

***PLACES OF
ENTERTAINMENT
IN EDINBURGH***

***Part 3
LEITH***



***Compiled from
Edinburgh Theatres, Cinemas and Circuses
1820 - 1963
by George Baird***

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Foreword

After Frances Watt of Nicolson Square Methodist Church had read my father's book *Edinburgh Theatres, Cinemas and Circuses 1820-1963*, she approached me to give a talk about places of entertainment in the South Side to the Epworth Group of her church. While preparing the material for the talk I was seized with the idea of producing compact books for some of the localities in Edinburgh. Naturally, my first effort was about The South Side. Part 2, deals with Tollcross and its environs. This book, Part 3, is about Leith and some places of entertainment South of the old burgh boundary, on or near Leith Walk. Parts still to be published are: Part 4, Portobello; Part 5, Stockbridge and Canonmills; and Part 6, Princes Street and the Top of the Walk.

In 1959 my father, **George Baird, 1893-1967**, conceived the idea of writing the History. His primary aim was to report the emergence of 'houses of entertainment', by quoting the first advertisement relating to the **opening** of the theatre or cinema; its address; 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*; Window Bills, handbills, held by the Edinburgh Room and the National Library; and the 1915 and 1954 *Kinematograph Year books*. Background information was included where he thought it would be of interest to the reader. His sources for this were J.C.Dibdin's *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage*; James Grant's *Old and New Edinburgh*; Councillor Wilson McLaren's Reminiscences, as given in the *Edinburgh Evening News*; William Hutchison's *Tales and Traditions of Leith*; and *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*.

He started work on the History in October 1959 and from the outset received practical support from the City Librarian, Mr. C. M. Minto, and the staff of the Edinburgh Room. He acknowledged the help of Librarians thus, "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."

In 1964 he completed his research into the opening of 70 theatres, 120 cinemas, 40 circuses and 22 skating rinks, ice and roller. It was a tragedy that as he was nearing the completion of the History he fell ill in the Spring of 1964; as a consequence he was unable to compose a foreword to the History. Two copies of the History were produced by typewriter: the top copy is held by the Edinburgh Room, I have the carbon copy.

With a view to making the History available to a wider readership, I decided to re-set the History in *Word 97*, in A4 format. Keying the 180,000 words made me realise the enormous task undertaken by my father in transcribing most of the text from source material. I completed the A4 version of the History in July 2000.

The material in this book is drawn from Chapters: 10, 11, 15, 16, 19, 21, 24, 28,30, 32 and 33 of the History. References to sources of information have been abbreviated by using the following conventions- **S:** *The Scotsman*; **WS:** *The Weekly Scotsman*; **EN:** *Edinburgh Evening News*; **ED:** *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*; **EC:** *Edinburgh Courant*; **LPA:** *Leith Burghs Annual*; **LBP:** *Leith Burghs Pilot*; **LO:** *Leith Observer*

I am grateful to my friend David Robertson, a *Leither*, for his comments on the final draft.

My personal comments are shown in square brackets [].

LEITH AMUSEMENTS FROM 1790

A few paragraphs from *Tales and Traditions of Leith* by **William Hutchison**, Leith. Charles Drummond, Printer, 133 Kirkgate. 30th 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 following paragraphs. 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 13th September **1643** to John, Lord Balmerino. On Monday, 29th 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 subdivided amongst a multitude of tenants of the poorest class.”

Note: I remember seeing a quaiting 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 quaiting 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”

Places of entertainment set up on or near main thoroughfares

Amusement caterers, like other businessmen, 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. 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.

In like manner, Junction Street and the Kirkgate were the main focal points for erecting theatres and picture houses in the Port of Leith.

Population of Leith at the 1961 Census: 30,000 fewer than in 1921

At the 1921 Census Leith had a population of 81,618; by 1951 it had fallen to 62,472; and by the 1961 Census, to 51,378. Thus in 40 years the town had sustained a loss of 30,240 people; Central Ward with 58 persons per acre in Central Ward at the 1961 Census, had still to feel the full effects of the demolition hammer.

The depopulation of Central Edinburgh ran in parallel with Leith's decline, long before the collapse of the notorious “Penny Tenement” (Beaumont Place), on Saturday, November 21st 1959. Many of the tenements in the St James' Square area are closed (1963) awaiting the bulldozers.

On Sunday, August 11th 1963, my son took me through the doomed area in Leith radiating from Kirkgate. On the front of a tenement in Parliament Place, 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.

During the period of rapid decline in population, with the consequential closure of shops etc, proprietors of theatres were faced with one of two alternatives, namely, to reduce admission prices and face bankruptcy, or to sell up and leave while the going was 'kindo' good.

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. I deal with the scandalous neglect of the Coalhill area which was designated a slum area in 1877 under the item on the *Magnet Theatre*.

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 justify its title of *Sunny Leith*.

THEATRES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

AMPHITHEATRE, LEITH WALK, 1790

LPA 1889: “Opened for Equestrian, Exhibitions and Pantomimic Entertainments, 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* (LBP Saturday, 12 November 1864.)**

“THE PROGRAMME Saturday, Monday Tuesday, November 12th 14th and 15th 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 19th 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 (LBP Saturday, 28 November 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 1864)”

***THEATRE, JUNCTION STREET* (LBP Saturday, 28 January 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 Theatres in Junction Street, or of any other Theatre prior to January 1865.

NEW THEATRE, BANGOR ROAD (LBP Saturday, 2 April 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 4th 1887 - SEE HAND BILLS”

Note: The two Theatres– Theatre, Junction Street and New Theatre, Bangor Road - may well have been the same although differently named and in different streets. The map shows that both streets are contiguous.

LEITH MUSIC HALL, MARKET STREET FORMERLY KNOWN AS RIDDLE’S COURT, OFF TOLBOOTH WYND (LBP Saturday, 18 November 1865)

“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 3rd 1953, “The theatre was opened by Mr John Davidson, who leased it to a Mr John Scotland.”

LEITH THEATRICALS, BONNINGTON ROAD/JUNCTION STREET

LPA 1889, “1865, January 3rd. *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”.**

LEITH ROYAL MUSIC HALL

Four advertisements are given below about the *Leith Royal Music Hall*, from, 1867 to 1872. I would draw the reader’s attention to:

“Re-opening of the Season”, in the first advertisement. I backtracked to the first issue of the *Pilot*, that is to 1864, but there was trace of this theatre.

“Entrance by St. Andrew Street and Tolbooth Wynd” in the fourth advertisement of December 1872. It may be helpful to state that 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.

LBP Saturday, 3 August 1867. No. 1 Advertisement. Preliminary Notice

**“LEITH ROYAL MUSIC HALL Re-opening of the Season:
WILL OPEN on MONDAY, AUGUST 5th 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”**

LBP Saturday, 14 September 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”**

LBP Saturday, 12 October 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 EXTRAVAGANZA:**
THE NIGGERS ON TRAMP By the Brothers Linn
With Sentimental, Serio and Comic Singing and Dancing.
John Davidson, Proprietor”

LBP Saturday, 7 December 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.

THEATRE ROYAL – MACARTE'S TEMPLE OF VARIETIES

LBP Saturday, 28 September 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?

N Tuesday 3 February 1953 “Leith Theatres that are no more: *Theatre Royal, Great Junction Street*” Note: The advertisement for September 28th 1867 had the address **South Junction Street**.

In the second paragraph of the 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*.

LBP 12 October 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*”

WHITEFIELD HALL, 65 LEITH WALK

LBP Saturday 24 January 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”

NEW STAR MUSIC HALL, FOOT OF THE WALK

LBP Saturday, 10 January 1874

“*NEW STAR MUSIC HALL FOOT OF LEITH WALK*

On Monday, 12th 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”**

LBP Saturday, 14 March 1874

“Prices: 1s. 6d.; 1s.; 6d.; 4d.; and 3d. Mr Cruvelli, Proprietor”

[I assume this advertisement relates to the *New Star* G.F.B.]

N Tuesday, 3 February 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 20th 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 10th 1963 (the start of the Football Season), the Leith Station is used as a Diesel maintained yard.

THE GAIETY, KIRKGATE, LEITH 1886-1956*, see Chapter on *The Gaiety

NEW THEATRE, BANGOR ROAD (OFF JUNCTION STREET)

LBP Saturday, 3 March 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.

IONA STREET THEATRE

LPA 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.

THE NEW ALHAMBRA, LEITH WALK

N Saturday 26 December 1914

"THE NEW ALHAMBRA THEATRE OF VARIETIES

**THIS MAGNIFICENT THEATRE WILL OPEN MONDAY, 28TH
DECEMBER 6.50 AND 9
15 IN ORCHESTRA, ETC."**

LO Saturday, December 26th 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), 1s. 6d., 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.

LO Saturday, 26 December 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 has 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.”

1954 *Kinematograph Year Book*, 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”

N Thursday, 15 November **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?

N *Pink Edition* [Sports G.F.B.], Saturday, 26 January **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. Tancy always had a smile and, with it, a sense of humour. He was one of the Greats in the BOXING WORLD. LEITH was proud of him.

N Friday, 7 March **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.’

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 8th **1915**, which announced that *ALHAMBRA SCOPE* 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.

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.

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 following is an extract from **1938 Cinema Buyers’ Guide**: “ALHAMBRA – Proprietors, Lees and Saunders; Seats – 1,480”)

S Friday, 23 November 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 11th **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.

PICTURE HOUSES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

ALHAMBRA, LEITH WALK See under *THEATRES*

ALLISON CINEMA, LAURIE STREET, 1944 See under *LAURIE STREET PICTURE HOUSE*

CADONA'S PICTURES AND VARIETIES, PARLIAMENT STREET, 1912

LO Saturday, 7 September 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 22nd 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, 1928

N Friday, 7 September 1928

**“LEITH’S SUPER CINEMA THE CAPITOL - OFF LEITH WALK
OPENING CEREMONY MONDAY, 10TH 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 I give the date of opening only; 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.

S Saturday, 8 July 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. 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*.

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.

ED Saturday, 22 July 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, 1920

EN Saturday, 27 November 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”**

EN Thursday, 2 December 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. Supported by a First-Class Musical Programme
Prices * (Including Tax): 9d.; 1s.; and 1s. 6d.”**

* given in EN Friday, 3 December 1920

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 14th **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, 1913

EN Saturday, 12 April 1913

**“LEITH CINEMA, TOLBOOTH WYND, THE COSY HOUSE
OPENING PROGRAMME Monday April 14th, Tuesday 15th and
Wednesday 16th *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 29th **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”**

LO Saturday, 5 April 1913

**“CINEMA HOUSE TOLBOOTH WYND, LEITH
GRAND OPENING MONDAY, 14TH 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”**

LO Saturday, 12 April 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 20th 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 11th 1911, “Continuous Performance Daily, from 2.30.”

EMPIRE PICTURE PALACE At corner of Henderson Street and Tolbooth Wynd, 1917

LO Saturday, 29 December 1917

“GRAND OPENING NIGHT MONDAY, 31ST DECEMBER, 1917

(Hogmanay 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): 2½ 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, 1899

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, 1911***

LO Saturday, 22 April 1911

"GRAND OPENING NIGHT SATURDAY, APRIL 22 1911

7 TWICE NIGHTLY 9

POPULAR PRICES: Pit, 3d.; Balcony, 4d.; Front Balcony, 6d."

LO Saturday, 29 April 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

EN Monday, 15 May 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 9th 1911.

EN Monday, 25 December 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, 1931-1934 See under
LAURIE STREET PICTURE HOUSE***

LAURIE STREET PICTURE HOUSE, LEITH

EN Monday, 29 May 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 7th 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 following item about the *Leith Picture House* that it opened on Monday November 27th 1911, and not 1912.

LEITH PICTURE HOUSE, LAURIE STREET, OFF CONSTITUTION STREET, AND ONE MINUTE'S WALK FROM CENTRAL STATION

EN Saturday, 25 November 1911

“7 TWICE NIGHTLY 9 Prices: 2d. to 6d.

**SEATS BOOKED AT JUPP'S GRAMOPHONE WAREHOUSE,
88 GREAT JUNCTION STREET”**

LO Saturday, 25 November 1911

“TWICE NIGHTLY - 7 and 9

**COMMENCING Monday, November 27th 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.”**

LO Saturday, 2 December 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 14th 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

Cinema Buyers' Guide for the Year 1938: "Picture House, Laurie Street, Edinburgh 6 Proprietor: J. Penn Seats, 470"

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 18th and September 30th **1963**, respectively.

Mr **James Cousins**, who was identified with the theatrical and cinema world from **1907 to 1926**, told me 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. 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** told me he was manager at one time of *The Allison*.

LEITH CINEMA, TOLBOOTH WYND See under the CINEMA HOUSE

LEITH PICTURE HOUSE, LAURIE STREET, 1911-1931 & 1934-1944 See under LAURIE STREET PICTURE HOUSE

MAGNET, PARLIAMMENT STREET Formerly CADONA'S PICTURES AND VARIETIES, 1913

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*.

EN Friday, 14 November 1913

**“MAGNET THEATRE, PARLIAMENT STREET, LEITH
GO-AS-YOU-PLEASE COMPETITION will be held EVERY NIGHT
during week commencing Monday 17th November 1913.**

Semi-final, First House , Friday. Final, Second House, Friday.

Winners must perform on SATURDAY EVENING

PRIZES: 1st, 30s.; 2nd, 15s.; 3rd, 10s.; 4th, 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 page 247

“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 page 246

“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 page 234

“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 per cent. 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, approved by the Home Secretary, made provision for the removal of 18 ancient closes.

In the first instance, £100,000 was to be borrowed from 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 11th **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.

NEW ELECTRIC THEATRE, SHRUBHILL, 1909

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.

EN Friday, 1 January **1909**

“NEW ELECTRIC THEATRE NEXT LEITH WALK STATION (SHRUBHILL) Don’t on any condition fail to see the

GREAT EASTERN BIOSCOPE of the 20th 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., 4d, 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 31st 1909. The *Petit Paris* went out of business before the 1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* was published.

PETIT PARIS, SHRUBHILL, 1909

This picture house opened as the *New Electric Theatre* on January 1st 1909, almost a year exactly before it became known as the *Petit Paris*.

EN Friday, 31 December 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.

EN Saturday, 23 December 1961: ‘Leith Walk’ wrote in reply to a letter of 18th 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 19th 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' on page 72.

PADDY'S COAL FAULD, LEITH PADDY FAULKENER'S PICTURE HOUSE, 1908

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, 1913

EN Saturday, 28 December **1912**

"This Magnificent Building, erected at Enormous Cost, will be OPENED TO THE PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 30TH 1912 (Alas, it did not open until Wednesday January 1st 1913)

TWICE NIGHTLY - 7 & 9

A LORDLY PICTURE HOUSE STAR PICTURE PROGRAMME

PRICES: 1s.; 6d.; 4d.; and 2d."

EN Tuesday, 31 December **1912** (a preview)

"PALACE, 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.

EN Monday, 6 January 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, Shandwick Place*, from **1923 to 1930**.

STATE CINEMA, GREAT JUNCTION STREET, LEITH, 1938

EN Saturday, December 17th 1938 Advertisement

“THE STATE, LEITH OPEN ON MONDAY FIRST

19TH 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'

EN Monday, 19 December 1938

"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 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.

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."

ED Tuesday, 3 November 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. He retired from the *State* on Saturday October 5th 1963

SWALLOW'S BOOTH, IONA STREET SHOW GROUND see under *Meeting with James 'Willie' Salvona*

REMINISCENCES OF IONA STREET 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 Salvona** 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 Salvona**, 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 20th 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 11th **1895**, by 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 as 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 ($\frac{1}{2}$ d.); 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.

**MEETING WITH JAMES SALVONA, who answered to *Willie*
Acrobat, Showman and ‘Play’ Actor**

On Monday, September 30th 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 **Dominick 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 in 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. .

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**.

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 71 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 1st 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.

THE GAIETY, KIRKGATE, LEITH
Saturday, November 6th 1886 (start of Concerts)
to Saturday September 15th 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*.

As I write on Saturday, May 25th 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*.

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 reseated in 1829. Altogether it was used as place of worship for 111 years.

The Congregation decided to move to another site, and, on September 12th 1885, the Memorial Stone of the new Church was laid by Provost Pringle, at Henderson Street, Leith, formally opened on October 5th 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 30th **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 6th NOVEMBER 1886. PROVOST PRINGLE IN THE CHAIR DETAILS IN FUTURE ANNOUNCEMENTS”

Future details appeared in the *Leith Burghs Pilot* on Saturday, November 6th **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 3rd **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 5th **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 2nd **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 [That was the case in 1963 G.F.B.] 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 21st **1889**

“New Princess’ Theatre, Kirkgate, Leith

Sole Lessee Mr. H. E. Moss Director and Manager Mr Frederick Wright

Grand Opening on Monday, December 30th 1889
Doors Open at 7 o'clock; Commence at 7.30
Morning Performance on New Year's Day 1st 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."

*** 19 Nicolson Street; eventually the site of the Empire Theatre [The Festival Theatre in 2001 G.F.B.]**

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.

LBP Saturday, 25 February 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.

LBP Saturday, 21 October 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 30th 1899

Admission: Private Boxes, 15s.; Private Circle, 2s.; Balcony, 1s.; Orchestra Stalls, 1s. 6d; Pit Stalls, 9d.; Pit, 6d.”

LO Saturday, 6 January 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 8th 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 15th 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”**

EN Saturday, 1 January 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”**

LO Saturday, 25 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.”

EN Friday, 5 April 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

LO Saturday, 27 December 27th 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 4th 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 5th 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 1st 1944 confirms.

“*Gaiety Theatre* , *Kirkgate* Grand Re-Opening as a Variety Theatre on July 3rd 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*.

[I remember my father listening to John McCormack singing it in a radio broadcast during the Second World War. G.F.B]

ED 29 December 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.

EN Monday, 22 August 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 8th **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.

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.

EN Thursday, 21 February **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 theatres 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.”

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*.

41 ELM ROW

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.

EN Saturday, 31 December 1910

**“PRINGLE'S NEW PICTURE PALACE ELM ROW, LEITH WALK
OPENS MONDAY JANUARY 2ND (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 2nd at 2, 4, 7 and 9

Tuesday, January 3rd at 3, 7 and 9

Wednesday, January 4th at 3, 7 and 9

Thursday January 5th at 7 and 9

Friday, January 6th at 7 and 9

Saturday, January 7th at 3, 7 and 9”

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 19th 1914, page 29.”

Note: The date January 19th 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’.

ATMOSPHERIC THEATRE, ELM ROW

N Monday, 6 January 1930. This was *Pringle’s* disguised by the above name; and was so named during 1929.

PRINGLE’S THEATRE, ELM ROW

N Monday, 23 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.”

THE STUDIO THEATRE, ELM ROW

N Saturday, 20 February 1932

“THE STUDIO THEATRE, EDINBURGH COMENCING TUESDAY, 1ST 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*. She played a prominent part in the setting up of the *Palladium Theatre, Fountainbridge*, in 1933.

REPERTORY THEATRE, ELM ROW

N Thursday, 21 December 1933

“REPERTORY THEATRE, ELM ROW at 8

Prices: 3s.; 2s. and 1s.3d.”

This was the first Advertisement to appear about the *Repertory*.

FESTIVAL THEATRE, ELM ROW, LEITH WALK

N Saturday, 12 October 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

N Friday, 27 November 1936

FESTIVAL THEATRE CLOSSES TONIGHT”

BROADWAY THEATRE (LATE FESTIVAL THEATRE) ELM ROW

N Saturday, 28 November 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, ELM ROW
OPENED THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17 1946; FOR BUSINESS ON
MONDAY, OCTOBER 21 1946

N Friday, 18 October 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 21st 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*.

N Wednesday, 16 October 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”

S Friday, 18 October 1946 page 6

“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 8th 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.

CIRCUSES, SHOWGROUNDS AND ROLLER SKATING RINKS

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.

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. Despite a thorough search prior to January 7th **1888**, I could not find an earlier Cooke's advertisement anent a Circus in Leith, except a preliminary notice of Saturday, December 24th **1887**. I would conclude that the method adopted to advertise their shows in Leith was by Handbills.

COOKE’S OLYMPIA, GREAT JUNCTION STREET, LEITH, 1888

LBP Saturday, 7 January 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 24th 1887, "TO OPEN FOR THE SEASON ON THURSDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 29, 1887"

LBP Saturday, 29 September 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.”**

LBP Saturday, 29 September 1888 Front page – Separate from the above advertisement

“HERMAN’S OLYMPIA, LEITH, LAST TWO WEEKS OF PRESENT VISIT.

EVERYTHING NEW, BRIGHT AND STARTLING, IN FACT, 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

LPA January 23rd 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, Central Library Old Programme

**“COOKE’S CIRCUS JUNCTION STREET – LEITH
SEPTEMBER 19, 1892”**

BARNUM AND BAILEY, EASTER ROAD, 1898

S Friday, 15 July 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.”**

A copy of the programme is 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, HENDERSON STREET, LEITH, 1899

LBP Saturday, 7 January 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, IONA STREET, 1911***

S Saturday, 3 June 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 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th (*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:

BATHGATE, TUE., June 6th	PERTH, MON., June 12th
FALKIRK, WED., June 7th	BLAIRGOWRIE, TUES., June 13th
STIRLING, THUR. June 8th	FORFAR, WED. June 14th
AUCTERARDE, FRI. June 9th	BRECHIN, THUR. June 15th
CRIEFF, SAT., June 10th	LAURENCEKIRK, FRI. June 16th
ABERDEEN, June 17th, 19th and 20th	

Children Admitted to Afternoon Performance Half-Price to all parts

TWICE DAILY, 2.30 and 8 p.m. POPULAR PRICES"

JAMES WILMOT'S FAIR, IONA STREET, 1911

N Wednesday, 27 December 1911

"JAMES WILMOT'S FAIR IONA STREET"

ROYAL GEORGE CIRCUS, PILRIG PARK, 1945

ED Wednesday, 27 June 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.

ROLLER SKATING RINKS

OLYMPIA SKATING PALACE, ANNANDALE STREET, 1909

N Monday, 6 September 1909

“OLYMPIA SKATING PALACE ANNANDALE STREET, LEITH WALK

OPENING DAY – WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8th 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”**

BELLE -VUE SKATING RINK 44A ELM ROW, 1909

N Friday, 22 October 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.”**

N Monday, 22 October 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.”

N Monday, 8 November 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”**

PINDER’S CIRCUS & SKATING CARNIVAL, BANGOR ROAD, 1910

N Saturday, 1 January 1910

**“PINDER’S CIRCUS & SKATING CARNIVAL
BANGOR ROAD, LEITH”**

BITS AND PIECES

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**.

FOOTBALL MATCH, 1881, EASTER ROAD , 1881

S Saturday, 12 March **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 VELODROME, HOPE CRESCENT, 1897

S Saturday, 18 December **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 18th 1898

Tuition – Single Lesson 2s.; Course, 10s.

Open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday to 5 p.m.

Inspection Invited.”

***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 18th 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.”**

***FREE GRAMOPHONE CONCERT,
STARBANK PUBLIC PARK, TRINITY, 1904***

**N Thursday, 28 June 1904 “For The People Free Gramophone
Concerts Every Wednesday and Friday, weather permitting, at 7.45
p.m.**

**From June 28th to July 22nd Come and hear Madame Melba
Operator: T.W. Wright, Music Seller, Ferry Road.”**

***FREE CINEMATOGRAPH SHOW, OUTSIDE QUEEN’S HOTEL,
LEITH, 1908***

**N Wednesday, 13 May 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.

PENNY GAFFS

A popular form of entertainment was the *Penny Gaff* (a cheap or low-class place of entertainment). *The News* of February 3rd 1953 mentioned two old-time Gaffs: **Johnny Barr's**, 1d. Gaff, and **Duckenfield's** 1d. Gaff, both of which were in Bangor Road, Leith. See page 47 for references to Salvona's Penny Gaff in the Iona Street Street Shows.

PROPOSAL FOR CINEMATOGRAPH PICTURES IN SCHOOLS, 1910

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 19th 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.”

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 they flopped badly when they decided, “The offer was declined.”

CHAPMAN-ALEXANDER MISSION, OLYMPIA, ANNANDALE STREET, 1914 - INDUSTRIAL HALL, ANNANDALE STREET, 1922

N Saturday, 7 February 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.

INDUSTRIAL HALL, ANNANDALE STREET, 1922

S Thursday, 12 October **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. 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 11th **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 26th **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 31st **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 10th 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, 28th September **1929** to Saturday, 5th 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.... its audience of 12,000 people hearing everything perfectly by means of devices of modern science, the scene was clearly of the new age.

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 2nd October **1929**. [Thursday 18th 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.]

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