951	Persons 1961	Persons per Acre
18 West Leith	648	18,529	16,016	24.7
19 Central Leith	295	22,310	17,156	58.2
20 South Leith	623	21,633	18,206	29.2
Total for Leith	1,566	62,472	51,378	32.8

Note 1: The 1921 Census in Leith numbered 81,618; a loss of 30,248 in 40 years. It is no Fairy Tale but stark realism

Note 2: Despite a 6 to 1 majority against the merger, Leith was amalgamated with Edinburgh on August 4<sup>th</sup> **1920**

Leith had started to decline long before I was born and I am over 70 years of age.

Its recorded history can be traced to 320 B.C. Much as I would like to digress, and relate some of its fascinating history, I must hasten forward. From time to time, however, I will introduce data pertaining to the street or area in which an old theatre once stood.

Amusement caterers, like other business men, would survey an area to determine which site would best suit their purpose. For example, the oldest known place of amusement in Leith was the ***Amphitheatre***, which was situated in Leith Walk in 1790. (Source: *Leith Pilot Annual*, **1889**, see page 110)

As **Leith Walk**, that is from Register Street to the Foot of the Walk, looms large in the places of amusement, I think it will be well to append a few notes on that noble thoroughfare.

Prior to the building of the **North Bridge**, one of the 'passageways' from Edinburgh to Leith was a mere footpath. The regular road was via Easter Road, while another road was by Broughton and along Bonnington Road. While the proposed bridge was intended as an easy access to Leith, it was, however, used as an approach to the *New Town*, namely those streets north of Princes Street and to the east and west thereof.

The first stone was laid by Lord Provost **Drummond** on 21<sup>st</sup> October **1763**. The North Bridge became passable in **1772**. That was the first bridge.

Leith Walk was made in **1773**. However, it remained a constant danger to pedestrians and carriages until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the present spacious thoroughfare was formed.

A Toll was established to provide for the payment of the upkeep of the road. It was removed in **1834** only to be replaced in another form which took the name 'Custom', on the same spot, and all goods from Leith to Edinburgh were levied.

Without any doubt The Walk has been a magnet, over the years, for places of amusement. From **1790** onwards I have recorded ten such places. The flag still flies above four sites: ***Playhouse, Salon, The Gateway and The Palace*** at the Foot of the Walk, that is at the north end.

### **The Period when the decline set in**

The date when whole districts in Leith started to decline and virtually fall apart can be traced to the time when the theatres, etc. closed their doors. There is no record of a good-going place of amusement closing its doors just for the fun of it. I have come to the conclusion that it came about in the following manner; the creeping paralysis which envelops **all** districts, in villages, towns or cities, does not have an ‘antidote’ to combat it. It is ‘change and decay’ taking place before our very eyes. We know it is happening but are as helpless as King Canute trying to stop the advance of the tide.

We read that rats desert a ship which will soon sink. The process, however, is reversed in the case of old and dying property. It has been the experience of many in my age group over the last 25 years to flit from a tenement and to occupy a bungalow. According to the Social Group, some moved from bungalows to even larger houses and many moved from Digs to one-roomed houses. Others changed from one- room to two-rooms and so on. As the property deteriorated, so did the class of tenant, until one day a Closing Order was virtually nailed to the stair door.

During this process the proprietor of a theatre was faced with one of two alternatives, namely, to reduce admission prices and face bankruptcy, or, to take the plunge, sell out and leave as quickly as possible while the going was “kindo” good.

The same happened with equal force in Central Edinburgh, long before the collapse of the notorious “Penny Tenement” (Beaumont Place), which collapsed on Saturday, November 21<sup>st</sup> **1959**. Many of the tenements in the St James’ Square area are closed (1963) awaiting the bulldozers.

### **Greenside Village**

The site of which lies ‘under’ the shadow of the ***Playhouse Cinema*** to the south east, was almost wholly demolished in **1899-1900**, which I witnessed; and the second demolition, which I also witnessed, was between April 15<sup>th</sup> **1961** and Friday October 6<sup>th</sup> **1961**, when 256 houses were razed to the ground. See my history *Ancient and Modern Greenside* in the Edinburgh Room. The back-waters of Old Edinburgh, in the main, are in a dreadful condition.

On Sunday, August 11<sup>th</sup> **1963**, my son took me through the doomed area in Leith radiating from Kirkgate. Parliament Place was such an area as Greenside Village. On the front of the tenement, cut into the stone were these words:

REBUILT  
1900  
McNALLY BROS.

The tenement was empty except for a public-house. The life span in each case was well-nigh similar.

### **The “Stalking-Horse”**

The re-building of Leith Town Hall is a good example of the term “stalking-horse”, and was used by aspirants, of all Parties, for Municipal Honours. They all promised “to do their utmost to promote so desirable an object for the welfare of the town.” Substitute “Town Hall” for any other “worthy cause” – in any ward – and we find in most cases their promises are never heard again.

I give two current “hardy annuals” which are perfect examples of the “stalking-horse”, namely, the smoke belching from St Margaret’s Engine Sheds, which has been going on from the 1840’s, and the hopeful band who, for years, have promised to turn Portobello into the perfect Utopia, before you can bat an eye. On page 205 I deal with the scandalous neglect of the Coalhill area which was designated a slum area in 1877.

### **The Sun Begins To Shine In Leith**

The twenty-one storey flats in Fort Street were ready for occupation in July/ August **1963**, long after the amalgamation of Leith with Edinburgh. Ere long, it is hoped that Leith will come into its own again and be known as Sunny Leith.

## **LEITH AMUSEMENTS**

### ***AMPHITHEATRE, LEITH WALK, 1790***

*Leith Pilot Annual, 1889:* “Opened for Equestrian, Exhibitions and Pantomimic Entertainmemnts, Dancing, Tumbling, Etc. Capable of seating 1,500.”

It is not claimed that the *Amphitheatre* was the First Leith Theatre, but it is the first to be mentioned in all the existing newsprint anent Leith,

### ***ASSEMBLY ROOMS, LEITH, 1864***

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, November 12<sup>th</sup> **1864**.

### **“THE PROGRAMME**

**Saturday, Monday Tuesday, November 12<sup>th</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> 1864**

**Mr Morgan, Practical Mesmerist and Phrenologist**

**Will Continue His  
EXTRAORDINARY DEMONSTRATION OF MESMERISM**

**Admission: 1s.; 6d.; and 3d.**

**Doors Open at 7, to commence at 8 o'clock"**

An Advertisement on Saturday November 19<sup>th</sup> intimated "Last Three Nights"

Note: These were the first published advertisements of the "Music Hall Variety" type of amusement to appear in the *Leith Pilot*. Church Concerts and the like had been advertised at an earlier date.

Exactly 27 years afterwards the following advertisement appeared: in *Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, November 28<sup>th</sup> 1891:

**"TO-NIGHT TO-NIGHT**

**PROFESSOR CAMERON WALKER**

**HYPNOTIST AND MESMERIST**

**Will give Amusing Demonstrations in the**

**ASSEMBLY ROOMS**

**EVERY EVENING NEXT WEEK**

**Doors Open at 7.30; Commencing at 8 p.m.**

**Admission: 1s.; 6d.; and 4d. (up 1d. since 1834)"**

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday January 28<sup>th</sup> 1865

**"GENERAL NOTICES**

**THEATRE**

**JUNCTION STREET, LEITH**

**THE NAUTICAL DRAMA**

***THE FRIEND OF THE LIGHTHOUSE***

**SINGING AND DANCING**

**LAST NIGHT OF THE *FAIRY FOUNTAIN*,  
concluding with *A LAUGHABLE FARCE***

**PRICES: Pit, 4d.; Gallery, 2d.**

**Open Every Evening at 7 o'clock**

**In active preparation *The Colleen Bawn* "**

Note 1: This was the first place of amusement in Leith to be advertised as a Theatre; even so, it was not necessarily the first Theatre in the burgh.

Note 2: The “Last Night” notice would indicate that it had been a Theatre prior to the above date. On going back to the first available edition of the *Pilot* there was no sign either of the above Theatre in Junction Street, or of any other Theatre prior to January **1865**.

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, April 2<sup>nd</sup> **1887**

**“NEW THEATRE  
BANGOR ROAD, LEITH  
ENGAGEMENT FOR SIX NIGHTS ONLY OF THE  
GREAT TRAGEDIAN MR. HENRY TALBOT  
Who will appear in SIX of his  
GREAT SHAKESPERIAN CHARACTERS  
On Monday, April 4<sup>th</sup> 1887 - SEE HAND BILLS”**

Note: The two Theatre – Theatre, Junction Street and New Theatre, Bangor - may well have been the same although differently named and in different streets. The map shows that both streets are contiguous.

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, November 18<sup>th</sup> **1865**

**“LEITH MUSIC HALL  
MARKET STREET  
FORMERLY KNOWN AS RIDDLE’S COURT, OFF TOLBOOTH WYND  
OPEN EVERY EVENING  
At Half-past Seven – Commence at Eight  
Under the PATRONAGE of PROVOST AND MAGISTRATES  
FIRST RATE TALENT  
NEW STARS  
BARNEY O’NEIL AND CLARE VILLERS  
Admittance: Boxes, 1s.; Pit, 6d.  
Half-price at a quarter past nine  
Concludes about quarter past ten”**

According to the *News*, Tuesday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1953, “The theatre was opened by Mr John Davidson, who leased it to a Mr John Scotland.”

*Leith Pilot Annual* for 1889, “1865, January 3<sup>rd</sup>. *Leith Theatricals*. Booth opened at corner of Bonnington Road and Junction Street. Acts apprehended in middle of performance for contravening **Police Act**, and confined for two days and two nights”.

In the following item on the *Leith Royal Music Hall*, with its four advertisements, 1867 to 1872, it may be well to bring to the attention of the reader:

In the first advertisement these words appear, “Re-opening of the Season”. I backtracked to the first issue of the *Pilot*, that is to 1864, but there was trace of this theatre.

In the fourth advertisement of December 1872, these words appear: “Entrance by St. Andrew Street and Tolbooth Wynd” In years to come the question may well arise, where were those streets? They will, of course, be shown on good maps, the Music Hall stood in a square bounded by The Kirkgate and Market Street, both of which ran north to south, and by Tolbooth Wynd and St Andrew Street, both of which ran east to west.

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1867. No. 1 Advertisement. Preliminary Notice

**“LEITH ROYAL MUSIC HALL**

**Re-opening of the Season:**

**WILL OPEN on MONDAY, AUGUST 5<sup>th</sup> 1867  
Will be a GALA NIGHT**

**Admission for that night only will be: Boxes, 1s.; Pit, 6d.  
Thereafter, Boxes, 6d.; Pit, 3d.**

**For Particulars see DAILY BILLS”**

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, September 14<sup>th</sup> 1867. No. 2 Advertisement

**“LEITH ROYAL MUSIC HALL**

**OPEN EVERY EVENING**

**TESTIMONIALS – BEST TALENT, SPLENDID STAGE,  
AMPLE ROOM, and CIVILITY TO ALL**

**J. Davidson, Proprietor”**

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, October 12<sup>th</sup> 1867. No. 3 Advertisement

**“LEITH ROYAL MUSIC HALL**

**OPEN EVERY EVENING**

**Performance at a Quarter to Eight Precisely**

**The Public are respectfully informed that the numerous attractions in this Elegant Place of Amusement are now completed, and it is admitted by all to be one of the Handsomest Halls in the Kingdom. In order to put amusements within the reach of all,**

**THE PRICES OF ADMISSION, till further notice will be:**

**Pit, 2d.; Gallery, 4d.; Side Boxes, 6d.**

**Saturdays: Pit, 3d.; Gallery and Side Boxes, 6d.**

**The Magnificent Illustrations of Every-day Life, in FOUR LIVING PICTURES entitled**  
***FATHER COME HOME***

**Has been received every Evening with shouts of applause; and to meet the wishes of a large portion of the community who have not yet seen it, it will be, by particular desire, continued during the ensuing week, in addition to the celebrated**  
**NEGRO EXTRAVAGAANZA:**

***THE NIGGERS ON TRAMP***

**By the Brothers Linn**

**With Sentimental, Serio and Comic Singing and Dancing.**

**John Davidson, Proprietor”**

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1872. No. 4 Advertisement

***“LEITH ROYAL MUSIC HALL***

**Entrance by St Andrew Street and Tolbooth Wynd**

**Proprietor: Mr John Davidson**

**Acting Manager: Mr Alfred McArte**

**WINES, BEER, CIGARS ETC AT THE BAR**

**Prices: Private Boxes, 1s.; Second Boxes and Promenade, 6d.; Body of Hall, 3d.**

**NO CONNECTION WITH ANY OTHER HALL**

**TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE STARS BY THE BRILLIANT PLANETS**  
**WHO APPEAR NIGHTLY AT THIS MAGNIFICENT HALL**

**On MONDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 9th 1872, and during the week the following unrivalled Company will appear.**

**First appearance of**  
**Mr EDWARD LYONS**  
**Motto Singer, Reciter and Comedian**

**Re-engagement for positively SIX NIGHTS only of**

**MISS FLORENCE WRIGHITT, the Lady Tenor**

**Language cannot describe the immense sensation this Lady's singing created during last week, having been received with rapturous applause, pronounced by the Press to be an able rival of  
MRS HOWARD PAUL**

**First appearance of MR J.C.SMITH  
Versatile Comic and Patter Vocalist.**

**Positively last SIX NIGHTS OF  
MISS ANNIE ADELAIDE  
The Dashing Serio Comic**

**MESSRS. A'MILTON, ALVERNO AND YOUNG ONZO**

**Will appear in entirely new performances for six nights only, before their return to England, their daring and graceful Gymnastic Entertainment having justly rendered them immense favourites in Leith.**

**In addition to the above powerful Company, every evening during the week will be brought forward a new Romantic Drama entitled:**

***THE ROVER OF THE SEA or  
THE BLUE JACKET AGAINST THE BLACK FLAG***

**In which Messrs. Alf McArte, Geo. Nicholson and E. Lyons, Mesdames Annie Adelaide and Fanny Clare will appear, supported by a full Dramatic Company.**

**In the course of the Drama will be introduced a  
*TERRIFIC BROADSWORD COMBAT* by Messrs. A McArte and Geo. Nicholson**

**The whole terminating with**

***BRITAIN'S TRIUMPH***

Well, they certainly went to town in those far-off days; the above Programme reads like a Royal Command Performance. The "Ad" man of the above programme could command an executive position, as I write in the 1960's.

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, September 28<sup>th</sup> 1867 No. 1 Advertisement

***"THEATRE ROYAL – MACARTE'S TEMPLE OF VARIETIES***

***South Junction Street***

**Mr. Alfred MacArte begs to announce that the  
above establishment will OPEN TONIGHT.**

Since the recess the interior has been thoroughly re-decorated and Great Alterations effected.

On the inauguration night the following brilliant array of talented Artistes will make their appearance in Leith:

Miss Egeron of Theatre Royal, Leeds;  
Miss Henderson of Liverpool;  
Madame Boyd of Dublin;  
Miss Helen McGregor, late danseuse of London;  
Mrs Sharp of Manchester;  
Miss Lawrence of Holder's Music Hall, Birmingham;  
Miss Percy of Oxford Music Hall, Newcastle;  
Mr Augustus Creamer of Sunderland;  
Mr G.F. Young of Hull;  
Mr J. Dixon of Dundee  
Mr A. Galloway of Sheffield;  
Mr Sharpe of Brighton;  
Master George Calvert, Champion Comic Singer;  
Mr H. Cook from Saturday Evening Concerts;  
and Mr Alfred MacArte, Pantomimist and Step dancer, Edinburgh

**THE PERFORMANCE will commence with a MISCELLANEOUS CONCERT**

**Doors Open 7, Start 7.30**

**Prices of Admission: Cushioned Stalls, 1s.; Reserved Seats, 6d.; Side Boxes, 4d.; Body of Hall, 3d."**

Never before nor since did I see a Programme give the name of town of every artist on a Bill. Quite a lesson on Geography; but why was Dear Old Glasgow Town left out?

*News* Tuesday February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1953

"Leith Theatres that are no more: *Theatre Royal, Great Junction Street*"

Note: The advertisement for September 28<sup>th</sup> 1867 had the address **South** Junction Street. A little thing perhaps, but it keeps the record right. I checked the advertisement twice to make sure, anent the name of the street; it was **South**.

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, October 12<sup>th</sup> 1867

**"THEATRE ROYAL AND TEMPLE OF VARIETIES**

**MR MacARTE having obtained full LICENCE from the MAGISTRATES to perform STAGE PLAYS, begs respectfully to announce that Elegant Place of Amusement will continue every evening for Dramatic Performance**

**A LAUGHABLE FARCE**

**After which a MISCELLANEOUS MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT,**

**In which MR BEN HOSKINS and MISS FANNY MORTON will appear**

**To conclude with the *DOGS OF MONTARGIS, OF THE FOREST OF BUNDY*"**

Notes: *Leith Theatricals* fell foul of the Law as regards the obtaining of a Licence; see page 193. Even in December 1913 the *King's Cinema, Home Street*, lost a day or two because the Management did not procure the Licence in time.

In the second paragraph of the No.1 advertisement it states "since the recess..."; nonetheless, it was the **first** advertisement for the *Theatre Royal and Temple of Varieties* to be published in the *Leith Burghs Pilot*.

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday January 24<sup>th</sup> 1874

**"WHITFIELD HALL, 65 LEITH WALK**

**JANUARY 24 1874**

**SIR JOHN PALLISTER'S, BART.**

**PANORAMA of the BRITISH EMPIRE entitled HOME**

**Prices of Admission: Reserved Seats, 2s.; Second Seats, 1s.;  
Gallery and Back Seats, 6d.**

**General Director and Manager: John Denholm**

**To whom all communications in connection with the EXHIBITION must be made"**

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, January 10<sup>th</sup> 1874

**"NEW STAR MUSIC HALL**

**FOOT OF LEITH WALK**

**On Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> January, and during the WEEK, Special Engagement of**

**MR R. COLEMAN'S PRIZE PUNCH AND JUDY**

**And the Comical Dog TOBY, with superior Scenery, Dresses and Effects**

**Treat the Juveniles to a hearty laugh at the eccentricities of PUNCH:**

**Those who laughed at Punch in early years,  
Must laugh again, tho' filled with cares and fears.  
'Tis innocent amusement for young and old,  
'Twill raise your spirits up a thousandfold**

**A Varied and Talented Entertainment Every Evening**

**RESPECTABILITY, COMFORT & ORDER  
NO INTOXICATING DRINKS SOLD"**

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup> 1874

**"Prices: 1s.6d.; 1s.; 6d.; 4d.; and 3d. Mr Cruvelli, Proprietor"**

[I assume this advertisement relates to the *New Star* G.F.B.]

*News*, Tuesday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> **1953** “Leith Theatres that are No More”

“*New Star Music Hall*: On going out of business as a Music Hall it was converted into a grain store.”

Note: In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the site was converted into a passenger station, Leith Central, for the North British Railway. When Lord Mathers, then **George Mathers**, M.P. lived in Duke Street, Leith, he claimed he could travel from Leith Station to the House of Commons without, as he said, “coming up for breath,” and he added, “I never got my boots wet.” As I write on August 10<sup>th</sup> **1963** (the start of the Football Season), the Leith Station is used as a Diesel maintained yard

*The Gaiety, Kirkgate, Leith 1886-1956*, see 107.

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> **1888**

**“NEW THEATRE, BANGOR ROAD (OFF JUNCTION STREET)**

**Will be opened on MONDAY FIRST, MARCH 5, 1888**

**For a Short Season as a MUSIC HALL**

**Under the Management of R. Silvester. A Company of Talented Artistes will appear, including Serio-comic Vocalists, Irish Character, Negro, and Variety Artistes, Duettists, Etc.**

**GIFTS GIFTS**

**Large and Handsome Gifts Given Away Nightly. Mr Silvester will give every Person entering the Theatre a fair and equal opportunity of winning the following Gifts:**

**GOLD and SILVER WATCHES; BEEF & MUTTON; HAM; SACKS OF FLOUR; SACKS OF POTATOES; FURNITURE; PICTURES; MELODEONS; MIRRORS; AND ELECTRO-PLATED TEA AND COFFEE SERVICES.**

**Prices: Boxes, 1s.; Balcony, 6d.; Gallery, 3d, with a gift Token**

**Doors Open at 7.30; Commence at 8 o’clock.”**

Well, it was enterprise, of a kind, with a big **E**. Ord’s Circus, Portobello Links, used a lottery to keep its head above water; in doing so they offered prizes similar in kind to the New Theatre’s gifts, see Chapter32: Circuses and Showgrounds.

*Leith Pilot Annual*, **1889**, page 51

“*Iona Street Theatre*: A feu in Iona Street of 0.262 of an Acre, at an Annual Feu-duty of £100, let to a Newcastle gentleman for a New Theatre”

Note: To the best of my knowledge, which goes beyond 1899 anent Iona Street, a Theatre was never built there. However, I will give a personal account of the “Shows” or Carnival, in Iona Street in Chapter 31.

*News*, Saturday December 26<sup>th</sup> 1914

**“THE NEW ALHAMBRA  
THEATRE OF VARIETIES**

**THIS MAGNIFICENT THEATRE WILL OPEN  
MONDAY, 28<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER**

**6.50 AND 9**

**15 IN ORCHESTRA, ETC.”**

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, December 26<sup>th</sup> 1914

**“ALHAMBRA**

**LEITH WALK**

**6.50 TWICE NIGHTLY 9**

**MUSICAL DIRECTOR: Mr W. Thurban Green**  
**Jean Campbell, Contralto; The Four Krays, Dancing Act;**  
**Merrylees & McIntosh, Sketch *A Soldier's Return*;**  
**Nelly Bly, Dancer *The Girl in the Flame*;**  
**P.T. Gillan & Co. Sketch, *The Railway Porter*;**  
**Eglan & Percival, Duo Comedy *Called for the Rent***

**ALHAMBRA KINEMATOGRAPH – LATEST WAR PICTURES**

**Prices of Admission: Private Boxes (to seat 6), 1s6d., or 2s. per seat;**  
**Grand Circle, 1s.6d.; Upper Circle & Orchestra Stalls, 1s. (booked 1s.3d);**  
**Pit Stalls, 6d (booked 9d.); Gallery, 3d.**

**Box Office open 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.”**

The fact that Pictures were shown in *The Alhambra* on Opening Night will come as a surprise to many old Leithers.

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, December 26<sup>th</sup> 1914

**“LEITH’S NEW THEATRE  
TO BE OPENED THIS EVENING  
DESCRIPTION OF BUILDING**

This evening the Town Council inaugurate the opening of the new *Alhambra Theatre, Leith Walk*, by a concert, the entire proceeds of which are to be directed to the *Prince of Wales’ National Fund* and the *Belgium Relief Fund*.

An attractive programme has been arranged for the occasion, and eminent artistes are engaged. It is to be hoped that the general public will show their appreciation of the efforts of the Council and the purposes of the concert.

The new theatre, the erection of which has been watched with considerable interest for some time, is now completed and is an up-to-date theatre. The site is in every way adapted for such a building, being enclosed on three sides and part of the fourth by a public street, providing easy and direct means of entrance and exit.

There is a large stage with several well equipped artistes’ retiring rooms. The auditorium is divided into three levels: Pit; Circle and Gallery. The front of the auditorium is covered by a flat dome in enriched plaster, and the back of the auditorium or Gallery, by a barrel ceiling in panelled plaster. The walls are tastefully panelled in enriched plaster, the dadoes in the Circle being of teakwood panelling, and in the Area of an English polished limestone and marble. The proscenium opening is enclosed in enriched plaster, the tympanum arch over the opening being filled by a decorative panel in the high relief symbolising the *Spirit of Harmony*.

The principal entrance is from Leith Walk through a loggia and vestibule to a spacious entrance hall, from which a marble stair leads top the centre floor.

While equipped for variety entertainments, it has a fully equipped cinema operating room in the centre of the building. It is well supplied with fire hydrants and portable chemical extinguishers, and a fire proof curtain.

An electric vacuum cleaning apparatus is installed, with piping at various points throughout the building. The theatre is heated by two low pressure hot water systems. The decorations are at present of a temporary character.

The principal Contractors:

Mason Work, Messrs Jas. Kinnear & Sons & Co. Leith

Carpenter and Joiner, Messrs Johnstone & Rose, Leith

Plumber etc., David S. Greig, Edinburgh

Plaster and Floor Work, P.F. Cavanagh, Edinburgh

Slater, Thomas Gray, Leith

Electric Lighting, Messrs Stewart & Bucher, Leith

Painter Work, Mr H.Muirhead, Leith

Steel & Iron, Redpath Brown & Co., Edinburgh

Marble Work, Messrs Allan & Sons, Edinburgh

Ironmongery, Messrs Park & Rutherford, Edinburgh

The stone carving and tympanum over the proscenium were modelled and executed by Mr Hayes, Edinburgh  
The Architect was Mr J.M. Johnson, Charlotte Street, Leith”

Extract from *Kinematograph Year Book*, **1954**, pages 415 and 416

**“Alhambra, Leith Walk**

Proprietor, Robert Saunders

8 Dressing Rooms

Prices: 1s. to 1s.9d. Seats 1,423

Proscenium: Width 26 feet, Stage 22 feet deep”

*News*, Thursday, November 15<sup>th</sup> **1917**

**“Alhambra Theatre, Leith Walk**

**commencing Monday, November 19, 1917  
complimentary Week to**

**TANCY LEE**

**Who will Appear At Every Performance  
Supported by All-Star Vaudeville Company**

**Special Prices of Admission (For Benefit of Tancy Lee)**

**Prices: Orchestra Stalls & Grand Circle: 2s.4d;  
Upper Circle, 1s.7d.; and Gallery, 8d.**

**ALL PRICES INCLUDING TAX**

**Seats may be booked at Theatre or at Lumley’s 165 Leith Street”**

**Who Was Tancy Lee?**

*News, Pink Edition* [Sports G.F.B.], Saturday, January 26<sup>th</sup> **1963**

“**Tancy Lee** (Leith) won the fly-weight Championship of Great Britain and the Lonsdale Belt at the National Sporting Club, London, on January 25, **1915**, when he beat **Jimmy Wilde** (Wales), the towel coming in from Wilde’s corner in the seventeenth round”

I met Tancy Lee in the year **1937**. At that time he was working on a building site. I liked Tancy; he always had a smile and had a sense of humour. He was one of the Greats in the BOXING WORLD. LEITH was proud of him.

*News*, Friday, March 7<sup>th</sup> **1958**

**“The Alhambra, Leith Walk**

The Alhambra Cinema in Leith Walk, one of the oldest picture houses in Edinburgh, is closing tomorrow night. It has fallen victim to the same economic pressures which are troubling the whole cinema industry.

Mr **Alf Becket**, who has been manager of the Alhambra for more than 38 years, said he blamed the burden of Entertainment Tax and a number of counter-attractions, among them T.V., ‘It’s the never-never, too,’ he added. ‘People making hire-purchase payments – maybe 16 s. a week – don’t go to the cinema.’

### MANY OF THE FAMOUS

The Alhambra, one of the city’s independently owned cinemas, was a theatre before it was converted into a picture house. (The interest shown in moving pictures was evident by a *News* advertisement of Monday March 8<sup>th</sup> **1915**, which announced that *ALHAMBRASCOPE* made its mark to large audiences.)

Many famous artistes appeared on its stage, including: **Harry Gordon; Tommy Lorne; Jimmy Jessiman; George West; Jack Anthony; Dave Willis, Sen.; Gracie Fields; and Bud Flanagan** of the *Crazy Gang*, which broke up in **1962**.

In those days the theatre was owned by **Harry Lees**, who ran three stage companies. (Note: The following is an extract from **1938** *Cinema Buyers’ Guide*: “ALHAMBRA – Proprietors, Lees and Saunders; Seats – 1,480”)

A cinema in the silent days, the Alhambra almost won the distinction of showing the first talkie in Edinburgh, but was ‘pipped’ by the *New Picture House, 56-57 Princes Street*. The film was called *Two Weeks Off*, with **Dorothy McKail**. It was 50 % talkie and 50 % silent. (For five weeks, June 10 to July 13 **1929**, the *New Picture House* showed *The Singing Fool*, the first talking picture in Edinburgh. Why, why, do otherwise responsible people go wrong in their ‘facts’?)

Outside the Alhambra’s front door are two ornate lamp standards which are believed to be the only privately owned street lamps in Edinburgh. They have been there since **1914**. As well as the two lamp standards mentioned above, the pavement in front of the building was Alhambra property.”

(Note: *The Scotsman*, Thursday December 29<sup>th</sup> **1960** This edition showed a photograph of two lamp standards outside No. 82 Princes Street, which were erected during the week starting Monday 24<sup>th</sup> **1860**. They were dismantled in **1920**, one of which was used as a Clock Standard and was erected for that purpose at the City Slaughter House in September **1923**. Oh, the lamps were Private Property. They were erected for the Life Assurance Office, 82 Princes Street.)

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, July 30<sup>th</sup> **1960**

### EDINBURGH CINEMA TO BE DEMOLISHED WAREHOUSE PLANNED

The *Alhambra Cinema*, Edinburgh, which has been closed since March 18<sup>th</sup> **1958**, is to be demolished. The interim warrant for demolition and excavation work was granted at Edinburgh Dean of Guild Court yesterday to *Yeoman Investments, Ltd., London*, who plan to build a bonded warehouse on the site.

Earlier objections to the site, at the corner of Leith Walk and Springfield Street, by families in the adjoining tenement have been withdrawn. They met agents of the London firm and are satisfied that every effort has been made to meet their objections (Note: Anyone caring to read the Local Press at, or about this date, July 1963, will see that the Letters to the Editor do not support the above statement about the locals being 'satisfied'.)

Permission to proceed with the erection of the warehouse will be given by the Court once technical adjustments have been amended on the plan."

The reason why the tenants in the area of the Alhambra objected to a Bonded Warehouse was that they were apprehensive that the fire in a bonded store in Cheapside, Glasgow, on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1960, in which 19 men of the Glasgow Fire Brigade and Salvage Corps lost their lives, might be repeated in Edinburgh.

*The Scotsman*, Friday, November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1962

**"Supermarket Planned for Theatre Site** Edinburgh Corporation's Planning Committee gave agreement in principle to a proposal to build a supermarket on the site of the Alhambra Theatre, Leith Walk"

On Sunday August 11<sup>th</sup> 1963, I passed the Old Alhambra, neglected, dirty looking and virtually a blot on the landscape. There it stood, with its one time ornate lamp standards, showing the Port's Coat of Arms, waiting; waiting for what? It is a gie long time since the Alhambra closed down in 1958 and the five and a half years have, like *Old Man River*, kept rolling along.

I take this opportunity to record the part played by **William Merrilees**, O.B.E., Chief Constable of Lothians and Peebles Police, by introducing me to Mr **James Cousins** and Mr **James Salvona** on Wednesday, September 18<sup>th</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup> 1963, respectively.

Mr Cousins had a quick call; he died on Monday, September 1963, aged 72 years. He told me much about his early life when he was employed in *Cooke's Circus*, *East Fountainbridge*, and later experiences in a few Leith picture houses. Bits and pieces have been recorded in the appropriate places in this history.

Mr Salvona was aged 85 years when I met him at his caravan, at No. 68 Seafield Road, Leith. He answers to the name "Willie". I feature Mr Salvona later in the history; see page 218.

**LEITH PICTURE HOUSES  
IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER**

***ALHAMBRA, LEITH WALK***  
**See under *THEATRES***

***ALLISON CINEMA, LAURIE STREET***  
**See under *LAURIE STREET PICTURE HOUSE***

***CADONA'S PICTURES AND VARIETIES, PARLIAMENT STREET***

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, September 7<sup>th</sup> 1912

**“CADONA'S Pictures & Varieties  
Parliament Street, Coalhill, Leith**

**At 7 and 9 Each Evening**

**CHANGE NIGHTLY**

**Admission: Front Seat, 2d.; Gallery, 1d.”**

I am indebted to Mr **Tom Oswald**, M.P. for Central Edinburgh, who told me on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1962 that the site of this Picture House was previously occupied by *Cadona's Fair Ground*. Its address has been given, at one time or another, as Sheriff Brae, Coalhill and Parliament Street. Both Coalhill and Sheriff Brae ran north and south on the right bank of the Water of Leith, which was but a few yards away. Parliament Street, which ran east and west, intersected Coalhill and Sheriff Brae. A three storey tenement at Sheriff Brae now occupies the site of the *Cadona Picture House*, which was a tent, and subsequently known as *The Magnet*; see the entry for *The Magnet*.

***CAPITOL PICTURE HOUSE, MANDERSTON STREET, LEITH***

*News*, Friday, September 7<sup>th</sup> 1928

**“LEITH'S SUPER CINEMA**

**THE CAPITOL - OFF LEITH WALK**

**OPENING CEREMONY  
MONDAY, 10<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER**

**OPENING PROGRAMME: *A SOUTH SEA BUBBLE***

**Prices: Stalls, 6d.; Balcony, 9d.; Grand Circle, 1s.  
Children: Stalls, 3d.; Circle and Balcony, 6d.**

**From 5 p.m. to 10.30 p.m.**

**Grand Orchestra of 12 performers under the conductorship of Mr James Smeaton”**

Extract from **1937 Cinema Buyers’ Guide**, Page 173

“CAPITOL, 24 Manderston Street.  
Proprietors: General Theatre Corporation, Ltd.  
Seating: 2,300”

Note: In the 1950’s the seating accommodation of many large cinemas was reduced with the introduction of the Broad Screen.

In the vast majority of Picture House histories, I give the date of opening. However, I have given the date of closing in very few instances. I was able to do so in the case of the *Capitol* as it was advertised in the Local Press that it would close and re-open for Bingo.

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, July 8<sup>th</sup> 1961

**“CINEMA WILL BE A BINGO CLUB**

**CAPITOL, 24 MANDERSTON STREET, LEITH**

**OPENED MONDAY SEPTEMBER 10 1928**

**TO BE CONVERTED – SEATING FOR 2,000**

**FIRST BINGO CLUB IN EAST OF SCOTLAND**

The *Capitol*, which can seat 2,000, is the first cinema in the *Rank Organisation* of the East of Scotland to switch to Bingo. It opened in 1928.

Yesterday a Rank spokesman in London said: “The cinema was not making money and was going to be closed down.” The cinema has a Saturday morning Boys’ and Girls’ Club with a membership of over 2,500. It will be transferred to the *Regent Cinema*.

**“FORWARD STEP”**

The manager of the Capitol, Mr **G. Newman**, said yesterday, “I shall miss the boys and girls, but the public want Bingo and it is our business to give them what they want. I really believe this is a step forward and will be a success.”

An Edinburgh Corporation spokesman said that there was nothing they could do about the change in the use of the cinema.

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND SAYS –  
BRING BINGO CLUBS UNDER CONTROL- AS IN THE CASE OF BETTING

The Rev. Dr. **R. Leonard Small**, convener of the Church of Scotland Committee on temperance and Morals said, “We have asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr MacLay) to institute legislation to bring Bingo Clubs under the same control as betting houses. Dr Small added that the Committee were asking presbyteries to report when Bingo clubs were being established.”

Since that date – July 1961 – the presbyteries up and down the country have had, unfortunately, much reporting to do, as I write in August 1963.

I give a few extracts from the *Dispatch* anent the *Capitol*.

*Dispatch*, Saturday, July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1961

**“Capitol – 24 Manderston Street, Leith**

**First Pictures *South Sea Bubble*  
With Ivor Novello**

**And**

***Her Father Said No*  
With Frankie Darro**

**Matinee Prices: 3d. for Stalls; 6d. for Circle and Balcony  
Increasing to 6d. and 9d.in the evenings “**

“In July 1961 the manager was Mr **George Newman**, who said, *inter alia*, “As far as my actual staff, 30 will be retained and the other 4 absorbed into the *Gaumont and New Victoria* Edinburgh. There is no redundancy”

“Principal Shareholders of the Capitol were: **Mr Burns; John Baird** who owned Jupp’s music shop in Great Junction Street; and **John Greig**, W.S. Leith Town Clerk. Gaumont offered the shareholders One Plus a Half, accepted. The Capitol was only half up.”

***CENTRAL KINEMA, HOPE STREET***

*News*, Saturday, November 27<sup>th</sup> 1920

**“THE CENTRAL KINEMA  
HOPE STREET, LEITH**

**THIS UP TO DATE HOUSE  
WILL BE OPENED IN A FEW DAYS  
FINEST MUSIC A SPECIALITY**

**CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE**  
**Watch this space for date of Opening**

**J.W. Hodgson, Managing Director”**

*News*, Thursday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1920

**“CENTRAL KINEMA, LEITH**  
**GRAND OPENING OF LEITH’S SUPER CINEMA**  
**ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1920**

**6 p.m. Continuous to 10.30 p.m.**

**Saturdays, 3 p.m.**

**Dustin Farnum, in a 5 Reel Super Production**

*A Man’s Fight*  
*Against Tremendous Odds*

**No. 1 of Gaumont’s Serial, *Barabas***

**Also Topical, Interest and Comedies and Comedies**

**Supported by a First-Class Musical Programme”**

*News*, Friday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1920

**“CENTRAL KINEMA**  
**HOPE STREET – FOOT OF THE WALK**

Programme as in the *News*, Thursday December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1920 but includes:

**Prices (Including Tax): 9d.; 1s.; and 1s.6d.”**

Hope Street is only a few yards from Victoria statue at the Foot of the Walk, on the west side. It is one of four streets which form a square: Kirk Lane, Cassel Lane, Hope Street, Union Street.

I was invited by the Rev **James Marshall** of Kirkgate Church, situated in Henderson Street, Leith, to visit his Men’s Club in the Liberal Rooms at 1 and 2 Union Street, on Friday December 14<sup>th</sup> 1962

Three weeks previous to the visit I sent out a number of slips, each one a questionnaire anent Leith Cinemas. I was fortunate to receive seven replies and, while the total information was

rather meagre, it was, nevertheless, very useful in so far as each piece of datum was **new**, and would have, I think, been lost forever but for those members who pooled their resources.

How true – one must dig for diamonds. Writing history and a Swiss Cheese have this in common: each is full of holes and every bit is used to stop up a hole. It is a glorious sensation when one at last obtains the final ‘bit’ and sees, in effect, a smooth surface on the cheese.

A number of the Men’s Club whom I met were no longer young; the main object was to get reliable information confirmed, before time, like Old Man River, carries off our Elder Citizens.

***CINEMA HOUSE, TOLBOOTH WYND***  
***Briefly known as LEITH CINEMA***

*News*, Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“LEITH CINEMA, TOLBOOTH WYND,  
THE COSY HOUSE**

**OPENING PROGRAMME**

**Monday April 14<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup>**

***FOR THE KING***  
3,000 feet

**We have secured the Exclusive rights for Next Week of this magnificent film**

**DON’T MISS IT**

***A TALE OF TWO CITIES***  
3,034 feet

**BEST IN PICTURES TWICE WEEKLY**

**CONTINUOUS SHOW, 6 to 11  
MATINEES WEDNESDAYS AND SATURDAYS AT 3**

**PRICES: 2d.; 4d.; and 6d.”**

Note: This was the only advertisement I saw in the *News* for the *Leith Cinema*, but it hit the headlines in the *Leith Observer*, Saturday, March 29<sup>th</sup> 1913.

**“CINEMA HOUSE  
TOLBOOTH WYND, LEITH**

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

**The management begs to intimate that the above House will open shortly with a FIRST CLASS DISPLAY of up-to-date PICTURES, including THRILLING EPISODES, COMEDY AND DRAMA, EDUCATIONAL AND COMIC, ETC.**

**BEST PICTURES - TWICE WEEKLY**

**POPULAR PRICES**

**J.Yuill, Manager”**

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“CINEMA HOUSE  
TOLBOOTH WYND, LEITH**

**GRAND OPENING  
MONDAY, 14<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1913**

**CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCES FROM 6 till 11 p.m.  
MATINEES – WEDNESDAYS AND SATURDAYS at 3**

**POPULAR PRICES – 2d.; 4d.; and 6d.  
Children half-price on Wednesdays”**

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“NEW PICTURE HOUSE FOR LEITH**

A new picture house, the *Cinema*, opens on Monday. The building is situated at the corner of Tolbooth Wynd and Henderson Street, and forms a large and commodious theatre with two convenient exits.

The large entrance hall is being fitted up, and nicely decorated with a profusion of palms and other plants. The theatre itself is well arranged, and the seats, even the cheapest, are comfortable, well within view of the centre of the screen. Accommodation has been provided for 600 spectators.

The new venture is to be run on the American system of continuous performances nightly from 6 till 11 o'clock.

The management

The chairman of the company, The Leith Photo Playhouse Company, Ltd., is Mr **H. Randolph Christie**, Edinburgh, and he has as co-directors, Mr **W.H.Baxter**, chairman of La Scala, Glasgow, and Mr **David Borland**, Glasgow. The resident manager is Mr **James Yuill**, who has large experience of cinema work in South Africa.

First Picture *For the King*.

## Continuous Performances

Note: The honour of being the first cinema in Edinburgh to institute the system of continuous performances goes to the *Picture House, 111 Princes Steet*, which announced on its opening day, July 20<sup>th</sup> 1910, that “Performances will be continuous.”; I believe the next cinema to operate this system was the *Cinema House*, 18 Nicolson Street, Edinburgh - according to the *News* of Monday September 11<sup>th</sup> 1911, “Continuous Performance Daily, from 2.30”

### *EMPIRE PICTURE PALACE*

At corner of Henderson Street and Tolbooth Wynd

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, December 29<sup>th</sup> 1917

**“GRAND OPENING NIGHT  
MONDAY, 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER, 1917  
(Hogmany night at 6 P.M.)**

### **GREAT HOLIDAY ROGRAMME**

**NEW YEAR’S DAY (TUESDAY) 11 A.M. TO 10.30 P.M.**

**MARIE DRESSLER AND CHARLIE CHAPLIN in**

***TILLY’S PUNCTURED ROMANCE***

**AND A HOST OF OTHER GOOD THINGS**

**Wednesday: 11 a.m. to 10.30 p.m.  
Thursday and Friday, 2 p.m. to 10.30 p.m.**

**Admission (Including Tax): 2 ½ d. and 5d.; Back Seats, 8d.  
Children’s Matinee, at 3 p.m. Admission, 1d.  
Seated 350”**

I append some bits and pieces anent the *Empire Picture Palace, or House*, from Tom Oswald and members of the Men’s Club of Kirkgate Church.

Maule’s of Princes Street, West End (now Binn’s) [now Fraser’s G.F.B.] had a branch shop at one corner while the *Leith Observer* and *Leith Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd* was at No 75 Tolbooth Wynd

Mr **James Reid** was the manager of the *Empire*.

Tom Oswald told me that the well known burglar “Scotch Jimmy”, otherwise known as **James Muirhead**, opened the *Empire*

Mr **James Baird** was the principal shareholder, along with Messrs. **Burns, Lee and John Greig**, Town Clerk of Leith. Mr Baird and his colleagues had a hand in floating the *Capitol*, Leith. Mr Baird at one time owned Lamb’s House; he had an interest in other Leith ventures.

The *Empire* although not a theatre, followed the then custom of putting on a ‘turn’ between pictures.

It was in the Empire that the well known artiste, **Dr Bodie**, put on his last show. True, he was a fake and he had been chased out of many houses, but he could put it over. I saw him several times in my life.

### ***FALCONER’S PICTURE HOUSE, JANE STREET***

**William Merrilees** told me that the first animated pictures in Leith were shown in *Falconer’s Picture House, Jane Street*, where the Telephone Exchange is sited. Willie Salvona., Light comedian, usually sang during the Interlude. *Falconer’s* was a gie dirty tent, but what did that matter? It provided entertainment and that, after all, was its main function

**Willie Salvona** confirmed that the picture house was a tent within the show ground which Falconer first occupied in **1899**; Pictures were first shown in **1899**. Admission was 2d. Falconer left the site in **1906/07**

### ***IMPERIAL ELECTRIC THEATRE 123 KIRKGATE, LEITH or Storrie’s Alley***

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> **1911**

**“GRAND OPENING NIGHT**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 22 1911**

**7 TWICE NIGHTLY 9**

**POPULAR PRICES: Pit, 3d.; Balcony, 4d.; Front Balcony, 6d.”**

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, April 29<sup>th</sup> **1911**

### ***“IMPERIAL ELECTRIC THEATRE***

This theatre which was opened last Saturday night, has been well patronised during the week, especially on Monday, when the printed announcement HOUSE FULL was displayed. The programme was up to a high standard. The dramatic film *The Tenderfoot’s Round Up* is an

interesting film, and the comic element is well sustained by *Tontilli's Aeroplane*. *The Redeeming Angle*, a picture depicting the trials and struggles a man has to go through in search of employment, is very appealing. The other items are equally interesting, and the theatre ought to be a decided success."

**IMPERIAL PICTURE THEATRE  
123 KIRKGATE, LEITH**  
Note change of name

News, Monday, May 15<sup>th</sup> 1911

**"TWICE NIGHTLY - 7 & 9**

**A GIGANTIC PICTURE PROGRAMME  
INCLUDING A SPECIAL AND EXCLUSIVE FILM OF  
THE FUNERAL OF THE GREAT LAFAYETTE"**

Note: Lafayette was burned to death in the *Empire Palace of Varieties, Nicolson Street*, on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1911; see page 22.

News, Monday, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1911

**"IMPERIAL PICTURE THEATRE  
KIRKGATE, LEITH**

**SHOWN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN EDINBURGH DISTRICT**

**THE GREAT "JOHNSON – JEFFRIES FIGHT"**

**PRICES: 3d.; 4d.; 6d.; and 1s."**

It will be seen that the House kept up with the times.

**William Merrilees** told me about an amusing incident that took place nightly between shows. The pianist went off for a drink, carrying a pitcher. He often held up the second show by overstaying or prolonging his drink at the *Princess Bar*. On his way back, with his pitcher full, he would be observed taking a *wee drappie* at frequent intervals. Those were the days

According to Tom Oswald the owner of the *Imperial* was known as **Captain Texas**. In appearance he was very like **Col. Bill Cody, or Buffalo Bill**, of Wild West fame. Both had this in common: they were Showmen, Crack-shots and sported the Imperial beard. As an extra turn, **Texas** would demonstrate his prowess with the rifle by shooting a cigarette or clay pipe from his daughter's lips.

***LAURIE PICTURE HOUSE. LAURIE STREET  
See under LAURIE STREET PICTURE HOUSE***

***LAURIE STREET PICTURE HOUSE, LEITH***

*News*, Monday, May 29<sup>th</sup> 1961

“The picture house opened in 1912\* and from then until 1931 it was known as the *Leith Picture House*. In 1931 the name was changed to the *Laurie Picture House*. From 1934 to 1944 it reverted to the name *Leith Picture House* and in 1944 it was changed to the *Allison Cinema*

The last mention in the *News* advertisement columns was on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1944 when the films were:

*Shepherd of the Hills*, starring **John Wayne and Betty Field**

and *Power Dive*, starring **Richard Arlen**”

\*It will be seen from the item about the *Leith Picture House* that it opened on Monday November 27<sup>th</sup> 1911, and not 1912.

***LEITH CINEMA, TOLBOOTH WYND  
See under the CINEMA HOUSE***

***LEITH PICTURE HOUSE, LAURIE STREET,  
OFF CONSTITUTION STREET, AND ONE MINUTE’S WALK FROM CENTRAL  
STATION***

*News*, Saturday, November 25<sup>th</sup> 1911

**“7 TWICE NIGHTLY 9**

**Prices: 2d. to 6d.**

**SEATS BOOKED AT JUPP’S GRAMOPHONE WAREHOUSE,  
88 GREAT JUNCTION STREET”**

*Leith Observer*, Saturday, November 25<sup>th</sup> 1911

**“TWICE NIGHTLY - 7 and 9**

**COMMENCING Monday, November 27<sup>th</sup> 1911**

**And during the Week**

**The Selig Masterpiece *Lost in the Jungle***

**Anne Estelle, Comedienne and Dancer**

**Doors Open- 6.45 and 8.45 Early Doors – 6.30 and 8.30**

**Prices – 2d; 4d.; and 6d. Early Doors- 3d.; 6d.; and 9d.**

**Circle Seats booked at Jupp's Gramophone Warehouse, 88 Great Junction Street"**

*Leith Observer*, Saturday December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1911

***"Laurie Street Picture House***

Although only two weeks old, this commodious amusement resort appears to have 'struck' popularity. Proof of this can be found twice nightly astride the 'house', where large numbers of pleasure seekers await the time for entrance to each performance. The programme submitted this week is of exceptional merit: *Lost in the Jungle*.

In addition to a selection given on the auxetophone, a splendid vaudeville turn is provided by Miss **Anne Austelle**, who meets with a hearty reception. A feature in connection with the new place of entertainment is its smartly attired staff, their attractive uniforms having been supplied by the West End Clothiers Coy., North Bridge, Edinburgh."

The **Allison Cinema** closed on Saturday October 14<sup>th</sup> 1944. At that time Laurie Street, which ran west to east, was split by Constitution Street. The cinema was at the extreme west end of the street, on the south corner. The site is now occupied by Woolworth's

I append an extract from *Cinema Buyers' Guide for the Year 1938*:

"Picture House, Laurie Street, Edinburgh 6  
Proprietor: J. Penn Seats, 470"

The manager at one time was Mr **Salvona**. Mr **James Cousins**, who was identified with the theatrical and cinema world from 1907 to 1926, told me on Wednesday, September 18<sup>th</sup> 1963, that Messrs **Baird and Burns** put up the money for the Laurie Street Picture House. Mr Cousins was stage manager for a period. There were two acts and three artistes formed the orchestra. A famous comedian who played the Laurie Street house was **Will Fyffe** who, at the time, received £6. 10s. per week

***MAGNET, PARLIAMMENT STREET***  
***Formerly CADONA'S PICTURES AND VARIETIES***

The owner was **Billy Cadona**, who was one of a large and well known family of Show People. The Picture House in the first instance was a tent; it served the purpose. Like most people in the Show Business world, Billy was enterprising and, in the course of time, he built a corrugated iron shed on the site of the tent. He was stuck for a name for his new Picture

House. This did not perturb Billy for long. He ran a competition, according to Mr Oswald, the winner of which had the honour to pronounce the new name which was the *Magnet*. To celebrate the opening Billy decorated the front of the 'new house' with 'Silver Magnets'. It seated about 200. Mr Oswald told me the first picture was *The Horse of Troy*.

News, Friday, November 14<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“MAGNET THEATRE  
PARLIAMENT STREET, LEITH**

**GO-AS-YOU-PLEASE COMPETITION will be held EVERY NIGHT during week  
commencing Monday 17<sup>th</sup> November 1913**

**Semi-final, First House , Friday  
Final, Second House, Friday**

**Winners must perform on SATURDAY EVENING**

**PRIZES: 1<sup>st</sup>, 30s.; 2<sup>nd</sup>, 15s.; 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10s.; 4<sup>th</sup>, 5s.**

**Entries must be in every evening by 6.30  
Competition is open to all comers over 14 years of age”**

I append a short but revealing history of the **Coalhill** area, extracted from *Grant's Old and New Edinburgh*.

**“NO SHORE DUTIES FOR COAL SHIPS AT LEITH**

In December **1797**, it was ordered by the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council of Edinburgh, through the deputy shore-master at Leith, that every vessel coming into the Port with coals for public sale, was to have a berth immediately on her arrival off the **COAL HILL**, and that all other vessels were to unmoor for that purpose, while no shore duties were to be charged for coal vessels.

**OLD COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

The Coal Hill area adjoined the Shore on the south, and it was here that, in a squalid and degraded quarter, but immediately facing the river was one of the most remarkable features in Leith – the Old Council Chamber, wherein the Earls of Lennox, Mar, and Morton, plotted in succession, their treasons against the Crown.

It was five storeys on height, and built of polished ashlar, with two handsome string mouldings. On its wester front two gables, and a double window projected on three large corbels; on the north it had a dormer window and a massive outside chimney-stack

One way and another it was quite a building and it is believed to have been built by Mary of Lorraine, to be used by her Privy Council

## PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF THE AREA

Early in **1877** the Provost of Leith drew attention to the insanitary condition of certain portions of the burgh, more especially the crowded central area lying between St Giles Street and Coal Hill. In the area mentioned the death rate amounted to 26 per 1,000 or 5% above any part of Leith, while the infantile mortality reached the alarming rate of 56 per 1,000. (Note: For Scotland as a whole in **1962** the rates were 12 and 25 respectively)

The (Leith) Town Council ordered that a plan for demolition of the area be prepared, which would affect some 3,500 inhabitants. The plan was approved by the Home Secretary. The proposed plan made provision for the removal of 18 ancient closes.

In the first instance, £100,000 was to be borrowed by the Public Works Loan Commissioners, payable in 30 years, about **1911**. In **1881** the Home Secretary reduced the loan to £70,000”

Then as now (1963) the policy was too few £s and too long to start the job.

On Sunday, August 11<sup>th</sup> **1963**, I saw a building in Parliament Street, Leith, opposite the Corporation Model Lodging House, built in **1893**, being demolished. The same day I saw St Giles Street, off the Kirkgate, standing like a ghost. It is a long, long time between 1877 and 1911. You see, slums that were mentioned then are **still** standing. True, some are propped up in 1963,

We owe Billy Cadona a vote of thanks for Resting His Caravan on the Coal Hill site; otherwise we might not have discovered these ‘gems’ of Leith History

### ***PADDY’S COAL FAULD, LEITH PADDY FAULKENER’S PICTURE HOUSE***

I never found any Press Advertisement for this Picture House. From time to time information filtered through to me anent many cinemas; this was one of them. It can be said therefore that the date anent its opening takes its place in history by coming down to us by word of mouth; in this case the details were provided by Mr **R. Hughson**, Master Painter, Ferry Road, Leith. He told me in May **1963** that the Picture House in Paddy’s Land, Dudley Bank, Leith, was there in **1908**. It was known as ***Paddy Faulkener’s Picture House***. It was a large tent with a wooden sign painted in bright colours. Admission was 1d. and 2d.. The programmes consisted largely of Westerns and Local News.

Leith Provident Co-operative Society built a super-market on the site in 1962-63.

***PALACE, FOOT OF THE WALK, LEITH***

*News*, Saturday, December 28<sup>th</sup> 1912

**“This Magnificent Building, erected at Enormous Cost, will be OPENED TO THE PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 30<sup>TH</sup> 1912**

(Alas, it did not open until Wednesday January 1<sup>st</sup> 1913)

**TWICE NIGHTLY - 7 & 9**

**A LORDLY PICTURE HOUSE  
STAR PICTURE PROGRAMME**

**PRICES: 1s.; 6d.; 4d.; and 2d.**

*News* Tuesday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1912

**“PALACE, A PREVIEW  
COST BETWEEN £15,000 AND £20,000**

Capable of accommodating 2,000 persons will be opened shortly in Leith. It is situated on one of the most central and prominent sites in the town, namely, the corner of Constitution Street and Duke Street. It was intended to open last night, but tradesmen were unable to finish on time.

Formerly occupied by a wine merchant's premises. Recently the work has been pushed on, taking several months to clear and build, the structure has been built over a number of old wine vaults, below street level. The road has been widened at the expense of a slice off Duke Street.

At the highest point the roof is 38 feet in height. Gallery built on cantilever principle; there is not a single pillar to obstruct the view. The proscenium is 32 feet wide and 22 feet high.

The **Brackliss** projection has been installed, which is placed behind the Gallery. There are eight exits, all of which lead to the streets.

In the auditorium the floor space is 70 feet wide. There is sitting room for 900 in the Pit; behind this area are the Pit Stalls with tip-up chairs for 650 and in the Gallery there are finely upholstered tip-up chairs for 450.

Electric light has been introduced, in addition to gas which is an auxiliary.

The **Palace** is owned by the Leith Public Hall and Property Co., Ltd. Total cost £15,000 to £20,000, inclusive of furnishing.

*News*, Monday, January 6<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“PALACE - LEITH**

***A RACE FOR INHERITANCE ”***

This may have been the first picture shown; at least, it was the first to be advertised.

In the early summer of **1963** Mr **Harold Davis**, a director of the Company, was appointed assistant manager; I had the pleasure of meeting him in November **1962**. In his younger days he was a well known ballad singer; he was manager of the *Albert Hall* from **1923 to 1930**

***STATE CINEMA, GREAT JUNCTION STREET, LEITH***

*News*, Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup> **1938** Advertisement

**“THE STATE, LEITH  
OPEN ON MONDAY FIRST**

**19<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 1938 at 2.30p.m.**

**PROCEEDS ON OPENING DAY TO LEITH HOSPITAL**

***BLOCKADE with MADELINE CARROLL & HENRY FONDA***

**Also  
GENE AUTRY in *BOOTS AND SADDLES* (U)**

**Prices: 6d.; 9d.; and 1s. Children if with adults: 3d.; 4d.; and 6d.**

**MATINEES till 4 p.m. 4d. and 6d. CHILDREN 3d and 4d.  
HOLIDAYS AND SATURDAYS EXCEPTED”**

**STATE CINEMA, GREAT JUNCTION STREET**

**A DESCRIPTION OF THE ‘HOUSE’**

*News*, Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup> **1938**

“To an interesting record of progress in modern cinema development is to be added a new venture which will provide for Leith a first-class choice of the finest film entertainment.

The *State Cinema*, which was opened today occupies a prominent site fronting Great Junction Street and adjoining Junction Bridge. A pleasant harmonious building of the stadium type, it is an excellent example of modern cinema planning, and it forms part of a scheme which may be regarded as an important architectural asset to Leith.

The cinema has accommodation for 1,650 patrons, and broad gangways contribute to the general effect of spaciousness. The comfort of the patrons has been considered in every detail. The seats have been so arranged as to eliminate neck-stretching or strain on the eyes

and they have been amply spaced to ensure complete comfort with perfect vision of the screen from any part of the house. The seating and furnishings are all of first-class quality, making the *State* worthy of its place as a 'luxury' cinema

#### FINEST SOUND SYSTEM

Luxurious lounges and foyers lead to the Stalls and Balcony, and notable features of the design of the building are the allowances for easy entry and exit. Acoustically, the cinema is of the very best type.

The sound equipment has been installed by Messrs **R.C.A. Photophone Ltd.**, incorporates all the latest improvements and the special design and acoustic treatment of the building will enable every member of the audience to hear with perfect clarity in every part of the cinema. The sound system is **R.C.A. High Fidelity**, complete with **Shearer Horn system**, identical with the system installed during the past year in the *Empire Theatre, Leicester Square, and the new Warner Theatre, Leicester Square, London.*

#### LIGHTING ARTISTRY

There are new notes in decorative treatment, both externally and internally, and the lighting, both attractive and novel, has been carried out in a scheme incorporating concealed as well as flood-lighting.

The internal lighting scheme has been carried through by Messrs Holophone of London, on the three colour system, and special care has been taken to devise the exact setting to secure a proper distribution of colour lighting throughout the auditorium. The cinema has been decorated throughout in colours of soft green and silver in order that the lighting will have the maximum effect.

#### BUILDING CONTRACTORS

The general contractors for the whole theatre were Messrs James Miller & Partners Ltd., 88 Hanover Street, Edinburgh, who carried out the mason, joiner, brick and plaster work in a first-class manner. This local firm of builders was also responsible for the building of the *Embassy* at Pilton, opened in August **1937**.

#### HEALTHY ATMOSPHERE

The heating and lighting and ventilation of the State have been carried through by Messrs MacKenzie and Moncur, Edinburgh, who are well-known specialists in this type of work, The electrical and plumbing was undertaken by David Stephens, 15 Howe Street, Edinburgh and both heating and electrical appliances are of the most modern type, the greater part of the heating being by **heated air units**, and this in the summer months can be changed to supply **cool air**, thus ensuring a healthy and pleasant atmosphere in this particular season.

#### FURNISHINGS AND DECORATION

Carpets are of the same high quality as the other furnishings of the cinema, and have been supplied by Messrs Patrick Thomson Ltd., Edinburgh. The scheme of decoration has been carried out through in its entirety by Messrs James Miller & Partners, Ltd.

Artistic glass-work throughout has been undertaken by Mr William Marshall, 157 Morrison Street, Edinburgh. Steel work by Messrs Redpath Brown & Co. Ltd. Edinburgh. Terrazzo work by Messrs Toffolo Jackson & Co. Glasgow. Reinforced concrete by Messrs J. and J.

Johnson, 119 Grove Street, Edinburgh; and Messrs W. G. Walker & Sons (Edinburgh) Ltd., Duff Street, Edinburgh carried out the rock asphalt roofing.

#### DIRECTORS' POLICY

The managing director of the State is Mr **William Albin**, who for many years conducted on his own behalf the *Pavilion and the Picture House, Dalkeith*. Patrons of the State will find, as was found in Dalkeith, that Mr Albin's time will be devoted entirely to providing first-class entertainment with the maximum of comfort.

All parts of the theatre will be open today (Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup> 1938) to the general public at popular prices from 5.30 p.m. and thereafter continuously from 1.30 each day.

List of Directors, all of Edinburgh

James Miller, J.P., Chairman; Hugh McGourty, Director; Councillor Lawrence S. Miller Director; Councillor R. McLaughlin, C.A., Director and Secretary

The policy of the Directors will be to ensure that patrons are provided with the pick of the best films."

*Dispatch*, Tuesday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1959

In his *After Dark* column, **Bill Winkie** apparently chose a subject at random. In the above issue men from the Cinema formed the feature for *After Dark*, one of whom was:

#### "Mr George Webster, Manager of the State

Mr Webster is coming up to his half Century in the entertainment business. He was a chocolate boy in the old *Electric Theatre, Falkirk*, now the *Roxy Theatre*.

After war service (1914-1918) with the Royal Engineers he managed shows all over Scotland, and eventually broke into the cinema business in the *Roxburgh Cinema, Drummond Street*, Edinburgh, in the early 1920's.

He moved from there to the *Grand, Stockbridge*, and from there to the *State* in May 1944."

In reply to Bill Winkie, Mr Webster said, anent worthies, "There is now a lack of worthies in the City. There had been a lot of changes since I got into the entertainment business. Even the length of films. Then they measured just over 500 feet and ran for about 5 minutes. Now they run for over two hours."

The article mentioned that Mr Webster resided at 16 Chancelot Terrace, Edinburgh 6.

I had the pleasure of meeting Mr Webster several times during the winter of 1962/63. He went to endless trouble to provide me with information in connection with the Cinema Business. . I will have more to write about Mr Webster under the *Roxburgh Cinema*. He retired from the *State* on Saturday October 5<sup>th</sup> 1963

#### SWALLOW'S BOOTH, IONA STREET SHOW GROUND

See under article on James Salvona

**JAMES SALVONA, who answered to Willie  
Acrobat, Showman and ‘Play’ Actor**

On Monday, September 30<sup>th</sup> **1963** I had the good fortune to meet one of an almost extinct race, in the person of ‘Willie’ Salvona. Willie, aged 85 years, was at home in his neatly appointed caravan at 68, Seafield Road, Leith. It was my first contact with an old-timer who had been a player in his father’s penny gaff in Iona Street show ground as far back as **1891**.

While in that caravan I realised the meaning of the saying, ‘A place for everything, and everything in its place’. To which my mother would have added, ‘Otherwise the place would soon get into a *boorach* [mess G.F.B.]’

**SWALLOW’S BOOTH SHOWING MOVING PICTURES**

When he was aged 15 years, ‘Willie’ recalled seeing moving pictures in the booth next to his father’s in Iona Street in **1893**. A **Mr Swallow** rented this booth and the moving picture in question was about a railway and a railway crossing. There were no seats in the booth and admission was 1d. **This was possibly the first moving pictures to be seen in Edinburgh.**

The conversation ranged over a wide field. Many bits and pieces are included through out the Leith history of entertainments. The most important piece of information imparted by Mr Salvona was regarding:

**IONA STREET ‘SHOWS’, FOUNDED IN 1891**

It was in the year **1891** that **Samuel Evans**, son of **John Evans**, one of the foremost showmen in Great Britain, leased that piece of ground known to my generation as ***Iona Street Shows and Carnival***.

It was in the same year that **Domenick Salvona**, father of James, was the first showman to rent a piece of ground on which to set up his booth, used as a penny gaff. ‘Willie’ was 13 years of age, nevertheless he was thrown at the deep end of the ‘acting’ business. He never had any schooling.

Iona Street as he remembered it in **1891** was little more than a broad park.. Green fields were between Leith Walk and Easter Road; and near Dalmeny Street was located **Quarry Holes Dairy**, where the showmens’ traction horses were stabled. I can still see the horses – four, six, and as many as eight harnesses to caravans and animal cages in Leith Walk as late as **1906**. I will have more to say about the area in My Reminiscences of Iona Street Showground, Chapter 31.

Note 1: On Johnson’s Plan of Edinburgh and Leith, **1851**, a farm named Quarry Holes is shown slightly to the north of the Edinburgh/Leith boundary, lying to the west of Easter Road, and level with Orchardfield, Leith Walk, on the west and the Drum, Easter Road, on the east.

Note 2: The first Show people using mechanical means for traction and to generate Electric Light was the huge combine **Bostock and Wombwell** had in Edinburgh in December **1891**; see Chapter 32: Circuses etc.

### THE PENNY GAFF

‘Willie’ Salvona recalled, with evident pleasure, some of the ‘plays’ enacted in the gaff, such As: *Sweeny Todd the Barber*; *Face at the Window*; *The Body Snatchers*; *Sign of the Cross*; *Girl Who Took The Wrong Turning*; and *Jeannie Deans*. ‘Willie’ assured me his family played in the last-mentioned in the actual Court Room where **Jeannie Deans** was tried in the Tolbooth, Canongate. See page 288 for details about **Barr’s** Gaff and **Duckenfield’s** Gaff in Bangor Road, Leith.

Without any coaxing ‘Willie’ would reel off the dialogue of one or other of the ‘plays’. He said *The Sign of The Cross* was his favourite.

### DIAMOND WEDDING

One of his proud possessions is a telegram of Congratulations from the Queen on the occasion of their Diamond Wedding. For the record, ‘Willie’ was married on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1899 at 13 Gordon Street, Leith:

James Salvona, Acrobat, aged 21, Bachelor

Margaret Davies, Printer’s Machinist, aged 17, Spinster

It was a great pleasure to meet and converse with ‘Willie’ Salvona.

***Leith Circuses***, see Chapter 32: Circuses and Showgrounds.

## 26: PORTOBELLO KNOWN TO ME AND COUNTLESS THOUSANDS AS 'PORTY'

*Extracts from William Baird's "Annals of Duddingston and Portobello", 1898; Portobello had a theatre before its first church; various locations for the Town Hall; Portobello Public Library; The Tower, Portobello, 1785; Portobello Harbour, 1787-88; Bathing Machines, 1795; Hot and Cold Baths, 1804; Stage Coach, 1806; Post Office, 1807; Portobello Races, 1811; Growth in population, 1799 to 1891 Census; Portobello's first streets, 1767-1802 Portobello Pier, 1871; Building on Rabbit Ha', 1804; Duddingston Road leading from Brighton Place, 1846; Shore Encroachment, 1842; Sewers came before Promenade, 1859; Porty, the dream of my childhood days; the Sand Thieves*

### **Portobello Amusements**

**Cinemas:** *Bungalow Electric Theatre, 26 Bath Street, 1912, also known as the Electric Theatre and the Victory, 1942, closed in 1956; Central Picture House, 281 High Street, 1914 later named the George, reverting to Central, 1954-1961, before becoming a Bingo Club in 1961; Cinema Theatre, 189 High Street, 1913, see under 'Old Town Hall in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, 'Other Places of Entertainment'; County Cinema, Bath Street, 1939 – later named George, 1954; Electric Theatre, Bath Street, see under Bungalow Electric Theatre; George, Cinema, Bath Street, see under County Cinema; George Cinema, 281 High Street, see under Central Cinema; Marine Cinema Theatre, see under 'Marine Gardens', 'Other Places of Amusement'; Picture Theatre, Harbour Green, 1915; Portobello Theatre and Cinema, 189 High Street, see under 'Old Town Hall in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century', 'Other Places of Amusement'; Star Picture House, 189 High Street, see under 'Old Town Hall in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century', 'Other Places of Amusement'; Tower Picture Palace, see 'Tower Street and its Various Places of Amusement'; Victory, Bath Street, see under Bungalow Electric Theatre.*

**Other Places of Amusement:** *Concerts in Town Hall, 189 High Street, 1863-64; Letta's Show/Pavilion, Bath Street (on site of George Cinema), 1928; Marine Gardens, 1909 – Scenic Railway; Cinema Theatre, 1913; Aeronautical displays, 1913; Used for billeting Army personnel in First World War (author's reminiscences); Roller Skating, 1931; Leith Athletic Football ground, pre 1940; Dirt Track Racing, 1920's and 1930's; Dog Racing; Landing craft built during the 1939-45 War; Post Second World War, land developed for Corporation Bus Garage, 1962, etc.; **Old Town Hall, 189 High Street, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century** – Portobello Theatre and Cinema, 1900; Cinema Theatre, 1913; Star Hall, 1920; Star Picture House, ?1910; Portobello Baptist Church, 1939; Opening of Cinema Theatre, 1913; **Portobello Pier and Pavilion**, Band and Variety Entertainments, 1877; **Portobello Town Hall, 1914; Prom Concert Party** (foot of Wellington Street), 1928; **Tower Street and its various places of amusement** The Promenade Saloon, foot of Tower Street, 1876; Tower Pavilion, Portobello, 1907; Tower Picture Palace, 1910; Tower Amusements, 1936; Tower Hall/Tower Street Hall, 62 Tower Street, 1907-08; New Ocean Skating Rink, 1909; St Anne's Mission.*

*Closure of Portobello Railway Station, 1963.*

*Circuses in Portobello, Ord's Circus, 1790's; see Chapter 32*

That it was, within my remembrance, a prosperous seaside resort can also be shown in the records. I show the 'highlights' of its greatness as a village and as a town (see the Census population figures). Alas, it has fallen from its exalted position largely through the neglect of its shopkeepers which can be traced to the early 1920's. Further on I show how, in **1963**, some people made a belated and half-hearted attempt to infuse life into dear old Porty.

I am indebted to **William Baird** who wrote *Annals of Duddingston and Portobello*, which was published in **1898**, for much of the historical data pertaining to the town.

Portobello became a Parliamentary Burgh under the Act William IV, Cap. 77, passed in August **1833**. It amalgamated with Edinburgh in **1896**.

#### PORTOBELLO HAD A THEATRE BEFORE IT HAD A CHURCH

During the summer of **1808**, Portobello, if it could not boast of having a Church, strangely enough had a Theatre established within its bounds. This, it appears, was a wooden building erected by a company of *Strolling Actors in Tower Street*, for the entertainment of the villagers and summer visitors.

#### PORTOBELLO CHAPEL

A suitable place for a chapel was acquired in a newly prospected street proposed to be opened on the Marquis of Abercorn's ground, and which he had named Melville Street after Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville, the M.P. for Edinburgh. The feu for the site was obtained at £2 per annum, and vested by a conveyance dated 25<sup>th</sup> March **1809**. The foundation stone was laid on 27<sup>th</sup> October **1808**.

Its first preacher was Mr Thomas Wright, who was succeeded after five years by the Rev John Glen in 1814 until **1843**, when he and his flock joined the Free Kirk.

The Chapel of Ease Act, 1834, was responsible for raising Portobello Chapel to the status of Parish Church *quod sacra*, which entitled the minister to be a member of the Presbytery with a right of sitting in rotation in the General Assembly.

#### PORTOBELLO MUNICIPAL PREMISES COUNCIL CHAMBERS OR TOWN HALL

In **1833** Baillie Barclay, at his own expense, rented the house at No 1 Brighton Place till Whitsunday. The Council's next meeting-place was at Forsyth's Rooms, adjoining Mount Charles, High Street. They were there for a number of years (I understand it is now known as the Royal Hotel).

After a number of changes the Council moved in **1852** to Rosefield House, at that time used as a school. It was taken on lease for 5 years at a rent of £35 per annum.

Note: Rosefield House, built in **1767** in Adelphi Place, the first side street in Portobello. Some of Adelphi Place was demolished in 1962-63.

Rosefield House having proved to be too small, a company was set up with capital to the extent of £2,000, with the Provost, Dr Hope, as Chairman and Mr Alex Taylor, postmaster, as Secretary. The site fixed upon was Portobello House, the property of the Baxter's, built in **1753**

In May **1860**, Mr David Bryce, R.S.A., drew up designs, which included Council Chambers, Town Clerk's Office, Police Cells and dwellings, and several shops on the ground floor. In October **1860** the Town Council sent an offer to the Secretary of the company to pay and rent for £80 per annum for a lease of 15 years. On this footing building operations were begun. The foundation stone was laid on 4<sup>th</sup> August **1862** amid general rejoicing. The building was completed in May **1863** which allowed the Council to move from Adelphi Place, having entered into a 15 years' lease.

### BIG TROUBLE OVER NEW COUNCIL CHAMBERS

(Much too long to give in detail)

In August **1863**, on the motion of **Thomas Wood** (bottle maker of Baileyfield Road) a former Provost, it was agreed to take certain action regarding the accommodation of the new building. On the advice of Counsel, it was agreed to apply to the Court of Session for a reduction of their unfortunate lease; as a preliminary to that they resolved to rent a house in Grove Place (situated between Pipe Street and Tower Street, fronting the High Street) for £40.

On 29<sup>th</sup> April **1864**, the Outer House before Lord Corriehill decided in favour of the Company's plea for payment of the first year's rent for the new Town Hall. The case was again heard in February before Lord Jerviswood. A reclaiming note was lodged. This came before the Court of Session in May **1866**. Their Lordships again decided in favour of the Town Hall Company.

A joint minute for the parties was lodged in process on 16<sup>th</sup> November **1866**, and on this date the Lords of the First Division pardoned the Town Hall Company from the conclusion of the action. So ended a bitter struggle lasting over four years.

The Town Council moved into the Town Hall premises in May **1867** after they had been thoroughly overhauled. We hear more about the Town Hall as a Place of Entertainment in the **1860's** and for several decades thereafter.

### PORTOBELLO NEW TOWN HALL MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS 1877

The Portobello Town Council completed the 15 years' lease of the Town Hall in **1878**. It must have been like a prison sentence to those Councillors who 'suffered' the indignity all that time. However, they bestirred themselves and a site for a New Town Hall to suit their needs was purchased at No. 118 High Street, adjoining Ramsay Lane, for £1,260, with a frontage of 57 feet and a depth of 106 feet.

Designs were prepared by Messrs R. Paterson & Son, architects, and this fine block of buildings in the old Scottish baronial style was erected in **1877-78** at a cost of £5,000.

Work was begun in December **1877** and it was opened during the autumn of **1878**. Ample room was provided for police and municipal purposes, Council and Court rooms. Police cells and offices, fire engine room etc. were at the rear. The tower at the Town Hall is fitted with a clock and a bell; the latter was the gift of Provost Wood.

It ceased to be used as Municipal Offices in November **1896**, in which year Portobello amalgamated with Edinburgh. Portobello Town Hall was opened in **1914**.

### **Portobello Public Library**

On 1<sup>st</sup> October **1897** a branch of Edinburgh Public Libraries was opened in part of the Town Hall which was formerly used to conduct Municipal business. It served with ever-increasing business for 66 years and was transferred to new premises in Rosefield Avenue, Portobello, which were opened informally on Monday, September 2<sup>nd</sup> **1963**. The ‘flitting’ was done the previous day, Sunday, without a hitch

### **THE NEW LIBRARY**

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, August 29<sup>th</sup> **1963**

“The library has an approximate area of 6,500 square feet; has accommodation for about 15,000 volumes in general library, children’s and reference sections. It also contains a reading room – periodicals and newspapers etc., and a large lecture room, which could be utilised for civic affairs meetings as well as library activities, workshops and staff accommodation.

The layout of the building was dictated by the available site. There is car parking space in the front courtyard.

Architect: The library was designed in the Department of the City Architect, Alexander Steel; site architect, M.E. Gunn. Costs (not final at time of writing, Friday 11<sup>th</sup> October 1963): Buildings, £28,000; Furniture, £6,000; Fees, £3,500; Total £37,500

*Dispatch*, Saturday October 12<sup>th</sup> **1963**

#### **“Portobello’s New Library Opens**

The Rt. Hon. Duncan M. Weatherstone, M.C., T.D., Lord Provost opened the new Portobello Library on Friday, October 11<sup>th</sup> 1963 at 3 o’clock. It was the first library to be opened since Dundee Street in 1940.

“These new buildings, 35 new schools built since the war, and the Portobello library, will provide new atmosphere and new inspiration not only for the children of today, but for their children’s children.” The Lord Provost said.

A company of about 65 ladies and gentlemen gathered in the beautiful lecture room. Sir John Banks, a former Lord Provost was present, Councillor Dinwoodie, Chairman of the Libraries and Museums Committee, welcomed the Lord Provost and his Lady. In a short address the Lord Provost was called upon by the Chairman to perform the Opening Ceremony.

### **The Tower, Portobello**

The Tower was erected in **1785**. It was advertised for sale in the *Edinburgh Courant* on 11<sup>th</sup> April **1807**. It fell into disrepair till about **1864** when **Hugh Paton**, the publisher of *Kay’s Edinburgh Portraits*, purchased the Tower, which he restored to its original condition, and built the commodious mansion adjoining it. The Tower will be mentioned on several occasions in the Portobello story.

### **Portobello Harbour**

*Grant's Old and New Edinburgh*, Volume III, page 149

“The harbour was built in **1787-88** at the mouth of Figgate Burn, at the foot of Pipe Street, by Mr Jameson. Mr Alex Robertson, lessee of Joppa Quarry, carted over 1,000 loads of boulder stones and squared stones for facing the pier and harbour walls.”

### **Bathing Machines**

*Edinburgh Evening Courant*, June 11<sup>th</sup> **1795**

“John Cairns at Portobello, begs to inform ladies and gentlemen anent Bathing Machines and Steady Horses and Careful Drivers (That is Good, Very Good, Steady Horses G.B.)  
1 shilling for each time they bath, same price as at Leith.”

It was ‘fashionable’ but too expensive for plain folk. Some of the ‘plain folk’, that is, for example, housepainters received 3d. per hour, as is shown in old records of Messrs Bonnar, for many years in George Street, Edinburgh, now in 7 Young Street, Edinburgh 2. Their place of business in the **1770’s** was in the Lawnmarket. They are, as I write in 1963, in the eighth generation and as such, are the oldest firm, of any kind, in Edinburgh. See my history, “Wage Fluctuation in the Painting Trade from 1824 to 1956”, in the Scottish Room, Central Library.

[From A.Foley’s *Portobello in picture postcards*, P.C. 42, “....Beyond the boat stance are the bathing machines. Bathers would undress in the machine after being pulled out into the sea by a horse. When they finished bathing they signalled the attendant to be hauled back to shore.” G.F.B.]

### **Hot and Cold Baths**

Based on a report which appeared in the *Edinburgh Courant*, September 11<sup>th</sup> **1804**

A company was formed; the cost estimated at £4,000. Shares were £25 each, and this allowed shareholders to have baths at half price; holders of two or more shares could have free baths.

Ground was feued from Mr John Rae, at Bent’s Park, extending 220 feet east and west, by 97 feet southwards.

### **Stage Coach**

The *Edinburgh Courant* announced on 9<sup>th</sup> April **1806**, that a stage coach had been established between Portobello and Edinburgh: Price, 10d., setting off from Peter MacArthur’s, Pipe Street, at 9 a.m, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. returning from John Swanston’s, grocer Niddry Street (near the Tron), Edinburgh, at 11 a.m., 3.15 p.m. and 8 p.m.

### **Pubs**

As early as **1806-07** Portobello enjoyed the rather doubtful advantage of having a good many public-houses or ‘Inns’, mostly all in the High Street.

### **Post Office**

In **1807** Mr **James Newlands** opened the Post Office at the corner of Tower Street and High Street. He was also House Agent, Banker, Valuator Auctioneer, etc. It will be seen that Mr Newlands was not *hard cawed* in those far-off days. The Post-runner at that time was a little widow woman named **Nanny Moffat**. It was thought the little old lady ‘ran’ with an average of two letters per day.

### **Portobello Races**

*Edinburgh Courant*, Monday July ? **1811**

“Portobello Races on Monday last offered most excellent sport. Portobello Races will be run next year on the first Monday after Leith Races, before which time the new tavern and hotel will be opened.”

The first and second prizes were 10 and 5 guineas respectively. The winning post was at Bath Street,

### **Population of Portobello**

William Baird quoted a work called *Scotland Delineated* , published in **1799** in which Portobello is described as “a rising village of about 300 inhabitants, employed in the manufacture of bricks, tiles, jars, brown pottery and white stoneware.” The 1961 Census Report for Edinburgh discloses that by **1821** the population had risen to 1,912; that in **1841** the count was 3,588 persons; that in **1871** it had risen to 5,481; and that in **1891**, the last Census before its amalgamation with Edinburgh, Portobello had a population of 8,182 persons.

### **The First Streets in Portobello**

Apart from the main street, namely the High Street, the first ‘side’ opening was Rosefield Avenue in **1767**. Others were: Tobago Street, which was named after a tobacco planter, who had returned from Tobago to spend his retirement in Portobello; Pipe Street; Ramsay Lane; Wilson’s Park; Nicolson Street or Jameson Street now Windsor Place. In **1802** Tower Street was opened and staked off for feuing.

### **Building on Rabbit Ha’**

A notice announcing that ground to feu was available at Rabbit Ha’ (Hall), was made on May 5<sup>th</sup> **1804** by Thomas Scott W.S. at his Chambers in Lawnmarket. Thomas was the brother of Sir Walter Scott. The following streets were built soon thereafter: Bath Place, Regent Street, Wellington Street, Straiton Place.

### **Duddingston Road leading from Brighton Place**

It was not until **1846** that a start was made to make the Duddingston Road. The delay was due to the obstinacy of one named **Baxter** who owned land between Brighton Place and the old Duddingston Road from **1834**.

### **Shore Encroachment**

*To know that Evil has been done and yet stay silent and lethargic  
is to decry the name of Mankind itself*

Sir **William Rae**, Lord Advocate of Scotland in the year **1842**, knew that evil was being done, but he did not stand aside. But for Sir William it is questionable whether there would have been a promenade, or a pier, in Portobello. It came about thus.

A Mr **Alexander Smith**, W.S., proprietor of Melville House, fronting the beach, took it upon himself to extend the area of his grounds by enclosing, with a high wall, a large slice of the sea beach within the high water mark. Numerous complaints had been made against the encroachment, but the only public authority which could take up the question was helpless, for want of funds, to take the matter to Court. Sir William Rae, a resident at the time in Portobello, on going along the beach one morning to take his usual bath found his way barred at Melville Street by Smith's high wall, against which the waves were being dashed. On learning the particulars of the case and, also, of the helplessness of the local authorities, he at once, on behalf of the Crown, raised an action in the Court of Session against Mr Smith, to have it declared that the wall was an encroachment upon the foreshore and should, therefore, be removed. The action was decided by the Court against Mr Smith in December **1846**, and he was ordered to take down the wall. The case was thereupon appealed to the House of Lords, which in **1848** confirmed the decision.

Smith tried to prevail upon the Town Council to allow him to build his wall in line with that of a Mr Marshall, on the west side of Smith's property, who had also taken in a piece of the sand. The Town Clerk replied that it was inadmissible, the Council having no right to consent to any encroachments on public property. The aforementioned Mr Marshall was compelled to give up the piece of sand which he had taken.

Had it not been for the action which Sir William Rae took, these encroachments would have multiplied and the fine continuity of the beach would have been destroyed.

### **Sewers came before the Promenade**

Lord knows where the sewage and waste matter would have found an outlet had Sir William Rae not taken the action he did, which was disposed of in **1848** by the House of Lords.

It may come as a surprise to learn that the main drain, or sewer, runs under the Promenade, but such is the case. We learn that, in **1859**, the intercepting sewer on the beach from Bath Street to Melville Street should be protected by a stone-faced terrace so as to make a walk 20 feet wide. The 'good' people of Joppa objected to the continuation of the sewer to their end etc.

Another petition from the Joppa people objected to the making of the Promenade along the beach to Joppa. No reason was given for their objection.

Another Portobello stalwart was honoured by the Townspeople of Portobello who were deeply indebted to **Lieut. Col. Johnson**, Provost of Portobello, for the work he did in bringing the £9,000 drainage scheme to a successful termination. The Promenade, so far built from Bath Street to Melville Street, was opened on 2<sup>nd</sup> June **1860**. It was declared open to the public under the name of : *The Prince of Wales Terrace*

The name given was given as a compliment to His Royal Highness, who during the preceding year, while residing at Holyrood, had been almost a daily visitor to Portobello

### ***Portobello Pier and Pavilion***

In March **1869** the Portobello Pier Company's Bill came before Parliament. The Bill passed Houses of Parliament in July **1869**

The Pier was built in **1871** at a cost of £10,000. It was formally opened on 23<sup>rd</sup> March **1871** in the presence of the Lord Provost of Edinburgh and the leading authorities of Leith, Musselburgh and Portobello. Mr **Thomas Bouch**, who designed the Pier, also designed the Tay Bridge. Provost Wood floated a company, with a capital of £7,000, in 700 shares of £10.

The length of the Pier was 1,250 feet; the main body or gangway being 1,080 feet, and the Pierhead or Pavilion making up the remaining length. Originally, the gangway was 22 feet wide, but was reduced to 19 feet.

For some years the venture was successful, but structural alterations and repairs, involving heavy expenditure, led to the company being wound up.. The Pier was disposed of to Mr **M. P. Galloway**, the Steam Packet Ship owner, for £1,500.

The Pier was demolished in **1917** and no attempt was ever made to build another one.

### **Run down housing: a challenge for the Town Council**

Edinburgh has the name of being East-Windy, West-endy. The peculiar position regarding Portobello then, and to a great extent now (1963), is that industry is carried out at the west end of the burgh; even the Gas Works were in Pipe Street. Now, of course, the mighty Electricity Generating Station is at the extreme west end of the High Street.

Yes, the seaside has, undoubtedly, had its moments, but how long since. In the hinterland, to the north of the High Street, from the Pool to Bath Street, it is a festering sore, and those aspirants for municipal 'honours', of all Parties, come out at the appointed time and all, strange to say, with much the same theme song: Put me into the Town Council and everything will be all right. What they forget to say is, All Right for whom. A plague on them, members of the silent league, who do a public turn once a year which entitles them to become members of an exclusive club, namely the Town Council.

### **Three Places of Amusement in Portobello in 1963**

Then there were.... Count them as you go along.

### **“Porty” – The Dream of my Childhood Days**

I first became acquainted with Portobello in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was the Mecca for children who lived in the big city of Edinburgh; the intervening three miles between the G.P.O. and Porty, or from the Waverley Station, was an added joy to the day's outing. The mountains of 'pieces', called packed lunches in the 1960's, it little matters for they find a common resting place. Ice-cream sliders just did not have the sale they have today. Then it was Ice-Cream Joe with his little cart who dispensed the ½ d. slider. Now, Big Business has turned the ½ d. into the minimum charge of 9d., or thereabouts.

Donkey rides, once in a while, and it had to be a very special occasion for that treat. The Pier was something to look at, as there was an admission charge. I remember Galloway's steamers at the Pier, but I never experienced the pleasure of a sail from Porty. However, I sometimes sailed from Leith Pier, and, of course, on the old *Wullie Muir* between Granton and Burntisland. If you wish pictorial evidence of the above, see the dozen or more enlarged photographs, which are to be hung in the lecture hall in the new Portobello Library.

The Portobello as described above is dead. The 'killing' was a bit more serious than the 'Killing of Cock Robin'. There is a good and well-authenticated case for the time when the 'killing' started and for the culprits

Through the decades amusements do not drop out of business just fore the fun of it. Summer visitors who once went to Porty in droves, now have good reason for staying away. The reader may and will be told various stories anent the decline and virtual death of Portobello as a seaside resort, except the real reason.

Prior to the first Thursday in the Merry Month of May (the day set aside each year for electors to choose a representative for the Town Council) it is one of the strange quirks that Portobello gets an annual 'airing' at meetings or through the medium of the Local Press.

Those aspirants for municipal honours, of all Parties, have not learned the simple truth that the dead cannot be brought back to life. This applies equally as well to one-time humans as to dead or dying towns. Letters to the 'Editor' appeal for something to be done for Portobello only at, or near, the Local Elections.

### **The Sand Thieves**

A woman's crowning glory is her hair. If, for any reason, a woman should lose her hair tresses it would be bad, very bad. But in the 1960's a woman could buy a 25s. wig, which would, to some extent, restore her confidence and cover her partial nakedness. I have in mind the story of Lady Godiva who depended upon her flowing tresses as a cover.

Prior to and for a year or so after the First World War one could step down on to the sand from the Prom in perfect safety. The sand was to Portobello what hair is to a woman. However, the sand was carted away in thousands of tons; then 'they' started all over again and carted further thousands of tons away. [From A Foley's *Portobello in picture postcards*, 1985. P.C. 43 vividly shows how it was possible to step from the promenade on to the beach, in the late 1920's; but in P.C. 39, taken 'about 1930' Mr Foley comments, "how much sand has been lost from the beach...The Promenade is now about five feet above the level of the sand." G.F.B.]

On enquiry you may be told this, that, or some other reason for the demise of Porty, so far as the loss of the 'summer' visitors is concerned. Those of you who may have seen Yarmouth, East Anglia, with its sand in abundance, will realise what Portobello looked like before the **sand thieves** got on the job.

For what purpose 'they' used the sand I do not know, but the day came when their 'friends' in the High Street, Edinburgh, had, through the outcry of the citizens, to tell 'them' that the **sand racket** had to stop.

Between the sand thieves and the Old Pal Club, who must have been descendants of Nelson, 'they' stole the birthright, not only of thousands of children, but of generations of children yet unborn

'They' lined their pockets. Without rain the ground becomes parched and growth ultimately ceases. Without sand in abundance at a seaside resort, it ceases to attract the parents and their children in sufficient numbers to maintain established places of amusement; and thus Porty simply became a suburb of Edinburgh, where the residents slept and worked in Edinburgh. [Following work carried out in the 1970's there is now (2000) sand in abundance, but the weather, Oh the weather. G.F.B.]

Many of my friends sigh for the old days that are gone, never to return. 'They' have much to answer for.

## PORTOBELLO AMUSEMENTS

The first recorded place of amusement was that of *Ord's Circus* in the late **1790's** on the Links, now Elcho Terrace. This will be dealt with in detail in the Chapter 32: Circuses and Showgrounds; Skating Rinks are mentioned in Chapter 33. *CINEMAS* and *OTHER PLACES OF AMUSEMENT* are shown in separate sections, with the individual entries in alphabetical order.

## C I N E M A S

### *BUNGALOW ELECTRIC THEATRE, 26 BATH STREET also known as the ELECTRIC THEATRE and the VICTORY*

I was fortunate to come across 17 *Portobello Street Directories*, covering the period **1895-96 to 1914-15** in the Edinburgh Room. It is not known whether the 1914-15 edition was the last to be issued. The first Directory was published in 1867 and there are many missing in the series, but, Glory Be!, the Directories contained vital information for the Portobello story; each bit will appear in its proper place.

In **1903-04** there is an entry 'The Bungalow, 26a Bath Street', which was the first mention. In **1902-03** the entry for 26 Bath Street was for 'Mr P.E. Low, Photo Studio'.

From **1903-04** 'The Bungalow' was mentioned until in **1910-11**, when the entry read 'The Bungalow, 26 Bath Street, The Scottish Roller Skating Company.' Prior to **1910-11** there was no indication to what use 'The Bungalow' was put.

I rejoice that by a stroke of Luck, Chance or Good Fortune has enabled me to unearth further information about amusements and the various addresses where entertainments were housed. I append an extract, full page, from the **1912-13 Portobello Street Directory**, page 85:

***“The Electric Theatre  
Bath Street, Portobello***

**Change of Programme Monday and Thursday  
Always Presenting the Best Motion Pictures  
7 to 10.30 Continuously  
Matinee, Saturday at 3.  
Prices: 3d., 4d. and 6d.”**

The rule for having Entries inserted in the Edinburgh Post Office Directory is that all details must be in the Office not later than February for publication in June. It is possible that the same policy applied to the Portobello Street Directory; in which case it would serve as a guide anent the opening of the *Electric Theatre*.

*News* Monday, August 11<sup>th</sup> **1913** First Advertisement relating to the *Electric Theatre*

***“Electric Theatre, Bath Street, Portobello***

***Les Miserables*  
3 nights  
Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, August 11, 12 and 13**

**Twice Nightly: 6 and 8.30  
Wednesday Afternoon at 2.30**

**Prices: 4d., 6d. and 9d.  
Reserved: 6d., 9d and 1s.”**

As in the case of The *Imperial Electric Theatre, Leith, 1911*, the term *Electric* was used in the title; in both cases it was soon dropped. That it reverted to the name *Bungalow* is no surprise, as that was the name by which it was known in the year **1903-04**.

*News*, Tuesday, August 26<sup>th</sup> **1913**

***“Bungalow Electric Theatre  
Bath Street, Portobello”***

When it dropped the *Electric Theatre* from the above name I do not know, and it would not add much to its history to have the exact date. In any case it retained the name *Bungalow* for the next 29 years (?) and, we have seen, in the year 1942 that a third name was added to the Bath Street Picture House.

For interest, the entry in the **1920-21** Street Directory: ‘Bath Street, 26, Portobello Pictures Ltd.’

### ***Victory, Bath Street***

*News*, Thursday, November 12<sup>th</sup> 1942

#### ***“George – Victory”***

Both advertised on the same day.

**1954** *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 415 and 416

“Victory, Bath Street, Portobello

Proprietor: Forth Cinema Co. Ltd., 149 West George Street, Glasgow.

Seats: 575 Proscenium Width: 16 feet

Continuous from 6 p.m.; Saturdays from 2 p.m.

Price 1s.”

The Victory closed in **1956** and the premises were taken over by Messrs James Scott & Son Ltd. of 308-314 High Street, Portobello, as a furniture store. Nevertheless the Street Directory for **1961-62** continued to show: ‘No. 26 Bath Street, Victory Cinema’

[From A. Foley’s *Portobello in picture postcards* Volume 2 , **1990**, “Originally named the Bungalow, its architecture and décor were influenced by the Indian sub-continent. This photo was taken after the change of name (Victory) and although somewhat faded by the passage of time, the Eastern influences are still evident.” G.F.B.]

All told, a cinema weathered the storm at No.26 Bath Street, from 1912-13 to 19**Error! Bookmark not defined.**56, (possibly longer).

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### ***CENTRAL PICTURE HOUSE, 281 HIGH STREET*** ***also known as the GEORGE***

*1914 –15 Portobello Street Directory:*

There was an entry for ***New Picture House***, 281 High Street. But it soon became known as ***Central Picture House***.

*News*, Monday March 22<sup>nd</sup> **1915** This was the only advertisement for this house in the year 1915.

#### ***“Central Picture House, 281 High Street, Portobello***

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday:

*The Slave of the Poppy*

Thursday, Friday Saturday:

*Lead us not into Temptation*

No increase in Prices”

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book*, page 85, New Companies registered during the year.  
“March **1914**

Central Picture House, Portobello, Ltd.

Capital £4,000 in £1 shares. Registered Office, 104 West George Street, Glasgow.”

This extract does not necessarily mean that the *Central Picture House* was built in **1914**. However, between the *News* advertisement and the *YearBook* extract, a ‘near’ date of opening can be guessed at.

*News*, Thursday, October 1<sup>st</sup> **1942**

*“Central Picture House  
281 High Street, Portobello*

**C L O S E D  
UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT  
OPENING DATE WILL BE DULY ANNOUNCED”**

The *Central* remained closed until the following announcement appeared in the *News*, November 12<sup>th</sup> **1942**, when it re-opened as the *George*.

**“GEORGE - VICTORY  
PORTOBELLO”**

Both cinemas advertised the same programme [A possible explanation for the cinemas having the same programme is that both were owned by companies having the same address, 149 West Nile Street, Glasgow, albeit the Proprietor in the case of the *George* was ‘Ass. G.P. Cinemas’ and that for the *Victory*, page 235, was ‘Forth Cinema Co. Ltd’. G.F.B.] The following week the first advertisement with the name *George* appeared in the *News*, Monday, November 16<sup>th</sup> **1942**.

**1954** *Kinematograph Year Book*, pages 415 and 416

“George Picture House, 281 High Street, Portobello  
Proprietor: Ass. G.P. Cinemas, 149 West George Street, Glasgow.  
Seats: 847 Prices: 1s. to 1s. 9d.”

Between **1954** and **1961** the name reverted to *Central*. As such, it finally closed its doors as a Picture House on Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup> **1961**. Last advertisement as a Picture House was on Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> **1961**. There is an entry for The Central Picture House in the 1961-62 Street Directory

#### Bingo Club

The old Central Picture House opened its doors as a Bingo Club on Friday December 22<sup>nd</sup> **1961**. It took some time to unravel the tangle out between the two Portobello Picture Houses named *George*; the one in the High Street, the other in Bath Street, Portobello. However, I got it straightened out and in the long run it was worth while. All in all, the Central – George – Central was a place of amusement for just on 46 years and well-situated to cater for the good folk of Joppa.

***CINEMA THEATRE, 189 HIGH STREET  
see 'The Old Town Hall in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century',  
under 'OTHER PLACES OF AMUSEMENT'***

***COUNT Y CINEMA, BATH STREET  
also known as the GEORGE***

***News, Saturday, March 25<sup>th</sup> 1939***

***"COUNTY CINEMA***

**BATH STREET PORTOBELLO**

**Phone Portobello 82410**

**FREE CAR PARK**

**GRAND OPENING CEREMONY  
THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 1939 at 2.30 p.m.**

**By  
BAILIE JAMES EDWARD, J.P., F.R.S.A.**

**STUPENDOUS OPENING ATTRACTION  
EXCLUSIVE TO THE DISTRICT**

***SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS (A)  
And***

**LARRY BLAKE, DICK PURCELL & BERYL WALLACE in  
*AIR DEVILS***

**Admission: Balcony, 1s.3d. and 1s.; Children, 9d. and 6d.  
Stalls: 9d. and 6d. Children, 6d. and 4d.**

**Matinee Prices till 4 p.m., Saturdays 3 p.m.  
Balcony, 9d. and 6d., Children, 4d.  
Stalls, 6d. and 4d. Children 4d. and 2d.**

**Deaf Aids on Request**

**Note: SPECIAL CHILDREN'S MATINEE on SATURDAY APRIL 1<sup>ST</sup> AT 11 a.m.  
to commemorate the Opening, at which each child will receive a Souvenir."**

Extract from **1954 Kinematograph Year Book**, pages 415 and 416

"County Cinema, Bath Street, Portobello  
Proprietor, County Cinema Co.  
Seats, 1,284  
Prices: 1s. to 2s.5d."

On Friday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> **1963** I noted that the admission prices were: Balcony, 2s.9d.; Stalls, 1s.9d. Old Age Pensioners: Matinee Prices up to 3 p.m., 1s.2d.”

The *County* (now the *George*) has the distinction of being not only the last picture house to be built in Edinburgh before the Second World War, it is the only remaining Picture House in Portobello (**1963**).

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, November 29<sup>th</sup> **1954** Film Notes

**“The George – Portobello Cinema  
Reconstructed  
To be opened Monday November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1954**

**Festival Use Envisaged**

The reconstructed *George Cinema, Bath Street, Portobello*, formerly the *County Cinema*, will be used for the showing of foreign and classical films during the next Edinburgh Festival.

Mr **George Palmer**, the owner, says that this will be done, “in order to meet the demands of the many patrons for this type of film.”

The *George* will be the first cinema in the East of Scotland to use **four-track stereo-phonic sound** with the wide screen; this system requires 32 loud-speakers in the cinema, 16 of which are behind the screen.

The official opening will be on Monday night, and members of the public in the queue for the cinema will be filmed and will see themselves on the screen later in the week. The festival film for the opening programme will be:

***The Robe*  
Starring  
Richard Burton and Jean Simmons”**

Note: I could not find an advertisement in the *Evening News* for *The Robe* during November **1954**; nor was there any criticism in the usual column of in the Tuesday edition of *The Scotsman*.

***ELECTRIC THEATRE, BATH STREET*  
*see under BUNGALOW ELECTRIC THEATRE***

***GEORGE CINEMA, BATH STREET*  
*see under COUNTY CINEMA***

***GEORGE CINEMA, 281 HIGH STREET*  
*see under CENTRAL CINEMA***

**MARINE CINEMA THEATRE**  
*See 'Marine Gardens' under 'OTHER PLACES OF AMUSEMENT'*

**PICTURE THEATRE, HARBOUR GREEN**

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book:*

*"Picture Theatre, Harbour Green. Proprietor: W Cadona."*

**PORTOBELLO THEATRE AND CINEMA**  
*See 'The Old Town Hall in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century'*  
*under 'OTHER PLACES OF AMUSEMENT'*

**STAR PICTURE HOUSE. 189 HIGH STREET**  
*See 'The Old Town Hall in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century'*  
*under 'OTHER PLACES OF AMUSEMENT'*

**TOWER PICTURE PALACE**  
*See 'Tower Street' under 'OTHER PLACES OF AMUSEMENT'*

**VICTORY, BATH STREET**  
*see under BUNGALOW ELECTRIC THEATRE*

**OTHER PLACES OF AMUSEMENT**

**CONCERTS, PORTOBELLO TOWN HALL, 1863-1864**

**Portobello Concert**

*The Scotsman*, Friday, July 26<sup>th</sup> **1863** This included a report of a concert which took place on Thursday, July 25<sup>th</sup> **1863**.

"In the Town Hall, 189 High Street

The **Edina Quartet** gave a concert last night in the Town Hall under the patronage of the Provost and Council. This being the first time that a musical performance has taken place within this new building; its adaptation for a concert-room was fully and successfully tested. The programme was well selected, and the efforts of the performers, who, on this occasion, were assisted by Miss **Isa Robertson**, were rewarded by repeated rounds of applause from a crowded audience"

Editor's Footnote: "The first Portobello Town Hall, in a mixed style of French and Flemish, was built by a limited liability company at a cost of £3,000 on the south side of the High Street, to the east of Brighton Place."

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1864

**“Portobello Town Hall**

**To-night**

**Mr Kennedy**

**The celebrated Scottish Vocalist is coming**

**Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> and Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October**

**Tickets and Programmes to be had from Mr Taylor, Post Office.”**

Note: Not only was it the first advertisement for a Portobello place of entertainment, it was also the first advertisement to appear in the *Leith Burghs Pilot*, anent entertainment. The Baptist Chapel, 189 High Street, now occupies what was once the Town Hall.

***LETTA’S SHOW AT THE PAVILION, BATH STREET***

*News*, Saturday, June 9<sup>th</sup> 1928

**“Let Us Go To Letta’s Show**

***Portobello Pavilion***

**Royal Portobello Entertainers, Bath Street**

**In**

**Letta’s Show**

**The Entertainment of To-day**

**Book Early - Telephone 231 Portobello”**

For a number of years I observed advertisements for *Letta’s Show*; he placed advertisements in the *News* of Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> 1932 and Saturday, June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1933 (the last I came across), for the *Prom Palace*. I do not know how long his show lasted beyond 1933.

*The Pavilion in Bath Street* was, in the first instance, a large tent near the site on which the *George Cinema* now stands. It had no connection with the *George* nor the *County* as it was first named. The owner of the Pavilion was Mr **Andre Letta**, who seemed to be known to everyone in Porty. The Letta family were well known as Show People.

Mr Letta had passed three score years and ten years when he donned the garb of Santa Claus in the years 1954 and 1955 during the Xmas Season in the “Store” Toy Bazaar, Bread Street Emporium. It was only advancing years which curtailed his active life. Alas, the man with

the scythe is no respecter of persons and fortunately for mankind he **cannot** be bribed to extend life by the finest fraction of a second.

**MARINE GARDENS, SEAFIELD ROAD**

**MARINE GARDENS PRELIMINARY NOTICE**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, May 8<sup>th</sup> 1909

**“THE EDINBURGH MARINE GARDENS**

**SCOTLAND’S PLEASANCE BY THE SEA**

***OPENS MONDAY, MAY 31<sup>ST</sup>***

**Season Tickets: Price 7s.6d. for the first 10,000  
(Price will be 10s. after first 10,000 are sold)**

**ADMITTING TO SKATING RINK – GROUNDS – BAND COURT – PROMENADE  
HALL AND CONCERT PAVILION (The latter with Reservations)**

**The USUAL ADMISSION will be SIXPENCE, but the Directors, in response to a  
general request have decided to  
RESERVE ONE DAY PER WEEK AS A SHILLING DAY**

**SEASON TICKETS WILL BE AVAILABLE**

**101 Agents have been appointed for the Sale of Tickets in Edinburgh and District,  
including the Edinburgh and District Company’s Officials, 1 South Charlotte Street,  
Edinburgh, and all their Conductors on the Cable Cars**

**WILLIAM HOLLAND, General Manager  
J. RUSSELL AUSTIN, Solicitor, Secretary  
Edinburgh Marine Gardens, Limited  
13 George Street, Edinburgh”**

*The Scotsman*, Monday, May 31<sup>st</sup> 1909

**“THE EDINBURGH MARINE GARDENS**

**BY THE SIDE OF THE SILVER SEA**

**GRAND OPENING DAY - TO-DAY**

**The Rt. Hon. JAMES GIBSON, M. P., Lord Provost of Edinburgh, has kindly consented to declare the GARDENS open at 2.30, and will be accompanied by the MAGISTRATES AND TOWN COUNCILLORS of the CITY**

**BAND OF THE ROYAL SCOTS (EDINBURGH CASTLE)**

**At 2 and 7.30**

**BAND OF THE ROYAL MARINES (PORTSMOUTH DIVISION)**

**At 2 and 7.30**

**27 ACRES OF ORNAMENTAL GARDENS**

**By The Side Of The Silver Sea**

**CONCERT PAVILION at 1, 3 and 8**

**HERR MENY’S WHITE VIENNESE BAND**

**Personally conducted by Herr Meny**

**HANID ALEXANDER, Entertainer**

**STELLING AND HIS A DOG KISWASKI**

**SKATING RINK – Absolutely the Finest and Largest in Scotland. Sessions: 11 to 1; 2 to 5; and 7 to 10.**

**BOSTOCK’S JUNGLE and American Animal Arena,  
And a Host of Sensation Devices and Laughter Compellers.**

**Admission: Sixpence**

**Opening Day (May 31) and every Tuesday (except June 1<sup>st</sup>), One Shilling**

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, June 1<sup>st</sup> 1909 Criticism of Marine Gardens, a precis

“Inclement weather marked the Opening ceremony which was held in The Concert Hall; there was a large attendance of visitors. The Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Sir **J.P. Gibson**, M. P., and the Magistrates & Town Council, The Town Council of Leith, headed by Provost Gibson, attended with Robes of Office, the Provost of Musselburgh, and a distinguished Company including Lord and Lady Dunedin

Ex-Bailie **Moxon**, chairman of Directors presided. He said, *inter alia*, the success of the **1908 Exhibition (Saughton Park)** had influenced the “Gairdens” and that they were acting on proper lines having open air amusements and entertainments (Applause). It was, he said, the

first in Scotland, although they were numerous in America and the Continent. The Hall in which they met was the 1908 Exhibition Concert Hall and many of the buildings had also been in the Exhibition.

The grounds in the afternoon were fairly well filled by the public, although the attendance was affected by the rainfall.

#### THE AMUSEMENTS

The **Royal Scenic Railway**. Each car held 28 people. A switch-back 3 tiers high. The run takes 4 or 5 minutes. On the dips the cars travel at 40 to 50 miles per hour. The track is about a mile long, and will be illuminated by over 3,000 electric lamps. The figure 8 was also popular. (The figure 8 found a home in the Fun Fair on Portobello Promenade for a few years).

Architects: Messrs. Walker & Ramsay, Glasgow.”

#### MARINE CINEMA THEATRE

*News*, Friday, May 16<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“Marine Gardens  
In the Marine Cinema Theatre**

**A continuous Programme of Star Films will be shown. These include:**

***The Unwritten Law 3,000 feet”***

In the same issue of the *News* **Season Tickets** were advertised at 5s.6d.

*News*, Monday, August 18th 1913

**“Marine Gardens**

**Fortnightly Tickets – 2s.”**

*News*, Wednesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1913

**“Marine Gardens - To-night**

**Aeronautical Displays**

**Daring Parachute Descent”**

[From A. Foley’s *Portobello in old picture postcards*, 1985, P.C. 71, “..A number of spectacular attractions were staged to keep the customers rolling in. ...**Captain Spence** made daily ascents in a balloon then thrilled the crowds by making a parachute jump into the sea. There was ten shillings (fifty pence) for the first boatman to reach and pull him out of

the water. In July **1912** the pioneer aviator Mr **W.R Evans** successfully demonstrated his flying machine.” G.F.B.]

In **1914** The Marine Gardens became a glorified “Lodging House”; I was one of them. My first visit to the Marine Gardens was in the autumn of **1914** and it came about thus:

I joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots, Territorials, on 24<sup>th</sup> March **1910**; my regimental number was 1079. I could not have wished for a better company of comrades. Captain McLagen was the Officer Commanding “A” Company, with Lieuts. Turnbull and “Bertie” Maule, both killed at the Dardanelles. Lieut Maule, son of Sir Rober Maule, draper etc., West End of Princes Street (Binns now occupy the site.) was killed a few yards from me.

The battalion mustered in the Moray Maltings, off London Road, in August **1914**; from there we went to Redford Barracks; then to Craiglockhart School; and finally to the **Marine Gardens**, the Ballroom, which at the moment of writing I see from my living-room window on 24<sup>th</sup> August **1963**. A number of other places in the Gardens were used as sleeping quarters by ‘other ranks’

The battalion marched out of the **Marine Gardens** on the evening of Tuesday March 10<sup>th</sup> **1915**, at 9 p.m. The Band of the 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots played us to Portobello Station. I was fortunate to see my mother in the crowds lining the pavements. The next time I saw her was in 17<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, Birmingham University, in July **1915**.

The troop train left Portobello at 10.35 p.m. for an unknown destination. Rumour had it here, there and elsewhere. In any case the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots, the only Territorial Battalion in the 29<sup>th</sup> Division, 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade, landed on the Dardanelles on Sunday morning, 25<sup>th</sup> April **1915**. I left the Dardanelles on 6<sup>th</sup> May **1915**, after having been wounded twice.

In due course, after the conclusion of the 1914-18 War, the **Marines** got under way again, minus many of the amusements. I came across this advertisement in the *News* of Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup> **1931**.

**“Marine Gardens  
Roller Skating  
Every Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday”**

**Leith Athletic Football Club** used that piece of ground at the extreme east end of the Gardens as their home ground. For a year or two it was used as Dirt Track (known in the 1950’s and 1960’s as Speedway Racing). The Dirt Track started in 1928-29. I paid several visits to the ground but soon tired of it. On the occasion of the World Championship a crowd estimated at 34,000 was present.

I remember **Drew McQueen**, who had a motor-cycle shop in Argyle Place, Meadows; **George Mc Kenzie**, a tubby, cheery lad who had a motor-cycle shop in Dalry Road; Eric ?; and Mr **Porter**, a staid ‘elderly’ rider, just about made up the ‘home’ team of Dirt Track Riders, with, of course, ‘guest’ riders from Australia and America, one of whom was Hank

something. It lasted a while and then faded out. [I remember being taken by my father to see Dirt Track Racing at Marine Gardens in 1938 or 1939. Like him I found it boring. G.F.B.]

### **Dog Racing**

The sports ground was also used for dog racing. Yes, it was an entertainment for those who liked it. I have, however, a large collection of photographs of the terracing, track, showing overhead lamps, Judge's Box, and the Tote, which was sited at the east end of the ground.

That, I think, exhausts the entertainment part of the story so far as the football park, dirt track and dog racing is concerned.

### **Corporation Bus Garage, Seafield Road**

A start was made on earth removal at the old playing field, Marine Gardens, on Thursday, July 14<sup>th</sup> **1960**, by Messrs Smart of Hanover Street, Edinburgh. After an estimated 1,400 tons of earth was removed the job hung fire until Monday April 24<sup>th</sup> **1961**, when Messrs Baxter of Tranent, started earth moving. George Smith was the driver of the bull-dozer. Big Geordie, an experienced man, estimated that between 95,000 and 100,000 tons of earth was removed.

I have a peculiar photograph that shows the sewer at the east end, which was and still is, the drain for the waste from Nos 1 to 16 (King's Cross Bar), Seafield Road, Portobello. The outlet, or lid of the sewer was on the top of the terracing, some 30 to 35 feet above ground level. George Smith carefully cleared the earth from the sewer manhole until he reached his objective. There it stood, I was photographed standing at the base of the Manhole, which looked for all the world like a factory chimney. Indeed, I have one shot with the 350 feet Power Station Chimney as a background to the manhole. I was fortunate to snap it being demolished on Monday, July 24<sup>th</sup> **1961**. All my photographs relating to the Bus Station will be lodged in the Edinburgh Room.

### **£222,000 Corporation Bus Garage Opened**

*Dispatch*, Friday, December 7<sup>th</sup> **1962**

"Sir John Greig Dunbar, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, performed the opening ceremony. Sir John, in one picture is seen seated at the wheel of a bus.

Details: Staff of 471. Accommodates 130 buses. Provision is also made for the parking of visitors' cars and buses, namely 150 cars and 60 buses."

Dimensions (not in newspaper): Length, 390 feet; Breadth, 258 feet; Height, 26 feet.

### **The Marines Ballroom Building Is still there in August 1963**

For a number of years the Scottish Motor Traction Co. used the Ballroom as a maintenance depot for their fleet of buses. In course of time more space was required by Scottish Omnibuses.

### **ADMIRALTY SHED**

Lying to the west of the Ballroom this huge shed was erected on the site of the Scenic Railway, one of the chief amusements of the *Marine Gardens*. In the early years of the Second World War the 'shed' was erected for the purpose of building 'landing craft', without

which there would have been little hope of ever landing an army on the Continent. The ‘shed’ had its own launching pad, of which I was fortunate to get a photograph just two weeks before it was cut for scrap.

The ‘shed’ was used by Messrs Graham Enoch, Engineers who manufactured Dairy Machinery. The firm was beset by a continual number of strikes caused, it has been stated, by members of the Communist Party.

#### TELEPHONE POST OFFICE VANS

For some years the ‘shed’ was used as a garage for the Post Office repair vans; thereafter the Scottish Omnibuses Marine Works, to give it the name by which it is now known, made a partial demolition of the old Admiralty Shed; that is, nothing but the iron was left standing.

I was fortunate to get a photograph of the actual start of the demolition on Monday, May 15<sup>th</sup> **1961**; and have photographs of practically every phase of the rebuilding of the Scottish Omnibuses Works, which was opened by Sir John Greig Dunbar, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, on Thursday, May 24<sup>th</sup> **1962**. [I donated these photographs to the Edinburgh Room in May 2000. G.F.B.]

The foregoing account of how some of the ground occupied by the old *Marines* was developed will, I think, be of some interest to future citizens of Edinburgh.

#### *OLD TOWN HALL IN THE 20th CENTURY*

Prior to **1900-01**, it was usually referred to as the “Old” Town Hall, and was numbered No. 107 High Street. From **1900-01** its number was changed to 189 High Street. The second Town Hall (and Police Chambers) was at No 118 High Street, on the north side

*The Scotsman*, Monday, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1900**

#### “PANTOMIME

#### *PORTOBELLO THEATRE AND CINEMA*

#### **TOWN HALL – PORTOBELLO 189 HIGH STREET**

#### *LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD*

#### **TO BE REPEATED TO-NIGHT AT 7.30 BY REQUEST**

#### **ADMISSION, 1s. ALL OVER”**

### ***CINEMA THEATRE, 189 HIGH STREET, PORTOBELLO***

From **1913 to 1915** the *Cinema Theatre* was housed in the Old Town Hall. From **1916-17 to 1919-20** there was no entry in The Edinburgh Street Directory; perhaps it was on War Service.

#### ***Star Hall, 189 High Street, Portobello***

In the **1920-21** Directory the name *Star Hall* was first mentioned; that name appeared until **1938-39**, after which the premises became the property of the **Portobello Baptist Church**. The church appeared for the first time in the **1939-40** Directory; and it is shown as such in the **1961-62** Directory.

I have attempted to give the reader some idea of the uses to which the *Old Town Hall* has been put over the past 60 years. Like the *Tower Picture Palace* at No 62 Tower Street, both are doing a useful job in the religious scheme of affairs.

#### **Star Picture House or Star Hall, 189 High Street, Portobello**

On Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup> **1963**, I met Mr **Andrew Jack**, an attendant at the newly opened *Empire Mecca Bingo Club, Nicolson Street*.

While Mr. Jack conducted me 'Back Stage' the conversation veered round to 'Houses'. He asked if I had the *Star* picture house on my list to which I replied "Yes". However, we seemed to be at cross-purposes. The *Star* I had on my list was in St. Mary's Street, Edinburgh; while Mr Jack's *Star* was, he said, in the Old Town Hall, High Street, Portobello; and that he was the 'chocolate boy' at the *Star* when he was 10 years of age. The manager was a Mr **Lambie** during the years **1910 to 1912**.

I give the information in good faith. Although I have given the chronological history of the Old Town Hall from 1900, there is reason to believe Mr Jack's reminiscences anent the Star between 1910-12. Just across the road in Bath Street, the Bungalow was in being and mentioned in the 1903-04 Directory, although it was never advertised until 1913. Was the Star in the same category? I would cast my vote in favour of Mr Jack. But that however, does not preclude me from recording the "Official History" as it appeared in the Press, as follows:

*News*, Thursday, March 6<sup>th</sup> **1913**

**"Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1913**

**Grand Opening Night**

***Cinema Theatre, 189 High Street, Portobello***

**This Comfortably and Luxuriously Furnished Drawing-room Theatre will open to the Public on Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> March, with a Continuous Programme, from 6.30 to 10.30.**

**The Theatre will be run on e most up-to-date lines, and the Programme will comrise the Pick of the World's Latest and Best Pictures.**

**Prices: 4d., 6d.; 9d. and Reserved 1s.**

**Family Matinees, Wednesdays and Saturdays.”**

*News*, Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> March **1913**

“An attractive programme is being submitted at the *Portobello Cinema Theatre* this week, and it brought together a good attendance last night. A strong drama was *Yvonne the Spy*, telling the story of high political life. *A Lesson in Courtship* proved a laughter-maker of the first order. Others were: *Carmen of the Isles*; *Tweedledum*, *Anarchist* and *The Leopard and the Burglars*.”

Quite a Programme for a modest 4d or 6d. , by any standard.

**PORTOBELLO PIER AND PAVILION**  
**Built 1871, demolished 1917**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, August 4<sup>th</sup> **1877**

**“By kind permission of Colonel McKenzie and Officers,  
the Band and Pipers of the 78<sup>th</sup> Highlanders will perform on the Pier  
(weather permitting)**

**Today from 3 till 6 o’clock”**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, June 10<sup>th</sup> **1893**

**“The Pier Band and Variety Entertainment**

**Two Performances Daily - 3 and 7 p.m.**

**Grand Sacred Concert on Sunday**

**M. P. Galloway, 24 Shore, Leith”**

*The Scotsman*, Friday, April 16<sup>th</sup> **1897**

**“Opening of the Season**

**Spring Holiday, Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> April**

**First-class Refined Variety Entertainments**

**Twice Daily at 3 and 7 p.m.**

**Saphrim, *The Gay Deceiver*, and Miss Ada Montrose along with the *Gaiety Girls***

**Mr J.P. Lannon, The Great Eccentric and Refined Irish Comedian Vocalist**

**Miss May Lear, the Charming Serio-Comedienne and Dancer**

**Mr Andrew Sheldrake, Musical Director and Pianist**

**Admission: Fourpence**

**Proprietors: The Galloway Saloon Steam Packet Co.”**

***P R O M   C O N C E R T   P A R T Y***

*News*, Saturday, June 9<sup>th</sup> 1928

**“PORTOBELLO**

**THE PROM CONCERT PARTY**

**AT THE PROM CONCERT HALL  
(Foot of Wellington Street, Portobello)**

**Twice Daily - Season 1928 - 3 and 7.30 p.m.**

**All Star Cast**

**Ten Talented Artistes including  
Harry Whitehead, the Popular Revue Comedian**

**Sylvia Watt**

**Opening Date - Saturday, June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1928, at 7.30**

**Prices: 2s. and 1s.3d., Reserved; 9d and 6d., Unreserved”**

***P O R T O B E L L O   T O W N   H A L L , 1 9 1 4***

[Inexplicably, my father failed to mention the Town Hall which opened in 1914. In **Archie Foley**’s *Portobello in picture postcards* 1985, the text about the Town Hall, under postcard 9, reads: “...fully equipped with stage and auditorium and over the years has been well used by local community organisations. However, it has also housed top-class professional entertainment and many will remember the regular visits of Scottish comedian **Tommy Morgan** and his Company for the summer season.” G.F.B.]

**TOWER STREET  
AND ITS VARIOUS PLACES OF AMUSEMENT**  
*Promenade Saloon, 1876; Tower Pavilion, 1907; Tower Picture Palace, 1910; Tower  
Amusements; Tower Street Hall; New Ocean Skating Rink; St Anne's Mission Hall*

**THE PROMENADE SALOON**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, November 4<sup>th</sup> 1876

“The Saloon at the Foot of Tower Street, will open  
for a few Sundays longer in consequence of the fine weather.

Saloon for Sale”

This was the first advertisement I noted regarding Tower Street. The premises were used for many purposes: Theatre Turns; Pictures; Skating Rink.

The next time I came across a Press advertisement for Tower Street was in **1907**. **It must be remembered and strongly emphasised, as I have repeated many times in this history, that some places of amusement had a penchant to advertise by means of Hand Bills or Window Bills.**

**TOWER PAVILION**

*News*, Tuesday July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1907

**“Tower Pavilion, Portobello**

**Now Open**

**14 First Class Artists**

**Latest Animated Pictures**

**3 and 7.30**

**Prices: Stalls, 1s.; Pit, 6d.; and Gallery, 3d.**

**Harry Marvello, Sole Proprietor.”**

**TOWER PICTURE PALACE**

*News* , Tuesday, August 9<sup>th</sup> 1910

**“Tower Picture Palace, Portobello**

**Great Success of the New Pictures**

## Twice Nightly 7 and 9

### Prices: 2d.; 4d. and 6d. Children, Half-price"

If for nothing else it is interesting to read about the **Prices of Admission**. For example, I show length of Performance in the *Pavilion* on the *Earthen Mound* in August **1820**, I give a full account of this lark in Chapter27: *Miscellaneous Bits and Pieces* - The Panorama, four times in day-time, one hour for each performance. Twice in the evening at 8 and 9 o'clock.

Prices: Front Seats, 2s.; Back Seats, 1s.

I show, in many instances, original prices and where the 'house' is still open in the 1960's the prevailing Admission Prices.

## TOWER AMUSEMENTS

It will be noticed the plural is used in this case at : 47 Tower Street and Promenade.

On Friday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> **1963**, I had a chat with the owner of the Amusements, **Erin A. Deane.**, who gave me some particulars about his tenure of the premises and, while meagre, had some historical value.

The premises were acquired by Mr Deane in the year **1936**. Previously to his taking over the premises they were used by Messrs Rankin, Fruit Merchants, as a garage.

The premises are at the north end of Tower Street and front the Promenade on the east side. The floor space is covered with dozens of machines of Chance; I believe some of them are called 'One Armed Bandits'. As this was my first visit to such a place of amusement, I could be wrong in giving this description to the machines.

The inevitable Bingo was sited in the centre of the building with, perhaps, 36 seats. I understand Bingo was originally known as "Housey". My first contact with it was while en route to the Dardanelles in March **1915**. We had just passed the Rock on our way along the Mediterranean, when bits and pieces were brought to light by one of the 'Regulars'. At that time it was taboo in the Army and the Sergeant Major was never far away to see that the 'Law' was not violated.

I mention 'Housey' simply to point out that it is not something altogether new. Or, call a rose by any other name, i.e. Housey or Bingo.

Without such a place as the *Tower Amusements*, Portobello would be completely dead as far as the young people are concerned.

I found it hard to believe that the *Tower Amusements* building was the first place of amusements on that site, but such is the case.

As the name 'Tower' appears several times in connection with Portobello amusements, it will be well to differentiate between ***Tower Amusements*** and the ***Tower Hall***.

I would refer the reader to **William Baird's** *Annals of Duddingston and Portobello*, **1898**, for a very full account of the local history, including how Tower Street got its name.

The building at the north-east end of Tower Street [The Street is now known as Figgate Street/Lane; only the Masonic Hall and the buildings at the corners with the High Street and 47 Tower Street, now known as 47 Figgate Lane, remain G.F.B.] is called Portobello Tower built in 1785. From its top windows watchers could observe the approach of ships while yet a long way off shore; hence the Tower.

On what is now 47 Tower Street was built a beautiful house in the style of the period. From the Promenade the house stands 35 yards south on the east side and a few minutes spent looking at it would be time well spent.

The Street Directory for 1900-01 shows that a Mr Wm. Gray lived at the Tower, No 47 Tower Street, at which time it could be seen from the Promenade as there was no building to obstruct the view of the house.

The Tower became a hotel as can be seen in the **1905-06** Directory, with Mr W.A.M. McKinnon shown as the proprietor.

In the Edinburgh Directory for **1919-20** the entry for 47 Tower Street was 'Tower Engineering Company.' I would suggest that the Company was floated during the 1914-18 War to assist in the War effort. The next occupant was a William Blows, whose name was entered in the Directories from **1924-25 until 1930-31**.

From **1931-32 until 1934-35** Messrs A. Rankin, Fruit Merchants, used the premises as a garage. A Miss M. Shaw is shown as the occupant of No 47 in **1934-35 to 1936**.

And Finally.... as stated above Erin A Deane took over the premises known as ***Tower Amusements***, as shown in the Directory for **1936-37**, and is still there in August **1963**.

### **T O W E R   H A L L**

I will now show how the ***Tower Hall*** comes into the picture. In the *News* advertisement for Tuesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup> **1907**, the Tower Pavilion was stated to be 'Now Open' with Harry Marvello, the sole proprietor.

Call it coincidence or what you will, but the ***Tower Street Hall*** was first entered in the Directory in **1907-08**, with its address at No 62 Tower Street. To continue the coincidence a step forward, in **1908-09**, the occupant at No 47 Tower Street, that is the Tower, is none other than Harry Marvello, the sole proprietor of the Tower Pavilion at No 62. [From A.Foley's *Portobello in old picture postcards*, **1985**: P.C. 31, "Henry Melville, or Harry Marvello to give him his show business name...was a colourful character who later took over the Tower Hotel and ran a Boxing Booth and Amusement Arcade; P.C. 43, "Behind the Tower is the large Victorian mansion...which was owned for a time by Harry Marvello...who built the Arcade on the Promenade near the Tower." G.F.B.]

### **NEW OCEAN SKATING RINK**

To complete the 'Amusements' part of No 62 Tower Street, I give below a *News* advertisement for Saturday, August 14<sup>th</sup> 1909. See also Chapter 33: Skating Rinks.

#### **“Grand Opening of the *New Ocean Skating Rink* (Late Tower Pavilion) Portobello...”:**

### **ST ANNE’S MISSION CHURCH**

In the Portobello Directory for 1910-11 the entry for No. 62 Tower Street was the Mission Church. In the 1962 Edinburgh Directory the Mission was still there but the spelling was given as “St. Ann’s”

Note: The Tramway Stables were at No. 14 Tower Street in 1905-06-07.

And there I have come to the end, as far as could be gleaned from a multitude of newspapers and other sources, of the Portobello story, which started with the hut erected in Tower Street, in 1808, by strolling actors for the entertainment of villagers and summer visitors. Alas, neither ‘villagers’ nor summer visitors have much in the shape of entertainments to beguile an hour or two away. For proof of this statement let the moaners, who are members of the Portobello Hoteliers’ and Traders’ Association say their piece through several newspapers.

### **Closure of Portobello Railway Station**

*News*, Wednesday, August 28<sup>th</sup> 1963 a precis

#### **“Monday Talks on Station Closing**

Dr . Says Councillor **Kenneth Borthwick**, a frequent spokesman for the Association (he is a trader). “He understood that at present about 100 people a day used the station to commute.” “Sometimes as many as 3,000 passengers arrive in a day by train.” “The threat to the station has come at a time when the Association are planning a winter campaign for a “Brighter Portobello”.”

*Daily Express*, Wednesday, August 28<sup>th</sup> 1963 Some extracts

#### **“Portobello High Street Gets a Beeching Shock**

Portobello, Edinburgh’s declining seaside resort, was shocked yesterday ... that Beeching’s axe would fall on December 2. “For the Association had been planning a winter campaign... to put the resort back on its feet.” Last night Councillor Borthwick described the shock announcement as a ‘set-back’ to their ‘face-lift plans’. “We were hoping to attract more visitors with our “Brighter Portobello” campaign”, he said. “This included painting the High Street, putting coloured lights all along the promenade and re-surfacing it. But now?.”

*Dispatch*, Tuesday, September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1963 Some extracts

**“Portobello Fights Closure**

Portobello Merchants’ and Hoteliers’ Association are to protest ‘most strongly’ against the closure of Portobello Railway Station, and letters are to be sent to the Minister of Transport and the Lord Provost of Edinburgh”

“Schools, church organisations and institutions, as well as Glasgow people, come to Portobello by rail, and if facilities are denied these people, Portobello and the city will suffer.” Said Councillor Borthwick.”

Whether by accident or design, I do not know, but the *Dispatch* had the following advertisement in the next column to the news item about the Monday meeting of the Hoteliers’ and Merchants’ Association.

*Dispatch*, Tuesday, September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1963

**“Rail Excursions to Blackpool  
For Illuminations**

**Hereafter Times of Departure for Saturday, September 14  
and Sunday, September 29.....**

**Return Fare 45s. , 35s.**

**Weekend Excursions from Princes Street Station on Fridays and Saturdays until  
October 26. Fare 45s.**

**BRITISH RAILWAYS”**

Gie like someone was taking the mickey out of puir old Porty.

Comment: Let Portobello Councillor take an excursion ticket to Blackpool, have a good look at the “Brighter Blackpool Lights”, then come away home and let Porty lie in peace.

I know full well that Councillor Borthwick and his two colleagues in the Ward can only go as far as the Town Council cares to travel – and this applies for **any** project for Greater Edinburgh. I have lived a long time and throughout the years Edinburgh has been as well dressed as the Income would allow. For example, 35 new schools since the termination of the Second World War made a queer dent in the Income.

A betting slogan runs, “If yer don’t put it down, yer can’t pick it up.” Conversely, if higher rates are objected to, yer can’t expect to get extra amenities. It is as simple as that.

## 27: ALBERT HALL, 22 SHANDWICK PLACE

*Albert Institute of Fine Arts, 1876; Albert Hall, 1882 – The Wardroppers; Chang The Chinese Giant; Bullock's Royal Marionettes. 1883 – Tute's Minstrels; 1884, Poole's Mammoth Diorama; 1886, The Japanese Village Fair; 1887, Revival of the Original Wardroper Entertainment; Professor Herrman, Mesmerist; West End Methodist Mission, 1888; "B.B." Pictures, 1908; Tindle's Picture Concerts, 1908; West End Cinema, 1915. Letters to the Editor of the News, 1954, about the Albert Hall; James Seager, Editor of the News.*

The **Albert Hall** has occasioned a great deal of confusion regarding its origin as a House of Entertainment.

My good friend, Mr **Murray Grant**, *The Scotsman* librarian, told me the Albert Hall was erected in **1876** and was known for a few years as the **Albert Institute of Fine Arts**. Its objects were the advancement of Art in general and more especially Scottish Art.

Starting from 1876 I commenced a long search and ultimately traced the Albert Hall to its source as a Play-house through the medium of the *The Scotsman* General Notices and Amusement Columns. Right through its history as a 'Theatre' it had many proprietors, at least two of whom went bankrupt.

### ALBERT HALL TO LET

In course of time it ceased to be an Art Institute and the following advertisement appeared in *The Scotsman*, Saturday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> **1881**

#### "ALBERT HALL - SHANDWICK PLACE WEST PRINCES STREET

Splendid Hall to Let, suitable for Stores, Wine Merchants, or others requiring large accommodation.

Capital entrance and extensive storage  
Also Large Front Shop, if desired

Apply to Couper and Cook, Chartered Accountants, 37 George Street."

Apparently no-one was in need of a 'suitable' hall as another advertisement couched in the above style appeared in *The Scotsman*, Saturday, September 24<sup>th</sup> **1881**

Some five months passed before the Albert Hall started on a long career as a place of entertainment. True, the entertainment was intermittent, but did not lack variety.

The first advertisement was, by any standard, very long and I will show how it appeared, line by line.

*The Scotsman*, Monday, March 6<sup>th</sup> 1882 Preliminary Advertisement

“ALBERT HALL MARCH 13<sup>TH</sup>

THE WARDROPERs – return after 7 years’ absence

THE WARDROPERs – Reappearance in Edinburgh

THE WARDROPERs – Reappear after an absence of 7 years

THE WARDROPERs – Henry and Walter

THE WARDROPERs – The Twin-like Mimics

Refined and Realistic Entertainment, more  
perfected than ever. Returns to the City of  
Former Triumphs, March 13<sup>th</sup>, for a Short  
Series of Performances

THE WARDROPERs – Albert Hall, March 13

THE WARDROPERs – Henry and Walter ‘At Home’ March 13

THE WARDROPERs – Henry and Walter’s Mimicry

THE WARDROPERs – ‘Music’ and

THE WARDROPERs - Marvellous

THE WARDROPERs – Metamorphoses’

THE WARDROPERs – Admission – 3s.; 2s.; 1s.; and 6d.

THE WARDROPERs – Plan at Wood & Co.’s.”

*The Scotsman*, Monday March 13 1882

“ALBERTHALL - SHANDWICK PLACE  
TO-NIGHT MATCH 13”

The advertisement of 6<sup>th</sup> March was repeated.

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, March 15<sup>th</sup> 1882

### “The Wardropers at the Albert Hall

Messrs **Henry and Walter Wardroper**, the well known mimics, are at present performing in the Albert Hall, Shandwick Place, to large audiences. The first part of the entertainment consists of mimetic portraitures of characters more or less eccentric, who may be met with in Society, and whose foibles have marked them out as fair game for the satirist.

Among these may be noted: the thorough-paced plebeian who has moved into the West End mansion; the nervous young man; the bouncing major; the hired waiter; the old ‘fogey’, fond of wine; and the young man of the period. In such sketches the brothers were exceeding successful – nothing being more surprising than the rapid manner in which they managed to change their attire.

Mr Henry Wardroper’s impersonations of women were somewhat rough to be altogether pleasing. The second part was devoted to caricatures of the prevalent styles of singing, and here, again, the brothers achieved much success. The entertainment, to judge by the amount of applause bestowed upon it, gave great satisfaction to the audience.”

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, October 31<sup>st</sup> 1882

**“The Albert Hall – West End of Princes Street  
Today, 1 till 5 and 7 till 10  
Chang, the Chinese Giant  
All Among The Mormons  
Barnum’s Greatest Acquisition  
The Tallest Living Man  
Seen Only Once In A Lifetime**

**Fashionable Matinees, 1 till 5, One Shilling  
Evening Receptions, 7 till 10, Sixpence.”**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, November 11<sup>th</sup> 1882

**“Chang - Last Day”**

Note: Such an advertisement in 1963 containing ‘fashionable matinee’ and ‘evening receptions’ would be regarded as bunk and a piece of kidology; nevertheless, the phrasing for that period was quaint and the pricing was a method of dividing the sheep from the goats.

*The Scotsman*, Monday, November 27<sup>th</sup> 1882

**“Bullock’s Royal Marionettes**

**The Gorgeous Pantomime**

***Little Red Riding Hood*  
In Twelve Scenes**

**Genuine Christy Minstrels  
Solo – Choruses – and Original Jokes**

**Prices: 3s.; 2s.; 1s.; and 6d.**

**Plan at Woods - Tickets at Grahams”**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, September 8<sup>th</sup> 1883

**Albert Hall - West End of Princes Street**

**Monday, September 10<sup>th</sup> Grand Opening Night**

**First Night of the Season**

**Tute’s Minstrels**

**Twenty Talented Artistes  
For 12 Nights only**

**Mr. J.T. Tute takes this opportunity of informing the  
Edinburgh Public that his Programme is strictly confined to  
The Original Christy Minstrel Entertainment,  
and under no circumstances does he tolerate  
other 'business' not in harmony with Ethiopian Minstrelsy “**

The prices were advertised in *The Scotsman*, Tuesday, September 11<sup>th</sup> 1883:

**“Tute’s Minstrels**

**Doors Open, 7.30 - Curtain Rises at 8.**

**Prices: 3s.; 2s.; 1s.; and 6d.**

**Children Half price except to Gallery**

**Plan at Wood and Co’s. Tickets at Grahams.”**

*National Library of Scotland, Music Box 250.* The following information was contained in a Play Bill or Hand Bill.

**“Albert Hall West Princes Street Edinburgh**

**April 7<sup>th</sup> 1884 Every Evening at 7.30**

**POOLE’S MAMMOTH DIORAMA**

**Matinees every Wednesday and Saturday at 2.30**

**Doors open at 2 and 7 o’clock. Carriages , 4.45 and 10 p.m.**

**Admission: Stalls, 3s.; Second Seats, 2s.; Third Seats, 1s.; Gallery, 6d.**

**Family Tickets to admit Five to Stalls, 12s.**

**Children under 10 and Schools over ten in number, half price to all seats except Gallery**

**The Diorama will be supported by Poole’s unrivalled  
Combination Company of Star Artists, Specially Selected for Merit:**

**Madame L. Du Maurier, Soprano and Ballad Vocalist  
Messrs Sandford and Kenyon, Popular Australian Comedians  
Mr Alfred Ross, Ventriloquist in a Sparkling Sketch  
Mr G.A. Foote, Great Comedian, Humorist and Satirist  
The Splendid Brass and String Bands under the Direction of  
the Talented Conductor, Mr Carl Webb, Pianist and Organist**

**Sole Proprietor - Messrs. Poole.”**

*The Scotsman*, Monday, April 7<sup>th</sup> 1884 This advertisement complements the Hand Bill Programme given above.

**“Albert Hall - Edinburgh**

**Return Visit after 8 years**

**Largest Panorama Proprietors in the World**

**Sole Lessee and Manager, Mr D.S. McKay**

**For a Short Season, Commencing This Monday Evening April 7.  
Messrs. Poole (Late Poole and Young)**

**Russo-Turkish, Zulu, Afghan and Boer Wars  
The Egyptian Campaign  
General Robert’s Triumphal Entry into Cabul  
Occupation of Cairo  
The Sudan War**

**Admission (As given in Handbill above)  
Booking Offices: Messrs Wood & Co., Musicsellers, George Street.  
Mr Graham’s Music Warehouse, next to the Hall**

**Manager, J.J. Taylor”**

Note: Our whole history seems to consist of one War after another!

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, May 10<sup>th</sup> 1884

**“Albert Hall Edinburgh**

**The Last Two Performances of Poole’s Grand Diorama**

**Today Saturday, at 2.30 and 7.30”**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1886

**“Albert Hall – Shandwick Place, West End of Princes Street**

**IT IS OUR OPENING DAY**

**DOORS OPENED TODAY AT 2 p.m.**

**THE JAPANESE VILLAGE FAIR**

**Under the Management of Mr J.P. Curle, lessee.  
The Village is beautifully designed and constructed by  
Messrs Carnegie & Co., Newcastle.**

**Mono Kitchee, Japanese Rope Walker  
Mons Tannaker, Japanese Equilibrist  
Saito and Wife, Japanese Banjoists  
Japanese Embroiderers, Painters, FanMakers  
and many other Artists at work  
Ko-Ko, the Japanese Mysterious Lady  
Co-Ningow, the Genuine Waxwork Exhibitionist from Japan,  
showing imitative power of this Marvellous People**

**Afternoon Tea to be had from the Japanese Tea House and Garden**

**IN FACT JAPAN TRANSFERRED TO EDINBURGH**

**Splendid Band under the direction of Mr R.E. Richardson**

**Entertainment Every Afternoon at 3.  
Open from 12 to 5, Admission 1s.  
And from 7 to 10, admission 6d.  
Children half-price in the afternoon**

**INSTRUCTIVE EDUCATIONAL AMUSING”**

*The Scotsman*, Monday, September 27<sup>th</sup> 1886

**“Albert Hall West End of Princes Street**

**Tonight**

**Grand Dioramic Views**

**NEW ZEALAND**

**BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE**

**ERUPTION OF TARAWERA**

**Startling Mechanical Effects**

**Prices: 3s.; 2s.; 1s.; and 6d.  
Children Half price.”**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1887

**“Albert Hall West End of Princes Street**

**Lessee and Manager Mr J.P. Curle**

**Commencing Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1887**

**Revival of the Original  
WARDROPER ENTERTAINMENT**

**Mr J.P. Curle has the pleasure to announce that he has effected an Engagement with  
the renowned**

**BROTHERS HENRY AND WALTER WARDROPER**

**Who after an absence of six years (conjointly) will reappear at the home  
of their former triumphs in Edinburgh, and return to the**

**ALBERT HALL**

**Prices of Admission: Stalls, 3s.; Second Seats, 2s.; Pit, 1s.;  
and Gallery (entrance by Queensferry Street Lane), 6d**

**Booking Plan at Curle's Pianoforte Saloons, 52 Hanover Street**

**Every Evening at 8. Saturdays at 3 and 8."**

*The Scotsman*, Monday, September 26<sup>th</sup> 1887

**"Albert Hall**

**Professor Herrman**

**The Greatest Mesmerist of the Present Day**

(There followed a lengthy screed extolling the powers of the Professor)

**In addition to the above wonderful entertainment there will be  
the Professor's Specially Selected Variety Company**

**Popular Prices: 2s.; 1s.; and 6d.  
Half Price to Front Seats at 9 o'clock**

**Doors Open at 7.30 Commence at 8"**

*News*, Saturday, September 21<sup>st</sup> 1901, page 4, extract from an article on the opening of the New Central Halls Methodist Church, Tollcross

**"Mission in Albert Hall**

The Rev **Geo. Jackson** and his coadjutors in the West End Mission have been going from success to success since the mission was begun in the Albert Hall in November, **1888**. From **1890** services were held in the larger *Synod Hall*"

It is pleasing to know that the *Albert Hall* had a tenant during the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – even for one day per week.

*News*, Friday, September 25<sup>th</sup> 1908

**“Albert Hall - Shandwick Place**

**Opening Entertainment**

**B. B. Pictures  
(Bright and Beautiful)**

**Monday First, September 28<sup>th</sup>**

**Splendid Animated Picture Show**

**Britain’s Best**

**Nightly at 8. Saturdays at 3 and 8**

**Prices: 1s. and 6d.”**

Note: This programme saw the introduction of Moving Pictures to the Albert Hall.

*News*, Thursday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1910

**“Albert Hall Shandwick Place**

**Tindle’s Picture Concerts**

**On Monday, February 7<sup>th</sup> 1910**

**Twice Nightly 7 and 9**

**Prices: 1s 6d.; 1s.; 6d.; and 3d”**

*News*, Thursday, October 9<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“Albert Hall Shandwick Place**

**Grand Re-Opening**

**Saturday, October 11, 1913**

(I did hear this was to obviate opening on Monday the 13<sup>th</sup>; it did not save him)

**First Class Programme**

**Prices: 1s.; 6d.; 4d.; and 2d.**

**Proprietor: Mr Senior”**

News, Tuesday, October 14<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“Albert Hall Criticism**

After being closed for a considerable period, the Albert Hall has again opened its doors as a picture house. The interior of the building has been nicely decorated.

Chief Picture: *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*” and *Wild Beasts at Large*”

Note: Here we have confirmation that the Albert Hall was closed for a long time.; I am afraid this was a common feature of the Hall at that period.

My, my, a ‘West End Show’ down to tuppence admission.

News, Saturday, December 18<sup>th</sup> 1915

**“West End Cinema (late Albert Hall)  
22, Shandwick Place**

**Under Entirely New Management**

**Grand Re-Opening of the above Hall**

**On Friday, December 17<sup>th</sup> 1915, at 2 p.m.**

**The Theatre has been re-decorated and is now under the Entire Management  
of Mr. F. Reed, late of the Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street, Edinburgh.**

**The latest and most up-to date Pictures will be shown.  
Mr Reed having secured the Sole Rights of Edinburgh  
for a large number of Exclusive Films.**

**Special Star Programme**

**For**

**Friday and Saturday**

**Special Picture**

***Mignon***

**Admission: Stalls, 6d.; Balcony, 1s.**

**Soldiers, Sailors and Nurses in Uniform Half –Price to all parts**

**Children Half-Price to all parts.”**

“Albert Hall, Shandwick Place  
Proprietor: J.N.Tindall Seats:800”

#### A HARD NUT TO CRACK

Gathering the material for the story of the Albert Hall was a real problem, particularly in view of its being closed for a ‘considerable period’. How often the Hall had those bouts of depression I did not establish. Without a record of Press Advertisements regarding any place of entertainment it becomes almost impossible to build a story round any ‘house’ That, then, was the position with which I was confronted anent the Albert Hall.

Indeed, I have come to the conclusion that the name *Albert Hall* is as dead as a dodo, bearing in mind the premises became the **West End Restaurant** during **1930/31**.

In a meeting I had with Mr **Harold Davis**, manager of the *Palace Picture House*, Constitution Street, on November 6<sup>th</sup> **1962**, he told me that he was the manager of the *West End Cinema* from **1923 until 1930**, when he left to become the manager of the *Palace*; that prior to **1923** Mr **Fred Reed** was the manager of *West End Cinema*; and that two former proprietors of the Albert Hall had failed, namely, Mr **J.N. Tindle** and Mr **Senior**.

#### Letters to the News Editor

*Saturday* January 9<sup>th</sup> **1954**

From Mr **A.C. Black**, 9 Loanfoot Road, Uphall

“The Albert Hall was used as a cinema before the First World War (1914-18).

The films were advertised as “**B.B.Pictures**”. The barker (doorman) was **Harry Denholm**, who stood at the door and shouted, “Here you are for the B.B. Pictures, bright and beautiful, always to the light.”

Incidentally, he was a very tall man resplendent in a uniform more fit for a general than a mere ‘barker’.”

From “Stockbridge”

“...certainly there was a picture house there before the 1914-18 War. It even boasted a hidden gentleman who was responsible for the sound effects behind the screen; and a very good job he made of it at times.. Some of the seats were mere benches.....”

I can agree with “Stockbridge” anent the ‘hidden gentleman’ and that, in the ‘body’ of the Hall, the seats were benches.

The letters were followed by this note by the Editor:

“Recalling the days when he was musical director at the Albert Hall in Shandwick Place, from June **1914** to March **1915**, when he joined the Army, Mr **R.B. Donaldson**, 31 Hillside Crescent, tells us that a Mr **Senior**, from Yorkshire, was the proprietor who ran variety turns and a *Go As You Please* competition once a week. There was an orchestra of six.

Mr Donaldson also states that after the *West End Theatre* closed about **1929** the premises were take over for use as a café and for years it was named the *Strand Café*.

Concluding, Mr Donaldson added that, as far as his memory serves him, the Albert Hall came into being somewhere about the beginning of the century.”

We are thankful to those ‘writers to the Editor’ who retail their reminiscences, on any subject, but especially regarding the Albert Hall. One fact emerges: one can’t depend on memory all the time, hence the value of advertisements in the Press, which can be checked.

**Mr James Seager, C.B.E., J.P.**

He was *News* Editor at the time the above letters were written in **1954**. He retired from the ‘Chair’ on 31 October **1956**, after 52 years’ service with the *News*. I am happy to report that as at October **1963** Mr Seager is still with us. Over a number of years he accepted many of my articles on diverse subjects. His weekly *Causerie* frequently brought many letters in response to his current article, thereby bringing to light many points about Auld Edinburgh from citizens of all shades of opinion.

But for Mr Seager, many a time I would never have seen a game of football at Tynecastle. He took me there and back in his car and made arrangements for me to have a seat on the track.

‘Jimmie’ Seager was a Sergeant in the Dandy Ninth, that is, the 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots. He gave a helping hand to many Edinburgh citizens.

It gave me great pleasure to write this item on the *Albert Hall*.

## 28: MISCELLANEOUS BITS AND PIECES

### All connected with Entertainment in Edinburgh at one time or another

*Barker's Panorama, Leith Walk, 1802; The Wonderful Ox, 'Caps All', The Mound, 1820; Pavilion on the Earthen, Mound, Grand Historical Panorama, 1820; Almost free admission for the Working Man or How long it took the working man to earn the cost of a seat in the 'Gods', 1910's; Assembly Rooms, George Street, 1789; Musical Festivals, 1815-1824; Music Hall, George Street, 1843; Football Matches at Easter Road in 1881, and at Tynecastle in 1881 and 1882; The Velodrome, Hope Crescent, 1897; Waxworks and Museum, 11 South Bridge, 1898; Cinematograph Show, Old Church (Chalmers Church 1847-1884) West Port, 1901; Oddfellows' Hall, Forrest Road, 1903; Livingstone Hall, 38 South Clerk Street, Saturday Night Concerts, 1901 and 1912; Free Gramophone Concerts, Starbank Park, Trinity, 1904; Wax Models, Lecture, Music, Convict Ship, Old Leith Dock, 1899; Gorgie Entertainments, Tynecastle Parish Church, 1905; Stewart's Waxwork, 164/166 High Street, 1900; Waxwork and Bioscope, 10 Nicolson Street, 1908; Free Cinematograph Show, outside Queen's Hotel, Leith, 1908; Scottish National Exhibition, Saughton Park, 1908; Caruso, MacEwan Hall, 1909; St Cuthbert's Co-op. Concert, Music Hall, 1911; St Cuthbert's in 1906 and 1962 – number of members, dividend etc.; Penny Gaffs, Blackfriars Wynd and Leith Wynd (now named Jeffrey Street); Cinematograph Show and Concert, Wesley Hall, Hamilton Place, 1911; Bohemian's Amateur Lyric Opera Company, 1914 – Reminiscences by the author; Chapman-Alexander Mission, Olympia, Annandale Street, 1914; Usher Hall, 1914; Industrial Hall, Annandale Street, 1922; The Sports Centre, 78 Leith Street, 1939. Waverley Market – House of Lords' decision, 1771, to prevent building on the south side of Princes Street above pavement level; Vegetable and Fruit Market; Waverley Market opened 1877; First Waverley Market Concert, 1876; Political Meetings – Gladstone, 1879, Balfour, 1889; Saturday Night Concerts, 1880 to 1920-21; Fred A. Lumley Athletic Tournament, 1903; Used as a Dining Hall; Boys' Brigade Inspections; Boxing Matches; Christmas and New Year Carnivals from 1885; Exhibitions and Shows; The Market Gardeners; Proposal to build an 18 storey hotel on the Market site refused in 1961. N.B. Hotel.*

Some of the *Bits and Pieces* refer to one-night stands. I will show the reason for this as one or other of the *Bits* comes to the surface.

### **BARKER'S PANORAMA, LEITH WALK, 1802**

In the year **1802**, the ground now occupied by Leith Walk School, built in **1876**, was occupied by **Barker's Famous Panorama**, from Leicester Square, London, wherein were exhibited views of Dover, the Downs and the coast of France, with the embarkation of troops, both horse and foot. The exhibition is from ten till dusk, at one shilling a head, opposite the Botanical Gardens, which were formed in **1767**.

Note 1: The Botanical Gardens were, in turn, to the east of Hope Crescent, off McDonald Road (just where the McDonald Road Library now stands). As I write in September 1963, Hope Crescent is the only piece of virgin ground in the area.

Note 2: The Botanical Gardens, Leith Walk, having been found inconvenient, a new Garden was acquired at Inverleith Row of eleven and one half Scots acres. It was opened in May **1824**.

*Edinburgh Courant*, Saturday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> **1820**

### **“WONDERFUL OX AT THE MOUND**

That noble, beautiful and immensely sized Durham Ox, called *Caps All*

Six Years Old – 6 feet high; 11 feet 6 inches round the body; 37 inches across the back; 10 feet from tail to horns.

Weight – 310 stones.

Sold by Auction for one thousand guineas. Bred by Mr Smith, Grindon, near Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Admission – Ladies and Gentlemen, 1s.; Working People, 6d.; Children, 3d.”

It was a noble, beautiful and immense *beastie*. Ladies and Gentlemen paid their bobs to see it but **working people** paid their tanners. Ye Gods! Intolerance in action ‘aw to see a big bull.’

*Edinburgh Courant*, Thursday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> **1820**

### **PAVILION ON THE EARTHEN MOUND**

Old pictures of the above Pavilion show that it was to the north of Ramsay Garden and stood on the west side of the Mound, just above where the railway tunnel was formed 25 years later. The advertisement read as follows:

“The Grand Historical Panorama (never before in the city) of the Battle of Ligny, Les Quatre Bras and Waterloo, accompanied by a full Military Band. (In flowery language the owners would be wanting in ingratitude if they did not appraise the inhabitants of Edinburgh, before it was too late, when it is closed to their view for ever)

There are Ten Subjects accompanied with  
Suitable Military Music for each scene

1. His Grace, Duke of Wellington. – Military Overture
  2. Napoleon Bonaparte and Staff – French Grand March
  3. Battle of Ligny – Battle Piece
  4. Battle of Les Quatre Bras – An Andante
  5. Battle of Waterloo – French Quick March
  6. Highlanders Charging Farmhouse of La Haye Santa – Campbells are Coming
  7. Death of Sir Thomas Pincton – Grand Battle Piece
  8. Grand Charge of the Scots Greys and overthrow of the Cuirassiers – Battle Piece
  9. A group of French Prisoners guarded by Cavalry and Infantry – Downfall of Paris
  10. The Last Grand Charge by the British ; the Duke of Wellington and Marquis of Anglesea in the foreground – See the Conquering Hero
- Finale – God Save the King

Admission: Front Seats, 2s.; Back Seats, 1s.; Children, Half Price.

The Panorama – Four times in the day time – First at 12; second at 1; third at 2; fourth at 3, finishing at 4 o'clock .

Time in the Evening – First at 8; second at 9 o'clock precisely.

N.B. Just Published, a new edition of descriptive book of the Panorama. To be had at the Pavilion, price 6d.”

The *Courant*, Monday October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1820, advertised that this was the last week of the Panorama.

### ***ALMOST FREE ADMISSION FOR THE WORKING MAN***

At first glance it might seem that 1s. and 2s. was a lot of money to pay for a ‘short’ hour of entertainment; and no reduced price for ‘working people’, as in the case to view the huge ox, *Caps All*, also on the Mound.

At that time, 1820, workers in the Building Industry received the princely sum of 17s.6d. per week of 60 hours at 3½ d. per hour. Therefore, for husband and wife and two children to see the Panorama, he would require to work for ten hours. My reason for putting it in this manner is two-fold. The exorbitant cost of painting the scenes had to be paid for and that was through the Pay Box. In Poole’s *100 years of Showmanship, 1837 – 1937*, pages 4 and 5, the cost involved is brought out “The greatest scenic artists of the day painted the pictures. **Sebastian Estelos** took eighteen months to paint *The Halt by the way of the Viceroy Of India’s State Elephants*: it cost **C.W. Poole** £350 for a single canvas. **William Tilbin** got £150 for a picture of Edinburgh.”

The second reason is that whereas it cost so much for entertainment in the 1820’s in respect of time worked to obtain the Admission Price, it was almost free admission, by comparison, 100 years later. I append a selection of ‘houses’ where it will be seen that the admission had been reduced to almost free admission. Wages per hour and year are shown in brackets.

Empire Theatre – 3d. for Gods (1912, 9d.)

Albert Hall – 2d. to 1s. (1913, 9½ d.)

Picturedrome, Easter Road – 2d. to 6d. (1912, 9d.)

Princess Cinema, 131 Princes Street – 6d. to 1s.6d. (1912, 9d.)

\*Palace, Leith – 2d. to 1s. (1912, 9d.)

New Picture House, 56-57 Princes Street – 6d. and 1s. (1913, 9 ½ d.)

\*Pavilion, Dean Street – 2 ½ d. to 7d. (1917, 11d.)

Poole’s Synod Hall – 9d. to 3s 6d. (1920, 2s. 2 ¾ d.)

Caley, Lothian Road – 1s. and 2s. (1923, 1s. 6 ½d. note the reduction in hourly rate)

\* In those two examples the husband, wife and two children could gain admission for less than one hour’s working time; and enjoy more than two hours at the ‘pictures’; whereas his old grandfather had to work 10 hours to take his granny and two aunties to the Panorama in 1820.

That is the March of Progress and no mistake

### **ASSEMBLY ROOMS, GEORGE STREET**

Some details extracted from *Grant's Old and New Edinburgh*, Vol II, pages 148-159

“The Clydesdale Bank is described as a handsome building; but the next chief edifice which, with its arcade of three arches and a portico, was long deemed by those obstinately wedded to use and wont as an eyesore and an encroachment on the old monotonous amenity of George Street, when first erected, is the *Assembly Rooms*

The principal dancing-room here is 92 feet long by 42 feet wide and 40 feet high; adorned with magnificent crystal clusters. “The New Assembly Rooms, for which the ground is staked out in the New Town,” says the *Edinburgh Advertiser* for April **1783**, “will be among the most elegant of any in Britain.” In addition to the ball-room, “there is a tea-room, 50 feet by 36, which will also serve as a ballroom on ordinary occasions; also a grand saloon, 38 feet by 44 feet, besides other and smaller rooms. The whole expense will be 6,000 guineas, and the building will be begun immediately.”

Another Assembly Room, continues the article, was built in Buccleuch Place.

In **1783** we learn that “minuets had gone out of fashion, and country dances were chiefly in vogue, and that in **1787** a master of ceremonies was appointed.”

Regulations brought up to date for the New Assembly Rooms, George Street,  
And to operate from Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> January, **1789**

1. That the ladies' subscription shall be one guinea.
2. Subscription for gentlemen who are proprietors, one guinea.
3. Gentlemen who are not proprietors, two guineas.
4. That each subscriber shall have 24 admission tickets
5. Absent subscribers can give two tickets for each assembly, to a lady or gentleman, and no more; if present, only one; no ticket will procure admittance unless dated and signed by the granter; and are **not** transferable.
6. Each non-subscriber to pay 3s. at the door on presenting ticket.
7. Each director is allowed two additional tickets extraordinary for each assembly, which he may transfer, adding the word 'Director' to his signature.
- 8. No admission without a ticket on any account.**

Subscription books are open at the house of the Master of Ceremonies, **William Graham**, Esq., merchant, in the Luckenbooths, (where animals were slaughtered) to whom the nobility and gentry intending to subscribe are requested to send their names and subscription money, when they will receive their tickets. The first assembly of the season to be on 29<sup>th</sup> January **1789**.

It was in the Assembly Rooms that Sir **Walter Scott**, on 23<sup>rd</sup> February **1827**, at the annual dinner of the *Edinburgh Theatrical Fund*, avowed himself to be the 'Great Unknown', acknowledging the authorship of the **Waverley Novels**.

In June **1842**, a great public banquet was given to **Charles Dickens** in the Assembly Rooms.

In **1871** the Rooms underwent considerable improvement.

### ***MUSICAL FESTIVALS, 1815-1824***

The following items were extracted from *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*

**1816 Proposed Music Hall** “In consequence of the success of the musical festival, it was proposed to add a Music Hall to the Assembly Rooms, George Street, for musical performances.”

**1843 The Music Hall** “The new Music Hall, George Street, was opened 9<sup>th</sup> October with a musical festival, which resulted in a loss of about £600”

### **Harking back to previous Music Festivals in Edinburgh**

**1815 Musical Festival** Held in the Parliament Hall and *Corri's Rooms*, see pages 48/ 49.

**1819 Musical Festival** “A second musical festival was commenced on the 19<sup>th</sup> October. The concerts, six in number, were in the Parliament Hall and in the Theatre (which not specified); 8,526 persons attended. The receipts were £5,256 and the expenses £4,024. Over £1,200 were available for division among the charities in Edinburgh”

### **High Demands of the Principal Singers**

**1824 Edinburgh Musical Festival** “The third musical festival was held on 25<sup>th</sup> October. Morning performances in the Parliament Hall, and the evening in the Theatre. Three guineas were charged for a set of six tickets. **Braham** was again one of the artists. The receipts were £4,940. 4s.10d, and the expenses £4,397. 18s. 11d., leaving for distribution among the charities of the city £542. 5s. 11. The decrease in the surplus was attributed to the ‘High Demands of the Principal Singers.’ ”

**1831 Paganini** “This celebrated violinist first appeared in Edinburgh on the 20<sup>th</sup> October, and gave three concerts.”

No further Festivals were mentioned, When the series ceased I do not know. It was, I think, worth while including the information from **1815-1819 and 1824** regarding the first three festivals, in view of the fact that, in **1947**, the First Edinburgh International Festival was launched; now in **1963**, it has completed its 17<sup>th</sup> presentation.

Over the years the Edinburgh Festival has become world famous and attracts visitors and artists from every part of the world. From its inception every Festival has been preceded with a devotional service in St Giles' Cathedral.

### ***MUSIC HALL, GEORGE STREET***

The following information regarding the *Music Hall, George Street*, was extracted from *Grant's Old and New Edinburgh, Vol.II, page 150*

“In immediate connection with the *Assembly Rooms* is the great music hall, built in **1843**, at the cost of more than £10,000. It is a magnificent apartment, with a vast domed and panelled roof, 108 feet long by 91 feet broad, with orchestral accommodation for several hundred performers, and a powerful and splendid organ by Hill of London.

It is the most celebrated place in the city for public meetings. There in **1853**, was inaugurated by Lord Eglinton and others, the great Scottish Rights Association, the ultimate influence of which procured so many necessary grants of money for Scottish purposes; in **1859** the first Burns' Centenary, and in **1871** the first Scott Centenary, were celebrated in this hall. There, too, has the freedom of the city been bestowed upon many great statesmen, soldiers and others. There has **Charles Dickens** often read his *Christmas Carol* to the delighted thousands; and there it was that, in **1859**, the great novelist and humorist **Thackeray**, was publicly hissed down (to the discredit of his audience, let it be said) in one of his readings, for making disparaging remarks on Mary, Queen of Scots."

From my earliest recollections, the *Music Hall* has undergone many changes in the interval. From **1914** it has, in many respects, been superseded by the *Usher Hall*. Before the turn of the century I remember being taken to see a model of an Indian village put on by missionaries for the first time in the Music Hall. Later when I began to take an interest in choir singing in the Central Hall, I found that the Music Hall's organ had long since been removed.

On a number of occasions I was present at the Scottish Amateur Boxing Championships in the 1920's and 1930's.

Many types of exhibitions continue to be held within its walls, Fruit and Flower, Book Shows, in September 1963 a very successful Cat Show, Dancing Championships, Country Dancing, etc.

In both World Wars it was pressed into service as a recruiting centre, and, after the 1914-18 War it became an auxiliary Unemployment Office. During the years many political meetings were held, and continue to be held, in the Hall.

Over to Pictures

It will, no doubt, come as a surprise to learn that the Music Hall showed moving pictures .

*The Scotsman*, Monday, December **1900**

**"MUSIC HALL, GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH**

**NEW YEAR ENTERTAINMENTS**

**2<sup>ND</sup>, 3<sup>RD</sup> AND 4<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 1901**

**FIRST VISIT OF WALKER & COMPANY'S  
WORLD FAMOUS CINEMATOGRAPH AND ELECTRIC DRAMA**

***THE FIGHT FOR THE FLAG IN SOUTH AFRICA*  
And other stirring events, etc.**

**Prices: 3s., 2s. and 1s. Programmes at Methven Simpson and Co., 83 Princes Street"**

**FOOTBALL MATCHES, 1881 AND 1882**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1881

“Grand Football Match

Hibernian Park, Easter Road Today

**Hibernian V Hanover** Kick off 3.45 p.m.

Admission 6d. Ladies Free

Tom O'Reilly, Hon. Secy.”

*The Scotsman*, Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup> 1881

“**Heart of Midlothian Football Club**

The Quarterly Meeting of the above Club will be held in Marshall Street Hall on Wenesday first, the 9<sup>th</sup> inst., at 7.45 p.m.”

*The Scotsman*, Monday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1882

“GRAND FOOTBALL MATCH

TODAY JANUARY 2<sup>ND</sup> 1882

ST MIRRENS (PAISLEY) V HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN

AT TYNECASTLE PARK, DALRY

KICK-OFF at HALF PAST ONE O'CLOCK

ADMISSION 6d. LADIES FREE”

Note: Two points of interest: the spelling of ‘St Mirren’; and the giving of ‘Dalry’ as the locality rather than ‘Gorgie’

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, March 4<sup>th</sup> 1882

“GRAND FOOTBALL MATCHES

AT TYNECASTLE PARK, DALRY

TODAY 4<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 1882

1<sup>ST</sup> AND 2<sup>ND</sup>

KILMARNOCK ATHLETIC

VERSUS

HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN

The Second Elevens play off Tie in Scottish Challenge Cup Competition.

KICK – OFF at 4 o'clock. Admission, Sixpence”

Note: In September 1963 the Scottish League would not Allow Falkirk F.C. to promote a pre-match ‘game’ of their supporters prior to the ‘big’ game Falkirk v Celtic.

I recognise that Football is outwith the main subject matter of this history; but these items did relate to entertainment and may otherwise have been lost forever. For, instance who was ‘Hanover’ ? It also shows that the Local Derby between Hearts and Hibs had not yet become an established fixture on New Year’s Day, **1882**.

***THE VELODROME, 1897***

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, December 18<sup>th</sup> **1897**

**“Cycling in Winter at Hope Crescent off Annandale Street**

**Track exercises at 6d. per hour, with own,  
And 1s. per hour with Hired Machine,**

**Season Tickets, 5s. monthly, or 12s. 6d. to February 18<sup>th</sup> 1898**

**Tuition – Single Lesson 2s.; Course, 10s.**

**Open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday to 5 p.m.  
Inspection Invited.”**

***WAXWORK & MUSEUM, 11 SOUTH BRIDGE, EDINBURGH, 1898***

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup> **1898**

**“Now added – The Sirdar, Lord Kitchener, Captain Dreyfus etc.**

**Singing and Talking Machine.”**

As an after-school hour’s message boy, I passed this Waxwork each evening and twice on a Saturday for three years during which period I learned a lot about the *South Side* and the Bridges. My journey was between **Francis Petrie**. Tobacconist, 98 Leith Street, to the branch shop at 104 Nicolson Street, next to Gibb’s Entry. I was about the highest paid message boy in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, at 2s6d. per week, at an average of 1 ¼ hours each night and 2 ½ hours on Saturdays.

Advertisements in Moss’ Carnival Programme for 1897-98 (2d. for the programme)

**“Wax work and Museum  
11 South Bridge, Edinburgh”**

This programme is held by Edinburgh Room.

**CINEMATOGRAPH SHOW, OLD CHURCH, WEST PORT, 1901**  
*News*, Tuesday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1901

**“Old Church\*, West Port**

**Cinematograph To-night (Tuesday). Price, 3d.”**

\*The second Chalmers’ Church, 1847-1884; a furniture store in 1963

The advertisement is complete, terse and to the point. At that time many church halls were opened during the New Year Festivities simply to attract certain citizens to such a ‘show’ who might otherwise make ‘beasts of themselves’ with the aid of John Barleycorn.

I mention a few such ‘shows’ which were advertised in the Press, supplemented with Bills on church notice boards stating there would be a ‘do’ in the church hall at such and such a date. Generally an announcement was made from the pulpit intimating the ‘do’. That those concerts, cinematograph shows, Punch and Judy, singers, teas and buns, the lot –along with the minister-did much good; I have every reason to know.

**ODDFELLOWS’ HALL**  
**opened on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1873**

*News*, Thursday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1903

***Oddfellows’ Hall, Forrest Road***

The advertisement was for Animated Pictures. Here, again, one can read into the above advertisement the intention of the promoters; simply an endeavour to keep the unfortunates off the streets and out of the pubs.

The Oddfellows’ Hall was one of the busiest in the South Side for many years. Concerts, Trade Union meetings and such like kept it very busy. It had a large hall with gallery; a fair-sized hall on the first floor and one or two big rooms at the top.

**LIVINGSTONE HALL, 38 SOUTH CLERK STREET**

*News*, Friday, September 20<sup>th</sup> 1901

**“Livingstone Hall (Late Literary Institute)**  
**South Clerk Street**

**POPULAR SATURDAY CONCERTS**

**FIRST NIGHT SEPTEMBER 21<sup>st</sup>**

**ARTISTES**

**Miss Grace Nicol, soprano**  
**Miss Isa Walker, Contralto**

**Mr Edwin J. Wilkins (London), tenor**  
**Mr A. Grant McDonald, Baritone.**  
**Miss Clara Clair, Elocutionist**  
**Mr Alex. Paterson, Descriptive Vocalist**  
**Mr E.D.Ferguson, Clarionet Solo**  
**Mr A. Ponsonby Alexander, Accompanist**

**Tickets – Threepence**  
**Reserved Seats, 6d.; Season Tickets, 5s.**

**Business Manager: Mr A. Ponsonby Alexander, 14 Dalkeith Road.**

**Seating Accommodation for 1,040.**

*News*, Thursday, January 25<sup>th</sup> 1912

**“Livingstone Hall, Clerk Street**

**Under Auspices of Livingstone Hall Mission**

**Saturday Evening, January 27<sup>th</sup> 1912, at 8 p.m.**

**AMERICAN JUBILEE SINGERS**  
**DEPICTING NEGRO LIFE”**

***FREE GRAMOPHONE CONCERT, STARBANK PUBLIC PARK, TRINITY, 1904***

*News*, Thursday, June 28<sup>th</sup> 1904

**“For The People**

**Free Gramophone Concerts**

**Every Wednesday and Friday, weather permitting, at 7.45 p.m.**

**From June 28<sup>th</sup> to July 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**Come and hear Madame Melba**

**Operator: T.W. Wright, Music Seller, Ferry Road.”**

***WAX MODELS, LECTURE, MUSIC, CONVICT SHIP, LEITH DOCKS, 1899***

The following item is probably the most peculiar in the whole history. Neither Theatre, Circus nor Cinema. Source: *Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, March 18<sup>th</sup> 1899, in which it was reported that Lord Roseberry inspected the Convict Ship.

**“Convict Ship  
Old Leith Dock  
Wax Models of Prisoners – Splendid Lecture  
Special Attractions & Music Today  
J.C. Harvey, Manager  
Admission, 6d.”**

***GORGIE ENTERTAINMENTS, TYNECASTLE PARISH CHURCH, 1905***

*News*, Monday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1905

**“Gorgie Entertainments**

**Tynecastle Parish Church Hall at 8 p.m.  
Royal Bioscope, Animated Pictures etc.”**

The story is the same as the last two items; a different year and location, but the same purpose: and all at the New Year Festivities.

***STEWART’S WAXWORK, HIGH STREET, EDINBURGH, 1900***

*News*, Tuesday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1900 **“Stewart’s Waxwork”**. The oldest advertisement.

*News*, Thursday, September 12<sup>th</sup> 1907

**“The Fasting Lady, Miss Agnes McDonald**

**10<sup>th</sup> Day**

**Stewart’s Waxwork, High Street**

**Open all night and Sunday  
Commissionaire on Door.”**

Stewart’s Waxwork was situated on that site (164-166 High Street) which is now occupied by the Cross Post Office. It also occupied the floor above which is known as the Central Branch of the former Scottish Painters’ Society known, since January 1<sup>st</sup> 1963, as the Amalgamated Society of Painters and Decorators.

***WAXWORK AND BIOSCOPE, 10 NICOLSON STREET, 1908***

*News*, Monday, November 9<sup>th</sup> 1908

**“The Zoo, Waxwork and Bioscope  
10 Nicolson Street (opposite the Empire)**

**Birds, Beasts, etc., in 14 cages**

**Tattoo artist in attendance**

**Admission: 2d.”**

***FREE CINEMATOGRAPH SHOW, OUTSIDE QUEEN’S, HOTEL LEITH, 1908***

*News*, Wednesday, May 13<sup>th</sup> 1908

**“Free Cinematograph Show**

**To-night and Every Evening This Week**

**From 8 till 11 p.m.**

**Out of Doors at Queen’s Hotel, Leith**

**Splendid Pictures of DEREK CLYDE, DETECTIVE.”**

The site has been occupied by Woolworth’s 3d. and 6d. Store from March 1924. “Derek Clyde” was contemporary with “Sexton Blake”, who was my favourite in those far-off days. In the 1960’s “Perry Mason” and “Maigret” have taken the place of “Clyde” and “Blake”. All good clean entertainment. Why free? I cannot tell you.

***SCOTTISH NATIONAL EXHIBITION, BALGREEN – SAUGHTON PARK, 1908***

The Exhibition was held in Saughton Park, Gorgie, and was opened on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> May 1908 by **Prince Albert**, accompanied by **Sir Robert Cranston** and **Lord Provost Gibson**. A picture of the opening, which appeared in the *News* of that date, was of gie poor quality. Some years had to pass before the majority of Press photographs came to the high standard we expect in the 1960’s.

One remnant of the Exhibition is still to be seen: the concrete bridge across the Water of Leith leading into the beautiful Rose Gardens in Saughton Park.

**Senegalese Village**

Part of the attraction was a Senegalese village and, believe it or not, as old man Ripley might have said, snow fell on the opening day. The natives, never having seen snow in their lives, looked upon it, and ate handfuls as if it were manna.

At the time I was an apprentice housepainter and it was one of my joys to be in possession of a Season Ticket.

The Exhibition remained open for six months. In those days one could travel from the G.P.O. to Gorgie in Cable Cars for 1d., and from Pilrig to Gorgie for 2d.

***CARUSO, ENRICO 1909***

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, July 10<sup>th</sup> **1909** Preliminary announcement

***“McEwan Hall***

**CARUSO**

**On Tuesday Afternoon, September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1909**

**Tickets: Reserved – 31s.6d.; 25s.; 21s.; 15s.; and 12s.6d.  
Unreserved – 10s.6d and 7s.6d.”**

At 31s.6d. it was Fine Fayre for Culture Vultures.

Then, as now, he was known by his surname; simply Caruso. It is the hall-mark in any walk of life to be referred thus, and stamps the person as being at the top of his calling.

I had the pleasure of hearing Caruso in the New York Metropolitan Opera House in December **1916**

The McEwan Hall, designed by Dr Rowand Anderson was opened in **1897**.

My next item deals with a Concert for the masses, where 240 admissions grossed one pound sterling.

***ST. CUTHBERT’S C-OP. CONCERT, MUSIC HALL, 1911***

*News*, Saturday, February 18<sup>th</sup> **1911**

**“St Cuthbert’s Co-op.  
Concert by Choir and Orchestra**

**Music Hall, George Street  
Tuesday, February 28<sup>th</sup> 1911, at 8.15 p.m.  
Admission Programme One Penny  
To be had at all Branches.”**

This advertisement was the first I came across relating to the ‘Store’ in many months of research. However, having a 1906 Balance Sheet for the Half-year ending 6<sup>th</sup> March, the 128<sup>th</sup> Quarter, I append some details of the ‘Store’ then and in **1962**.

“Instituted August **1859**  
Musical Society.

1906 Vocal and Orchestral (page 7)

The Musical Society has been very successful in its work during the past Session. Both Sections have had a good membership, and the attendances have been well maintained.

The appearance by the Chairs at our Educational meetings speak for themselves, and show evidences of a good deal of hard work and careful study during the Session. Our thanks are due to Mr **Lingard** for his work, which has been the means of giving great pleasure to those who have been able to attend the various concerts.

The Children’s Festival in Glasgow was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> January **1906**, when Mr Lingard took 32 members of the orchestra for the occasion.

Juvenile Choirs (page 8)

The practices have been conducted by Mr **Alan Reid**, F.E.I.S., in the St Cuthbert’s Church Hall, Lady Lawson Street, and we have no doubt that the Choirs will give a good account of themselves at the Concerts to be held in the Music Hall on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> April **1906**. The programmes are very attractive, and we would advise Members to secure their tickets early, as there is always a rush for these.

Mr Reid takes great pleasure in his work, and is very successful in retaining the sympathy and attention of his pupils”

It is interesting to recall that Mr **Adam Steel**, Furniture Buyer in Bread Street was the Choir and Orchestra Conductor in the **1920’s and 1930’s**.

***ST. CUTHBERT’S CO-OP. ASSOCIATION, 1906 AND 1962***

The ‘Store Then and Now

	1906	1962
Members	33,603	110,219
Sales, Half Year	£716,495	£13,580,229 (Full Year)
Dividend	4s.4d in the £	1s.4d. in the £
Branches	38	90 Grocer Shops

Note: I will lodge the 1906 Balance Sheet in the Edinburgh Room

## ***PENNY GAFFS***

A perusal of a **1900** Edinburgh City map will show that, in extent, it was not a very big town. Consequently, most of the entertainments were grouped in the then ‘city centre’, namely side-streets off the High Street and, of course, they were found in the Port of Leith.

A popular form of entertainment was the ***Penny Gaff*** (a cheap or low-class place of entertainment). *The News* of February 3<sup>rd</sup> **1953** mentioned two old-time Gaffs: **Johnny Barr’s**, 1d. Gaff, and **Duckenfield’s** 1d. Gaff, both of which were in Bangor Road, Leith.

Nobody, however, had more to write about the ***Penny Gaff’s*** than Councillor **Wilson McLaren**, as late as **1937**. Councillor captured the interest and imagination of countless citizens for many years. Of the many ***Gaff’s*** that he wrote about, I will quote two:

“At the foot of Blackfriars Wynd, ***penny gaffs*** were nightly frequented by people in the surrounding districts. Three shows nightly and what a bill of fare produced by the old mummers – *The Ticket of Leave Man*, *Sweeny Todd*, *The Colleen Bawn*, *Crammon Brig*, and *Hamlet* with **Ned Holt** playing the principal part.”

And

“Almost a stone’s throw away from Blackfriars Wynd was another show ground much frequented by dwellers in the centre of the city. Leith Wynd (now Jeffrey Street) was the spot. Behind Netherbow Port stood **Harry West’s *Alhambra***, a wooden erection used as a music hall where Variety turns, clog and sand-dancing were much in vogue.”

There was also **Salvona’s *Penny Gaff*** at Iona Street Shows prior to the **1914** War; see page 220.

## ***WESLEY HALL, HAMILTON PLACE, 1911***

*News*, Saturday, October 21<sup>st</sup> **1911**

***“Wesley Hall, Hamilton Place***

**Tonight at 8**

**Attractive Cinematograph and Concert**

**Admission: 2d., 3d., and 4d.”**

This entry may, at some distant time, settle a bone of contention.

***THE BOHEMIANS AMATEUR LYRIC OPERA COMPANY, 1914***

News, Monday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1914

***“Theatre Royal***

**To-night at 7.30 p.m.**

**Under the Patronage of the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Roseberry, K.C., K.T.**

**President Sir Richard MacKie**

**Present the Charming Opera**

***PAUL JONES***

**by**

**Robert Planquette”**

**A short history of “The Bohemians”**

**By George Baird, a one time member**

In the winter of **1909** four or five musical enthusiasts were spending a social evening together (as was common in those days). After singing selections from some of the famous comic operas, one of the party remarked, “Don’t you think there is room in Edinburgh for an amateur company that would play French light opera?” It was decided to seek the advice of other musical friends. Very soon the idea ‘caught on’ and the birth of the **Bohemians** was not long delayed.

Members were advertised for and soon two score of enthusiasts met for weekly rehearsal. The name of the Company having been fixed, it was arranged to present *La Cigale* for their first venture.

The membership increased gradually. Mr **George Burnley**, who had been on tour with *La Cigale* for three years, gave powerful assistance in licking the new Company into shape.

For the first dress rehearsal the members turned up at the *Gaiety Theatre*, in the Kirkgate at 6 p.m. They were gay and their hearts full of hope. Alas, the conductor kept them going over passages time and time again until 2 a.m. the following morning; but all that was forgotten when the performance was pronounced a great success.

I became a member of the Company in the Spring of **1913**. The **1913-14** rehearsals for *Paul Jones* took place in the Lower Hall of the *Free Gardeners’ Hall, Picardy Place*. In the late summer of **1914** rehearsals for the *Country Girl* had started, but August of that year put paid to *Johnny Going to London Town*, one of the songs from the *Country Girl*. While ‘Johnny’ had a little suit of brown I had, perhaps, a bigger suit of Khaki and, later, on I went to the Dardanelles.

One member whom I knew very well was Mr **Masterton Brown**, Master Painter, 5 Pirrie Street, Leith. Mr Brown was associated with the management side of the Company, simply for the joy of it.

I append the names of some of the members of the *Paul Jones* cast:

**Agnes Ross**, *Paul Jones*

Mrs **Jack Copland**, *Yvonne*

**Jack Copland**, *Petit Pierre*

**Jessie D. Small**, *Malaguena*

**Francis Gibson**, *Don Trocadero*

**Jack Chisholm**, *Bouillabaisse*

I was happy to be a member of the **Bohemians**. Over the years many thousands of pounds have been donated to charity as a result of the **Bohemians'** efforts

### **CHAPMAN-ALEXANDER MISSION, OLYMPIA, 1914**

*News*, Saturday, February, 7<sup>th</sup> 1914

#### **“CHAPMAN-ALEXANDER MISSION**

**DR. J. WILBUR CHAPMAN**

**SPEAKS TO MEN ONLY**

**TOMORROW AT 3 p.m.**

**IN THE OLYMPIA**

**ANNANDALE STREET, OFF LEITH WALK**

**SUBJECT:**

**THREE PERILS THREATENING EDINBURGH**

**DOORS OPEN – 2**

**5,000 COMFORTABLE SEATS – GRAND MUSIC”**

By any standard **Chapman and Alexander** were worthy successors to those other famous evangelists, **Moody and Sankey**. Indeed, Chapman and Alexander used the well-known hymns of their predecessors to good effect.

Local church choirs and members of many choirs throughout the city deemed it a privilege to be in such goodly company. Frequently during their Mission the Full House sign was hung outside.

Strange but true, 50 years ago the masses went to such Missions. Now, in the 1960's, the B.B.C. takes the 'Message' to the masses in the comfort of their living rooms. While this item may not be classed as entertainment, nevertheless the Masses enjoyed those sessions with the hearty singing and the straight from the shoulder addresses.

## ***THE USHER HALL, 1914***

It has been described by many people as a beautiful hall, which is an understatement .

### **The Donor**

Mr **Andrew Usher**, of Blackford Place, Edinburgh, gifted £100,000 to Edinburgh in care of the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council; for the purpose of providing a city hall to be used for concerts, recitals, or other entertainments or performances of a musical nature and for civic or such other purposes as they might from time to time sanction or approve. The gift was made in **1896**.

### **The Site was acquired in 1911**

The site of the proposed new hall was adopted by the then Town Council on the motion of Sir **William S. Brown**. Lothian Road School, at the corner of Grindlay Street adjacent to the **Lyceum Theatre**, occupied the site. **Cooke's Circus** had to vacate the site in February **1883** to make way for the **Lyceum Theatre**.

Note: Lothian Road School opened in **1880** and cost £7,333. 17s.0d. The first Headmaster was Mr George Robertson.

### **Choice of Architect**

Architects were invited to send in plans for a hall to cost £65,000 and to seat 3,000 in the auditorium and 500 on the platform. One hundred and thirty three sets of plans were exhibited in the hall of the new Corn Market, Gorgie (built in **1910-11**). Sir **Aston Webb** gave the decision on July 22<sup>nd</sup> **1910** by selecting the design of **Stockdale Harrison & Sons** of Leicester.

### **Foundation Stone**

King George V and Queen Mary, on their visit to Edinburgh after their Coronation, laid the foundation or memorial stones on Wednesday, July 19<sup>th</sup> **1911**.

### **Ultimate Cost of Hall**

The total cost of the hall was £146,842, and to the extent of £135,943 was met out of Mr Usher's donation and accumulation from interest; the balance being provided by the city which was £10,899 from Capital Account. The site cost £36,000. Building and Furnishing cost £94,000 (approximately).

### **The Organ and Case**

**Norman Beard** of Norwich and London built the organ with its 4,000 pipes and accessory ranks, at a cost of £4,000.

### **Accommodation in 1914**

At the opening there were 2,902 seats as follows: Area, 1,192; Grand Tier, 428; Upper Tier, 813; Orchestra, 349; and Platform, 120. In the *City of Edinburgh Financial Review* for **1961** the seating accommodation was given as 2,880,

### **Rental of Hall**

As at 1961, where the cost of admission exceeded 9s., the rental was 25 per cent. of the gross takings, with a minimum of £75. For meetings where there was no admission charge, the rental was £40. For use of organ £5.

### Opening of Usher Hall

The Usher Hall was opened on Friday, March 6<sup>th</sup> **1914** by Mrs Andrew Usher, widow of the donor. **Neville Garden** who writes the Turret Widow column for the *News* had this to say about the opening of the hall in the issue of December 27<sup>th</sup> **1963**.

#### “50 Years not out for ‘The Usher’

We live in an age when centenaries, etc. are celebrated promptly, usually with much advance shouting. So I was a little surprised to discover today that there is an important anniversary coming up within three months...so far – no ballyhoo.

50 years ago, on March 7<sup>th</sup> 1914, the Usher Hall, the capital’s major concert hall and focal point of the city’s annual International Festival, was opened by the then Lord Provost.

The hall was built by money gifted in **1896** to Edinburgh by Mr Andrew Usher, the well known local brewer.”

Mr Garden was in error in stating that the Hall opened on the 7<sup>th</sup> March, instead of the 6<sup>th</sup>; that it was opened by the Lord Provost, instead of Mrs Usher; and that Mr Usher had been a brewer instead of a distiller. Despite sending the facts to Mr Garden; he ignored my letter. Thus, is local history butchered by journalists out for the ‘fast buck’. The correct information was extracted from the *News*, Saturday March 7<sup>th</sup> **1914** and also in *The Scotsman* of the same date, a precis from which is given below:

#### “Opening of Usher Hall

Crowds started to gather for the 2.30 start at 1.45 p.m. Edinburgh High Constables acted as stewards and the Rev. Dr. Wallace Williamson of St Giles led the audience in prayer.

The Town Council were of the view that nothing could be more appropriate than that Mrs Usher should be asked to perform the ceremony of formally opening the Hall. She kindly consented to do so and the Lord Provost was invited to undertake the important part of the day’s proceedings to loud applause. Mrs Usher rose amid applause and contented herself in opening the Hall with these words, “I have great pleasure in declaring the Hall opened.”

The Lord Provost then presented to Mrs Usher a silver glove box. The box had a representation of the exterior of the Hall in appliqué work, and was lined with satin in the colours of the city. The gift box bore the following inscription:

“Presented to Mrs Usher on the opening of the Hall, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1914”

There was also presented to Mrs Usher a silver life ticket to the Hall enclosed in a case, there being on the face a representation of the City Arms, and an inscription similar to that on the box.”

Sir **Robert Kirk Innes**, K.T., was Lord Provost of Edinburgh from 1912 to 1916. He consented to serve another year to help out with the War effort. He was the last Lord Provost to drive to the City Chambers in his carriage and pair.

To keep the record right, there were Two Opening Concerts. The first on the 6<sup>th</sup> March after the Opening ceremony. The second in the evening of Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup>.

On the Friday Mr **T.H.Collinson** was at the organ and Dr **Georg Henchel** conducted the orchestra. Mr Collinson played Handel's Second Organ Concerto, Bach's Grand Passacaglia in C Minor and Ole Bull's 'Sacterjentens Sontag'. In the orchestral part of the concert the Overture was Hamish MacCunn's lively *Land of the Mountai and the Flood*, first performed at the Crystal Palace, London, in **1887** when MacCunn was aged 21; and Granville Bantock's suite *Scenes from the Scottish Highlands*, based on Scottish melodies, which had its first performance in Sheffield in November **1913**

**Eleanor Osborne** sang the appropriate excerpts from Wagner's *Tannhauser*: Elizabeth's Greeting to the Hall of Song, which contained these lines;

Charmed Hall of Song  
I give thee greeting  
FHow proud, how grand dost thou appear  
Thou Hall enchanted, hail , hail to thee.

(*Tannhauser* was, and is, my favourite opera, which I had the pleasure of hearing seven times.)

**John Coates**, sang *Lohengrin's* Narration the following lines from which were appropriate to the occasion:

A gleaming temple opens  
There its portal  
More costly than wealth  
Of earth can claim."

A week or two prior to the opening of the Hall I remember seeing two or three hundred Police Constables assembled outside. They had volunteered to 'risk life and limb' by occupying the Grand Tier in order to ascertain whether it would bear their combined weight – it did.

The Hall has been the scene of many memorable occasions. Many 'top' politicians have 'said their piece' in that braw building – alas too many to mention in detail. Round about **1938** Sir **Oswald Moseley**, Leader of the British Union (Fascist Movement) held one meeting there – but never another one. **Harry Pollit**, Leader of the Communist Party also spoke in the Hall; however the Lord Provost's Committee, Magistrates and Council frowned on such meetings and that was that.

King Edward VIII, as Prince of Wales, thought it the most beautiful hall he had ever seen.

Many notable persons have received the Freedom of Edinburgh within its walls, including Sir **Winston Churchill**, and Five Star General **Dwight Eisenhower**, who plotted and planned D Day, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944.

#### The Edinburgh International Festival

The Festival has always been opened with a service of Praise and Thanksgiving in St Giles' Cathedral on the first Sunday; while the first concert of the Festival is held in the Usher Hall and is broadcast throughout Europe.

## ***INDUSTRIAL HALL, ANNANDALE STREET, 1922***

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, October 12<sup>th</sup> 1922

### **“Opening Ceremony**

The Chairman of the Exhibition Committee, Mr **P.J.Pringle**, called upon the Duke of Atholl to formally open the hall.

A large company of invited guests were present among whom were: The Duchess of Atholl, the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Mr and Mrs Hutchison, Lord Salveson, members of the Town Council in their robes and members of the High Constables.

The ceremony was brief; a gold key made by Latimer & Son, Lothian Road, was presented to his Grace by Mr Williamson as a memento of the occasion. The Architect was Mr Douglas.”

The Edinburgh and Scottish Grocers, Bakers, Confectioners and Allied Trades Exhibition had opened the Hall for the first time on Wednesday October 11<sup>th</sup> 1922. The Hall catered for large trade exhibitions throughout its short life from October 1922 to July 1926.

At least one European Title Boxing Match was staged in the Hall, on November 26<sup>th</sup> 1924 between **Tommy Milligan and Ted Kid Lewis**, London. Milligan of Bellshill, won over 20 rounds.

A troupe of **Cossack riders** occupied the Hall for about three weeks in September 1923, some of whom were alleged to be members of the Czar’s body-guard.

The Industrial Hall became a ‘white elephant’; why, I do not pretend to know. Since 1926 many voices have been raised to high heaven pleading for such a Hall to replace the Waverley Market. But Sports Stadia, Swimming Pools, Running Tracks and what have you, costing over the £2 million mark, are more in the public eye. How true, give them Beer and Circuses. However, the Meadowbank project was turned down on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1963.

### **Industrial Hall becomes Corporation Garage**

To meet the ever growing need for space to garage Corporation buses, the city acquired the Industrial Hall on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1926. At that time it had a floor area of 90,000 square feet. It became known as the Central Garage.

*A Short History of Transport in Edinburgh* Extract from page 14

### **“Garage Becomes A Synod**

For one week the Central Garage was used as a Synod on a memorable occasion in Scottish Church history. This was the Union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church. For this event the Central Garage was cleared of buses from Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> September 1929 to Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1929.”

*Church of Scotland Year Book, 1930*

“October 2, 1929, stands out as indeed a day on the Mount for all who were privileged to share in its supreme emotions... this was a fitting prelude to the institution of the new order

that was to fill the afternoon... the magic of Sir **D.Y.Cameron** had made a quite wonderful 'Hall of Assembly' in Annandale Street: but with its audience of 12,000 people hearing everything perfectly by means of devices of modern science, the scene was a clearly of the new age.

The **Duke of York** (subsequently George VI) was Lord High Commissioner in May 1929, and he virtually was Lord High Commissioner at the above conjoint meeting of the two churches on 2<sup>nd</sup> October **1929**. He was accompanied by the Duchess of York

The first Moderator of the United Churches was the Right Rev Dr **John White**, of the Barony, Glasgow"

I saw the procession of 1,500 ministers on their way from St. Andrew's Church, George Street, on that Wednesday afternoon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> October **1929**. [ Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May **1843**, was the day of the Disruption of the Church of Scotland and the foundation of the Free Church. On that day some of the leading Free Church ministers and elders left St Andrew's Church, George Street, in a procession to Tanfield Hall G.F.B.]

### ***THE SPORTS CENTRE, 78 LEITH STREET, 1939***

*News*, Saturday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> **1939**

**"The Sports Centre**

**All the Fun of the Fair**

**78 Leith Street**

**Now Open Daily from 1 to 11 p.m.**

**Admission Free"**

The 'Fun of the Fair' and another such place at 66 Leith Street, where Montague Burton, Ltd., Tailors, have been in business from 1939, were not unlike the ***Tower Amusements, Portobello***.

## ***THE WAVERLEY MARKET***

Being wise after the event has no great merit in itself; show me the ‘historian’ who could write the history of next year and I would tell you – “There goes one who takes precedence over the Almighty!”. Fortunately there is no such person.

History can only be compiled from two main sources, namely, one’s own experience, combined with that of older members of one’s own generation. Or from books, records, diaries, newspapers etc.

It requires much **time** and an abundance of **patience** to unearth the bits and pieces necessary to complete a story. In this instance ‘Why is Princes Street ‘half a street’?’

Princes Street provides Glasgow ‘comics’ with material certain to raise a laugh when they remark, “Ach, it’s only hauf a street, whit dae they need to brag about?”

I can forgive my Glaswegian friends having a wee twinge of envy and, in turn, remark “Many thousands of foreign visitors come to Edinburgh every year to see, and to be seen, to admire and to promenade along ‘The Royal Drive’, known to us as Princes Street.

We are familiar with the saying, “Half a loaf...” But, Half a Street, means joy and pleasure; just to see it is a wish gratified.

To gaze beyond the ‘missing half’ at the beautiful and wonderful vista to the south, either by daylight or by floodlight is to see part of a fairy-tale come to life.

Perhaps many of my Glasgow friends may learn why it is only ‘hauf a street’ and mourn in secret why Mother Nature showered her favours on “Dear Auld Edinburry Toon, The Toon That I adore”

Oh, that once again could I walk from the Register to Maule’s Corner (now Binn’s) and back again is a hope that can never be fulfilled.

Ancient history teaches us that the Wise Men came from the East. Fortunately for Edinburgh some of those Wise Men fought to preserve Princes Street in the **1770’s** and to them we are indebted for having the finest half street in the world.

### **The Story**

Much of my information was gleaned from Grant’s *Old and New Edinburgh*, Vol. II, page 100; *The Scotsman*, *Dispatch*, *News* and other sources will be mentioned at the appropriate time. To avoid appending too much detail I simply name the source and give a bare outline of many of the items. Those who wish to pursue the respective items in full may do so in the Edinburgh Room.

*News Photo. Album*, Monday, May 30<sup>th</sup> **1960**

Shows First North Bridge, with at north-west corner a number of houses; no date is given as to when the photograph was taken. The bridge was the original crossing of **1763**.

An **1820** picture in the Edinburgh Room shows traders under the arches; west side of bridge.

*News Photo Album*, Friday May 13<sup>th</sup> **1960**

Photograph of Waverley Market Roof; the caption reads, in part, that the Waverley Market dates from **1869**. Between then and the Tron Kirk days the traders had the use of the Green Market site (see above) from which they were evicted for the building of the new railway station. After costly litigation, the Railway Company were obliged to provide a new site. The foregoing shows where trading was done long before the advent of the Waverley Market.

*Dispatch*, Wednesday, December 21<sup>st</sup> **1961**. Article by **Robert Vacha**, “The Fight to Retain the South Side of Princes Street”

**James Craig**, architect, published and exhibited his plan of Edinburgh New Town in **1767**, showing the south side as a pleasure ground (As it is today, 1963). However, **John Home**, a coach-builder, had other ideas as he had bought the land on the north-east corner which was free of all rates and taxes. Home had acquired the rate-free land at the east of Princes Street, which had originally been given to a plumber, **John Graham**, in return for land needed in the construction of the North Bridge.

By **1771** Home had acquired additional ground to the west and to the south, namely, 162 feet west, by 318 feet south (The site now occupied by the N.B. Hotel)

In June **1770**, Home and Messrs **Young & Trotter**, upholsterers, petitioned to the Town Council to build workshops there. The Council agreed, but provided that no building erected on the area should rise above the level of Princes Street.

“On August 8<sup>th</sup> **1770**, a committee reported to the Council their opinion that, ‘no more of the remaining area running along the south side of Princes Street be feued till the quarries are filled up and then feuars may have a proper place to dispose of the earth which they be obliged to dig.’ (Mr Vacha did not state where the quarries were. However, the nearest quarries at that time were at the east end of Royal Terrace at the Regent Road junction).

No sooner, however, was it seen that buildings were about to be erected on Home’s ground than several well-known citizens, including **David Hume** of international fame as a philosopher and historian, complained bitterly. But whatever the citizens thought of the Council for permitting building in St Anne’s Street (immediately west of the parapet on the North Bridge – a slope of 1 in 6) and the terms of Craig’s Plan on amenity, on strictly legal grounds the Council had a good case.

#### Original Terms

One clause in the feu contract said, ‘As it is not intended at present to feu out the land betwixt the South Side and the North Loch, the feuars upon that street should have an obligation in their favour, that if houses were afterwards built there, they should not be nearer to their houses than 96 feet.’ This did not rule out the erection of houses.

The original terms of the bargain with John Graham also said the ground he was to get in the New Town was for building purposes, and the Council argued that Home, taking Graham’s place, was entitled to use the ground for the same purpose. Nevertheless, the feuars in **1771** raised a Court action against the Council. It was rejected by the Court of Session but the House of Lords reversed the decision and ordered the Court of Session to prevent the building.

And this ruling arising from these first protests by proprietors and other citizens of Princes Street prevented other attempts in later years to build on the south side.

Council and objectors agreed to abide by the decision of Mr **David Rae** (later Lord Justice-Clerk, Esk Grove), who decreed on March 19<sup>th</sup> **1776** that the houses in Princes Street and St Anne's Street were to be finished 'in proper taste', but that buildings on the south side of Princes Street were not to extend further than Waverley Steps. West of this point, Young & Trotter were to be allowed to erect their workshops **below** the level of Princes Street.

That, then, is the legal reason why Princes Street has remained 'half-a-street'.

Before proceeding further it is well to record that Edinburgh Town Council favoured the name 'St Giles Street' for the new thoroughfare, but **George III** objected. It became 'Princes' Street', complete with apostrophe.

Press Pictures of the Waverley Market in the Edinburgh Room.

Taken for the News Photo Album, **1960**; Monday, May 30<sup>th</sup> - First Bridge; Tuesday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> - **1850**; Friday, May 13<sup>th</sup> - **1886**; Tuesday, June 28<sup>th</sup> - **1870**

*Grant's Old and New Edinburgh, Volume II, page 100*

"The Green Market, which lies immediately westward of the block of houses at the west side of the North Bridge, occupies, or rather covers, the original terminus of the Edinburgh, Perth and Dundee Railway, and was formed on 6<sup>th</sup> March **1868**, in lieu of the previous market at the eastern end of the valley, removed by the North British Railway. It stands on a basement of lofty arches, constructed of strength sufficient to bear the weight of such an edifice.

It was covered by an ornamental terraced roof, laid out in tastefully-arranged gardens, level with Princes Street, and having well-lights and a gallery; changes, however, were effected in **1877**, when it was to suffer encroachment on its roof by street improvements, and when it received a further ornamentation of the former, and acquired at its north-west corner a handsome staircase. In the spacious area of this edifice, promenade concerts, cattle and flower shows are held."

The Waverley Market stands on one and a half acres: see *The Scotsmen* for March 2<sup>nd</sup> **1869** and *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*.

"The vegetable market, built by the North British Railway Company was simply an enclosed piece of ground and was open to the sky. This was what was handed over to the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council on Monday, March 1<sup>st</sup> **1869**. At a celebration dinner on that day the name of the new place was coined by **George Harrison**, later Lord Provost and M.P. for South Edinburgh, gave the toast "**The Waverley Market**".

The News, Friday, May 13<sup>th</sup> **1960** recalls the Corporation spent some £30,000 in roofing and improving the Market.

*Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century* "Lord Provost Sir **James Falshaw**, Bart., accompanied by Lady Falshaw formally opened the promenade on the top of the Waverley Market formed by the city covering in the Market". The ceremony took place on Monday, June 18<sup>th</sup> **1877**.

Plaque on Wall of Waverley Steps

“This market place was begun in 1875

and opened by the Right Honourable Sir

James Falshaw, Lord Provost.

Architect, Robert Morham”

Note: Lord Provost Falshaw was the first Englishman to hold the office of Lord Provost of Edinburgh. A street in Leith was named after him and was so called until **1886** when it became known as Iona Street.

### **SOME OF ITS USES**

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup> **1872**

“Womball’s No 1 Royal Menagerie was sold the previous day in the Waverley Market.”

Founded in 1805 and named **Bostock and George Womball’s Menagerie**. The No.2 and No.3 menageries continued to travel the country.

### ***FIRST WAVERLEY MARKET CONCERT***

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, December 30<sup>th</sup> **1876**

**“Monstre Promenade Concerts for the People**

**New Vegetable Market**

**Entrances – Waverley Bridge and Princes’ Street**

**This Saturday Evening, 30<sup>th</sup> December**

**Doors Open at 4 p.m.**

**The Lord Provost and Magistrates and Council have kindly consented to open the proceedings at 5 p.m.**

**AND**

**On Tuesday January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1877, Doors Open at 12 a.m.**

**Under the Patronage of Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council, Colonel and Officers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Hussars and Colonel and Officers of the 78<sup>th</sup> Highlanders**

**Admission to Promenade, 6d. Balconies, 1s.”**

Some of the artistes who appeared were: Madame **Vanfrie**, Prima Donna; Miss **S.N. Johnson**, Mezzo Soprano; Mr. **Reed Larwell**, Popular Tenor; **J.Harvey**, Solo Trombone; Highland Dancers, etc.

### ***POLITICAL MEETINGS***

**William Gladstone**, the G.O.M.' addressed a monster demonstration in the Market on Saturday, November 29<sup>th</sup> **1879**. There was an audience of 20,000.

**A. J. Balfour**, the Irish Secretary, 4 December **1889**; see under 'The Waverley Market becomes a Dining Hall.

### ***SATURDAY NIGHT CONCERTS, 1880 - 1921***

Miss **H. Armet**, the City Archivist, provided me with the following information:

"On 17<sup>th</sup> February **1880** the Town Council agreed that music should be provided in the Waverley Market for two or three Saturday evenings as a trial. The principle was established. That the concerts did carry on was confirmed in a Press cutting, "Promenade Concerts on Saturday evenings have been provided for about 40 years; the last series having been given in the winter of **1920-21**"

*News*, Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> **1904**

#### **"Waverley Market**

**Corporation Concerts   Tonight   3d.**

**Band and Pipers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Highland Light Infantry**

**Fraser and Elrick's Cinematograph**

**Russian- Japanese War**

**At 7.30 p.m.**

**City Chambers, Edinburgh. 1<sup>st</sup> December 1904"**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> **1897**

#### **"Waverley Market**

**J.P. Curle's Popular Entertainment**

**Tonight   Admission 3d."**

Mr Curle was identified with the *Albert Hall* at that time. See Chapter 27.

## ***FRED LUMLEY'S ATHLETIC TOURNAMENT, 1903***

*News*, Monday, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1903

### **“Waverley Market**

### **Fred A. Lumley's Athletic Championship Tournament**

**Boxing      Tug Of War**

**From December 7<sup>th</sup> to December 12<sup>th</sup>”**

### ***USED AS A DINING HALL***

*Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century* “On Wednesday, December 4<sup>th</sup> **1889**, a great banquet was held in the Market in honour of Mr **A.J. Balfour**, then Irish Secretary. 2,500 gentlemen dined together; the largest in the records of Scotland. The Duke of Fife presided, and the gathering was quite an historic demonstration.”

The Market was used in the capacity of a dining hall for those members of the Medical Profession who attended a Conference in Edinburgh in **1960**. For the last 17 years all those who had made the **Castle Tattoo** a great success were entertained in the Market in fitting manner.

### ***BOYS' BRIGADE INSPECTION IN MARKET***

I joined the 26<sup>th</sup> Company, Greenside Church, in **1902** and remember taking part during an inspection in **1904**. In those days we drilled with the *Martini Henry* rifle.

### ***BOXING MATCHES***

During the **1920's** Boxing Matches were very popular; 10,000 spectators was a common thing. **Nat Dresner** was the promoter. **George MacKenzie**, a nephew of Tancy Lee, and **Alex. Ireland**, both Leith lads, were very popular with the fans.

### ***WAVERLEY MARKET CARNIVAL***

I give an account of Moss's Waverley Market Carnival, held during the Christmas/New Year Period (see page 38). This started on Monday, December 28<sup>th</sup> **1885** until his death in **1912**. **Fred. A. Lumley** took over the Carnival for the **1913-14** Season, and carried on the tradition that Moss had set. Mr Lumley was a Londoner; an all-round sportsman, he could hold his own in the ring. His business premises were at Nos. 163-167 Leith Street, 'Sports Emporium'. He could never 'best', Moss in the entertainment world, although he was interested in many Edinburgh projects such as: the Powderhall Sprints when the 'New Year Handicap' was something to take notice of in the late **1880's** and for a number of years in the **1890's**. Powderhall opened on 1<sup>st</sup> January **1870**. He ran various entertainments in the

*Olympia, Annandale Street*, such as Circuses, Pictures and Roller Skating, all of which will be detailed in due course.

By any standard he was a wealthy man as a perusal of the **1914** Valuation Roll shows for the Greenside Place and Leith Street area. He was also connected with the ***Tabernacle*** on which the ***Playhouse*** now stands. I knew Mr Lumley very well by sight as I lived in the area. He always wore a blue serge suit, bowler and carried a cane. His son, Captain Lumley, was killed in the 1914-18 War

*News*, Tuesday, January 19<sup>th</sup> **1954**

#### *“Lumley’s Carnival 1914-15*

During the week commencing January 4<sup>th</sup> **1915**, F.A. Lumley introduced to the public a ‘galaxy of champion lady boxers’. The exhibition had all the accompaniments of the ordinary boxing match with the exception that the referee and seconds were also women.

The English champion, Miss **Lucie Warner**, was described as having a fine style and an accurate ‘left’. Miss **Alice Fleury** represented Belgium and Miss **Adele Neilson**, Norway and Denmark. Chief attraction was **Mlle. Carpentier**, champion of the world, and sister of the great French boxer **Georges Carpentier** (who fought **Jack Demspey** for the World’s Heavy weight title in America in July **1921**). During the week Mlle. Carpentier opposed **Tancy Lee** of Leith, in three one-minute rounds. As well as giving a return exhibition bout against Tancy Lee, she also tackled **Alec Lafferty** of Airdrie and **R. Buchan** of Leith

Lumley introduced many ‘stars’ to his Carnival such as **Yoki Tani**, Japanese wrestler, and **Hakensmidt**, world heavy-weight wrestler.

#### *EXHIBITIONS HELD IN THE MARKET*

Many exhibitions have been held in the Market such as: Castle; Flower Shows; Ideal Homes; Building Trades, with craftsmen working on the ‘job’; Motor Cars; and Dog Shows. *The Scotsman* of Tuesday September **1963** announced the following Educational Exhibition:

“Edinburgh with the Lid Off

Civic Exhibition taking shape

‘This is Your City’

To be staged from October 21 to November 9. Many push-button devices, action displays, modern techniques. Public Health Department displays. The City Chamberlain’s Department will show modern computers. The Parks Department will transform a large area into a Japanese tea-garden etc.”

## ***A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE MARKET GARDENERS***

*Dispatch*, Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup> **1955**

“In **1933** the gardeners agreed to move provided the Corporation found suitable accommodation for them within a half a mile of the Waverley Market. Building then begun on the Cranston Street market but was interrupted by the Second World War.

It was not until **1946** that the Market Gardeners’ Association moved into their new home. Written in their minutes is this paragraph: ‘Not since **1874** have the Market Gardeners had the undisputed use of any premises and it is to be hoped that in view of the falling off of the attendances this state of affairs has not come too late.’

Note: Cranston Street Markets were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

*The Scotsman*, March 5<sup>th</sup> **1938**

“In terms of Section 278, to transfer the Vegetable Market to the junction of Cranston Street with East Market Street and partly consisting of North Canongate School.”

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, December 26<sup>th</sup> **1940**

### **“War Measures for Market Gardeners**

#### **Edinburgh Market Gardeners**

#### **Vegetable and Flower Market**

Owing to the Waverley Market having been requisitioned by a Government, the Vegetable and Flower Market will be held on Waverley Bridge on Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> December and until further notice at 8.30 a.m.”

## ***PROPOSALS FOR AN EXHIBITION HALL AND HOTEL***

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, November 15<sup>th</sup> **1939**

### **“Architectural Exhibition for New Exhibition Hall**

An Exhibition of the Designs will be held in the Royal Academy Galleries, The Mound, from 15<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> November 1939, inclusive.

D.Robertson, Town Clerk, 10<sup>th</sup> November 1939”

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, October 16<sup>th</sup> **1956**

### **“500 Guineas Award**

The above was awarded to Leeds Architects in November 1939 (Mr Donald Dex Harrison and Mt Thomas M Cartledge)

The War prevented any building at the Waverley. The alterations were estimated to cost £38,500.”

*News*, Friday, July 1960

### **“Motion in Town Council to move Market Gardeners to Leith**

A motion by Councillor A. Theurer to move the Fruit Markets from Market Street to Leith.”

*The Scotsman*, Friday, April 14<sup>th</sup> 1961

### **“18 Storey Hotel Plan Rejected**

#### **Waverley Market Project 220 foot high Building Harmful to Amenity**

Edinburgh Corporation Planning Committee yesterday turned down a proposal to build an 18 storey hotel on the Waverley Bridge site. The project included shops, an Exhibition Hall and a car park to accommodate 282 vehicles.

The plan was submitted by a firm of London architects, Arthur Swift and Partners.”

The 1771 House of Lords decision regarding building on the south side of Princes Street was a fitting reply to this proposal.

### ***NORTH BRITISH HOTEL***

*News*, Tuesday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1960

### **“Details of North British Hotel**

The building of the N.B. Hotel started in 1895 and was opened in 1902, that is it took 7 years to build, as long as it took to build the Forth Rail Bridge.

13,000 tons of stone were used in its construction. There are 2,000 windows, 1,000 doors and 700 rooms. Prior to the building of the hotel the street numbers on that side of Princes Street were 1 to 9.”

### **Scaffolding Accident**

*Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*: “A huge scaffolding, erected to support a crane on the top of the North British Railway new hotel, fell in a gale of wind, on the 18<sup>th</sup> March 1898. Two workmen were killed and thirteen injured.”

Dances and Conferences are frequently held in the N.B. Hotel.

## 29: THE CINEMA IN EDINBURGH AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INDUSTRY

*Beginnings in Edinburgh; Some firsts, latests etc; Cinerama comes to Scotland but not to Edinburgh; The South Side and its many Picture Houses; Cinemas open for business in December 1913 and January 1914;*

*Extracts from the 1915 Kinematograph Year Book: The First Coloured Film, 1896; £70 per week Rental Charge in London; Seating Capacity in Bombay; Montreal: City of Cinemaniacs; Filming the Wells-Bell Boxing Match; Perlatino Projection Screen; Local Film Censors; Sunday Openings for Concerts; Safety First – Traffic Films, 1914; Length of a Screen Kiss.*

*Cinematograph Pictures in Schools, 1910 proposal turned down, 1938; War Time Concerts, 1939-1945; 1954 Kinematograph Year Book, Admissions and Gross/Net Takings, 1936-1953; 300 more cinemas to close, 1963; Public Support for Serious Cinema Called in Question, Allen Wright; Music Not Vital at Pop Concerts held in Cinemas - Case brought by Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association to reduce the amount paid to the Performing Rights Society; First film performance in Palace of Holyroodhouse; Gracie Fields' Ave Maria 'blue-pencilled' by the BBC; Serials in the Silent Days; The House, Look Ma, I'm on TV - Cinerama Telcan.*

*News*, Saturday, January 1948    Precipis of an article by "D.B."

### "Development of Cinema Industry in the City

Fifty years ago may be said to embrace the whole history of the gigantic cinema industry. About 1897 some of us had our first experience of that modern miracle, the 'moving picture'. We remember all its crudities, but principally the quick jerky movements of men as they walked across the screen.

### How did it begin in Edinburgh?

.....there are no official records, none at any rate that are easily come by. It seems pretty well established, however, that the first permanent cinema in the city was the ***Operetta House***, Chambers Street, which opened in **1902**. .... and after gradually extending seasons became a permanent house some four years later... that it was followed about a year later by the Cinema House, 100 yards away in Nicolson Street ....and that the ***Albert Hall*** in Shandwick Place, ***Pringle's Picture Palace***, Elm Row, and ***St Bernard's Picture House***, St Bernard's Row, Stockbridge, were among the pioneer houses."

My comments on "D.B.'s" on what comprised the 'pioneer' cinemas, are as follows:

***Operetta House***, Chambers Street.    Opened on December 20<sup>th</sup> **1892** as a theatre, see page 125; and an advertisement for moving pictures appeared in the *News* of December 31<sup>st</sup> **1900**, see page 126.

**Cinema House**, Nicolson Street. Opened on Monday September 11<sup>th</sup> **1911**, see page 317.

**Albert Hall**, Shandwick Place. Opened as a place of amusement on March 13<sup>th</sup> **1882** with *The Wardroppers*. Under the title **B.B. Pictures** it opened on September 25<sup>th</sup> **1908**, see page 316

**St Bernard's Picture House**, St Bernard's Row. There was a 'Grand Re-opening' on April 12<sup>th</sup> **1912**, see page 319; on the same site there was the **Palace Picture House** which opened on Monday, April 10<sup>th</sup> **1911**, see page 318

I give below a few names of Houses and their Dates of Opening, so that the reader can judge for himself whether "D.B.'s" houses can properly be designated as being in the 'pioneer class'.

1. **Queen's Hall**, Queen Street. *The Scotsman* Monday December **1897**.
2. **Pavilion Theatre**, Grove Street, Hillcoat's Cinematograph, *News*, December 15<sup>th</sup> **1902**.
3. **Synod Hall**, Fisk Jubilee Singers and Animated Pictures., *News*, Thursday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> **1902**.
4. **Central Hall, Methodist Church**, Tollcross. *News*, Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> **1901**
5. **Moss's Empire**. *The Scotsman*, Tuesday, April 13<sup>th</sup> **1896**.
6. **Moss's Carnival, Waverley Market**. *The Scotsman*, Saturday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> **1894**.
7. **Swallow's Booth**, Iona Street Showgound, **1893**. See item on **James Salvona**.

In the following paragraphs I bring together information that is relevant to determining which cinemas in Edinburgh were the first, or among the first, with reference to certain aspects of the cinema industry.

1. The **first moving pictures to be shown** were in **Moss's Waverley Market Carnival** in the shape of "Edison's Latest and Most Wonderful Invention, the Kinetoscope" *The Scotsman*, Saturday December 22<sup>nd</sup> **1894**. It is, however, claimed that the first moving pictures, not only in Edinburgh, but in Scotland, were shown in the **Empire Palace Theatre**, Nicolson Street on Monday April 13<sup>th</sup> **1896**. *The Scotsman*, April 14<sup>th</sup> **1896**.
2. The **first cinema to be expressly built** as such was **The Haymarket**, Dalry Road, which opened on December **1912**. Previously, all 'houses' showing 'movies' had been converted from theatres or halls for the purpose.
3. The **last cinema to be built** in Edinburgh was **The County** (now **The George**), Bath Street Portobello, which opened on Thursday, March 30<sup>th</sup> **1939**. *News*, March 25<sup>th</sup> **1939**.
4. The **oldest 'moving picture house'** was the **Operetta House**, Chambers Street. My father took me to the **OP** in **1898**. On page 127 I give details of a 'short season of Edison's Animated Pictures' (*News* December 31<sup>st</sup> **1900**). See also references to **Queen's Hall** on page ...
5. The **oldest building in the city still functioning as a 'play house'** is the **La Scala**, Nicolson Street, which was erected as the **New Alhambra** in **1862**, see page...

6. The **first cinema to advertise ‘continuous performance’** was the *Picture House, 111 Princes Street*, which advertised that “Performances will be continuous.” when it opened on July 20<sup>th</sup> **1910**.
  7. The *Cinema House* was the **first to institute a free Cup of Tea and Biscuit**: *News*, September 11<sup>th</sup> **1911**, “Afternoon Teas served *gratis* to all Visitors between 3.30 and 5.30 p.m.”
  8. The *Monseigneur* was the **first cinema to concentrate on ‘News’**. It opened on Monday December 2<sup>nd</sup> **1935** on the site of the *Princess Cinema* which opened on September 14<sup>th</sup> **1912**.
  9. The **first ‘talkies’** were heard in the *Silver Kinema*, 30 Nicolson Square : *News*, Tuesday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> **1913**, “‘Edison’s Kinetophone Talking Pictures.’ Hereabouts the late Professor Joad might well have asked “what is the definition of a Talking Picture?” My definition would be a reproduction of the human voice, whether it is by gramophone or sensitised tape. **Poole’s Synod Hall** claimed to have the first talkies in Edinburgh with the presentation of *Till the Bells Rung* in **1926**; here the sound was from a gramophone. The *News*, August 6<sup>th</sup> **1946** gave the following information about the first Talkie
- “*New Picture House*, 56-57 Princes Street,  
The Singing Fool, First Talking Picture with **Al Jolson**,  
June 10 to Saturday July 13<sup>th</sup> **1929**”
- Fred Mitchell**, chief operator at the *New*, confirmed in an interview that the ‘sound’ was provided by a gramophone record. See pages 82- 84, “How Talkies Came to Town”, in particular the article by **Colin N. Bennett**.
10. The **first cinema in Princes Street** was the *Picture House*, 111 Princes Street, which opened on July 20<sup>th</sup> **1910**. *News* Tuesday, July 19<sup>th</sup> **1910**.
  11. The *Playhouse* was the **largest cinema** with 3,250 seats and the *Monseigneur* the **smallest**, with 347 seats. The seating accommodation of each cinema will be shown from the *Kinematograph Year Books* of **1915, 1938 or 1954**; in a few cases the information was missing as it was not obligatory to supply it.
  12. The **first ‘Wide –Screen’** was installed in *Poole’s Roxy*. *Dispatch*, May 29<sup>th</sup> **1953**.

*News*, Monday, October 26<sup>th</sup> **1953**, page 5, A precis

**“The One That Got Away  
New Cinema Planned for Leith Street**

A project for a new cinema in Leith Street, Edinburgh, to replace the *St Andrew Square Cinema* which was destroyed by fire on 12<sup>th</sup> November **1952**, has received the Approval of the Edinburgh Corporation as planning authority.

The site chosen for the new cinema is at the corner of Leith Street, at Nottingham Place, which at the moment incorporates the well-known restaurant premises of Fairley and Son and the *Victoria Palais* dance hall.

This is the site which three years ago was mentioned in connection with a scheme to erect a super cinema with seating of over 3,000 and with new shops, offices and restaurants adjoining

.

#### Modified Plan

Due to complicated title-deeds for the property in the district, a Birmingham firm of architects prepared a new scheme. Instead of a cinema with seating accommodation of 3,000, a cinema with only half of that amount of accommodation has been designed. Provision is still made for garages, shops and offices in the new scheme.

Application to the Corporation for planning sanction was made on behalf of the Circuits Management Association Ltd., 5 Bainbridge Street, London, W.C.1. Ministry of Works permits will be required before any move can be made to bring the project to fruition.”

.

Note: Extract from Planning Register 630/53, “Erection of Cinematograph Theatre – Granted 23 September **1953**”

*News*, Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup> **1960**

#### “Redevelopment of Leith Street Area

It is proposed to demolish, among other places, the following: Land and Buildings at 1 to 7 Waterloo Place, 1a, 1 to 45 Leith Street and 2 to 14 Calton Road.

Land and Buildings at 47 to 91 Leith Street, and land and buildings to the rear of those properties up to and including 8 to 14 Calton Hill and subjects comprising Nottingham Place and Nottingham Terrace.

The scheme is expected to cost £20 million and will embrace St James’ Square and area.”

As at September **1963**, many houses in the St James’ Square area are empty. There is great activity in the Council Chambers; huge Property Companies are ganging up – there is much Lolly at stake, £20 million and how much more.

*News*, Tuesday, September 24<sup>th</sup> **1963** A precis

#### “Cinerama Comes to Scotland but Not To Edinburgh

Cinerama comes to Scotland this week. It has been installed in a renovated cinema in Glasgow at a cost of £100,000.

‘We estimate that our Cinerama Cinema will be accessible to most of Scotland’s population’, said Mr **Ronald A Lee**, an official of Cinerama Inc. The first Cinerama cinema in Britain opened in London in **1954**. Altogether there may be 20 Cinerama cinemas in Britain by the end of **1964**. Current estimates indicate that a potential audience of just under one million is necessary to support a Cinerama cinema.

‘It might be theoretically possible to open one in Edinburgh,’ said Mr Lee, ‘but we have no plans to do so in the foreseeable future.’

Cinerama’s home in Glasgow is the *ABC Coliseum Cinerama Theatre*, Eglinton Street, converted to seat 1,300 persons. It opens on Thursday evening (September 26<sup>th</sup>) with the £5 million feature film *How The West Was Won*. It is expected to run for a year. Block bookings by out-of-town coach parties are expected to be an important part of their custom. Said Mr Lee, ‘It is now part of the film business; in five years it may be the backbone’

*Glasgow Evening Times*, Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup> 1963.

“Prices – 12s.6d.; 10s.6d.; 7s.6d.; 6s.6d.; and 5s.  
Evenings at 7.45. Saturdays at 2; 5 and 8.  
Matinees Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 2.30.”

### **The Sooth Side and its Many Picture Houses**

The Romans it is alleged coined the phrase “Give them beer and circuses”. I have often wondered if, during the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the phrase was changed to “Give them beer and Picture Houses.”. That there is plenty of evidence for thinking along these lines, the following statistics will reveal.

Between the years **1912 to 1921** there were, at one time or another, 18 silent moving picture houses tucked away, in the main, in the back streets of the **Parliamentary Division of Central Edinburgh**. The Central Division was one of the most densely populated Divisions in Great Britain. The following information extracted from various *Census Reports* require no explanation; the figures in themselves provide the evidence.

#### **1921 Census**

Central Division – 68,463 persons  
Edinburgh – 420, 264 persons  
No.12 St Giles Ward 22,203  
No. 14 George Square Ward 23,371  
No. 15 St Leonard’s Ward 22,889

#### **1961 Census**

Area/Wards	Acres	Persons 1951	Persons Number	Persons 1961 Per acre
Edinburgh City	33,294	466,943	468,361	14.1
St Giles Ward	394	23,864	17,687	44.9
Holyrood Ward	894	19,959	13,949	15.6
George Square Ward	317	18, 929	16,334	51.5
Central Division		62,752	47,970	

The reader can draw his own conclusions and perhaps lead him to enquire why 20,493 persons are 'missing' between the 1921 and 1961 Censuses; or why there was a drop of 14,782 persons between 1951 and 1961.

The property in the St Leonard's area has been described as 'Red Rotten', simply by its ruinous condition. It came as no surprise to the citizens when, on Saturday November 21<sup>st</sup> **1959**, the tenement in Beaumont Place nick-named the ***Penny Tenement*** collapsed.

In Pre- First World War days much of the area was due for demolition; it was no surprise, therefore, when some of it ultimately collapsed and gave up the ghost through sheer disgust. A property owner tried, in vain, to sell the Beaumont Place tenement for One Penny. Had been able to do so the new 'owner' would have been liable for demolition expenses.

In this run down, squalid, area, 18 'moving' picture houses, plus the ***Empire Palace Theatre of Varieties*** were in business; all at different addresses. There were also the ***Penny Gaffs*** referred to on page on page 288. I would emphasise the spread of the 18 addresses as it was then a common practice to have a number of differently named houses on the same site. For example, ***Morningside Hall***, where, in due course I will show that eight differently named houses occupied the site; the Grove Street site had five different names; and Elm Row had eight places of amusement.

The 18 picture houses were:

1. ***Operetta House***, 5 Chambers Street
2. ***Cinema House***, 18 Nicolson Street
3. ***Abbey***, 7 North Richmond Street
4. ***Roxburgh***, 6 Drummond Street
5. ***People's***, 19 Blackfriars Street
6. ***Waverley***, 6 Infirmary Street
7. ***Tron*** (later ***Royal***), 235-241 High Street
8. ***La Scala***, 50 Nicolson Street
9. ***Palace, New***, opposite John Knox's House
10. ***Lyric or Silver Kinema***, 30 Nicolson Square
11. ***Star***, St Mary's Street Hall, St Mary's Street
12. ***Salisbury (Livingstone Halls)***, 38 Clerk Street
13. ***Lauriston Hall***, 38 Lauriston Street
14. ***Poole's Synod Hall***, 14 Castle Terrace
15. ***King's Cinema (now Cameo)***, 38 Home Street
16. ***Palladium Pictures***, East Fountainbridge
17. ***Coliseum***, Fountainbridge
18. ***Tollcross***, 140 Lauriston Place

Of the 18 picture houses listed above only three were still in being as picture houses as at October **1963**: ***Poole's***, ***La Scala*** and the ***Cameo***; thus completing 56, 51 and 50 years respectively.

Like the mystery of the *Marie Celeste*, the sailing ship which had no crew in mid-ocean, one might ask, 'What happened to the other 15 picture houses?'. Perhaps there are 15 different reasons for their change of status.

## ***CINEMAS OPEN FOR BUSINESS IN DECEMBER 1913 AND JANUARY 1914***

In the *Dispatch* article of November 7<sup>th</sup> **1952** relating to the sale of the Palace Cinema, Princes Street, it was stated that, “..nearly 20 cinemas were already in existence” when it opened in December **1913**. I think it would be useful to put that statement into context by listing **all places of entertainment** that advertised in the *News*, on Thursday, January 1<sup>st</sup> **1914** **and also those cinemas that were open for business in December 1913-January 1914, but did not advertise in the News of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1914.** I have indicated for what purpose the premises are now (1963) used.

*Empire Palace of Varieties, 19 Nicolson Street.*

*King's Theatre, Leven Street.*

*Theatre Royal, Broughton Street.*

*Lyceum, Grindlay Street.*

*Waverley Market, Waverley Bridge, Lumley's Carnival.*

*Olympia, Annandale Street.*

*Royal Choral Union, Scottish Concert, Music Hall, George Street.*

*Central Hall Methodist Church, Tollcross.*

*Tollcross Carnival on Showground, West Tollcross (where City Wash-house is now sited)*

*Cinemas are in the order in which they appeared in the advertising columns*

*Operetta House, 5 Chambers Street.* Adam House built on site.

*New Picture House, 56-57 Princes Street.* Site occupied by Marks and Spencer.

*Palladium, East Fountainbridge.* Variety Theatre

*Pringle's Picture House, Elm Row.* Gateway Theatre.

*Gaiety, Kirkgate, Leith.* Demolished in 1963.

*Tivoli, Gorgie Road.* Rebuilt as New Tivoli in 1934; Still Open.

*Salon Baxter's Place.* Still Open

*Cinema Theatre, 189 High Street, Portobello.* Premises used by Portobello Baptist Church.

*Leith Picture House, Laurie Street, Leith.* Woolworth's now stands on the site.

*Poole's Synod Hall, Castle Terrace.* Still Open, but just.

*King's Cinema, Home Street.* Now Cameo; Still Open

*Princess Cinema, 131 Princes Street.* Now Jacey's Cinema; Still Open

*Palace, Foot of Walk, Leith.* Still Open.

*Silver Kinema, 30 Nicolson Square.* Now a Furniture Store.

*La Scala, 50 Nicolson Street.* Still Open.

*Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street.* Now Salvation Army premises.

*Tron Picture House, 235-241 High Street.* Now Furniture Store.

*Palace, 15 Princes Street.* Woolworth's extended into site in 1955.

*Haymarket, Dalry Road.* Still Open.

*Coliseum, 125 Fountainbridge.* No longer operating as a cinema.

It will be seen that of the 20 cinemas listed, 8 are still operating as cinemas, which means they have been in the business for over 50 years at time of writing, November **1963**.

The following 22 cinemas were open for business during December **1913** and January **1914**, but did not advertise in *The News* on 1<sup>st</sup> January **1914**.

*Albert Hall, Shandwick Place.* Now a restaurant.

*Bungalow, Bath Street, Portobello.* Now a furniture store.

*Falconer's Pictures., Jane Street, Leith.* Now a Telephone Exchange.  
*Imperial Electric, Kirkgate, Leith.* Property demolished in early 1960's.  
*Lauriston, Lauriston Street.* No longer shows films.  
*Leith Cinema, Tolbooth Wynd, Leith.* Property demolished in early 1960's.  
*Magnet, Parliament Street, Leith.* Site redeveloped for housing.  
*Marine Gardens, Seafield Road.* Would have been closed during the 1913/14 Winter break.  
 Now occupied by S.M.T.  
*Morningside Photo Play House, Springvalley Gardens.* No longer shows films.  
*Paddy's Coal Fauld, Dudley Bank, Leith.* Now a supermarket.  
*Palladium, Raeburn Place.* Site acquired by Woolworth's in 1962.  
*Petit Paris, Shrubhill, Leith Walk.* Edinburgh Corporation premises demolished in 1962.  
*Picture House, 111 Princes Street.* Occupied by Lotus Delta, shoe shop.  
*Picture Theatre, Blackfriars Street.* No longer shows films.  
*Picturedrome (later Eastway), Easter Road.* Now a supermarket.  
*Pringle's Picture Palace, Grove Street.* Now Martin's Bakery.  
*Queen's Hall, Queen's Street.* Now B.B.C. studios.  
*Royal Electric Theatre, Royal Hotel Buildings, Princes Street.* No longer shows films.  
*St Bernard's (now Tudor), Stockbridge.* Still Open.  
*Star Picture House, St Mary's Street.* No longer shows films.  
*Tollcross Cinema, Lauriston Place.* Now a furniture store.  
*Waverley Picture House, 6 Infirmary Street.* *The original Id. 'scratcher' or admission by a jelly jar.* No longer shows films.

Only one of the 22 is still open for business as a cinema. Probably my statistical friends may make something out of this, e.g. Does it pay to advertise?

The writer of the *Dispatch* article almost certainly based his 20 cinemas on those which advertised. It turns out that there were 42 premises open for presenting moving pictures in the period December 1913 and January 1914. True, many of them were very small, but they all had this in common: they had an admission price ere admittance could be gained to the cheapest or the dearest.

Cash is a great leveller...

I wrote the above note on November 18<sup>th</sup> 1963. That evening the B.B.C. announced the *Edinburgh Evening News* had taken over the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* and that from Tuesday November 19<sup>th</sup> 1963 the evening paper would be known as *The Edinburgh Evening News and Dispatch*.

## `SOME POINTS OF INTEREST IN CONNECTION WITH THE CINEMA INDUSTRY, INCLUDING A COMPLETE LIST OF ALL PRESENT AND FORMER EDINBURGH CINEMAS

**EXTRACTED FROM THE 1915 KINEMATOGRAPH YEAR BOOK** It has been my endeavour to bring to the notice of the reader a number of items which had the tag 'the first' to be used, or invented, in connection with the Cinematograph World. Without assistance we can do little by ourselves. It is with a sense of gratitude that I have extracted the following 'firsts' which appeared in the 1915 Year Book. Of all the Year Books I examined, that for

1915 contained more historical information than any subsequent one. This Year Book and others may be seen in the National Library for Scotland, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, where *The Scotsman News*, etc may also be examined. I should add that there is an interesting article, entitled *Talking Pictures*, by **Colin Bennett**, which I extracted from the **1915** Year Book; this is included in Chapter 10: The Castle Terrace Site, where I drew together some early material relating to the ‘talkies’.

### THE FIRST COLOURED FILM, 1896

Page 47, paragraph 14    An article by **Will Day**.

“Amongst the visitors to *Olympia* to see the marvellous real life pictures was **Cecil Hepworth**, from whom Mr **Paul** was the purchasing hand-fed lamps to work in his projectors, and it was at this time that a contract was entered into (March 24<sup>th</sup> **1896**) for showing pictures at the London *Alhambra*. So successful did they prove, the contract eventually ran continuously for nearly four years. **Trewey** made the point of showing comic pictures at the *Empire* (London) with **Lumiere’s** apparatus, whilst **R.W.Paul** showed London Street Scenes, and an extremely successful picture which had quite a record run – a sea scene showing waves breaking against a wall on the shore. In referring to the first advertisement of moving pictures in colours, the *Evening News* (London) of April 10<sup>th</sup> **1896**, states that, “Mr R.W. Paul has been able to overcome the difficulties of presenting his wonderful animated photographs in colours, and upon that occasion an Eastern dance was depicted upon the screen, in all the gorgeous colours the scene warranted.

One month to execute 40 feet of film by hand painting

This was the first public display of coloured animated pictures by Mr Paul. The film which was about 40 feet in length, was coloured by hand and the work was ably executed by the painter of the Polytechnic lantern slides, Mr **Doubell**. Although the film was of such short length, it took considerably over one month to execute the work.”

Moving pictures were shown at the *Empire Palace Theatre*, Nicolson Street, on Monday, April 13<sup>th</sup> **1896**, using Lumiere Brothers’ instruments.

### £70 PER WEEK RENTAL CHARGE IN LONDON

Page 48    Article by **Will Day**

“With the advent of animated pictures at the *Olympia*, the *Empire* and *Alhambra*, it is little wonder that other music halls followed suit, and in April **1896**, contracts were entered into with the *Britannia Theatre* and the *Canterbury Music Hall* to show animated pictures, the figure charged being nearly £70 per week.”

## SEATING CAPACITY OF PICTURE HOUSES

In this work-a-day world (1963) we must have a standard or yard-stick by which to judge certain goods, whether cars, clothes, or houses. This also applies in modern sport: how fast, how far, how many... In the item which follows, it is size, or if you like, capacity which will be judged, taking into consideration the time or date factor; in one case prior to 1915; the other case, 1929.

The houses mentioned below may be of interest to some readers who 'have been there'

### BOMBAY PICTURE HOUSES

The *Year Book* states that the city of Bombay had the following Cinemas and seating capacity: Royal Opera House, 3,000; Excelsior Theatre, 3,000; Gaiety Theatre, 2,000; La Scala, 1,000; Parsee Theatre, 2,000; Ameroca India Theatre, 600; Imperial Cinematograph, 700; Alexandra, 600; Grant Road Royal, 600; Olympia, 700; and Coronation Cinema, 500.

While the five largest Bombay picture houses had a combined seating capacity of 11,000 in 1914/15, Edinburgh's five largest, in 1914/15 according to the **1915** *Kinematograph Year Book*, were as follows:

Cinema Theatre, Marine Gardens	2,000
Coliseum, Fountainbridge	1,800
Palace, Foot of Walk	1,650 (Seating not given in 1915 Year Book, but in the 1954 edition 1,650 was given; when it opened the News, December 1912, stated it was 'capable of accommodating 2,000')
Salon, 5 Baxter's Place	1,000
New Picture House, Princes Street	960
	8,050

No Comment!

In **1929**, the Playhouse in Edinburgh opened with a capacity of 3,048

### MONTREAL: A CITY OF CINEMANIACS

Pages 55 to 59

"..eight hundred thousand people a week pass through the seventy-five moving picture houses of Montreal, viewing 200,000 feet . or close on 40 miles of film.

The exact seating capacity registered at the City Hall is 57,526. Eight hundred thousand people! That represents a quarter as much again as the population of the Island of Montreal"

Note: 800,000 cash customers represented a nice handful of Lolly; Hollywood had not yet been heard of; London was the chief centre in the world for making films

## FILMING A BOXING MATCH

### “How the Wells - Bell Fight was Taken”

Page 83

“Today, in 1963, we can watch a Boxing Match, blow by blow, from virtually any part of the world, by means of Television. This is the story of how the Wells-Bell fight was filmed.

“**Barker’s Motion Photography** filmed the fight at a distance of 40 feet from the ring; twenty 4,000 Candle Power open-type **Westminster arcs** being used for lighting. They were backed up by green baize to act as a reflector and diffuser, whilst the ring side was laid out with baize for a similar reason.

The cameras were in use under the direction of Mr Smith, and between them they exposed some 4,000 feet of stock. It should be noted, however, that before the fight a large amount of time had been spent in testing the lighting and general arrangements, and for this purpose Mr Pearson indulged in 30 seconds of ‘shadow’ boxing as hard as he could go. He said afterwards he felt as though he had been doing three minutes of it. Directly the exposure had been made the stock was hurried back to Soho Square, where negatives were ready by one o’clock the following morning.

The first copy was sent out by 10 a.m., while 24 copies had been completed by night, and on the following day they supplied every customer.”

Note: Bombardier **Billy Wells** was a handsome man, in every way. He was one of the top English boxers pre-First World War. He lacked the ‘killer instinct’; as a consequence he got the nickname *The Horizontal Heavyweight*. If memory serves me right, he lasted less than half a round with **Georges Carpentier**, the French champion, in London.

He was an excellent sprinter and appeared on several occasions at the New Year Powderhall Sprint during the **1910’s**. [I believe Billy Wells was seen striking a huge gong with a hammer as a prelude to films produced by a British company – Rank?; rather like 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox’s searchlights, RKO’s signals circling the earth, and Paramount’s mountain G.F.B.]

## PROJECTION SCREENS

Page 34

I know that, on occasion, clouds have been used for the purpose of a Projection Screen, but what a crick in the neck one could get watching, for example, *Gone With The Wind*; approximately 2 and a half hours’ showing.

“About the beginning of **1914** several good-sized London theatres installed **Perlantino** screens. This screen is purely German, hailing from Berlin... it is quite a good thing for halls of the long and narrow description (such as the Princess Cinema, later the Monseigneur and Jacey’s).

Briefly the **Perlantino** screen consists of a sheet of canvas coated with white flatted oil colour, upon which has been sifted a fairly liberal sprinkling of small colourless transparent glass beads. The dead white surface between the beads acts in the usual way as a plain projection screen, and the beads act as small prisms reflecting a portion of the incident light

very brightly back upon itself... There is still a fairly good reflection for those who view the picture at an angle.”

I have also referred to the ‘mirrored’ screen, under the *King’s Cinema*, News, Monday January 12<sup>th</sup> **1914**; and the Plaster screen, under the *Roxburgh Picture House*, News, Tuesday, December 30<sup>th</sup> **1919**.

#### BED SHEET

The screen which gave me more pleasure, as a child, than any other was the Bed Sheet which was hung on a wall, and pulled tight, to eliminate the wrinkles. This was the magic lantern screen – no movies at that time.

#### TYPES OF SCREENS

All told, I count four types of projection screens, plus the one provided by nature, namely, suitable clouds:

1. Perlantino **1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 34.
2. Mirrored Screen *King’s Cinema*, **1914**.
- 3 The Plaster Screen, Roxburgh, **1919**.
- 4 Large Wide Screen, Poole’s Roxy, **1953**

No doubt there are other types of screens of which I am unaware.

We have come a long way in the history of Edinburgh Cinemas, and, believe it or not, I was here before the First Moving Picture was shown in Edinburgh. People in my age group have seen a great many firsts, too many to enumerate here. The last ‘first’ that I think it would be appropriate to mention is **Telstar**, which has a direct bearing on the screen, albeit the small screen.

#### LOCAL FILM CENSORS

Page 121

“Edinburgh – A letter to the local branch of magistrates from the **British Board of Film Censors**, containing the suggestion that the magistrates should compel all licensed exhibitions to be composed entirely of films passed by that Board, was submitted to the bench.

The magistrates concluded there was no necessity for taking such a step.”

#### SUNDAY OPENINGS FOR CONCERTS

Page 125

“Throughout the year 1914 a fierce battle has been waged on this question. It is pleasing to record those instances where the matter has been handled in a fair-minded manner, and the evidence clearly shows that the opening of picture theatre on Sunday is beneficial as regards

conduct in the streets, as well as tending to minimise drunkenness. On the other hand, the blind obstinacy of some authorities, coupled with the feverish activities of self-righteous meddlers, has created an enormous amount of trouble for exhibitors. Surely no body of men catering for public recreation have ever been so persecuted and harassed as the picture theatre proprietors. The great mass of the public, however, is with the exhibitor, and patience, unity, and perseverance will eventually win the day.”

Note: Patience was rewarded 49 years after as shown in this extract from the *News*, Friday, December 6<sup>th</sup> **1963**, “Edinburgh Town Council agreed that two cinemas, in rotation, could open on Sundays for a 6 month period” Patience? Thirteen cinemas desired to open; three did not.

### **SAFETY FIRST – TRAFFIC FILMS - 1914**

Page 160

“Traffic – The American Safety First Society arranged for a cinematograph in a covered van to take records in congested streets in New York, with a view to showing films arousing interest in traffic problems.”

#### **DOES ANYONE CARE ABOUT SAFETY FIRST?**

Forty-nine years after the above item, I quote from *The Scotsman*, Thursday, December 26<sup>th</sup> **1963** Front page, “39 KILLED ON ROADS, CHRISTMAS EVE TOTAL ‘SHOCKING’ ”

*The Scotsman*, Friday, December 27<sup>th</sup> **1963** Front page

“BLACK CHRISTMAS ON THE ROADS - Death-toll of 94, for two days, that is between midnight Sunday and midnight Wednesday, the provisional total was 94 – EIGHT KILLED IN SCOTLAND.”

The final total in Christmas Week, **1963**, was 120 killed. Yes, we progress – in increasing numbers of Road Accidents and in numbers killed. Safety Last!

### **LENGTH OF A SCREEN KISS!**

Page 122

“Pennsylvania - The Film Censor ruled kisses must not exceed three feet.”

Writing in December **1963**, when progress is said to have speeded up to the nth degree in the last decade, in some respects I find it hard to believe – kisses not to exceed three feet. That is specific. Today, 33 or 66 feet does not seem to be long enough for the sex starved wantons who appear on the TV, or little screen. Perhaps the British Board of Film Censors had a point in **1914**.

## CINEMATOGRAPH PICTURES IN SCHOOLS

At first glance the reader might well say to himself – Well, that’s a common event in schools – and – TV as well, he might add. To which I could agree **but** for the date which follows.

Of all the many hundreds of notes I have taken in connection with the history of *Edinburgh Entertainments*, the one about cinematograph pictures in schools is, I think, the most fortuitous, in this respect. Like the chappie at the organ one night, who struck a chord divine (*The Lost Chord*) I also in another sense struck gold when I came across the following item in the Minutes of the Edinburgh School Board for **1910**, page 634, item 64.

### “Cinematograph Pictures in School

Read letter, dated 19<sup>th</sup> September **1910**, from Mr **John Stewart**, 1 Shrub Place, Leith Walk, suggesting that the cinematograph provides a new and most useful, as well as interesting method of education, and offering to place his premises together with his instruments at the disposal of the Board, for any experimental exhibition they might desire to make.

The offer was declined.”

Several of the Chief Officials in the Education Offices, 12 St Giles’ Street, were flabbergasted when they read this Minute. The John Stewart of No 1 Shrub Place was the owner of the *Petit Paris Picture House*. Our forefathers, in many respects, were far-seeing, but it has been agreed that they flopped badly when they decided, “The offer was declined.”

The following article which appeared in *The Scotsman* of Tuesday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> **1938**, has relevance to the **1910** Minute.

### “EDUCATIONAL FILMS SCOTTISH EFFORTS

What were described as the first fruits of the efforts of the film-production groups, formed under the auspices of the **Edinburgh branch of the Scottish Educational Film Association**, were shown in the Library of the Education Offices, St Giles’ Street, Edinburgh, yesterday afternoon, before members of the Town Council and Education Committee.

Mr **James B. Frizell**, City Education Officer, who introduced the films, explained that some of them were not yet completed, and that they were intended for use in the Corporation Schools. Notes would be supplied for the aid of teachers.

The first film shown, *The Port of Leith*, was designed to give a child a visual impression of how trade operates in a big port. *From Cloud to Tap* is the story of how Edinburgh’s daily consumption of 28 million gallons is brought to the reservoirs from the outlying country.

The introduction of natural colour added to the interest of a short film, *Peeps At Little Jean’s Farm*, designed schools. The exuberant delight of the small scholars when they see it, will hardly exceed that of the Education Committee yesterday, who hailed graceful swans, lambs, kittens, young foals, and ‘piggies going for a walk’ with equal abandon.

The thanks of the Committee to **Mr Kirkness**, **Mr Rush**, and others concerned with the production of the films, was voiced by Sir **William McKechnie**, **K.B.E., C.B.** (an H.M. Inspector of Schools).

Thirty-two schools under the management of the Corporation are now equipped with cinematograph projectors, and are using films for instructional purposes. A central library of films for school use is being built up at the Education Offices, and contains some 36 films.”

John Stewart was certainly ahead of his time. A pity his offer was declined.

[In **1938 or 1939** the Education Authority (or perhaps it was the School) asked parents to buy scented cards to help raise funds to buy a cinematograph for my Primary School, Tollcross. There was great excitement when we attended a show in the smaller of the two Halls showing: the life cycle of a butterfly, suitably speeded up; a beaver building a dam; and the Post Office’s classic film about the overnight mail train from Edinburgh to London. G.F.B.]

### **WAR TIME CONCERTS 1939-1945**

That the Government of the day sponsored Concert Parties for the benefit of H.M.Forces, both at home and abroad, is simply a matter of history. I will show that the Cinemas in Britain never ‘had it so good’ as during the Second World War. As the Telly was brought out of cold storage – in England – slowly in the post-war years, and as the number of TV sets increased, conversely, the attendances at cinemas decreased.

It is well to record that during those dark days between September 1939 and May 1945 the Local Cinemas, up and down the country, did much to maintain the morale of the civilian population, and thus greatly contributed to beating the dastards – the Nazis.

Even as I pen these words on Sunday, August 18<sup>th</sup> **1963**, we are still officially at war with them, as no Peace Treaty has yet been signed.

### **ADMISSIONS AND GROSS/NET TAKINGS 1936 TO 1953** **According to C.E.A. Accountants**

*Kinematograph Year Book 1954 Page 517*

Year	Number of Admissions in millions	Gross Takings £ Millions	Net Takings £ Millions*
1936	917	38.6	33.4
1937	946	39.9	34.5
1938	987	41.5	36.0
1939	900	41.7	36.1
1940	1,027	44.9	38.2
1941	1,309	65.0	52.2
1942	1,494	87.2	64.0
1943	1,541	103.5	68.8
1944	1,575	111.8	72.1
1945	1,585	114.2	73.4
1946	1,635	118.3	75.9
1947	1,462	105.4	67.7

1948	1,514	108.8	70.0
1949	1,430	103.3	66.8
1950	1,396	105.2	68.0
1951	1,365	108.3	68.9
1952	1,352	109.6	71.9
1953	1,295	108.6	71.1
1961	472) see Daily Herald exrract of March 1 <sup>st</sup> 1963, below		
1962	414 )		

- After deduction of Entertainment Tax but before all other payments

#### VISITS TO KINEMA

Average visits to the kinema per head of the population in **1933** was 20, rising to 34 in in the year **1946**.

#### AVERAGE PRICE OF ADMISSION

Rough estimates say that the attendances were 903 million in **1933**, and that the average price of admission was 10.3 d.

#### SEAT PRICES

Most popular seat prices in the first quarter of **1951** were 1s.3d and 1s.10d., being 19 per cent. and 27.15 per cent. of total admissions respectively.

Average price paid in **1952** was 1s.8d.”

*Daily Herald*, Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup> **1963**

#### “300 MORE CINEMAS TO SHUT

Fewer people are going to the cinema. Attendances were down 12 per cent. last year, the Board Of Trade reported yesterday.

It is forecast that 300 more cinemas will close by the end of **1963**, bringing the total over the past three years to more than 1,000.

Last night Mr **Ellis Pinkney**, General Secretary of the Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association, blamed the slump on the changing habits of the public and the death of the star system, bringing a decline in American film production.

Total admission figures for **1962** are estimated at 414 millions, compared with 472 million for **1961**”

## WHAT 'THEY' ARE SAYING IN DECEMBER 1963

*The Scotsman*, Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup> 1963

### 'PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR SERIOUS CINEMA CALLED IN QUESTION' By ALLEN WRIGHT

'Thanks to Wardour Street, British cinema-goers are about as debauched with trivia as any I have found anywhere in the world'. **Peter Baker**, editor of *Films and Filming*.

There is a tendency to exaggerate the amount of support that exists for serious theatre and cinemas.' **J.K.S. Poole** (Synod Hall), past chairman, Scottish Exhibitors' Association.

These two comments seem to sum up the conflict of opinion between critics and cinema owners, which has been such a monotonous accompaniment to the succession of crises that has dogged the film industry. Writing in the new edition of *Film Review* Baker says, 'If book publishers were to behave like British cinema owners, there would be nothing to read except **Mickey Spilane** and **Hank Janson**.'

Mr Poole presented the exhibitors' case in a letter rejecting my suggestion that films like *The Caretaker* demonstrated the need for a third circuit, independent of the Rank and A.B.C chains. Pointing out that *The Caretaker* had a smaller-than-average audiences at the **Cameo**, Edinburgh, he writes, 'The query arises as to whether, in these troublesome days, there are too many people studying the art of the cinema as distinct from the art of entertainment.'

### SAD COMMENTARY

Mr Poole adds that the stage is approaching when 'serious' films like *The Caretaker* or Antonioni's *L'eclipse* can only be shown provided they are offset by the showing of films that have more general appeal with their box-office value acting as a form of subsidy.

This seems a reasonable suggestion, until you pause to reflect that out of the hundreds of cinemas in Scotland, only two cater for minority tastes.

### CARNIVAL STATUS

At this rate, the specialised cinemas will not be worthy of the name – if they continue to use films of obvious box-office value to bolster up a few works of distinction and originality, then it is a sad commentary on the discrimination of film-goers – showing the same films that can be seen in dozens of other larger cinemas.

If the *Cosmo*, owned by Mr **George Singleton**, Glasgow, and the *Cameo*, owned by Mr Poole, do not encourage experiment, then there is no one else who will take the risks and the cinema will revert to its original status as a form of amusement, no more stimulating or intelligent than a carnival.

But I am told that the specialised cinemas are feeling the effects of the depression in the film trade less severely than the general cinemas.

Some exhibitors feel that the future of the cinema lies in specialisation – whether the 'circus' type of entertainment like **Cinerama**, repertory like the *Classic, Glasgow*, or Continental and 'art' films like the *Cosmo and Cameo*.

Mr George Singleton, has demonstrated his confidence in the future of specialised cinemas by establishing a new 'art' cinema in Aberdeen, *Cosmo 2*, which is to open next month (January 1964). A very small cinema, it is attached to a ballroom which may act as a form of subsidy. This seems a better policy than diluting the quality of the programme."

To which I may add *Quo Vadis?* Is this article a warning of further cinemas about to close down in the next year or two?

It seems that an 'under-ground' battle is going on in the cinema industry to **force** a particular type of programme on the public; on the other hand, it would further appear the public are **not** falling for it and it may very well be that the cinema industry will fall between the two stools.

That, therefore, is what No.1 had to say; what follows is given over to what No. 2 crowd have to say.

*News and Dispatch*, Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup> 1963

### **"MUSIC NOT VITAL AT 'POP' CONCERT**

Screaming teenagers made so much noise at popular 'beat' or 'pop' concerts at cinemas that the music was scarcely audible and certainly not vital to the programme, Mr **Duncan Rankine**, for the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association and other interested parties, told the **Performing Rights Tribunal** in London today.

The Association and Harold Fielding Ltd., Harold Davidson Ltd., impresario **Vic Lewis** and artist manager **Larry Parnes**, were contesting the rate of payment being sought by the Society for the use of 'pop' music at Concerts. They are claiming that four per cent. of box office takings is not justified.

Mr Rankine said that he would like to take the members' tribunal, if they agreed, to a performance of **The Beatles** so that they could hear just what went on.

### **'BEAT' MUSIC**

The chairman, Mr **W. Raeburn**, Q.C., smiled when he said, "We are not expected to scream or dance?" Mr Rankine replied, "Although the concert cannot be given unless there is music available, the music is by itself of no audience drawing power at these concerts." He added that the 4 per cent. tariff as 'oppressive and unreasonable' and 'grossly excessive'. He said that two thirds of the concerts held in cinemas were of 'beat' or popular music. 'Beat, music, he said, was an entirely modern phenomenon dating from 1956. Possibly it was a misuse to call such concerts by that name. It would probably be more accurate to call them 'musical entertainments'.

### **NO MELODY**

"The music which is played has in fact little or no melody. To some extent the performers play the fool on the stage, grimacing and dancing, and they are often dressed in an unusual and outlandish way'. He added, 'The performers enjoy quite fantastic popularity among the young people in Britain. Their popularity is such that very often they have to go to and leave the Cinemas under police protection or in secret.

Instead of sitting quietly and attentive as they would when they listened to a symphony by Beethoven or a serious performance the audience kept up a very “loud and hysterical screaming.”

The rest of the article is taken up with the Economics, as is usual when Vultures gather round the body. I have included this article in the history, firstly because it deals with **entertainment** and, secondly, because the entertainment is conducted in **cinemas**.

By way of comment I may add – Yeah! – Yeah! – Yeah!

I do, however, have a good word for the Young People and their Screaming in this history – Yeah, I do.

#### ‘SPACH A’ NEWS

To write the full title of the merged evening papers, *Edinburgh Evening News and Dispatch*, every time, at this kind of work, could use up a lot of valuable time and space. [I agree with my father’s observation and soon after starting to key up the History, I shortened the titles to *News and Dispatch* G.F.B.]

A year or two before the First World War a news vendor stood against **Craik**’s tobacco shop at No. 1 Leith Street, in a convenient niche. He never seemed to be without an overcoat – all the year round. He had a pale face and affected what is termed in the 1960’s a **Weirdie** beard. He stood about 6 feet and had an even temperament. He never seemed to speak to his neighbours. Across the road from ‘beardie’, at the wall of Register House stood **Blind Boab**, who sold boxes of matches; his plaintive cry was, “Match a Boxes”

It was ‘beardie’ whom I first heard calling evening news papers thus, “Spach A’ News”, omitting to sound the ‘t’ - ‘Spach A’ News was long enough for him. In closing I would add that I miss the *Dispatch*.

#### FIRST IN HISTORIC HOLYROOD

The Royal Palace story which follows, is extracted from the Poole’s Brochure, *100 years of Showmanship, Poole’s, 1837-1937*, page 13.

“The occasion, **1935**, Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Kent were in residence at Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh. John R. Poole was entrusted with the presentation of Sound Pictures to Their Royal Highnesses.

By arrangement with **Radio Corporation of America** a sound set was installed in the picture gallery. With the Royal ancestors looking down upon them, *Royal Cavalcade, The King! God Bless Him, Mickey Mouse, British Movietonews, Roberta, Gold-Diggers of 1935*, and other subjects were screened for the Royal party.

One wonders what the spirits of Mary, Queen of Scots, Darnley, Bothwell and Rizzio thought as they witnessed this unique entertainment.

I came across the following item when browsing among my notes; although not applicable to Edinburgh, it could have...

*News*, Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> 1937

### “GRACIE’S ACT ‘BLUE-PENCILLED’ BY B.B.C.

#### AVE MARIA BAN AT CINEMA OPENING

**Gracie Fields** (says the *News Chronicle*) who sang, at the opening of the *Kilburn State Cinema, in London*, accompanied by **Sidney Torch** at the organ, was told very politely by **John Watt**, Variety Director, at the B.B.C., he would be unable to broadcast that part of the programme, because the B.B.C. would not allow religious songs in a music hall show.

A cinema organ accompaniment might aggravate the offence, said Mr Watt”

Comment: Instead of saying that “he would be unable”. he could simply have said that he would not allow the aria to be sung, or ‘Put a beggar on horse-back and he will ride to hell.’

Was it coincidental that I penned this item about Gracie Fields on Christmas Night 1963, when the B.B.C. T.V., at 8.50 p.m., broadcast **Kenneth McKellar**, the Scottish tenor, singing *Ave Maria*. Old Aunty B.B.C., in the interval from 1937, has mellowed, or perhaps John Watt has seen the error of his Puritanical upbringing. In any case we have come a long way since 1937.

### SERIALS IN THE ‘SILENT DAYS’

In the early days of the Silent Films serials were a must in the vast majority of picture houses.

True, the films were silent – but that is about all that was silent during the showing of the serial. The children who lived from episode to episode did so in a welter of fear, apprehension, worry or dread; this came about as most episodes ended with the hero or heroine, or both, being left in a state of peril. The fate of their heroes was something real to children – I know, as my children asked me – Would the ‘baddies’ be captured next week? Or would the Hero be saved from falling off the cliff? I assured the children, in every case, that the hero or heroine would be saved next week and that the bad men would go to jail, and, of course, that is how it ultimately turned out, as all ‘Once upon a time stories’ end.

Two exciting serials I remember very well were *The Clutching Hand* and *The Exploits of Elaine*. **Pearl White** was the ruling Queen of the serials – she reigned supreme. Meanwhile the lone pianist had to adapt her tempo to suit the fast moving events on the screen. Along with my wife and children I enjoyed the weekly episode of the current serial. [In 1940 I watched a sound version of the *Clutching Hand* serial in the *Coliseum* G.F.B.]

### FROM PENNY BOOTH TO PENNY SCRATCHER, THENCE TO ROYAL PALACE

Thank goodness the common people and Royalty have this in common – all can laugh their heads off at the antics of **Charlie Chaplin**.

Does it really matter where a film is shown?

Writing in Christmas week 1963, I am glad to remember the Old Story of how Christ was born in a manger and, fortunately, not one of us could choose his first bed – nor his last.. How often have we heard or said, “I wouldn’t be found dead there.”

Had the tycoons of the Moving Picture Industry decreed top prices for all cinemas, I am afraid many, many thousands would never have seen moving pictures; or should I write millions, ad lib.

Did the tycoons evolve the saying, “A picture house to view our films- to each according to his ability to pay? (With apologies to **Karl Marx**’s “From each according to his abilities; to each according to his needs”)

### “THE HOUSE, LOOK, MA, I’M ON TV”

Extract from *Time*, the weekly News Magazine, December 20<sup>th</sup> **1963**, Page 40

“It will now be possible to record any program to keep for ever. The **Cinerama Telcan** does the trick. It is a video-tape recorder no bigger than a bread-box. Wired into a home TV set, it can record programs off the air as they are being watched. Then with a flick of the switch, Telcan can play them back immediately, or at any future time as desired... The neatest part of the trick is the price: under \$300 (approximately £100)... With the addition of a tiny TV camera (about \$150, equal to about £50), Telcan can turn the living room into a studio so that shots of the family, and pets, can be immortalised on the family TV set, like Polaroid movies...

Telcan is as simple to operate as any other tape recorder, uses standard one-fourth-inch triple-play recording on oversize reels... Telcan records half track so that 44 minutes of programming can be recorded on a single reel. Telcan can record TV programs when nobody is home - by means of a timing device. In fact, the day may come when plays, concerts, or operas are video-taped by professional companies and sold to the home market the way gramophone records are.

Is this the ultimate in the Moving Picture world?”

I have tried to take the reader through every facet of the industry. I have had as much pleasure in compiling these notes, as I had in watching the Silent Pictures in the old *Op*, before the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

It is Hogmany **1963** and whether you are looking at your own Telcan or kicking an old tin can in the year **2000**, I wish you luck in whatever viewing may be the vogue at that time.

GEORGE BAIRD

[Thank you Dad for your efforts and kind thoughts; in June **2000** I am watching **Ondigital** through my TV set G.F.B.]

### 30: EDINBURGH PICTURE HOUSES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

*Newspaper advertisements main source for establishing when cinemas opened; impossible task to identify when some cinemas closed; Thanks from Management of Cinema House when it closed in 1930; Alpha and Omega – Swallow's Penny Booth, 1893, to Jacey's News Theatre, 1964; The Lot As Far As I Know – an **Alphabetical List** of the 120 cinemas identified, showing those still open in January 1964, and the Chapter in which the story about each of them is to be found; The stories about Abbey Picture House – Waverley Picture House.*

On the B.B.C. 1 o'clock News on October 4<sup>th</sup> **1956** I heard the following sentence which made a deep impression on me: "The mere cutting out of an item from a report, or the omission of an Historical Incident, is no proof that the statement had never been uttered or that a certain incident had not taken place." The relevance which the statement has to my efforts to trace the various places of entertainment within Edinburgh is that I am humble enough to realise that I did not find them all. I was able to trace the **vast** majority of the Picture Houses through advertisements in Newspapers; those not so treated will have their origin and source mentioned. Where a picture house has been given two names, like the **Blue Halls**, opened on January 1<sup>st</sup> **1930** and the **Beverley**, opened April 26<sup>th</sup> **1954**, I have treated them as separate picture houses, in the main to suit the various age groups who would have known the house by a particular name.

#### Final Close Down of Cinemas!

Should a Cinema have been advertised in the Press regarding its Opening Date, that will be duly noted as a matter of routine. On the other hand, it is an almost impossible task to even guess at the month or year when many picture houses closed down.

For example, when did the Blue Halls change to the Beverley? And, this question applies to a number of houses in Edinburgh. Sometimes it was a fairly simple task to find an answer. But when did a cinema finally close down, is, as stated above, 'an almost impossible task.'

When closing dates are known they have been recorded and that is as far as I can commit myself to this aspect of the story or history on Cinemas in particular.

#### Thanks From The Management

On the last day of the **Cinema House**, 18 Nicolson Street, on Saturday May 24<sup>th</sup> **1930**, the manager, Mr **C. Drysdale**, took the trouble to thank his patrons for their support. I will show the advertisement in full, later. This was the only public form of thanks that I came across during my long research.

## ALPHA AND OMEGA

From *Swallow's Id. Booth*, the first at Iona Street Show Ground in **1893**, to *Jacey's News Theatre*, 131 Princes Street, the latest cinema to open in January **1964**, I have endeavoured to name every known Edinburgh house during the intervening 70 years, **all** of which operated during my life time.

I have indicated which of following list of cinemas in Edinburgh are still open as at January 20<sup>th</sup> **1964** – the wonder is that that there are 20 in this category. The ‘story’ about some of the cinemas is contained in chapters: 2. Mr H.E, Moss; 10: Castle Terrace site; 12: The Gaiety, Leith; 13: 5 Chambers Street; 14; St Stephen Street site; 16: Grove Street Theatres; 19: Central Hall, Tollcross; 20: 41 Elm Row; 25: Leith Amusements; 26: Portobello; 27: Albert Hall; and 28: Miscellaneous Bits and Pieces; pointers to these chapters are given in the list. The ‘stories’ for the remainder of the cinemas, the majority, follow immediately after the list.

The *Lyceum Theatre*, Grindlay Street, showed moving pictures for about three weeks in **1912** but, so far as I could determine, it has not shown any films on a commercial basis since then; I have therefore ruled it out of the reckoning.. Likewise the *King's Theatre* is ruled out, although fitted up to show moving pictures. The Empire, Lyceum and King's Theatres, as well as the Waverley Market, were all listed in the **1915 Kinematograph Year Book**.

## THE LOT AS FAR AS I KNOW

Name and address of cinema	Date of opening	Whether still open as at 24 Jan. 64
Abbey Picture House, North Richmond Street.	6 August 1921	
Albert Hall, 22 Shandwick Place <b>See Chap 27: Albert Hall</b>		
Site occupied by B.& B., Bright and Beautiful, Tindle's Pictures, West End Cinema.		
Alhambra, Leith Walk <b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amusements</b>	28 December 1914	
Allison, Laurie Street	1944, News Advice	
Also known as Leith and Laurie Street Picture Houses		
<b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amusements</b>		
Astoria , Manse Road	1 January 1930	Yes
Atmospheric Theatre, <b>See Chap. 20: 41 Elm Row</b>	6 January 1930	
B. & B, Bright and Beautiful, <b>See Chap 27: Albert Hall</b>	28 September 1908	
Beverley, Lauriston Street, formerly the Blue Halls	26 April 1954	
Blue Halls, Lauriston Street, subsequently the Beverley	1 January 1930	
Bungalow, Bath Street <b>See Chap. 26: Portobello</b>	1912/13 Street Directory	
also known as the Electric Theatre and Victory		
Cadona's Pictures and Varieties, Parliament Street	7 September 1912	
Magnet built on site. <b>See Chap 25: Leith Amusements</b>		
Caley, Lothian Road	1 January 1923	Yes
Cameo, 38 Home Street, formerly the King's Cinema	7 March 1949	Yes
Capitol, Manderson Street <b>See Chap 25: Leith Amusements</b>	10 September 1928	
Carlton, Pierfield Terrace	23 December 1935	
Central Hall Methodist Mission <b>See Chap. 19: Central Hall</b>	21 September 1901	
Central Kinema, Hope Street <b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amuse'ts</b>	2 December 1920	

Central Picture House, 281 High Street, Portobello	22 March 1915	
Also known as George. <b>See Chap 26: Portobello</b>		
Cine Playhouse, 12 Springvalley Gardens	1920/21 Street Directory	
See entries for Morningside Halls and 12 Springvalley Gardens		
Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street	11 September 1911	
Cinema House, Tolbooth Wynd <b>See Chap 25: Leith Amus.</b>	14 April 1913	
Cinema Theatre, 189 High Street Portobello	7 March 1913	
Also known as Portobello Theatre and Cinema and Star Hall		
<b>See Chap. 26: Portobello</b>		
Coliseum, 125 Fountainbridge	14 December 1911	
Cooke's Circus Picture Palace, East Fountainbridge	2 April 1908	
Subsequently the Palladium Picture House		
County, Bath Street <b>See Chap. 26:Portobello</b>	30 March 1939	
Subsequently known as the George		
County, Wauchope Avenue Formerly the Rio	29 August 1950	
Dean, 28 Dean Street Formerly the Pavilion	10 May 1930	
Dominion, Newbattle Terrace	31 January 1938	Yes
Eastway, 14 Easter Road Subsequently the Picturedrome	17 May 1913	
Electric Theatre, Bath Street <b>See Chap. 26:Portobello</b>	11 August 1913	
Also known as the Bungalow and Victory		
Elm Row, 41 <b>See Chap. 20: 41 Elm Row</b>		
Site occupied by Pringle's New Picture Palace, Atmospheric Theatre and Gateway Theatre; plus some theatres.		
Embassy, Boswall Parkway	2 August 1937	Yes
Empire Palace of Varieties <b>See Chap. 2: Mr H.E.Moss</b>	13 April 1896	
Empire Picture House, Henderson Street	31 December 1917	
<b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amusements</b>		
Evan's Picture House, 12 Springvalley Gardens	19 December 1914	
See entry for 12 Springvalley Gardens		
Falconer's Picture House, Jane Street	1899	
<b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amusements</b>		
Gaiety, New Kirkgate <b>See Chap. 12 The Gaiety, Leith</b>	6 January 1900	
Gateway, 41 Elm Row <b>See Chap. 20: 41 Elm Row</b>	21 October 1946	
Also known as Pringle's New Picture Palace and the Atmospheric		
Gaumont, Canning Street Formerly the Rutland	6 March 1950	
George, Bath Street Formerly County	22 November 1954	Yes
<b>See Chap. 26: Portobello</b>		
George, 281 High Street Portobello	12 November 1942	
Previously the Central <b>See Chap. 26: Portobello</b>		
Grand Picture House, St Stephen Street	31 December 1920	
<b>See Chap. 14: St Stephen Street Site</b>		
Grove Street <b>See Chapter 16: Grove Street Theatres</b>		
Site ocpiyed by the Pavilion, Pringle's Picture Palace plus some Variety Theatres		
Haymarket Picture House, subsequently the Scotia	13 December 1912	
Imperial, 123 Kirkgate <b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amus.</b>	22 April 1911	
Jacey's News Theatre, 131 Princes Street	20 January 1964	Yes
Formerly Princess Theatre and Monseigneur		
King's Cinema, Home Street Subsequently the Cameo	8 January 1914	

La Scala, 50 Nicolson Street	31 December 1912	Yes
Laurie Picture House, Laurie Street	1931, News Advice	
Also known as Leith Picture House and the Allison		
<b>See Chap.25: Leith Amusements</b>		
Laurie Street Picture House. <b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amusements</b>		
Site occupied by Leith Picture House, Laurie Picture House and Allison Cinema		
Lauriston Hall, Lauriston Street	21 December 1912	
Leith Cinema, Tolbooth Wynd <b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amusements</b> , under Cinema House		
Leith Gaiety, Kirkgate, Sunday Concerts	5 April 1912	
<b>See Chap. 12:The Gaiety, Leith</b>		
Leith Picture House, Laurie Street	27 November 1911	
Also known as Laurie Picture House and the Allison		
<b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amusements</b>		
Lyceum Picture House, Slateford Road	8 November 1926	
Lyric, 30 Nicolson Square Formerly the Silver Kinema	15 August 1914	
Magnet, Parliament Street, formerly Cadona's Pictures etc	14 November 1913	
<b>See Chap 25: Leith Amusements</b>		
Marine Gardens Pictures, Seafield Road	16 May 1913	
<b>See Chap. 16: Portobello</b>		
Modern Marvel, see entry for Queen Street Hall		
Monseigneur News Theatre, 131 Princes Street	2 December 1935	
Formerly, Princess Theatre; subsequently Jacey's News Theatre		
Morningside Cinema, 12 Springvalley Gardens	27 December 1915	
See entry for 12 Springvalley Gardens		
Morningside Picture House,12 Springvalley Gardens	23 December 1912	
See entry for 12 Springvalley Gardens		
Morningside Photo Play House, 12 Springvalley Gardens	1915 Kine.Year Book	
See entry for 12 Springvalley Gardens		
Moss's Carnival, Waverley Market	22 December 1894	
Music Hall, George Street <b>See Chap. 28: Misc. Bits etc.</b>	31 December 1900	
New Electric Theatre, Shrubhill Subsequently the Petit Paris	1 January 1909	
New Palace Cinema, 20 High Street	15 October 1929	
New Picture House, 56-57 Princes Street	21 October 1913	
New Tivoli, Gorgie Road, formerly the Tivoli	1 January 1934	Yes
New Victoria, Clerk Street	25 August 1930	Yes
Oddfellows' Hall, Forrest Road <b>See Ch. 28: Misc Bits etc.</b>	1 January 1903	
Old Church, West Port <b>See Chap. 28: Misc Bits etc.</b>	31 December 1901	
Olympia Palace, Annandale Street	5 February 1912	
Operetta House, 5 Chambers Street	31 December 1900	
<b>See Chap. 13: 5 Chambers Street</b>		
Paddy's Coal Fauld, Dudley Bank, Paffy Faulkener's Picture House	1908	
<b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amusements</b>		
Palace Picture House, 15 Princes Street	24 December 1913	
Palace Picture House, St Bernard's Row	10 April 1911	
Also known as St Bernard's Picture Palace, Savoy and Tudor		
Palace, Foot of the Walk <b>See Ch. 25: Leith Amusements</b>	1 January 1913	Yes
Palladium Picture House, Raeburn Place	1915 Kine. Year Book	
Palladium Pictures, East Fountainbridge	18 November 1912	
Pavilion, Dean Street	1912	

Pavilion, Dean Street	27 March 1917	
Pavilion Theatre, Grove Street <b>See Ch 16: Grove St. Th.</b>	15 December 1902	
People's Picture House, 19 Blackfriars Street	1913 Street Directory	
Petit Paris, Shrubhill, formerly New Electric Theatre	31 December 1909	
Picturedrome, 14 Easter Road Subsequently the Eastway	30 August 1912	
Picture House, The, 111 Princes Street	20 July 1910	
Picture Theatre, Harbour Green, Portobello	1915 Kine. Year Book	
Playhouse, 18 Greenside Place	12 August 1929	Yes
Poole's Roxy, Gorgie Road	20 December 1937	
Poole's Synod Hall <b>See Chap. 10: Castle Terrace site</b>	December 1906	Yes
Portobello Theatre and Cinema, 189 High Street	31 December 1900	
<b>See Chap. 26: Portobello</b>		
Princess Cinema, 131 Princes Street	14 September 1912	
Subsequently the Monseigneur and Jacey's News Theatres		
Pringle's Picture Palace, 41 Elm Row	2 January 1911	
<b>See Chap. 20: 41 Elm Row</b>		
Pringle's Picture Palace, Grove Street	16 November 1908	
<b>See Chap. 16: Grove Street Theatres</b>		
Pringle's, Synod Hall, Castle Terrace	3 October 1907	
<b>See Chap. 10: Castle Terrace site</b>		
Queen's Hall, Queen Street, Modern Marvel	20 December 1897	
Regal, Lothian Road	10 October 1938	Yes
Regent, 12 Abbey Mount	1 August 1927	Yes
Rio Picture House, Wauchope Avenue Later the County	6 February 1936	
Ritz, Rodney Street	9 September 1929	Yes
Ritz Kinema, 12 Springvalley Gardens	8 October 1913	
See entry for 12 Springvalley Gardens		
Roxburgh, Drummond Street	1 January 1920	
Royal Cinema, 241 High Street Formerly the Tron	27 December 1928	
Royal Electric Theatre, Royal Hotel Buildings, Princes St.	1915 Kine. Year Book	
Rutland, Canning Street Subsequently the Gaumont	28 April 1930	
St Andrew Square, Clyde Street	1 January 1923	
St Bernard's Picture Palace, St Bernard's Row	15 April 1912	
Also known as Palace Picture House, Savoy and Tudor		
St Bernard's Row		
Site occupied by Palace Picture House, St Bernard's Picture Palace, Savoy		
Salisbury Picture House, South Clerk Street	17 December 1925	
Salon, 5 Baxter's Place	16 October 1913	Yes
Savoy Picture House, St Bernard's Row	28 March 1921	
Also known as Palace Picture House, St Bernard's Pic Palace and the Tudor		
Scotia, 90 Dalry Road Formerly the Haymarket	1 September 1949	Yes
Silver Kinema, 30 Nicolson Square Later the Lyric	15 September 1913	
Springvalley Cinema, 12 Springvalley Gardens	1 January 1931	
Springvalley Gardens, 12		
Site occupied by Morningside Picture House; Ritz Kinema; Morningside Photo Playhouse; Evan's Picture House; Morningside Cinema; Cine Playhouse; and Springvalley Cinema		
Star Hall, 189 High Street Portobello ) <b>See Ch. 26:</b>	1920 Street Directory	
Star Cinema, 189 High Street, Portobello) <b>Portobello</b>	1910	
Star Picture House, St Mary's Street <b>See Ch. 18: St Mary's Street Hall</b>		

State, Great Junction Street	<b>See Ch. 25: Leith Amusements</b>	19 December 1938	Yes
Swallow's Booth, Iona Street Show Ground		1893	
<b>See Chap. 25: Leith Amusements</b>			
Tindle's Pictures, 22 Shandwick Place	<b>See Ch 27: Albert Hall</b>	1 February 1910	
Tivoli Picture House, Gorgie Road	Later the New Tivoli	2 September 1913	
Tollcross Cinema, 140 Lauriston Place		31 December 1912	
Tower Pavilion, Tower Street	<b>See Ch 26: Portobello</b>	23 July 1907	
Tower Picture Palace, Tower Street	<b>See Ch:26 Portobello</b>	9 August 1910	
Tron Picture House, 24I High Street	Later the Royal	17 April 1913	
Tudor Picture House, St Bernard's Row		25 July 1960	Yes
Also known as Palace Picture House, St Bernard's Picture Palace and Savoy			
Tynecastle Parish Church, Gorgie	Entertainments	2 January 1905	
<b>See Chap. 28: Miscellaneous Bits and Pieces</b>			
Victory, Bath Street , formerly Bungalow Cinema		12 November 1942	
<b>See Chap. 26: Portobello</b>			
Waverley Picture House, 6 Infirmary Street		1915 Kin. Year Book	
Waverley Market Concerts	<b>See Ch.28: Misc. Bits etc.</b>	1904	
Wesley Hall, Hamilton Place	<b>See Ch.28: Misc. Bits etc.</b>	21 October 1911	
West End Cinema, 22 Shandwick Place		17 December 1915	
<b>See Chap. 27: Albert Hall</b>			

### ***ABBEY PICTURE HOUSE, NORTH RICHMOND STREET***

*News*, Saturday, August 6<sup>th</sup> **1921**    Advertisement

“6.30    to    10.30

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday

Romantic Drama featuring **Bessie Barriscale** in

***The Painted Soul***                      ***The Fatal Fortune***

The Great Fight Jim Higgins V Pete Herman  
Bantam Weight Champions”

Note: This was the only advertisement I ever saw for the ***Abbey***.

A draw for ‘lucky’ numbers was made at the interval, for which ‘prizes’ were exchanged. This type of ‘gimmick’ was not unusual in those far off days. Saturday Matinee for Children cost 1d., the usual charge in most of the ‘little’ picture houses, which was the category in which the ***Abbey*** found itself. Competition was fierce, especially with ***Operetta House*** close by.

**ASTORIA, MANSE ROAD**

News, Wednesday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1930 Advertisement

**“CORSTORPHINE TALKS ABOUT  
THAT BEAUTIFUL THEATRE**

**THE ASTORIA**

**Will be opened to-day at 2 p.m.  
With the Wonderful 100 per cent “Talkie”**

*Movietone Follies of 1929*

**All Singing, Dancing and Talking Review**

**By the Gracious Permission of the Directors of  
the *Capitol Picture House*, Leith, we have secured the services of**

**MR LYNDON LAIRD**

**The famous Solo Organist, of London, Montrel, New York. To give the opening  
Interlude on our Grand Organ at 2 p.m. on January 1<sup>st</sup> at the above Theatre.**

**Note the Prices: 6d.; 9d. and 1s.2d.”**

I append some extracts from the brochure:

*“ The Creators of the Astoria,*

**Mr T. Bowhill Gibson, F.R.I.A.S.**

The Architect by whom the Astoria was designed and whose supervision this fine structure has been erected, is a specialist in Cinema and Theatre work. He was also responsible for the planning of the *Regent*, Abbeymount, *The Blue Halls*, (just about to be opened) *The Rutland* Super Cinema in the West End of Edinburgh (Canning Street).

**Mr F.R. Graham-Yooll**

**The Big Man Behind The Astoria**

A man associated with the successful entertainment enterprises (The three cinemas mentioned in the previous paragraph, for example), the *Marine Gardens* in 1909, and other cinemas throughout the town.

**Mr Arthur Albin**

The Manager of the Astoria has been successfully associated with the cinema for a number of years. He was manager of the *Regent* at Abbeymount since its inception (Monday 1<sup>st</sup> August 1927) which theatre, under his skilful control, ranked as one of the most popular houses in Edinburgh.

He will now take over both the Astoria and The Blue Halls (both Talkie Cinemas); a heavy responsibility, which will enable him to further develop his capacity for establishing success.

It is less than twelve months ago that Mr F.R. Graham-Yooll and several other business men met together to discuss the prospect of building a new cinema theatre in Corstorphine. Things moved quickly; a site was found in the main thoroughfare at Manse Road, and now the Astoria, one of the most beautiful picture houses in Edinburgh or elsewhere, is in being. If Keats was right about a 'thing of beauty', then the Astoria is 'a joy for ever.'

A note of comfort is struck in the orange-coloured velvet coverings of the seats, and the thick crimson carpet that covers the floor. Most important of all, from every one of the 1,369 seats, there are 946 stalls and 423 balcony seats, a perfect view of the screen is had.

The stage, which is 36 feet by 10 feet, is suitable for small turns or prologues to films, and on each side are small dressing rooms.

#### The Men Who Made This Beautiful Theatre Possible

Who are the men who made this beautiful theatre possible? Who were the craftsmen responsible for the work? The Principal men behind the venture are; Mr **F.R.Graham-Yooll**, who is managing director; Mr **Robert Black** of Roslin and Mr **Arthur Ingram** of Gorgie. The legal advisers were Messrs **W.J. Burness** W.S. and the Secretaries, Messrs **D.and F, Marshall and Anderson**, C.A., both of Edinburgh; Mr **T. Bowhill Gibson**, F.R.I.A.S., who was responsible for the design and carrying out of the contract, in which he was most ably assisted by Mr **Alexander Mennie**, Master of Works. The quantity surveyors, Messrs **Murray and Baird**, F.F.S., prepared the schedule of quantities and measured up the contract.

#### The Principal Contractors On The Job

Excavator Work: Messrs Fisher Brothers, Haymarket

Mason Work: Messrs Arnot McLeod & Co, Edinburgh

Steel Work: Redpath, Brown & Co, St Andrew Steel Works, Edinburgh

Joiner Work: Cochrane Brothers, Bo'ness

Plaster Work: Mr William Graham, 113 St Leonard Street, Edinburgh

Decorative Work: Jenners Ltd., Princes Street in co-operation with Messrs Hugh Muirhead and Son, Leith

Electric Installation: A.& T. Shand & Co., George Street

#### The Proscenium Wherein The Organ Is Played

The whole of one end of the theatre is occupied by the proscenium, which is in the form of two arches, one within the other.

In the curved wall of the intervening space in which the lighting effects play there is placed the fine organ, designed and constructed by Messrs Ingram & Co., Saughton Avenue, Edinburgh, which has been built on the **unit** system. Although slightly smaller, this organ is similar to the popular instrument in the *Capitol Theatre*, Leith.

The organ has a complete range of all cinema effects: cathedral chimes; harp; xylophone; drums; traps, etc. and the action is electric throughout.

#### The Talking Installation

The talking system is **Western Electric**, and the operating room, rewinding room, talkie battery room, non-synchronising room, and the electrical switch room occupy the space of the whole width of the building, and are situated above the balcony, on the outside wall, from

which, at each end, is a private stair leading to the street. Thus the perfect safety of the audience is ensured.”

### **The Cinema Organ**

The Organ – Church, Cinema or Concert Hall, has been my favourite musical instrument and I consider the article given below, to be the finest it has been my pleasure to read on the subject of the organ. It was extracted from the Astoria handbook;

“It is a difficult matter to satisfy everyone’s taste, especially in the matter of entertainment. There are a few who will deny the appeal of the organ. Indeed, one of the greatest musical treats is to hear an organ played by a master. The following facts may, therefore, be of interest to the seeker after knowledge.

The first organ was built in **678** A.D. by a monk in a Swiss monastery, who conceived the idea of adapting keyboard control by a system of coupling to them the common enough instrument known as the bagpipes.

Through course of time various improvements were effected, until the advent of pneumatic power. With the advance of electricity as a power unit, it was only to be expected that thoughts were directed towards the application to the organ. It was not until the year **1885**, however, that the first really successful electrical organ was built.

Mr **Hilborne Roosevelt**, a wealthy New Yorker and incidentally a cousin of the famous President, an ardent organ enthusiast, had an electric unit organ erected in the Garden City Cathedral, New York. It was a success, but it did not revolutionise the industry as its full possibilities were not appreciated.

Some years later, a Mr **Robert Hope Jones**, organist at Birkenhead Parish Church, by profession a telephonist, tried to interest organ builders in this country in a stunt electric organ of his own conception. Meeting with no success here, he went to America, and succeeded in interesting **Wurlitzer**, the founder of the famous firm of that name in the idea. With the advent of the movies and the advance in cinema construction, the electric unit organ, with its numerous effects, came into its own as the one instrument capable of providing musical atmosphere of all shades so necessary for successful film exhibition.

### **Electric Organ Is Made In Three Separate Parts Or Sections**

An electric organ is made in three separate sections: the console, and the voice (the pipes etc.) connected with the coupling system. This last may be said to be the soul of the organ. The greatest care has to be observed in its construction, especially as concerns the selection of the woods for the framework. They must be thoroughly seasoned.

### **The Wiring**

Then, the wiring: every note and effect has its own complete circuit, and an idea of the magnitude of the task of assembling can be gained from this: the Astoria organ alone has 12 miles of fine electric wire in its coupling system.

### **Takes Months To Build**

An organ takes months to build, and great care has to be taken that the acoustic properties of a building are such that they will give the best results according to the power of the installation. This can only be guaranteed by the expert in organ construction. Small wonder,

considering all this, that the unit organ is so expensive, some of them running into many thousands of pounds.

#### King Of Instruments

The average 2-3 manual electric cinema organ runs to £2,000 to £3,000, but who can fail to respond to its soul-stirring descriptive accompaniment to a good star picture (Silent Picture) in the silence and comfort of our luxurious cinemas. Surely it is worth it, and the showmen of the world have realised it.

The “Voice” of the “King of Instruments” has come into its own to stay.”

As I write in October **1963**, I am making an effort to have the Astoria and other brochures sent to one of the Edinburgh Libraries for reference.

Alas, the “king” lost his “Voice”. Indeed, he has lost his “Crown” and the Cinema organ is no longer heard in the land. The “King” followed the Cinema ‘Orchestras’ into oblivion.

True, some Cinema Orchestras merely consisted of a piano and the pianist would change the tune and tempo to suit the action of the picture. For galloping horses the ivories would thump out- thumpity-thump; and for the sad picture, a ‘weepy’ was played. My goodness, if anyone in the picture business earned a salary it was the lassie at the piano.

The ‘big’ picture houses, like *Poole’s* and the *New*, Princes Street, had ‘slap-up’ orchestras. It was accepted that an interlude of 20 minutes or thereby was devoted to patrons’ requests.

Both Organ and Orchestras have *Gone With the Wind*.

#### A Cinema Manager on the Organ

In the month of October **1962**, a Cinema Manager was being quizzed on a B.B.C. TV programme- no name mentioned on Auntie B.B.C.- regarding the non-use of the Cinema organ. The manager said, *inter alia*, “The organ is played about four times a year – and only for special occasions at that.”

Extract from *Astoria Monthly Review No.7 July 1931*

“Proprietors: The Corstorphine Picture House Ltd.

Managing Director: Mr F.R. Graham-Yooll

General Manager: Mr A.S. Albin

Resident Manager: Mr J.W.M.D.Young

Performances are continuous from 6 p.m.; Saturdays from 2 p.m.

Prices of Admission: Balcony, 1s.2d.; Stalls, 9d.; Front Stalls, 6d. Children Half-Price  
1,369 seats

CAR PARKING ADJOINING THEATRE”

I have happy memories of the Astoria. Every Friday evening was a must for my wife and two sons for a year or two after the opening. Happy Days. [Around 1931 I paid my first visit to the cinema, to see and hear **Janet Gaynor** in *Sunny Side Up* in the Astoria. The theme song of the film *Keep Your Sunny Side Up*, *Up* was often sung by my mother; today (2000) I can still whistle the tune, but can remember only the first line of the song. G.F.B.]

Extract from **1954** *Kinematograph Year Book*, pages 415-416

“Astoria, Manse Road, Corstorphine Picture House Ltd.  
Prices: 1s. to 2s.1d. Seats 1,368  
Proscenium, 37 feet; Screen, 22 feet; 2 Dressing Rooms”

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, December 19<sup>th</sup> **1963**

### “Cinema Pioneer Helps Festival Appeal fund benefits from legacy

A former cinema owner, Mr **Louis Dickson**, who died more than two years ago, has left £61,181, the bulk of which, after death duties, will go to the *Edinburgh Festival Society* to assist a special appeal fund launched in **1960**.

Mr Dickson, a pioneer of the cinema and of cinematography in Scotland and proprietor of the Astoria Picture House (Corstorphine), directed in his will that the major part of his capital should go to the fund which was started a few months before his death.

The appeal fund was launched with the intention of bringing the Society an income of £50,000 a year. To raise this, the sum of £1 million would have to be invested at an interest rate of 5 per cent. Revenue would be used to enlarge the Festival’s range and artistic standard. It is believed that the Mr Dickson’s bequest is the largest single donation yet made to the fund”

The following extract from *The Scotsman*, Thursday, February 16<sup>th</sup> **1961**, has some relevance to the death of Mr Dickson.

“*New Tivoli*, Edinburgh, will be taken over by **J.B. Milne Theatres**, Dundee from Monday (February 20<sup>th</sup> **1961**) The Milne Company already own two Edinburgh Cinemas, the *Tudor*, Stockbridge, and the *Astoria*, Corstorphine, both acquired last year (1960). The J.B.Milne Chain now own 29 cinemas. They range from Lerwick to Galashiels.”

### ***BEVERLEY, LAURISTON STREET***

*News*, Monday, April 26<sup>th</sup>, **1954** First Advertisement

**The Beverley Formerly the Blue Halls)**

**Proudly Presents**

***The Robe***

**In Cinemascope and Technicolor**

**At 2.40, 5.25 and 8.15**

**Special Morning Show for Children at 9.45 a.m. on Saturdays”**

*The Beverley* closed down in 1959.

***BLUE HALLS, LAURISTON STREET***

*News*, Wednesday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1930

***“The Blue Halls, Lauriston Street***

**Edinburgh’s New Talking Picture and Variety Theatre**

**Will be opened on New Year’s day at 2 p.m.**

**With All-Talking Film of the World’s Most Sensational Play**

***White Cargo***

**Featuring Leslie Faber as ‘Weston’**

**Note the Prices: 4d.; 6d.; 8d.; and 1s.**

**The Blue Halls is equipped with Western Sound System**

**Also a Grand Unit Orchestral Organ  
built by Messrs Ingram & Co., Organ Builders, Edinburgh”**

The ***Blue Halls*** was built on what had been a cattle market up until the beginning of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; as was the Grassmarket and another in Valleyfield, with the Slaughterhouse in Fountainbridge. Tollcross School now occupies the site of the former Slaughterhouse.

The ***Blue Halls*** catered for a working-class ‘clientele’. It was on a good circuit as many excellent pictures came its way. It was well managed and kept its ‘head’ and name until it became known as the ***Beverley*** on Monday, April 26<sup>th</sup> 1954.

Extract from 1954 *Kinematograph Year Book*, pages 415-416

“Blue Halls

Proprietors: Blue Halls (Edinburgh) Ltd., 14 Walker Street, Edinburgh

Prices: 1s. to 1s.9d.

Seats: 1,757”

*News*, Saturday, April 24<sup>th</sup> 1954 Last advertisement for the ***Blue Halls***

**“Johnny Weissmuller and Johnny Sheffield in**

***Tarzan Triumphs***

**3.45, 6.25 and 8.5**

**and Rosa Clark in *Island of Monte Christo*”**

**CALEY, LOTHIAN ROAD**

News, Monday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1923 Advertisement

**“The Caley**

**Edinburgh’s new Cinema Superb  
Magnificent Music, Sumptuous Seating and  
a Picture Programme which includes:**

*The Game of Life*

**G.B. Samuelson’s Spectacle**

*The Picture That Makes The Dimples To Catch The Tears*

**Continuous, from 1 till 10.30**

**Musical Director – Mr Albert Dobson**

**THE CALEY PICTURE HOUSE  
LOTHIAN ROAD (NEAR WEST END)”**

News, Saturday, January 13<sup>th</sup> 1923 First advertisement showing Prices

“Prices: 1s. and 2s. Children Half-Price from 1 till 4.”

News, Tuesday, January 1923

**“Caley and St Andrew Square**

The first day of the New Year was fixed as the opening date of two new picture houses in Edinburgh; the *Caley* in Lothian Road and the *Square* in Clyde Street.

The *Caley*, which is situated near the West End of Princes Street, has an imposing frontage with entrance doorways framed in white cipollino marble. To erect such a building, costing over £25,000 within eight months, on a site which had to be cleared of its existing structure, is no mean achievement, and the Management yesterday had the satisfaction of seeing the house crowded.

There is a total seating capacity of 900 – 600 in the area and 300 in the balcony. The seating and upholstery have been carefully selected to produce a harmonious and artistic effect.

A varied and very entertaining programme was submitted to the patrons, the feature film being *The Game of Life*, a production reminiscent of the reign of Queen Victoria.”

The Caley Presents Its last All Silent Programme and Why!

News, Wednesday, May 1<sup>st</sup> 1929

**“The Caley**

**D.W. Griffith’s *Drums of Love***

**Patrons are asked to note that the Theatre will be closed  
for reconstruction on and after Monday 6<sup>th</sup> May 1929”**

**An Expeditious Job**

Opened on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1923 it might seem strange to a reader any time after the 1960’s that the *Caley* should be closed for reconstruction only 6 years 5 months later. There two very good reasons:

1. The Talkie Boom Was On , and
2. To ‘cash in’ it was imperative that the seating accommodation should be drastically increased. It was, from 900 to 2,100.

The re-opening announcement was advertised in the Press exactly 7 months 3 weeks from the time reconstruction started. A good job of work by any standard.

News, Saturday, December 21<sup>st</sup> 1929 Page 4, Among The Films

**“Re-opening of The Caley**

The principal event in the Edinburgh cinema world next week will be the re-opening of the Caley Picture House. A little over a year ago one of the most popular of the Cinemas in the city, yet seating but a few hundreds; now a super-picture house with accommodation for 2,000.

Work on the new Caley Cinema has been rapid. Very little time seems to have elapsed since the early stages of demolition of the County Hotel were commenced, and in place of that building has arisen a picture house which will stand comparison with any cinema of like capacity erected, or in course of erection in the city. ( The reference to cinemas erected or in course of erection referred to the *Playhouse*, opened August 12<sup>th</sup> 1929, the *New Victoria*, opened August 25<sup>th</sup> 1930 and the *Astoria* and *St Andrew Square*, both opened on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1930.)

The Directors of the Caley Picture House Company have taken a bold step. In these days of super-cinemas it requires no little courage to venture upon another big scheme. Such action, however, has been taken, and the public, on Monday, will find one of the most up-to-date buildings for picture presentation in the country open for their patronage.

Gone is the familiar entrance and staircase with the crush-hall downstairs. Instead there is an entrance-hall with a gold leaf roof; a vestibule with Parisian glass panels and Austrian oak panelling; cloak-room, confectionery stall, and a lift capable of conveying 20 persons to the balcony.

**Comfort and Utility**

Then there are hand-wrought ironwork railings and the Italian modelled staircases leading to the interior, undoubtedly one of the finest in Scotland at the present time. There has been no

effort to include what might be called 'fancy work'. Comfort and utility have been the main considerations, and a surprise awaits the public when they visit this New Caley. From the most remote corner of the interior, whether the area or upstairs, there is a perfect view of the screen, whilst the acoustics (considering the fact that the programmes will be practically 'all talkie') have been carefully studied.

#### First Time In Scotland

The balcony is almost straight; there is hardly a foot deviation in an 80 foot span, a method of construction which is tried for the first time in Scotland. There are no side balconies – a most commendable feature. The decorative work in the interior is of a modest character, and the lighting is calculated to give the maximum of effect and the minimum of 'glare' - the latter a rather too common feature in some of the present cinemas.

Four enormous shades hold 40 lights each, and every shade includes four different colours worked from a 'dimmer' in the operating box. The actual operating box itself contains the R.C.H. apparatus, and a good test should be provided by the 'talkies' of Reginald Denny (his first in the city) and Laura La Plante.

It should not be long before the New Caley occupies a foremost place in the cinemas of Edinburgh."

#### Brown's County Hotel

After I was discharged from the Army in March 1916 on account of wounds, I thought, like many Americans, that I was far removed from the scene of battle. However, this was not the case as Edinburgh suffered a Zeppelin Raid on the night of Sunday April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1916. The night was clear, a perfect night for their dirty work. I saw the Zepp that night and occasionally a bright light signified the opening of the bomb chambers. A number of places were hit, including Brown's County Hotel; Grassmarket, at, or about the Beehive Inn, or the White Hart Inn; George Watson's Boys' College, then in Archibald Place, Lauriston Place, a plaque in the playground marked the spot where the bomb fell; and Marshall Street, where, unfortunately, some people were killed.

#### First All Talkie Caley Programme

*News*, Saturday December 21<sup>st</sup> **1929** Advertisement

**"The New Caley Picture House  
Lothian Road Edinburgh**

**Opening on Monday Fisrt at 2 p.m.**

**With Our Old Favourites To Be Seen And Heard**

**Reginald Denny in *One Hysterical Night*  
And Laura La Plante in *The Love Trap***

**Popular Prices: Front Stalls, 9d.; Back Stalls, 1s.3d; Balcony, 1s.3d; Circle, 2s.**

**Continuous from 2 till 10.30**

## **The New Caley Picture House”**

Extract from **1938 Cinema Buyers Guide** page 173

“Caley Picture House, 31 Lothian Road.

Proprietor: Caley Picture House Ltd.

Seating, 2,100”

**1954 Kinematograph Year Book** Pages 415-416

“Caley Picture House, 31 Lothian Road

Proprietors; The Caley Picture House Co. Ltd., 5 Coates Place

Prices: 1s.9d to 3s.1d.

Seats: 1,900 Proscenium, width 50 feet. Screen, 40 feet by 15 ½ feet”

Note the loss of 200 seats between 1938 and 1954 was to make room for the large Todd-O screen. Many Super Cinemas lost seats due to the same reason

## **EDINBURGH FILM GUILD**

*News*, Saturday, October 19<sup>th</sup> **1963** Page 5

**“Edinburgh Film Guild**

**Opens its Thirty-Fourth Season of**

**OUTSTANDING**

**FILMS ON SUNDAYS**

**CALEY PICTURE HOUSE**

**ON SUNDAY OCTOBER 20 1963**

**Subscriptions 25s. which includes admission to 10 performances**

**LIBRARY, CLUB ROOMS, DISCUSSION GROUP**

**Call, Write or Phone for Illustrated Brochure**

**FILM HOUSE, 3 RANDOLPH CRESCENT, CAL 1671**

The Guild has provided a long felt want over the years, despite a slight falling off in membership, which has resulted in a contraction of the Season and a little extra on the Subscription. A year or two back the Subscription was 21s. for 12 shows.

***CAMEO, HOME STREET***

*News*, Friday, March 4<sup>th</sup> 1949 Advertisement

**“CAMEO  
JOHN R. and J.K. STAFFORD POOLE  
HAVE PLEASURE IN PRESENTING  
EDINBURGH’S NEW ART CINEMA**

**THE CAMEO**

**HOME STREET TOLL CROSS**

**OPEN TO THE PUBLIC MONDAY, MARCH 7, 1949**

**CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE DAILY FROM 1.45 p.m.**

**OPENING ATTRACTION - MICHELLE MORGAN in**

***LA SYMPHONIE PASTORALE***

**ENGLISH SUB-TITLES”**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, March 5<sup>th</sup> 1949

**“New Edinburgh Cinema**

A preview of the Cameo, Edinburgh’s new specialised cinema, was given to the Press yesterday (Friday). Formerly known as the King’s Cinema, the theatre has been renovated and redecorated, and will be opened officially by Lord Provost Sir Andrew Murray tomorrow night. There is accommodation for approximately 500 people, and it is intended that continuous performances should be given throughout the week.

The directors – Baillie John R and Mr J. K. Stafford Poole – intend that, in the main, single feature programmes should be run, with short subjects of interest and educational value to supplement the feature film”

*The Scotsman*, Monday, March 7<sup>th</sup> 1949

**“Lord Provost Opens Edinburgh’s New Specialised Cinema**

The Cameo, Home Street, Edinburgh’s new specialised cinema, was officially opened last night (Sunday) by Lord Provost Sir Andrew Murray. A preview was given of the programme which will be shown until March 12: the French film *La Symphonie Pastorale* and a short Swedish film with English commentary *Cliff Face*.

Declaring the cinema open, the Lord Provost said there had been sufficient controversy over the recent Royal concert to prove that tastes differed.

“But, generally speaking”, he said, “and without offending the normal box-office appeal, standards could be improved and it is necessary and desirable – among cinema-goers especially – that we should aim at a higher standard of appreciation.

I hope that the educational value of this cinema, and the contribution of the films here, will be made available to the children of our city, and that, through the medium of the Cameo, appreciation of what is good and bad in the art of the film may be inculcated into them.”

It was his place, continued the Lord Provost, to invite controversy between Edinburgh and Glasgow, but it had been rather galling for Edinburgh people to have to travel to the west, or even to London, to see some of the films that had furthered the art of the cinema.

“You have added to the culture life of the city, and to its status as an International centre”, the Lord Provost told Baillie John R. Poole.

Mr. J.K. Stafford Poole, who with his father, Baillie Poole, is a Director of the Cameo, told the guests at last night’s preview that the success of the French film, *Les Enfants du Paradis* had been partly responsible for the opening of the new cinema. That film when shown at the Synod Hall during the International Festival had beaten the receipts of many of the British and American films. “I hope this cinema will fill a gap that has existed in Edinburgh for too long,” he said.

*Evening Dispatch*, Monday March 7<sup>th</sup> 1949 This is an impression of a reduced Handbill, complete with a replica of a Cameo.

**“Cameo Home Street Tollcross  
Opens Today March 7, 1949**

**This new Cinema offers unequalled Comfort- Atmosphere - Courtesy**

**Showing today**

***La Symphonie Pastorale***

**With Michelle Morgan**

**Showing: 1.55, 4.10, 6.20, 8.20”**

**1954 *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 415-416**

“Cameo Picture House, Home Street  
Proprietor: Poole’s Cameo, Room 18, Synod Hall, Edinburgh.  
Prices: 2s.1d. to 4s.  
Seats, 550.

*Evening Dispatch*, Tuesday, October 15<sup>th</sup> 1963

**“Edinburgh Cinema Gets ‘Pub’ Licence**

The Cameo, Tollcross, today became the only Edinburgh Cinema to have a liquor licence. Edinburgh Licensing Court granted it a public-house licence by 5 votes to 3, despite a suggestion by objectors that this would create ‘a most unfortunate precedent’.

The application was made by Mr J.K.S.Poole, managing director of Poole’s (Cameo), Ltd., Castle Terrace, Edinburgh. Mr Poole assisted his late father in operating a cinema in Aberdeen where bars were available for the benefit of patrons.

The Cameo could fairly be described as a friendly, popular and successful cinema. It seats around 500 people. Only people who had bought admission tickets would be served if a licence were granted.

Mr J. Lindsay Stewart, advocate for the objectors, said, *inter alia*, there were, within 300 yards, 13 public houses.”

Note: The opening of the King’s Cinema was postponed on Thursday, January 21<sup>st</sup> 1914, “Due to a licence not being granted.” Strange but true; see the item on the King’s Cinema.

*Evening Dispatch*, Saturday, November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1963 Page 2

“At Dean Of Guild Court

The Court also gave permission for work to start on Edinburgh’s first cinema bar, to be installed at the Cameo Cinema, Tollcross, at a cost of about £1,000.”

***CARLTON, PIERSHILL***

*News*, Monday, December 16<sup>th</sup> 1935

**“THE CARLTON, PIERSHILL**

**WATCH FOR OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT”**

*News*, Wednesday, December 18<sup>th</sup> 1935

**“THE CARLTON SUPER CINEMA**

**PIERSHILL EDINBURGH**

**GRAND OPENING PROGRAMME**

**MONDAY FIRST, DECEMBER 23<sup>RD</sup>, at 2.30 p.m.**

**BY BAILLIE TOM STEVENSON**

**DICK POWELL in**  
***GOLD DIGGERS OF 1935 (A)***  
**And JOSEPHINE HUTCHISON in**  
***THE SACRED FLAME***

**Prices: 6d., 9d., 1s. All Including Tax"**

Extract from **1938 Cinema Buyers' Guide** page 173

"Carlton Cinema, Piershill  
Proprietor: Edinburgh Cinema Properties Ltd.  
Seating: 1,509"

*News*, Friday, February 27<sup>th</sup> **1959**

**"Another Edinburgh Cinema is to close**

Edinburgh is to lose another cinema, the ***Carlton*** in Piershill, which was built in **1935**. It is being closed because of the falling off in attendances.

The Carlton has a seating capacity of 1,400 and the notice advertising the sale stated that it is suitable for conversion to a factory, garage or business premises. It has a floor space of 12,000 square feet and a large car park at the rear.

Councillor **Robert Mc Laughlin**, a director of the cinema, told the Evening News today: "We are closing for the same reason as many other cinemas throughout the country. Business started falling off after the war (1939-45) but there has been a very big drop in the past 12 months.

Public habits have changed and many people have moved out of this area to new housing schemes. The cinema could easily be adapted for other purposes. The floor space is unusually large for a cinema."

Upset Price £25,000

The upset price asked for the Carlton is £25,000. Councillor McLaughlin said that its closing date was uncertain but it was likely to stay open for several more weeks. He wanted to keep the cinema open until a buyer had been found.

**Other Edinburgh Cinemas Closed In Recent Years**

In recent years several cinemas have closed in Edinburgh. These included: the ***Palace***, 15 Princes Street; the ***New Picture House***, 56 Princes Street; ***St Andrew Square Cinema***, Clyde Street, destroyed by fire; the ***New Palace Cinema***, High Street; and the ***Alhambra***, Leith Walk.

Bell & Co (Transport) Ltd.

Soon after the Carlton Cinema closed Messrs Bell made extensive alterations and took possession during 1960. [In the 1970's the site was obtained by Safeway for a supermarket. When Safeway extended their premises in **1993** my wife and I saw the last vestige of the Carlton Cinema, part of the terrazzo at the entrance to the cinema's doorway, being covered with earth by gardeners who were planting shrubs opposite the pedestrian crossing in Piersfield Terrace G.F.B.]

***CINEMA HOUSE, 18 NICOLSON STREET***

*News*, Monday September 11<sup>th</sup> **1911** Advertisement

***CINEMA HOUSE***

***18 NICOLSON STREET (OPPOSITE EMPIRE THEATRE)***

**CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE DAILY FROM 2.30**

**MONDAY, TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY**

**THE STIRRING COWBOY DRAMA  
*THE CALL OF THE OPEN RANGE***

**AFTERNOON TEAS SERVED GRATIS TO ALL VISITORS  
BETWEEN 3.30 and 5.30**

**ADMISSION: 6d and 1s."**

The *Cinema House* was the first picture house to institute 'continuous' performances, from 2.30 to 10.30. Their offering to provide a free 'cuppa' to 'visitors' was a novelty.

The Cinema House was next door to the Surgeons' Hall. At one time in its history it was known as the *North British Electric Theatre*. It will be agreed at this late date (1963) that the title was quite a mouthful. It was, however, in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the custom to indulge in long-winded names, for example, the full title of the *Empire Theatre* was the *Empire Palace Theatre of Varieties* – now wonder it was contracted to *Empire*.

Those of us who saw the 'Commercial' Silent Films, which started to go 'out' in the year **1930**, just after the advent of Sonny Boy with **Al Jolson** in the *New Princes Street*, in June **1929**, will remember that when a 'Big' picture was going the rounds it was the occasion for the 'Standing Only' notice to go up. It was on one such an occasion, to see for the second time *Quo Vadis*, that I paid a visit to the *Cinema House*.

**The Tireless Pianist**

I can still remember the lady pianist pounding away on the 'ivories'; my goodness, there was no let up for her, or for any of her colleagues in other houses. She had to switch from the tender love scene to imitate the thundering hooves of horses out in the *Wild West*. The sound of shooting was simply the sound of a cane being brought down sharply on a leather covered

chair, or a drum was brought into service when a battle scene was being enacted to imitate the 'roar' of the guns.

The most incredible memory I have anent the Cinema House is that of a child, unaccompanied, on a Saturday afternoon, from opening time until about six o'clock. He saw the show twice [Methinks the author also saw the show twice that day G.F.B.] and called for a cup of tea and two biscuits, all the while ignoring the notice on the screen, "All patrons who have witnessed the entire programme are earnestly requested to vacate their seats in favour of those standing." All for 3d., and 6d. for adults, that is, those who were 'doon' stairs.

A great battle raged in the early days: will it be 'continuous showing' or will it be 'twice nightly', 7 and 9? Certainly the staff of those houses who favoured the two houses nightly had a little time on their hands, if for nothing else than to air the premises. For as long as I could remember the *Empire* always favoured two houses, except for big musicals such as *Showboat*. Picture houses, however, began to drop the practice of conducting two houses, and in turn, they all adopted the 'continuous showing', at the same time intimating times of showing the 'big' or main feature film.

To impress upon their patrons how big or long a picture was, it was generally advertised, for example, 2,000 feet, or again, a film might be described in so many reels. Sometimes the reels would get mixed up and the ensuing blackout was the signal for blasts of piercing whistles. It was all accepted in good part and the *Wild Indians* would again be seen attacking the *Lonely White Man*.

You see, I was at the 'flicks' before the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; before motor cars were commonplace, in Edinburgh at least; before Marconi had his wireless working; before Radio, ach, before anything that now is. Yet those early days of the Silent Moving Pictures will remain with me as a fond memory till the end of the road.

That I was, at one time or another, in some awful joints, I do not deny; for the very good reason there 'wis nae ither place tae go tae'.

To go to the *New Picture House*, 56 Princes Street, was gie near an occasion for evening suit at its opening. Talk aboot posh – that's no' the word for it. Door-attendants done up like Field Marshals and usherettes then could take the shine off present day Air Hostesses.

The Princes Street 'Berties' could not entice the Kimley Benk 'Jessies', or the lassies from the delectable district of Morningside, with motor cars. The 'Berties' would take their 'clicks' home from the pictures all the way for a 2d, tram car run. Don't any of you young things who may read this history any time up to the year **2000** think that your great-great-granda or maw were **squares** – you could be very far off the mark.

Well, life in the main carried on when the Cinema House was in being in the manner described above, and, I think, that some reminiscences of such a character should be appended throughout this history.

Extract from the **1915 Kinematograph Year Book** page 468

"Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street  
Proprietor: North British Electric Theatres. Seats: 550"

I show another extract from the same source, to illustrate the point that the Cinema House was part of a big combine.

Page 503, Picture Companies and Theatre Proprietors, Registered Offices

“London and Provincial Electric Theatres Ltd.  
Address: West End House, 3,4,5 76 Rupert Street, London W  
Secretary: W.S.Redfern”

Eleven Picture Houses were shown including the Cinema House.

The following Press Advertisement is the only one of its kind I can recall out of **many dozens** I have scrutinised throughout this history.

*News*, Saturday, May 24<sup>th</sup> **1930**

**“CINEMA HOUSE**

**SEPTEMBER 11, 1911    MAY 24, 1930**

**On The Last Day of the Cinema House  
18 Nicolson Street**

**The Management Desire to Extend to All Patrons, Old and New, their Appreciation of  
their Support during the Many Years this Theatre has been I Existence**

**C.Drysdale, manager**

**TODAY**

**Mildred Harris in *Sea Fury*  
Also  
*The Love of the Atlantic*”**

In time, after the closing of the Cinema House, the premises were converted for the use of the Salvation Army Divisional Headquarters, Edinburgh & South-East of Scotland. **Congress Hall** was opened on Wednesday, April 5<sup>th</sup> **1935** by **Lady Sands**, wife of **Lord Sands**, a Senator of the High Court of Justiciary. **Lord Wark**, also a Senator of the High Court, was Chairman of the meeting.

***COLISEUM, 125 FOUNTAINBRIDGE***

It will be well to write a few words about the district in which the Coliseum Picture House stood for 30 years, that is from 11<sup>th</sup> December **1911 to 1942**. To pass along that busy thoroughfare today, **1963**, it hardly seems credible that, as recently as the first decade of the 20th Century, it was little better than, in appearance, the purlieu of some country village which had been left to decay.

From Lothian Road or Earl Grey Street out as far as Dundee Street the 'main' road was narrow. Bit by bit, a piece here and there was demolished so that in the 1960's it had the semblance of being almost fit enough to carry the huge load of traffic every hour of the day. If one would care to see how narrow Fountainbridge was in the not so long ago, see that part of the street immediately west of Grove Street.

The first city slaughterhouse was built in **1851** and remained there, on the site on which Tollcross School now stands, until **1910**, when it was removed to Slateford. That movement was only one of a number changes made at that time and great credit must be bestowed on Lord Provost **Brown** who played a big part in making a goodly part of the city beautiful. It came about in this manner.

#### Lothian Road Board School

Source: *1910-11 Minute Books of the Edinburgh School Board, 9 South Castle Street Edinburgh.*

The school was built in **1880**; Mr George Robertson, from West Port School, was elected the first Head Master and, incidentally, the last Head Master was Mr Kenneth Whitton, in **1910**.

#### Usher Hall

To comply with the terms of Mr Andrew Usher's bequest of £100,000, in **1896**, it was incumbent upon the Town Council to find a suitable site for the Hall. The chain of events were as follows.

The Minutes of 21<sup>st</sup> March **1910** show that the School Board sold Lothian Road School to the Corporation for £8,500, subject to an annual feu-duty of £97. In turn, the Corporation sold the School Board two acres, or thereby, forming part of the site at Fountainbridge slaughterhouse at £5,242 per acre, subject to the existing feu-duty.

Lothian Road School was vacated on 17<sup>th</sup> March **1911**, some pupils going to West Fountainbridge School (an annexe for the New Street School of Building, in 1963). Some children were housed in a temporary building on the site in Fountainbridge on which the new school to take the place of Lothian Road School was being erected. The report concluded that when completed the new school would provide accommodation for 1,100 pupils.

The Town Council Minutes for June 29<sup>th</sup> **1910** confirm that Lothian Road School was purchased for £8,500 and £97 feu-duty

I believe that this is the first time that the story given above has appeared in print; it took some time to draw it together, but it was worthwhile. In any case it includes part of the history of Edinburgh's Entertainments.

#### The Canal

The Coliseum was numbered 125 Fountainbridge and at the opposite side of the street stood No. 92, now St Cuthbert's Co-operative Association Ltd., Head Office. In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century a 'Store' bakery was sited to the west of the Office.

The canal was adjacent to both Nos 125 and 92. A small wooden hump-back bridge carried the traffic over the canal; this could be raised, in two parts, to allow barges into Port

Hamilton (on which site the huge ‘Store’ Bakery was built between **1921-23**). Eventually an iron drawbridge was built over the canal at the junction of Fountainbridge and Gardener’s Crescent; but with the running down of the coal trade on which Port Hamilton depended, the bridge was removed in **1920** and resited at Mill Lane (Gilmore Park) at the Lochrin Basin of the canal.

The canal, however, carried on and under another hump-back bridge into the basin of Port Hopetoun, which was virtually square and was enclosed on the north by Morrison Street, on the east by Lothian Road, on the south by Fountainbridge and on the west by Semple Street. All the premises within that square now stand on the site of the old canal basin, including, of course, one of the leading Picture Houses in the city, namely the ***Regal***, now the ***ABC***, opened on Monday October 10<sup>th</sup> **1938**, at which I was a guest of the management.

#### Gardener’s Crescent

This did not become a through road until after the canal was drained and filled up, which would be in line with the building of the ‘Store’ Bakery. A small foot-path was the only access from Morrison Street to Fountainbridge.

The removal of the slaughterhouse saw the last of live cattle, sheep, etc on the hoof, not only in Fountainbridge, Grassmarket, West Port and Valleyfield Street, but throughout the city.

That, then, is a short piece of history of the district wherein I spent many happy times in the ***Collie*** and in the Skating Rink prior to the emergence of the Coliseum Picture House.

*News*, Monday, December 11<sup>th</sup> **1911** Advertisement

### **“PROPRIETORS THE COLISEUM (EDIN.) CO. LTD. WEST FOUNTAINBRIDGE**

#### **FINEST & LARGEST PICTURE HALL IN EDINBURGH**

**Opening Ceremony will take place on Thursday, December 14<sup>th</sup> (1911) at 3 o’clock Afternoon, at which Colonel Sir Robert Cranston, K.C.V.O., V.D., LL.D., has kindly consented to preside and to declare the building open to the Public.**

**The Hall will be open to the Public the Same Evening,**

**TWICE NIGHTLY 7 9**

**EARLY DOORS 6.30 & 8.30**

**A Spacious and Comfortable Lounge for Early Door Patrons between Performances.**

**ALL STAR PERFORMANCES**

**PROGRAMME INCLUDES**

**SAM THOMSON**

**Edinburgh’s Favourite Scotch Comedian;  
the Original ‘Postie’ at the King’s Theatre Pantomime 1910-11**

and  
**MISS CISSIE THOMSON**  
**The Hit of Last Year's Leith Pantomime**

**Prices: Pit, 3d.; Pit Stalls, 4d.; Balcony Stalls, 6d.; Family Circle, 9d.  
Front Rows, 1s."**

In course of time the threepennies became the Front Rows.

*News*, Friday, December 15<sup>th</sup> **1911**

"Opening of the Coliseum Edinburgh

A transformation has been effected on the interior of the one-time *Grand Roller Skating Rink, Fountainbridge*, the place having been fitted up as a picture-house and opened yesterday under the name of the *Coliseum*.

The stage has been fitted up at the south end of the building, and four classes of seats have been erected with spacious promenades on either side, seating accommodation having been provided for 1,500 persons.

The Manager of the entertainment is Mr **Thomas Watt**. Mr. **John Baird** presided over a large number of guests.

Sir Robert Cranston said in the course of his Opening Address, "If they did nothing else, amusement promoted temperance amongst the people and those shows were going a long way to create a better state of society, and money was better spent there than in the public house." Applause.

Ex Baillie Forrest moved a vote of thanks to Sir Robert Cranston for declaring the Coliseum open.

A cinematograph display was afterwards given. The Coliseum is the largest picture house in the city."

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

"Coliseum, 125 Fountainbridge  
Proprietor: Coliseum (Edinburgh) Co., Ltd.  
Seats, 1,800"

**THE PALAIS DE DANSE**  
**Same address as the Coliseum Picture House**

The *Pally* was opened by the Palais de Danse and Cinema Company on Friday December, **1920**. The drawings from the Opening Night, approximately £170, were donated to the funds of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

In the 1920's there were Two Sessions of dancing: 3 to 6 p.m., 2s.6d. and 7.30 to 11 p.m., 3s.6d.

I remember in the early 1930's the gallery was opened to non-dancers, such as myself, at a modest charge. It was pleasant to watch the dancing in the afternoon.

*Dispatch*, Saturday, February 13<sup>th</sup> 1954

I came across a little snippet in this issue to the effect that the *Coliseum* had closed in the year 1942.

### ***COOKE'S CIRCUS PICTURE PALACE, EAST FOUNTAINBRIDGE***

We who lived in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century knew that **John Henry Cooke** went on tour with his circus after the winter season in Edinburgh. In 1908 the premises were used from the April to October for the presentation of moving pictures: see page 184 of the *News*, February 21<sup>st</sup> 1908 intimating the closing of the 1907-08 Winter Season; and the *News* of April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1908 and October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1908 intimating the start and end of the moving picture season..

It will be seen that some of the customers entered from the High Riggs. This may not convey much to the reader but the admission price may give a clue. A circus ring is an awkward place to drape a picture screen; that being so, the threepenny customers viewed the screen from the rear; in consequence, all the pictures being silent had sub-titles, which appeared back-to-front. This handicap was treated in a good humoured manner and it did not take long to learn the art of reading captions, pronto.

### ***COUNTY, WAUCHOPE AVENUE, CRAIGMILLAR***

The *County*, formerly the *Rio*, which was destroyed by fire in 1946. The County opened in 1950.

In the autumn of 1962 I took the trouble to pay a visit to the owner of the County, who traded under the name of Mr **Paulo**, but whose name I believe was Mr **Butcher**. Under no circumstances would any member of the family give information about the cinema which is adjacent to a grocer's shop. Mr Butcher was the only cinema owner who refused to give me any information. However, I got the 'gen' necessary to put it on the map. The intervention of the fire cause a four year gap, which took me three hours to track to its source.

*News*, Tuesday, August 29<sup>th</sup> 1950

**"County, Craigmillar**

**Matinee Daily 1.30 Evenings Continuous from 5.0**

**Robert Paige in *Red Stallion* (U) (In Colour)**

**Donald O'Connor in *Feudin', Fussin' and A'Fightin'* "**

In **1962** the County became a dual purpose house, that is, two nights for Bingo; the other nights for pictures. The County went over to Bingo full-time during October-November **1963**.

*News*, Saturday, September 20<sup>th</sup> **1913**

***DALKEITH PICTURE HOUSE***

***Quo Vadis?***

**OPEN NIGHTLY ALL THE YEAR ROUND**

**Prices: 4d., 6d. and 1s."**

I have included this advertisement as it was the first picture house announcement I came across from outside Edinburgh.

***THE DEAN PICTURE HOUSE, 28 DEAN STREET, STOCKBRIDGE***

The entry for the *Pavilion* shows that it was situated at the above address in **1917**.

*News*, Saturday, May 10<sup>th</sup> **1930**

**"THE DEAN PICTURE HOUSE**

**OPENING ON MONDAY FIRST**

**28 DEAN STREET STOCKBRIDGE**

**ALL RECONDITIONED AND REDECORATED**

**BEST PICTURES JAZZ ORCHESTRA**

**EXCELLENT OPENING PROGRAMME**

**MONDAY – TUESDAY – WEDNESDAY**

**JACK HOLT IN THE SUPER PICTURE**

***SUBMARINE***

**A PICTURE WHICH TALKS FOR ITSELF**

**ALSO**

***BEWARE OF BACHELORS* WITH AUDREY FERRIS**

**THURSDAY - FRIDAY – SATURDAY**

***ABIE'S IRISH ROSE* WITH CHARLES ROGERS & NANCY CARROLL**

**Prices: 3d., 4d., 6d. Saturdays: 4d., 5d., 6d.”**

It will be seen from the entry on the *Pavilion, Stockbridge*, that the **1938 Cinema Buyers' Guide** recorded that there was seating for 900.

***DOMINION, NEWBATTLE TERRACE, CHURCHILL***

*News*, Saturday, June 19<sup>th</sup> **1937**

“The Edinburgh Dean of Guild Court have granted warrant for the erection of a new picture house at Newbattle Terrace, Morningside Road.

The application was by Mr **William M. Cameron**. The cinema will seat 1,500 and the cost is estimated about £25,000. It is hoped to open in the autumn. It will incorporate all the newest features in cinema construction.

An effort will be made to achieve the best acoustic properties, and a new type of lighting will be introduced. The architect is Mr **T. Bowhill Gibson**. F.R.A., I.S.

*News*, Saturday, January 29<sup>th</sup> **1938**

**“THE DOMINION  
NEWBATTLE TERRACE, CHURCHILL**

**EDINBURGH'S LATEST DE LUXE CINEMA THEATRE**

**OPENS**

**ON MONDAY FIRST, at 2.30 p.m. JANUARY 31, 1938**

***HIS AFFAIR***

**Prices: Balcony, 1s., Stalls, 9d., Front Stalls, 6d.**

**Matinee Prices till 4 p.m.”**

*News*, Tuesday, February 1<sup>st</sup> **1938** Page 8

A large picture of the Dominion appeared in the above issue of the *News*, showing a painter putting the finishing touches on the exterior.

*Evening Dispatch*, Friday, January 28<sup>th</sup> 1938 Advertisement

“The Dominion To Open On Monday (Monday January 31 1938)

It is estimated that only 16 weeks’ building time has been necessary for the erection of the Dominion Cinema, at the estimated cost of £25,000. Seating capacity between 1,300 and 1,400, two-thirds of which is in the Stalls.

#### A New Trend

The lighting system by Walters & Co., London, is on very modern lines. Three basic colours are used, red, blue and green, with the three colours hundreds of shade variations can be used.

There are two **Ross projectors**, and the sound is **R.C.A. High Fidelity de Luxe**, incorporating the new **Shearer Multihorn**, an invention of Norma Shearer’s brother

The owners of the cinema are **Granada Cinemas (Edinburgh) Ltd.** The promoter is captain **W.M. Cameron**, managing director of the company. Capt. Cameron, who will himself act as manager, has been associated with the cinema trade in Edinburgh for 12 years, with the *Lyceum* and the *Carlton*.

The chief operator is Mr **Peter McGregor**. The cinema will open with *His Affair*, starring **Robert Taylor and Barbara Stanwyck**, *I Cover the World*, will also be shown, starring **John Wayne and Don Barclay**.

1954 *Kinematograph Year Book*, pages 415-416

“Dominion, Churchill

Proprietor: N.M.Cameron, 15 Durham Drive, Portobello.

Seats: 1,369

Proscenium, 36 feet. Screen, 20 feet by 18 feet

Prices: 1s.6d. to 2s.5d.”

**The Scotsman**, Wednesday, January 30<sup>th</sup> 1963.

#### “Cinema Celebrates Silver Jubilee

The Dominion Cinema, Edinburgh, celebrates its Silver Jubilee on Saturday with a morning performance showing *The Castaways*, for 600 crippled children, and with a staff dance at night. The cinema built by the late William Cameron, aims at family audiences and never shows an ‘X’ film, a policy which has established a regular patronage of 8,000 a week. [When I was a pupil at Boroughmuir School we were taken to the Dominion in 1945/46 to see the film about the freeing of Belsen Concentration Camp; it may not have been rated ‘X’- it certainly was ‘horrific’. G.F.B.]

The co-directors are Mr Cameron’s son Derek and Mrs Cameron, his widow, who yesterday presented a tape recorder and refrigerator to Mr **William McLean**, chief projectionist, and a television set to Mrs **Lena Taylor**, chief usherette, in recognition of their 25 years’ service.”

***EASTWAY, EASTER ROAD***

*News*, Monday, May 17<sup>th</sup> 1943

**“EASTWAY (FORMERLY THE PICTURE DROME)  
TOP OF EASTER ROAD**

**FIRST PROGRAMME**

**JEANETTE McDONALD & NELSON EDDY in**

***I MARRIED AN ANGEL* (U)**

**JACK BUCHANAN in *THE MIDDLE WATCH* (U)**

**AND FULL SUPPORTING PROGRAMME**

**1954 *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 415 –416**

“The Eastway, Easter Road

Proprietor: George Palmer, Associated Gaumont British Cinemas, 149 West George Street, Glasgow.

Seats: 875. Proscenium Width, 30 feet.

Prices: 1s. and 1s.9d.”

The *Eastway* was converted into a supermarket around 1962.

***EMBASSY, BOSWALL PARKWAY, PILTON, GRANTON***

*News*, Monday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1937.

**“OPENING TODAY AT 5.30**

**THE EMBASSY**

**BOSWALL PARKWAY, PILTON, EDINBURGH  
(5 MINUTES FROM WEST END)**

**‘BUS NO. 19, QUEENSFERRY STREET**

**Myrna Loy, Spencer Tracy, Jean Harlow, William Powell**

**in *Libelled Lady***

**Also 20 minutes of ‘Popeye’ in Colour, etc.**

**Continuous from 5.30. Wednesdays and Saturdays, from 2.0**

**Prices: Front Stalls, 6d.; Stalls, 9d., Balcony, 1s.**

**Afternoon Prices, Wednesdays and Saturdays: 4d. & 6d.**

**No Half-Price”**

**1954 *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 416-416**

“Embassy, Boswall Parway, Granton

Proprietor: Granton Cinema Co. Ltd., 5 Coates Place, Edinburgh.

Seats: 1,500. Proscenium, 36 feet. Stage, 15 feet deep. Screen, 25 feet by 19 feet..

Two Dresssing Rooms.

Prices: 1s. to 2s.3d.”

I had the pleasure of meeting the Manageress of the Embassy, Mrs **Haig**, on Thursday, October 11<sup>th</sup> **1962**. It was from her chief projectionist that I received the loan of the 1915 Kinematograph Year Book.

As a result of a fire, the seating was reduced to 1,350.

***EVAN’S PICTURE PALACE, SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS, MORNINGSIDE***

The above and six other picture houses occupied the same site at various times between **1912** and **1937**. I will give details of all of them under the heading of *Morningside Hall*.

*News*, Saturday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, **1914**

**“EVAN’S PICTURE PALACE  
SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS**

**7 TWICE NIGHTLY 9**

**GRAND OPENING NIGHT**

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1914**

**We are running Two Special Feature Films, in Addition to the Most Stupendous  
Program of Pictures Ever Yet Shown to an Edinburgh Audience.**

**Prices: 3d., 4d., and 6d.”**

***GAUMONT, CANNING STREET***  
***Formerly The Rutland***

Perhaps it was the craze to indulge in the Take-Over that was the reason for so many cinemas changing their names. Whatever the cause, it has been disconcerting to marry the one with the other in a number of cases, for example, the Morningside Cinemas at Springvalley & Elm Row.

*News*, Saturday, March 4<sup>th</sup> **1950**

***“GAUMONT NEXT WEEK  
FORMERLY THE RUTLAND***

**OPEN 1.30, MONDAY, MARCH 6, 1950**

**THE NEW JOLSON PICTURE**

**LARRY PARKS**

***JOLSON SINGS AGAIN (TECHNICOLOR)***

**2.10, 4.25, 6.40 AND 8.55”**

According to the *News*, the last *Rutland* programme took place on Friday March 3<sup>rd</sup> **1950**, when **Loretta Young & Celeste Holm** appeared in *Come To The Saddle (U)* and *Sand* in Technicolor.

1954 Kinematograph Year Book, pages 415-416

“Gaumont, Canning Street

Proprietor: Circuits Management Association Ltd. Albion House, 59 New Oxford Street,  
London.

Prices: 1s.9d. to 3s.1d.”

**Gaumont Guttled by Fire**

On Wednesday, May 30<sup>th</sup> **1962**, the *Gaumont* was destroyed by fire.

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, January 24<sup>th</sup> **1963**

**“The Gaumont Canning Street**

The future of another cinema, the Gaumont, Canning Street, Edinburgh, gutted by fire in May 30<sup>th</sup> **1962**, has not yet been decided. A London spokesman for Circuits Management Association, Ltd., said: “We have no news; there have been no further developments.”

Early last year the cinema was surveyed by the Rank Organisation officials making a report on which cinemas in the group would be suitable for conversion into ballrooms and bowling alleys.”

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, January 1963

**“Gaumont – Odeon  
Dispatch Christmas Scheme for  
Children and Old People**

**Deputy Editor Ends 52 Years Service  
Mr R.H.Leishman**

Mr **Robert H. Leishman**, deputy editor of the *Evening Dispatch*, retired yesterday after more than 52 years service on the paper broken only by his service in the Lothian and Border Horse and the Cameron Highlanders during the First World War.

Mr Leishman joined the *Evening Dispatch* staff in July 1911. He was, in turn, on the reporting staff, chief reporter, news editor and latterly deputy editor. During the Second World war he was second-in-command of the Home Guard unit formed in the offices of The Scotsman Publications Ltd.

Dispatch Christmas Gift Scheme

In 1948 Mr Leishman founded the Dispatch Christmas gift scheme for children and old people, in collaboration with Gaumont-Odeon and he personally directed the scheme every Christmas since then.

At a ceremony in the office yesterday (29/1/1963) presided over by Mr *Alaister M. Dunnet*, resident director and editor of *The Scotsman*, Mr **Max McAuslane**, editor of the *Evening Dispatch*, presented gifts to Mr and Mrs Leishman”

I am glad to record that Mr Leishman was never weary in well doing, especially the part he played in association with the Cinema.

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, April 30<sup>th</sup> 1963

**“Gaumont Site Not To be Rebuilt  
Site Will Be Sold**

One of Edinburgh’s largest cinemas, which was burned last year, is not to be rebuilt. The Rank Organisation has decided to dispose of the ruined Gaumont Cinema in Canning Street, and have put up the site for sale.

A Rank Organisation spokesman said yesterday there had been many enquiries about the site. He would give no indication of the price required. The decision not to rebuild the Gaumont leaves only two Rank cinemas in Edinburgh, the *New Victoria and Regent*, where formerly there were six\*.

Consideration was given to redeveloping the Gaumont as an entertainment centre, with dance hall, bowling alley, and cinema. No repair work has been carried out since the fire, and only the walls and the foyer remain standing.

The Gaumont had more than 2,000 seats”

- The other three were *St Andrew Square Cinema*, Clyde Street, which was not replaced after it was destroyed by fire on 12<sup>th</sup> November **1952**; the *New*, No. 56 Princes Street, demolished to make way for Marks and Spencer; the *Capitol*, Manderson Street, Leith is now a Bingo Hall.

**HAYMARKET PICTURE HOUSE, 90 DALRY ROAD**  
(afterwards *The Scotia*)

According to my research the Haymarket was the first purpose-built Picture House in Edinburgh .

*News*, Saturday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, **1912**

**“HAYMARKET DALRY ROAD**

**OPENING NIGHT - FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1912**

**TWICE NIGHTLY 7 & 9**

**Prices: 2d., 4d., 6d.**

**PROGRAMME CHANGED TWICE WEEKLY”**

*News*, Tuesday, December 17<sup>th</sup> **1912**

“This picture house, which opened last week, is doing exceedingly well in the Dalry district, and an excellent programme was witnessed by two large audiences last night.

*The Prison Ship* is the star film for the earlier part of the week. It deals with an incident in the American War of Independence, showing the treatment aboard the prison ship, and with the usual romance interwoven.

Another fine drama is *The Double Cross*, while *Bill Becomes A Sailor* and *The Stubbornness of Youth* provide an abundance of amusement. *In the Parks of Paris* is a fine travel picture.”

Quite a lot to pack into two hours!

*News*, Tuesday, December 24<sup>th</sup> **1912**

“Haymarket Picture House

This picture house is now firmly established in public favour. The pictures submitted are of a high standard of merit; the subjects varied and interesting.”

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* page 468

“Haymarket Picture House, 90 Dalry Road.

Proprietor: Edinburgh Haymarket Picture House Ltd.”

As will be shown under *Scotia* it seated 638.

For several years, to my knowledge, the Haymarket had a *Friday Night Sing Song*, at which members of the audience were invited to do a turn. Friday nights in the 1920's generally had the "House Full" notice at the Pay Box.

*News*, Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup> 1931

**"Haymarket Dalry Road**

**Installed The Most Perfect Talking Picture Known to Science**

*Song of the Flame"*

**Change of Name from Haymarket to Scotia**

*News*, Saturday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1949

**"THE SCOTIA CINEMA DALRY ROAD**

**FORMERLY THE HAYMARKET"**

The advertisement went on to state that the *Scotia* would open on Thursday, September 1<sup>st</sup> 1949 with **David Niven and Margaret Lockwood** in *Bonnie Prince Charlie*.

***JACEY'S NEWS THEATRE, 131 PRINCES STREET***

To get the background of the *Jacey* see the item on the *Monseigneur* which followed the *Princess Cinema* on this site, be it said without previous advertisement, on Monday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1935. This information appeared on page 9 of *The Scotsman* of Tuesday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1935, in an article by the film correspondent.

Indeed, the closing of both the *Princess Cinema* and the *Monseigneur* would be worth reading for a second time.

The name *Jacey News Cinema* first appeared in a Press article as follows:

*News*, Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup> 1963

**"Princes Street Cinema to reopen by Christmas**

The Monseigneur News Theatre in Princes Street, Edinburgh, which has been closed since September 1962, will open again by Christmas, provided the £10,000 reconstruction work is completed in time.

It will be renamed the *Jacey News Theatre*. Mr George Cohen, managing director of Jacey Cinemas Ltd., Birmingham, who have 16 news and Continental film theatres in the main

centres of Britain, told an Evening News reporter today that attached to the cinema would be a modern snack-bar, replacing the old restaurant in the building.

Mr Cohen said that he was sorry that the cinema had had to be closed for such a long spell, “It certainly was not our intention that this should be so, “ he commented. “Originally the plan was to alter the restaurant only, but it was discovered later that other alterations would also have to be made. The auditorium is now being redecorated and the foyer designed in contemporary style.”

Mr W. Mulligan, whose Yorkshire firm specialise in cinema alteration work, is on the site supervising the alterations. He said today that there was no reason why the cinema should not be opened by Christmas, provided work continued at its present rate. Floors had been reconstructed and the interior was now ready for painting. A further alteration to the building was the subject of a submission to the Dean of Guild Court.”

*The Scotsman*, Monday, January 20<sup>th</sup> 1964 Page 9 From an article by Allen Wright

“Another cinema which had been given up for lost reopens its doors today. The last surviving cinema in Princes Street, Edinburgh, the *Monseigneur* has been redecorated and renamed The *Jacey*.”

As stated above neither the opening of the Jacey, nor the name of the first picture was advertised; but from information received from my son, a large poster was set up in the foyer of the News Theatre stating to the effect that the Pope’s visit to the Holy Land would be screened on Monday, January 20<sup>th</sup> 1964

*News & Dispatch*, Tuesday January 21<sup>st</sup> 1964 Page 6.

### **“Jacey’s News Theatre**

#### **Prices of Admission – 20 January 1964**

**Front Stalls, 1s.6d; Back Stalls, 2s. 6d.; Balcony, 2s.6d**

**Special Opening Film, *Pope Paul’s Pilgrimage To The Holy Land*”**

### ***KING’S CINEMA, 38 HOME STREET*** **(Later the *Cameo*)**

In the beginning the story of the King’s Cinema was one of frustration and the words of Burns’ certainly apply, “The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men gang aft a-gley.”

The work of the scribe, who had a flair for poetry, who framed one of the advertisements almost 50 years ago, is worth recording, line by line.

*News*, Wednesday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1913

**“THE KING’S CINEMA  
(ALMOST OPPOSITE THE KING’S THEATRE)  
HOME STREET**

**NEW YEAR’S DAY AT 12 NOON**

**Will open to the Public. A Magnificent  
Programme of Pictures Has Been Arranged, And The  
Comfort of Patrons Has Been Fully Insured.**

**Prices of Admission: 6d. and 1s.**

**Children Half-Price to All Parts  
(New Year’s Day Excepted) to 6 p.m.**

**LADIES’ COSTUME ORCHESTRA”**

*News*, Thursday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1914

**“THE KING’S CINEMA  
(ALMOST OPPOSITE THE KING’S THEATRE)  
HOME STREET**

**OPENING UNAVOIDABLY  
POSTPONED  
FOR A FEW DAYS  
DUE TO LICENCE NOT BEING GRANTED**

**NOTIFICATION OF OPENING  
WILL BE GIVEN LATER”**

*News*, Thursday, January 8<sup>th</sup> 1914

**“KING’S CINEMA  
(NEAR KING’S THEATRE)**

**GRAND OPENING TODAY  
(THURSDAY) AT 2.30**

**Superlatives Having Been Exhausted As Applied  
To The City Picture Houses, The Directors Simply  
Ask The Public To Come And Judge For Themselves.**

**Prices. 6d. and 1s. Children Half-Price (Afternoons)**

**CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCES FROM 2.30 to 10.45  
MADAME EGGER’S LADIES’ COSTUME ORCHESTRA”**

Note: The reader may have observed some slight differences in the last two or three advertisements – very slight.

*News*, Tuesday, January 13<sup>th</sup> 1914

**“King’s Cinema**

The newest of Edinburgh’s many picture houses, the King’s Cinema, Home Street, is already receiving its fair share of public patronage. Last night a large crowd witnessed a lengthy programme and listened to the music of the ladies’ costume orchestra. *The Mystery of the Yellow Aster Mine* is a most sensational picture, and the fight between the miners and the Indians is both picturesque and exciting.

Three more dramatic subjects are contained in the bill, and very pathetic and touching is *Till The Day Breaks*. A delightfully pretty travel production and three merry-makers complete a flawless programme.”

**1915 Kinematograph Year Book**

“King’s Cinema, 32 Home Street.

Proprietor, Edinburgh & District Cine Theatres Ltd.

Seats, 650”

For comparison I show the entry for the Cameo in the 1954 edition of the Year Book. This shows a difference in the seating accommodation and ownership. The reduction in the seating might have resulted from removing some of the front stall seats where the sight lines were poor.

**1954 Kinematograph Year Book** Pages 415-416

“Cameo Picture House, Home Street

Proprietor: Poole’s Cameo, Room 18, Synod Hall, Edinburgh.

Prices: 2s.1d. to 4s.

Seats, 550.

*News*, Friday, April 15<sup>th</sup> 1915

**“KING’S KINEMA  
TOLL CROSS**

**KALEIDOSCOPE KEYSTONE KOMEDIES**

**KUM KWICK  
KUM KWICK  
KUM KWICK”**

The Advent of Talking Pictures To The King’s Cinema

News, Monday, April 28<sup>th</sup> 1930

**“THE KING’S CINEMA  
(OPPOSITE KING’S THEATRE)**

**TODAY AT 2.30**

**OPENING CEREMONY OF WESTERN ELECTRIC TALKIES  
BY  
LADY MARGARET SACKVILLE**

**TONIGHT AT 6.30      DOORS OPEN AT 6.**

**FIRST PERFORMANCE OF THE TALKING, SINGING AND DANCING PICTURE**

***MARRIED IN HOLYWOOD***

**A wonderful Waltz Number**

***Dance Away The Night***

**Talkie Comedies etc.**

**Admission Prices (Including Tax). Front Stalls, 6d., and 9d.;  
Back Stalls, 1s., and 1s.3d.”**

News, Tuesday, April 29<sup>th</sup> 1930

**“King’s Cinema Talkie**

The latest of the Edinburgh picture houses to go over from the silent films to the ‘talkies’ is the King’s Cinema at Tollcross.

By invitation of the directors, a large audience assembled for the inauguration of the ‘talkies’ yesterday afternoon. Mr **Robert Duncan**, solicitor, the managing director of the Edinburgh and District Cinema Theatres Ltd., who presided, said that there were many who would regret the passing of the silent film. But the public demand for the sound film could not be ignored, and it was up to them to meet the public demand.

Lady Margaret Sackville formally declared the installation open. The picture chosen to mark the transference was *Married in Hollywood*.”

Note: As I write, November **1963**, it is nigh on 50 years since the King’s Cinema opened, namely January 8<sup>th</sup> **1914**. I spent many happy nights with my family in the King’s Cinema.

***LA SCALA, 50 NICOLSON STREET***

*News*, Tuesday, December 24<sup>th</sup> 1912

***“La Scala***

**Electra Theatre, Nicolson Street**

**Ye Olde Princess Theatre**

**Grand Opening**

**Tuesday, December 31 1912**

**Under the direction of Mr Ralph Pringle**

**Continuous Performance from 2.30 till 10.45**

**Entirely Reconstructed and Redecorated, Ventilated,  
and Heated on the most Approved Plans; nothing but the best at La Scala**

**Entire Change of Programme MONDAY & THURSDAY**

**Prices: Grand Circle, 9d.; Circle, 6d; Fauteuils, 6d; Stalls, 6d.”**

Note: I first mentioned **Ralph Pringle** anent his first visit in **1907** to the Synod Hall with the North American Animated Picture Company; in **1908**. Pringle’s Picture Palace, Grove Street; and in **1910**, with reference to Elm Row.

*News*, Tuesday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1912

**“LA SCALA, NICOLSON STREET**

**GRAND OPENING**

**TONIGHT, TUESDAY AT 7.30**

***CUSTER’S LAST FIGHT*  
AND**

***THE SHUTTLE OF FATE*  
Featuring Maurice Costello”**

**1915 *Kinematograph Year Book*, page 468**

“La Scala Electra Theatre, Nicolson Street, ‘Ye Olde Princess Theatre’  
Proprietor: La Scala Ltd.  
Seats, 800”

Extract from **1938** *Cinema Buyers' Guide*, page 173: "La Scala. Proprietor: Peter Crerar. Seats, 800"

**1954** *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 415 – 416

"La Scala, 50 Nicolson Street.

Proprietor: La Scala Ltd.

Seats, 800; Prices: 1s. to 2s.1d.; Stage 12 feet deep; Two Dressing Rooms."

Note: In **1916** the title was shortened to its present one, La Scala.

In the chapter, "50 Nicolson Street" which covers the period from 1862 to 1912, I quote from a *Dispatch* article, dated March 21<sup>st</sup> **1950**, entitled 'La Scala was an old Playhouse'. The original theatre, the *New Alhambra*, had seating for 1,500. It is not clear how or when the seating was reduced to 800; a possible clue is that in **1884** the theatre was reopened after extensive repairs.

*News*, Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup> **1914**

**"LA SCALA  
YE OLDE PRINCESS THEATRE**

**STAGE ALTERATIONS**

**Extensive Stage Alterations are Now Complete,  
and the Management Beg to Announce that**

**HIGH CLASS VARIETY**

**Will now be a Feature of our High Class Entertainment. Among the Many Attractions  
to be submitted in our Programme on**

**MONDAY – TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY**

**Are**

**The Sligo Sisters in their Irish Speciality. A treat to all Music Lovers.**

*The Food of the Gods* Interest & Instructive

*The Receiving Cashier* Splendid Drama

**The La Scala Orchestra, under the direction of Mr W.T. Beveridge. Leader and Solo  
Violinist, Mr G. Sowerbutts, (over 25 years with the Halle Orchestra)**

**PICTURE MATINEE SATURDAY AFTERNOONS FROM 2.0**

**PRICES AS USUAL"**

Writing in November 1963, it is pleasing to record that the La Scala is one of the very few Edinburgh picture houses now well into its second 50 years.

***LAURISTON HALL, LAURISTON STREET***

An old friend was quite surprised to learn that for a period the **Lauriston Hall** was, to all intents, a commercial picture house. Indeed, I had to prove it to him. That is the beauty of the Advertisement: it is phrased to suit the wishes of the advertiser and is not, as a rule, at the whim of the editor. Suffice it to say, my old friend accepted the situation, although he shook his head – whether in sorrow or not I could not determine.

*News*, Saturday, December 21<sup>st</sup> **1912**

**“LAURISTON HALL, LAURISTON STREET, TOLLCROSS  
TELEPHONE – 2472 CENTRAL (NEXT TO THE SACRED HEART)**

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 23, and through the Christmas and New Year Holidays, will  
be the Resort of the Elite of the City.**

**ANIMATED PICTURES**

**Provided by the Management of the *Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street***

**Prices: 6d.; 1s.; 1s.6d; and 2s.**

**ALL DAY, CHRISTMAS DAY, FROM 1.30**

**FASHIONABLE ORCHESTRA**

*News*, Tuesday, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1912**

**“Lauriston Hall**

The pictures at the Lauriston Hall are of a varied character, with much human interest, and, the screen being a big one, the subjects are clearly visible.

*The Death Sentence* Drama

*The Spy Mania* Comedy

*Heligoland – or the Gibraltar of Germany”*

Note: Just one of those things – Heligoland loomed large in the War News of the First and Second World Wars. The heavily fortified island was surrendered to Great Britain on May 23<sup>rd</sup> **1945**; demilitarised in **1947**, that is, the submarine pens were destroyed; and returned to West Germany on March 1<sup>st</sup> **1952**.

**1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* page 468**

“Lauriston Hall, Lauriston Street.  
Proprietor: Rev J.B. McLuskey.”

**LYCEUM CINEMA, SLATEFORD ROAD**

*News*, Saturday, November 6<sup>th</sup> 1926

**“THE LYCEUM CINEMA, SLATEFORD ROAD**

**6.30 CONTINUOUS 10.30**

**5.30 SATURDAYS 10.30**

**OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Monday, 8<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER (1926) at 2.30 P.M.**

**THE RT. HON. LORD PROVOST STEVENSON**

**WILL OPEN THIS THEATRE**

**AN OUTSTANDING PROGRAMME WILL BE SUBMITTED INCLUDING:**

***THE GREATER GLORY***

**Featuring Conway Tearle, Anna Q. Nillson, &c.**

**Supported by**

***TOO MUCH WIFE***

**A brilliant comedy drama featuring Wanda Hawley**

**THE LYCEUM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA will be under the direction of  
MR. HERBERT MORE, of Broadcasting Fame.**

**Note: Net Proceeds of the Opening Performance will be Entirely Devoted to Charity**

**Prices: Stalls, 9d., Balcony 1s.3d”**

*News*, Tuesday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1926

**“Lyceum Cinema**

This new picture house has made a convincing start. Two thoroughly good films were shown this week. *The Greater Glory*, featuring **Conway Tearle**, and **Anna Q. Nillson** and **Wanda Hawley** in *Too Much Wife*.”

**1954 *Kinematograph Year Book* pages 415-416**

**“Lyceum Cinema, Slateford Road**

**Proprietor: Associated British Cinemas, Ltd., 30/31 Golden Square, London, w.1.**

**Seats: 1,324”**

The **1938 *Cinema Buyers’ Guide*** also gave the seating as 1,324.

An article which appeared in *The Scotsman*, Saturday, April 1<sup>st</sup> **1961**, stated that it was to close on Saturday, April 8<sup>th</sup> **1961**. It had been a very popular cinema which catered for the Gorgie and Shandon districts of the city. A spokesman for the ABC chain said that low admissions made it uneconomic to continue.

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup> **1963**

**“Lyceum Bingo Club Burned Down**

The Lyceum Bingo Club was burned down early today. It closed down as a picture house in April **1961**. It changed ownership to ABC in 1936. It seated 800.”

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, November 9<sup>th</sup> **1963** STOP PRESS

**“Bingo Club Fire**

Fire swept Lyceum Bingo Club, Slateford Road, Edinburgh, early this morning. Fire engines, five in all, raced to the scene. This was the second fire in a year at the club.”

*Dispatch*, Saturday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, **1963** “Bingo Fire. Damage £15,000.”

***THE LYRIC, 30 NICOLSON SQUARE***

*News*, Friday, August 14<sup>th</sup> **1914**

**“THE LYRIC, 30 NICOLSON SQUARE  
(LATE THE SILVER KINEMA)**

**Opens Saturday first - 15 august 1914**

**3 till 10.15**

**Prices: 6d. and 9d. A few reserved seats, 1s.”**

Note 1: On page 2 of this issue of the *News* is a photograph of *The Lyric*.

Note 2: The prices for the *Silver Kinema* on 15 September **1913** were: 2d.; 4d.; 6d.; and 9d. reserved

**1915 Kinematograph Year Book** Page 468

“Picture Palace, 30 Nicolson Square.

Proprietor: Edinburgh Photoplay House, Ltd.”

If there was a cinema named ‘Picture Palace’ at 30 Nicolson Square, I did not come across it in my research. On the same page of the Year Book there was this entry, “*Silver Kinema*, Nicolson Square”.

On page 93 of the **1915** Year Book there was this reference to the *Lyric*:  
“New Companies Registered During the Year to August 1914:  
Lyric Picture Theatre (Edinburgh) Ltd.  
Capital £800 in £1 shares.”

I understand that the introduction of the ‘talkies’ put paid to the Lyric in **1930**. I do know that Messrs. Parker (Bristo) used the old cinema as a furniture store.

***MONSEIGNEUR, 131 PRINCES STREET  
(FORMERLY THE ‘PRINCESS THEATRE’)***

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> **1935** Page 9

**“NEWS-REEL THEATRE  
PRINCES STREET HOUSE OPENED  
FIRST IN SCOTLAND**

The *Monseigneur News Theatre* is the first cinema in Scotland to show exclusively news film, was opened in Princes Street, Edinburgh, yesterday.

It occupies the site of the former *Princess Cinema*, which closed on November 4<sup>th</sup>(1935), the reconstruction and decoration having been completed in one month.

The venture had an auspicious send-off yesterday (writes our film correspondent). Although the redecoration is not yet complete in detail, a remarkable transformation has been effected, and yesterday’s initial audience was attracted by the inviting appearance of the cinema and the comfortable accommodation. Formerly the cinema seated about 600 but the rearrangement now gives comfortable accommodation for about 350. The screen is bright, and the sound reception is excellent.

Sir **John C. Watson, K.C.**, presided at the opening ceremony yesterday, and in the course of his remarks paid tribute to the cultural value of the cinema. Most of us found our life, though limited, rather intense, he said, but we all had a great interest in what was far away. The stranger from a strange lands with a story to tell could always gather willing listeners. But in our modern world, our friend ‘Mr Gossip’ and the stranger from strange parts were transmuted into the moving picture. Among the things which had most affected the life of our people, the moving picture (with its sound recording) and the wireless were the two most striking.

We now understand better than at the start, Sir John continued, how to impart artistry into the new mode of possible artistic expression. We had rapidly gone through the emotional experience of all classes and types, from the crude drama, the ‘shilling shocker’ type of thing and the heroics of Buffalo Bill and his Wild West to the news picture and the artistic expression by sight and sound in this marvellous technique of the world’s great stories

**Cinema and Community**

The house which they were opening marked a new stage in the development of pictures in the life of the community. It was cultural in its appeal. It was selective and discriminating in the

type of scene which it laid before us. It brought the world to our door in news, brought the beauty of strange climes to our present view. Without being too didactic, it would seek to be educational. It was complementary to the Press in seeking to present a series of events which made a seam of history.

Mr **Alaistair McDonald**, the architect son of Mr **Ramsay McDonald** (Labour Prime Minister) also spoke, and Mr Jack Davis replied on behalf of the directors of Scottish Associated News Theatres.

The first programme on view yesterday extended to about 90 minutes, and included an extended version of **British Movietone News**, with sections devoted to Europe, America and Australia; a brief scenic film of the *Dee at Aberdeen*; *Spider's Web*, a nature film; *Darkest Africa*, a travel film; *Musical Queen's*; and *Noah's Ark*, a Disney cartoon.

Later in the evening the cinema was well patronised by the general public.”  
*News*, Saturday, January 25<sup>th</sup> 1936

**“MONSEIGNEUR NEWS THEATRE**  
**PRESENTS**  
**EXCLUSIVE PICTURES**  
**EDINBURGH GEORGE Vth MEMOIR**  
**AND**  
**LATEST NEWS, FROM EVERYWHERE**  
**Open 11 A.M. TILL 11 P.M.**

**1938** *Cinema Buyers' Guide* Page 173

“Monseigneur News Theatre, 131, Princes Street  
Proprietor: Scottish Associated News Theatre.  
Seats: 347. Prices: 1s. to 2s.1d.”

The statement about ‘comfortable accommodation’ is borne out by the reduction in seating from the 520 during the *Princess* era to 347.

*Dispatch*, Wednesday, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1960

**“City News Cinema is Sold**

A Princes Street, Edinburgh, cinema, the Monseigneur, one of a group of eight, has been bought by a Birmingham firm. The other seven Monseigneur news cinemas are all in the West End of London.

The buyers are **Jacey Cinemas Ltd.** The sale followed the death of Mr **Jack Davis**, founder and managing director of the Monseigneur group. The deal was handled by Harris and Gillon, agents and valuers, of Wardour Street, London.

A spokesman for the Monseigneur group said that all the cinemas would be run ‘just as they are’.”

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, October 26<sup>th</sup> 1961

### **“International Film Theatre Planned Edinburgh Cinema Scheme**

An English company are considering a scheme to provide an international film theatre in Princes Street, Edinburgh. The company are Jacey Cinemas, Ltd., of Birmingham, who control 18 cinemas in London and the provinces, including the Monseigneur News Theatre in Princes Street.

As Edinburgh architect is preparing a report on the suitability of adapting the Monseigneur Theatre. The project would mean that the existing premises would be improved and possibly extended, with an extra floor added to the building.

In Birmingham, a spokesman for the company added that the scheme might be shelved unless the company were allowed to open seven days a week. “So far, we have always been refused permission to run **Sunday shows** in Edinburgh,” he complained.

Lord Provost **J. Greig Dunbar** of Edinburgh admitted that then officials had been against Sunday opening in the city; “But we haven’t considered this for some time, and it is always open to anyone to make an application,” he added.”

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, January 1963

### **“Cinema’s Future Uncertain Structural Faults At the Monseigneur Report Awaited**

The future of the Monseigneur Cinema, Princes Street, Edinburgh, is in doubt. Originally opened as a cinema more than 50 years ago it may close as a structural survey shows the cost of bringing the building up to standard is prohibitive. The cinema was closed three and a half months ago so that a new restaurant floor could be put in, but work revealed other defects. (Closed for alterations in October 1962)

Mr George Cohen, managing director of Jacey Cinemas, Ltd., Birmingham, said yesterday that an Edinburgh firm began a survey about two weeks ago, and the first report was that the building had undergone alterations about ten times through its life. Mr Cohen added that he expected the firm’s report in 2 or 3 weeks but emphasised that no decision had yet been made.

Ticking over

Jacey Cinemas took over the Monseigneur over two and a half years ago when they acquired the controlling group. Asked if it made a profit, Mr Cohen said, “We have just been ticking over.” ”

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, February 19<sup>th</sup> 1963

**“Cinema Survey Completed  
Monseigneur May Become A Store**

The management of the Monseigneur Cinema, Princes Street, Edinburgh, are considering three possibilities for its future. The Monseigneur was closed more than three months ago when work on in its restaurant revealed structural defects; this resulted in the management's request for a full survey by an Edinburgh firm.

Mr George Cohen, managing director of Jacey Cinemas, Ltd., Birmingham said yesterday that the survey showed to be 'a reasonably happy one'.

Store Proposal

There were three possibilities:

They would do the minimum necessary to reopen the cinema quickly; completely modernise the building; or go ahead with an expensive redevelopment as a store.

“Before we do anything, though, we will look into the more ambitious schemes. We may even do away with the possibility of having a cinema there at all.”

The Monseigneur is the only remaining cinema in Princes Street. It was opened more than 50 years ago (September 14<sup>th</sup> 1912). Jacey Cinema took over the Monseigneur in 1960.” (*Jacey's News Theatre* opened in January 1964)

***MORNINGSIDE HALLS, 12 SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS***

Long before these Halls were used for the purpose of showing moving pictures, they were given over to concerts and religious meetings, not unlike the *Livingstone Halls*, South Clerk Street.

All told I have noted seven picture houses which have been associated with this site, two of which I failed to find in the advertisement columns of the Press, but, as is my wont, I give the source of my information in both cases, the *Morningside Play House* and the *Cine Playhouse*.

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

“*Morningside Photo Play House*, 12 Springvalley Gardens  
Proprietor: R.M. Ireland.  
Seats: 400”

Extract from **1920/21** *Edinburgh Street Directory*

“12 Springvalley Gardens, *Cine Playhouse*”

***MORNINGSIDE CINEMA, 12 SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS***

*News*, Monday December 27<sup>th</sup> 1915

**“MORNINGSIDE CINEMA  
SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS**

**GRAND HOLIDAY PROGRAMME**

**OPEN 2 till 11 p.m.**

**Stalls, 3d.; Balcony, 6d.”**

***MORNINGSIDE PICTURE HOUSE, 12 SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS***

*News*, Thursday, December 19<sup>th</sup> 1912

**“MAKE A NOTE OF THIS  
MORNINGSIDE HALL  
(12 SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS)**

**THE MORNINGSIDE PICTURE HOUSE**

**OPENING ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1912**

**With a COLOSSAL PROGRAMME of EXCLUSIVE and FEATURE FILMS.  
Provided by the EXPERT MANAGEMENT OF THE CINEMA HOUSE, 18  
NICOLSON STREET**

**Prices: Body of Hall, 3d. & 6d.  
Gallery, 9d. & 1s.**

**TWICE NIGHTLY 7 & 9**

**MATS. WEDS. & SATS AT 2.30**

**CHRISTMAS DAY  
CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE from 2.30 to 11.**

***THE REVOLUTION MARRIAGE* (EXCLUSIVE PICTURE) 2,000 feet**

***THE DEATH SENTENCE* 2,000 feet**

**And other STAR FILMS”**

*News*, Tuesday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1912

One of the cosiest and most entertaining programmes in town, at the Morningside Hall, and to those who do not care to make the journey into the city it is a welcome resort”.

## **MOSS' CARNIVAL, WAVERLEY MARKET**

### **First Moving Pictures?**

Now is the time, I think, to decide the questions: Where and When did Moving Pictures first appear in Edinburgh?

Fortunately the following information contained in *The Scotsman* of Saturday December 22<sup>nd</sup> **1894** can supply the answer.

### **“EDISON’S LATEST & MOST WONDERFUL INVENTION THE KINETOSCOPE**

**Marvellous and Living Pictures. Every Picture in Motion.  
Pronounced by the Press and all who have seen it to be the Most Remarkable of  
Mr.EDISON’S INVENTIVE GENIUS”**

In the chapter “The Story of Mr H.E.Moss...” I include an article which appeared in the *Dispatch* in August **1946**, which claimed that Edinburgh was the first city in Scotland to show moving pictures, on Monday April 13<sup>th</sup> **1896** at the *Empire Palace of Varieties*, when ‘Edison’s wonderful *Kinetoscope*’ was in use.

The calendar decides the issue in this case as to which was first; however, see the “Leith Amusements ...” chapter for **James Salvona’s** claim that when he was aged 15 he saw moving pictures in Mr Swallow’s booth in the Iona Street Showground in **1893**.

It finally boils down to the **Booth** and not the **Palace (Empire)** which was the first to show moving pictures in Edinburgh, always allowing that in **1893** the Iona Street Showground was in Leith.

*News*, Tuesday, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1912** page 4

### **“Talking Moving Pictures**

The *Daily Telegraph* New York correspondent wires: America’s New Year gift to the world will be moving pictures which will talk, not in mechanical, automatic fashion, but with a power that moves to tears and laughter. Something of the kind has not been attempted before, but the demonstration I have seen and heard of Edison’s latest **Kiteophone** marks the difference between imperfect attempt and definite achievement. It works in harmony with moving pictures.

Within a short time it is predicted, London productions will thereby be given the mining camps of America’s West. Great Musical Comedies, it is expected, will be ‘canned’ by the machine. Mr Edison thinks it is only a question of time ere the best actors will be performing their best roles before the camera.

After four years of the hardest work Mr Edison has perfected the machine so that it is what he refers to a ‘Fool Proof’ ”

I only record the ‘facts’ as I come across them. **Truth**, we are told, is the first casualty in War; but **Truth** is murdered every day between Wars.

***NEW ELECTRIC THEATRE, SHRUBHILL***

It is strange to think that children who had patronized the New Electric Theatre, and had not reached their teens, but gie near it, are as I write in November 1963, nearing retiring age. It is a thought; it is also a reminder that time does not stand still.

*News*, Friday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1909

**“NEW ELECTRIC THEATRE**

**NEXT LEITH WALK STATION (SHRUBHILL)**

**Don’t on any condition fail to see the**

**GREAT EASTERN BIOSCOPE of the 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY ANIMATED PICTURES**

**The finest ever shown in Edinburgh.**

**This week the latest Pantomime**

***BLUE BEARD***

**8 PERFORMANCES EACH DAY**

**Prices: 2d., 3d., 4d. & 6d.**

**Holidays. 3d., 4.d, 6d. & 9d.”**

The building which housed the New Electric Cinema Theatre was small, very small. If it seated 350 that, I think, would be HOUSE FULL. It was often full. Boys and girls had a field day on Saturday matinees when, on entering each child received a stick of rock with the words New Electric Theatre printed right through.

The building stood between Leith Walk Station and Shrubhill Tramway Depot; its steeple was in keeping with the building, it was tiny, and a clock gave it an air of distinction.

The *New Electric Theatre* became the *Petit Paris* on Friday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1909. The Petit Paris went out of business before the 1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* was published.

***NEW PALACE CINEMA, 20 HIGH STREET***

*News*, Monday October 14<sup>th</sup> 1929

**“GRAND OPENING**

**15<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER**

**NEW PALACE  
OPPOSITE JOHN KNOX’S HOUSE  
18-20 HIGH STREET**

**FIRST PRESENTATION IN EDINBURGH**

***THE GREAT PICTURE*  
ALL TALKING, SINGING, COMEDY and DANCING**

**WITH BELLE BENNETT AND A GREAT TALKING CAST**

***HER NEW CHAUFFEUR***

**OTHER SUPPORTING COLOSSAL ATTRACTIONS**

**TUESDAY, 15<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER BY TICKET ONLY AT 2 p.m.**

**OPEN TO PUBLIC, 5.30**

**PRICES: 4d., 6d., 9d. & 1s.”**

On page 8 of this issue of the *News* appeared a picture of the New Palace Cinema “Will seat 1,100 Both Talking and Silent.”

**1938** *Cinema Buyers’ Guide* page 173

“New Palace, High Street (Edinburgh)  
Proprietor: J.L.Lucas Seats: 1,050”

**1954** *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 415- 416

“New Palace Picture House, High Street, Edinburgh  
Lessee: J.Penn, 12 Cadogan Road, Liberton, Edinburgh.  
Seats: 950. Prices: 9d. to 1s.6d.”

*News*, Thursday, March 28<sup>th</sup> 1957

**“Cinema To Become A Food Hall?**

Edinburgh may lose another cinema. Yesterday the Planning Committee of Edinburgh Town Council were asked to consider whether they would allow the Palace Picture House, High Street, to become a Food Hall.

The Town Planning Officer, Mr T.T.Hewitson, said that the property was situated in an area zoned primarily for residential purposes, and although it was not affected by any scheme of redevelopment at present contemplated, it might be the subject of later reconstruction for housing purposes. The location of the property was at a particularly narrow part of the High Street, which might necessitate some control of loading and off-loading.

The Committee decided the applicant should be advised that, if a formal application was submitted and detailed plans were satisfactory, they would be prepared to grant consent for a proposed change of use for a limited period of ten years. It was stated that, in considering a formal application, the Committee might wish to impose, in the interests of the public, some restrictions on the hours during which loading and off-loading would take place.”

Suffice it to say the Town Council granted permission to Mr **J.L.Lucas** (the owner of the premises) to change the use to a Food Hall. In due course the Food Hall was opened in **1957** by **Alfie Conn and Jimmy Wardhaugh** two of Heart of Midlothian’s star players. The Food Hall closed down lang syne writing in November **1963**.

Note: **Conn, Bauld & Wardhaugh** [inside-right, centre-forward and inside-left respectively G.F.B.] were known as the “Terrible Trio”; they brought much glory to the Tynecastle Club.

### ***NEW PICTURE HOUSE, 56-57 PRINCES STREET***

This is the story of Edinburgh’s first posh, spelled with a capital ‘P’, cinema,

We who had the privilege to visit the *New*, as it was affectionately known, almost from the first, have fond memories of those early days. The cathedral silence which seemed to meet one on passing through the glass doors which lead to the auditorium. The carpets, one almost sank up to the ankles, so rich were they in the pile; they contributed to the ‘wall’ of silence. To many of us who had known other ‘pictier hooses’ it was a revelation.

On looking back those 50 years to the day the *New* opened in October **1913**, it was not only a revelation but a revolution which took place in **values**.

We were suddenly jerked out of the ever-day life, that is, as it applied to the masses. We glimpsed a **new** world; it seemed far removed from our reach, unattainable and not for common working people.

The First World War came and many of my comrades never came back to see the beautiful *New*, nor to tread the pavement of the most beautiful street in the world, in which a gem was set to further embellish the street. So that, 50 years hence (1913-1963), there is almost a surfeit of ‘good’ things, which I need not enumerate, except to say that after a lapse of five decades, the masses are, in many respects, On Top Of The World but the *New* has disappeared *Gone With The Wind*.

For the most part I carry on the story of the *New* as contained in Press Advertisements and articles.

**THE NEW WAS THE FIRST PICTURE HOUSE  
WITH 'DRAW CURTAINS' COVERING THE  
SCREEN AFTER THE EVENING PERFORMANCE**

The signal to start the performance was when the conductor tapped his lamp-shade with his baton and the curtain would open, while the orchestra played the overture. That was, of course, in the year **1913**.

*News*, Monday, Monday, October 20<sup>th</sup> **1913**

**"THE NEW PICTURE HOUSE**

**PRINCES STREET - EDINBURGH  
(OPPOSITE THE SCOTT MONUMENT)  
will be opened**

**by LADY PIGGOTT REDFORD**

**at 3 o'clock on**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21<sup>st</sup>**

**ADMISSION BY INVITATION ONLY**

**THE HOUSE WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AT 6.30 p.m.**

**SPECIAL FOR OPENING WEEK**

***HAMLET***

**FAREWELL PERFORMANCE OF FORBES-ROBERTSON**

**ADMISSION 6d. BALCONY, 1s.**

**ORCHESTRAL MUSIC"**

*News*, Tuesday, October 21<sup>st</sup> **1913** page 4 Descriptive article on the New Picture House, Princes Street.

"The picture theatre has now become a permanent part in the round of entertainment and with that stability assured, there has followed a launching out into more pretentious schemes, in theatre building and their adjuncts. **The Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Co.**, of London, who own a score of theatres of the highest class in provincial sites, have discovered the value of the field to be worked in Edinburgh by the success of their smallest house in Edinburgh. That has emboldened them to venture upon them opening a large and much more elaborately equipped theatre in a portion of Princes Street. This site is an excellent one in a thoroughfare where life goes with a throb, and the promoters have spared nothing to make the New Picture House, which was opened today, as an ideal cinematograph theatre. It is more than that. In other cities the promoters have proved the popularity of tea rooms as an adjunct

to the theatre and in this new house in Princes Street, there is an admirably appointed suite of tea-rooms which may be used independently of the theatre itself.

#### A THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED BUILDING

The main building of the theatre is at the rear of the Royal Hotel, and the big slice of this building acquired for the purpose included the commodious dining saloon, in which many an important dinner has been held. To reach the theatre an entrance has been made through the western part of the hotel. The whole design of the Architects, Messrs. Atkinson & Alexander, London, seem to have left nothing out of account that could tend to the comfort, the pleasure, the convenience, and the safety of the patrons of the theatre. The building has accommodation for 850 persons, and the seating in area and balcony is so arranged on the slope that every seat affords an excellent view of the pictures.

The decorated designs of the interior are striking in their effect. The style is classic but not strikingly so. The green marble pillars at the sides of the theatre support a finely moulded cornice, and the coffered ceiling imports a handsome appearance to the building. The side walls are beautifully panelled in oak and hung with rich tapestry. The proscenium is a fine example of the modeller's art. The whole colour scheme is subdued and pleasing.

The electric lighting is a special feature, and particular attention has been paid to ventilation, the air can be changed 12 times an hour. The projection room for the films it may be noted, has been made absolutely fire-proof.

#### A SUITE OF TEA ROOMS

Passing through the white marble entrance with its pillars in Swedish green, the visitor finds himself in a handsome vestibule and entrance foyer. A tea lounge enters from the vestibule, and at the end of the foyer there is an oval tea room, prettily decorated in Louis XVI style. Then below the foyer, the biggest of the cafes, *The Wedgwood*, is situated. The lounge room has been tastefully decorated in Adam style, with Wedgwood blue as the distinctive note.

Much of the success in the above direction is due to Captain **A. Mears**, one of the directors, and Mr **E.R. Grierson**, the engineer in chief, who have devised many of the improvements of the building.

The contractors were Messrs. J Miller & Sons."

*News* Wednesday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1913

#### “NEW PICTURE HOUSE OPENING CEREMONY

The *New* was opened yesterday by Lady Redford, in the presence of an invited gathering that filled the magnificent theatre.

Mr. R.T.Jupp, the managing director of Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Company, introduced Lady Redford, who said it was a pleasure to her to perform the opening ceremony of the theatre, which she described as “a most beautiful and luxurious picture house”, (applause). No trouble had been spared to make it a house of the highest class and a credit to their enterprise and to the city of Edinburgh. A wonderful site, and the architect had displayed great taste and wonderful skill in adapting the building to the best advantage.”

Mr. Jupp thanked Lady Redford.

The series opened with a film of Scottish historic scenes; followed by a lesson in golf. with **J.H. Taylor**, the Open Champion.

The principal film *The House of Temperly*.

The screen was exceptionally large.

The musical director, Mr Nicholls, added a very pleasant accompaniment; the music being, as far as possible, consonant with the subject on the screen.”

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

“New Picture House, 56 Princes Street.  
Proprietor: Prov. Cine Theatres. Seats: 960”

Page 505 Owners of Picture Houses

“Provincial Cinematograph Theatre Ltd.  
Address: 199 Piccadilly, London, W.  
Managing Director: Mr R.T. Jupp  
Secretary: James H. MacAulay.”

Note: ***The Picture House***, 111 Princes Street was also included with the *New*.

The years rolled on, the Miners’ Strike of 1921 and the General Strike of 1926 became memories. I was now making frequent visits to Edenhall Hospital, Musselburgh; at that time exclusively for War Disabled. Radio was fast taking a grip, especially on the *man in the house* who became immersed in putting bits and pieces together to assemble what was known as the ‘Cat’s Whisker’- they were happy days.

The long spoken about event, **The Talking Picture**, reached red-hot point in June **1929**. Could they be called ‘Talking Pictures’ when they burst upon a credulous public in the June?

As the story unfolds the reader can judge for himself; I include all the information available to me. As **Barnum** said a long time ago, “There’s one born every minute,”; and he is an exceptionally wise guy who has not been ‘had’ once or twice during his life.

Japanese Proverb  
“You fooled me once, shame on you.  
You fooled me twice, shame on me”  
Fair enough.

News, Monday, June 10<sup>th</sup> 1929

**“THE NEW PICTURE HOUSE  
56 PRINCES STREET**

**Theatre Open 11.15 a.m. Continuous from 12 noon**

**TODAY TODAY TODAY**

**See and Hear**

**AL JOLSON  
IN**

***THE SINGING FOOL***

**‘THE’ TALKING PICTURE**

**APPROXIMATE TIMES OF SHOWING:**

**12 - 2.25 – 4.35 – 6.45 & 8.40**

**ALSO SPECIAL SOUND FILM OF ‘THE DERBY’**

**ADMISSION – STALLS, 1s.3d., BALCONY, 2s., SATURDAYS, 2s.4d.  
NO HALF-PRICE OR MATINEE PRICES**

**BE ADVISED**

**COME EARLY”**

News, Tuesday, June 11<sup>th</sup> 1929

**“THE SINGING FOOL AT THE NEW**

Approximately two years after the release of the talking film we in Edinburgh have the opportunity of witnessing and hearing a production which has achieved the most popularity in America and Great Britain.

There are those who may be inclined to criticism of Edinburgh’s tardiness in introducing the ‘talkies’, but the fact remains that the cinemas in the Scottish capital which will deal with such productions will now be in a position to select the very best.

Had Edinburgh been a ‘talkie’ centre a year or so ago we would have had to rest content with releases which, frankly speaking, have been proved to be of comparatively poor standard. Now we can expect *Showboat*, *On Trial*, *The Donovan Affair* and *Broadway Melody*.

To the Provincial Cinema Theatres, Ltd., go the credit of breaking the ‘talkie’ ground in Edinburgh. For months and months one has heard little else in the ‘talkie’ world but **Al Jolson**, *Sonny Boy*, and *Little Davie Lee*, and *When There Are Grey Skies*. It is estimated that nearly 2,500,000 gramophone records of the theme song have been sold. All attendance records have been broken .

A New York waiter, Al Stone, becomes a Broadway Star. In this part Al Jolson is magnificent. In selecting the famous American vocalist 'Davie Lee', aged three, is natural and good. He could do nothing else at his age. The money he earned for that picture will enable him to live in comfort for the rest of his life. He has achieved more fame in a short space of time than even **Jacky Coogan**.

**Josephine Dunn & Betty Bronson** are the other principals. The latter speaks well.

The musical accompaniment to this great film is provided by the **Vitaphone Orchestra**.

*Dispatch*, Friday, April 28<sup>th</sup> **1950**

#### **“New Picture House To Be Sold**

The New Picture House, Princes Street, Edinburgh, and certain adjoining property, is to be converted into a departmental store by the firm **Marks & Spencer**.

Messrs. L.S.Gumley & Davidson, Edinburgh property agents, who were responsible for the deal, said that it would be several years before the cinema lease expired and before the conversion could be carried out.

Mr J.S.Dunbar, district manager of **Circuits Management Association Ltd.**, confirmed this view. The cinema, he said, would be open for some time yet. The lease was for a fairly long time.

Six months ago the block of property containing the Royal Hotel, the cinema and four shops – at present occupied by a shoe firm (T.Duncan & Co. No. 55), travel agents (Cook, Thomas & Son, No. 54), tobacconists and chemists- was bought by Mr **Gammuck Clark**, a former ‘boots’ and now managing director of Allied Hotels, for £750,000.

The sale of the cinema and certain of the adjoining shops- the number is not disclosed- to Marks & Spencer was completed recently.

The cinema was opened on Tuesday October 21<sup>st</sup> **1913** and was originally owned by Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Ltd., who also owned the Royal Hotel. Mr Dunbar said he understood the cinema was originally the banqueting hall for the hotel

This company had at one time considered extending the cinema, but no such plans had been under consideration in recent years.

The New Picture House is one of the two ‘first run’ cinemas operated by Circuits Management Association Ltd.” (The other was the *New Victoria*)

Note: *The Scotsman*, Friday April 28<sup>th</sup> **1950** also carried the above article.

News, Saturday, April 1951

### **“NEW CINEMA CLOSES DOWN NEXT MONTH ON MAY 26, 1951**

The New Picture House in Princes Street, Edinburgh, which has been acquired by Messrs Marks and Spencer for conversion into a large departmental store, is to be closed down on May 26.

The New Picture House has been one of Edinburgh's most popular places of entertainment for the past 40 years. When it was opened by Provincial Cinematograph Theatres shortly before the First World War it was Edinburgh's first 'super-class' cinema.

Although it has seating accommodation for fewer than a thousand which makes it small by modern standards, for many years it was among Edinburgh's biggest cinemas. In 1927 the New came under the control of **Gaumont-British Corporation**, which is now merged in **Gaumont-Odeon Circuits Management Association**.

### **ONCE BANQUETING HALL**

The ornate auditorium of the New Picture House was constructed in what was the original banqueting hall of the Royal Hotel. Both the Royal Hotel and the New Picture House are in a block of property which about 18 months ago was sold for £750,000 to the Allied Hotels Group headed by Mr **Gammuck Clark**, a former hotel 'boots'. About a year ago Marks and Spencer acquired the picture house and some adjoining shops. The scheme to open as a new departmental store will not affect the hotel property.

A long and progressive chapter of cinema history is associated with the New Picture House. It was the first cinema to have synchronised sound installation in 1929, when Edinburgh's first talking picture *The Singing Fool* was shown; it had a five week run there. (*Dispatch* Wednesday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1947: "The run lasted from Monday June 10, to Saturday, July 13, 1929, with five shows a day. Nothing could keep the crowds away from *The Sing Fool*, and milling throngs seethed around the cinema.")

### **SAW FILM 150 TIMES**

Sound for *The Singing Fool* was provided through the medium of 16 inch records. That was before the introduction of the combined film and sound track. It meant that Mr. **G.B. Thomson** the chief projection operator, had to keep his eyes glued to the screen throughout the 150 performances of the one picture to ensure that there was proper sound synchronisation.

Mr Thomson had been with the New Picture House since 1925. One of the notable features of the cinema's history which he recalled today was the popularity built up for 'Orchestral Evenings' before the coming of sound pictures. The musical programmes began with a five minute interlude, but became so popular that eventually a large cinema orchestra was given a half-hour share in the programme every Friday evening. At that time most cinemas were operating musically with a piano and violin."

(And how many didn't even have a fiddle? G.B.)

In the above article Mr **G.B.Thomson** was stated to be the chief projection operator, but in the following extract from the *News* of Tuesday August 6<sup>th</sup> **1946**, it is a Mr **Fred Mitchell** who is stated to have had the crucial chief projection operator's job.

#### “THE SINGING FOOL – 1929, NEW PICTURE HOUSE

The chief operator at the New Picture House in 1929, was Mr **Fred Mitchell**, who later became Gaumont-British divisional engineer for the East of Scotland. Before the opening of the 1929 show in Edinburgh he was rushed off to London for a week's training in sound technique, and for five weeks after that he had to listen to Al Jolson for nearly 12 hours a day.

Recalling his experiences, Mr Mitchell told a Press correspondent: “The speech was on gramophone discs. We had to put the needle on a certain point to synchronise with the film – and then hope to goodness it would not jump. During the five weeks we showed the Al Jolson film 150 times. By the fifth week, if the thing had broken down, we could have gone behind the screen and shouted out the lines!”

Mr Mitchell took nearly all his meals in a room next to the operating box, just in case of emergency. Nearly all the women in the audience, he remembered, went out with handkerchiefs in their hands and tears in their eyes.

Sound and movement did not always synchronise and there were amusing instances of lips moving a few seconds before sound and vice versa.

Al Jolson's film *The Singing Fool* was really a **song picture**, and the 100 per cent. talkie did not arrive until later in 1929."

The only comment I can offer is to mention that **George Thomson** was one of the staff who took the stage on Saturday May 26<sup>th</sup> **1951**, which was the last night of the old *New*. This, of course, could not be regarded as conclusive as to who actually was the chief projectionist during the five week run in 1929: Thomson or Mitchell.

A page or two back I posed the question: Could they be called ‘talking pictures’ when they burst upon a credulous public in 1929. From the facts I have been able to muster, I leave it to you the reader to decide, as in the TV programme *You Are The Judge*.

*News*, Monday, May 28<sup>th</sup> **1951** Article and photograph

#### “FAREWELL AT THE NEW

Mr **D.S. McGregor** (centre of photograph) manager of the New Picture House, Princes Street, Edinburgh, had a farewell handshake for his staff on Saturday evening, following the closing of the cinema for conversion into a departmental store.”

Note: In addition to the above report, some long serving of members of staff of the *New* were mentioned in the *News*, Thursday, February **1959**, in a News Advice Column:

“The last pictures were *Pagan Love*, starring **Esther Williams and Howard Kent** and *Cause for Alarm*, with **Loretta Young**.

During the evening, **Mr D.S. McGregor**, the manager and four employees - **Mrs Campbell**, cleaner for 28 years; **Mr Alex. Ochiltree**, foreman for 25 years; **Mr George Thomson**, chief operator for 26 years; and **Miss Vaughan**, café manageress – took the stage and thanked customers for their patronage.

The manager and staff were thanked on behalf of the patrons by **Mr Forsyth Hardy**.”

So ended the beautiful *New Picture House*, after 37 and a half years’ entertainment of Clean Bills.

It is well to add that during the whole of the Second World War, or gie near it – the *New* was hired by the **Ministry of Information** on Sunday evenings. Many prominent speakers ‘said their piece of encouragement during those dark days.’

The question may arise – When did Marks and Spencer occupy the completed premises?

It was a long time indeed after the *New* closed down on Saturday, May 26<sup>th</sup> 1951 before Marks and Spencer occupied the completed premises. The manager of the store informed me that it was not until June **1957** before M & S opened for business.

So the face of Princes Street got another ‘going over’, only one of many I have seen in a long, long time. In conclusion I would mention an exceptional building, namely, Forsyth’s at the west corner of St Andrew Street, on Princes Street. It was the first steel frame building to be erected in Edinburgh; the year was **1911**.

### ***NEW TIVOLI CINEMA, GORGIE ROAD*** **(Formerly *The Tivoli*)**

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> January **1934**

#### **“NEW EDINBURGH CINEMA**

A demonstration in the advance of sound recording and reproduction was included in a private performance which was held to mark the opening of the *New Tivoli Cinema, Gorgie Road*, Edinburgh. Various sounds recorded by the **R.C.A. Photophone system** were reproduced through the **B.T.H. (British Thomson Houston) high frequency extended range reproducer**. They included orchestral excerpts, dialogue, and natural sounds such as running water, and proved a revelation of the strides which have proved that developments have been made along the path to sound perfection. The purity and fidelity of the sounds was a tribute to British enterprise. An interesting feature of the programme was a film of the demolition of the old *Tivoli*, and the erection on the same site of the new building.

It was accompanied by a running commentary, a microphone by means of which the audience can be addressed being installed in the theatre, and cast an interesting sidelight on the amount of local labour used in the erection of the building

The *New Tivoli* opened with *King of the Jungle*, a film of animal life, with **Buster Crabbe** as the star.”

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, August 30<sup>th</sup> 1938

### “EDINBURGH CINEMA’S SILVER JUBILEE

The New Tivoli, Tynecastle, Edinburgh, celebrates this week its silver jubilee. Opened on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1913, the cinema is one of the oldest buildings in the city to be used continuously as a picture house.

### SOUND EQUIPMENT

Sound equipment was introduced in 1929. Some five years later (January 1<sup>st</sup> 1934) the cinema was extended and became the New Tivoli.

### OVER FIVE MILLIONS

During the past four and a half years, admissions to the cinema have totalled over five millions.

Mr **J.C.Robertson** is at present managing director, and the manager is Mr **A.S.Albin**, Chairman of the Edinburgh Section of the Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association.”

1938 *Cinema Buyers’ Guide* Page 173

“Tivoli, New - Mrs E Robertson. Seats, 1,300” (Compared with the 580 seats in the old Tivoli)

1954 *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 415-416

“New Tivoli Picture House, Gorgie Road  
Seats: 1,200. Prices: 1s.6d. to 2s.3d.  
Screen: 23 feet by 18 feet. Stage: 25 feet.  
Proscenium, Width 38 feet. Six Dressing Rooms.”

The New Tivoli was taken over by **J.B.Milne Theatres, Dundee**, on February 20<sup>th</sup> 1961: see *The Scotsman* report of February 16<sup>th</sup> 1961 under the *Astoria*.

### NEW VICTORIA, 7 CLERK STREET

After writing about the *New* with its rather small seating accommodation, variously given between 850 and 960, the difference between the *New* and the *New Vic* as it became known, was like a ‘but and ben’ and a mansion, as the *New Vic* could seat 1,999.

I was convalescing after yet another breakdown of War wounds, but had the good fortune to pay a visit to the *New Victoria* on its opening day. The main picture *Rookery Nook* was one

of those pictures that one remembers and keeps remembering, and I am writing in November 1963. But to get on with the story.

*News*, Saturday, August 23rd 1930

**“NEW VICTORIA  
TREMENDOUS OPENING PERFORMANCE**

**INCLUDES**

**RALPH LYNN AND TOM WALLS  
IN**

***ROOKERY NOOK***

**THE CELEBRATED ALDWYCH FARCE**

**LESLIE JAMES  
ON THE MIGHTY WURLITZER ORGAN**

**OPENING ON MONDAY NEXT  
AUGUST 25, AT 2.30 p.m.**

**By  
SIR SAMUEL CHAPMAN, M.P.**

**THE NEW VICTORIA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
UNDER THE DIRECTION OF ‘SAM’**

**SCREEN SNAPSHOTS, VARIETY ACTS  
MOVIETONE NEWS  
ON  
WESTERN ELECTRIC APPARATUS**

**PRICES : MATINEE up to 4.30 p.m.  
FRONT STALLS, 6d., CHILDREN, 4d.  
BACK STALLS, 8d 4d.  
BALCONY, 1s. 6d.**

**PRICES: EVENING  
FRONT STALLS, 8d , CHILDREN, 4d.  
BACK STALLS, 1s. 6d.  
BALCONY, 1s.3d. 8d.  
FRONT CIRCLE, 1s.6d.  
BOX SEATS, 2s. 4d.**

**PUBLIC HOLIDAYS EXCEPTED”**

**1963 prices**

Front Stalls, 4 rows, 3s.6d.; Back Stalls, 4s.6d.; Front Circle, 4s.6d. & 5s.6d.; Box Seats, 6s.

For Special Pictures prices rose in each grade up to as high as 8s.6d. For the showing of *Cleopatra* on Wednesday December 25<sup>th</sup> **1963** the prices were: 15s.; 12s.6d.; 10s.6d.; 7s.6d.; and 5s. Reduced prices for children and O.A.P's. at mid week matinees only.

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, August 26<sup>th</sup> **1930**

### **“OPENING OF NEW CINEMA NEW VICTORIA**

At the opening ceremony **Mr Ritson Bennett** *area manager of the Gaumont British and Provincial Cinematograph Theatres* presided, and **Sir Samuel Chapman, M.P.**, for South Edinburgh, in declaring the theatre open, said that the emergence of Picture Houses, was one of the greatest movements of the age. Edinburgh people were well informed, and there were more libraries in South Edinburgh than in any other constituency in Scotland, But there were people who wanted and needed a comfortable and more easy form of learning, and there was much that could be brought to them by the screen. (Applause)

Note: As to the statement about libraries, Her Majesty the Queen opened the new National Library of Scotland in George IVth Bridge in July **1956**; the Scottish Central Library, 312-320 Lawnmarket, opened in the **1950's**. Yes, we are fortunate in having so many libraries in Edinburgh.

Extracts from the *New Victoria Brochure*

**“Opened on Monday, August 25, 1930**

At 2.30 p.m. by Sir Samuel Chapman, M.P.

Doors open at 1.30 p.m. Please be seated by 2.15 p.m.

Controlled by **Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Limited**

#### Introduction

The New Victoria, Edinburgh's latest luxury theatre, is the outcome of a desire on the part of the Company to provide our beautiful city with an inimitable entertainment venue, under ideal conditions. The result is the most beautifully artistic and up-to-date theatre in Scotland.

The Controlling Company, P.C.T.Ltd., holds a unique position in the entertainment world, controlling as they do, a circuit of over three hundred theatres in almost every town of importance in the British Isles, including London's West End Cinemas. They are, therefore, in the happy position of being able to acquire all the West End talkie successes for the New Victoria.

#### The Organ

The mighty Wurlitzer Organ, which is mounted on an electric lift, is a complete orchestra in itself. It is known as the **Special Ten Rank Wurlitzer Unit Orchestra**, and is one of the very few organs in existence containing the brilliant English horn stop. Apart from the pipes, the organ contains many effects – xylophone, sleigh bells, glockenspiel, and the full compass vibraphone. (See article about cinema organs under the *Astoria*.)

This palace of pleasure has truly been built for you, and the comfort, convenience and entertainment has been studied in every possible detail and catered for in a very lavish manner.

The Symphony Orchestra has been placed in the very hands of an old Edinburgh favourite, 'Sam', who will be delighted to play any request pieces that are desired

#### The Café

The New Victoria Café is included for you convenience; the Café is controlled by the Company, and the thought and consideration for patrons which is the feature of all P.C.T. theatres is reflected in our catering organisation.

The New Victoria is dedicated to those who appreciate wholesome entertainment and who seek to forget for a time the cares of the workaday world.

#### CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE

DAILY 2.00 to 10.30 p.m.

DOORS OPEN 1.30 p.m.

#### PROGRAMME

MONDAY, AUGUST 25, 1930

1. OPENING CEREMONY – Performed by Sir Samuel Chapman, M.P.
2. FROLICKING FISH – A WALT DISNEY CARTOON.
3. THE MOVIE TONE NEWS – The Talking Screen's Newspaper.
4. ORGAN RECITAL – With LESLIE JAMES at the MIGHTY WURLITZER ORGAN
5. THE NEW VICTORIA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA – Under the direction of 'Sam'.
6. THE GAUMONT MIRROR – Depicting Interest, Education & Amusement.
7. THE LAUGH EPIC of the TALKING SCREEN

#### *ROOKERY NOOK*

Directed by the inimitable Tom Walls

RALPH LYNN, as Gerald Popkiss  
TOM WALLS, as Clive Popkiss  
WINIFRED SHOTTER, as Rhoda Maley  
MARY BROUGH, as Mrs. Leverett"  
ROBERTSON HARE, as Harold Twine  
ETHEL COLERIDGE, as Mrs Twine  
GRIFFITH HUMPHREYS, as Mr. Putz  
DOREEN BENDIX, as Poppy Dicky  
And  
MARGOT GRAHAME, as Clare Popkiss"

Tom Walls owned Racehorses and gave a 'tip' from the stage that his horse *April The Fifth* would win a race that particular week; it did, and 'sunk' a great number of bookies in the process.

News Saturday, February 8<sup>th</sup> 1936

**“PUBLIC NOTICE  
NEW VICTORIA CINEMA  
EDINBURGH**

It Has Come To The Knowledge Of The Proprietors That Some Persons Have Declared That There Are Rats At The Above.

There Is No Truth In The Rumours Which Have Been Circulated As The Following Statement Testifies, viz,

“I Have To State That The In View Of Rumours That Rats Were Present In The New Victoria Picture House, I Had A Careful Examination Made In Every Part Of The Premises On 20<sup>th</sup> December Last (1935) But There Was No Evidence Whatsoever Of The Presence Of These Vermin

(Signed) Allan W. Ritchie, Chief Sanitary Engineer.

NOTICE. Is Accordingly Hereby Given That Proceedings Will Be Taken Against Any Person Making Or Repeating Any Statement Contrary To The Facts As So Certified. By Order.”

In the year **1948** the New Victoria came under the management of **Gaumont-Odeon**. See *The Scotsman*. January 30<sup>th</sup> **1963**, under *The Gaumont*

**1954** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 415

“New Victoria, Clerk Street

Proprietor: Circuits Management Association, Ltd., Albion House, 59 New Oxford Street, London, W.C.1

Prices: 2s.3d. to 4s.2d. Seats, 1,999”

***OLYMPIA PALACE, ANNANDALE STREET***

The Olympia is now a garage and has been since long before the Second World War. Many types of entertainment were held there. I tell the story in the “Miscellaneous Bits and Pieces” chapter of when Chapman and Alexander held their Mission Services there in February **1914**.

It has been used as a Roller Skating Rink, a Carnival, a Circus and a Picture House. I hope to give a line or two to each of these forms of entertainment, all of which happened, well, getting on for a long time ago.

For most of its period as a place of entertainment it was a **Fred A. Lumley** preserve; Lumley was always ‘yapping’ at the heels of that prince of entertainers, Sir Edward Moss.

In the year **1912** the Olympia Palace stood in a cul-de-sac; that part of Annandale Street remained a ‘blind alley’ until after the First World War.

*News*, Monday, February 5<sup>th</sup> 1912

**“OLYMPIA PALACE, ANNANDALE STREET**

**OPENING WEEK UP-TO-DATE PICTURES**

**7 TWICE NIGHTLY 9**

**AND FIRST-CLASS VARIETY ENTERTAINMENT**

**MATINEE EVERY SATURDAY AT 3 p.m.**

**PRICES: 2d., 4d. & 6d.**

**SATURDAY EVENING: 3d., 6d. AND 9d**

**CLYDE FOOTBALL CLUB**

**The Members of CLYDE F.C. will be present**

**At the 7 o'clock performance on MONDAY FIRST”**

Note: Mention of the Clyde Football Club prompts me to relate that it was in the month of February 1912 that building trades working week was reduced from 51 hours to 50 hours. The usual stopping time on a Saturday was 1.00 p.m.; thereafter the stopping time was 12 noon. This break in the working week was, believe it or not, simply to accommodate football fans who desired to ‘follow’ their team to away games. Yes, I was one of them.

It was out of the question to see the 3 o'clock start of an International game at Hampden Park or elsewhere in Glasgow with a 1 o'clock stop on Saturdays. All pay at the gate in those days. Beer and Football applied then just as it does in the 1960's.

*News*, Tuesday February 6<sup>th</sup> 1912

“Olympia Palace, Annandale Street was re-opened last night as a Cinematograph Theatre and Variety Entertainment. Internally the place has been reconstructed, and seating accommodation has been provided for 1,800, while at the north end a stage has been erected.

Two houses nightly at 7 and 9 and if the place does not eventually turn out a success it is not for the want of resource and enterprise on the part of the management.

The vaudeville turns were of a high-class standard. The principal being **Victor Newman**. The pictures included two dramas from the Wild West, and two humorous films of a new order. Altogether a really excellent entertainment was provided.”

Note 1. In the above criticism, seating accommodation is given as 1,800, yet at the Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman meeting in February 1914 (see under “Miscellaneous Bits and Pieces”) it was stated that there were 5,000 comfortable seats; which suggests poetic licence or that Dr Chapman, being an American, was employing a bit of ‘kidology’ or showmanship.

Note 2. The Olympia opened as a Skating Rink on Wednesday September 8<sup>th</sup> **1909**; hence the statement that the Olympia “reopened”.

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book*

“Olympia, Annandale Street.  
Proprietor: Olympia (Edinburgh) Ltd.”

### ***PALACE PICTURE HOUSE, 15 PRINCES STREET***

The quarter acre on which Woolworth’s Princes Street now stands was the most fabulous piece of ground, in many respects, in Edinburgh. As I am not writing a history of Princes Street, but rather drawing attention to this particular **quarter acre, numbered 10 to 15** and, as the Palace Picture House occupied that section at No. 15, it is, I think, worthy of mention anent its historical association with the Street.

That quarter acre was the very first site of the new street and, as such, it holds a place of honour in the Street. Peculiar, but true; anything first in the world holds a special place – in this case its is Pride.

1767 to 1923

From **1767 to 1923** the quarter acre was exempt from rates and it came about this way. The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of the first North Bridge was celebrated in October **1963**.

To obtain the necessary ground for the bridge project, Lord Provost **George Drummond** and the Town Council entered into negotiations with various owners of the ground in what was then known as the New Town; one of these was **John Graham**, a plumber. On January 22<sup>nd</sup> **1763**, in offering his property to the Lord Provost he wrote, “I will by no means be a hindrance to the City of Edinburgh’s improving their property by refusing to let the city have my property on Multrees Hill at a reasonable price.” (Note: Multrees Hill became St James’ Square and, in December **1960**, that area was scheduled by the Corporation for an £18 million redevelopment scheme)

In proposing the sale Graham asked in return for the feu a quarter of an acre of ground, “and I shall hold it of the city for payment of one penny Scots of feu duty yearly, if demanded.” The Council accepted Graham’s offer – with differences arising as to the terms of the bargain. The main point as whether or not the feu granted was to be liable to the town’s taxes.

It was finally decided by the Dean of the Faculty of Advocates that Graham was entitled “to hold that quarter of an acre which shall be set apart and allotted to him as in lieu thereof... for payment of one penny Scots yearly... and without being liable to any of the town’s burdens.”

In August **1765**, the Council granted Graham the quarter of of an acre and they bound and obliged themselves and their successors, “to free and relieve the said lands of all cesses,

stents, taxations ... and of all feu-duties for all time coming hereafter with the exception of the yearly feu-duty of one penny Scots money.” The Council reserved the right to redeem that piece of ground, in exchange for any quarter of an acre in the New Town, on the same terms, before April 19<sup>th</sup> **1767**. It was further agreed, should the Council fail to implement the above agreement by April **1767**, then their right of redemption was to lapse and Graham was to remain in possession by absolute title of the original quarter of an acre on the terms stipulated.

Finally, Graham’s representatives, a painter named **Charles Robertson** and **John Humble**, a plumber, took possession of the site – on Graham’s original terms – and they were terms which specifically included freedom from all the town’s burdens.

The magistrates tried in **1834** and again in **1919** to extract payment, but without success – the court decided in favour of the owners- indeed, the court had no other option. The only way open to the Council to break the impasse was to buy the property and thereby end the loss in rates to the city’s till. After a period of 156 years, the quarter of an acre which was exempt from paying rates, was ultimately bought by the Corporation in **1923** from the North British Railway Company.

The site had passed through many hands: from John Hume, through John Elder of Forneth (three times Lord Provost), Archibald Constable the famous publisher, to the Crown Hotel and finally to Woolworth’s.

With acknowledgements to the *Dispatch* of 10<sup>th</sup> December **1960**

I show the names of the occupants of the quarter of an acre from whom Frank W. Woolworth took over for the first phase of his Princes Street venture:

No. 10 Watt Brothers, ladies wear, blouses, gloves, etc. Watt Brothers removed to the South Bridge, east side.

No. 12 The Crown Hotel was above Watt’s shop. The entrance to the Hotel was by 2 West Register Street.

Nos. 11 and 13 The Domestic Bazaar Co., Ltd. Popularly known as the D.B.C., or the 6 ½ d. bazaar (There was also a branch at the Chambers Street, South Bridge corner)

No. 14 John Sinclair, tobacconist.

No. 15 Palace Picture House.

F. W. Woolworth & Co. Ltd., opened for business on Saturday March 13<sup>th</sup> **1926**. The previous day they threw their doors open for inspection. The F.W.W. Store occupied Nos. 10 to 14 Princes Street. Their first venture in the district was at the Foot of Leith Walk, in **1924**. Being an American firm and known there as the 5 and 10 cent store, the nearest they got to these charges was stated on their facade thus:

Nothing over 3d. or 6d.

I will mention Woolworth again in connection with the *Dispatch's* report of Wednesday, November 5<sup>th</sup> 1952 that "Princes Street To Lose A Cinema". But, now the birth of the *Palace*.

1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 175

"New Theatres opened in 1914

The Palace, Edinburgh - This new theatre makes the fourth in Princes Street. It accommodates 750. The colour scheme is in cream, gold and white. The front of the building is massively built in light stone, after the Georgian classic style. The building has been erected at a cost of £19,000, and £43,000 was paid for the site."

The Palace opened on Christmas Eve, 1913.

*News*, Wednesday, December 17<sup>th</sup> 1913

**"THE PALACE – 15 PRINCES STREET  
OPPOSITE WAVERLEY STEPS**

**THE LATEST PICTURE THEATRE IN EDINBURGH**

**A MAGNIFICENT CREATION**

**WILL OPEN NEXT WEDNESDAY  
DECEMBER 24, 1913**

**PRICWES: STALLS, 6d.; BALCONY, 1s.; BOXES, 7s.6d. (Single seats, 1S.6D.)**

**HIGH CLASS ORCHESTRA  
CONTROLLED BY MR. J.H.SMITH**

**PICTURE *LIFE IN THE BRITISH ARMY*"**

*News*, Wednesday, December 24<sup>th</sup> 1913

**"THE PALACE**

**THE PALACE**

**THE PALACE**

**OPPOSITE WAVERLEY STEPS**

**Will Open Today, at 5 p.m.**

**TO THE PUBLIC**

**When a Special Programme Will Be Given.**

**COMPLETE Change of Programme  
Tomorrow (Christmas Day)  
DECEMBER 25 th (EXCLUSIVE)**

**11 a.m. to 10.30 p.m.**

**THE PALACE**

**THE PALACE**

**THE ALACE**

**ADMISSION: 6d. & 1s.”**

*News*, Tuesday, December 30<sup>th</sup> **1913**

**“PALACE PICTURE HOUSE  
INTERESTING PROGRAMME AT THE PALACE**

The latest addition to Princes Street picture houses, the Palace, has readily found plenty of patronage, and the management are maintaining their high class of picture.

Future pictures mentioned were: *Her Indian Guardian* and *A Proposal From Nobody*”

*News*, Wednesday, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1913**      There was this intimation at the foot of the Palace’s advertisement.

“Tea Rooms Are In Course Of Completion.”

*News*, Thursday, January 1<sup>st</sup> **1914**

**“THE PALACE, 15 PRINCES STREET**

**SPECIAL NOTE**

**New Year Powderhall Handicap and Marathon Race  
Will Be Shown On The Screen On Friday Evening And Saturday “**

This was very good going in those days. As a point of interest to ‘Sporting’ readers, **Powderhall Recreation Grounds** opened on January 1<sup>st</sup>, **1870**.

*Dispatch*, Wednesday, November 5<sup>th</sup> **1952**

**“PRINCES STREET TO LOSE A CINEMA**

The Palace Cinema, Princes Street, Edinburgh, has been bought by F.W. Woolworth & Co.

It is understood that the Palace will continue as a cinema until licences are obtained for reconstruction of the premises as an extension of the adjacent Woolworth store. Apart from the Monseigneur, which is a news theatre, this means that Princes Street will be without a cinema.”

*Dispatch*, Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup> 1952

### “A 40 YEAR OLD CINEMA STORY ENDS

The sale of the Palace, Princes Street, to Woolworth’s will bring to an end a 40 year old story and reduces still further the number of veterans of those far-off days.

When the Palace was built, cinema-going had become more than just a novelty. Already nearly 20 cinemas were in existence – the majority of them showing variety acts and films on a fifty-fifty basis.

The construction of the Palace was started in the early summer of 1913. The site, which originally housed an old-established business firm (From Edinburgh Room – Cowan & Strachan, Silk Mercers, 15 Princes Street. Also displaced by Palace Cinema – Thomas Methven & Sons, Seed Merchants) and which had been acquired for £43,000 was cleared and the architect and builders were given instructions: “**Have it ready for a Christmas opening.**”

Six months later the £20,000 building was ready, and on December 24, the cinema was formally opened before a private gathering of city dignitaries.

There was accommodation for about 750 people in the new cinema. Prices were 1s. for the balcony and 6d. for the stalls. Programmes started at 5 p.m. and were generally changed each day. The films were supplemented by a light orchestral performance.

What were Edinburgh cinema-goers seeing at that time? At the *Tollcross Cinema*, now closed, the fans were thrilled to a melodrama, *In A Gambler’s Clutches*. The *New Picture House* had the *Greatest Bull Fights Of All Time*, advertised with the thoughtful footnote: “By judicious censorship the film has been robbed of everything likely to prove objectionable.”

*News*, Wednesday, December 29<sup>th</sup> 1954

### “PRINCES STREET CINEMA TO CLOSE

Another cinema is to go from Princes Street. The Palace Cinema, the property which was bought some time ago by F.W. Woolworth & Co. Ltd., is to close in the first week or two of February. The date of closing has not been definitely decided, but the cinema owners have to be out by February 19 (1955). Naturally they have a considerable amount of property to remove and the cinema will not run until the very last day.

The new owners of the property, Woolworth’s, have invited tenders from demolition contractors and others for the total demolition of the premises. The work, it is stated, will commence towards the end of February and must be completed as speedily as possible to allow for reconstruction to commence at the earliest possible date.

The Palace Cinema, which is owned by the Princes Street Cinema Co. Ltd., was opened on December 24 **1913**. It has a seating capacity of 780.”

*News*, Monday, February 7<sup>th</sup> **1955**

### “PASSING OF THE *PALACE* IN PRINCES STREET

The Palace Cinema, Princes Street, one of Edinburgh’s leading places of entertainment for the past 42 years, closed its doors for the last time on Saturday night (February 5).

There were no speeches or announcements to mark its ‘passing’ which was, in fact, as quiet as its silent films with which it opened on Wednesday December 24, **1913**.

The cinema’s veteran, Mr **Robert Wooley**, who was the projectionist at the Palace for 28 years, was not present at the last performance having been released from hospital only a few days ago.

The manager, Mr **Percy Charles Tobell**, who spent 11 years there, said that several of the regular patrons had expressed regret at the cinema’s closing.

The Palace has been purchased by F.W.Woolworth & Co., for an extension to their adjacent premises. The only cinema remaining in Princes Street is the Monseigneur News Film Theatre.”

Note: Mr Tobell told me in October **1962** that he was the manager of the Gaiety, Leith, for several years.

*News Advice*, Thursday, February 19<sup>th</sup> **1959** Reply

### “PALACE CINEMA

The doors of the Palace closed on Saturday February 5<sup>th</sup> 1955. The programme included *On The Waterfront*, starring **Marlon Brando**, and **Glenn Ford & Evelyn Keyes** in *Mating Millie*.

The owners had to be out by February 19, 1955.”

### WOOLWORTH’S PRINCES STREET ASSESSMENT

When Woolworth’s opened in Princes Street in February **1926** the assessment amounted to £4,500. The **1960/61** Roll shows that Messrs. Woolworth, Nos. 10 to 15 Princes Street, was assessed at £12,250, which would generate a healthy contribution to the City’s Exchequer.

Extract from Council Record **1923-24** Page 604.

Price paid by Corporation - in 1923 – for the property held by F.W.Woolworth at Nos. 2,4,6 and 8 West Register Street and Nos. 10 to 14 Princes Street, was £121,000. So, by 1963, the Corporation had recouped the large sum paid out 40 years ago.

***PALACE PICTURE HOUSE, ST BERNARD'S ROW,  
DEANHAUGH STREET (TOP OF ST BERNARD'S ROW)***

*News*, Monday, April 10<sup>th</sup> **1911**

**“PALACE PICTURE HOUSE**

**NOW OPEN**

**HIGH CLASS ANIMATED PICTURES**

**TWICE NIGHTLY AT 7 and 9 p.m.**

**MATINEES EVERY SATURDAY AT 2 and 4 p.m.**

**POPULAR PRICES: 3d., 4d. and 6d.”**

*News*, Tuesday April 11<sup>th</sup> **1911**

**“STOCKBRIDGE PICTURE HOUSE**

The demand for the picture house entertainment remains as keen as ever in Edinburgh, and the latest addition to the many is to be found in Deanhaugh Street, Stockbridge, where an up-to-date theatre has been opened.

**SPECIAL FLOORING**

The building embraces several novel features, the flooring being specially constructed to allow of anyone having an uninterrupted view of the films on the ‘screen’.

This week’s programme is a splendidly varied and interesting one, and includes the *Forest Ranger*, a tale of cowboy life, *Foolshead In The Bank*, another of the well known series, and the *International At Ibrox, Scotland v. England*, which is being shown for the first time in Edinburgh.”

It appears that ‘fitba’ canny be kept out of the ‘picture’; in this case the picture on the screen. The ‘goggle box’ on TV has nothing on the Old Time Movie.

Note: The following ‘houses’ were also sited at St Bernard’s Row:

***St Bernard’s Picture Palace*, April 12<sup>th</sup> **1912.****

***Savoy*, Monday March 28<sup>th</sup> **1921.****

***Tudor*, Wednesday, July 13<sup>th</sup> **1960** and is still open for business as at November **1963.****

***PALLADIUM, 38 RAEBURN PLACE***

This is one of the very few ‘houses’ for which I could not trace an advertisement in the Press; however I am fortunate that I have a deal of data which indicates it was at the above

address. For example, the *News*, Tuesday September 28<sup>th</sup> **1909**, carried an advertisement to the effect for 38 Raeburn Place:

**“NORTHERN ROLLER SKATING RINK**

**Men, each session, 6d. and 1s.  
Ladies, each session, 6d. and 9d.”**

This confirms that the premises were used as a place of entertainment. The following item shows that it had become a cinema by **1915**, but just when the change from roller skating to cinema took place I cannot say.

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

“Palladium, Raeburn Place.  
Proprietor: R.C.Buchanan.”

At that time Mr Buchanan was Treasurer of Edinburgh Corporation.

The premises at 38 Raeburn Place were acquired by Woolworth’s in **1962**.

***PALLADIUM, EAST FOUNTAINBRIDGE***

The Palladium formerly housed Cooke’s Circus. On Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup> **1908** an advertisement appeared in the *News* for **“COOKE’S CIRCUS PICTURE PALACE”**. After a 30 week run the premises reverted to the Circus’s Winter Season.

I deal with Cooke’s Circus very fully in the chapter covering the period 1835 to 1911. At this juncture a few words on the Palladium site will bring the reader into the picture.

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, November 9<sup>th</sup> **1886**

**“OPENING OF COOKE’S CIRCUS  
EAST FOUNTAINBRIDGE”**

As I write, November 19<sup>th</sup> **1963**, 77 years have passed since the Palladium building was erected; in wet weather the name Cooke’s Circus can be seen shining through the paint on the façade. All good things come to an end and time, like an ever rolling stone, bears all her sons away. Cooke’s Circus closed down on February 11<sup>th</sup> **1911**.

The Grand Old Man of the Circus Ring passed away on Wednesday, August 22 **1917**; he rests in the Dean Cemetery. It is pleasing to record that one of the many seats gifted to the City is one to his memory. It is inscribed: “John Henry Cooke, Cooke’s Royal Circus, 1837-1917.”

Mr **William Burns**, a one time lion tamer, was manager of the Palladium; a position he held in **1908**. He stood no nonsense – from anyone.

Until the house was reconstructed the screen was dropped from the ceiling plumb centre of the ring; so that, those behind the screen saw the captions back to front. This was accepted with good humour – anyway it cost less to ‘see’ from behind and that meant something to me while I was still an apprentice.

*News*, Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup> 1912

**“THE PALLADIUM  
(COOKE’S CIRCUS RECONSTRUCTED) GRAND OPENING  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1912**

**7 TWICE NIGHTLY 9**

**WE PLACE THE WORLD BEFORE YOU**

**POPULAR PRICES: 3d., 4d., 6d. and 9d.  
SEATS IN PRIVATE BOXES: 1s. 3d.**

**MATINEE - SATURDAYS. CHILDREN, 1d., 2d. and 3d.**

***THE SHADOW OF THE BLIND  
AND  
CHARLIE COLMS THE DANDIE’S CLUB***

*News*, Tuesday, November 19<sup>th</sup> 1912

“The picture palaces seem to grow in our midst like mushrooms’ this year the public appetite for such pictorial entertainment is as voracious as ever. For proof, one had only to glance at the large attendance at the Palladium last night, the latest addition to the picture theatres. The Palladium is a bright, cheerful theatre and its programme is a good balance of grave and gay, education and humorous.”

**TALKING PICTURES**

The *News Advice* says that the first talking pictures in the Palladium were shown on March 17<sup>th</sup> 1930 with *The Voice of the City*.

The Palladium closed as a picture house on Saturday, August 13<sup>th</sup> 1932 and reopened as a theatre on December 30<sup>th</sup> 1933 – see the chapter “Palladium Theatre, East Fountainbridge”

The *Pal* as I knew it, is still going strong as at November 1963.

***PAVILION PICTURE HOUSE, 28 DEAN STREET***

Mr **James Cousins** was, in his younger days, associated with the Picture House business and was manager of the Laurie Street Picture House and assistant manager in the Alhambra, Leith Walk, during its early days. Naturally, one in the ‘business’, any business, knows what’s cracking all round the town; in this respect Mr Cousins told me two weeks before he died on Monday, September 30<sup>th</sup> 1963 that he remembered a picture house in Dean Street,

Stockbridge, which had been a church in **1912**. Mr Cousins was 20 years of age when he and some others entered the church to tidy it up. He remembered clearing out a number of Bibles

I could not find any trace of the Dean Street Picture House in the advertisement columns of the Press for the year **1912**. It did, however, show up in **1917**, which lends credence to Mr Cousin's story.

#### OLD THEATRES

The following appeared in the Turret Widow of the *News*, Thursday, April 6<sup>th</sup> **1961**:

"You would notice in the Post Bag the other day a letter pointing out that Edinburgh's *Pavilion Theatre*, where actor **Finlay Currie** made his first stage appearance, was not in Stockbridge but in Grove Street.

It is not difficult, of course, to confuse these old entertainment houses, many of which changed their names frequently down the years. In Dean Street, Stockbridge, there was indeed a Pavilion - the *Piv* (the writer of the Turret Window spelled it *Pav*) as it was affectionately known – where cinema and stage shows were produced."

I acknowledge with thanks the above item, which very materially furthers the History of the Cinema.

*News*, Tuesday, March 27<sup>th</sup> **1917** The first advertisement for the cinema that I came across.

#### **"PAVILION PICTURE HOUSE**

**28 DEAN STREET, STOCKBRIDGE**

**7 AND 9**

**THEDA BARA in**

***KREUTZER ZONATA***

**Founded on LEO TOLSTOY'S masterpiece**

**Supported by Latest Comedies and Topicals**

**POPULAR PRICES: 2 ½ d., 5d. & 7d.**

**1938** *Cinema Buyers' Guide* Page 173

"Pavilion, Dean Street, Stockbridge.  
Seats: 900. Closed."

See story of The *Dean Picture House*, 28 Dean Street, which opened on Monday, May 12<sup>th</sup> **1930**.

***PEOPLE'S PICTURE HOUSE, OR PICTURE THEATRE***

***19 BLACKFRIARS STREET***

I never found a Press advertisement for this house.

In the **1913** *Street Directory* it was mentioned as "People's Picture House." In the **1915** *Kinematograph Year Book*, page 468, the entry for it was "Picture Theatre, 19 Blackfriars Street; Proprietor: C.W. Johnson"

Old residents in the district assured me that this picture house opened in **1912** and closed in **1915**. The First World War was the cause of many one man businesses closing down .

***PETIT PARIS, SHRUBHILL***

This picture house opened as the *New Electric Theatre* on January 1<sup>st</sup> **1909**, almost a year exactly before it became known as the *Petit Paris*.

*News*, Friday, December 31<sup>st</sup> **1909**

**"PETIT PARIS  
ADJOINING LEITH WALK STATION, SHRUBHILL**

**PRICES: 3d., 6d. and 1s. CHILDREN: 2d."**

Note the prices for the New Electric Theatre had been, 2d., 4d. and 6d. Quite a considerable increase in one year!

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

I find such letters, on most subjects, of great interest and frequently they bring to light valuable information which otherwise might have been lost for ever. On the other hand, simply through the memory being at fault on the question of dates, it sometimes makes things a bit awkward for a 'historian' (That is why I always give the date of an excerpt from the Press).

From time to time the Editor invites his readers to send him information on certain subjects, and the following contributions on the *Petit Paris* contain some interesting points, but, regrettably, some misleading ones.

*News*, Saturday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> **1961**

'Leith Walk' wrote in reply to a letter of 18<sup>th</sup> December 1961.

"At that period I attended Leith Walk School, Brunswick Road, and one afternoon, on coming out of school, I saw the fire engine racing down Leith Walk. I rushed along Brunswick Road into Leith Walk. The firemen were trying desperately to put out the fire which had started at the Petit Paris, and which eventually destroyed the theatre."

‘Persevere’ wrote:

The manager of the Petit Paris was Mr Bill Stuart. The attendants wore French-design uniforms. The cinema did not last long; it was followed by the New Electric Cinema Theatre, where every Saturday matinee a stick of rock was given to each child with the words, “New Electric Theatre” printed right through.

This cinema did not last long either, I am sorry I cannot give an exact date, but it closed to make way for the Bass Rock Garage, which functioned until the Edinburgh Corporation Transport took over the building.”

John Dunlop wrote:

“My work at the Petit Paris was indeed enjoyable. I was much helped by my accompanist, **Miss McGill**, Concert Director, 3 Henderson Row.”

Notes:

1. The New Electric Theatre was first on the scene.
2. The Petit Paris did not close in the accepted manner; it was virtually destroyed by fire.
3. The Bass Rock Garage appeared in the **1914** Street Directory. The name was painted on the North Side of the roof in white letters almost 6 feet high, just like the word ‘Tabernacle’ which appeared on the building of that name which preceded the **Playhouse** in Greenside Place. Both were magnificent advertisements. The building was used for several purposes by the Transport Department; it was demolished during the summer of **1962**.

On 19<sup>th</sup> September **1910**, **John Stewart**, 1 Shrub Place, Leith Walk, the owner of the **Petit Paris**, wrote to the Edinburgh School Board suggesting that the cinematograph would be a useful and interesting form of education. His offer to mount an exhibition was turned down by the Board; see ‘Cinematograph Pictures in Schools’ in Chapter 29: The Cinema in Edinburgh...

### ***PICTUREDROME, 14 EASTER ROAD***

**Mr Palmer** the bookbinder in the Central Library, George IV Bridge, knew I was writing this history and asked to see what I had written about the **Picturedrome**. When he handed the script back to me he remarked, “Every patron got a welcome from one or other of the brothers Black who stood at the top of the steps at both ‘houses’.. It was nice to look back on those days.” Mr Palmer stayed round the corner from the **Drome**. That the owner **Alex. Black** was a nice person to know will show up as the story unfolds.

*News*, Friday, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1912

**“PICTUREDROME**

**TOP OF EASTER ROAD**

**GRAND OPENING**

**Beautifully Decorated, Artistically Lit**

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1912**

**ALL THE LATEST FILMS**

**PRICES: 2d., 4d. and 6d.**

**PICTURES INCLUDE: *CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS*,  
*ANGEL UNAWARES & BLIND MINER*”**

*News*, Tuesday, September 10<sup>th</sup> 1912

“Although the Picturedrome at Easter Road has been opened for a week it has taken a place in public favour...”

*News*, Monday, August 11<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“PICTUREDROME**

**GRAND RE-OPENING TO-NIGHT**

**PRICES: 2d., 4d. and 6d.”**

*News*, Tuesday, August 12<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“PICTUREDROME RE-OPENED**

After being closed for four weeks the Picturedrome, Easter Road, opened its doors again last night.

The hall has been practically re-built, and the seating accommodation doubled, the capacity now being 600 visitors. Electric fans have been installed, the decorative scheme is tasteful, and altogether the Picturedrome now is a cosy and thoroughly up-to-date house.

The attendance last night was very gratifying, when a strong programme was submitted with *The Counterfeiter*.”

Was it just one of those things, or did an underground stream manifest itself in the 1960's when the building was being converted into a supermarket? It is known that the Greenside

Burn does run under London Road, northwards to Leith, but by **1791** it had been carried in a culvert; see my history on *Ancient and Modern Greenside*.

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

“Picturedrome, 14 Easter Road.  
Proprietor: A. Black Seats: 850.”

These details also appear in the **1938** *Cinema Buyers’ Guide*.

In conversation with Mr **George Webster**, manager of the *State* Picture House, Leith, on Tuesday, October 30<sup>th</sup> **1962**, he told me about a good deed performed by Alex Black. Mr Black left somewhere in the region of £75,000, out of which he directed a sum of money was to provide a life-boat in memory of his wife. A Beautiful Thought.

I enquired of the Royal National Life-Boat Institution, Life-Boat House, 42 Grosvenor Gardens, London S.W.1, in November **1962**, and was informed by the Institution: “I am able to confirm that she is named *Margaret* and was sent to her station in **1959**. The late Alexander Black, to whom you referred, left a generous legacy to the Institution which was appropriated towards the cost of a new life-boat for Scotland, in accordance with the deceased’s wishes, and the life-boat was in fact allocated to the Dunbar station.”

We frequently hear or read about certain people and how they dissipate money. It gives me great pleasure to record what one man did in memory of his wife and his practical help for his comrades who go down to the sea in ships and who face peril every time they do so.

#### LAST PICTUREDROME ADVERTISEMENT

*News*, Saturday, May 15<sup>th</sup> **1943**

**“PICTUREDROME**

**2 - TO - 10.15**

**WALLACE BEERY, *JACKASS MAIL***

**BERNARD NEDELL, *TERROR ON TIPTOE***

**MONDAY – JEANETTE ‘‘McDONALD, *I MARRIED AN ANGEL (U)***

**JACK BUCHANAN, *IN THE MIDDLE WATCH*”**

On Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> May **1943** the name of the Picture House, 14 Easter Road was changed to *Eastway*.

***THE PICTURE HOUSE, 111 PRINCES STREET***

**This was the first Picture House in Princes Street**

*News*, Tuesday. July 19<sup>th</sup> 1910

**“IMPORTANT OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT**

**THE PICTURE HOUSE**

**111 PRINCES STREET**

**OPENS TO-MORROW (WEDNESDAY) JULY 20<sup>th</sup>  
AT 6.30 p.m.**

**ADMISSION: 6d. and 1s.**

**PERFORMANCES WILL BE CONTINUOUS TILL 10.30 p.m.**

**CHILDREN HALF-PRICE BEFORE 7 p.m.”**

*News*, Tuesday, July 26<sup>th</sup> 1910

**“THE PICTURE HOUSE IN PRINCES STREET**

The new place of entertainment, with its high-class programme of cinematograph pictures, has speedily found favour. That there was a need for the *Picture House* has been shown by the gratifying attendances since the opening. The handsomely appointed little theatre presents a superior programme of pictures, the topics of which are of a very interesting character and uniformly of a high style. The scenes are depicted with beautiful clearness and realism. The subjects shown yesterday were not only entertaining and amusing, but in many ways instructive, the animated gazette being a cleverly contrived series of pictures of current events.

The programme is changed twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays.”

Note: The Picture House was the first cinema I came across that advertised ‘continuous performance’.

**1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* page 468**

“Picture House, 111 Princes Street.  
Proprietor: Patrick and James, S.S.C.”

**SOME BITS AND PIECES I COLLECTED ABOUT THE PICTURE HOUSE**  
Together, they form a picture of the house.

A **photograph** of the Picture House is held in the Edinburgh Room. It depicts the front of the house and contains the following details:

“PROGRAMME CHANGED MONDAYS & THURSDAYS

A PLEASANT HOUR MAY BE SPENT AT THE  
PICTURE HOUSE, 111 PRINCES STREET

OPEN DAILY from 1 p.m. till 10.30 p.m.  
SATURDAYS, from 11 a.m. till 10.30 p.m.  
ADMISSION, 6d. and 1s.”

The photograph and script seem to have been extracted from a Guide Book.

*News*, Thursday, January 1<sup>st</sup>, **1948** Extract from an article on cinemas.

“Princes Street had been invaded in 1910. The first was the Picture House at No. 111, which had formerly been the Kardomah Café. It was a modest picture house, seating only 400.

How many remember the short dapper figure of the manager, **John Mitchell**? afterwards it made way for a motor saloon.”

*News Advice*, Tuesday, December 29<sup>th</sup> **1959**

“The Picture House, 111 Princes Street  
Opened about 1910. The last programme was given on Saturday November 24<sup>th</sup> **1923**, and the film shown was *Success* with **Brandon Tynan** and **Naomi Childers** in the leading roles.

The property owned by Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Company, was sold for over £30,000.”

#### Lotus and Delta

The site at No.111 Princes Street has been occupied by Lotus and Delta from the early 1920's. **Murray Grant**, *The Scotsman* librarian, approached the shop on my behalf but they were reluctant to help, pleading their Headquarters were in Stafford, and to apply there. Well, well, we come across these snags from time to time; in any case I have the dates when the four Princes Street Cinemas opened and closed:

1. Picture House, The, 111 Princes Street. 20 July 1910 – 24 November 1923
2. Princess Cinema, 131 Princes Street, 14 September- 2 November 1935. The Monseigneur News Theatre, 2 December 1935 - September 1962; Jacey's News Theatre, opened on 20 January 1964.
3. New Picture House, 56 Princes Street. 21 October 1913 – 26 May 1951.
4. Palace, 15 Princes Street. 24 December 1913-5 February 1955”

There was also The Royal Electric Theatre, Royal Hotel Buildings, which was mentioned in the 1915 Kinematograph Year Book.

**PLAYHOUSE, 18 GREENSIDE PLACE  
OPENED MONDAY, AUGUST 12, 1929**

The site of the Playhouse Cinema in Greenside Place and the immediate area, including the Calton Hill, is so rich in history that it would be a shame not to record the ‘highlights’ of the first ‘playground’ in Edinburgh.

1459

Greenside was the site of probably the first ‘Sports and Amusement Park’ in ancient Edinburgh. In this respect the city has recorded ‘Sporting’ history going back over 500 years, namely, to **1459** when the Area to the east of the Playhouse Cinema, namely the valley of the Calton Hill, was used by the sporting fraternity of those far off days to practise the art of mimic warfare and so it became known as a Tilting Ground (See Grant’s *Old and New Edinburgh*)

**A LEPER HOSPITAL IN GREENSIDE**

In the year **1516** a leper hospital was erected to the north-east of the Playhouse site, almost on the location of Greenside Parish Church, which R.L.Stevenson called “The Church on the Hill”; this was built in **1836**.

**CARMELITE MONASTERY OF GREENSIDE**

The monastery was in being in **1518**. The Whitefriars first took up residence there in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. On an old Edinburgh map the monastery is shown on the site of Greenside Parish Church. There is no mention of the monastery after **1543**.

**THE NAME IS PERPETUATED IN ROME**

In the convent of the Carmelites of Rome, an official bears the title of “Il Padre Priore di Greenside.” (I obtained this information from Lectures on the Antiquities of Edinburgh, 1845)

So much for Greenside being so weel kent in far off Rome. I have written a short, but comprehensive history of *Ancient and Modern Greenside*; a copy is lodged with the Edinburgh Room.

Greenside Place was developed in **1801**; the tenements are still occupied as at November **1963**. Greenside Place, prior to 1801, was in the country and, in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century it was the ‘top row of a natural grandstand’ whereon citizens were wont to gather to watch the Fun and Games in the ravine far below. That it is a ravine can be seen by anyone who cares to stop for a moment or two at the top of the flight of broad steps, between Hillside Church and the Playhouse; from that stance can be seen the west slope of the Calton Hill which completes the ravine.

The ravine, the floor of which was converted into a Car Park, was where the first performance of Sir **David Lindsay**’s play *The Pleasant Satyre of the Three Estaits* took place in **1539** and at various dates until **1544**. “It was played in the presence of the Queen Regent in 1544 and an immense concourse of people.”

Henry Charteris, an Edinburgh bookseller, sat patiently for nine hours on the slope to witness the play, which started at nine in the morning and finished at six in the evening; this surpassed the most prolix efforts at Bayreuth or Oberammergau.

In the 1940's 2 and a half to 3 hours was thought to be a **long, long** time to watch such as *Gone With The Wind*. You might appreciate the fortitude of your forefathers who could 'stick it out' a mere 9 hours – and nae soft seats to rest the bottom on.

So, after a period of 500 years the Playhouse carries on an old Greenside tradition, namely, the Play, even though it is on celluloid. It is fitting, therefore, that the cinema should be named the ***Playhouse***, as it rests on the site of an ancient Playground

## **THE TABERNACLE, GREENSIDE PLACE**

It was the desire of Mr **H.E.Moss** (later Sir Edward) to purchase the **Tabernacle** as long ago as **1894** (See the "Story of Mr H.E.Moss...". Alas, Sir Edward died on November 25<sup>th</sup> 1912; however, his rival, **Fred A Lumley**, secured the Tabernacle, on which he and several Edinburgh businessmen erected a super-cinema, **The Playhouse**.

The Tabernacle was the first building to be erected on that site in the year **1801**. Its first preacher was the **Rev James Alexander Haldane**, a former ship's captain. He preached there for over 40 years, gratuitously, until his death in **1851**.

The Tabernacle could seat 3,200 persons in comfort and on occasion 4,000 could be crowded within its walls. In **1864** it ceased to be house of religion; the congregation transferred to the Baptist Church in Upper Gray Street, Edinburgh.

On my way to and from school in the mid **1890's** and early **1900's** I passed the Tabernacle at least four times a day. Its distinguishing feature was the single word 'TABERNACLE' in 6 foot letters, or larger, painted on the roof. For many years Messrs Underwood used the premises as a furniture store.

We take a giant stride to the year **1929**.

### ***"THE PLAYHOUSE***

## **SCOTLAND'S SUPER PICTURE THEATRE**

### **THE DIRECTORS BEG TO ANNOUNCE**

### **GRAND OPENING**

**TODAY (MONDAY) 12<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 1929**

### **WITH THE SPLENDID ALL-TALKING PICTURES**

### ***THE DOCTOR'S SECRET***

**Based on the Play *HALF-AN-HOUR* , by Sir J.M.BARRIE**

**And**

**MISS INFORMATION (An Amusing Comedy Drama)**

**ALSO ALL SILENT PICTURE *THE FLEET'S IN* starring CLARA BOW**

**ADMISSION (Including Tax)**

**ADULTS: BACK BALCONY, 9d., FRONT BALCONY, 1s.,**

**STALLS, 9d., CIRCLE, 2s.4d.**

**CHILDREN: BACK BALCONY, 6d., FRONT BALCONY, 6d.,**

**STALLS, 9d., CIRCLE, 1s.3d.**

**Children as above to all parts Saturdays and Holidays till 2.30**

**NOTE: TODAY 12<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 1929. ADMISSION BY TICKET ONLY  
FROM 1 TO 4.30 P.M.**

**THE PUBLIC WILL BE ADMITTED FROM 5.15 P.M. ONWARDS"**

*News*, Tuesday, August 13<sup>th</sup> 1929

**"THE PLAYHOUSE**

At last the Playhouse is opened, and from now on Edinburgh's share of talking pictures will be strengthened. The Playhouse was opened yesterday by Mr **F.A. Lumley** and Councillor **Gorman**, the latter complimenting the directors on providing Edinburgh with such a fine cinema."

From the above date crowds started to congregate in this part of Greenside as their forebears had done up until **1864**. Their purpose today is also to hear sermons (or otherwise) in celluloid at the Playhouse.

In every sense of the word the Playhouse is a super place of entertainment and, if need be, can take over the function of a theatre. It has a commanding position and will be standing long after its near neighbour, Hillside Church, known in my youth as Lady Glenorchy's Church, built in **1844**, is demolished, which may come about in 1980 [The façade of the church, supported by scaffolding, is still standing as at May 2000. G.F.B.] As at December 1963, the Playhouse is the oldest super-cinema in Edinburgh.

**THE BUILDING**

The front elevation to Greenside Place is 102 feet, and the south elevation, measured from Greenside Place to Marshall's Court which rests in the ravine far below, has an average depth of 215 feet. About 1,250,000 bricks were used in the building of the cinema. Messrs Robert Bruce & Son, Ltd., of Edinburgh were the builders. Other measurements are as given in the **1954 Kinematograph Year Book**, pages 415-416:

"Playhouse, 18 Greenside Place.

Proprietor: Playhouse (Edinburgh) 18 Greenside Place.

Seats: 3,048

Proscenium Width, 45 feet; Screen, 35 feet.

Three Dressing Rooms. Showing from 12.30 p.m.

Prices: 1s.9d. to 4s."

### THE BUILDING DEVELOPS A LIST

During building operations the structure began to develop a list in the south-east corner; this was thought to have been caused by a seepage from the old Greenside Burn (see item on *Picturedrome* where reference is made to the Burn)

Mr **D. Allan Stevenson, M.Inst. C.E.** was called in to make a survey and to report his findings anent the list. Mr Stevenson told me in a telephone conversation in November 1961, that a fault in the strata was responsible for the list. Suitable action was taken and the fault was corrected; since when (**1928-29**) it has not occasioned anxiety.

Note. Mr Stevenson and I exchanged letters during **1961** when I was writing *Ancient and Modern Greenside*.

### COUSIN OF R.L.S.

It is worthy of note to record that Mr Stevenson was a cousin, twice removed, of Robert Balfour Louis Stevenson

### GRANDFATHER ROBERT STEVENSON'S HOUSE

Cochrane's, or the House of Fraser, at Nos. 1 & 3 Baxter's Place, on the corner of Greenside Lane (formerly Goodwillie's shop) was bought, in part, by Robert Stevenson in **1821**. Cochrane's and the Playhouse are less than 100 yards apart. [*The Buildings of Scotland, Edinburgh*, 1984, "Baxter's Place.. section was freed of shops and restored...in 1976-8." G.F.B.] On a plaque which hangs in Cochrane's shop reference is made to how the young R.L.S. used to explore the cellars and attics of his grandfather's house, and how he enjoyed himself going to the orchard at the foot, or east end of Lower Greenside Land. He, of course, went on to write *Treasure Island*, which made such an impact on the 'silver screens' throughout the world.

Robert Stevenson was the celebrated engineer who built the Bell Rock Lighthouse.

On Friday, October 26<sup>th</sup> **1962** I had a long chat with Mr **Ronnie Maguire**, manager of the Playhouse. He was greatly interested to learn about the link between the Stevenson family and Playhouse; I have no doubt it would surprise many Edinburgh citizens.

Mr Maguire assured me he had no idea that the Playhouse was carrying on the tradition of the **play** which was such a feature in the district over 400 years ago; but now carried out under more congenial conditions.

Whether *The Three Estaits* was the first play to be performed by actors in Edinburgh is a matter of conjecture. It is accepted that the first theatre in Edinburgh was, strange to relate, the **Playhouse** in the Canongate, the foundation stone of which was laid in **1746**, the theatre being completed in **1747**.

Before the presentation of *The Three Estaits* in **1539**, plays took place throughout Scotland by local gentry. The same play or subject then, could have a different set of words for each presentation. Unfortunately, **no** records of the plays have been handed down to us.

*News*, Wednesday, August 7<sup>th</sup> 1963 From The Turret Window

“New Ground

The 3,000-seat Playhouse, an Edinburgh landmark since 1929, will break new ground during this year’s Festival. **Chris Barber** and his wife **Ottillie Patterson** are to star in a late night jazz session on August 22. It is an experiment which will, no doubt, be closely watched. If it is a financial success it may be the first of a series of such ventures.

“It is not generally realised that the Playhouse was built as a theatre”, Mr Ronald Maguire told me at the cinema yesterday. “We have lots of dressing room accommodation. Someone had the foresight to see that it might be useful sometime in the future to have a big stage and dressing rooms.”

It has taken 34 years to justify the prophet! Actually the performers will not be able to use the entire stage because of the curve in the **Cinemascope** screen. They will employ the ‘mobile orchestral pit’ which can be raised almost to the level of the stage. The two-hour show begins at 11.30 p.m.

Tickets, from 4s. to 8s.6d. are now on sale.”

The first advertisement on August 12<sup>th</sup> 1929 was worded thus:

**“SCOTLAND’S SUPER PICTURE THEATRE  
PLAYHOUSE HAS THE TOP SITE IN EDINBURGH!”**

Of all the many Edinburgh cinemas which feature in this history, only the Playhouse has such a romantic and historical background. I have not required to use the word ‘about’; all the information relating to dates has been extracted from recorded history sources.

**PLAYHOUSE IN THE YEAR 2057?**

It is only the second building to be erected on the site and, given that the Tabernacle lasted from 1801 to 1928/29, it is possible that the Playhouse will have the same life expectancy, or even longer. So it might still be there in 2057! Few people born in 1963 will still be alive in 2057, or about then (about in this case may be capable of being proved in or nearly 94 years’ time).

Well, it is a passing thought.

***POOLES ROXY, GORGIE***

*News*, Friday, December 17<sup>th</sup> 1937 Preliminary advertisement

**“A CINEMA THAT WILL SET A NEW STANDARD IN**

**LUXURY, COMFORT AND EQUIPMENT**

***POOLE’S ROXY, GORGIE ROAD***

**OPENS MONDAY, DECEMBER 20, AT 5.30 p.m.”**

*News*, Saturday, December 18<sup>th</sup> 1937

**“COLOUR AT POOLE’S ROXY, GORGIE.**

**OPENING MONDAY FIRST AT 5.30 P.M.**

**On Visiting The Roxy, Edinburgh Filmgoers Will See A Revolution  
And A Revolution In Cinema Lighting And Decoration**

**Showing Monday – Tuesday – and Wednesday**

**JAMES STEWART SIMONE SIMON**

**IN**

***SEVENTH HEAVEN***

**AND**

**DICK FORAN in *SUNDAY ROUND-UP* (TECHNICOLOR)**

**POPEYE CARTOON**

**BRITISH MOVIE TALKING NEWS**

**FROM TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, CONTINUOUS, 2 p.m. – 10.40 p.m.”**

*Dispatch*, Monday, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1937 Photograph

The caption under the photograph reads: “Edinburgh’s latest cinema, Poole’s Roxy, Gorgie, which opens to-night.” The picture shows a state of urgency and bustle. The pavement in front of the main entrance is in chaotic condition, with piles of paving stones in heaps, awaiting to be laid. Builders’ barrows and material collected ready to be taken away.

Above the entrance is a huge banner bearing these words, “SEVENTH HEAVEN, starring JAMES STEWART.” Two painters are seen perched on ladders putting the finishing touches to the long sign space which advertises the current attraction.

## FIRST WIDE-SCREEN IN SCOTLAND

*Dispatch*, Friday, May 29<sup>th</sup> 1953

### “CITY CAN SEE QUEEN ON WIDE SCREEN

Edinburgh will have Scotland's first wide-screen installation. On Monday, June 8, (1953) the Poole's Roxy, Gorgie, will introduce the new system to coincide with the showing of the colour film *Coronation Day*.

The approximate dimension of the new screen will be 35 feet wide, 17 feet 10 inches high, with a 2 feet curvature. The system, by the use of the short focus lens, increased light illumination, and a new metallic sprayed silver curved screen, enables enlargement of up to 50 per cent. in screen width. It claims several advantages.

First, there is an illusion of depth without the audience having to wear glasses; next, there is a panoramic effect giving added realism, particularly in outdoor subjects; and last, special projectors are not required.

Mr **J.K. Stafford Poole**, the managing director of the cinema, states that experiments carried out some weeks ago revealed that this cinema's modern design and equipment enabled the wide screen to be installed with the minimum of difficulty. This is particularly marked in regard to the sight lines of the audience.

In the *Empire, Leicester Square, London*, where the system was first introduced, no less than 500 seats had to be sacrificed owing to the change over. No seats will be lost at the Roxy. (This explains the differences in seating capacity when figures for 1915 or 1938 are compared with the 1954 Kine.Year Book).

Mr Poole states that all future films will be presented on the wide screen and the small standard one will be dispensed with. Film programmes following June 8<sup>th</sup> 1953 have been arranged so that the maximum number of outdoor films can be seen”

*The Scotsman*, Monday, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1953

### Film Notices

Newspapermen were invited to an Edinburgh cinema, the Roxy in Gorgie, to see the wide-screen.

The impression one gets on entering the auditorium is that the screen now takes up the whole of the **Fourth Wall**. There is a certain loss at the top and bottom of the frame; and this can also be observed on the Monseigneur News Theatre in Princes Street, where a wide-screen has been installed, but the overall effect, especially in panoramic shots, is to give the film-goer an even greater sense of participation. He is, so to speak, drawn into the picture itself.

In spite of crudities, the wide screen has apparently come to stay, and when films are designed specifically for it we should have that heightened sense of realism which promises to be part, at least, of the cinema's answer to television”

News, Monday, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1953 Excerpt

### “CORONATION FILM TRY-OUT

### OF ROXY WIDE SCREEN

Work on the new installation was begun shortly after the final flat screen performance on Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1953, and it was completed in time for a preview of *Coronation Day*, a twenty minute feature, last night.”

### BINGO CLUB

Poole’s Office, Synod Hall, Castle Terrace, informed me that Poole’s Roxy would show its last picture performance on Saturday, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1963 and that from Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup> 1963 the theatre would become a Bingo Club. It was not known whether the house would revert to pictures.

The effect of the *Roxy* and the *County*, Wauchope Avenue, going over to Bingo during the last quarter of 1963 is to reduce the ‘active’ Picture Houses in Edinburgh to 19.

### *PRINCESS CINEMA, 131 PRINCES STREET*

This cinema was the most westerly during the period when there were four cinemas in the Street: *Palace*, 15 Princes Street, 24 December 1913 – 5 February 1955; *New Picture House*, 56 Princes Street, 21 October 1913 – 26 May 1951; *Picture House*, 111 Princes Street, 20 July 1910 – 24 November 1923; *Princess*, 131 Princes Street, 14 September 1912 – 2 November 1935.

Some accounts have included the one-time Albert Hall, 22 Shandwick Place; it was described in *The Scotsman* of Tuesday, October 31<sup>st</sup> 1882 as being at “The West End of Princes Street”

1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

“Princes’ Cinema, 131 Princes Street  
Proprietor: Edinburgh Entertainments, Ltd.  
Seats: 520.”

News, Saturday, September 14<sup>th</sup> 1912

### “PRINCESS CINEMA

### 131 PRINCES STREET

### TELE. 6668 CENTRAL

### THE LATEST PICTURE HOUSE IN THE CITY

**Magnificently Appointed, Luxuriously Furnished**  
**WILL OPEN TO THE PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME**  
**TODAY (Saturday 14<sup>TH</sup>) AT 2 O'CLOCK AFTERNOON**

**And thereafter a**

**CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE**  
**Will be given Daily from Noon till 10.30 p.m.**

**Orchestra under the Direction of Mr H. DAMBMANN**

**RESTAURANT AND CAFÉ**

**SPACIOUS TEA, COFFEE, AND SMOKING ROOMS**  
**LADIES ROOM**

**PRICES: FAUTEUILS, 6d. & 1s.;**  
**BALCONY STALLS, 1s.;**  
**BALCONY STALLS (FRONT ROWS RESERVED) 1s. 6d.**

**CHILDREN HALF-PRICE to 1s. and 1s,6d. SEATS, DAILY UP TO 6 p.m.”**

*News*, Tuesday, September 1912

“Although this splendidly-appointed picture house in Princes Street has only been opened for a week it has already become firmly established in the public estimation, and has been receiving a very large patronage...large crowds are to be seen nightly waiting in the lounge at the main entrance until the seats have become vacant.

The Tea Room has a commanding view of Edinburgh Castle and Princes Street in general”

The *Princess* jogged along in a tranquil manner for the next 23 years. Its final programme was on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1935 before becoming the *Monseigneur New-Reel Theatre*, which opened on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1935.

*Dispatch*, Wednesday, October 30<sup>th</sup> 1935

**“PRINCESS CINEMA**  
**131 PRINCES STREET**

**JACK HULBERT in *LOVE ON WHEELS***  
**And**  
**STAN HOLLOWAY in *IN TOWN TONIGHT***

**ETC. ETC. ETC.**

**TALKIE EQUIPMENT FOR SALE**

**Complete Talkie Set, Machines and Screen for Sale;  
cheap to immediate buyer; refixed anywhere for use”**

[In Town Tonight was a popular BBC radio programme in the 1930's. It started with Coates' Knightsbridge March and someone intoning "In Town Tonight"; I think it was presented on Saturday evenings. G.F.B.]

***QUEEN'S HALL, 5 QUEEN STREET***

The Queen's Hall has not been much in the limelight as a place of public entertainment during the past 50 years; by entertainment I mean, the theatre, cinema, concert hall and the like. True in the **1920's** it was known as the *Embassy* night club and dance hall and since **1930-31** it has been the Edinburgh Headquarters of the B.B.C.

**POLITICAL MEETING**

I attended my first political meeting in the Queen's Hall on the occasion of the 'Khaki Election, 1918.' **Avon Clyde, K.C.**, stood and was elected for Edinburgh North. In due course he became Lord Advocate for Scotland and ultimately Lord President of the Court of Session from 1920 to 1935. It is remarkable that his son, **James Latham McDiarmid, Q.C.**, M.P., became President of the Court of Session in December 1954.

I came across the next two items by sheer chance.

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> **1881**

**“TO LET**

**QUEEN STREET HALL**

**PUBLIC MEETINGS, LECTURES  
AND MUSICAL or other ENTERTAINMENTS**

**SEATED FOR ABOVE 1,000**

**APPLY TO MR MASTERTON, 5 QUEEN STREET”**

*The Scotsman*, Monday, November 13<sup>th</sup> **1882**

**“QUEEN STREET HALL**

**MADAME HELEN HOPEKIRK'S  
PIANOFORTE RECITAL**

**ON SATURDAY , 18<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER,  
AT HALF PAST TWO**

**Tickets may be had from the PRINCIPAL MUSICSELLERS**

**The doors will be opened half an hour  
previous to the commencement of the Recital**

**Carriages may be ordered at 4.15”**

I searched back for two years in the columns of *The Scotsman* but was unable to establish whether this was the first concert in the Hall; in any case it goes back quite a step in history. [In *The Buildings of Scotland, Edinburgh*, 1984, there is this reference to No. 5 Queen Street, “a long frontage of five windows was recast in 1847/48 by John Dick Peddie, as the United Presbyterian Synod Hall.” The U.P. Church bought the Edinburgh Theatre, Castle Terrace, in 1877 and converted it into their Synod Hall and offices. See under ‘The Castle Terrace Site’. G.F.B.]

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1895

**“QUEEN STREET HALL**

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1895**

**MR. G.PARKER EVANS will give a DRAMATIC  
and MUSICAL RECITAL ASSISTED BY  
MISS BESSIE SIMPSON, SOPRANO;  
MR HECTOR L. CHALMERS, BASS; MR GAVIN GODFREY, ACCOMPANIST**

**DOOR OPEN AT 7.30, COMMENCE AT 8.**

**TICKETS: 3s., 2s., & 1s.  
FROM MESSRS PATERSON & SONS, GEORGE STREET  
KOHLER & SONS, NORTH BRIDGE  
R.W.PENTLAND, FREDERICK STREET”**

Note: I have indicated throughout the history my love of music; how I sang in the Tollcross Central Hall Choir and in the Bohemian’s Amateur Lyric Opera Company. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr Godfrey in these activities.

*The Scotsman*, Friday, November 5<sup>th</sup> 1897

**“QUEEN’S HALL**

**THURS., FRI., & SAT - 18<sup>TH</sup> – 19<sup>TH</sup> – 20<sup>TH</sup>**

**MR J.A. MUIR  
THE CELEBRATED ENTERTAINER**

**RESERVED SEATS, 3s. UNSERVED, 2s., 1s.”**

In the next item is mentioned the show that did so much to put the Queen's Hall on the map, with its yearly visits, namely:

**THE MODERN MARVEL CO. LTD.,  
which was under the general direction of  
MR T.J. WEST**

*The Scotsman*, Monday, December 20th 1897

**“QUEEN'S HALL**

**FROM DECEMBER 27 1897 TO JANUARY 8, 1898**

**Every Night at 8, Matinees Mons., Weds., & Sats**

**THE MODERN MARVEL CO., LTD.,**

**WILL INTRODUCE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SCOTLAND  
THE MOST RECENT SCIENTIFIC WONDER**

**THE ANALYTICON  
FOR PROJECTING SOLID VIEWS**

**CINEMATOGRAPHY UP-TO-DATE,  
with the LARGEST and FINEST SELECTION of  
COLOURED and other ANIMATED SCENES  
ever EXHIBITED AT ONE PERFORMANCE**

**Only previously shown before THE ROYAL SOCIETY  
and THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION**

**The Times says: “Had certainly a highly realistic aspect.”  
The Standard says, “Complete stereoscopic effect is produced.”**

**ADMISSION: 3s., 2s., and 1s.**

**CHILDREN HALF-PRICE**

**BOOK AT WOOD AND CO's.”**

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, December 28<sup>th</sup> 1897

**“THE ANALYTICON AT THE QUEEN STREET HALL**

The Queen Street Hall has for the New Year holidays the **Modern Marvel Company (Limited)** to show an optical novelty called ‘**the analyticon**’. It is the same instrument that has been exhibited for a year or two past at the scientific and other societies in London under the name ‘Lantern’ stereoscope. It is the invention of Mr **John Anderson**, and its merit consists in this, that to objects thrown upon the screen it gives relief and perspective in the

same way as the stereoscope imparts to views shown by its mechanism. How it is done seems simple enough, now that it has been discovered. The figures or views of a pair of stereoscopic transparencies are thrown from two lanterns upon a 10 foot screen. When these are superimposed, the point of view of each being slightly different, representing the object as seen by the right and the left eye, a slight blurring occurs. But each member of the audience being supplied by an analyst, resembling a small opera glass, with the glasses set in the fashion as the lens of a stereoscope, the image at once is righted, and assumes the qualities of a solid body, and also takes the place in true perspective amid its surroundings,

The views shown yesterday were of animals in the zoo and church interiors, and all had a very realistic aspect. From the point of a new development of optical science the exhibition was exceedingly interesting, but for the purposes of popular entertainment the analyticon is not very exciting – not nearly so diverting as the animated pictures, whose exhibition by the Cinematograph formed an important part of the entertainment. Several of these were very good, notably a view of horses swimming across a river, the march of a Highland regiment, and the Jubilee procession. Diorama dissolving views and coloured lantern slides were likewise exhibited, which served to emphasise the great advance which has been made by cinematography in this species of entertainment.

Mr T.J. West proved a pleasant guide to the show, which was well received by a large audience.”

Note: *The Scotsman* scribe deserves a hearty vote of thanks, at this late date, for his excellent article.

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1898

**“QUEEN STREET HALL  
TONIGHT AT 8**

**THE ANALYTICON FOR PROJECTING SOLID VIEWS  
CINEMATOGRAPHY UP-TO-DATE**

**PRICES 3s., 2s. & 1s. CHILDREN HALF-PRICE”**

*The Scotsman*, Monday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1899

**“QUEEN STREET HALL**

**TODAY AT 3    TONIGHT AT 8**

**THE MODERN MARVEL COMPANY LIMITED**

**THE ANALYTICON COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHY**

**PRICES: 3s., 2s. & 1s. BOOK AT PATERSON’S”**

*Dispatch*, Tuesday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1900

**“QUEEN STREET HALL**  
**MODERN MARVEL COMPANY LTD.**  
**UNDER THE DIRECTION OF MR. T.J. WEST**  
**INTRODUCING THE NEW CENTURY CINEMATOGRAPH**  
**ALSO VOCAL & INSTRUMENTAL ITEMS**  
**PRICES: 3s., 2s. & 1s.”**

**Criticism of January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1900 Show**

“The Modern Marvel Co. proved so successful that in 1900 there was ‘a grand holiday programme’ introducing ‘animated pictures of our gallant Navy and Army taken under the auspices of the Admiralty and War Office.’ On the same programme there was shown ‘for the first time in Scotland’ the latest cinematograph revelation, the grand Christmas pantomime of *Cinderella*, produced entirely by animated pictures.”

It was further described as “quite a sensation, beautifully realistic and truly wonderful.”

*Dispatch*, Monday, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1905

**“NINTH ANNUAL HOLIDAY PICTURES**  
**MODERN MARVEL COMPANY’S CINEMATOGRAPH**  
**QUEEN STREET HALL**  
**T.R.H. the PRINCE and PRINCESS OF WALES ROYAL TOUR OF INDIA**  
**The SCIENCE and HUMOUR of GOLF,**  
**as played by HARRY VARDON on the BRAID HILLS**  
**ROYAL TOUR in NEW ZEALAND - by T.J. WEST**  
**An ASCENT of the WETTERHORN and a VISIT TO NAPLES**  
**MSSRS. GOODRICH & EARLY in SOLO and DUETS**  
**MISS THERESE LINDSAY has also been engaged.”**

*Dispatch*, Tuesday, December 26<sup>th</sup> 1905

### **“MODERN MARVEL COMPANY’S CINEMATOGRAPH**

An eight years’ acquaintance with the Modern Marvel Company has taught Edinburgh audiences to expect a high standard of excellence in cinematograph displays, and the Company’s efforts this season to satisfy the public are quite in accordance with their reputation. A short season was commenced in the Queen’s Hall yesterday afternoon with an entertainment instructive as well as amusing. Since last in Edinburgh, the Modern Marvel Company have toured New Zealand. Hence the chief portion of the programme is devoted to films of the life and industries in that southern colony, illustrative of the various phases of the life of our cousins. An insight into the works of the frozen meat company at Islington surprises one at the gigantic scale on which the industry is carried out.

Then the Maori is not forgotten. His sports on the water, his war-dance, also amusing antics of the women in ‘tripping the light fantastic’ according to the native idea, their domestic life – the women washing, cooking in the hot springs – all combine, to make an interesting programme.”

*Scottish Daily Express*, Thursday, April 30<sup>th</sup> 1959

### **“THE QUEEN’S HALL**

It was known as the ‘Modern Marvel cinematograms’, under the direction of Mr T.J. West. The Queen’s Hall show was claimed to be the first animated picture ever taken in Edinburgh by electric light – the children’s parade at the Lord Provost’s juvenile fancy dress ball, specially take by the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Cranston, Lord Provost.

“This unique local picture is timed to be exhibited at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. daily.” The hall was showing also *The Wonders of Niagara*, *The Dear Boys Home for the Holidays*, and other films; on stage there were comic sketches and coon singers.”

*News*, Saturday, April 15<sup>th</sup> 1944 Extracts from an article by ‘M.F.’

This is one of the best articles it has been my lot to read in connection with Edinburgh Cinemas. It is unfortunate that ‘M.F.’ did not write a history of ‘pictur hooses’ in Auld Edinburry. The extract below deals mainly with the Queen’s Hall. Much of the article I can vouch for, as I experienced all that ‘M.F.’ went through – except that I never had the pleasure of visiting the Queen’s Hall while it showed moving pictures.

### **“QUEEN’S HALL, 5 QUEEN STREET OLD-TIME CINEMAS AND STARS**

Edinburgh is today a cinema minded city. There are at the present time upwards of half a hundred picture houses in the Capital.

Forty years ago there were only three – the Queen’s Hall, 5 Queen Street; the Operetta House, 5 Chambers Street, and the Albert Hall, 22 Shandwick Place. Of those, the city’s first permanent cinema, the writer has very happy memories. There were no queues then. One

merely walked in, paid one's money, and chose a good seat – good, that is, as a viewpoint. Modern 'fans' might have found something lacking in the matter of upholstery, but we, knowing no better, observed nothing amiss.

The Pictures in those days were looked upon as a marvel, and it was always 'raining' on the early films. I cannot remember that the 'rain' ever detracted in the least from our enjoyment of them

The cinematograph alone was not then considered of sufficient importance or to be interesting enough to provide all the evening's fare, and was treated more as a scientific wonder to be shown at intervals between turns on the stage.

The *Operetta House* programme was run on these lines, alternating flesh and blood with celluloid ones. The *Queen's Hall* pinned its faith to a preponderance of pictures and thus attracted a more scientifically-minded clientele. Its turns were of a quieter nature than those of its competitors. Natives of different parts of the world would give demonstrations of the customs of their respective countries, and I remembered seeing there an exhibition of some Orientals being punished by the *bastinado*, i.e. pummelling a criminal's upturned feet with a sort of drumstick

#### SOME OF THE SILENT STARS

**Florence Turner**, small and wistful;  
**Flora Finch**, the angular comedienne;  
**Maurice Costello**, the curly haired hero;  
**John Bunny**, the corpulent, smiling comedian;  
**John Dory**, the handsome one;  
**Mr and Mrs Drew**, and many more.

In the old Silent Days it was a thrilling moment when the conductor tapped his lamp-shade with his baton, the musicians struck up the overture, the curtains moved aside – that is – those cinemas which had curtains, and the 'pictures began'. M.F.”

**1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468**

“Queen's Hall, 5 Queen Street.  
Proprietor: T.J. West”

Note: The extract names the person who held the licence to show moving pictures.

#### ***REGAL OR A.B.C., LOTHIAN ROAD***

I gave a short account of the neighbourhood in which the Regal stands, in the story about the *Coliseum*. 125 Fountainbridge. Suffice it to say that the Regal stands on part of the old canal basin, known as Port Hopetoun, and was bounded by these streets: Fountainbridge; Lothian Road, Morrison Street; and Semple Street.

On looking over my notes on the Regal I came across ‘one of those things’ which happen from time to time. In this case it was statement regarding the date of the opening of the Regal, along with a preview of the building, cost and furnishing, etc. in *The Scotsman*, Wednesday, August 10<sup>th</sup> 1938 wherein it was stated, inter alia, that the Regal would open on Monday, September 26<sup>th</sup> 1938;. In fact, it opened on Monday October 10<sup>th</sup> 1938. What happened? I learned that someone had made a mistake which kept the workmen back and thus slowed the job in the last furlong. However, they passed the winning post – to everyone’s satisfaction and it has remained a credit to all who were concerned in its erection.

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, October 8<sup>th</sup> 1938 intimated the Regal would open on Monday October 10<sup>th</sup> 1938.

The following extracts are taken from the preview mentioned above.

#### “THE ARCHITECTS, MESSRS. STEWART KAYE & WALLS

One is struck on entering the stalls, with the great breadth. (An asset when the ‘New Sound’ was introduced in June 1955)

There is all the necessary equipment to meet any requirements for stage entertainments, an orchestra pit has accommodation for 30 musicians.

#### NO ORGAN

Although it is not intended to install an organ the cinema has up-to-date fittings for an organ.

#### MURAL PICTURES

On each side of the stage are large recesses in which special lighting effects produce a changing series of mural pictures (I was always intrigued by these pictures during the intervals).

#### PROJECTION EQUIPMENT

The projection equipment in the new cinema is the first of its kind in the East of Scotland, and the latest sound equipment of **Western Electric** has been installed. The system is one which gives faithful reproduction of sound from the faintest whisper to the loudest roar of a gun.

#### COMFORT FOR PATRONS

Ample space has been allowed between the rows of seats, which have been fitted with sponge arm rests. There is a large air-conditioning plant, and other features of the scheme are a Café and ample cloakroom accommodation. A fireproof operating box has doors opening on to the roof.

#### THE OWNERS

The Regal is owned by the **Associated British Cinemas Corporation**, which control about 50 cinemas in Scotland, including the *Ritz*, Rodney Street, the *Lyceum*, Slateford Road, and the *Savoy*, Stockbridge.

#### COST

The Regal was built at an estimated cost of £60,000.

### THE MANAGER

Mr **Thomas Battison**, who has been appointed the resident manager of the Regal, was formerly the manager of the *Cranston Cinema, Glasgow*, and during a period of about 25 years he has been connected with practically every branch of the entertainment industry.

At one time he was manager of a cinema in Peshwar, on the North-West frontier of India, combining with his duties that of taking the money at the door and playing piano accompaniments. One of his amusing recollections is that of the trouble which was caused by a boy assistant who had a disconcerting habit of interrupting the show and repeating any particular part of the film that he liked. Of course, the 'more enlightened whites' got over the problem by 'sitting' through the entire showing – thus depriving those waiting outside.

### OPENING CEREMONY & FIRST PICTURE

Bailie **Henry Steele** will perform the opening ceremony on Monday afternoon (October 10, 1938).

The opening programme will include:

*Vessels of Wrath*, with **Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester**,  
the first production of the Mayflower Corporation."

*News*, Saturday, October 8<sup>th</sup> 1938

### "THE REGAL

### LOTHIAN ROAD

### SCOTLAND'S FINEST SUPER CINEMA

GRAND OPENING ON  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 10 1938, AT 2.30 p.m.  
BY BAILIE HENRY STEELE

**CHARLES LAUGHTON AND ELSA LANCHESTER in**

*VESSELS OF WRATH (A)*

ON THE SAME PROGRAMME

**FRED MACMURRAY AND HARRIET HILLARD in**

*COCONUT GROVE (U)*

PRICES: FRONT CIRCLE – REAR CIRCLE- BACK STALLS – FRONT STALLS				
<b>EVENING</b>	<b>2s.</b>	<b>1s.6d.</b>	<b>1s.</b>	<b>6d.</b>
<b>HALF PRICES</b>	<b>1s.</b>	<b>9d.</b>	<b>6d.</b>	<b>6d.</b>
<b>AFTERNOONS</b>	<b>1s. 6d.</b>	<b>1s.</b>	<b>1s.</b>	<b>6d.</b>
<b>HALF PRICES</b>	<b>1s.</b>	<b>9d.</b>	<b>6d.</b>	<b>6d."</b>

*News*, Monday, October 10<sup>th</sup> 1938

“The Regal is owned by the A.B.C. Corporation, who also control a large number of other cinemas, including the Ritz, Lyceum and the Savoy in Edinburgh. The Regal has seating for nearly 3,000.

Bailie **Henry Steele**, who performed the opening ceremony, said the cinema was in keeping with all that the name Regal implied. The completion of the Regal was another step in the development of the Canal Basin site. What was a few years ago a deserted bit of land had now become a busy centre of activity. The Regal was ideally situated for the cinema public. The interior had been designed on broad simple lines to give the maximum comfort from the entrance vestibule to the screen. The house was unusually broad in design, and that made it possible to maintain contact with the screen which was necessary for the full enjoyment of film entertainment.

#### FUTURE POLICY

Bailie Steele also commented upon the various other features of the cinema such as generous space between seats, the installation of the latest type of sound and screen projectors, an up-to-date air conditioning plant, and the warm autumn colourings of the interior decorations. He expressed pleasure at being included in the opening programme.

Mr **Stewart Kyle** returned thanks for Bailie Steele’s tributes on behalf of the architects, the contractors, and the craftsmen.

Mr **David A. Stewart**, general manager of the new cinema, said that the policy of the A.B.C. Corporation at the Regal would be the same as at all their houses. They would make an endeavour to provide all that was best in cinema entertainment. They realised that comfortable seats, a healthy atmosphere, the beautiful surroundings were necessary in a modern picture house, but the deciding factor for success was pictures. The Government had recently passed an Act abolishing what were called ‘quickies’. They were made with the object of discrediting the British picture.

Mr **Thomas Murray Battison**, resident manager of the Regal, was formerly manager of the *Cranston Cinema, Glasgow*.”

*Dispatch*, Friday, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1955

#### “REGAL GETS ‘NEW SOUND’

The latest method of recording film sound-track – **Perspecta Stereophonic Sound** – has been installed at Edinburgh’s Regal Cinema, Lothian Road.

At a special preview of the musical *Deep In My Heart*, showing at the cinema next week, - Monday June 20<sup>th</sup> 1955 – members of the Press were given the opportunity of hearing it, and comparing it with other systems already well known.

Unlike the ordinary Stereophonic sound at present in operation in several Edinburgh cinemas, Perspecta does away with auditorium speakers, having its loudspeakers behind the screen. By reason of their positioning, if an actor in the film being shown moves from left to right, or vice versa, the audience is able to locate the actual sound, instead of merely being conscious that it is there.

The Perspecta system, which costs in the neighbourhood of £4,000 to install, can be operated on any type of projector and has separate frequency controls. Thus, both high and low frequencies can be adjusted to suit the acoustics of any auditorium.”

**1954** *Kinematograph Year Book*. Page 415

“Regal Cinema, Lothian Road.

Proprietor: Associated British Cinemas, Ltd., 30/31 Golden Square, London, W.1.

Seats: 2,757”

### ***REGENT PICTURE HOUSE. 12 ABBEY MOUNT***

Search as I did for an hour or two over the period when the **Regent** was opened on Monday, August 1<sup>st</sup> **1927**, and prior to its opening, I did not come across any write-up anent the cinema; however, the brochure which was issued on the occasion of the opening of the **Astoria**, Corstorphine, on Wednesday, January 1<sup>st</sup> **1930**, contained some useful information about the Regent and the relevant information will bear repeating. I am glad to say the cinema is still open as at November **1963**.

The architect responsible for the design and erection of the Regent was Mr **T. Bowhill Gibson**, F.R.I.A.S., who was also involved in the Blue Halls, Rutland and Dominion.

Mr **Fred. R. Graham-Yooll**, was the big man behind the Regent, Blue Halls, Rutland and St Andrew Square. He also played a part in the setting up of the Marine Gardens, Seafield Road, which opened in 1909. In his day Mr Graham-Yooll did much to bring amusements, of a varied character, to the citizens of Edinburgh and their country cousins from the Lothians and further afield.

Mr **Arthur Albin** was the manager of the Regent from its date of opening until he took over responsibility for the Astoria and Blue Halls, which both opened on 1 January **1930**. Under Mr Albin’s skilful control, the Regent ranked as one of the most popular houses in Edinburgh. During the long period I was engaged in gathering material for this history I met a number of cinema managers, all of whom thought highly of Mr Albin.

*News*, Wednesday, July 27<sup>th</sup> **1927**

#### **“THE REGENT PICTURE HOUSE**

**ABBEY MOUNT OFF REGENT ROAD**

**Will Be Opened To The Public On**

**MONDAY, 1 AUGUST 1927**

**RONALD COLEMAN & VILMA BANKY IN**

***THE DARK ANGEL***

*And*

**HAROLD LLOYD in *FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE***

**Continuous Every Evening From 5.45 p.m.**

**PRICES: FRONT STALLS, 4d.; BACK STALLS, 6d.;  
BALCONY, 8d.; CIRCLE, 1s.**

**It Will be Worth Your While To Visit The Regent Picture House"**

*News*, Tuesday, April 29<sup>th</sup> 1930

**"THE REGENT SUPER TALKIES**

**ALL TALKING MUSICAL DRAMA**

***THE DELIGHTFUL ROGUE***

**OPENING OF THE 'COMPTON' ORGAN**

**(Recognised By Experts To Be The Finest Organ In The Worl)**

**BY LESLIE JAMES**

**The Popular London Organist, of H.M.V. Record Fame,  
Who Will Give Special Music Interludes At Every Performance**

**PRICES: MATINEES till 4.30 STALLS, 3d., CIRCLE & BALCONY, 6d.  
EVENING STALLS, 4d & 6d., CIRCLE 1s., BALCONY, 8d."**

*News*, Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup> 1930

**"AMONG THE FILMS**

In the Regent Cinema, Abby Mount, the **John Compton Organ Company** have installed an organ which has been specially designed for the **Gaumont British Company**. It is the first Compton organ in Scotland, and it is claimed to have very special qualities for a cinema theatre.

The organ will be in use on Monday (April 28<sup>th</sup> 1930) and for the opening week recitals are to be given by Mr **Leslie James**, one of the most popular of cinema organists.

Mr **Richard Telfer**, who will be the regular organist, has been in the St Andrew Square Picture House."

Note: "Among The Films", was one of the several Press columns which contained useful pieces of information on the Cinema; all very welcome.

**1938 Cinema Buyers' Guide** Page 173

"Regent, Abbey Mount

Proprietor: General Theatre Corporation Ltd. Seating: 1,765"

**1954 *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 415-416**

“Regent, Abbey Mount

Proprietor: Management Association Ltd., Albion House, 59 New Oxford Street, London, W.C.1

Prices: 1s.6d. to 2s.3d.”

In the respective Year Books for the years 1915, 1938 and 1954, several changes can be detected, but are not noticed in our weekly visits to the cinema over the years:

1. Changes of Proprietor; 2. Reduction in seating accommodation, brought about by the Large Screen; 3. The inevitable increase in prices.

***RIO PICTURE HOUSE, WAUCHOPE AVENUE***

*News*, Saturday, February 1<sup>st</sup> 1936

**“TO ANNOUNCE THE OPENING OF THE  
RIO SUPER CINEMA, WAUCHOPE AVENUE, CRAIGMILLAR**

**BUSES 2 AND 6 TO THE DOOR**

**ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6, AT 2 p.m.**

**SUPER HEATING  
SUPER SOUND SYSTEM  
SUPER VENTILATING SYSTEM  
SUPER SEATS  
SUPER PROGRAMMES**

**DICK POWELL & RUBY KEELER  
IN  
*FLIRTATION WALK*  
AND  
EDWARD G. ROBINSON  
IN  
*PASSPORT TO FAME***

**FURTHER ANNOUNCEMENT ON WEDNESDAY”**

*News*, Wednesday, February 5<sup>th</sup> 1936

**“THE RIO SUPER CINEMA**

**WILL BE OPENED ON**

**THURSDAY, 6<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY, AT 2 p.m.**

**BY THE GREAT SCOTTISH COMEDIAN**

**MR HARRY GORDON**

**(With The Kind Permission of the Management of  
the THEATRE ROYAL, EDINBURGH)**

**ENORMOUS OPENING PROGRAMME  
(AS STATED IN PREVIOUS ADVERT.)”**

No prices of admission were given in the advertisements. I did not find any criticism in the Tuesday Column of the News regarding the opening of the cinema.

**1938** *Cinema Buyers’ Guide* Page 173

“Rio, Wauchope Avenue, Craigmillar.  
Proprietor: Mrs M.E. Broadhurst.  
Seats: 1,100”

**Dispatch**, Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup> **1946** Excerpt

“The Rio Cinema, Craigmillar, was gutted by a fire which broke out early this morning. The Edinburgh National Fire Service state that it was the most rapid and spectacular blaze tackled by them since the *Theatre Royal* fire on March 30 **1946**.

A constable first noticed the outbreak at 2.15 this morning and immediately ‘phoned the fire service at Lauriston Place. Engines from Angle Park and London Road were also rushed to the scene and Commander W.B.Muir, O.B.E., was in charge

The projection box suffered no damage. Stalls, circle and gallery were completely destroyed.”

We hear no more about the Wauchope Avenue cinema until the opening of the *County* in August **1950**; see under *County*.

***RITZ PICTURE HOUSE, RODNEY STREET***

The Ritz Cinema is but a few yards away from the Water o Leith and historic Canonmills. The fact that it was opened in September **1929** indicates that it has ‘something’, call it appeal or drawing power. In any case it has been able to withstand the onslaught of many counter attractions of the last decade.

*News*, Tuesday, September 10<sup>th</sup> **1929**

**“THE RITZ**

**RODNEY STREET**

**BUILT  
FOR  
TALKIES**

**BUILT  
FOR  
TALKIES**

**DAILY AT 2.30 EVERY EVENING CONTINUOUS FROM 6.30 p.m.**

**GRAND OPENING PROGRAMME**

**TODAY AND ALL NEXT WEEK**

**AL JOLSON in**

***THE SINGING FOOL***

**PRICES: 6d., 9d., 1s. and 1s.3d.**

**CHILDREN: 6d and 9d.**

**NEXT WEEK PAULINE FREDERICK in *ON TRIAL*"**

*News*, Tuesday, September 10<sup>th</sup> 1929

**"THE NEW RITZ CINEMA**

The Ritz, in Rodney Street, is the latest addition to the already long list of Edinburgh cinemas, but a distinctive feature about the building is that it is the first picture house erected in the city designed for nothing but talking films.

**NO SILENT PRODUCTIONS**

There will be no silent productions. The step the directors have taken is a courageous one, but there is little doubt success will be met with.

The new cinema is, in interior decoration, designed on somewhat futuristic colours, and the effect is exceedingly bright. A new and somewhat novel system of lighting enhances the colouring.

Built to seat nearly 2,000, every chair is of 'tip-up' character, and the same pattern in all portions of the cinema, and the seating arrangement permits of an unobstructed view from any section.

The floors are heavily carpeted in order to ensure no interference with the presentation of the talking and sound films and one finds extreme purity of tone in the transmission."

**1938** *Cinema Buyers' Guide* Page 173

"Ritz, Rodney Street

Proprietor: Scottish Cine and Variety Theatres Ltd.

Seats: 2,030 "

**1954** *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 415-416

"Ritz, Rodney Street

Proprietor: Associated British Cinema Ltd., 30/31 Golden Square, London W.1.

Seats: 1,923"

**RITZ KINEMA, SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS**

*News*, Friday, October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1913

**“MORNINGSIDE**

**RITZ KINEMA  
SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS**

**WILL OPEN 8<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 1913**

**BEAUTIFULLY FURNISHED**

**First Class Orchestra Under The Supervision Of Mr Paterson Lamb**

**PRICES: 1s., 9d. and 6d.**

**DAILY from 3 till 10.30”**

*News*, Tuesday, October 14<sup>th</sup> 1913

“With such a comfortable and well-equipped picture house as the Ritz Kinema in their midst, the people resident in Morningside are well catered for in the matter of picture entertainment”

*News*, Saturday, January 10<sup>th</sup> 1914

**“THE RITZ KINEMA**

**BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH JURY’S PICTURE PLAY**

***QUO VADIS?***

**WILL BE SHOWN ALL NEXT WEEK AT  
THE RITZ KINEMA  
SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS, MORNINGSIDE**

**3 PERFORMANCES DAILY – 3, 6.30 & 8.45  
PRICES AS USUAL: 4d., 6d., 9d & 1s.”**

Note: Compared with the previous advertisement, 4d. has become the cheapest admission price.

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* showed that there was seating for 400.

The *Ritz* in Springvalley Gardens was but one of 7 picture houses on that site, from **1912** to **1937** since when I could find no trace of the premises showing moving pictures, presumably because of the opening of the *Dominion*. For the good folk of Morningside I will give the complete list of picture houses which stood on the site when the **Springvalley Cinema** comes under the ‘pen’

## ***ROXBURGH, DRUMMOND STREET***

It is true to say that the ***Roxburgh*** was a family house in every sense; I will show how it catered for the young and the young in heart. That the ***Roxy***, as it was called in the **1920's**, played a useful **social role** in the very heart of the *Sooth Side*, is undoubted

It is true that some cinemas catered for the *Kimley Benk* and *Moaning Side* residents, in the same manner as a Five Star hotel is open to anyone, provided he can pay the bill. Which brings to mind George Orwell's pointed tag," All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

I heard the Rev **Henry Heath**, one time minister of Chalmers' Church, West Poort, say, "Surely God must have loved the Common People, He made so many of them." It is a thought, but does not seem to have the International recognition, even though our own Bard pleaded, "That Man to Man the world ou'r shall Brithers be for aw that."

A number of my old *Sooth Side* colleagues were anxious to know if it was my intention to include the ***Roxy*** in the history of Edinburgh cinemas. On being told that the ***Roxburgh*** was well to the fore, each one, in turn, expressed his thanks. That sentiment applied to a number of picture houses in this manner, "Aye I remember the old....", mentioning the name of the picture house that was uppermost in their minds.

Sentiment is a strong trait in our way of living. It applies to our first school, our street, our picture house, our battalion of the Territorials, all demanding our loyalty and allegiance. Alas, it was such picture houses as the ***Roxy***, the ***Op***, the ***Starry*** and the ***TollX***, all in closely crowded areas, that received our allegiance,

It will be seen that there are several aspects regarding the Way Of Life as it was carried on in the *Old Sooth Side* which, in the main, will soon be no more, as I write in December **1963**. No one will mourn its death but many will retain happy memories of that close-knit community of kindly neighbours.

*News*, Monday, December 29<sup>th</sup> **1919**

### **"THE ROXBURGH**

### **DRUMMOND STREET**

### **OPENING ON NEW YEAR'S DAY (THURSDAY January 1<sup>st</sup> 1920)**

**With An All-Star Programme OF Pictures including**

**WILLIAM FAVERSHAM & BARBARA CASTLETON**

**IN *THE SILVER KING***

**6.30 CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE 10.30**

**NEW YEAR'S DAY, CONTINUOUS FROM 3"**

News, Thursday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1920

**“ROXBURGH - DRUMMOND STREET**

***THE SILVER KING***

**The 40 years' fame of this Remarkable Drama by  
H.A.Jones and Hendry Herman  
makes the Motion Picture Version,  
starring William Faversham and Barbara Castleton,  
one of the greatest events in the history of the silent film.**

**ALSO COMPLETE PROGRAMME OF COMEDY, CARTOON AND TOPICAL.”**

News, Tuesday, December 30<sup>th</sup> 1919

**“PREVIEW OF THE ROXBURGH**

The Roxburgh Picture House in Drummond Street will open on Thursday (January 1<sup>st</sup> 1920) under the manager-ship of Mr **W. Lewis Brown**, who, during the War, held a commission in the Royal Scots.

The building has been reconstructed and redecorated, and accommodates about 500.

**PLASTER SCREEN**

A special feature is the plaster screen which is built in. The opening picture should be a sufficient draw in itself, the feature film being: *The Silver King*.”

Note: In the **1920's** the preconceived idea was that it was *The Silver Screen*. For example, in the story of the King's Cinema, Home Street, one advertisement says, “The only ‘mirrored’ screen in Scotland, direct from the U.S.A”.

For the record the address of the **Roxy** as given in the 1920/21 Street Directory was : “Roxburgh Street, 1 and 3, The Roxburgh Picture House Ltd.”

Prices for the **Roxy** were 4d., 6d. and 9d.. Children, half-price

**MR GEORGE WEBSTER  
MANAGER OF THE ROXBURGH**

Mr Webster was first introduced into the Cinema Industry as a ‘chocolate boy’ in the old *Electric Theatre, Falkirk*, now the *Roxy Theatre* (1962)

After serving with the Royal Engineers, Mr Webster was discharged in 1919, and took up the entertainment business, and managed shows in many parts of Scotland. Mr Webster told me that he spent two happy years at the **Roxy** from **1922** to December **1923**.

He became manager of the *Grand Picture House, St Stephen Street*, in January **1924**, where he remained until May **1944**. On that date he became manager of the *State, Great Junction Street*, until he retired on Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup> **1963**.

It was my great pleasure to meet Mr Webster in his office in the State; he gave me the loan of several cinema brochures, which assisted me very much in writing this history. He was one of nature's gentlemen; always doing something for someone. During his tenure as manager at the Roxburgh Mr Webster introduced a series of *Tuesday Jazz Nights*.

#### **The Four Asters**

This was the name adopted by the four in the band. The present M.P. for Central Edinburgh, **Tom Oswald**, was the vocalist in **1922/23**. **Jimmy Edmonston**, for many years head upholsterer in the Palace of Holyroodhouse, was on the drums. Jimmy retired in **1960**. **Ralph Henderson** played the violin and **Jim Reid** completed the quartet on the 'sax'.

The Four Asters had a regular 'spot' in the Queen's Hotel Ballroom, at the Foot of the Walk (The site is now occupied by F.W. Woolworth's)

Mr Webster told me he introduced Mr **James McGregor** to the mysteries of the projection box in the Roxburgh; Jimmy at that time was a little nipper in short trousers. In time, Jimmy became the chief projectionist at the *Caley, Lothian Road*, and still holds the post as at December **1963**.

Among his other activities, Mr McGregor is the Edinburgh Secretary of the National Association of Theatre and Kinema Employees.

#### **ROYAL CINEMA, 241, HIGH STREET**

*News*, Thursday, December 27<sup>th</sup> **1928**

**"THE ROYAL CINEMA  
241 HIGH STREET (LATE TRON)**

**UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT  
TWO GREAT PICTURES**

**DECEMBER 27 – 28 – 29, THURSDAY-FRIDAY-SATURDAY**

**WHY SAILORS GO WRONG**

**With**

**Sammy Cohen and Ted Macnamara  
A REAL SCREAM**

**Also TOM MIX & TONY, the Wonder Horse  
In  
DARE DEVIL'S REWARD**

**Do Not Miss Seeing These Pictures**

**SATURDAY MATINEE from 12 Noon**

**PRICES: 3d, 4d, 6d, & 1s. AFTER 4 p.m.: 4d., 6d, 8d. & 1s.”**

Note: The *Royal* closed down within 12 months.

***ROYAL ELECTRIC THEATRE  
ROYAL HOTEL BUILDINGS, PRINCES STREET***

**1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468**

“Royal Electric Theatre, Royal Hotel Buildings, Princes Street  
Proprietor: Princes Picture House Co.”

I never found any advertisement for the Royal Theatre. It may well be that the hotel catered for guests – I will leave it at that.

***RUTLAND PICTURE HOUSE, CANNING STREET***

*News*, Thursday, April 24<sup>th</sup> **1930** Preview

“The Rutland Cinema, in the Rutland Square district, which opens on Monday first, April 28<sup>th</sup> **1930**, is the latest addition to the more commodious picture houses in the city. The seating accommodation is just over 2,000 and plans permit of further extension if necessary.

There will be several new features in the Rutland – one particular system of interior lighting never hitherto utilised. Altogether 2,000 lights will be employed; the principal shades being four distinct colours. An elaborate switchboard system will allow the grading and blending of the lights.

The interior decoration is of a delicate shade of orange, silver and light blue, whilst the entire seating is in old rose colour.

The mediaeval panels are placed at each end of the screen, and of such shape that they could be dispensed with in the event of a new wide screen coming into being.

Such is the construction of the new picture house that an uninterrupted view of the screen is obtainable from any seat in the building, the area seating being particularly well adapted for viewing films. The cinema should prove one of the most popular of the **General Theatre Corporation Ltd.**”

**1938 Cinema Buyers' Guide** Page 173  
"Rutland Picture House, Canning Street.  
Proprietor: General Theatre Corporation Ltd.  
Seats: 2,138"

*News*, Friday, April 25<sup>th</sup> 1930

**"THE RUTLAND PICTURE HOUSE  
TORPHICHEN STREET, HAYMARKET**

**PHONE 30502**

**CONTINUOUS FROM 2 p.m.**

**SEE PAGE 7 OF THIS ISSUE FOR FULL DETAILS  
OF THE OPENING MONDAY NEXT  
OF SCOTLAND'S LATEST AND FINEST PICTURE HOUSE**

PAGE 7

**OPENING MONDAY NEXT  
APRIL 28 th 1030 AT 2.30 p.m.**

***THE LOVES OF BURNS*  
STARRING JOSEPH HISLOP**

**A SCOTTISH TALKIE SENSATION**

**OPENING CEREMONY TO BE PERFORMED BY  
SIR WILLIAM LOWRIE SLEIGH, LL. D., D.L.**

**HOURS AND PRICES:  
CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE FROM 2 p.m. DOORS OPEN 1.30 p.m.  
MATINEE TILL 4.30 p.m. 6d., 8d. & 1s  
CHILDREN 4d. and 6d.**

**EVENING, 8d., 1s., 1s.3d. 1s.6d.  
CHILDREN, 4d. and 8d. (Saturdays excepted)**

Note: Mr **Joseph Hislop** was an Edinburgh man, a scholar of St Mary's Cathedral, Palmerston Place. I knew his father, a house painter; the family lived in Caledonian Crescent, Dalry. Joseph Hislop ultimately took up residence in Sweden or Norway. Yes, Hislop could sing!

At the opening **Lyndon Laird** was at the 'Mighty Organ'; and **Norman Austin** led the Rutland Symphony Orchestra.

Three street names are given above in the above advertisements:

1. Torphichen Street; 2. Canning Street; and 3. Rutland Square district.

The picture house stood at the east end of Torphichen Street and the west end of Canning Street. The site was formerly the Dewar Place Generating Station, which opened on April 11<sup>th</sup> **1895**; it was installed at a cost of £120,000.

The Rutland lost its identity and the last advertisement for it appeared in the *News*, Friday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> **1950**. The last programme was:

**LORRETTA YOUNG, CELESTE HOLM**  
***COME TO THE STABLE (U)***  
**2.40, 3.45 and 8.55**

***SAND in TECHNICOLOR***  
**4.15 and 7.25."**

On March 6<sup>th</sup> **1950** the cinema became known as the *Gaumont*.

#### ***ST ANDREW SQUARE PICTURE HOUSE, CLYDE STREET***

The site at the north-west end of Clyde Street, between Elder Street and St Andrew's Street, which the *Square* occupied, to give it the name by which it was known throughout the city for 29 years, had an interesting history; I append a summary.

#### **THE ROYAL 'DICK' VETERINARY COLLEGE**

**Professor Dick** was born in White Horse Close in **1793**. His father was a blacksmith. In **1833** he founded the Veterinary School in Clyde Street, which he maintained at his own expense. From time to time the building was enlarged.

Professor Dick died on 11<sup>th</sup> April **1866** and he left his estate in trust to the Town Council for the endowment of the college. In **1906** it was incorporated under Act of Parliament and was named **Royal Dick Veterinary College**.

In **1914** the college authorities acquired ground at Summerhall, near the east end of the Meadows, part of which was occupied in **1916**.

#### **ENTER THE MILITARY POLICE OR 'RED CAPS'**

In the First World War the strength of the Military Police grew in ratio to the Armed Forces. The War Department seized the premises of the former Vet. College which were ideal for the purpose of housing a number of men. The address of the Military Police, as shown in the 1920/21 Street Directory in Clyde Street was simply 'Provost Marshall'. In course of time, the Military Police, their job completed, returned to civvy street; thus, the old Vet. College was on the market to be exploited by the highest bidder.

What is left of Clyde Street as at December **1963** is passable. However, up until the fire in **1952** it was a dump. It was little more than a lane; depressing, uninviting and altogether a blot on the landscape.

That was the location where the *St Andrew Square Picture House* held sway for 29 years, from January 1<sup>st</sup> **1923** to November 12<sup>th</sup> **1952**.

#### ENTER GRAHAM-YOOLL

The name **Graham-Yooll** has been mentioned several times in the Cinema section. When it became known the old ‘Dick Vet College’ was to be converted into a picture house many citizens shook their heads in a knowing manner and forecast it would be a failure.

It was unthinkable that a house billed as a ‘super cinema’ should be located in a side street, when, close at hand, Princes Street had four excellent cinemas; current reports were to the effect that the New Clyde Street picture house was to seat 1,400 approximately.

People, it was said, would not go into a **side street** for first-class entertainment. Subsequent events proved how completely wrong were the prophets of failure and how right Fred Graham-Yooll was in his first cinema venture. I have shown how he had an ‘interest’ in a number of Edinburgh cinemas: Astoria, Rutland, Blue Halls, Regent, and other smaller theatres. Whether the opening of the *Square* had anything to do with the closing of the *Picture House*, 111 Princes Street, on 24<sup>th</sup> November **1923**, may never be known..

Cinema Flash. Tuesday December 3<sup>rd</sup> **1963**, BBC TV announced that **Sabu**, the Elephant Boy, had died at the age of 39

The Square picture house occupied an ‘island’ site and it was a common sight to see the queue completely circle the cinema. The police were happy as no crowd control was necessary.

*News*, Wednesday, January 3<sup>rd</sup> **1923** Advertisement

**“OPENED JANUARY 1 1923**

**ST ANDREW SQUARE PICTURE HOUSE  
CLYDE STREET**

**A MOST SUCCESSFUL OPENING**

**MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> JANUARY**

**A SAILOR- MADE MAN HAROLD LLOYD  
And  
GENERAL JOHN REGAN**

**TWO BIG FEATURES**

**CONTINUOUS FROM 2 p.m. DAILY**

**PRICES: 1s. 3d. BALCONY (CHILDREN HALF-PRICE, 2 to 5)  
9d. STALLS**

**BUSES & TRAMS ALL LEAD TO ST ANDREW SQUARE.”**

News, Tuesday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1923

### “ST ANDREW SQUARE PICTURE HOUSE

Although not yet completed, it was able to be thrown open to provide for the New Year needs and shared largely in meeting the big demand for amusement at this time.

There is seating for about 1,500 and on entering one is impressed with the spaciousness of the building and with the excellent view of the screen obtainable from all parts.

Included in yesterday's (Monday) programme were: *The Silent Barrier* and *The Sailor-Made Man*”

Note: The *Caley*, Lothian Road opened on the same day, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1923, as the *Square*

As stated above the *Square* continued to prosper for the next 29 years, until on Wednesday, November 12<sup>th</sup> 1952, at half-past one the dreaded shout ‘Fire’ was heard. I append a few paragraphs from *The Scotsman*, Thursday, November 13<sup>th</sup> 1952, regarding the fire:

“The staff in the cinema were going about their usual duties, preparing for the afternoon when, without any warning, someone shouted ‘Fire!’, and within half an hour the building was almost totally destroyed , except for the projection box.

Soon after one of the employees had put a ‘999’ call through to the Fire Brigade, five engines in all, were soon on the scene. In about fifteen minutes from the time the fire was first noticed, the roof fell in, and, as it fell, the west wall of the cinema burnt out and collapsed.

The cinema employees were unable to take out the projection machines, but saved films and some valuable lenses when the roof fell in. Fortunately, no one was injured, although four firemen escaped death in a miraculous fashion when the west wall collapsed.

Only the fact that the cinema was empty at the time averted a disaster.

It has been estimated that it would cost between £250,000 and £300,00 to replace the cinema, but executives of the **Gaumont-Odeon Circuit** have grave doubts about the authority to build.

The Burgh Engineer ordered the charred remains of the cinema to be demolished.

Mr. **J.S. Dunbar**, the Gaumont-Odeon group's district controller and Mr **L.B. Fancourt**, an executive hurried from London immediately they heard of the fire.

Mr Dunbar was appointed manager of the *Square* when it opened in 1923.”

### NOW BUS DEPOT

In due course the site was cleared and Scottish Omnibuses Ltd. now operate their long distance coaches from the spot which was once the Royal Dick Veterinary College, and lastly the St Andrew Square Picture House.

**ST BERNARD'S PICTURE PALACE  
ST BERNARD'S ROW, DEANHAUGH STREET, STOCKBRIDGE**

*News*, Friday, April 12<sup>th</sup> 1912

**"ST BERNARD'S PICTURE PALACE  
ST BERNARD'S ROW - DEANHAUGH STREETN  
STOCKBRIDGE  
GRAND RE-OPENING  
ON MONDAY, 15<sup>th</sup> APRIL 1912  
With up-to-date Series of FIRST CLASS and Interesting Pictures  
Orchestra will render Selections during the Performance.  
PRICES: 2d., 3d. & 4d."**

*News*, Tuesday, April 16<sup>th</sup> 1912

"St Bernard's Picture Palace at Deanhaugh Street, had a successful re-opening last night, being well patronised at both houses (not mentioned in the advertisement).

Star Film: *A Blind Man's Dog*, - *Red X Martyr* and *Waiting At The Church*"

Note: See *Palace Picture House*, St Bernard's Row, which opened on Monday, April 10<sup>th</sup> 1911.

***SALISBURY PICTURE HOUSE, SOUTH CLERK STREET  
(FORMERLY THE LIVINGSTONR HALL)***

*News*, Thursday, December 17<sup>th</sup> 1925

**"EDINBURGH'S LATEST CINEMA  
THE SALISBURY PICTURE HOUSE  
OPENING DATE – THURSDAY, 17<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 1925  
CONTINUOUS FROM 6.30  
A FIRST-CLASS CINEMA  
FURNISHED IN FIRST-CLASS STYLE  
FOR PATROINS WITH FIRST-CLASS TASTE**

**SPECIAL OPENING ATTRACTION**

***THE SEA HAWK***  
**BY RAFAEL SABATINI**

**ADMISSION: 1s., 9d. and 6d.”**

*News*, Tuesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> **1925**

“The Salisbury Picture House – Edinburgh’s new picture house has lost no time in attracting the crowds, if last night’s attendance is any criterion. The management have made a good start in the matter of the programme.

What is lost by the absence of stage lines is gained by the more comprehensive eye of the camera.”

**1938** *Cinema Buyers’ Guide* Page 173

“Salisbury Picture House, South Clerk Street.  
Proprietor: Salisbury Picture House.  
Seats: 1,040”

*News*, Tuesday, 14<sup>th</sup> February **1939**

**“FIRE**

**SALISBURY PICTURE HOUSE, SOUTH CLERK STREET**

Considerable damage was done by fire early this morning.”

In **1943**, Messrs Brown, 31 South Clerk Street, took over the premises as a furniture store; that seems to be one of the most common fates for old cinemas.

***SALON, THE 5, BAXTER’S PLACE***

**THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW OF EDINBURGH’S CINEMAS WHICH HAS PASSED  
ITS HALF CENTURY**

*News*, Thursday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> **1913** First Advertisement

**“THE SALON**

**BAXTER’S PLACE**

**(A Few Doors From The Tabernacle)**

**Absolutely The Last Word In Kinema Houses”**

**WILL OPEN SHORTLY**

**The House Which Will Accommodate 1,000 People  
Is Being Luxuriously Furnished and Decorated In  
*PERSIAN STYLE***

**HAS FIRST-CLASS TEA-ROOMS AND AN ORCHESTRA PAR EXCELLENCE”**

*News*, Saturday, October 11<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“THE SALON**

**5 BAXTER’S PLACE - LEITH WALK  
(TWO DOORS FROM LONDON ROAD)**

**WILL BE OPEN ON  
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16<sup>th</sup>, 1913 AT 6 p.m.**

**AS A HIGH-CLASS  
KINEMA HOUSE**

**With A First-Class Orchestra**

**AND**

**TEA-ROOMS A SPECIALITY”**

Note: No admission prices were advertised.

*News*, Tuesday, October 21<sup>st</sup> 1913

**“THE SALON**

The Baxter’s Place Picture House, opened the other afternoon seems to have already established itself in popular favour, a packed attendance being present last night.

The finishing touches to the decoration of the interior have now been made, and the scene is one of tasteful beauty. The lighting effects are particularly pleasing

The programme presented last night was composed of well-chosen and varied subjects. Bizet’s famous opera was ‘tapped’ to provide the theme for *Carmen*, and the picture version gives scope for some charming photography.

*The Lady of Shallott*, detailed Tennyson’s touching poem from the *Idylls of the King*. There was a Travel film showing *Picturesque Roumania*, while on the humorous side was *Dick Turpin’s Ride To York*.”

The decoration of The Salon was done by Gregor MacGregor, Barclay Place; a petrol station now stands on the site.

When the salon opened the doorman and the door-women attendants were dressed in Eastern fashion. The men wore turban styled head-dress, loose pantaloons, and the toes of their slippers were delicately turned up. The women affected the garb of the 'Dancing' or *Nautch Girls*. Needless to say the clothing was of many colours.

#### THE HAREM

Inevitably the Salon received the nickname the *Harem*.

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

"Salon, 5 Baxter's Place.

Proprietor: Regent Photo Playhouse Ltd.

Seats: 1,000"

When the Playhouse opened in August **1929**, it was thought the Salon would 'pack up'. True, the more fashionable Playhouse attracted big crowds, with consequent long queues. The waiting period did not suit patrons who were in a hurry to see some action – the Salon met their needs.

#### ***SAVOY PICTURE HOUSE, ST BERNARD'S ROW***

*News*, Monday, March 28<sup>th</sup> **1921**

**"THE SAVOY PICTURE HOUSE**

**ST BERNARD'S ROW - STOCKBRIDGE**

**FORMAL OPENING TODAY AT 3 p.m. by**

**THE RIGHT HON. LORD PROVOST CHESSE**

**D.W.GRIFFITH'S MASTERPIECE**

***HEARTS OF THE WORLD***

**The Greatest Picture Ever Screened**

**AND ALL WEEK**

**AT 6.30 and 8.30 p.m. WEDNESDAY MATINEE at 3.**

**PRICES (INCLUDING TAX) : 8d., 1s., 1s.6d. and 2s.4d. RESERVED**

**BOOK SEATS AT TOWNSEND & THOMSON'S,  
MUSICSELLERS, 79 GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH"**

Note: The Savoy was the third cinema on the site; the first two being Palace Picture House, April 10<sup>th</sup> **1911**; and St Bernard's Picture Palace, April 12<sup>th</sup> **1912**. The Tudor succeeded the Savoy.

*News*, Tuesday, May 24<sup>th</sup> **1960**

“The manager of the Savoy Cinema, Stockbridge, has disclosed that only a few days ago the owners of the Savoy cancelled plans to close the cinema. The Savoy will remain open indefinitely.”

But, within 2 months the Savoy closed; see under *Tudor*.

***SCOTIA, 90 DALRY ROAD***  
**(FORMERLY THE HAYMARKET)**

*News*, Monday, August 29<sup>th</sup> **1949**

**“THE SCOTIA CINEMA**  
**DALRY ROAD**  
**(FORMERLY THE HAYMARKET)**  
**PRESENTS AS A SPECIAL OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT**  
**THAT EPIC OF SCOTTISH HISTORY**  
***BONNIE PRINCE CHARLIE***  
**STARRING**  
**DAVID NIVEN and MARGARET LEIGHTON**  
**ON**  
**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1<sup>st</sup> 1949 - AT 6.15 p.m.**  
**DOORS OPEN - 5.45 p.m.”**

**1954** *Kinematograph Year Book* Pages 415 –416

“Scotia, 90 Dalry Road.

Proprietor: Edinburgh Haymarket Picture House, Ltd., 23 Walker Street, Edinburgh

Seats: 638. Proscenium Width: 22 feet

Prices: 1s. and 1s.9d.”

For 50 years the cinema at 90 Dalry Road carried on with little to report. Except for re-decorating it opened week after week – until the dreaded cry of alarm **Fire!**, was once more raised.

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, October 31<sup>st</sup> **1962**

“Because of a fire in the auditorium yesterday, the Scotia Cinema, Dalry Road, Edinburgh, may be closed for three months.

Four fire engines brought the fire under control in half an hour. Mr **Alexis King**, the cinema’s managing director, said he had not so far been able to assess the damage, which was to seating and the foyer.

The cinema was closed at the time.”

The Scotia re-opened on Monday January **1963**; it closed down on Saturday, February 29<sup>th</sup> **1964**.

***SILVER KINEMA HOUSE, 30 NICOLSON SQUARE***

*News*, Monday, September 15<sup>th</sup> **1913** First advertisement

**“SILVER KINEMA HOUSE,  
30 NICOLSON SQUARE ‘PHONE 7877 CEN**

**WEEK COMMENCING, MONDAY SEPTEMBER 15, 1913**

**Daily Thereafter From 2 till 10.30 p.m.**

**PICTURE *THE RIVAL AIRMEN***

**CHANGE OF PROGRAMMES – MON. & THURS.**

**Most Elaborately Furnished and Decorated House in the City**

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC – R. DEARBLOITZ**

**BEAUTIFUL BOUDOIR – TEA LOUNGE**

**PRICES: BOX SEATS, 1s.6d., GRAND CIRCLE, 1s.,  
UPPER CIRCLE, 9d., FAUTEUILS, 6d.**

**CHILDREN HALF-PRICE till 5.30”**

Within the year the War started on August 4<sup>th</sup> 1914; and there were, only too true, Rival Airmen.

News, Tuesday, September 16<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“THE SILVER KINEMA**

The new South Side house, the Silver Kinema, was crowded yesterday afternoon and evening.

*The Rival Airmen* claimed first place on the programme, and in it many thrilling incidents were shown. *The Niagara Falls* which is beautifully coloured and of more than usual length and interest. *Max and His Rival* and *The Amateur Photographers* and *Jim's Little Wife* are amusing comedies. The programme is completed with a Wild West drama and Animated Gazette.”

Well, the patrons of 50 years ago certainly got quantity, if not quality.

News, Thursday, December 18<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“SILVER KINEMA  
NICOLSON SQUARE**

**2 TODAY 10.30**

**GRAND OPENING  
EDISON'S KINETOPHONE**

**TALKING PICTURES  
The Most Marvellous Invention Of The Age, Shown Before  
Their Majesties THE KING AND QUEEN**

**Visited by 40,000 People at LA SCALA, GLASGOW, in one week**

**USUAL PRICES”**

See index entry ‘Cinemas: Some firsts, lasts oldest’ for comments about where the first talkies were presented in Edinburgh.

News, Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup> 1914 Last advertisement prior to the opening of *The Lyric* on Saturday, August 15<sup>th</sup> 1914.

**“SILVER KINEMA**

**NICOLSON SQUARE**

**2 TO 10.30 p.m.**

**UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT**

**GRAND-DAD**

**PRICES: 2d., 4d., 6d. & 9d. (RESERVED)  
SATURDAYS: 4d., 6d., 9d. & 1s.”**

Note the Price reductions compared with the First Advertisement.

***SPRINGVALLEY CINEMA, 12 SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS***

*News*, Thursday, January 1<sup>st</sup> **1931**

**“SPRINGVALLEY CINEMA,  
MORNINGSIDE**

**THURSDAY, FRIDAY & SATURDAY, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> JANUARY**

**SPECIAL ATTRACTION**

**With JOHN BOLES AND CARLOTTA KING in  
THEIR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT**

***THE DESERT SONG*  
THE ENORMOUSLY SUCCESSFUL PLAY**

**APPROXIMATE TIMES OF SHOWING: 2.15, 4.30, 6.15 & 9 P.M.  
DOORS OPEN at 1.45 p.m. EACH DAY”**

There were no further advertisements for the next three months; I did not look beyond Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup> **1931**.

**1938 *Cinema Buyers’ Guide* Page 173**

“Springvalley Cinema, Morningside.  
Proprietor: Scottish Cinema & Variety Theatres Ltd.  
Seats: 400.”

**12 SPRINGVALLEY GARDENS, MORNINGSIDE SITE  
AND ITS SEVERAL CINEMAS**

I give below a list in chronological order of all the cinemas mentioned in connection with the Springvalley Gardens site.

1. Morningside Picture House , opened December 19<sup>th</sup> **1912**.
2. Ritz Kinema, opened October **1913**.
3. Morningside Photo Playhouse, entry found in 1915 Kine. Year Book
4. Evan’s Picture House, opened December 19<sup>th</sup> **1914**.
5. Morningside Cinema, opened December 27<sup>th</sup> **1915**
6. Cine Playhouse, entry found in 1920/21 Street Directory.
7. Springvalley Cinema, opened January 1<sup>st</sup> **1931**.

The last mention of a cinema in the Street Directory was in **1937**; it seems likely that the arrival of the Dominion in January **1938** put paid to the small Springvalley cinema. The premises were subsequently used as the *Silver Slipper* ballroom.

***TIVOLI PICTURE HOUSE, GORGIE ROAD***

*News*, Thursday August 26<sup>th</sup> **1913**

**“PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT**

**TIVOLI, TYNECASTLE  
ARDMILLAN TERRACE CAR TERMINUS**

**THIS UP-TO-DATE PICTURE HOUSE  
WILL BE OPENED ON  
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2 1913**

**LATEST PICTURES & VARIETIES**

**TWICE NIGHTLY AT 7 AND 9**

**ADMISSION: 2d., 4d. & 6d.  
MATINEES EVERY SATURDAY at 2.30  
ADMISSION: 1d., 2d. & 3d.”**

Car Terminus: From **1910** Electric Trams were **towed** from Shrubhill Depot to Ardmillan Terrace, which ran from there to Slateford. This continued until the night of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> October **1922**, when poles (still there in **1963**) were erected in the middle of Princes Street, thus making the route to Slateford all electric.

*News*, Tuesday, September 2<sup>nd</sup> **1913**

**“OPENING OF THE TIVOLI PICTURE HOUSE  
BY JUDGE STEVENSON**

The Tivoli Picture House, Tynecastle, the latest addition to the ever-increasing number of cinema theatres in Edinburgh, was formally opened last night. The building which will accommodate 600 persons, has been erected on the site of the old Toll House in Gorgie Road, and has a handsome stone frontage. It has a spacious, lofty and well-ventilated auditorium, while for colder weather a heating system has been installed. In the interior decorations, cream is the dominant colour, and gives the theatre a bright appearance. The operating box, in which there are installed two of the latest types of projectors, is a spacious compartment situated outside the theatre altogether, thereby minimising the risk of an outbreak of fire.

## EDINBURGH JUDGE ON THE PICTURE HOUSE

**Judge Stevenson**, who performed the opening ceremony, was introduced by Mr **R. Raymond**, one of the Directors. He was also accompanied to the platform by Bailie Rose and Councillor Archbold. Judge Stevenson congratulated the proprietors on their enterprise in erecting such a comfortable theatre, and wished them every success in their venture. The picture house in Edinburgh, he continued, was a comparatively modern institution, but it had met with such remarkable success that today there was not a district in the city that had not got at least one.

Recently an eminent Cabinet Minister at a concert in Wales spoke about the dreariness of village life, and said that he did not wonder that so many villagers come to town. Those who were familiar with city life know that there were many thousands in Edinburgh, and in every large city, who lived in dreary surroundings. It was the natural desire on the part of both villagers and townspeople to take as much sunshine as possible out of life, and that was really the main source of the success of the picture house.

Personally, he welcomed that picture house, because it seemed to combine amusement with instruction (applause). The ever increasing prosperity of the working-classes had within recent years brought within their reach an opportunity of securing a reasonable amount of enjoyment, and if in the past they had spent more on amusement pure and simple, he thought cinematograph had come to remedy that defect (applause). There were many thousands in Edinburgh, to whom the charm of visiting the cities of the Continent and elsewhere must be a sealed book, but they had in the picture houses pictures depicting scenes from other countries, and incidents that were of world-wide interest, all for the expenditure of a few pence.

Bailie Rose also spoke, and on the call of Mr Raymond, three hearty cheers were given to the municipal representatives of the ward.

The chief picture was an absorbing drama entitled, *Till Death Do Us Part*. An amusing subject was *An Aeroplane Affair*

Miss **Agnes Hazel**, soprano, gave delightful renderings of well-known songs, while **King and Carson**, comedians and dancers, kept the house in merriment with their smart patter

There will be a complete change of pictures on Thursday, star item, *In Spite of All*".

## JUDGE STEVENSON'S REMARKS, 1913

It is well to include, in full, the remarks of Judge Stevenson, later Lord Provost of Edinburgh. He was in business as a jeweller and watchmaker in Earl Grey Street. Bailie Rose was in business as a grocer in Morrison Street, opposite Grove Street. I wonder whether 'things' have really improved in the 50 years since **1913**.

**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

"Tivoli, Gorgie Road.

Proprietor: Robertson & Raymond.

Seats: 580"

*News*, Tuesday, September **1913** Excerpt

“...This comfortable establishment at Gorgie Road has become well established in public favour, and large crowds are attending nightly.

The chief item for the earlier part of the week is *Gambling Mania* along with *A Cheyenne Brave*.”

There was no end to the supply of *Red Injuns* films, and since the introduction of TV the ‘Brave’ and his family has prospered and multiplied. Well, well the ‘Braves’ live to fight another day – it is a pity **real war** could not be fought under similar conditions, then we would not have a Remembrance Day to commemorate near one million dead in the First World War. It is a passing thought.

I append some Bits and Pieces from an article which appeared in the **News** of Saturday March 20<sup>th</sup> **1954**, much of which I can confirm from my own remembrance.

“The original **Tivoli**, or **Tiv**, was opened on September 2<sup>nd</sup> **1913**, on the site of Begbie’s Farm and Dairy (this was adjacent to the Toll G.B.)

Among other members of the Company in those days was Heart of Midlothian’s famous internationalist, **Bobby Walker**, the founder of the business being **John Robertson** father of the present director. (See Story of New Tivoli regarding ownership)

In common with other cinemas at that time, the Tivoli divided its programme between stage and screen, several variety artists later reaching fame – **Will Fyffe**, the **Houston Sisters**, **Harry Gordon** and **Tommy Lorne** for example.

The ‘orchestra’ was a lone lady pianist, who adapted the repertoire to the mood of the film. This was common in most ‘little houses’ in the city

Booing and hissing at places of entertainment were the accepted thing then, whether for a ‘rotten turn’ on stage, a breakdown in the film, a frequent occurrence in those days, or just a general hatred of the ‘villain of the piece’ who, in those days, always looked a villain.

And then there was the burly ‘chucker out’. A busy man this, especially if the ‘Herts’ [This was, and still is, the way ‘Hearts’ is pronounced by some of the support, the ‘ea’ is pronounced as the ‘e’ in ‘egg’. G.F.B.] were beaten, either at home or away – it was an occasion to cause a ‘barney’. Despite nuts being cracked and sometimes tossed about, paper bags being rustled and often blown and burst, causing a loud bang, the show carried on.. Another disturbance was talking (I think the writer erred when he wrote ‘talking’, it was ‘shouting’ as I remember it) between patrons separated by several rows and often a bit of horse-play, all designed to make the ‘chucker-out’ work for his money.

Often the theatre after a break for a ‘turn’, or to repair a film, would be plunged into darkness for a moment or two. It was this that frequently saved the ‘leaders of the noisy section from being caught in the “act” ’

Once in a while one of the ‘gang’ would suddenly burst open the Exit door by banging the Bar; this was the signal for a number of ‘boys’ waiting in the lane to dash inside. The

‘chuckers out’ were on a piece of cheese when this happened – as the lights would go on and all those standing were immediately thrown out.”

**Bobby Walker.** He was, without doubt, the greatest inside-forward in Great Britain. By 1913 his playing days were drawing to a close, but I had the pleasure of watching him during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In consequence I know the *Old Tiv* very well; I only stopped going to Tynecastle Park in 1963/64 Season because of war injuries.

#### AID TO READING

In the days of the ‘silent pictures’ a continuous ribbon or caption would ‘follow’ or accompany the ‘ongauns’ of the players on the screen. This led, from the initial stages of the captions to the audience, in mass, reading aloud every word. Did this, then, lead to better reading skills?

Reading aloud, did not annoy anyone in those days; nor, for that matter, did children running up and down the gangways cause an annoyance. Changed days, however, came to the cinema, starting in **1929** when Al Jolson appeared on the screen, or scene. Patrons who talked during the ‘talkies’ were sharply reminded to ‘Shut up!’. From 1929 the Deaf or Hard of Hearing were the greatest sufferers. So there was something to be said for silent pictures.

#### DISORDERLY PATRONS - COURT CASE

The follow case was extracted from the **1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 25.

“EDINBURGH – DEFENDANT: JOHN IMRIE

CHARGE: Behaving in a disorderly manner in the Tivoli Picture House. Prisoner and a number of other young men whistled and shouted and stamped their feet, and threatened to wreck the premises. They were ejected and given into custody.

Result: Fine of 5s.”

The date given in the Year Book was ‘February 5’; I assume this relates to the year 1914; the Year Book being issued in 1915.

This case is given to show that we have always had ‘problem’ youths; but I have no doubt that John Imrie and his fellow ‘gangsters’, if one could so describe them, answered the call for the First World War; likewise, the youth of today would not be found wanting should the need arise – God Forbid

The story of the Tivoli was simply one of countless ‘little houses’ throughout Edinburgh and up and down the country. They were Happy Days before the First World War; the world never seems to have recovered from that awful period.

#### ***TOLLCROSS CINEMA, 140 LAURISTON PLACE***

*News*, Friday, December 27<sup>th</sup> **1912**

**“THE TOLLCROSS CINEMA, LTD.  
140 LAURISTON PLACE**

**OPEN TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31, at 7 p.m.**

**PERFORMANCE CONTINUOUS**

**PROGRAMME NOTHING BETTER**

**PRICES: 4d., 6d., 1s. RESERVED SEAS, 1s.6d**

**Children Half-Price At All Hours**

**BOXES May be Reserved for Parties of 4 or more**

**PROGRAMME CHANGED MONDAY & THURSDAY”**

*News*, Tuesday, January 7<sup>th</sup> 1913

“The Tollcross cinema, a recent addition to the Edinburgh picture house world, in Lauriston Place, was well patronised yesterday.”

*News*, Saturday, January 18<sup>th</sup> 1913 The first advertisement to show details of the programme.

***“REMOVING SUNKEN VESSELS***

**and**

***BACHELORS’ BUTTONS***

**With**

**Mr Bunny**

**(Better known as John Bunny)”**

*News*, Thursday, August 14<sup>th</sup> 1913

**“TOLLCROSS CINEMA – SPECIAL NOTICE**

**In connection with Café and Heating System all of which  
will be completed MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15 , 1913.**

**From which date this theatre will be continuous form 3 p.m. to 10.30 p.m. DAILY”**

**1938 *Cinema Buyers’ Guide* Page 173**

“Tollcross Cinema; Lauriston Cinema Ltd.

Seats: 670”

News, Thursday, February 17<sup>th</sup> 1944

**“An Appreciation of Mrs Ellen ‘Ma’ Ladley**

Mrs Ellen ‘Ma’ Ladley, whose remains were laid to rest in Morningside Cemetery on Tuesday, was in charge of the female staff at the Empire Theatre for some years.

Mrs Ladley was, until recently, manageress of the Tollcross Cinema, where she succeeded her husband”

In the 1920’s I attended a series of lectures given by **John C Clark**, M.P. for a Glasgow division, on behalf of the Labour College. My impression of the Cinema was one of gloom; it was, without doubt, one of the ‘crumiest’ houses in the town, with no redeeming feature. In short, it was a dump. It closed during 1942/43, and like many more old picture houses it became a furniture store.

***TRON PICTURE HOUSE, 241 HIGH STREET***

News, Tuesday, April 15<sup>th</sup> 1913 Preliminary Announcement

**“GRAND OPENING BY LADY RADFORD**

**ON THURSDAY, APRIL 17, 1913, at Three O’Clock  
(BY INVITATION ONLY)**

**FROM 6.30 THAT DAY – OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

**CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE DAILY FROM 2 p.m. till 10.30**

**COMPLETE CHANGE OF PICTURES MONDAYS & THURSDAYS**

**Seize This Opportunity of Witnessing This Unique  
Entertainment of Incomparable Brilliance.  
A Vision of the World – From Sky-Blue to Purple – Deep**

**A HIGH-CLASS ORCHESTRA  
Will Provide Appropriate Music**

**PRICES: FRONT STALLS, 4d.; CENTRE STALLS, 6d.; LOUNGE STALLS, 9d.;  
RESERVED SEATS, 3d. EXTRA TO ALL PARTS.**

**Children Half-Price to all Parts until 6 p.m. when accompanied by an Adult.**

**The Ventilation, Heating, and Lighting of this House  
Has Been Done On The Most Up-To-Date Plans**

**TAKE THE TRAM TO THE TRON”**

*News*, Tuesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> **1913**

“This, the latest addition to the already numerous picture houses in the city, is proving a great attraction in the High Street district, and was visited by a large number of people yesterday.

The principal film for the early part of the week is a society drama entitled *As In A Looking Glass*, and *Reward for Broncho Billy*, *Calamity Ann’s Vanity Comic*, *A Day In The Life Of A New Recruit*.”

`**1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

“Tron Picture House, High Street, Edinburgh  
Proprietor: Tron Picture House Ltd.  
Seats: 600.”

*News*, Saturday August 22<sup>nd</sup> **1943** Article

#### “How Talkies Came To Town”

In **1912** the first attempt at mechanical synchronisation of vision with sound were made in Edinburgh. It was in the Tron Picture House, High Street, where a gramophone was installed that was worked in conjunction with the film, though the timing was dependent on the human element. The person in charge of the gramophone had to endeavour to keep his machine running at the same speed as a moving clock-hand which could be seen turning round in one corner of the screen”

The writer was wrong in stating that the experiment took place in **1912**, as the Tron did not open until **1913**.

*News*, Friday, June 1<sup>st</sup> **1928**

**“TRON - 241 HIGH STREET**

**THURSDAY - FRIDAY - SATURDAY**

**HOOT GIBSON in GALLOPING FURY**

**PATHE GAZETTE”.**

I failed to trace any advertisements for the Tron after this date; the Royal Cinema opened on the same site on December 27<sup>th</sup> **1928**. I therefore concluded that the Tron closed on or soon after the appearance of the June 1<sup>st</sup> advertisement.

## WHAT THE HIGH STREET WAS LIKE IN THE YEAR 1913

I was nearing the end of my apprenticeship as a house-painter with the firm of Archibald Selkirk, Gilmore Place, who had the **entire** city contract for painting. As a consequence it meant virtually an open door to every piece of town property, including the Police Headquarters. Therefore I came to know every nook and cranny, not only in the Royal Mile, but throughout the city wherever there was town property.

In 1913, what was known as the New Council Chamber was nearing completion; Messrs Dobie of George Street was responsible for the painter work.

The City Museum was then in the City Chambers. The East and West Wings of the Chambers were built in the 1920's; the East Wing took in the Royal/Tron cinema.

The Cable Tram Car along with the Horse Cab were the principal modes of travel. The Fire Engine and Police Ambulance were also horsedrawn. Indeed, it was not until **1926** that the Police set up a Special Traffic Department consisting of two motor cycles with side cars and four men (this information was supplied by the Chief Constable). In 1913 the motor car was not a menace; children could still play in the streets.

There were no Police Boxes; the first was introduced in **1933**; nor Traffic Lights, the first set were installed in **1928** at Broughton Street.

Soon, all too soon, *Hogmany* will have no meaning to Edinburgh children. It was in the High Street that Hogmany was celebrated at the Tron Church on the last day of the old year, where, aye in 1913, many thousands would congregate to bring in the New Year. Strangers would offer the bottle of friendship to other strangers and thus become brither Scots. On the stroke of 12 much merrymaking and toasting good health was the order of the first hour of the newly born year. Thereafter the huge crowd would turn their backs on the Tron Church and make for their respective destinations by the four points of the compass. There were no motor cars in the vicinity, even in 1913, to obstruct the swaying mass of humanity proceeding towards Register House. I think car owners at that time had the 'wind up' to venture near the Tron, knowing full well what the crowd would be like.

One of the features of the pre-1914 War in the High Street and North Bridge was the number and variety of Barrow Vendors; literally everything from a needle to an anchor could be bought. One Edinburgh writer claims that it was the advent of the motor car which drove those colourful merchants off the streets. I would argue, however, that it was the Merchants of Edinburgh who were responsible for doing so, particularly the small shopkeepers who, after the First World War, complained of unfair trading from the hawkers who did not pay rates.

Where the Cross Post Office is now situated, used to be the location of Stewart's Waxworks, almost opposite the Tron Picture House. The Scottish Painters' Society Central Branch, had a room alongside Stewart's.

Most significant of all, Christmas was not commercialised; this did not happen until the late 1940's.

### ***TUDOR, ST BERNARD'S ROW, STOCKBRIDGE***

The Tudor is the fourth picture house which has occupied the site since the Palace Picture House opened there on Monday April 10<sup>th</sup> 1911. St Bernard's Picture Palace opened on April 15<sup>th</sup> 1912; the Savoy on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1921 and the Tudor on July 25<sup>th</sup> 1960. In 1960 it was touch and go whether a cinema would continue there, with the Savoy closing in the middle of that year; but the Tudor is still in business as at December 1963. Thus, there has been a cinema on this site for over 52 years.

*News*, Monday, July 18<sup>th</sup> 1960

**“TUDOR – STOCKBRIDGE**

**FORMERLY SAVOY**

**CLOSED for REDECORATION and the Instalment of  
CINEMASCOPE EQUIPMENT**

**RE-OPENING ON MONDAY, JULY 25, 1960”**

*News*, Monday, July 25<sup>th</sup> 1960

**“TUDOR - STOCKBRIDGE**

**DORIS DAY & ROCK HUDSON in**

***PILLOW TALK* (A) SCOPE COLOR**

**JEFF CHANDLER in *SIGN OF A PAGAN*”**

### ***WAVERLEY PICTURE HOUSE, 6 INFIRMARY STREET***

The Waverley Picture House is the last ‘pictur hoose’ I deal with in alphabetical order; the *West End* is included in **Chapter 27: The Albert Hall**

There is a beautiful story of the 90 and 9 sheep which were safely gathered into the fold, but **one** was missing having strayed far from the Shepherd's kindly care....

In some respects the Waverley Picture House was the one that strayed in Edinburgh. The story of the Waverley might well have been extracted from Ripley's famous series, ‘Believe It Or Not’; the reader will be the judge.

In all, I give details of some 120 picture houses, or houses where moving pictures were shown, in Greater Edinburgh. The Waverley was the only one to have such a story as follows.

As at December **1963** there are several handsome picture houses in Edinburgh. In November **1963** Lord Provost **Duncan Weatherstone** described the Lyceum Theatre as 'Lousy' . He was right in terms of its lack of comfort and spaciousness compared with, say, the Playhouse and the New Victoria. There were, are, many Edinburgh picture houses which merit being described as 'lousy'; the chief of which was the Waverley Picture House. Indeed, it gloried in the name 'The Penny Scratcher'.

#### FLEAS

In a recent TV programme (November **1963**) **Mary Marquis** interviewed **Dr Dunnet** on the subject of fleas. He told her he was going on a three months' expedition to the Antarctic and hoped to bring back thousands of fleas. Had Dr Dunnet paid a visit to the Waverley he would have had no difficulty in 'collecting' without any effort on his part, as fleas caused the Waverley to be known as 'The Penny Scratcher'

#### NEVER ADVERTISED

The Waverley never advertised in the local Press; nevertheless, its nickname was a by-word in the city and probably received more publicity than all the other picture houses in the item 'The South Side and its Many Picture Houses.'

Fortunately, the Waverley was entered in the **1915** *Kinematograph Year Book*, page 468.

"Waverley Picture House, 6 Infirmary Street.  
Proprietor: J. McMahon."

A long time ago it was quite usual for conversation to veer round to , "Do you remember?"; the query frequently was about some Old Edinburgh subject. This was in the early 1920's before Radio raised its head and visiting friends was part and parcel of one's Way Of Life.

It seemed that all my friends knew out 'The Penny Scratcher', and how admission could be had to that picture house for a Jelly Jar – except the writer.

I admit that it is only since I started to write the history of Edinburgh Entertainments in October **1961**, and it is now December **1963**, that I became intrigued with the name 'Penny Scratcher'.

On asking what was the name of the alleged picture house? Where was it located? I could get no definite answers. In course of time it became a myth; in this case an old wives' tale and a legend in the cinema industry.

**Frank O'Donovan**, chief of the American Secret Service, said , "Given time, everything could be found out about anyone." I believe that I could say much the same about the 'Penny Scratcher.

The entry about the Waverley in the **1915** Year Book did not convey very much to me. However, on calling on my good friend Bailie **George Hedderwick**, in business as a chemist at No 54 Blackfriars Street, about some Town Council matter, the conversation turned to Edinburgh cinemas. I asked him the question, "Do you know anything about the cinema with the peculiar name The Penny Scratcher?"

Over a period of time Bailie Hedderwick asked questions of his numerous customers and gradually bits of information emerged that fell into some semblance of order.

While the address is given as 6 Infirmary Street in the 1915 Year Book, there was another Entrance/Exit in Robertson's Close, Cowgate. This Close runs between the Cowgate and Infirmary Street and is near the **Edinburgh Working Men's Club and Institute**. North of the Cowgate end stands a large Transformer Station.

The Club began in premises within the Royal Exchange, High Street, in **1864**, but with the expansion of the City Chambers the Club moved to Infirmary Street in **1896**. In the *Dispatch and News*, Tuesday, December 10<sup>th</sup> **1963**, there was a long, interesting, article about the origin, former glories and impending demise of the Working Men's Club; it rightly comes under the heading of a place of entertainment. It is thought that the 'high' prizes for Bingo elsewhere in the city, has had a bad effect on the Club, as the vast majority of its members left for pastures new. Its fate may be decided at a meeting on Sunday, January 19<sup>th</sup> **1964**.

I am indebted to Bailie Hedderwick for putting me in touch with several old residents who had lived in the district for upward of 60 years.

On Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> October **1962**, I met Canon Gallacher in his study in connection with the *Star Picture House*, St Mary's Street. The same day I met three of the old residents, one at a time; this prevented them telling the same 'tale'.

I put the same set of questions to each of them.

1. Did you ever go to McMahon's Picture House in Infirmary Street?
2. Did you ever get into the Picture House by handing over a jelly jar?
3. Did McMahon ever accept rags as the price of admission?

They all answered 'Yes' to each of these questions. Thereafter we adjourned to a nearby Local, the time being 12.15 p.m., where each had a drappie of what he fancied. As a teetotaler I had lemonade! While in the Local we had a chat about the old days; I summarise their comments.

All agreed the cash price of admission was 1d. and 2d., but none of them ever paid 2d.. They might pay 1d. if they had one, and take the opportunity to dodge into the 2d. seats.

They confirmed that by 'handing over a 1 lb. jeelie jaur ye goat in tae the front seats.'; these seats had no backs. For a 2 lb. jelly jar you were admitted to the back seats, which had backs, and were given an orange.

A handful of rags secured entry to the front seats.

That then, is how the Waverley came to be known as 'The Penny Scratcher'.

#### OPERETTA HOUSE

The person who drew up the two-page foolscap 'write-up' about the opening of Adam House, 5 Chambers Street, where the Operetta House stood from December 27<sup>th</sup> 1892 until December 1939, overstepped his terms of reference when he alleged that 'it was usual to gain admittance to the old Operetta House, which formerly stood on this site, by the handing over of a Jelly Jar.'

I am happy to nail that canard. Such a method of admission never took place during its 47 years of existence. In the story about the Operetta House I relate how my father took me to the *Op* in the late 1890's and I went there with some of my chums in the opening years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Admission was always on a cash basis.

Mrs **Haig**, at present (1963) manageress of the *Embassy Cinema*, was the cashier in the Operetta House before the Second World War. She refuted the suggestion that admission could be had to the *Op* by presenting a jelly jar.

Some lies such as the story of the Operetta House and the Jelly Jar, are hard to catch up with. It was not unlike the story which went the rounds during the period the Penny Scratcher was open, about the 'Russian Soldiers who passed through the Waverley Station with snow on their boots.'

I am happy it fell to my lot to put the above details in writing and thus dispel a lot of drivel which has gone the rounds for nearly 50 years.

Many picture houses in Edinburgh were 'lousy', and richly deserved to be called 'scratchers'; that was inevitable; but not nearly as lousy as I and my comrades were at the Dardanelles at the time the Scratcher was open early 1915, and just on the point of 'packing up'.

#### FIRST WORLD WAR

A number of South Side young men served with me in the same Territorial regiment, the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots, whose Headquarters were in Forrest Road Drill Hall. That the young men from the district, in too many cases, paid the supreme sacrifice can be seen from the Roll of Honour at the Tolbooth in the Royal Mile.

One of their number, **Robert Wilson**, a newsvendor in civilian life, won the greatest honour which our country can bestow upon a member of the Armed Forces: The Victoria Cross.

#### MR McMAHON

**Mr McMahon** brought joy to many a child, who might never have seen the Wild West or the Keystone Kops, but for a Jelly Jar or a 'puckle of rags'.

### 31:REMINISCENCES OF IONA STREET SHOWGROUND

*A tin photograph; A 'monkey' as a consolation prize; Evening Lights; Steam Age in the Showground; Horse Traction; Sweet Seville oranges, 40 for a shilling; Barrow Time in Edinburgh; French Nougat Stall or Van; Hot Chestnut Van; Tea Stall; Mechanical Orchestra; Penny Gaff; Stuart's Boxing Booth; Assured of a 'Fair Do'; Freddie Mills; Boxing Booth at Gardener's Crescent; The Passing of the Showground.*

Prior to **1886** Iona Street was known as Falshaw Street named after Sir **Thomas Falshaw**, Bart., Lord Provost of Edinburgh during **1874-1877**.

I show in the item about **James Salvano** in Chapter 25: Leith Amusements, that it was not until **1891** that **Samuel Evans**, son of **John Evans**, leased a large part of ground in Iona Street for the purpose of converting it into a Showground. Evans was one of Britain's biggest names in the Show business world.

The next step, after Evans had satisfied his own needs, was to sub-let the remainder of the ground into plots large enough on which to erect stalls or booths. The first plot was rented to **Dominick Salvano**, father of James, who was better known in later life as 'Willie'. I am indebted to James for much of the information which has formed the basis of this chapter.

The Showground occupied that island site bounded by Iona Street on the north, Dickson Street to the east, Albert Street to the south and by the back greens of Buchanan Street (east side) to the west. As at January **1964** much of the former Showground is now occupied by a handsome Corporation Housing scheme, while the remainder of the ground is occupied by Messrs W. & J. R. Watson, builders.

Fortunately the Edinburgh/Leith burgh boundary ran from the mid-point of the part of Buchanan Street lying between Albert Street and Iona Street, and proceeded in a south-eastern direction to Albert Street; thus the Showground was almost entirely situated within the Burgh of Leith, averting any Internal Complications between the natives of Sunny Leith and those of Edinburry regarding the ownership of the Showground. In the days prior to **1920** there was always a friendly spirit of rivalry between the two towns.

#### A TIN PHOTOGRAPH

I still retain a tin photograph of my father, George, which was taken in the Showground in the **1890's**. It is in a remarkable state of preservation and says much for the 'cheap-john' product of some 70 years ago.

In good weather Iona Street shows could hold their own with their Big Brother, namely, Moss' Carnival, Waverley Market, over the New Year Season. During the first three days of the New Year many thousands of our country cousins could be seen trailing up Leith Walk en route for the Waverley Station. Many years had to pass before the now ubiquitous 'bus came

on the scene. Places as near to Edinburgh as Dalkeith, Newtongrange and Gorebridge on the south, or Corstorphine or Broxburn to the west, were a long way from town when one had to depend on a train, or else shank's mare, that is, walk if you missed your train. I am writing in terms of the 1890's and the first 12 or 13 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is true we have come on quite a bit in the interim, but whether we have **progressed** is another matter.

However, to see them laden with 'prizes' was a sign of their prowess either with a rifle at the shooting stall, or with a hand ball at the coconut shy, or the like. For those who were not so skilful, there was always a **monkey** and, nearing the end of the day, it was a grand sight to see them returning home with their caps or bunnets, as well as the lapels of their jackets, covered with **monkeys**; the **monkeys** were simply coloured pipe-cleaners fashioned into a monkey-shape. Many a **monkey** I received from a jovial reveller returning in good humour from the huntin' and shootin' with his trophies, and full of talk about the great time he had had at the Shows.

### EVENING LIGHTS

In daylight the Showground looked tawdry, but as the evening shadows slowly gathered the whole area gradually assumed a fairy-like appearance. My earliest recollection of the Evening Lights was of spluttering, smelly, paraffin lamps within the stalls. For illuminating the 'road-ways' naphtha lamps were pressed into service; these lamps placed within individual iron hoops at the top of ten foot poles, were interesting to watch swaying in the breeze and smoking like a chimney on fire. Came the day when the wonderful bright lights of the incandescent mantle burners made their appearance; their fuel was paraffin oil, under high pressure. The ultimate came with the introduction of electricity; Fairy Land came to life with hundreds of coloured lamps

With each phase of lighting I was, of course, getting older – we both grew up together. I should mention that it was thought that the Shows attracted lots of little boys and not so many little girls. The theory advanced for this was that in the 1890's all show people were gypsies and that they stole little girls and sometimes little boys. As a matter of fact, the only gypsy who might be associated with a showground would be a *palmist* telling *fortunes*.

Note: Public Electricity was first switched on in Edinburgh in Princes Street, on Thursday April 11<sup>th</sup> **1895**, my Mrs McDonald, wife of the Lord Provost. My father took me to the Calton Hill to see to see the sight.

I draw on the Salvona article referred to above, to mention the names of the Show People who first generated electricity for (a) the **lighting** of their stalls and the roads within the showground and the entrances thereto, and (b) the **power** to drive their roundabouts and other mechanical amusements.

Messrs **Bostock & Wombwell**'s were the first show people in Edinburgh to generate electricity for their own use in a show ground in December **1891**.

### THE STEAM AGE IN THE SHOW GROUND

It is well that **James Watt** came along when he did or goodness knows how long we would have waited before there was some kind of motive power to drive the various types of roundabouts and the huge *Swee Boat* which almost described a complete circle. Like many others who tried the *Swee* [Swing] *Boat*, I lost some loose change. On looking back it would

not have amounted to much, as it was not until **after** the First War that I had money to jingle in my pocket.

### HORSE TRACTION

I do not know whether Bostock and Wombwell were the first to use steam traction to move their equipment from place to place. It is probable, however, that the ‘big combines’, then as now, would have been the first in the field to make use of an innovation which was going to save time in travelling, a major consideration.

I have fond memories of various types of horse power used for traction purposes. All types – big, small, fat, thin, bonny ones and those not so bonny; it appeared that every show or circus horse had to ‘pull its weight’ when on the road.

Teams of four, six, eight and twelve were a common sight; each team hitched to an appropriate load. The vast advertising parade through the main streets of the city was something no child would miss; it frequently happened at the ‘dinner break from school’ which meant that many of us being late for the afternoon session. I never knew any child being punished for being late.

The float on which the *Circus Queen* was perched – away high up in space, or so it seemed – was pulled by a dozen ponies. The parade remains vivid in my memory: the elephants, the camels, the clowns, and the ringmaster with his Top Hat. Truth to tell, the parade was all I invariably saw of a visiting circus; perhaps that is why I remember the outside events so well.

### SWEET SEVILLE ORANGES – 40 FOR A SHILLING

It seems unbelievable in January 1964, to mention that 40 oranges could be had for a shilling, but such was the case. True, this was the price prevailing round New Year time.

### BARROW TIME IN EDINBURGH

Prior to the First World War some of the High Street vendors with their barrows found their way to the Showground, where they obtained a stance, perhaps at a small charge. I mention the 40 oranges for a bob; that is but an example of the type of bargain which Mrs Citizen could pick up from a barrow rather than go to a shop. That the vendors made the Festive Season bright cannot be denied, they certainly played their part in helping the ‘Old Fayre’ go with a swing.

I do not know if any of the Old Time Barrows have found a resting place in a museum, like old tram cars; that they were quaint cannot be gainsaid.

To see the little **Chip Van** with its still smaller ‘chimbley’ smoking away, as if it had not another minute to exist, was a sight which has remained with me for nigh on 70 years. For a half-penny we could get a fair-sized poke of chips.

### FRENCH NOUGAT VAN OR STALL

To watch the man, a strong man, pulling, twisting and kneading his sweet delicacy to the right consistency was a severe test on the salivary glands.

### HOT CHESTNUT VAN

Apart from his hot chestnut he had, at least during the New Year period, an enviable job. For hour after hour he would sit on the shaft of his barrow facing the pavement. His fire was made up with gas coke, which in those days could be had at the Gas Works in New Street (now the site of the S.M.T. Repair Works and Garage) for 4d. per cwt., and that was a big bag!

### THE TEA STALL

Perhaps not conducted on up-to-date hygienic standards, nae running water, just a bucket o' water to swill out the last cup, but suffice it to say that all the patrons went away satisfied.

### THE MECHANICAL ORCHESTRA

A further sight which glued me to the spot, literally for hours, was to watch the beautifully proportioned and painted figures, each player seeming to keep his eye on a conductor and playing his appointed instrument with perfect precision. The roll of the drums was something I waited for. (Perhaps there was only one other thrill which took precedence over the 'Orchestra', and that was the **Fire Engine Steamer**, belching smoke and leaving a trail of sparks behind, as its two galloping horses, seeming to jump as high as a full-grown man at every stride, appeared to float down Leith Walk.)

### THE PENNY GAFF

About the last thing my mother would say to me during the Gaff Season was, "Don't you go near the Shows", and invariably **every** day I was told, "Mind your cap". There was many a 'greeting match' in those far off days looking for a misplaced cap. To this day, January **1964**, I have been unable to fathom those injunctions given to me by my mother.

Then, as now, the maxim has it that stolen apples are sweeter than bought ones; I am afraid that that logic applied to the Gaff, especially when there was a popular Saturday matinee.

My aim has been to portray some of the sights of Iona Street Showground through the eyes of a boy. Those sights charmed me then, and they bring a thrill to me now – long after the showground has disappeared.

My usual weekly pocket money was a **maik**, that is a halfpenny (½d.); in those wonderful days that, by any stretch of imagination, did not go far. However, the pocket money was augmented by some well disposed person who paid a visit to your parents. Then again, some unknown buddy would 'take ye into the gaff.' That memory has remained with me throughout the years and I often think of these words, "Suffer the little Children to come unto Me."

### STUART'S BOXING BOOTH

For a number of years the **Stuart** family, who hailed from Newcastle, toured the many showgrounds in the circuit with their large tent, which when the Ring and numerous forms were fitted up was all one could desire wherein to witness a boxing match. In the running of his Boxing Booth, Stuart stood for no nonsense – that was the secret of his success.

His two sons 'Spider' and 'Snowball', toured with the outfit. To lend colour to the company one negro would be among the fighters with whom the members of the public were invited 'to have a go'. Whoever accepted the offer of a 'go' was assured a Fair Do!

### ASSURED OF A FAIR DO

This statement of faith was carried out on every occasion- no member of the public was subjected to a 'rough house', when it was obvious he was a novice of the 'noble art'.

Each contest, as a rule, carried Prize Money. He who thought he could stand an agreed number of rounds with one or other of the members of the troupe could be in line to win anything from £1 to, on a rare occasion, £5. There was never any lack of challengers, as many young bucks were willing, nay anxious, to try conclusions with one of the professionals, under the rules of the 'manly science of self-defence'.

Once in a while, however, a proper dark-horse would issue a challenge, which would be accepted. The stake money on such an occasion would be collected long before 'Spider', 'Snowball' or the coloured fighter woke up some time later. Repeat – this only happened once in a very long time.

The last such Boxing Booth I remember in Edinburgh was, I think, also Stuart's, whose tent was pitched on that site now occupied by the FOU Telephone Exchange at Gardener's Crescent. The preparation of the site put paid to the Boxing Booth which was well attended [In the winter of **1938-39**, I attended the Shows on this site and had a ride on the Roundabouts. G.F.B.]

### FREDDIE MILLS

I am happy to conclude my Reminiscences of Iona Street Showground by recalling that **Freddie Mills** was not only one of Britain's greatest boxers, but that he served his apprenticeship to the Noble Art as a one time Booth Boxer.

### THE PASSING OF THE SHOWGROUND

The passing of such places as Iona Street Showground and others mentioned in the history, as distinct from the travelling Circus, is to be deplored and, unfortunately, having passed by is never likely to emerge again. It would be worth considering setting an acre or two aside to house a permanent Showground.

## 32: CIRCUSES AND SHOWGROUNDS

*Portobello - Ord's Circus, 1777-1859; Evan's Showground, Promenade, 1908-09; Marine Gardens, Bostock's Jungle and American Animal Area, 1909.*

*Leith – Cooke's Royal Circus, Elbe Street, 1841; Cooke's Olympia, Great Junction Street, 1888; Hermann's Olympia, 1888; Leith Circus bought by John Henry Cooke, 1890; Barnum and Bailey, Easter Road Grounds, 1898; White's Carnival, Henderson Street, 1899; Lord John Sanger's Circus, Hippodrome and Menagerie, Iona Street, 1911; James Wilmot's Fair, Iona Street, 1911; Royal George Circus, Pilrig Park, 1945; Chipperfield's Circus, Pilrig Park, 1963.*

*Edinburgh – Wombwell's Royal Menagerie, Waverley Market, 1872; Swallow's Hippodrome and People's Circus, Jeffrey Street, 1875; Batty's Great London Circus, Royal Gymnasium, 1876; Edmond's (late Wombwell's), Grassmarket, 1881; Bostock and Wombwell's, Grassmarket, 1891; Bostock's Menagerie, Grassmarket, 1894; Carnival, Royal Gymnasium, 1900; Article on Gymnasium by Councillor Wilson McLaren; Author remembers Inspector's Cup being played at Gymnasium, 1900-06; Showground, Gibson Terrace, 1900; Bostock and Wombwell's Menagerie, Grassmarket, 1902; Article on Grassmarket by Councillor Wilson McLaren; The Scottish Caterers' Carnival, Pinder's Royal Circus, Logie Green, 1902; Lumley's Athletic Championship Tournament, Waverley Market, 1903; Buffalo Bill, Gorgie, 1904; Royal Italian Circus, Fountainbridge, 1907; Evan's Carnival, Ponton Street, 1911; Bostock and Wombwell's, Fountainbridge, 1912; Royal Italian Circus, Olympia, Annandale Street, 1913; Codona's Carnival, Meadowbank, 1931; Bertram Mills' Circus, Murrayfield, 1931; Pinder's, Palladium Royal Circus, Fountainbridge, 1932; Bertram Mills' Circus, Murrayfield, 1938; White's Annual Carnival, Milton Street, 1938; Are circuses on the way out?*

### PORTOBELLO

#### ORD'S CIRCUS, PORTOBELLO, 1777-1859

*Extracted from William Baird's Annals of Duddingston and Portobello, 1898*

I am indebted to William Baird's work for much of the history anent Portobello

Of all the travelling circuses, as distinct from those which settled for a period in 19 Nicolson Street from **1820**, for example *Ducrow's* (see Chapter 1: 19 Nicolson Street), or in Broughton Street (see Chapter 7: Broughton Street site) where the *Edinburgh Equestrian Circus* was first mentioned in **1790**, it would appear that *Ord's* had first claim to being the oldest travelling circus to have visited Edinburgh.

**Thomas Ord**, the famous equestrian, once a year visited Portobello and pitched his tent on the Links. Note: Elcho Terrace, to the north of Abercorn Park, which is on the London Road, now occupies the site of the Links.

His stay generally lasted two or three days and evenings. For over half a century he visited every village and town of any consequence. He was well known in the late **1790's**. When in better circumstances, he pitched a large tent and charged admission, but during the latter half of his career the tent was abandoned, and the exhibition was an open one.

A ring was formed on the turf of the Links, within which the performance took place, the spectators watching the show on the elevated ground nearer the highway (London Road). On one side he had a covered stand with seats, for which a small charge was made for those who used them; they were usually well patronised by the 'gentry'.

He was a tall, rather slenderly-made man; carried himself with much dignity of manner, and his grave and reverent appearance always commanded respect. His exhibitions of horsemanship, whether of *Dick Turpin the Highwayman*, *Mazeppa*, or *Rob Roy*, were certainly very remarkable, especially performed by one who had reached the allotted span of life.

Note: This description of Thomas Ord fitted another great equestrian, **John Henry Cooke**, 1835-1917, both in appearance and type of programme engaged in.

#### HOW TO MAKE THE SHOW PAY

Towards the close of each evening's entertainment, the crowd round the ring were canvassed to buy tickets for the **lottery**, at 6d. a ticket. The prizes consisted generally of light ornaments or fancy goods with one or two superior articles by way of inducement, such as an eight-day clock, a gold or silver watch, a cheese or a load of meal. Suffice it to say, the larger proportion of the audience purchased tickets and thus helped to support the show, in a precarious manner. See Chapter 25: Leith Amusements, New Theatre, Bangor Road, where 'every person entering the Theatre was given a fair and equal opportunity of winning a gift'.

In the year **1858** he made his last appearance on the Links, an old man of eighty, still taking an active part in the performance with his son-in-law, **Delaney**.

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In a well-written history of his native town by the late Mr **William Hunter**, a former Provost of Portobello, we have an interesting narrative of Ord's career.

It was thought he was the son of the Rev. **Selby Ord**, a minister of Longformacus; for some time a medical student; that he threw up the lancet and enlisted into a cavalry regiment, and later bought himself out. On the other hand, it has been asserted that he engaged himself as a boy to the distinguished equestrian named **MacDonald**, with whom he served five years.

In his sixteenth year (say 1793/94) it is said he started as an equestrian on his own account, making his debut at Kelso. Having great confidence in his own abilities and encouraged by the success of his previous efforts, he set up regular establishments in Edinburgh, Glasgow,

Aberdeen, Dundee, Perth, Inverness, Dumfries etc. and everywhere received substantial marks of public favour.

He went to England, but his good fortune deserted him – he was forced to dispose of the greater part of his stud and his company of artists – returning to Scotland in comparative poverty. Mr Ord was temperate in his habits, charitable in his disposition and opposed to anything like fraud and gambling.

In his day he was an equestrian of the first order. In proof of his skill in the heyday of his strength and vigour, it is said that he challenged the renowned **Andrew Ducrow** to a trial of skill and agility for £500, but the latter refused to imperil his reputation by entering the lists against so fearless and renowned a competitor.

Note: As **Ducrow** was in Edinburgh in the year **1820** I searched both *The Edinburgh Evening Courant* and *The Scotsman* for **1820 and 1821** but did not come across any mention of the £500 challenge.

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### HIS LAST RIDE

His last appearance on horseback was at Thornhill, on the 29<sup>th</sup> September **1859**. He became ill and at his own request was taken home to Biggar. He grew worse and at last closed his earthly career on the 27<sup>th</sup> December **1859**, aged upwards of 80 years.

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After the ring at the Links ceased to be used as a showground, the boys and girls played all sorts of games including cricket and golf. But the building of Elcho Terrace somewhat reduced its cope for such games.

For many years afterwards, Ord's old circus ring was visible, until, in **1878**, what remained of old Portobello Links was enclosed with an iron railing by the surrounding feuars (who had in some way acquired a right over the ground).

Note: The phrase in brackets is made to sound ominous by William Baird. He pointed out an authentic case of encroachment in **1842**, Rae V. Smith See Chapter 26: Portobello. I wonder whether the take-over of the Links by the Elcho Terrace residents was also a case of encroachment but on a smaller scale; and could the feu holders of Elcho Terrace show Clear Title to all **their** land in the year **1964**!

### EVAN'S SHOW GROUND

**1908-09** *Portobello Street Directory*

**“EVAN'S SHOWGROUND  
NO. 47 PROMENADE, NEXT VICTORIA TERRACE.”**

## **MARINE GARDENS, SEAFIELD ROAD**

*The Scotsman*, May 31<sup>st</sup> 1909

In the programme of attractions mention is made of *Bostock's Jungle and American Animal Arena*.

## **LEITH CIRCUSES**

Much of the information in this section was extracted from *The Leith Burghs Pilot and Leith Observer*, the existing copies of which are held in the Leith Public Library. I also include a number of Cooke's Circuses which were located in Leith. They are grouped together, thus completing the history of the advertised complement of Cooke's Circuses as far as could be gathered from the Local Press in Edinburgh and Leith. See also Chapter 25: Leith Amusements.

National Library of Scotland, Old Programme

### **"OPENING OF COOKE'S CIRCUS**

**MR. COOKE will Open His ROYAL CIRCUS,  
ELBE STREET, LEITH'**

**On Thursday FIRST, DECEMBER 9, 1841**

(There followed a long list of artists)

**PRICES: BOXES, 2s.; SIDE BOXES, 1s.6d.; GALLERY, 6d.**

**Half-price to the FRONT BOXES only at 9 o'clock**

**RIDING MASTER – MR WILLIAM COOKE"**

**LAST WEEK – THURSDAY, MARCH 24, 1842.**

Note: The first advertisement for a public entertainment which I found in *The Leith Burghs Pilot* was on the front page of the issue of Saturday, October 22 **1864**, for an entertainment in Portobello Town Hall, see Chapter 26: Portobello. Despite a thorough search prior to January 7<sup>th</sup> **1888**, I could not find an earlier Cooke's advertisement anent a Circus in Leith, except a preliminary notice of Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup> **1887**.

I would conclude that the method adopted to advertise their shows in Leith was by Handbills.

**COOKE'S OLYMPIA, LEITH**

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday January 7<sup>th</sup> 1888

**“ALFRED EUGENE COOKE'S**

**LEITH CIRCUS AND OLYMPIA**

**GREAT JUNCTION STREET  
FOOT OF LEITH WALK**

**LEITH'S ONLY PALACE OF AMUSEMENT**

**Patronised by the Clergy and elite of LEITH and district.**

**PRONOUNCED by all a Magnificent Building, a Lovely Place, a Credit to Leith**

**This is just the identical thing LEITH has wanted for many years,  
viz. a place of recreation and amusement, where ladies  
and children can be taken to spend an enjoyable evening without  
fear of seeing or hearing anything that has the slightest tinge of vulgarity.  
Etc. Etc**

**FASHIONABLE MIDDAY PERFORMANCE  
THIS DAY and every WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY**

**DOORS open at 2 o'clock; commence at 2.30**

**Open every evening at 7 o'clock; commence at 7.30**

**PRICES:**

**STALLS, 3s.; BOXES, 2s.; PIT & SMOKING PROMENADE, 1s; GALLERY, 6d.  
Half-price at 9 o'clock, except to Gallery**

**RESERVED SEATS CAN BE SECURED IN ADVANCE  
AT MESSRS JUPP'S MUSIC WAREHOUSE, KIRKGATE, LEITH**

**SEASON TICKETS CAN BE HAD AT THE CIRCUS BOOKING OFFICE”**

Note: This circus had a preliminary advertisement in *Leith Burghs Pilot* on Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup> 1887, “TO OPEN FOR THE SEASON ON THURSDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 29, 1887”

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, September 29<sup>th</sup> 1888

**“COOKE’S OLYMPIA, LEITH**

**LAST WEEK OF PRESENT VISIT OWING TO  
EXHORBITANT INCREASE OF £100**

(The reason for the increase was not given; presumably it was for the rent of the site)

**THIS IS PROOF OF THE ENORMOUS TRADE WE DO AND THE VALUE WE  
GIVE; AND AS WE PAY EVERYBODY – INCLUDING THE COMPANY, STAFF,  
POLICE, RATES, GAS AND WATER TAXES – WE CANNOT SEE OUR WAY TO  
SUBMIT TO THIS GREAT DEMAND, SO WE MUST CLOSE ON SATURDAY, THE  
8TH OCTOBER, AND BID YOU FOR THE PRESENT ADIEU**

**OUR COMPANY THIS WEEK IS STRONGER AND BETTER THAN EVER –**

**ANDY AND ANNE HUGHES, Irish-American comedians**

**(Annie Hughes is the acknowledged champion sandjig dancer of the world)**

**MONS –TRILLO French ventriloquist**

**UNA, the Wonderful Gymnast**

**SISTERS MAYFIELD, serio duettists, Tyrolean warblers, etc**

**HERMAN, the world’s mesmerist**

**MONDAY NIGHT – COMIC SINGING CONTEST,**

**FOR THOSE OVER 18 YEARS OF AGE**

**TUESDAY NIGHT – LADIES’ SINGING CONTEST**

**WEDNESDAY NIGHT- MR WINTER’S (MANAGER) BENEFIT**

**THURSDAY NIGHT - ?**

**FRIDAY NIGHT- HERMAN’S BENEFIT**

**SATURDAY NIGHT – LAST NIGHT – LAST NIGHT**

**HERMAN’S POPULAR PRICES: 3d., 6d., 9d., 1s. and 1s.6d.”**

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, September 29<sup>th</sup> 1888 Front page – Separate from the above advertisement

**“HERMAN’S OLYMPIA, LEITH**

**LAST TWO WEEKS OF PRESENT VISIT**

**EVERYTHING NEW, BRIGHT AND STARTLING,  
INFACIT, NEXT IN POPULARITY TO THE GLASGOW EXHIBITION**

**THE BEST AND GREATEST ENTERTAINMENT IN THE KINGDOM**

**PRICES: 1s.6d., 1s., 9d., 6d. and 3d.”**

## **COOKE'S OLYMPIA AND HERMAN'S OLYMPIA, LEITH**

How the above showmen, or circus proprietors, came to form a partnership I do not know. I have recorded the incident; I do not propose to indulge in conjecture. **1888** marks the year of one of many Glasgow Exhibitions.

### **John Henry Cooke buys Leith Circus**

*Leith Pilot Annual, January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1890* Page 41

“The circus in Great Junction Street was purchased by John Henry Cooke for £400, the upset price.”

[The Ordnance Survey Map of **1894** shows a ‘Royal Circus’ on the West side of Great Junction Street, between Bonnington Road and Bangor Road, opposite King Street; there was a lane to the south side of the Circus. G.F.B.]

Edinburgh Room, Public Library Old Programme

### **“COOKE’S CIRCUS**

#### **JUNCTION STREET – LEITH SEPTEMBER 19, 1892”**

Thus we come to the end of the Cooke’s Circus story, as shown in several chapters of the history. The story will be brought together in the Index.

## ***BARNUM AND BAILEY***

*The Scotsman*, Friday, July 15<sup>th</sup> **1898**

### **“BARNUM AND BAILEY**

#### **EASTER ROAD**

**COMMENCING MONDAY JULY 18 AT 2 p.m.**

**GROUNDS, EASTER ROAD, NEAR ALBERT STREET**

**DAILY EXPENSE OF £1,500  
NEARLY 100 ACTS – 3 RINGS**

**TWICE DAILY AT 2 AND 8 p./m.**

**PRICES: 1s.; 2s.; 3s.; 4s.; PRIVATE BOX SEATS, 7s.6d. EACH;  
CHILDREN UNDER TEN, HALF-PRICE, EXCEPT 1s.**

**OFFICIAL PROGRAMME – PRICE 2d.”**

(Copy in the Edinburgh Room)

Many Edinburgh merchants were mentioned in the advertisement section of the programme.

Where the 'Greatest Show On Earth' was to be seen was not, however, mentioned in the programme; it did contain the following warning, "WEATHER PERMITTING"

While Easter Road is mentioned in the advertisement for the Barnum and Bailey show, there is sufficient evidence to substantiate that Iona Street was where all **big** shows were held in Edinburgh after **1891** – **big** meaning 3-ring shows.

***WHITE'S CARNIVAL***

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday, January 7<sup>th</sup> **1899**

**"WHITE'S CARNIVAL**

**HENDERSON STREET, LEITH**

**'NEW GAVIOLIPHONE THE BIGGEST MUSICAL  
RACECOURSE IN THE WORLD'  
CIRCUSES, SWINGS, ETC. ETC.**

**WHITE, PROPRIETOR"**

***LORD JOHN SANGER'S CIRCUS, HIPPODROME AND MENAGERIE***

*The Scotsman*, Saturday June 3<sup>rd</sup>, **1911**

**"LORD JOHN SANGER**

**THE ORIGINAL AND ONLY SANGER'S  
CIRCUS, HIPPODROME AND MENAGERIE  
WILL POSITIVELY VISIT**

**E D I N B U R G H**

**IONA STREET**

**THURSDAY, FRIDAY, SATURDAY and MONDAY**

**June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>**

***(Four Days only)***

**A PERFORMANCE OF REPUTED EXCELLENCE AND  
THE TALK OF TWO HEMISPHERES**

**SANGER'S FAMOUS SEA LIONS**

**Marvellous Amphibious Performers. Part Animal and Part Fish.**

**See Day Bills for Detailed Particulars of this Extraordinary Act.  
Rock Family. The Goldbergs. Three Sydneys. Coleman & Co.  
(Three Elephants, Three Horses and Three Trainers)**

**PIMPO AND HIS TEDDY BEAR**

**The Aeroplanes (the Sensation of Sensations). Football Dogs.  
Hoffman's Thought Reading Pony.**

**TROUBLES OF A CAB-DRIVER  
(an Amusing American Skit)**

**The Austins. Dundas Troupe (Sensational Enough for the Most Exacting Taste)  
THE ELEPHANT DENTIST  
An Excruciating Funny Pantomime**

**The above are only a few of the Acts in a Programme admitted  
the Finest in or out of London**

**Reserved Seats can now be Booked at Paterson & Sons, 27 George St. Edinburgh,  
where Detailed Programme of a Performance Unparalleled in the History of  
Amusements can be obtained Gratis.**

**This Great Show will also Visit:**

<b>BATHGATE, TUE., June 6<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>PERTH, MON., June 12<sup>th</sup></b>
<b>FALKIRK, WED., June 7<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>BLAIRGOWRIE, TUES., June 13<sup>th</sup></b>
<b>STIRLING, THUR. June 8<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>FORFAR, WED. June 14<sup>th</sup></b>
<b>AUCTERARDE, FRI. June 9<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>BRECHIN, THUR. June 15<sup>th</sup></b>
<b>CRIFEFF, SAT., June 10<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>LAURENCEKIRK, FRI. June 16<sup>th</sup></b>

**ABERDEEN, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>**

**Children Admitted to Afternoon Performance Half-Price to all parts**

**TWICE DAILY, 2.30 and 8 p.m. POPULAR PRICES"**

***JAMES WILMOT'S FAIR***

*News*, Wednesday, December 27<sup>th</sup> 1911

**"JAMES WILMOTS'S FAIR**

**IONA STREET"**

***ROYAL GEORGE CIRCUS***

*Dispatch*, Wednesday, June 27<sup>th</sup> 1945

**“ROYAL GEORGE CIRCUS**

**PILRIG PARK**

**THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN**

**POPULAR ATTRACTION IN EDINBURGH**

**The Royal George Circus – to visit Pilrig Park this week,  
brings all the thrills of the ‘Big Top’.**

**There is much to delight children of all ages,  
High-stepping ponies, dancing horses, tricky black bears,  
and, of course, many clowns.**

**The biggest thrill is provided by ‘Buffalo Bill’ who brings all the glory  
of the Wild West to the circus ring**

**Another thrilling act is that of ELROY, the handless wonder. Lighting a cigarette,  
opening a bottle, shooting the flame off a candle, and painting with his toes, ELROY  
rounds off his performance by playing the trumpet.”**

***CHIPPERFIELD’S CIRCUS***

**PILRIG PARK, SEPTEMBER 1963**

Some of Chipperfield’s camels were used in the Edinburgh Castle Tattoo.

During their stay at Pilrig Park here was a great deal of rain which left the ground in a very soft state. When Chipperfields were breaking camp their heavy tractors churned up the turf to such an extent that one or two Town Councillors protested about the state in which the Park had been left. The City Gardener said that it would not take too long to rectify matters; the sum of £100 was mentioned.

**EDINBURGH**

**See also Chapters 1: 19 Nicolson Street; 5: Moss' Carnivals in the Waverley Market;  
7: Broughton Street Site; 21: Palladium, Fountainbridge; 24: Cooke's Circus**

***WOMBWELL'S ROYAL MENAGERIE***

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup> 1872

**“WOMBWELL'S ROYAL MENAGERIE**

The No. 1 circus was sold in the Waverley Market on Tuesday, April 9<sup>th</sup> 1872”

There were many numbers listed for sale, and they occupied a great deal of space in *The Scotsman*. There were three menageries which travelled the country. The Menagerie was founded in **1805**.

***SWALLOW'S HIPPODROME & PEOPLE'S CIRCUS***

*Edinburgh Courant*, Saturday, November 13<sup>th</sup> 1875

**“SWALLOW'S HIPPODROME & PEOPLE'S PALACE**

**JEFFREY STREET OFF HIGH STREET  
EDINBURGH**

**TODAY (SATURDAY) NOVEMBER 13**

**AFTERNOON PERFORMANCES EVERY SATURDAY AT 2.30 p.m.”**

There was no mention of admission prices.

***BATTY'S GREAT LONDON CIRCUS***

*Edinburgh Courant*, Tuesday, May 30<sup>th</sup> 1876

**“BATTY'S GREAT LONDON CIRCUS**

**ROYAL GYMNASIUM GROUNDS**

**(PITT STREET, EDINBURGH)**

**PRICES: 3s.; 2s.; 1s. and 6d.”**

**EDMOND'S (LATE WOMBWELL'S)**

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, December 29<sup>th</sup> 1881

**“EDMOND'S (LATE WOMBWELL'S)**

**ROYAL WINDSOR CASTLE MENAGERIE will make a grand entry into Edinburgh this day from Dalkeith, and after parading the principal thoroughfares will proceed to the Grassmarket and exhibit by the Corn Exchange, for the New Year holidays.**

**DELMONICO! DELMONICO! DELMONICO!**

**THE ONLY REAL FOREIGN LION-TAMER IS COMING. THIS WORLD RENOWNED LION SUBJUGATOR HAS NO EQUAL IN HIS PARTICULAR LINE OF PROFESSION. HE PERFORMS WITH FOREST-BRED GROUPS AND THOSE BRED IN CAPTIVITY.**

**THE MENAGERIE WILL BE OPEN ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30<sup>TH</sup> AT 12 O'CLOCK.  
PERFORMANCES BY DELMONICO AT 1 P.M., 3 P.M., 5 P.M., 7 P.M. AND 9 P.M.**

**ADMISSION TO VIEW THE WHOLE: 1s.; CHILDREN, 6d.**

**FEEDING TIME 6d. EXTRA.”**

**BOSTOCK AND WOMBWELL'S**

*Leith Burghs Pilot*, Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> December 1891

**“BOSTOCK AND WOMBWELL'S**

**MONSTER COMBINED SHOWS**

**GRASSMARKET – EDINBURGH**

**DURING CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR**

**ELECTRIC LIGHT  
AN ENTIRELY NEW FEATURE IN THE LIGHTING**

**OF**

**TRAVELLING EXHIBITIONS**

**ALSO AT  
HENDERSON STREET, LEITH**

**ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19 AND MONDAY DECEMBER 21, 1891”**

***BOSTOCK'S MENAGERIE***

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, December 26<sup>th</sup> 1894

**“BOSTOCK'S MENAGERIE**

**FIRST VISIT TO SCOTLAND**

**BOSTOCK'S GREAT CONTINENTAL MENAGERIE**

**NOW EXHIBITING IN THE GRASSMARKET**

**ADMISSION: 1s; CHILDREN 6d.  
FEEDING TIME – 9.30 p.m. 5d. EXTRA”**

***CARNIVAL, ROYAL GYMNASIUM***

*News*, Monday, January 29<sup>th</sup> 1900

**“CARNIVAL**

**ROYAL GYMNASIUM**

**PITT STREET, EDINBURGH**

**ADMISSION FREE”**

Note: The King George V playing fields now occupy this site.

Mrs **Cora Ledingham**, to whom I referred in Chapter 24: Cooke's Circus, gave me a number of press cuttings when I met her on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1963. Among them was cutting about the *Royal Gymnasium*, which appeared in *The World's Fair*, April 24<sup>th</sup> 1937.

“Many of our older readers who were resident in the Scottish Capital or who, in the course of their business paid frequent visits to that city during the latter part of the last century, will doubtless retain happy memories of its round of shows and entertainments.

Outside and inside amusements in those days were in plenty and all the Fun of the Fair, be it said, was relished to the full by all classes of people.”

Regarding those old-time shows, no one wrote more intimately than Councillor **Wilson McLaren**, and a lengthy but interesting article on this subject appeared in a recent issue of the *Weekly Scotsman*, ‘Edinburgh's Old Time Amusements: Councillor McLaren's Happy Memories’. His write-up on the Gymnasium follows. The article was extracted by ‘Marbell’.

“Even in Stockbridge district in those days all the fun of the fair carried on merrily. This amusement park was situated in Pitt Street and is now known as the Gymnasium, the home of the St. Bernard’s Football Club.

#### A POPULAR GYMNASIUM

In **1865**, Mr **Robert Cox** (glue and hide works) who subsequently became M.P. for South Edinburgh, conceived the idea of constructing a recreation ground at Fettes Row extending to Pitt Street and the Scotland Street tunnel. It was titled the ***Royal Patent Gymnasium***, the object being to give amusement and instruction to the people. It was opened by the Lord Provost **Charles Lawson** on 6<sup>th</sup> April.

The new place of amusement had many attractions, and it did not fail to draw the crowd. The principal attraction was the *Great Sea Serpent*, a rotary boat seating 600 persons. Other novelties were the *Giant Sea –Saw*. It was familiarly known as *Chang* after the Chinese Giant of that name. This iron cage measured 100 feet long by seven feet wide. It held 200 persons and rose to a height of 50 feet. There was no mechanical power to work this fearsome object with its freight of young human beings. Its movement was entirely by gravity and by and girl power.

Saturday afternoons and summer evenings always found the showground crowded. An outstanding attraction was the *Velocipede*. Made of iron, the machine had heavy wooden wheels and iron tyres! It was better known as the ‘boneshaker’. Even in wintertimes, the gym was not deserted. The circular pond on which the *Great Sea Serpent* floated, when bearing gave facilities for skating and both sexes were always out in force till late at night. Viewed from a distance it was a weird sight, the ground being lit by a number of flares.

Auld Reekie is no stranger to Christmas and New Year open-air carnivals with their many up-to-date stunts; but for innocent and healthy amusement, the old Gymnasium would be hard to beat

‘Marbell’ concluded, “Still anon, the writer (‘Marbell’) has never lost interest in showland and many amusement caterers and circus proprietors have in the Councillor a real and true friend. Long may he be with us! **MARBELL**”

Councillor McLaren died on January 31<sup>st</sup> **1944**, aged 83.

#### HAPPY MEMORIES OF THE GYMNASIUM

I have happy memories of the old Gymnasium during the years **1900-1906**. It was there that football teams from the Public Schools, or Board Schools (as they were named till **1918**, I think) met to compete for the Inspector’s Cup and other cups and trophies

I am happy to record that the Inspector’s Cup is still being competed for in **1964**. The final now takes place at the Warriston Playing Fields.

#### THE OLD GYMNASIUM GRANDSTAND

As the wind carries seeds long and short distances, so do building workers on occasions uproot and transplant various types of structures. In this case the grandstand of the old Gymnasium was moved and re-erected at Old Meadowbank in **1947**.

## ***SHOWGROUND GIBSON TERRACE***

*News*, Monday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1900

**“SHOW GROUND**

**GIBSON TERRACE, OFF FOUNTAINBRIDGE**

**ADMISSION FREE”**

Writing in March 1964, old residents of the district, or their grandchildren, might be mildly surprised to learn on reading the above notice, that the ‘Old Street’, where Granny lived, once housed a showground.

## ***BOSTOCK AND WOMBWELL’S MENAGERIE***

*News*, Thursday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1902

**“BOSTOCK AND WOMBWELL’S MENAGERIE**

**GRASSMARKET - EDINBURGH**

**PRICES: ADULTS, 1s., JUVENILES, 6d.”**

## **THE GRASSMARKET**

I turn once again to Councillor **McLaren** for his comments on the Grassmarket. As in the case of his story on the Gymnasium Carnival, this first appeared in *The World’s Fair*, in 1937, and extracted from a recent issue of the *Weekly Scotsman* by ‘Marbell’.

“In those days “(referring to the period before the dawn of 1900) “ outdoor and indoor amusements were in plenty.

The Grassmarket was another location that provided all the fun of the fair thirty years after this district had attained notoriety in respect of the cold-blooded murders of **Burke and Hare** in 1827-1828. The All Hallow Fair held in the spacious thoroughfare received special attention.

I have a vivid recollection of the amusements, with the wily horse-cowpers, farmers and characters who never failed to draw the crowd....*Wombwell’s Menagerie*, which stood near the Corn Exchange, was one of the principal attractions. The street was lined from top to bottom with hawkers’ barrows, Punch and Judy, and other penny shows. The *Fat Lady’s* booth stood cheek-by-jowl with that of the *Petrified Mummy*, claimed by the owner to be thousands of years old, and **Ned Holt**, one of the most original and wayward characters of Auld Reekie, had charge of the show.”

***THE SCOTTISH CATERERS' CARNIVAL***

*News*, Monday, December 15<sup>th</sup> 1902

**“THE SCOTTISH CATERERS' CARNIVAL**

**PINDER'S ROYAL CIRCUS**

**LOGIE GREEN, EDINBURGH”**

Note: I remember **Logie Green** from the first decade of the 1900's until the start of the First World War, after which I had other interests to occupy my time.

It was the home ground of one of the local football teams, possibly Leith Athletic, as St. Bernard's played at the Royal Gymnasium.

The Logie Green ground, long since a housing scheme, was off Broughton Road. Close by was **Powderhall Ground**, which was opened on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1870, and is still used as such, mainly greyhound racing as at March 1964. I remember seeing a football match between St Bernard's and Albion Rovers on Saturday, February 21<sup>st</sup> 1920; the score was 1-1.

*News*, Monday, December 1903

***“LUMLEY'S ATHLETIC CHAMPIONSHIP TOURNAMENT***

***WAVERLEY MARKET”***

***“BUFFALO BILL”, COL. WM. FREDERICK CODY***

*News*, Monday, August 8<sup>th</sup> 1904

**‘ “BUFFALO BILL”, COL. WM. FREDERICK CODY**

**ONE WEEK ONLY**

**EDINBURGH, AUGUST 8<sup>th</sup> TO 13<sup>th</sup>**

**GORGIE ROAD - NEAR GORGIE STATION**

**BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST**

**AND CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD**

**HEADED AND PERSONALLY INTRODUCED BY**

**COL. W. F CODY “BUFFALO BILL”**

**CARTER, THE COWBOY CYCLIST**

**IN HIS AERIAL 'LEAP THROUGH SPACE'**  
**'BUFFALO BILL', THE MASTER EXPONENT**  
**OF HORSEBACK MARKSMANSHIP, IN HIS**  
**WONDERFUL EXHIBITION OF SHOOTING**  
**WHILE GALLOPING A HORSE**

**100 NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS,**  
**GENUINE 'BLANKET RED MEN', CHIEFS,**  
**WARRIORS, BUCKS, SQUAWS & PAPOOSES.**

**TYPICAL SCENES OF WESTERN BORDER LIFE.**  
**THE DEADWOOD STAGE COACH 'HOLD UP', PONY EXPRESS**

**VIRGINIA REEL ON HORSEBACK,**  
**ROPING WILD HORSES, BUCKING BRONCOS**

**ONSLAUGHT UPON AN EMIGRANT TRAIN**

**AMERICAN MARKSMEN**

**INDIAN PASTIMES AND WAR DANCES.**

**IMPERIAL JAPANESE TROUPE**

**THRILLING HISTORICAL SPECTACLE OF**  
**SAVAGE WARFARE – THE BATTLE OF TYE LITTLE BIG HORN, OR,**  
**'CUSTER'S LAST STAND'**

**TWO PERFORMANCES DAILT, RAIN OR SHINE**

**AFTERNOOONS AT 2 - EVENINGS AT 8.**

**DOORS OPEN AT 1 AND 7 P.M.**

**PRICES OF ADMISSION: 1s.; 2s.; 3s.; 4s. BOX SEATS: 5s., & 7s.6d.**  
**CHILDREN UNDER 10 YEARS HALF-PRICE TO ALL EXCEPT 1s. SEATS**

**TICKETS AT ALL PRICES ON SALE AT THE GROUNDS AT HOURS OF**  
**OPENING, AND TICKETS 4s., 5s. AND 7s.6d. ON SALE DAILY FROM 9 A.M.**  
**UNTIL 5 P.M. AT WOOD & CO., PIANO WAREHOUSE, 49 GEORGE STREET"**

*News*, Friday, August 12<sup>th</sup> 1904

**"SPECIAL NOTICE**

**Special trains on the N.B.R. run to and from GORGIE STATION"**

From an old programme in the Edinburgh Room, Central Library:

“Col. Cody was born in Iowa on February 26<sup>th</sup> 1846. He died in Denver on January 10<sup>th</sup> 1917. He last appeared in Edinburgh in 1904.”

The *News* in answer to a query stated that close to 140,000 saw his 1904 show when he visited Gorgie Road.

Chief Superintendent **Robert Cribbes**, C.I.D., told me, “Buffalo Bill left a Winchester rifle in St Cuthbert’s Stables, Grove Street, where his circus ‘stood in equipage’.”

***ROYAL ITALIAN CIRCUS***

*News*, Monday, April 15<sup>th</sup> 1907

**“ROYAL ITALIAN CIRCUS**

**HELD IN COOKE’S CIRCUS**

(Fountainbridge)

**COMMENCING THIS MONDAY - APRIL 15<sup>th</sup>**

**AT 2.30**

**BEFORE KING AND QUEEN AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE**

**OVER 200 PERFORMING ANIMALS**

**PRICES: NUMBERED AND RESERVED, 3s.; UNRESERVED, 2s., 1s., AND 6d.  
CHILDREN, HALF-PRICE**

**UNTIL SATURDAY NIGHT - MAY 18<sup>th</sup> 1907”**

***EVANS’ CARNIVAL***

*News*, Friday December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1911

**“EVANS’ CARNIVAL**

**PONTON STREET TOLL CROSS**

**Admission free Opening Night**

**“All the fun of the fair etc.””**

***BOSTOCK AND WOMBWELL'S***

*News*, Wednesday, July 24<sup>th</sup> **1912**

**“BOSTOCK AND WOMBWELL'S  
FOUNTAINBRIDGE TOLLCROSS  
FOR 9 DAYS - FRIDAY JULY 26<sup>th</sup>  
TO AUGUST 5<sup>th</sup>, 1912  
ADMISSION: 1s.; CHILDREN, 6d.  
FEEDING TIME - 9.30 p.m. – 3d. EXTRA”**

***ROYAL ITALIAN CIRCUS***

*News*, Tuesday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> **1913**

**“OLYMPIA  
ANNANDALE STREET  
THE ROYAL ITALIAN CIRCUS  
FOR FOUR WEEKS  
PRICES: 3s., 2s., 1s. AND 6d.”**

Note: This site is now occupied by Rossleigh Ltd., Olympia Garage - **1963** Edinburgh Street Directory.

**CODONA CONQUERS EDINBURGH**

*News*, Thursday, January 1<sup>st</sup> **1931**

**“CODONA CONQUERS EDINBURGH  
MEADOWBANK ABBEYHILL  
With the Largest and Most Spacious  
CARNIVAL  
Ever staged in the Capital**

**EDINBURGH'S NEW AMUSEMENT PARK**  
**MEADOWBANK ABBEYHILL**  
**CONTINUING TILL 10<sup>th</sup> JAN.**  
**CHARGE FOR ADMISSION 3d.**  
**CHILDREN ADMITTED FREE- ACCOMPANIED BY PARENTS**  
**OPENING 10 a.m. THUR, FRIDAY & SATURDAY**  
**FIGURE RAILWAY - NOAH'S ARK**  
**WALL OF DEATH - ROYAL GRAND CIRCUS**  
**DARE-DEVIL PEGGY**  
**VISIT THE PEOPLE'S SHOW**  
**10 OF BRITAIN'S LARGEST ROUNDABOUTS"**

***BERTRAM MILLS' CIRCUS***

*News*, Saturday July 16<sup>th</sup> 1932, Page 8, under the 'The Passing Show'

**"BERTRAM MILLS' CIRCUS**

**MURRAYFIELD**

**SCOTTISH RUGBY UNION GROUND**

Edinburgh is to have a visit for a fortnight beginning on Tuesday, of Mr Bertram Mills' famous circus and menagerie from Olympia, London. A new location for such a show has been obtained in the parking ground behind the grandstand of the Scottish Rugby Union ground at Murrayfield, and the only entrance will be by the bridge over the Water of Leith at Murrayfield Road. Upon the ground a huge marquee is to be erected to give accommodation to 4,000 spectators.

Included in the programme are **Mcrowzkowski's Lippizaner Arab stallions**, **Mathie's** eleven tigers, **Power's** dancing elephants, the greatest thrill of the century, the **Wallenda's High Wire Act**, the **Millimetre Girls**, Red Indian and Mexican riders, a rodeo, congress of International Clowns and **Augustes Manzano** the Spanish High School rider and toreador. These are only part of the aggregation that Bertram Mills has assembled for the tour. It is the most magnificently equipped circus that has ever visited these parts.

Performances are to be given daily at 4.45 and 8 o'clock, but the menagerie will be open to visitors daily from 10 till 4, and after each performance Miss **Peggy Solomon**'s lion cubs from Central Africa will be on view, and in his private tent, **Zaro Agha**, aged 156, will hold daily receptions. Two special trains and 700 lorries will be required to bring the show and staff from Newcastle. This will be the first visit of the circus to Scotland and the Lord Provost, Sir **Thomas B. Whitson**, is to be at the opening on Tuesday, July 19<sup>th</sup> 1932"

*News*, Tuesday, July 19<sup>th</sup> 1932

**"NOW OPEN**  
**EDINBURGH**  
**ROSEBURN**  
**SCOTTISH RUGBY UNION GROUND**  
**POSITIVELY 2 WEEKS ONLY**  
**TO JULY 30<sup>TH</sup>**  
**BERTRAM MILLS'**  
**CIRCUS AND MENAGERIE**  
**FROM OLYMPIA LONDON**  
**TWICE DAILY AT 4.45 AND 8 p.m.**  
**SATURDAY JULY 30<sup>th</sup> only, at 2.30 and 6.30 p.m.**  
**MENAGERIE OPEN DAILY FROM 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**  
**AND AFTER EACH PERFORMANCE**  
**DON'T MISS SEEING ZARO AGHA**  
**THE WORLD'S OLDEST LIVING MAN**  
**PRICES OF ADMISSION: 1s.3d, 2s.6d., 3s.9d., 5s. and 7s.6d.**  
**7s.6d. and 5s. seats may be booked in advance on the Ground or by telephone**  
**(Edinburgh 61438). Also from Methven Simpson Ltd., 83 Princes Street, Edinburgh**  
**('Phone Edinburgh 21271, 3 lines); and Messrs. Paterson Sons & Co. Ltd., 27 George**  
**Street, Edinburgh ('Phone Edinburgh 23797)'"**

*News*, Friday, July 29<sup>th</sup> 1932 Turret Window

"The Circus  
After a highly successful visit, Mr Bertram Mills' Circus at Murrayfield closes tomorrow, when there will be performances at 2.30 and 6.30. The next place to be visited is Dundee. Mr Mills is greatly gratified with the appreciation shown by the Edinburgh public. St Giles."

***PINDER'S  
PALLADIUM ROYAL CIRCUS FOUNTAINBRIDGE***

*News*, Tuesday December 27<sup>th</sup> 1932

**“BEAUTIFUL HORSES, ACROBATS,  
HIGH STILT WALKERS,  
THE FUNNIEST CLOWNS ETC.**

**PRICES: 6d., 1s.6d. and 2s. (PALLADIUM 27874)**

**This circus has no connection with late John Henry Cooke.”**

The last ‘picture’ advertisement for the Palladium was in the *News*, Saturday, August 13<sup>th</sup> 1932, when the following double feature was presented:

***MISCHIEF & THE SKY SPIDER***

**With Pete Marsh and His Aeolian Dance Band**

**And Variety with Jack Ross, Dame Comedian**

The Palladium opened as a theatre on Saturday, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1933, with **Millicent Ward** and her Repertory Players. See Chapter 21: Palladium Theatre.

***BERTRAM MILLS' CIRCUS***

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, June 1<sup>st</sup> 1938

**“BERTRAM MILLS' CIRCUS**

**SCOTTISH RUGBY UNION FOOTBALL GROUND**

**MURRAYFIELD**

**CIRCUS FOR EDINBURGH**

The Edinburgh Magistrates yesterday sanctioned the holding of a circus in the car park of the Rugby ground, by Bertram Mills' Touring Circus from July 17<sup>th</sup> to July 30<sup>th</sup>, and the opening of the premises to the public on Sundays, so that the public might see the horses and other animals.”

## **WHITE'S ANNUAL CARNIVAL**

*News*, Monday December 9<sup>th</sup> 1938

**“WHITE'S ANNUAL CARNIVAL**

**MILTON STREET, ABBEYHILL**

**ADMISSION FREE”**

### **ARE CIRCUSES ON THE WAY OUT IN EDINBURGH?**

The first reference to Circuses in this history is to Messrs **Jones and Parker, 1788**, in Chapter 7: Broughton Street Site, and the last piece of information I gathered about a circus was about Chipperfield's, which appeared at Pilrig Park during September **1963**. Thus, circuses have been presented to the population of Edinburgh for their entertainment for at least 175 years. Will a circus appear in Edinburgh in 1964-65, or any other year? Time will tell, but the cold mitt send-off by certain Edinburgh councillors in September 1963 to Chipperfield's Circus would seem to indicate that CIRCUSES ARE NOT WELCOME IN EDINBURGH ANYMORE.

In Chapter 8: Pantomimes I show that Pantomimes were produced during the 'Season' from the start of the First World war right through to Season 1961-62, then NO PANTOMIMES were produced in Edinburgh in the 1962 –63 Season.

I am glad it fell to my lot to put on record the history of Edinburgh Amusements, especially the section dealing with Circuses. I endeavoured to name every circus which appeared in Edinburgh, i.e. those that were advertised in the Press. If, however, some have been omitted, my plea is – it is unfortunate. I did my best to bring before the citizens of my beloved CITY – EDINBURY – some of the delights I experienced, firstly in Cooke's Circus, East Fountainbridge when I was a child; and, in turn, later circuses with my family.

Like Theatre People, Circus People have always been at the top of the queue, ready and willing to give freely of their services on behalf of any deserving cause.

And so I say farewell to the Sawdust Ring of my childhood days; I understand that the Sawdust Ring has been superseded by Non Dust floor coverings.

**HAPPY MEMORIES**

### 33: SKATING RINKS

*The Skating Club, Edinburgh, Established 1744; The Skater's Monitor, Instructor and Evening Companion, 1846; The Skating Club, London, Established 1830.*

**Ice Skating Rinks:** *Craiglockhart Safety Ponds, 1881; Edinburgh Skating Rink, Curling Rink, Perth Street, 1883; Anderson's Ice Rink, St Stephen's Street, 1898; Edinburgh Ice Rink, Haymarket, 1912; Lochrin Ice Pond, Tollcross, 1912; Craiglockhart Ponds, Happy Valley, 1935; Murrayfield Ice Rink, 1938; Murrayfield Royals first ice-hockey match, 1952.*

**Roller Skating Rinks:** *Plimpton's Patent Roller Skating, Drill Hall, Forrest Road, 1875; The Edinburgh Roller Skating Rink, Drill Hall, Forrest Road, 1876; Portobello Skating Rink, 1876; Royal Gymnasium Roller Skating, 1877; The Edinburgh Roller Skating Rink, Drill Hall, Forrest Road, 1881; American Roller Skating, Russell Road, 1908; Marine Gardens, Portobello, 1909; Olympia Skating Palace, Annandale Street, 1909; Northern Roller Skating Rink, 38 Raeburn Place, 1909; Belle-Vue Roller Skating Rink, 44A Elm Row, 1909; Ocean Skating Rink, Tower Street, Portobello, 1909; The Grand Rink, West Fountainbridge, 1909 (later The Coliseum Picture House); Pinder's Circus and Skating Carnival, Bangor Road, Leith, 1910; Royal Park Skating Rink, St Leonard's Bank, 1910; The Bungalow, Bath Street, Portobello, The Scottish Roller Skating Coy., 1910.*

The following extracts are from a book about *The Skating Club, Edinburgh*, held by the Edinburgh Room. It provides an unexpected and delightful introduction to an ancient Edinburgh pastime, which still flourishes, but under more congenial (?) if somewhat artificial conditions, as I write in March **1964**, 220 years after the Club was formed.

#### “THE SKATING CLUB, EDINBURGH

ESTABLISHED 1744

PATRON: HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE ALBERT

President: GEORGE MORE      Vice-president: JAMES MACKNIGHT

Council: LORD COCKBURN, SIR GEORGE CLERK, Bart., SIR ROBERT KEITH DICK CUNYGHAM, Bart., WILLIAM WOOD, WILLIAM DOUNE GILLON, GEORGE GILLON, JAMES G. THOMSON, JOHN RICHARDSON, J. L. WOODMAN, WILLIAM S. ELLIOT. Dr. CHARLES M. KER.

Secretary: ARCHIBALD W. GOLDIE

Skate-maker: J. SIMPSON, South Bridge.      Officer: J. MACKAY

This Club has had enrolled among its Members many of the nobility, judges and eminent men of the land; all of whom, however, without distinction of rank, were required to go through regular trials of their qualifications on the ice, before they could be admitted as Members; no one being allowed to enter who is not a good skater and able to take part in all movements and evolutions of the Club.

All the Members of the Club use skates of a uniform make. They are immovably fixed to boots made for the purpose, which lace in front.”

Advertisement at end of book:

### “SKATES

At **Young’s** well-known Cutlery Establishment, 79 Prince’s Street, Edinburgh – Gentlemen in search of a good pair of skates can be supplied with all the various patterns of that article, from the most approved **Boot Mounted Skates** down to the cheapest article made for beginners. All sizes of boys' skates always on hand.

A. Young begs respectfully to inform the Public that he has been duly appointed Skate Master to the Edinburgh Skating Club: it having only been ascertained, after the early sheets of the preceding Work had gone to Press, that there was a vacancy by the removal of Mr Simpson from this neighbourhood to another sphere of business.”

### “THE SKATER’S MONITOR, INSTRUCTOR AND EVENING COMPANION

**EDINBURGH: JOHN MENZIES, 61 PRINCE’S STREET, 1846**  
**Printed by G. MOIR, ST. ANDREW STREET, EDINBURGH**

### *PREFACE*

Pages v and vi

Any excellence in the art that I am said to possess, is to be referred entirely to my obedience to the rules found in the annexed dialogue; and were they widely known among skaters, it is not unlikely but an immediate improvement would follow.

My escape from accident and immersion, is also to be referred to strict attention to the warnings unfolded in the scenes within.

The humorous tale of *Tom Tickle*, a London impostor, is introduced in the hope that it may impress on the minds of the young, a moral truth, viz.: “Look to your first wrong step.”

It is with trembling then, that I send away this little craft on the mind’s ever glorious sea, with its prow bearing for that haven, where ride in security, and undecaying radiance many a stately vessel: there float the Franklin and Washington – the Shakespeare and Newton – the Scott and Burns – the Burke and Sheridan – and a countless fleet with flags blazoning as they flutter at their lofty heights! and as they wave, mingle into a canopy of a thousand hues!

The skiff carries a few atoms of the ore of truth, in the form of Instructions on the Art of Skating; a Humorous Moral Tale; Anecdotes; Warnings for all who frequent the Ice, practically treated in Scenes on the Serpentine; and its Company are *Lieutenant Gleam, Albert, Tom Tickle*, and **Walter Dove**.

EDINBURGH  
20<sup>th</sup> October 1846”

### **THE SKATING CLUB, LONDON, ESTABLISHED 1830**

The Club had 16 Rules, some of which were rather quaint and I quote several for that reason:

“RULE 7 - That the Annual Subscription be one Guinea, to be paid at the General Meeting in December, and that every Member pay on his election an entrance fee of one Guinea and his subscription for the current year.

RULE 8 – That every Member be considered liable for his Annual Subscription **until he sends in his resignation in writing to the Secretary**.

RULE 11 – That Members of the Club be distinguished by wearing a small model of a Skate, executed in silver; with one of which each Member shall provide himself at *Coleman’s, Cutler, 4 Haymarket*; **and that if any Member appear on ice, or at any meeting of the Club without it**, he shall be fined 2s. 6d.

RULE 13 – That no Labourers be employed on **Sunday** for sweeping or cleaning the ice: the Attendant alone is to remain in charge of the property of the Club, and to wait upon Members at the ....

RULE 15 – That if any surplus of expense be incurred at the Annual Dinner, for Wines, Waiters, etc., beyond the sum fixed by the Committee, it shall be paid out of the funds of the Club.”

### **ICE SKATING RINKS**

#### ***CRAIGLOCKHART SAFETY PONDS***

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1881

#### ***CRAIGLOCKHART SAFETY PONDS***

#### **SNOW REMOVED- ICE IN SPLENDID CONDITION**

**ADMISSION: 1s.; AFTER 5 O’CLOCK, 6d.**

**ILLUMINATED”**

Unfortunately there was no mention of the type of illumination used.

*News and Dispatch*, Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> August **1964**

In *Here's Your Answer!*, it was stated that the Pond was built by **Mr Cox**, of the *Royal Gymnasium*, for skating and curling

### ***EDINBURGH SKATING RINK***

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, August 18<sup>th</sup> **1883**

**“EDINBURGH SKATING RINK**

**OPEN EVERY SATURDAY EVENING,**

**WITH GOOD BAND AT 6.30**

**ADMISSION 3d.; SKATES, 3d.**

**ICE RINK  
CURLING RINK, PERTH STREET”**

[*Encyclopaedia Britannica*: The first rink with artificially frozen ice, a private one, the Glaciarium, was opened in London in **1876**, and throughout the century larger and public rinks with artificially produced ice appeared.]

Extract from *First Electricity Test Book*, March 13<sup>th</sup> **1898**

**“ANDERSON’S ICE RINK, ST. STEPHEN’S STREET”**

The rink became the *Tivoli Theatre* in **1901**: see Chapter 14: St. Stephen Street Site.

### ***EDINBURGH ICE RINK, HAYMARKET***

*News*, Wednesday, January 24<sup>th</sup> **1912**

**“EDINBURGH ICE RINK  
HAYMARKET**

**REAL ICE**

The largest ice-rink in the United Kingdom will be opened by Lord **Balfour of Burleigh**, K.T., on Saturday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> February, **1912**. Sir **Archibald Buchan**, Bart., Chairman of the Directors, will preside.

A curling match will take place and an exhibition of skating given.  
Admission to the opening, 3s.

The rink will be open to the public for skating the same evening between 6.30 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Charges: Pavilion, 1s., Ice 2s.

Tickets for the opening are procurable from Messrs R. and R. Anderson, Managers, 101 Princes Street and Messrs Thornton & Co.

A Curling Club has been formed. Those desirous of joining will kindly communicate with A. J. Simpson, S.S.C., 36 George Street."

*News*, February 7<sup>th</sup> 1947

#### **"EDINBURGH SKATERS MUST WAIT**

It will probably be several years yet, according to Mr **George Tomlinson**, the Minister of Works, before *Murrayfield Ice Rink* in Edinburgh is derequisitioned. The *Haymarket* may be available in the near future as it has been derequisitioned by the Admiralty, though some time must pass before opening to the public, as a six-foot deep concrete floor, which covered the freezing pipes, will require to be removed."

#### ***LOCHRIN ICE POND, TOLLCROSS***

*News*, Saturday February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1912

#### **"LOCHRIN ICE POND**

**HAS NOW A SPLENDID SURFACE OF ICE**

**OPEN TODAY, ENTRANCE BY TOLLCROSS**

**9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.**

**2 p.m. to 5 p.m.**

**7 p.m. to 10 p.m.**

**ADMISSION TO SKATING 1s.**

**THE ICE POND WILL BE COVERED WITH A FRESH SHEET OF ICE  
EVERY MONDAY DURING FEBRUARY, MARCH AND APRIL**

**CURLING – MONDAYS, WEDNESDAYS AND FRIDAYS  
ADMISSION 6d. ICE AND CURLING STONES 6d. per hour**

**SKATING – TUESDAYS, THURSDAYS & SATURDAYS**

**ADMISSION AND SKATING 1s.”**

*News*, Wednesday, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1913

**“LOCHRIN ICE POND**

**TOLLCROSS**

**TONIGHT**

**SKATING, 7.30 to 10 p.m.**

**ADMISSION AT SKATING 6d.”**

Note the reduction in Admission Price.

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, November 13<sup>th</sup> 1963 Extract from an article about Ross' Lochrin, Tollcross, which celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their appointment as Hillman car dealers.

“An ice rink until taken over by the company in 1920. The Lochrin premises were spacious by the standards of those days, and were adequate for many years.”

[On warm days during the summer holidays in the late 1930's and early 1940's my pals and I often used to visit the Ice Factory in Lochrin, next to what is now Arnold Clark's showroom. (the site of the Lochrin Ice Pond) An attraction was to see blocks of ice, 1 foot square, being loaded onto vans, possibly for use by hotels. Once the task was completed the lads would let us have small chunks of ice which we would suck. G.F.B.]

***CRAIGLOCKHART PONDS***

*News*, Saturday, December 21<sup>st</sup> 1935

**“HAPPY VALLEY  
(SAFETY POND)**

**SKATING TODAY**

**“SCOTLAND'S FINEST OUTDOOR RINK”**

**FLOODLIGHTING MUSIC**

**OPEN 10 till 10.30 ADMISSION 1s.**

**SKATES FOR HIRE**

**SUNDAY 10 till 10 (FROST HOLDING)**

**CONDITIONS BEING FAVOURABLE LARGE POND WILL BE OPEN”**

## **MURRAYFIELD ICE RINK**

*News*, Saturday, June 12<sup>th</sup> 1937

The first press report of the rink coming into existence appeared in the above issue of the *News* and was billed “Edinburgh to get ‘The World’s Fastest Game’, to cost £80,000.”

*News*, Monday, January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1938

### **“NEW ICE PROJECT**

#### **S.R.U. OFFER SITE AT MURRAYFIELD**

It will be remembered that various possible sites have been suggested in connection with the project, including Meadowbank, the Marine Gardens, the Gymnasium ground, the home ground of St. Bernard’s F.C., and Balgreen Road.”

*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, January 4<sup>th</sup> 1938

### **“PROMOTERS SECURE OPTION ON GROUND AT MURRAYFIELD**

The president of the S.R.U., Mr **A.A.Lawrie**, confirmed the report anent granting an option for the provision in Edinburgh of a sports stadium with facilities for ice-hockey, boxing contests and other recreations. The S.R.U. to provide facilities for the parking of motor cars.”

*The Scotsman*, Monday, January 17<sup>th</sup> 1938

### **“THE PROPOSED ICE-HOCKEY STADIUM AT MURRAYFIELD**

The building will have seating for 5,700 persons. The surface area will be 200 feet by 100 feet. The project is being promoted by Edinburgh businessmen who will form a company to raise £75,000 of capital to be divided into ordinary shares of 5s. each.

The architects for the scheme are Messrs Dunn & Martin.”

*Dispatch*, Tuesday, January 25<sup>th</sup> 1938

### **“THIRD ICE HOCKEY STADIUM FOR EDINBURGH**

#### **SITE NEAR MEADOWBANK**

...it is believed that steps are being taken to build a stadium in the Meadowbank area. Last week, plans for rival rinks at Murrayfield and Balgreen were published....

### **PLAYERS’ PROBLEM**

The question of obtaining a sufficient number of first-class players is likely to be a real problem. The third stadium, it is understood, will have seating for 8,000 spectators and to attract enthusiasts from Portobello, Leith and the surrounding district.”

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1938

**“MURRAYFIELD SCHEME SANCTIONED.”**

*Dispatch*, Friday, April 8<sup>th</sup> 1938

**“TOWN COUNCIL REJECTS CORSTORPHINE SCHEME (BALGREEN)**

After a keen debate the proposal was defeated by 36 votes to 7.”

*News*, Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup> 1938

**“ICE STADIUM - £60,000 SCHEME AT MURRAYFIELD**

**AMENDED PLANS**

Amended plans for the ice rink at the S.R.U. ground were passed by Lord Dean of Guild Court, W.W. Finlayson presiding. The seating accommodation being reduced from 5,700 to 4,000 – the area of the building being slightly reduced.”

*Dispatch*, Tuesday, November 8<sup>th</sup> 1938

Shows a photograph of the ice rink in course of construction.

*Dispatch*, Thursday, August 10<sup>th</sup> 1939

Shows a photograph of the ice rink virtually completed.

The stadium was due to open on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1939, but was requisitioned by the Government on the outbreak of War on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939. The building was used as a N.A.A.F.I. store until 1942; thereafter it was used by H.M. Stationery Office until 1951.

*The Scotsman*, Friday, August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1952

The first ice-hockey match, **Murrayfield Royals** versus **Falkirk Lions**, will take place on September 19<sup>th</sup>.

In normal circumstances, it is intended that there will be ice-hockey every Monday night; six sessions of curling each week; and skating every day. There will be 1,200 pairs of skates (attached to boots) for hiring. The rink will be open on Sundays for club members only.

It will have a restaurant, a milk-bar, and for members of the *Murrayfield Ice Rink Club*, a licensed lounge.”

*The Scotsman*, Thursday, August 8<sup>th</sup> 1952

#### “NEW ICE RINK OPENED IN EDINBURGH

Such perseverance deserved success, said Lord Provost **James Miller**, when he opened the Murrayfield Ice Rink, Edinburgh, yesterday; and referred to the difficulties that had beset the concern for the past 13 years.

The Lord Provost cut a white tape across the main entrance of the handsome building which seats 4,500 spectators. Mr **H.H.Leslie**, vice chairman of the company, presided at a short ceremony. Later in the afternoon a full-dress rehearsal was held of the *Rose Marie On Ice* show which will be playing at Murrayfield for the next four weeks, and which opens tonight.”

*News*, Saturday, June 30<sup>th</sup> 1956

#### “MURRAYFIELD ICE RINK IS PUT UP FOR SALE

This decision was taken by the shareholders less than four years after the belated official opening of the rink. The company was registered in July 1938, and the rink was due to be opened on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1939, but the premises were requisitioned by the Government from the outbreak of War on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939, first for use as a N.A.F.F.I. store until 1942, and from then until 1951 by H.M. Stationery Office.”

*News*, Tuesday, October 16<sup>th</sup> 1956

#### “SKATING AGAIN AT MURRAYFIELD ICE RINK

The building was put up for sale in June of this year but it is understood that no suitable offer was received.

The stadium has been rented by Mr **Alaistair Walker**, C.A., Edinburgh, for the coming winter until next March.”

## **ROLLER SKATING RINKS**

*Edinburgh Courant*, Wednesday, May 25<sup>th</sup> 1875

### ***“PLIMPTON’S PATENT ROLLER SKATING***

#### ***DRILL HALL, FORREST ROAD***

**The Hall will be open to the Public on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays  
until further notice, from 10 till 1, and from 2.30 until 6 p.m.**

**Admission, 1s.; Hire of Skates, 6d.”**

*Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*, page 149

“The Drill Hall was opened by Lord Provost **James Cowan** on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1872. It was then known as the *Forrest Road Volunteer Hall*.”

Note: In 1875 building trade workers received 7d. per hour for 51 hours per week. That is £1.9s.9d. per week. Thus, these workers and their families neither had the income nor the time - 2.30 until 6.30 – to engage in this **sport, past-time, gemmie** or what have you.

### ***PLIMPTON’S PATENT ROLLER SKATING***

**changes its name to**

#### ***THE EDINBURGH ROLLER SKATING RINK DRILL HALL, FORREST ROAD***

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, November 4<sup>th</sup> 1876

“The Hall will be closed from Monday, November 6<sup>th</sup> until further notice, in order that a new and specially prepared asphalt floor may be constructed.”

*The Scotsman*, Wednesday, December 6<sup>th</sup> 1876

### ***“THE EDINBURGH ROLLER SKATING RINK***

New floor has been constructed and the hall decorated. Every evening until further notice.”

***PORTOBELLO SKATING RINK***

*The Scotsman*, Monday, November 6<sup>th</sup> 1876

***“PORTOBELLO SKATING RINK***

**OPEN DAILY AT 10.30; 2.30; & 6.30**

**ADMISSION – AFTERNOON – ONE SHILLING**

**FORENOON AND EVENING – SIXPENCE**

**FASHIONABLE PROMENADE ON THURSDAY**

**GREAT PROMENADE ON SATURDAY**

**SPLENDID BAND OF 78<sup>TH</sup> HIGHLANDERS  
AFTERNOON & EVENING”**

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, August 4<sup>th</sup> 1877

***“PORTOBELLO SKATING RINK***

**OPEN EACH DAY**

**A BAND EVERY SATURDAY**

**AFTERNOON AND EVENING**

**REFRESHMENTS, TEAS, COFFEES, ETC.”**

***ROYAL GYMNASIUM***

*The Edinburgh Courant*, Monday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1877

***“ROYAL GYMNASIUM***

**ROLLER SKATING”**

***THE EDINBURGH ROLLER SKATING RINK  
DRILL HALL, FORREST ROAD***

*The Scotsman*, Saturday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1881

***“THE EDINBURGH ROLLER SKATING RINK  
DRILL HALL, FORREST ROAD***

**OPEN THIS DAY 11-1, 2.30-5.30 & 7-10**

**AUGMENTED BAND,  
AND BY KIND PERMISSION OF COL. DAVIDSON & OFFICERS,  
THE PIPES OF THE Q.E.R.V.B.,  
UNDER THE DIRECTION OF PIPE-MAJOR RUTHERFORD”**  
‘Q.E.R.V.B.’ – Queen’s Edinburgh Rifles Volunteer Brigade, which in 1908 became known as Territorials.

***AMERICAN ROLLER SKATING RINK***

*News*, Monday, July 27<sup>th</sup> 1908

***“AMERICAN ROLLER SKATING RINK  
RUSSELL ROAD, MURRAYFIELD***

**EDINBURGH’S NEWEST AMUSEMENT**

**HIGH-CLASS ROLLER SKATING**

**MILITARY BAND FREE TUITION**

**AFTERNOON TEAS FREE CLOAKROOMS**

**30,000 SQUARE FEET OF SKATING SURFACE  
THE LARGEST, SMOOTHEST, AND BEST IN THE WORLD**

**SAMUEL WINSLOW 1908 MODEL STEEL WHEEL,  
BALL BEARING SKATES USED EXCLUSIVELY**

**THREE SESSIONS DAILY**

**MORNINGS: 10 – 12; ADMISSION FREE; SKATES 1s.**

**AFTERNOONS: 2-5; ADMISSION 6d.; SKATES 1s.**

**EVENINGS: 7 – 10; ADMISSION 1s. SKATES 1s.**

**Ladies free at afternoon session**

**INVITATION OPENING FRIDAY NIGHT, JULY 31**

**DAILY SESSIONS BEGIN SATURDAY, AUGUST 1<sup>st</sup> 1908”**

*News*, Tuesday, August 4<sup>th</sup> **1908** Extract

“This form of sport has gone well with the management of the American Roller Skating Co.

Naturally enough, some time will be required before people ‘cotton on’ to the game properly. The only difficulty seems to be a want of a sufficient supply of young ladies.

Miss **Daisy Davis**, of Pittsburg, whose gyrations are a delight of the company ....her skating is the essence of all that is beautiful in movement.”

*News*, Tuesday, October 5<sup>th</sup> **1909**

“Managing Directors: C.P. Crawford & F.A. Wilkins”

*News*, Monday, November 9<sup>th</sup> **1908**

**“AMERICAN ROLLER SKATING RINK**

**RUSSELL ROAD, MURRAYFIELD**

**THREE SESSIONS DAILY**

**GRAND SKATING CINDERELLA  
TUESDAY NOVEMBER 10<sup>th</sup> 1908**

**ALL SKATERS MUST BE IN EVENING DRESS**

**ADMISSION 1s”**

***MARINE GARDENS, SEAFIELD ROAD***

The Marine Gardens opened on Monday, May 31<sup>st</sup> **1909**. The following is quoted from a programme appearing in *The Scotsman* of that date.

“Skating Rink – Absolutely the Finest and Largest in Scotland.

Sessions: 11 to 1, 2 to 5 and 7 to 10”

*News*, Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup> **1931**

**“MARINE GARDENS SEAFIELD ROAD**

**ROLLER SKATING**

**EVERY WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY & FRIDAY”**

***OLYMPIA SKATING PALACE  
ANNANDALE STREET***

*News*, Monday, September 6<sup>th</sup> 1909

**“OLYMPIA SKATING PALACE**

**ANNANDALE STREET, LEITH WALK**

**OPENING DAY – WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8<sup>th</sup> 1909 at 3 p.m.  
MANAGING DIRECTOR – F.A. LUMLEY**

**THE HON. LADY DUNEDIN HAS KINDLY CONSENTED  
TO PERFORM THE OPENING CEREMONY.  
THEREAFTER AN EXHIBITION OF FANCY SKATING**

**LEADERS: PROFESSOR G.W. THURLOW, floor manager  
And  
MISS MAY PICKERING, INSTRUCTRESS**

**ADMISSION TO OPENING CEREMOINY BY INVITATION ONLY**

**PRICES OF ADMISSION AFTER OPENING  
LADIES FREE TO MORNING AND AFTERNOON SESSIONS  
GENTLEMEN 6d.**

**EVENING SESSIONS 6d. SKATERS ALL SESSIONS 1s.**

**BOOK OF 30 TICKETS £1”**

***NORTHERN ROLLER SKATING RINK  
38 RAEBURN PLACE***

*News*, Monday September 27<sup>th</sup> 1909

**“ALL SESSIONS 6d EXCEPT 7 TO 10”**

This was the first advertisement I came across about this rink.

*News*, Tuesday, September 28<sup>th</sup> 1909

**“6d. & 1s. MEN EACH SESSION  
6d. & 9d. LADIES”**

The site is now occupied by Messrs Woolworth’s.

***BELLE -VUE SKATING RINK***

*News*, Friday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1909

**“BELLE-VUE SKATING RINK  
44A ELM ROW**

**ROLLER SKATING RINK**

**BILLIARD ROOM, 16 TABLES**

**MINIATURE RIFLE RANGE, 6 TARGETS**

**BOWLING, 6 RINKS**

**OPEN TODAY BY INVITATION, AT 3 O’CLOCK**

**ADMISSION 6d. SKATES 1s.”**

*News*, Monday October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1909

“The new venture in Elm Row, The Belle-Vue Skating Rink, made an auspicious start, and the pretty decoration inside the building ought to make it a rendezvous for rinkers. The maple floor, though well laid, is a bit stiff, and with time should develop into an excellent skating surface.

The hanging bandstand from the centre of the roof is a novel idea and is naturally the subject of much comment.”

*News*, Monday, November 8<sup>th</sup> 1909

**“BELLE-VUE SKATING RINK  
ELM ROW**

**POPULAR PRICES 3 SESSIONS DAILY**

**11 to 1, ADMISSION FREE – SKATES 6d.  
2.30 to 5, LADIES FREE, GENTS. 6d. – SKATES 6d.  
7 to 10.15, 6d. – SKATES 6d.**

**BOOKS OF TICKETS NOW READY”**

***OCEAN SKATING RINK, TOWER STREET, PORTOBELLO***

*News*, Saturday August 14<sup>th</sup> 1909

**“OCEAN SKATING RINK**

**TOWER STREET, PORTOBELLO**

**GRAND OPENING  
OF THE NEW  
OCEAN SKATING RINK  
(LATE TOWER PAVILION)  
PORTOBELLO**

**TONIGHT (SATURDAY) THE ABOVE RINK  
WILL BE OPENED TO THE PUBLIC**

**SPECIALLY SELECTED MAPLE FLOOR,**

**AND IS FULLY EQUIPPED TO MEET**

**THE REQUIEREMENTS AND COMFORT OF PATRONS**

**ADMISSION 6d. SKATES 6d.”**

***THE GRAND RINK, WEST FOUNTAINBRIDGE***

*News*, Wednesday, November 24<sup>th</sup> 1909

**“THE GRAND**

**THE CALEDONIAN RINK (LIMITED)  
WEST FOUNTAINBRIDGE, LOTHIAN ROAD**

**TO BE OPENED BY SIR R. CRANSTON, K.C.V.D., V.D., LLD.  
ON FRIDAY NOVEMBER 26<sup>th</sup> 1909  
BAILLIE GEDDES IN THE CHAIR  
J. WOOLFOOT, MANAGER**

**THE GRAND RINK  
WEST FOUNTAINBRIDGE, LOTHIAN ROAD  
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC – FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 26<sup>TH</sup> 1909  
PRICES: EVENING 6d. SKATES 1s.”**

In 1910 I was a regular attender at the *Grand Rink* until it became the *Coliseum Picture House*, which opened on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1911.

***PINDER'S CIRCUS & SKATING CARNIVAL***

*News*, Saturday, January 1<sup>st</sup> 1910

**“PINDER'S CIRCUS & SKATING CARNIVAL  
BANGOR ROAD, LEITH”**

***ROYAL PARK SKATING RINK  
ST LEONARD'S BANK***

*News*, Wednesday, January 12<sup>th</sup> 1910

**“ROYAL PARK SKATING RINK  
ST. LEONARD'S BANK**

**ADMISSION 6d. SKATES 6d.”**

***THE BUNGALOW, 26a BATH STREET, PORTOBELLO***

**1910/1911** *Portobello Street Directory*

Reference is made in the Directory to, “The Scottish Roller Skating Coy., The Bungalow, 26a Bath Street”

The Bungalow is mentioned in the Directories from 1903-04 until 1910-11. See Chapter 26: Portobello Amusements.

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