

**PLACES OF
ENTERTAINMENT
IN EDINBURGH**

Part 6

**PRINCES STREET
AND
THE TOP OF THE WALK**

**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. The other Parts already published are: Part 2, Tollcross and its environs; Part 3, Leith; Part 4, Portobello; and Part 5 Stockbridge and Canonmills.

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: 5, 6, 7, 17, 27, 28, 30 and, 32 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*

My personal comments are shown in square brackets [].

George F. Baird
November 2001

THE WAVERLEY MARKET

Being wise after the an event has no great merit in itself; show me the ‘historian’ who could write the history of next year and I would tell you – “There goes one who takes precedence over the Almighty!” Fortunately there is no such person.

History can only be compiled from two main sources, namely, one’s own experience, combined with that of older members of one’s own generation. Or from books, records, diaries, newspapers etc. It requires much **time** and an abundance of **patience** to unearth the bits and pieces necessary to complete a story. In this instance ‘Why is Princes Street ‘half a street’?’

Princes Street provides Glasgow ‘comics’ with material certain to raise a laugh when they remark, “Ach, it’s only hauf a street, whit dae they need to brag about?” I can forgive my Glaswegian friends having a wee twinge of envy and, in turn, remark “Many thousands of foreign visitors come to Edinburgh every year to see, and to be seen, to admire and to promenade along ‘The Royal Drive’, known to us as Princes Street.

We are familiar with the saying, “Half a loaf...” But, Half a Street, means joy and pleasure; just to see it is a wish gratified. To gaze beyond the ‘missing half’ at the beautiful and wonderful vista to the south, either by daylight or by floodlight is to see part of a fairy-tale come to life.

Perhaps many of my Glasgow friends may learn why it is only ‘hauf a street’ and mourn in secret why Mother Nature showered her favours on “Dear Auld Edinburry Toon, The Toon That I adore.” Oh, that once again could I walk from the Register to Maule’s Corner (now Binn’s) and back again is a hope that can never be fulfilled.

Ancient history teaches us that the Wise Men came from the East. Fortunately for Edinburgh some of those Wise Men fought to preserve Princes Street in the **1770’s** and to them we are indebted for having the finest half street in the world.

The Story Much of my information was gleaned from Grant’s *Old and New Edinburgh*, Vol. II, page 100; *The Scotsman*, *Dispatch*, *News* and other sources will be mentioned at the appropriate time. To avoid appending too much detail I simply name the source and give a bare outline of many of the

items. Those who wish to pursue the respective items in full may do so in the Edinburgh Room.

News Photo Album, Monday, May 30th **1960** Shows First North Bridge, with at north-west corner a number of houses; no date is given as to when the photograph was taken. The bridge was the original crossing of **1763**. An **1820** picture in the Edinburgh Room shows traders under the arches; west side of bridge.

News Photo Album, Friday May 13th **1960** Photograph of Waverley Market Roof; the caption reads, in part, that the Waverley Market dates from **1869**. Between then and the Tron Kirk days the traders had the use of the Green Market site from which they were evicted for the building of the new railway station. After costly litigation, the Railway Company were obliged to provide a new site. The foregoing shows where trading was done long before the advent of the Waverley Market.

ED Wednesday, 21 December **1961**. Article by **Robert Vacha**, “**The Fight to Retain the South Side of Princes Street** **James Craig**, architect, published and exhibited his plan of Edinburgh New Town in **1767**, showing the south side as a pleasure ground (As it is today, 1963). However, **John Home**, a coach-builder, had other ideas as he had bought the land on the north-east corner which was free of all rates and taxes. Home had acquired the rate-free land at the east of Princes Street, which had originally been given to a plumber, **John Graham**, in return for land needed in the construction of the North Bridge.

By **1771** Home had acquired additional ground to the west and to the south, namely, 162 feet west, by 318 feet south (The site now occupied by the N.B. Hotel). In June **1770**, Home and Messrs **Young & Trotter**, upholsterers, petitioned to the Town Council to build workshops there. The Council agreed, but provided that no building erected on the area should rise above the level of Princes Street.

“On August 8th **1770**, a committee reported to the Council their opinion that, ‘no more of the remaining area running along the south side of Princes Street be feued till the quarries are filled up and then feuars may have a proper place to dispose of the earth which they be obliged to dig. No sooner, however, was it seen that buildings were about to be erected on Home’s ground than several well-known citizens, including **David Hume** of

international fame as a philosopher and historian, complained bitterly. But whatever the citizens thought of the Council for permitting building in St Anne's Street (immediately west of the parapet on the North Bridge – a slope of 1 in 6) and the terms of Craig's Plan on amenity, on strictly legal grounds the Council had a good case.

Original Terms One clause in the feu contract said, 'As it is not intended at present to feu out the land betwixt the South Side and the North Loch, the feuars upon that street should have an obligation in their favour, that if houses were afterwards built there, they should not be nearer to their houses than 96 feet.' This did not rule out the erection of houses.

The original terms of the bargain with John Graham also said the ground he was to get in the New Town was for building purposes, and the Council argued that Home, taking Graham's place, was entitled to use the ground for the same purpose. Nevertheless, the feuars in 1771 raised a Court action against the Council. It was rejected by the Court of Session but the House of Lords reversed the decision and ordered the Court of Session to prevent the building.

And this ruling arising from these first protests by proprietors and other citizens of Princes Street prevented other attempts in later years to build on the south side. Council and objectors agreed to abide by the decision of Mr **David Rae** (later Lord Justice-Clerk, Esk Grove), who decreed on March 19th 1776 that the houses in Princes Street and St Anne's Street were to be finished 'in proper taste', but that buildings on the south side of Princes Street were not to extend further than Waverley Steps. West of this point, Young & Trotter were to be allowed to erect their workshops **below** the level of Princes Street.

That, then, is the legal reason why Princes Street has remained 'half-a-street'. Before proceeding further it is well to record that Edinburgh Town Council favoured the name 'St Giles Street' for the new thoroughfare, but **George III** objected. It became 'Princes' Street', complete with apostrophe.

THE WAVERLEY MARKET

The Waverley Market stands on one and a half acres: see *The Scotsman* for March 2nd 1869 and *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*.

"The vegetable market, built by the North British Railway Company was simply an enclosed piece of ground and was open to the sky. This was what

was handed over to the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council on Monday, March 1st **1869**. At a celebration dinner on that day the name of the new place was coined by **George Harrison**, later Lord Provost and M.P. for South Edinburgh, gave the toast “**The Waverley Market**”.

EN Friday, 13 May **1960** recalls the Corporation spent some £30,000 in roofing and improving the Market.

Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century

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

SOME OF ITS USES

S Wednesday, 10 April **1872** “**WOMBWELL’S NO 1 ROYAL MENAGERIE** was sold the previous day in the Waverley Market.” Founded in 1805 and named **Bostock and George Wombwell’s Menagerie**. The No. 2 and No. 3 menageries continued to travel the country.

FIRST WAVERLEY MARKET CONCERT **S** Saturday, 30 December **1876** “**Monstre Promenade Concerts for the People, New Vegetable Market Entrances – Waverley Bridge and Princes’ Street**This Satuday Evening, 30th December, Doors Open at 4 p.m.The Lord Provost and Magistrates and Council have kindly consented to open the proceedings at 5 p.m. **AND**

On Tuesday January 2nd 1877, Doors Open at 12 a.m. Under the Patronage of Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council, Colonel and Officers of the 7h Hussars and Colonel and Officers of the 78th Highlanders.

Admission to Promenade, 6d. Balconies, 1s.”

Some of the artistes who appeared were: Madame **Vanfrie**, Prima Donna; Miss **S.N. Johnson**, Mezzo Soprano; Mr. **Reed Larwell**, Popular Tenor; **J.Harvey**, Solo Trombone; Highland Dancers, etc.

POLITICAL MEETINGS **William Gladstone**, the G.O.M.’ addressed a monster demonstration in the Market on Saturday, November 29th **1879**.

There was an audience of 20,000. **A. J. Balfour**, the Irish Secretary, 4 December **1889**; see under ‘The Waverley Market becomes a Dining Hall.

SATURDAY NIGHT CONCERTS, 1880 – 1921 Miss **H. Armet**, the City Archivist, provided me with the following information: “On 17th February **1880** the Town Council agreed that music should be provided in the Waverley Market for two or three Saturday evenings as a trial. The principle was established. That the concerts did carry on was confirmed in a Press cutting, “Promenade Concerts on Saturday evenings have been provided for about 40 years; the last series having been given in the winter of **1920-21**”

EN Saturday, 3 December **1904**

“**Waverley Market Corporation Concerts Tonight 3d.**

Band and Pipers of 2nd Battalion Highland Light Infantry

Fraser and Elrick’s Cinematograph Russian- Japanese War

At 7.30 p.m. City Chambers, Edinburgh. 1st December 1904”

S Saturday, 3 December **1897** “**Waverley Market J.P. Curle’s Popular Entertainment Tonight Admission 3d.**” Mr Curle was identified with the *Albert Hall* at that time.

MOSS’ CARNIVALS IN THE WAVERLEY MARKET

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

H. E Moss’ Enterprise or Ye Olde English Fayre This was how the first New Year Carnival was described in the play-bills. It commenced on Monday, December 28th **1885** and closed on Tuesday, January 5th **1886**. Note: Mr Moss did not, in the first instance, introduce the Christmas

'holiday' as an added money making lark; December 24th **1888** saw the first Carnival taking in Christmas.

The choice of the Waverley Market as the locus for the first carnival was a happy one for our country cousins, in those far off days, with the railway station practically under the Market. Furthermore, for Edinburgh citizens virtually the whole of the tram service converged on the Market.

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

Moss' Third New Year Carnival Programme One Penny

"Commencing Monday, December 26th 1887

For 12 days only Positively terminating, Saturday, January 7th 1888

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

Under the personal supervision of Mr H.E.Moss

Decorations executed by Messrs. Cranston and Elliot, North Bridge

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

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

Carnival open 12 Hours daily, from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. The stage show was free for all those who cared to stand during the performance. However, a portion of the floor area was enclosed by a strong wooden barrier; said enclosure was reserved for seating accommodation, at an extra charge. The

wooden barrier had this in its favour: those who ‘knew the drill’ would edge up to the barrier in time to claim a space which assured them a good lean during the stage show.

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

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

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

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

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

Everyone became aware when the stage show was about to commence; a hush descended over the Market when the organs on the roundabouts were silenced. These organs had a fascination for me in my schooldays. To

watch the beautifully proportioned mechanical painted figures, each of which played its appointed instrument was, indeed, something to glue a youngster to the spot.

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

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

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

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

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

End of an Era Had Sir Edward Moss lived another month he would have celebrated his 28th tenancy of his Annual Waverley Market Carnival. It was

decreed otherwise as the Pioneer of the Carnival died on Monday, November 26th 1912. Thus ends the story of the *Waverley Market Carnival*, and of the man who made those enterprises possible. The story is about Edinburgh, and anything about Edinburgh has a big place in my make up.

USED AS A DINING HALL *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century* “On Wednesday, December 4th 1889, a great banquet was held in the Market in honour of Mr **A.J. Balfour**, then Irish Secretary. 2,500 gentlemen dined together; the largest in the records of Scotland. The Duke of Fife presided, and the gathering was quite an historic demonstration.”

The Market was used in the capacity of a dining hall for those members of the Medical Profession who attended a Conference in Edinburgh in 1960. For the last 17 years all those who had made the **Castle Tattoo** a great success were entertained in the Market in fitting manner.

FRED LUMLEY'S ATHLETIC TOURNAMENT, 1903

EN Monday, 7 December 1903 “**Waverley Market Fred A. Lumley's Athletic Championship Tournament Boxing Tug of War From 7th to 12th December 12th.**”

BOYS' BRIGADE INSPECTION IN MARKET I joined the 26th Company, Greenside Church, in 1902 and remember taking part during an inspection in 1904. In those days we drilled with the *Martini Henry* rifle.

BOXING MATCHES During the 1920's Boxing Matches were very popular; 10,000 spectators was a common thing. **Nat Dresner** was the promoter. **George MacKenzie**, a nephew of Tancy Lee, and **Alex. Ireland**, both Leith lads, were very popular with the fans.

WAVERLEY MARKET CARNIVAL **Fred. A. Lumley** took over the Carnival for the 1913-14 Season, and carried on the tradition that Moss had set. Mr Lumley was a Londoner; an all-round sportsman, he could hold his own in the ring. His business premises were at Nos. 163-167 Leith Street, 'Sports Emporium'. He could never 'best', Moss in the entertainment world, although he was interested in many Edinburgh projects such as: the Powderhall Sprints when the 'New Year Handicap' was something to take notice of in the late 1880's and for a number of years in the 1890's. Powderhall opened on 1st January 1870. He ran various entertainments in the *Olympia, Annandale Street*, such as Circuses, Pictures and Roller Skating, all of which will be detailed in due course.

EN Tuesday, 19 January **1954** *“Lumley’s Carnival 1914-15* During the week commencing January 4th **1915**, F. A. Lumley introduced to the public a ‘galaxy of champion lady boxers’. The exhibition had all the accompaniments of the ordinary boxing match with the exception that the referee and seconds were also women.

The English champion, Miss **Lucie Warner**, was described as having a fine style and an accurate ‘left’. Miss **Alice Fleury** represented Belgium and Miss **Adele Neilson**, Norway and Denmark. Chief attraction was **Mlle. Carpentier**, champion of the world, and sister of the great French boxer **Georges Carpentier** (who fought **Jack Demspey** for the World’s Heavy weight title in America in July **1921**). During the week Mlle. Carpentier opposed **Tancy Lee** of Leith, in three one-minute rounds. As well as giving a return exhibition bout against Tancy Lee, she also tackled **Alec Lafferty** of Airdrie and **R. Buchan** of Leith

Lumley introduced many ‘stars’ to his Carnival such as **Yoki Tani**, Japanese wrestler, and **Hakensmidt**, world heavy-weight wrestler.

PROPOSALS FOR AN EXHIBITION HALL AND HOTEL

S Wednesday, 15 November **1939** **“Architectural Exhibition for New Exhibition Hall** An Exhibition of the Designs will be held in the Royal Academy Galleries, The Mound, from 15th to 28th November 1939, inclusive. D. Robertson, Town Clerk, 10th November 1939.” S Tuesday, 16 October **1956** **“500 Guineas Award** The above was awarded to Leeds Architects in November 1939 (Mr Donald Dex Harrison and Mt Thomas M Cartledge). The War prevented any building at the Waverley. The alterations were estimated to cost £38,500.”

S Friday, 14 April **1961** **“18 Storey Hotel Plan Rejected Waverley Market Project 220 foot high Building Harmful to Amenity** Edinburgh Corporation Planning Committee yesterday turned down a proposal by a firm of London architects, Arthur Swift and Partners, to build an 18 storey hotel, an Exhibition Hall and a car park to accommodate 282 vehicles on the Waverley Bridge site.”

The 1771 House of Lords decision regarding building on the south side of Princes Street was a fitting reply to this proposal.

**THEATRE ROYAL, SHAKESPEARE SQUARE *Now the site of the
General Post Office* DECEMBER 9th 1769 TO MAY 25th 1859**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Copy of Play Bill:

“Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, Shakespeare Square

Tuesday, August 27th 1822

Rob Roy Mac Gregor

In the presence of the King”

The performance had, presumably, been arranged to coincide with a “Visit of King George IV, who arrived in Leith Roads on August 14th **1822**, on the Royal Yacht *George*.”

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

Grant’s Old and New Edinburgh

“Theatre Royal, Shakespeare Square, Sold Sole Lessee, R.H.Wyndham, 95 Princes Street. Final Closing of this Theatre on Wednesday, May 25th 1859”

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

“The admission prices to the Theatre Royal during the last week of its existence had not changed very materially over the 90 years. Prices: Boxes and Stalls, 5s.; Pit, 2s.; Lower Gallery, 1s.; Upper Gallery, 6d. The first gallery had become the Lower Gallery, while the Upper retained its name, and half the price, from 1s. to 6d.”

Theatre Sold; Closed May 25th 1859 The Government had acquired the entire property of Shakespeare Square on which was built the General Post Office. Considerable difficulty was encountered by the arbitrators between the Commissioners of H. M. Works and the Trustees of the Theatre regarding the price.

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

Old and New Edinburgh page 358 Vol.1

General Post Office. “The foundation stone was laid on 23 October 1861. The office, the chief one for the whole of Scotland, cost £120,000, inclusive of the site, and was opened for business on 7 May 1866.”

BROUGHTON STREET SITE: THE HOME OF MANY THEATRES, FROM 1788 TO SATURDAY, MARCH 30th 1946

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

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

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

THE AMPHITHEATRE OR EDINBURGH EQUESTRIAN CIRCUS, was opened on January 25th **1790**. Prices; Boxes, 3s.; Pit, 2s.; Gallery, 1s. During the season riding lessons were advertised to be given in the Circus, "no gentlemen being admitted during the ladies' hours of riding." An advertisement in *The Courant* of December 3rd **1790**, stated that constant fires had been kept going for five weeks previously, "so that the most delicate constitution may not have the smallest apprehension of cold or damp."

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

In **1795** the **NEW THEATRE CIRCUS** was opened by **Jones** on February 21st, with similar performances as given in the previous year **1796** saw the

opening of **JONES' ROYAL CIRCUS** on January 26th and in February of **1797** it was advertised as the **ROYAL CIRCUS**, with a ballet dance called *Nosegay* by Mr **D'Egville**.

In **1798** no performances were advertised, although a steady business seems to have been done in **horse sales**. In **1799** equestrian performances were resumed. Prices: Boxes, 2s.; Pit, 2s.; and Gallery, 1s. But after that we hear no more of the Circus until **1803**, when, on January 14th the premises were converted by **Natali Corri**, who was a dealer in music and musical instruments, and named **CORRI'S NEW ROOMS**. The interior had been entirely re-arranged, so as to make it suitable for concerts etc. A medical report was published to the effect that the building was not damp.

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

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

The **NEW THEATRE ROYAL**, Leith Walk, was opened under His Majesty's Patent on Tuesday November 14th **1809** with the Comedy *Honeymoon*.

The following comments about the new theatre are taken from the *Monthly Mirror* November **1809** issue in which it records "The **New Theatre Royal** is finished. It is in the Gothic style." A few months later the following appeared, "A house which was formerly a Circus, and later Concert Rooms, has been fitted up with tolerable neatness,..... the access to which is excessively bad, one must take a complete circle of the house ... up a few stairs before arriving at the box lobby. The music has been very much improved." In an advertisement it says, *inter alia*, "It is requested that no carriage will come by St James' Square, that road being reserved for chairs." The **New Theatre** was re-transferred to its original state, and was again known as **CORRI'S ROOMS**: concerts, card and dancing assemblies starting in January **1812**.

On December 8th **1812**, Corri re-applied for permission to perform operas, after his first application in October of that year had been turned down by the Lord Chamberlain. He was again unsuccessful. Sometime in **1813** **Henry Johnstone** made a similar application to perform operas; without any success. Although Corri's concerts were discontinued in **1814**, the card and dancing assemblies went on.

From *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*, pages 60 and 61

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shakespeare Square, in a rhyming address made reference to the death of **Kean**.

Five major fires at the Broughton Street Site

In all, five major fires took place, the first to the *Adelphi*, in 1853; the remainder to a series of houses all named *Theatre Royal* in the years 1865, 1875, 1884 and 1946.

S Monday, 1 April **1845** Advert

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

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

Dibdin, page 470

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

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

S, Saturday 14 May **1853**

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

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

QUEEN’S THEATRE AND OPERA HOUSE

Black opened the new theatre on December 19th **1855**. *Love’s Sacrifice* was the title of the first production. Black’s venture had proved a failure, notwithstanding the excellent programmes and companies he had provided. On June 26th **1857**, he announced his farewell benefit, when *A Cure for the Heartache* and *The Jacobite* were played. Exit Black, a sadder, and perhaps a wiser, but certainly a poorer, man.

The Illustrated London News, February 14th **1857**

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

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

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

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

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

S Tuesday, 1 July **1884** ***“Theatre Sold*** In **1857** the theatre was sold to Mr **John Brown** of Marlie, subject to a perpetual annuity of £2 to each of the shareholders, who have since been known as the rentallers”

Dibdin Change of Name from Queen's Theatre and Opera House to THEATRE ROYAL

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

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

Second Fire, 1865

Dibdin "About 3.45 p.m. on Friday January 13th 1865, during the lighting of the stage, the Gas man, who used a long pole to ignite the gas-jets, accidentally set the scenery on fire. Despite efforts by several theatre employees to put the fire out, the theatre was a raging furnace in 15 minutes.

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

S Friday, 13 January 1865, reported the pantomime, *The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*, was running.

S Monday, 16 January 1865, devoted many columns about the fire and many letters to the Editor were printed about new sites for the theatre, etc. A short, but revealing, précis is given below:

"The particulars of those killed in the fire are:

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

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

S Tuesday, 24 January 1865

“Theatre Royal Fire Site for the new Theatre

Letters to the Editor:

Sir,- I earnestly hope that no portion of the Princes Street Gardens will be given as a site for the new theatre and I humbly suggest that the east end of Princes’ Street, on the north side, now occupied by two hotels, would prove a good situation. If the building is constructed in a style of architecture worthy of the city of Edinburgh, it will prove an admirable pendant to the new Post Office. The position of the late ***Theatre Royal*** is inconvenient: but instead of becoming a vegetable market, I hope our Roman Catholic fellow-citizens will, when rebuilding St Mary’s, require the entire space. I am, etc. C.H.”

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

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

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

S Tuesday, 1 July 1884. Part of an article anent the ***Theatre Royal***.

“The work of rebuilding the ***Theatre Royal*** is now drawing rapidly to a close, and there seems to be no doubt that the opening will take place on Saturday week as advertised – Dean of Guild, Mr John Shennan, stated on November 22nd 1865 that the new theatre will open on Saturday, December 2nd 1865. It is little more than six months since the removal of the wreck of the former building commenced. The building is seated for 2,591 persons, being an increase of 900 over the former house.”

S 24 November 1865 Advertisement

“Theatre Royal The Elegant and Commodious Theatre will open on Saturday, December 2nd, under the management of Mr and Mrs Wyndham. The great care taken in the construction of this Beautiful Theatre, both as regards the safety and comfort of the audience, will, it is hoped, at once secure for it the confidence and support of the Public.

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

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

S Monday, 18 December 1865. Advertisement
“**Great Christmas Pantomime *Robin Hood***
Or, *Harlequin Little John & the Merry Men of Sherwood Forest*”

Continuing S article of Tuesday July 1st 1884
“The theatre which opened on Saturday December 2nd 1865cost £17,000 to build, was, in 1874, sold for £11,000 to the late Mr W.H. Logan.”

Third Fire, 1875

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

Dibdin, page 488.

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

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

Reverting to S Tuesday, July 1st 1884

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

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

The house was carried on under the joint management until, a break occurring in the contract, and some disagreement having taken place between the partners, a new lease for fourteen years was obtained by Messrs **Logan and John Heslop** in May **1883**, at the rent of £2,100; Mr **Howard**, as a competitor for the tenancy, not having seen his way to offer more than £2,000. Mr Logan died in December **1882**, and the theatre since the commencement of the new lease in May **1883**, has been carried out by Mr Heslop as sole lessee. The house, we believe, stands insured for its full value of £12,500.

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

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

Dibdin page 482

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

Fourth Fire, 1884

S Tuesday, 1 July **1884** A précis

“Yesterday on June 30th **1884**, the *Theatre Royal* was destroyed by fire. About 12 o'clock a Mr Paterson, a bookseller of 15 Broughton Street, was passing down Catherine Street * and smelt fire and observed smoke from the theatre. Mr Paterson hastened to St James' Police Station and raised the alarm.

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

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

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

A Helping Hand **WS** Saturday, 27 May **1933** It will be remembered that Mr Howard severed his connection with the **Theatre Royal** and lined up with the *Lyceum Theatre*. “It so happened that the first production of *Rob Roy* in the **Lyceum** was in July **1884**. The proceeds (over £200) was handed over to Mr **John Heslop**, lessee of the *Theatre Royal*, which was destroyed by fire on June 30th **1884**.”

Dibdin page 482

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

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

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

Visits to the Theatre Royal pantomime

From my earliest recollections, extending over 67 years as I write, the *Theatre Royal* pantomime was the main source of entertainment in the city during the New Year Festivities – later, it included a Christmas season. I am happy to recall the happy days of the 1890's and the first decade of the 20th Century and my visits to the Pantomimes. Like the Sunday School Trips and Soirees, they also were something to look forward to and something to remember.

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

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

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

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

Theatre Royal Handsome Scheme of Reconstruction

EN Thursday, 25 July 1935 Précis

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fifth and last fire at the Broughton Street site

S Monday, 1 April 1946 Précis

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

DAMAGE ESTIMATED AT £75,000 FIRE STARTED IN GALLERY
The fire started about 11.15 p.m., 35 minutes after the close of the performance *Hail Caledonia*. Mr Wark, resident manager, estimates it would cost £100,000 to build a modern theatre”

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

S Friday, 17 September 1948

“EDINBURGH’S THEATRE ROYAL PERMISSION TO REBUILD REFUSED The appeal made by the owners, **Edinburgh Varieties Ltd.**, for permission to rebuild the *Theatre Royal* at Broughton Street has been dismissed by the Secretary of State for Scotland. In issuing his decision, however, the Secretary of State for Scotland has said that he regards the provision of a new theatre in the area as desirable in the public interest, and has indicated to the Corporation that he will be glad if they will take steps to make a new site available as soon as possible.”

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

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

OPERETTA HOUSE, 23 WATERLOO PLACE

Strictly this theatre belonged to Mr **J. C. Dibdin**'s sphere of interest. I will content myself by listing some extracts from local newspapers. For the above reason this is one of the few Theatres I did not trace to its source.

ED Tuesday, 21 March 1950

“WILLIAM HOWARD’S OPERETTA HOUSE, 23 WATERLOO PLACE Previously the **Waterloo Reading Rooms**, it was acquired as a Theatre in 1861. [The site was first occupied by the **Waterloo Hotel**, which was erected in **1819**, the first large purpose made hotel in the city. In the wing was the long Ionic-columned dining room, later adapted as an operetta house – it was partitioned off as the North British Railway office in **1894**. The building is now (**2000**) a City of Edinburgh Office. Sources: A.J. Youngson’s “The Making of Classical Edinburgh” and Gifford, McWilliam and Walker’s “Edinburgh THE BUILDINGS OF SCOTLAND” G.F.B.]

The auditorium of the *Operetta House* was upstairs. It was a long room, not very wide, with a semi-circle of raised seats at the back. It had a small stage – where **Christy Minstrels**, dioramas, and variety concerts of all kinds were produced. It was a family house, that is, anything of an objectionable nature on the stage was discouraged.

The entry in the Street Directory for **1868/69**, for 22 Waterloo Place was “*Prince of Wales Operetta House*.” Originally called *William Howard’s Operetta House*, it was later named the *Prince of Wales*. It ceased to function as a Theatre about **1878**. The **Signet Library** possesses an interesting collection of its old Play Bills.

Reproduced in *The Scotsman*, February 11th **1963**, originally published in *The Scotsman*, Monday, February 9th **1863**. “*The Christy Minstrels* On Saturday the Christy’s Minstrels gave their first morning entertainment in the Waterloo Rooms in the presence of a crowded audience. The performance was most successful and was deservedly rewarded with hearty applause. The troupe are to continue their performances during the present and ensuing week.” “Footnote: The troupe originated by **Edwin P. Christy**, a Philadelphian, were first called the **Virginian Minstrels**. Their success when they came to London set the fashion of that form of time, and at the head of his profession, as a master in providing the public with that peculiar and now almost non-existent type of entertainment known as the blackface or negro minstrelsy.”

ALBERT HALL, 22 SHANDWICK PLACE

The *Albert Hall* has occasioned a great deal of confusion regarding its origin as a House of Entertainment. My good friend, Mr **Murray Grant**, *The Scotsman* librarian, told me the Albert Hall was erected in **1876** and was known for a few years as the **Albert Institute of Fine Arts**. Its objects were the advancement of Art in general and more especially Scottish Art.

Starting from 1876 I commenced a long search and ultimately traced the Albert Hall to its source as a Play-house through the medium of the *The Scotsman* General Notices and Amusement Columns. Right through its history as a 'Theatre' it had many proprietors, at least two of whom went bankrupt.

ALBERT HALL TO LET

In course of time it ceased to be an Art Institute and the following advertisement appeared in *The Scotsman*, Saturday, January 22nd **1881**

“ALBERT HALL - SHANDWICK PLACE WEST PRINCES STREET

Splendid Hall to Let, suitable for Stores, Wine Merchants, or others requiring large accommodation.

Capital entrance and extensive storage. Also Large Front Shop, if desired Apply to Couper and Cook, Chartered Accountants, 37 George Street.”

Apparently no-one was in need of a 'suitable' hall as another advertisement couched in the above style appeared in *The Scotsman*, Saturday, September 24th **1881**. Some five months passed before the Albert Hall started on a long career as a place of entertainment. True, the entertainment was intermittent, but did not lack variety.

I have abbreviated the first advertisement which was, by any standard, very long.

S Monday, 6 March **1882** Preliminary Advertisement

“ALBERT HALL MARCH 13TH

THE WARDROBERS – Henry and Walter return after 7 years' absence;

The Twin-like Mimics; Refined and Realistic Entertainment, more perfected than ever. Returns to the City of Former Triumphs, March 13th, for a Short

Series of Performances– Albert Hall, March 13; ‘At Home’ March 13; Mimicry, Music and Marvellous Metamorphoses.

Admission – 3s.; 2s.; 1s.; and 6d. – Plan at Wood & Co.’s.”

S Wednesday, 15 March 1882

“The Wardroper at the Albert Hall Messrs **Henry and Walter Wardroper**, the well known mimics, are at present performing in the Albert Hall, Shandwick Place, to large audiences. The first part of the entertainment consists of mimetic portraitures of characters more or less eccentric, who may be met with in Society, and whose foibles have marked them out as fair game for the satirist.

Among these may be noted: the thorough-paced plebeian who has moved into the West End mansion; the nervous young man; the bouncing major; the hired waiter; the old ‘fogey’, fond of wine; and the young man of the period. In such sketches the brothers were exceeding successful – nothing being more surprising than the rapid manner in which they managed to change their attire.

Mr Henry Wardroper’s impersonations of women were somewhat rough to be altogether pleasing. The second part was devoted to caricatures of the prevalent styles of singing, and here, again, the brothers achieved much success. The entertainment, to judge by the amount of applause bestowed upon it, gave great satisfaction to the audience.”

S Tuesday, 31 October 1882

“The Albert Hall – West End of Princes Street

Today, 1 till 5 and 7 till 10

Chang, the Chinese Giant; All Among The Mormons; Barnum’s Greatest Acquisition; The Tallest Living Man, Seen Only Once In A Lifetime.

Fashionable Matinees, 1 till 5, One Shilling

Evening Receptions, 7 till 10, Sixpence.”

S Saturday, 11 November 1882

“Chang - Last Day”

Note: Such an advertisement in 1963 containing ‘fashionable matinee’ and ‘evening receptions’ would be regarded as bunk and a piece of kidology; nevertheless, the phrasing for that period was quaint and the pricing was a method of dividing the sheep from the goats.

S Monday, 27 November 1882

“Bullock’s Royal Marionettes

The Gorgeous Pantomime *Little Red Riding Hood* In Twelve Scenes
Genuine Christy Minstrels Solo – Choruses – and Original Jokes
Prices: 3s.; 2s.; 1s.; and 6d. Plan at Woods - Tickets at Grahams”

S Saturday, 8 September 1883

“Albert Hall - West End of Princes Street

Monday, September 10th Grand Opening Night

First Night of the Season Tute’s Minstrels

Twenty Talented Artistes For 12 Nights only

Mr. J.T. Tute takes this opportunity of informing the Edinburgh Public that his Programme is strictly confined to The Original Christy Minstrel Entertainment, and under no circumstances does he tolerate other ‘business’ not in harmony with Ethiopean Minstrelsy “

The prices were advertised in *The Scotsman*, Tuesday, September 11th 1883:

“Tute’s Minstrels

Doors Open, 7.30 - Curtain Rises at 8.

Prices: 3s.; 2s.; 1s.; and 6d. Children Half price except to Gallery

Plan at Wood and Co’s. Tickets at Grahams.”

National Library of Scotland, Music Box 250. The following information was contained in a Play Bill or Hand Bill.

“Albert Hall West Princes Street Edinburgh

April 7th 1884 Every Evening at 7.30

POOLE’S MAMMOTH DIORAMA

Matinees every Wednesday and Saturday at 2.30

Doors open at 2 and 7 o’clock. Carriages, 4.45 and 10 p.m.

Admission: Stalls, 3s.; Second Seats, 2s.; Third Seats, 1s.; Gallery, 6d.

Family Tickets to admit Five to Stalls, 12s. Children under 10 and Schools over ten in number, half price to all seats except Gallery.

The Diorama will be supported by Poole's unrivalled Combination Company of Star Artists, Specially Selected for Merit: Madame L. Du Maurier, Soprano and Ballad Vocalist; Messrs Sandford and Kenyon, Popular Australian Comedians; Mr Alfred Ross, Ventriloquist in a Sparkling Sketch; Mr G.A. Foote, Great Comedian, Humorist and Satirist. The Splendid Brass and String Bands under the Direction of the Talented Conductor, Mr Carl Webb, Pianist and Organist. Sole Proprietor - Messrs. Poole."

S Monday, 7 April 1884 This advertisement complements the Hand Bill Programme given above.

"Albert Hall - Edinburgh Return Visit after 8 years

Largest Panorama Proprietors in the World

Sole Lessee and Manager, Mr D.S. McKay

For a Short Season, Commencing This Monday Evening April 7.

Messrs. Poole (Late Poole and Young)

Russo-Turkish, Zulu, Afghan and Boer Wars; The Egyptian Campaign;

General Robert's Triumphal Entry into Cabul; Occupation of Cairo ;

The Sudan War.

Admission (As given in Handbill above)

Booking Offices: Messrs Wood & Co., Music sellers, George Street.

Mr Graham's Music Warehouse, next to the Hall. Manager, J.J. Taylor"

Note: Our whole history seems to consist of one War after another!

S Saturday, 10 May 1884

"Albert Hall Edinburgh

The Last Two Performances of Poole's Grand Diorama

Today Saturday, at 2.30 and 7.30"

S Saturday, 3 June 1886

"Albert Hall - Shandwick Place, West End of Princes Street

IT IS OUR OPENING DAY DOORS OPENED TODAY AT 2 p.m.

THE JAPANESE VILLAGE FAIR

Under the Management of Mr J.P. Curle, lessee.

The Village is beautifully designed and constructed by Messrs Carnegie & Co., Newcastle.

Mono Kitchie, Japanese Rope Walker; Mons Tannaker, Japanese Equilibrist; Saito and Wife, Japanese Banjoists; Japanese Embroiderers, Painters, FanMakers and many other Artists at work; Ko-Ko, the Japanese

Mysterious Lady; Co-Ningow, the Genuine Waxwork Exhibitionist from Japan, showing imitative power of this Marvellous People.

Afternoon Tea to be had from the Japanese Tea House and Garden

IN FACT JAPAN TRANSFERRED TO EDINBURGH

Splendid Band under the direction of Mr R.E. Richardson

Entertainment Every Afternoon at 3.

Open from 12 to 5, Admission 1s. And from 7 to 10, Admission 6d.

Children half-price in the afternoon

INSTRUCTIVE EDUCATIONAL AMUSING”

S Monday, 27 September 1886

“Albert Hall West End of Princes Street

Tonight Grand Dioramic Views

**NEW ZEALAND BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE
ERUPTION OF TARAWERA**

Startling Mechanical Effects

Prices: 3s.; 2s.; 1s.; and 6d. Children Half price.”

S Saturday, 3 September 1887

“Albert Hall West End of Princes Street Lessee and Manager Mr J.P. Curle.

Commencing Monday, 5th September 1887

Revival of the Original **WARDROPER ENTERTAINMENT**

Mr J.P. Curle has the pleasure to announce that he has effected an Engagement with the renowned

BROTHERS HENRY AND WALTER WARDROPER

Who after an absence of six years (conjointly) will reappear at the home of their former triumphs in Edinburgh, and return to the **ALBERT HALL.**

Prices of Admission: Stalls, 3s.; Second Seats, 2s.; Pit, 1s.; and Gallery (entrance by Queensferry Street Lane), 6d.

Booking Plan at Curle’s Pianoforte Saloons, 52 Hanover Street Every Evening at 8. Saturdays at 3 and 8.”

S Monday, 26 September 1887

EN Saturday, 21 September 1901, page 4, extract from an article on the opening of the New Central Halls Methodist Church, Tollcross

“Mission in Albert Hall The Rev **Geo. Jackson** and his coadjutors in the West End Mission have been going from success to success since the

mission was begun in the Albert Hall in November, 1888. From 1890 services were held in the larger *Synod Hall*”

It is pleasing to know that the *Albert Hall* had a tenant during the last decade of the 19th Century – even for one day per week.

EN Friday, 25 September 1908

“Albert Hall - Shandwick Place Opening Entertainment

B. B. PICTURES (BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL)

Monday First, September 28th

Splendid Animated Picture Show Britain’s Best

Nightly at 8. Saturdays at 3 and 8

Prices: 1s. and 6d.”

Note: This programme saw the introduction of Moving Pictures to the Albert Hall.

EN Thursday, 1 February 1910

“Albert Hall Shandwick Place

TINDLE’S PICTURE CONCERTS

On Monday, February 7th 1910

Twice Nightly 7 and 9 Prices: 1s. 6d.; 1s.; 6d.; and 3d”

EN Thursday, 9 October 1913

“Albert Hall Shandwick Place

Grand Re-Opening Saturday, October 11, 1913

(I did hear this was to obviate opening on Monday the 13th; it did not save him)

First Class Programme Prices: 1s.; 6d.; 4d.; and 2d.

Proprietor: Mr Senior”

EN Tuesday, 14 October 1913

“Albert Hall Criticism After being closed for a considerable period, the Albert Hall has again opened its doors as a picture house. The interior of the building has been nicely decorated. Chief Picture: *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*” and *Wild Beasts at Large*”

Note: Here we have confirmation that the Albert Hall was closed for a long time; I am afraid this was a common feature of the Hall at that period.

My, my, a 'West End Show' down to tuppence admission.

EN Saturday, 18 December 1915

“WEST END CINEMA (LATE ALBERT HALL)

22, Shandwick Place Under Entirely New Management

Grand Re-Opening of the above Hall On Friday, December 17th 1915, at 2 p.m. The Theatre has been re-decorated and is now under the Entire Management

of Mr. F. Reed, late of the Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street, Edinburgh. The latest and most up-to date Pictures will be shown.

Mr Reed having secured the Sole Rights of Edinburgh for a large number of Exclusive Films.

Special Star Programme For Friday and Saturday Special Picture *Mignon*

Admission: Stalls, 6d.; Balcony, 1s.

Soldiers, Sailors and Nurses in Uniform Half –Price to all parts

Children Half-Price to all parts.”

Kinematograph Year Book 1915 Page 468

“Albert Hall, Shandwick Place. Proprietor: J. N. Tindall Seats:800”

A HARD NUT TO CRACK Gathering the material for the story of the Albert Hall was a real problem, particularly in view of its being closed for a 'considerable period'. How often the Hall had those bouts of depression I did not establish. Without a record of Press Advertisements regarding any place of entertainment it becomes almost impossible to build a story round any 'house' That, then, was the position with which I was confronted anent the Albert Hall.

Indeed, I have come to the conclusion that the name *Albert Hall* is as dead as a dodo, bearing in mind the premises became the **West End Restaurant** during **1930/31**.

In a meeting I had with Mr **Harold Davis**, manager of the *Palace Picture House*, Constitution Street, on November 6th **1962**, he told me that he was

the manager of the *West End Cinema* from **1923 until 1930**, when he left to become the manager of the *Palace*; that prior to **1923** Mr **Fred Reed** was the manager of *West End Cinema*; and that two former proprietors of the Albert Hall had failed, namely, Mr **J.N. Tindle and Mr Senior**.

Letters to the *News* Editor

Saturday January 9th **1954**

From Mr **A.C. Black**, 9 Loanfoot Road, Uphall. “The Albert Hall was used as a cinema before the First World War (1914-18). The films were advertised as “**B.B.Pictures**”. The barker (doorman) was **Harry Denholm**, who stood at the door and shouted, “Here you are for the B.B. Pictures, bright and beautiful, always to the light.” Incidentally, he was a very tall man resplendent in a uniform more fit for a general than a mere ‘barker’.”
From “Stockbridge” “...certainly there was a picture house there before the 1914-18 War. It even boasted a hidden gentleman who was responsible for the sound effects behind the screen; and a very good job he made of it at times.. Some of the seats were mere benches.....”

I can agree with “Stockbridge” anent the ‘hidden gentleman’ and that, in the ‘body’ of the Hall, the seats were benches.

The letters were followed by this note by the Editor: “Recalling the days when he was musical director at the Albert Hall in Shandwick Place, from June **1914** to March **1915**, when he joined the Army, Mr **R. B. Donaldson**, 31 Hillside Crescent, tells us that a Mr **Senior**, from Yorkshire, was the proprietor who ran variety turns and a *Go As You Please* competition once a week. There was an orchestra of six. Mr Donaldson also states that after the *West End Theatre* closed about **1929** the premises were take over for use as a café and for years it was named the *Strand Café*. Concluding, Mr Donaldson added that, as far as his memory serves him, the Albert Hall came into being somewhere about the beginning of the century.”

We are thankful to those ‘writers to the Editor’ who retail their reminiscences, on any subject, but especially regarding the Albert Hall. One fact emerges: one can’t depend on memory all the time, hence the value of advertisements in the Press, which can be checked. **Mr James Seager, C.B.E., J.P.** He was *News* Editor at the time the above letters were written in **1954**. He retired from the ‘Chair’ on 31 October **1956**, after 52 years’ service with the *News*. I am happy to report that as at October **1963** Mr Seager is still with us. Over a number of years he accepted many of my

articles on diverse subjects. His weekly *Causerie* frequently brought many letters in response to his current article, thereby bringing to light many points about Auld Edinburgh from citizens of all shades of opinion.

But for Mr Seager, many a time I would never have seen a game of football at Tynecastle. He took me there and back in his car and made arrangements for me to have a seat on the track. 'Jimmie' Seager was a Sergeant in the Dandy Ninth, that is, the 9th Royal Scots. He gave a helping hand to many Edinburgh citizens.

It gave me great pleasure to write this item on the *Albert Hall*.

BITS AND PIECES

EC Saturday, 23 September 1820

“WONDERFUL OX AT THE MOUND That noble, beautiful and immensely sized Durham Ox, called Caps All. Six Years Old – 6 feet high; 11 feet 6 inches round the body; 37 inches across the back; 10 feet from tail to horns. Weight – 310 stones.

Sold by Auction for one thousand guineas. Bred by Mr Smith, Grindon, near Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Admission – Ladies and Gentlemen, 1s.; Working People, 6d.; Children, 3d.”

It was a noble, beautiful and immense *beastie*. Ladies and Gentlemen paid their bobs to see it but **working people** paid their tanners. Ye Gods! Intolerance in action ‘aw to see a big bull.’

EC Thursday, 3 August 1820

PAVILION ON THE EARTHEN MOUND

Old pictures of the above Pavilion show that it was to the north of Ramsay Garden and stood on the west side of the Mound, just above where the railway tunnel was formed 25 years later. The advertisement read as follows:

“The Grand Historical Panorama (never before in the city) of the Battle of Ligny, Les Quatre Bras and Waterloo, accompanied by a full Military Band. (In flowery language the owners would be wanting in ingratitude if they did not appraise the inhabitants of Edinburgh, before it was too late, when it is closed to their view for ever)

There are Ten Subjects accompanied with Suitable Military Music for each.

Admission: Front Seats, 2s.; Back Seats, 1s.; Children, Half Price.

The Panorama – Four times in the day time – First at 12; second at 1; third at 2; fourth at 3, finishing at 4 o’clock .

Time in the Evening – First at 8; second at 9 o’clock precisely.

N.B. Just Published, a new edition of descriptive book of the Panorama. To be had at the Pavilion, price 6d.”

EC Monday, 2 October 1820, advertised that this was the last week of the Panorama.

ALMOST FREE ADMISSION FOR THE WORKING MAN

At first glance it might seem that 1s. and 2s. was a lot of money to pay for a 'short' hour of entertainment; and no reduced price for 'working people', as in the case to view the huge ox, *Caps All*, also on the Mound.

At that time, **1820**, workers in the Building Industry received the princely sum of 17s.6d. per week of 60 hours at 3½ d. per hour. Therefore, for husband and wife and two children to see the Panorama, he would require to work for ten hours. My reason for putting it in this manner is two-fold. The exorbitant cost of painting the scenes had to be paid for and that was through the Pay Box. In Poole's *100 years of Showmanship, 1837 – 1937*, pages 4 and 5, the cost involved is brought out "The greatest scenic artists of the day painted the pictures. **Sebastian Estelos** took eighteen months to paint *The Halt by the way of the Viceroy Of India's State Elephants*: it cost **C.W. Poole** £350 for a single canvas. **William Tilbin** got £150 for a picture of Edinburgh."

The second reason is that whereas it cost so much for entertainment in the 1820's in respect of time worked to obtain the Admission Price, it was almost free admission, by comparison, 100 years later. I append a selection of 'houses' where it will be seen that the admission had been reduced to almost free admission. Wages per hour and year are shown in brackets.

Empire Theatre – 3d. for Gods (1912, 9d.); Albert Hall – 2d. to 1s. (1913, 9½ d.); Picturedrome, Easter Road – 2d. to 6d. (1912, 9d.); Princess Cinema, 131 Princes Street – 6d. to 1s.6d. (1912, 9d.); *Palace, Leith – 2d. to 1s. (1912, 9d.); New Picture House, 56-57 Princes Street – 6d. and 1s. (1913, 9 ½ d.); *Pavilion, Dean Street – 2½ d. to 7d. (1917, 11d.); Poole's Synod Hall – 9d. to 3s 6d. (1920, 2s. 2¾ d.); Caley, Lothian Road – 1s. and 2s. (1923, 1s. 6½d. note the reduction in hourly rate)

*In those two examples the husband, wife and two children could gain admission for less than one hour's working time; and enjoy more than two hours at the 'pictures'; whereas his old grandfather had to work 10 hours to take his granny and two aunties to the Panorama in 1820.

That is the March of Progress and no mistake.

ASSEMBLY ROOMS, GEORGE STREET Opened in 1787 Some details extracted from *Grant's Old and New Edinburgh*, Vol II, pages 148-159

“The Clydesdale Bank is described as a handsome building; but the next chief edifice which, with its arcade of three arches and a portico, was long deemed by those obstinately wedded to use and wont as an eyesore and an encroachment on the old monotonous amenity of George Street, when first erected, is the ***Assembly Rooms***

The principal dancing-room here is 92 feet long by 42 feet wide and 40 feet high; adorned with magnificent crystal clusters. “The New Assembly Rooms, for which the ground is staked out in the New Town,” says the *Edinburgh Advertiser* for April 1783, “will be among the most elegant of any in Britain.” In addition to the ball-room, “there is a tea-room, 50 feet by 36, which will also serve as a ballroom on ordinary occasions; also a grand saloon, 38 feet by 44 feet, besides other and smaller rooms. The whole expense will be 6,000 guineas, and the building will be begun immediately.”

In 1787 a master of ceremonies was appointed and Regulations brought up to date for the New Assembly Rooms, George Street, to operate from Thursday, 29th January, 1789. Subscription books were open at the house of the Master of Ceremonies, **William Graham**, Esq., merchant, in the Luckenbooths, (where animals were slaughtered) to whom the nobility and gentry intending to subscribe were requested to send their names and subscription money, when they would receive their tickets. The first assembly of the season was to be on 29th January 1789.

It was in the Assembly Rooms that Sir **Walter Scott**, on 23rd February 1827, at the annual dinner of the *Edinburgh Theatrical Fund*, avowed himself to be the ‘Great Unknown’, acknowledging the authorship of the **Waverley Novels**. In June 1842, a great public banquet was given to **Charles Dickens** in the Assembly Rooms.

MUSIC HALL, GEORGE STREET opened 1843

Grant's Old and New Edinburgh, Vol.II, page 150

“In immediate connection with the ***Assembly Rooms*** is the great music hall, built in 1843, at the cost of more than £10,000. It is a magnificent apartment, with a vast domed and panelled roof, 108 feet long by 91 feet

broad, with orchestral accommodation for several hundred performers, and a powerful and splendid organ by Hill of London.

It is the most celebrated place in the city for public meetings. There in **1853**, was inaugurated by Lord Eglinton and others, the great Scottish Rights Association, the ultimate influence of which procured so many necessary grants of money for Scottish purposes; in **1859** the first Burns' Centenary, and in **1871** the first Scott Centenary, were celebrated in this hall. There, too, has the freedom of the city been bestowed upon many great statesmen, soldiers and others. There has **Charles Dickens** often read his *Christmas Carol* to the delighted thousands; and there it was that, in **1859**, the great novelist and humorist **Thackeray**, was publicly hissed down (to the discredit of his audience, let it be said) in one of his readings, for making disparaging remarks on Mary, Queen of Scots."

From my earliest recollections, the *Music Hall* has undergone many changes in the interval. From **1914** it has, in many respects, been superseded by the *Usher Hall*. Before the turn of the century I remember being taken to see a model of an Indian village put on by missionaries for the first time in the Music Hall.

On a number of occasions I was present at the Scottish Amateur Boxing Championships in the 1920's and 1930's. Many types of exhibitions continue to be held within its walls, Fruit and Flower, Book Shows, in September 1963 a very successful Cat Show, Dancing Championships, Country Dancing, etc. In both World Wars it was pressed into service as a recruiting centre, and, after the 1914-18 War it became an auxiliary Unemployment Office. During the years many political meetings were held, and continue to be held, in the Hall.

Over to Pictures It will, no doubt, come as a surprise to learn that the Music Hall showed moving pictures.

S Monday, 31 December 1900

**"MUSIC HALL, GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH
NEW YEAR ENTERTAINMENTS 2ND, 3RD AND 4TH JANUARY 1901
FIRST VISIT OF WALKER & COMPANY'S
WORLD FAMOUS CINEMATOGRAPH AND ELECTRIC DRAMA
THE FIGHT FOR THE FLAG IN SOUTH AFRICA
And other stirring events, etc.**

Prices: 3s., 2s. and 1s. Programmes at Methven Simpson and Co., 83 Princes Street”

ST. CUTHBERT’S CO-OP. CONCERT, MUSIC HALL, 1911

EN Saturday, 18 February 1911

“St Cuthbert’s Co-op. Concert by Choir and Orchestra

Music Hall, George Street Tuesday, February 28th 1911, at 8.15 p.m.

Admission Programme One Penny To be had at all Branches.”

THE BOHEMIANS AMATEUR LYRIC OPERA COMPANY, 1914

EN Monday, 23 February 1914

“Theatre Royal To-night at 7.30 p.m.

Under the Patronage of the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Roseberry, K.C., K.T.

President Sir Richard MacKie

Present the Charming Opera *PAUL JONES* by Robert Planquette”

A short history of “The Bohemians” by George Baird, a one time member In the winter of **1909** four or five musical enthusiasts were spending a social evening together (as was common in those days). After singing selections from some of the famous comic operas, one of the party remarked, “Don’t you think there is room in Edinburgh for an amateur company that would play French light opera?” It was decided to seek the advice of other musical friends. Very soon the idea ‘caught on’ and the birth of the **Bohemians** was not long delayed.

Members were advertised for and soon two score of enthusiasts met for weekly rehearsal. The name of the Company having been fixed, it was arranged to present *La Cigale* for their first venture.

The membership increased gradually. Mr **George Burnley**, who had been on tour with *La Cigale* for three years, gave powerful assistance in licking the new Company into shape.

For the first dress rehearsal the members turned up at the *Gaiety Theatre*, in the Kirkgate at 6 p.m. They were gay and their hearts full of hope. Alas, the conductor kept them going over passages time and time again until 2 a.m. the following morning; but all that was forgotten when the performance was pronounced a great success.

I became a member of the Company in the Spring of **1913**. The **1913-14** rehearsals for *Paul Jones* took place in the Lower Hall of the *Free Gardeners' Hall, Picardy Place*. In the late summer of **1914** rehearsals for the *Country Girl* had started, but August of that year put paid to *Johnny Going to London Town*, one of the songs from the *Country Girl*. While 'Johnny' had a little suit of brown I had, perhaps, a bigger suit of Khaki and, later, on I went to the Dardanelles.

One member whom I knew very well was Mr **Masterton Brown**, Master Painter, 5 Pirrie Street, Leith. Mr Brown was associated with the management side of the Company, simply for the joy of it.

I append the names of some of the members of the *Paul Jones* cast:
Agnes Ross, *Paul Jones*; Mrs **Jack Copland**, *Yvonne*; **Jack Copland**, *Petit Pierre*; **Jessie D. Small**, *Malaguena*; **Francis Gibson**, *Don Trocadero*; **Jack Chisholm**, *Bouillabaisse*.

I was happy to be a member of the **Bohemians**. Over the years many thousands of pounds have been donated to charity as a result of the **Bohemians'** efforts

NORTH BRITISH HOTEL EN Tuesday, 3 May 1960 “**Details of North British Hotel** The building of the N.B. Hotel started in **1895** and was opened in **1902**, that is it took 7 years to build, as long as it took to build the Forth Rail Bridge. 13,000 tons of stone were used in its construction. There are 2,000 windows, 1,000 doors and 700 rooms. Prior to the building of the hotel the street numbers on that side of Princes Street were 1 to 9.”

Scaffolding Accident *Edinburgh in the Nineteenth Century*: “A huge scaffolding, erected to support a crane on the top of the North British Railway new hotel, fell in a gale of wind, on the 18th March 1898. Two workmen were killed and thirteen injured.”

Dances and Conferences are frequently held in the N.B. Hotel.

CINEMAS IN PRINCES STREET, in chronological order

THE PICTURE HOUSE, 111 PRINCES STREET This was the first Picture House in Princes Street

EN Tuesday, 19 July 1910

“IMPORTANT OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT

THE PICTURE HOUSE, 111 PRINCES STREET

OPENS TO-MORROW (WEDNESDAY) JULY 20th AT 6.30 p.m.

ADMISSION: 6d. and 1s.

PERFORMANCES WILL BE CONTINUOUS TILL 10.30 p.m.

CHILDREN HALF-PRICE BEFORE 7 p.m.”

EN Tuesday, 26 July 1910

“THE PICTURE HOUSE IN PRINCES STREET The new place of entertainment, with its high-class programme of cinematograph pictures, has speedily found favour. That there was a need for the *Picture House* has been shown by the gratifying attendances since the opening. The handsomely appointed little theatre presents a superior programme of pictures, the topics of which are of a very interesting character and uniformly of a high style. The scenes are depicted with beautiful clearness and realism. The subjects shown yesterday were not only entertaining and amusing, but in many ways instructive, the animated gazette being a cleverly contrived series of pictures of current events. The programme is changed twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays.”

Note: The Picture House was the first cinema I came across that advertised ‘continuous performance’.

1915 Kinematograph Year Book page 468

“Picture House, 111 Princes Street. Proprietor: Patrick and James, S.S.C.”

SOME BITS AND PIECES I COLLECTED ABOUT THE PICTURE HOUSE Together, they form a picture of the house.

A **photograph** of the Picture House is held in the Edinburgh Room. It depicts the front of the house and contains the following details:

“PROGRAMME CHANGED MONDAYS & THURSDAYS
A PLEASANT HOUR MAY BE SPENT AT THE
PICTURE HOUSE, 111 PRINCES STREET
OPEN DAILY from 1 p.m. till 10.30 p.m.
SATURDAYS, from 11 a.m. till 10.30 p.m.
ADMISSION, 6d. and 1s.”

The photograph and script seem to have been extracted from a Guide Book.

EN Thursday, 1 January **1948** Extract from an article on cinemas.

“Princes Street had been invaded in 1910. The first was the Picture House at No. 111, which had formerly been the Kardomah Café. It was a modest picture house, seating only 400. How many remember the short dapper figure of the manager, **John Mitchell**? Afterwards it made way for a motor saloon.”

News Advice, Tuesday, December 29th **1959**

“The Picture House, 111 Princes Street Opened about 1910. The last programme was given on Saturday November 24th **1923**, and the film shown was *Success* with **Brandon Tynan** and **Naomi Childers** in the leading roles. The property owned by Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Company, was sold for over £30,000.”

Lotus and Delta The site at No.111 Princes Street has been occupied by Lotus and Delta from the early 1920's. **Murray Grant**, *The Scotsman* librarian, approached the shop on my behalf but they were reluctant to help, pleading their Headquarters were in Stafford, and to apply there. Well, well, we come across these snags from time to time.

131 PRINCES STREET Three ‘houses’ were situated at 131, Princes Street: *Princess Cinema*, 14 September **1912**; *Monseigneur News Reel Theatre*, 2 December **1935**; and *Jacey's News Theatre*, 20 January **1964**.

PRINCESS CINEMA, 131 PRINCES STREET

This cinema was the most westerly during the period when there were four cinemas in the Street: *Palace*, 15 Princes Street, 24 December 1913 – 5 February 1955; *New Picture House*, 56 Princes Street, 21 October 1913 – 26 May 1951; *Picture House*, 111 Princes Street, 20 July 1910 – 24

November 1923; *Princess*, 131 Princes Street, 14 September 1912 – 2 November 1935.

1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

“Princes’ Cinema, 131 Princes Street

Proprietor: Edinburgh Entertainments, Ltd. Seats: 520.”

EN Saturday, 14 September 1912

“PRINCESS CINEMA 131 PRINCES STREET

TELE. 6668 CENTRAL

THE LATEST PICTURE HOUSE IN THE CITY

Magnificently Appointed, Luxuriously Furnished

WILL OPEN TO THE PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME

TODAY (Saturday 14TH) AT 2 O’CLOCK AFTERNOON

And thereafter a CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE

Will be given Daily from Noon till 10.30 p.m.

Orchestra under the Direction of Mr H. DAMBMANN

RESTAURANT AND CAFÉ

SPACIOUS TEA, COFFEE, AND SMOKING ROOMS

LADIES ROOM

PRICES: FAUTEUILS, 6d. & 1s. ; BALCONY STALLS, 1s.;

BALCONY STALLS (FRONT ROWS RESERVED) 1s. 6d.

CHILDREN HALF-PRICE to 1s. and 1s,6d. SEATS, DAILY UP TO 6 p.m.”

EN Tuesday, September 1912

“Although this splendidly-appointed picture house in Princes Street has only been opened for a week it has already become firmly established in the public estimation, and has been receiving a very large patronage...large crowds are to be seen nightly waiting in the lounge at the main entrance until the seats have become vacant. The Tea Room has a commanding view of Edinburgh Castle and Princes Street in general”

The *Princess* jogged along in a tranquil manner for the next 23 years. Its final programme was on November 2nd 1935 before becoming the *Monseigneur New-Reel Theatre*, which opened on December 2nd 1935.

ED Wednesday, 30 October 1935

**“PRINCESS CINEMA 131 PRINCES STREET
JACK HULBERT in *LOVE ON WHEELS*
And STAN HOLLOWAY in *IN TOWN TONIGHT*
ETC. ETC. ETC.**

**TALKIE EQUIPMENT FOR SALE
Complete Talkie Set, Machines and Screen for Sale;
cheap to immediate buyer; refixed anywhere for use”**

[In Town Tonight was a popular BBC radio programme in the 1930's. It started with Coates' Knightsbridge March and someone intoning "In Town Tonight"; I think it was presented on Saturday evenings. G.F.B.]

***MONSEIGNEUR, 131 PRINCES STREET (FORMERLY THE
'PRINCESS THEATRE')***

S Tuesday, 3 December 1935 Page 9

**“NEWS-REEL THEATRE PRINCES STREET HOUSE OPENED
FIRST IN SCOTLAND**

The *Monseigneur News Theatre* is the first cinema in Scotland to show exclusively news film, was opened in Princes Street, Edinburgh, yesterday. It occupies the site of the former *Princess Cinema*, which closed on November 4th (1935), the reconstruction and decoration having been completed in one month. Although the redecoration is not yet complete in detail, a remarkable transformation has been effected, and yesterday's initial audience was attracted by the inviting appearance of the cinema and the comfortable accommodation. Formerly the cinema seated about 600 but the rearrangement now gives comfortable accommodation for about 350. The screen is bright, and the sound reception is excellent.

Sir **John C. Watson, K.C.**, presided at the opening ceremony yesterday, and in the course of his remarks paid tribute to the cultural value of the cinema. He observed that our friend 'Mr Gossip' and the stranger from strange parts were transmuted into the moving picture. Among the things which had most affected the life of our people, the moving picture (with its sound recording) and the wireless were the two most striking. We had rapidly gone through the emotional experience of all classes and types, from the crude drama, the 'shilling shocker' type of thing and the heroics of Buffalo Bill and his Wild

West to the news picture and the artistic expression by sight and sound in this marvellous technique of the world's great stories

Cinema and Community The house which they were opening marked a new stage in the development of pictures in the life of the community. It was cultural in its appeal. It was selective and discriminating in the type of scene which it laid before us. It brought the world to our door in news, brought the beauty of strange climes to our present view. Without being too didactic, it would seek to be educational. It was complementary to the Press in seeking to present a series of events which made a seam of history.

The first programme on view yesterday extended to about 90 minutes, and included an extended version of **British Movietone News**, with sections devoted to Europe, America and Australia; a brief scenic film of the *Dee at Aberdeen*; *Spider's Web*, a nature film; *Darkest Africa*, a travel film; *Musical Queen's*; and *Noah's Ark*, a Disney cartoon. Later in the evening the cinema was well patronised by the general public."

1938 Cinema Buyers' Guide Page 173

"Monseigneur News Theatre, 131, Princes Street

Proprietor: Scottish Associated News Theatre. Seats: 347. Prices: 1s. to 2s.1d."

ED Wednesday, 8 June 1960

"City News Cinema is Sold A Princes Street, Edinburgh, cinema, the Monseigneur, one of a group of eight, has been bought by a Birmingham firm. The other seven Monseigneur news cinemas are all in the West End of London. The buyers are **Jacey Cinemas Ltd.** The sale followed the death of Mr **Jack Davis**, founder and managing director of the Monseigneur group. The deal was handled by Harris and Gillon, agents and valuers, of Wardour Street, London. A spokesman for the Monseigneur group said that all the cinemas would be run 'just as they are'."

S Thursday, 26 October 1961

"International Film Theatre Planned Edinburgh Cinema Scheme

An English company are considering a scheme to provide an international film theatre in Princes Street, Edinburgh. The company are Jacey Cinemas, Ltd., of Birmingham, who control 18 cinemas in London and the provinces, including the Monseigneur News Theatre in Princes Street.

In Birmingham, a spokesman for the company added that the scheme might be shelved unless the company were allowed to open seven days a week. "So far, we have always been refused permission to run **Sunday shows** in Edinburgh," he complained. Lord Provost **J. Greig Dunbar** of Edinburgh admitted that then officials had been against Sunday opening in the city; "But we haven't considered this for some time, and it is always open to anyone to make an application," he added."

S Thursday, 24 January 1963

"Cinema's Future Uncertain Structural Faults At the Monseigneur

Report Awaited The future of the Monseigneur Cinema, Princes Street, Edinburgh, is in doubt. Originally opened as a cinema more than 50 years ago it may close as a structural survey shows the cost of bringing the building up to standard is prohibitive. The cinema was closed three and a half months ago so that a new restaurant floor could be put in, but work revealed other defects. (Closed for alterations in October **1962**)

Mr George Cohen, managing director of Jacey Cinemas, Ltd., Birmingham, said yesterday that an Edinburgh firm began a survey about two weeks ago, and the first report was that the building had undergone alterations about ten times through its life. Mr Cohen added that he expected the firm's report in 2 or 3 weeks but emphasised that no decision had yet been made."

S Tuesday, 19 February 1963

"Cinema Survey Completed Monseigneur May Become A Store

The management of the Monseigneur Cinema, Princes Street, Edinburgh, are considering three possibilities for its future. The Monseigneur was closed more than three months ago when work on its restaurant revealed structural defects; this resulted in the management's request for a full survey by an Edinburgh firm. Mr George Cohen, managing director of Jacey Cinemas, Ltd., Birmingham said yesterday that the survey was 'a reasonably happy one'.

JACEY'S NEWS THEATRE, 131 PRINCES STREET

The name *Jacey News Cinema* first appeared in a Press article as follows:

EN Friday, 15 November 1963

“Princes Street Cinema to reopen by Christmas The Monseigneur News Theatre in Princes Street, Edinburgh, which has been closed since September 1962, will open again by Christmas, provided the £10,000 reconstruction work is completed in time. It will be renamed the *Jacey News Theatre*. Mr George Cohen, managing director of Jacey Cinemas Ltd., Birmingham, who have 16 news and Continental film theatres in the main centres of Britain, told an Evening News reporter today that attached to the cinema would be a modern snack-bar, replacing the old restaurant in the building.

S Monday, 20 January 1964 Page 9 From an article by Allen Wright
“Another cinema which had been given up for lost reopens its doors today. The last surviving cinema in Princes Street, Edinburgh, the *Monseigneur* has been redecorated and renamed The *Jacey*.”

As stated above neither the opening of the Jacey, nor the name of the first picture was advertised; but from information received from my son, a large poster was set up in the foyer of the News Theatre stating to the effect that the Pope’s visit to the Holy Land would be screened on Monday, January 20th 1964

EN&D Tuesday, 21 January 1964 Page 6.
“**Jacey’s News Theatre** Prices of Admission – 20 January 1964
Front Stalls, 1s.6d; Back Stalls, 2s. 6d.; Balcony, 2s.6d
Special Opening Film, *Pope Paul’s Pilgrimage To The Holy Land*”

NEW PICTURE HOUSE, 56-57 PRINCES STREET

This is the story of Edinburgh’s first posh, spelled with a capital ‘P’, cinema,

We who had the privilege to visit the *New*, as it was affectionately known, almost from the first, have fond memories of those early days. The cathedral silence which seemed to meet one on passing through the glass doors which lead to the auditorium. The carpets, one almost sank up to the ankles, so rich were they in the pile; they contributed to the ‘wall’ of silence. To many of us who had known other ‘pictier hooses’ it was a revelation.

On looking back those 50 years to the day the *New* opened in October **1913**, it was not only a revelation but a revolution which took place in **values**.

We were suddenly jerked out of the ever-day life, that is, as it applied to the masses. We glimpsed a **new** world; it seemed far removed from our reach, unattainable and not for common working people.

The First World War came and many of my comrades never came back to see the beautiful *New*, nor to tread the pavement of the most beautiful street in the world, in which a gem was set to further embellish the street. So that, 50 years hence (1913-1963), there is almost a surfeit of 'good' things, which I need not enumerate, except to say that after a lapse of five decades, the masses are, in many respects, On Top Of The World but the *New* has disappeared *Gone With The Wind*.

For the most part I carry on the story of the *New* as contained in Press Advertisements and articles.

**THE *NEW* WAS THE FIRST PICTURE HOUSE
WITH 'DRAW CURTAINS' COVERING THE
SCREEN AFTER THE EVENING PERFORMANCE**

The signal to start the performance was when the conductor tapped his lamp-shade with his baton and the curtain would open, while the orchestra played the overture. That was, of course, in the year **1913**.

EN Monday, Monday, 20 October 1913
"THE NEW PICTURE HOUSE PRINCES STREET - EDINBURGH
(OPPOSITE THE SCOTT MONUMENT)
will be opened by LADY PIGGOTT REDFORD
at 3 o'clock on TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21st
ADMISSION BY INVITATION ONLY
THE HOUSE WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AT 6.30 p.m.
SPECIAL FOR OPENING WEEK *HAMLET*
FAREWELL PERFORMANCE OF FORBES-ROBERTSON
ADMISSION 6d. BALCONY, 1s.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC”

EN Tuesday, 21 October 1913 page 4 Descriptive article on the New Picture House, Princes Street.

“The picture theatre has now become a permanent part in the round of entertainment and with that stability assured, there has followed a launching out into more pretentious schemes, in theatre building and their adjuncts. **The Provincial Cinematograph Theatres Co.**, of London, who own a score of theatres of the highest class in provincial sites, have discovered the value of the field to be worked in Edinburgh by the success of their smallest house in Edinburgh. That has emboldened them to venture upon them opening a large and much more elaborately equipped theatre in a portion of Princes Street. This site is an excellent one in a thoroughfare where life goes with a throb, and the promoters have spared nothing to make the New Picture House, which was opened today, as an ideal cinematograph theatre. It is more than that. In other cities the promoters have proved the popularity of tea rooms as an adjunct to the theatre and in this new house in Princes Street, there is an admirably appointed suite of tea-rooms which may be used independently of the theatre itself.

The main building of the theatre is at the rear of the Royal Hotel, and the big slice of this building acquired for the purpose included the commodious dining saloon, in which many an important dinner has been held. To reach the theatre an entrance has been made through the western part of the hotel. The whole design of the Architects, Messrs. Atkinson & Alexander, London, seem to have left nothing out of account that could tend to the comfort, the pleasure, the convenience, and the safety of the patrons of the theatre. The building has accommodation for 850 persons, and the seating in area and balcony is so arranged on the slope that every seat affords an excellent view of the pictures.

The decorated designs of the interior are striking in their effect. The style is classic but not strikingly so. The green marble pillars at the sides of the theatre support a finely moulded cornice, and the coffered ceiling imports a handsome appearance to the building. The side walls are beautifully panelled in oak and hung with rich tapestry. The proscenium is a fine example of the modeller’s art. The whole colour scheme is subdued and pleasing.

The electric lighting is a special feature, and particular attention has been paid to ventilation, the air can be changed 12 times an hour. The projection room for the films it may be noted, has been made absolutely fire-proof.

A SUITE OF TEA ROOMS

Passing through the white marble entrance with its pillars in Swedish green, the visitor finds himself in a handsome vestibule and entrance foyer. A tea lounge enters from the vestibule, and at the end of the foyer there is an oval tea room, prettily decorated in Louis XVI style. Then below the foyer, the biggest of the cafes, *The Wedgwood*, is situated. The lounge room has been tastefully decorated in Adam style, with Wedgwood blue as the distinctive note. Much of the success in the above direction is due to Captain **A. Mears**, one of the directors, and Mr **E. R. Grierson**, the engineer in chief, who have devised many of the improvements of the building. The contractors were Messrs. J Miller & Sons.”

EN Wednesday, 22 October **1913**

“NEW PICTURE HOUSE OPENING CEREMONY

The *New* was opened yesterday by Lady Redford, in the presence of an invited gathering that filled the magnificent theatre. The series opened with a film of Scottish historic scenes; followed by a lesson in golf with **J.H. Taylor**, the Open Champion. The principal film *The House of Temperly*. The screen was exceptionally large. The musical director, Mr Nicholls, added a very pleasant accompaniment; the music being, as far as possible, consonant with the subject on the screen.”

1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

“New Picture House, 56 Princes Street.

Proprietor: Prov. Cine Theatres. Seats: 960”

Page 505 Owners of Picture Houses

“Provincial Cinematograph Theatre Ltd., Address: 199 Piccadilly, London.

Managing Director: Mr R.T. Jupp. Secretary: James H. MacAulay.”

The years rolled on, the Miners’ Strike of 1921 and the General Strike of 1926 became memories. I was now making frequent visits to Edenhall Hospital, Musselburgh; at that time exclusively for War Disabled. Radio was fast taking a grip, especially on the *man in the house* who became

immersed in putting bits and pieces together to assemble what was known as the 'Cat's Whisker'- they were happy days.

The long spoken about event, **The Talking Picture**, reached red-hot point in June **1929**. Could they be called 'Talking Pictures' when they burst upon a credulous public in the June? As the story unfolds the reader can judge for himself; I include all the information available to me. As **Barnum** said a long time ago, "There's one born every minute."; and he is an exceptionally wise guy who has not been 'had' once or twice during his life.

Japanese Proverb

"You fooled me once, shame on you.
You fooled me twice, shame on me"
Fair enough.

EN Monday, 10 June **1929**

"THE NEW PICTURE HOUSE, 56 PRINCES STREET

Theatre Open 11.15 a.m. Continuous from 12 noon

TODAY TODAY TODAY

See and Hear AL JOLSON IN *THE SINGING FOOL*

'THE' TALKING PICTURE

APPROXIMATE TIMES OF SHOWING:

12 - 2.25 - 4.35 - 6.45 & 8.40

ALSO SPECIAL SOUND FILM OF 'THE DERBY'

ADMISSION - STALLS, 1s. 3d., BALCONY, 2s., SATURDAYS, 2s.4d.

NO HALF-PRICE OR MATINEE PRICES

BE ADVISED COME EARLY"

EN Tuesday, 11 June **1929**

"THE SINGING FOOL AT THE *NEW* Approximately two years after the release of the talking film we in Edinburgh have the opportunity of witnessing and hearing a production which has achieved the most popularity in America and Great Britain.

There are those who may be inclined to criticism of Edinburgh's tardiness in introducing the 'talkies', but the fact remains that the cinemas in the Scottish

capital which will deal with such productions will now be in a position to select the very best.

Had Edinburgh been a 'talkie' centre a year or so ago we would have had to rest content with releases which, frankly speaking, have been proved to be of comparatively poor standard. Now we can expect *Showboat*, *On Trial*, *The Donovan Affair* and *Broadway Melody*.

To the Provincial Cinema Theatres, Ltd., go the credit of breaking the 'talkie' ground in Edinburgh. For months and months one has heard little else in the 'talkie' world but **Al Jolson**, *Sonny Boy*, and *Little Davie Lee*, and *When There Are Grey Skies*. It is estimated that nearly 2,500,000 gramophone records of the theme song have been sold. All attendance records have been broken.

A New York waiter, Al Stone, becomes a Broadway Star. In this part Al Jolson is magnificent. In selecting the famous American vocalist 'Davie Lee', aged three, is natural and good. He could do nothing else at his age. The money he earned for that picture will enable him to live in comfort for the rest of his life. He has achieved more fame in a short space of time than even **Jacky Coogan**. **Josephine Dunn & Betty Bronson** are the other principals. The latter speaks well.

The musical accompaniment to this great film is provided by the **Vitaphone Orchestra**.

EN Saturday, 21 April 1951

"NEW CINEMA CLOSING DOWN NEXT MONTH ON MAY 26, 1951

The New Picture House in Princes Street, Edinburgh, which has been acquired by Messrs Marks and Spencer for conversion into a large departmental store, is to be closed down on May 26.

The New Picture House has been one of Edinburgh's most popular places of entertainment for the past 40 years. When it was opened by Provincial Cinematograph Theatres shortly before the First World War it was Edinburgh's first 'super-class' cinema.

Although it has seating accommodation for fewer than a thousand which makes it small by modern standards, for many years it was among Edinburgh's biggest cinemas. In **1927** the New came under the control of

Gaumont-British Corporation, which is now merged in **Gaumont-Odeon Circuits Management Association**.

ONCE BANQUETING HALL

The ornate auditorium of the New Picture House was constructed in what was the original banqueting hall of the Royal Hotel. Both the Royal Hotel and the New Picture House are in a block of property which about 18 months ago was sold for £750,000 to the Allied Hotels Group headed by Mr **Gammuck Clark**, a former hotel 'boots'. About a year ago Marks and Spencer acquired the picture house and some adjoining shops. The scheme to open as a new departmental store will not affect the hotel property.

A long and progressive chapter of cinema history is associated with the New Picture House. It was the first cinema to have synchronised sound installation in **1929**, when Edinburgh's first talking picture *The Singing Fool* was shown; it had a five week run there. (*Dispatch* Wednesday, January 22nd **1947**: "The run lasted from Monday June 10, to Saturday, July 13, **1929**, with five shows a day. Nothing could keep the crowds away from *The Singing Fool*, and milling throngs seethed around the cinema.")

Saw film 150 times Sound for *The Singing Fool* was provided through the medium of 16 inch records. That was before the introduction of the combined film and sound track. It meant that Mr. **G. B. Thomson** the chief projection operator, had to keep his eyes glued to the screen throughout the 150 performances of the one picture to ensure that there was proper sound synchronisation.

Mr Thomson had been with the New Picture House since **1925**. One of the notable features of the cinema's history which he recalled today was the popularity built up for 'Orchestral Evenings' before the coming of sound pictures. The musical programmes began with a five minute interlude, but became so popular that eventually a large cinema orchestra was given a half-hour share in the programme every Friday evening. At that time most cinemas were operating musically with a piano and violin."

(And how many didn't even have a fiddle? G.B.)

In the above article Mr **G.B.Thomson** was stated to be the chief projection operator, but in the following extract from the *News* of Tuesday August 6th **1946**, it is a Mr **Fred Mitchell** who is stated to have had the crucial chief projection operator's job.

“THE SINGING FOOL – 1929, NEW PICTURE HOUSE The chief operator at the New Picture House in 1929, was Mr **Fred Mitchell**, who later became Gaumont-British divisional engineer for the East of Scotland. Before the opening of the 1929 show in Edinburgh he was rushed off to London for a week’s training in sound technique, and for five weeks after that he had to listen to Al Jolson for nearly 12 hours a day.

Recalling his experiences, Mr Mitchell told a Press correspondent: “The speech was on gramophone discs. We had to put the needle on a certain point to synchronise with the film – and then hope to goodness it would not jump. During the five weeks we showed the Al Jolson film 150 times. By the fifth week, if the thing had broken down, we could have gone behind the screen and shouted out the lines!”

Mr Mitchell took nearly all his meals in a room next to the operating box, just in case of emergency. Nearly all the women in the audience, he remembered, went out with handkerchiefs in their hands and tears in their eyes.

Sound and movement did not always synchronise and there were amusing instances of lips moving a few seconds before sound and vice versa.

Al Jolson’s film *The Singing Fool* was really a **song picture**, and the 100 per cent. talkie did not arrive until later in 1929."

The only comment I can offer is to mention that **George Thomson** was one of the staff who took the stage on Saturday May 26th **1951**, which was the last night of the old *New*. This, of course, could not be regarded as conclusive as to who actually was the chief projectionist during the five week run in 1929: Thomson or Mitchell.

A page or two back I posed the question: Could they be called ‘talking pictures’ when they burst upon a credulous public in 1929. From the facts I have been able to muster, I leave it to you the reader to decide, as in the TV programme *You Are The Judge*.

EN Monday, 28 May 1951 Article and photograph

“FAREWELL AT THE NEW Mr **D. S. McGregor** (centre of photograph) manager of the New Picture House, Princes Street, Edinburgh,

had a farewell handshake for his staff on Saturday evening, following the closing of the cinema for conversion into a departmental store.”

Note: In addition to the above report, some long serving of members of staff of the *New* were mentioned in the *News*, Thursday, February 1959, in a News Advice Column: “The last pictures were *Pagan Love*, starring **Esther Williams and Howard Kent** and *Cause for Alarm*, with **Loretta Young**. During the evening, **Mr D.S. McGregor**, the manager and four employees - **Mrs Campbell**, cleaner for 28 years; **Mr Alex. Ochiltree**, foreman for 25 years; **Mr George Thomson**, chief operator for 26 years; and **Miss Vaughan**, café manageress – took the stage and thanked customers for their patronage. The manager and staff were thanked on behalf of the patrons by **Mr Forsyth Hardy**.”

So ended the beautiful *New Picture House*, after 37 and a half years’ entertainment of Clean Bills.

It is well to add that during the whole of the Second World War, or gie near it – the *New* was hired by the **Ministry of Information** on Sunday evenings. Many prominent speakers ‘said their piece of encouragement during those dark days.’

The question may arise – When did Marks and Spencer occupy the completed premises? It was a long time indeed after the *New* closed down on Saturday, May 26th 1951 before Marks and Spencer occupied the completed premises. The manager of the store informed me that it was not until June 1957 before M & S opened for business.

So the face of Princes Street got another ‘going over’, only one of many I have seen in a long, long time. In conclusion I would mention an exceptional building, namely, Forsyth’s at the west corner of St Andrew Street, on Princes Street. It was the first steel frame building to be erected in Edinburgh; the year was 1911.

PALACE PICTURE HOUSE, 15 PRINCES STREET

The quarter acre on which Woolworth’s Princes Street now stands was the most fabulous piece of ground, in many respects, in Edinburgh. As I am not writing a history of Princes Street, but rather drawing attention to this particular **quarter acre, numbered 10 to 15** and, as the Palace Picture

House occupied that section at No. 15, it is, I think, worthy of mention anent its historical association with the Street.

That quarter acre was the very first site of the new street and, as such, it holds a place of honour in the Street. Peculiar, but true; anything first in the world holds a special place – in this case its is Pride.

1767 to 1923

From **1767 to 1923** the quarter acre was exempt from rates and it came about this way. The background to this state of affairs is given on pages 8 and 9 and results from the building of the first North Bridge.

To obtain the necessary ground for the bridge project, Lord Provost **George Drummond** and the Town Council entered into negotiations with various owners of the ground in what was then known as the New Town; one of these was **John Graham**, a plumber. On January 22nd **1763**, in offering his property to the Lord Provost he wrote, “I will by no means be a hindrance to the City of Edinburgh’s improving their property by refusing to let the city have my property on Multrees Hill at a reasonable price.” (Note: Multrees Hill became St James’ Square and, in December **1960**, that area was scheduled by the Corporation for an £18 million redevelopment scheme)

In proposing the sale Graham asked in return for the feu a quarter of an acre of ground, “and I shall hold it of the city for payment of one penny Scots of feu duty yearly, if demanded.” The Council accepted Graham’s offer – with differences arising as to the terms of the bargain. The main point was whether or not the feu granted was to be liable to the town’s taxes but it was finally decided by the Dean of the Faculty of Advocates that Graham was entitled “to hold that quarter of an acre which shall be set apart and allotted to him as in lieu thereof... for payment of one penny Scots yearly... and without being liable to any of the town’s burdens.”

In August **1765**, the Council granted Graham the quarter of an acre and they bound and obliged themselves and their successors, “to free and relieve the said lands of all cesses, stents, taxations ... and of all feu-duties for all time coming hereafter with the exception of the yearly feu-duty of one penny Scots money.” The Council reserved the right to redeem that piece of ground, in exchange for any quarter of an acre in the New Town, on the same terms, before April 19th **1767**. It was further agreed, should the Council fail to implement the above agreement by April **1767**, then their

right of redemption was to lapse and Graham was to remain in possession by absolute title of the original quarter of an acre on the terms stipulated.

Finally, Graham's representatives, a painter named **Charles Robertson** and **John Humble**, a plumber, took possession of the site – on Graham's original terms – and they were terms which specifically included freedom from all the town's burdens.

The magistrates tried in **1834** and again in **1919** to extract payment, but without success – the court decided in favour of the owners- indeed, the court had no other option. The only way open to the Council to break the impasse was to buy the property and thereby end the loss in rates to the city's till. After a period of 156 years, the quarter of an acre which was exempt from paying rates, was ultimately bought by the Corporation in **1923** from the North British Railway Company.

The site had passed through many hands: from John Hume, through John Elder of Forneth (three times Lord Provost), Archibald Constable the famous publisher, to the Crown Hotel and finally to Woolworth's.

With acknowledgements to the *Dispatch* of 10th December **1960** I show the names of the occupants of the quarter of an acre from whom Frank W. Woolworth took over for the first phase of his Princes Street venture: No. 10 Watt Brothers, ladies wear, blouses, gloves, etc. Watt Brothers removed to the South Bridge, east side; No. 12 The Crown Hotel was above Watt's shop - the entrance to the Hotel was by 2 West Register Street; Nos. 11 and 13 The Domestic Bazaar Co., Ltd. popularly known as the D.B.C., or the 6½ d. bazaar (there was also a branch at the Chambers Street, South Bridge corner); No. 14 John Sinclair, tobacconist; No. 15 Palace Picture House.

F. W. Woolworth & Co. Ltd., opened for business on Saturday March 13th **1926**. The previous day they threw their doors open for inspection. The F.W.W. Store occupied Nos. 10 to 14 Princes Street. Their first venture in the district was at the Foot of Leith Walk, in **1924**. Being an American firm and known there as the 5 and 10 cent store, the nearest they got to these charges was stated on their facade thus: Nothing over 3d. or 6d.

But, now the birth of the *PALACE*.

1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 175

“**New Theatres opened in 1914** The Palace, Edinburgh - This new theatre makes the fourth in Princes Street. It accommodates 750. The colour scheme is in cream, gold and white. The front of the building is massively built in light stone, after the Georgian classic style. The building has been erected at a cost of £19,000, and £43,000 was paid for the site.”

EN Wednesday, 17 December 1913

“THE PALACE – 15 PRINCES STREET OPPOSITE WAVERLEY STEPS

THE LATEST PICTURE THEATRE IN EDINBURGH

A MAGNIFICENT CREATION

WILL OPEN NEXT WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 24, 1913

PRICES: STALLS, 6d.; BALCONY, 1s.; BOXES, 7s.6d. (Single seats, 1s. 6d.)

HIGH CLASS ORCHESTRA

CONTROLLED BY MR. J. H. SMITH

PICTURE *LIFE IN THE BRITISH ARMY*”

EN Wednesday, 24 December 1913

**“THE PALACE THE PALACE THE PALACE
OPPOSITE WAVERLEY STEPS**

Will Open Today, at 5 p.m. TO THE PUBLIC

When a Special Programme Will Be Given.

COMPLETE Change of Programme Tomorrow (Christmas Day)

DECEMBER 25th (EXCLUSIVE) 11 a.m. to 10.30 p.m.

THE PALACE THE PALACE THE PALACE

ADMISSION: 6d. & 1s.”

EN Tuesday, 30 December 1913

“PALACE PICTURE HOUSE INTERESTING PROGRAMME AT

THE PALACE The latest addition to Princes Street picture houses, the Palace, has readily found plenty of patronage, and the management are

maintaining their high class of picture. Future pictures mentioned were: *Her Indian Guardian* and *A Proposal From Nobody*”

EN Wednesday, 31 December **1913** There was this intimation at the foot of the Palace’s advertisement. “Tea Rooms Are In Course Of Completion.”

EN Thursday, 1 January **1914**

“THE PALACE, 15 PRINCES STREET

SPECIAL NOTE New Year Powderhall Handicap and Marathon Race Will Be Shown On The Screen On Friday Evening And Saturday.”

This was very good going in those days. As a point of interest to ‘Sporting’ readers, **Powderhall Recreation Grounds** opened on January 1st, **1870**.

ED Wednesday, 5 November **1952**

“PRINCES STREET TO LOSE A CINEMA The Palace Cinema, Princes Street, Edinburgh, has been bought by F. W. Woolworth & Co. It is understood that the Palace will continue as a cinema until licences are obtained for reconstruction of the premises as an extension of the adjacent Woolworth store. Apart from the Monseigneur, which is a news theatre, this means that Princes Street will be without a cinema.”

ED Friday, 7 November **1952**

“A 40 YEAR OLD CINEMA STORY ENDS The sale of the Palace, Princes Street, to Woolworth’s will bring to an end a 40 year old story and reduces still further the number of veterans of those far-off days. When the Palace was built, cinema-going had become more than just a novelty. Already nearly 20 cinemas were in existence – the majority of them showing variety acts and films on a fifty-fifty basis.

The construction of the Palace was started in the early summer of **1913**. The site, which originally housed an old-established business firm (From Edinburgh Room _ Cowan & Strachan, Silk Mercers, 15 Princes Street. Also displaced by Palace Cinema – Thomas Methven & Sons, Seed Merchants) and which had been acquired for £43,000 was cleared and the architect and builders were given instructions: **“Have it ready for a Christmas opening.”**

Six months later the £20,000 building was ready, and on December 24, the cinema was formally opened before a private gathering of city dignitaries.

There was accommodation for about 750 people in the new cinema. Prices were 1s. for the balcony and 6d. for the stalls. Programmes started at 5 p.m. and were generally changed each day. The films were supplemented by a light orchestral performance.

What were Edinburgh cinema-goers seeing at that time? At the *Tollcross Cinema*, now closed, the fans were thrilled to a melodrama, *In A Gambler's Clutches*. The *New Picture House* had the *Greatest Bull Fights Of All Time*, advertised with the thoughtful footnote: "By judicious censorship the film has been robbed of everything likely to prove objectionable."

EN Monday, 7 February 1955

"PASSING OF THE PALACE IN PRINCES STREET The Palace Cinema, Princes Street, one of Edinburgh's leading places of entertainment for the past 42 years, closed its doors for the last time on Saturday night (February 5); the programme included *On The Waterfront*, starring **Marlon Brando**, and **Glenn Ford & Evelyn Keyes** in *Mating Millie*. There were no speeches or announcements to mark its 'passing' which was, in fact, as quiet as its silent films with which it opened on Wednesday December 24, 1913. The cinema's veteran, Mr **Robert Wooley**, who was the projectionist at the Palace for 28 years, was not present at the last performance having been released from hospital only a few days ago. The manager, Mr **Percy Charles Tobell**, who spent 11 years there, said that several of the regular patrons had expressed regret at the cinema's closing. The Palace has been purchased by F.W.Woolworth & Co., for an extension to their adjacent premises. The only cinema remaining in Princes Street is the Monseigneur News Film Theatre."

**ROYAL ELECTRIC THEATRE, ROYAL HOTEL BUILDINGS,
PRINCES STREET**

1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

"Royal Electric Theatre, Royal Hotel Buildings, Princes Street
Proprietor: Princes Picture House Co."

I never found any advertisement for the Royal Theatre. It may well be that the hotel catered for guests – I will leave it at that.

OTHER CINEMAS, in chronological order

QUEEN'S HALL, 5 QUEEN STREET

In 1847-8 No. 5 Queen Street was recast as the United Presbyterian Synod Hall, which moved in the late 1870's to the site of the Edinburgh Theatre, Castle Terrace, which they had bought in 1877. I give below some examples of the various forms of entertainment presented in the Hall in the 1880's and 1890's. The show that did so much to put the Queen's Hall on the map was the Modern Marvel Company with its yearly visits starting in 1897.

The Queen's Hall has not been much in the limelight as a place of public entertainment during the past 50 years; by entertainment I mean, the theatre, cinema, concert hall and the like. True in the **1920's** it was known as the ***Embassy*** night club and dance hall and since **1930-31** it has been the Edinburgh Headquarters of the B.B.C.

I came across the next two items by sheer chance.

S Saturday, 22 January 1881

“TO LET QUEEN STREET HALL
PUBLIC MEETINGS, LECTURES AND MUSICAL or other
ENTERTAINMENTS SEATED FOR ABOVE 1,000
APPLY TO MR MASTERTON, 5 QUEEN STREET”

S Monday, 13 November 13th 1882

“QUEEN STREET HALL MADAME HELEN HOPEKIRK'S
PIANOFORTE RECITAL ON SATURDAY , 18th NOVEMBER,
AT HALF PAST TWO.

Tickets may be had from the PRINCIPAL MUSICSELLERS
The doors will be opened half an hour previous to the commencement of the
Recital. Carriages may be ordered at 4.15”

I searched back for two years in the columns of *The Scotsman* but was unable to establish whether this was the first concert in the Hall; in any case it goes back quite a step in history.

S Saturday, 2 November 1895

“QUEEN STREET HALL WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1895

MR. G. PARKER EVANS will give a DRAMATIC and MUSICAL
RECITAL ASSISTED BY MISS BESSIE SIMPSON, SOPRANO;
MR HECTOR L. CHALMERS, BASS; MR GAVIN GODFREY,
ACCOMPANIST.

DOORS OPEN AT 7.30, COMMENCE AT 8. TICKETS: 3s., 2s., & 1s.

FROM MESSRS PATERSON & SONS, GEORGE STREET;

KOHLER & SONS, NORTH BRIDGE; R.W.PENTLAND, FREDERICK
STREET”

S Friday, 5 November 1897

“QUEEN’S HALL THURS., FRI., & SAT - 18TH - 19TH - 20TH

MR J.A. MUIR THE CELEBRATED ENTERTAINER

RESERVED SEATS, 3s. UNRESERVED, 2s., 1s.”

***THE MODERN MARVEL CO. LTD.*, which was under the general
direction of MR T. J. WEST**

S Monday, 20 December 1897

**“QUEEN’S HALL FROM DECEMBER 27 1897 TO JANUARY 8,
1898 Every Night at 8, Matinees Mons., Weds., & Sats**

**THE MODERN MARVEL CO., LTD.,
WILL INTRODUCE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SCOTLAND
THE MOST RECENT SCIENTIFIC WONDER
THE *ANALYTICON* FOR PROJECTING SOLID VIEWS
CINEMATOGRAPHY UP-TO-DATE,
with the LARGEST and FINEST SELECTION of
COLOURED and other ANIMATED SCENES
ever EXHIBITED AT ONE PERFORMANCE**

**Only previously shown before THE ROYAL SOCIETY
and THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION**

The Times says: “Had certainly a highly realistic aspect.”
The Standard says, “Complete stereoscopic effect is produced.”
ADMISSION: 3s., 2s., and 1s. CHILDREN HALF-PRICE
BOOK AT WOOD AND CO’S.”

S Tuesday, 28 December 1897

“THE ANALYTICON AT THE QUEEN STREET HALL The Queen Street Hall has for the New Year holidays the **Modern Marvel Company (Limited)** to show an optical novelty called ‘**the analyticon**’. It is the same instrument that has been exhibited for a year or two past at the scientific and other societies in London under the name ‘Lantern’ stereoscope. It is the invention of Mr **John Anderson**, and its merit consists in this, that to objects thrown upon the screen it gives relief and perspective in the same way as the stereoscope imparts to views shown by its mechanism. How it is done seems simple enough, now that it has been discovered. The figures or views of a pair of stereoscopic transparencies are thrown from two lanterns upon a 10 foot screen. When these are superimposed, the point of view of each being slightly different, representing the object as seen by the right and the left eye, a slight blurring occurs. But each member of the audience being supplied by an analyst, resembling a small opera glass, with the glasses set in the fashion as the lens of a stereoscope, the image at once is righted, and assumes the qualities of a solid body, and also takes the place in true perspective amid its surroundings,

The views shown yesterday were of animals in the zoo and church interiors, and all had a very realistic aspect. From the point of a new development of optical science the exhibition was exceedingly interesting, but for the purposes of popular entertainment the analyticon is not very exciting – not nearly so diverting as the animated pictures, whose exhibition by the Cinematograph formed an important part of the entertainment. Several of these were very good, notably a view of horses swimming across a river, the march of a Highland regiment, and the Jubilee procession. Diorama dissolving views and coloured lantern slides were like-wise exhibited, which served to emphasise the great advance which has been made by cinematography in this species of entertainment.

Mr T.J. West proved a pleasant guide to the show, which was well received by a large audience.”

Note: *The Scotsman* scribe deserves a hearty vote of thanks, at this late date, for his excellent article.

ED Monday, 25 December 1905

“NINTH ANNUAL HOLIDAY PICTURES

MODERN MARVEL COMPANY’S CINEMATOGRAPH

QUEEN STREET HALL

T.R.H. the PRINCE and PRINCESS OF WALES ROYAL TOUR OF INDIA

The SCIENCE and HUMOUR of GOLF, as played by HARRY VARDON on the BRAID HILLS

ROYAL TOUR in NEW ZEALAND - by T.J. WEST

An ASCENT of the WETTERHORN and a VISIT TO NAPLES

MESSRS. GOODRICH & EARLY in SOLO and DUETS

MISS THERESE LINDSAY has also been engaged.”

ED Tuesday, 26 December 1905

“MODERN MARVEL COMPANY’S CINEMATOGRAPH An eight years’ acquaintance with the Modern Marvel Company has taught Edinburgh audiences to expect a high standard of excellence in cinematograph displays, and the Company’s efforts this season to satisfy the public are quite in accordance with their reputation. A short season was commenced in the Queen’s Hall yesterday afternoon with an entertainment instructive as well as amusing. Since last in Edinburgh, the Modern Marvel Company have toured New Zealand. Hence the chief portion of the programme is devoted to films of the life and industries in that southern colony, illustrative of the various phases of the life of our cousins. An insight into the works of the frozen meat company at Islington surprises one at the gigantic scale on which the industry is carried out.

Then the Maori is not forgotten. His sports on the water, his war-dance, also amusing antics of the women in ‘tripping the light fantastic’ according to the native idea, their domestic life – the women washing, cooking in the hot springs – all combine, to make an interesting programme.”

Scottish Daily Express, Thursday, April 30th 1959

“THE QUEEN’S HALL It was known as the ‘Modern Marvel cinematograms’, under the direction of Mr T.J. West. The Queen’s Hall show was claimed to be the first animated picture ever taken in Edinburgh by electric light – the children’s parade at the Lord Provost’s juvenile fancy dress ball, specially take by the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Cranston, Lord Provost.

“This unique local picture is timed to be exhibited at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. daily.” The hall was showing also *The Wonders of Niagara*, *The Dear Boys Home for the Holidays*, and other films; on stage there were comic sketches and coon singers.”

EN Saturday, 15 April 1944 Extracts from an article by ‘M.F.’

This is one of the best articles it has been my lot to read in connection with Edinburgh Cinemas. It is unfortunate that ‘M.F.’ did not write a history of ‘pictur hooses’ in Auld Edinburry. The extract below deals mainly with the Queen’s Hall. Much of the article I can vouch for, as I experienced all that ‘M.F.’ went through – except that I never had the pleasure of visiting the Queen’s Hall while it showed moving pictures.

“QUEEN’S HALL, 5 QUEEN STREET OLD-TIME CINEMAS AND STARS

Edinburgh is today a cinema minded city. There are at the present time upwards of half a hundred picture houses in the Capital.

Forty years ago there were only three – the Queen’s Hall, 5 Queen Street; the Operetta House, 5 Chambers Street, and the Albert Hall, 22 Shandwick Place. Of those, the city’s first permanent cinema, the writer has very happy memories. There were no queues then. One merely walked in, paid one’s money, and chose a good seat – good, that is, as a viewpoint. Modern ‘fans’ might have found something lacking in the matter of upholstery, but we, knowing no better, observed nothing amiss.

The Pictures in those days were looked upon as a marvel, and it was always ‘raining’ on the early films. I cannot remember that the ‘rain’ ever detracted in the least from our enjoyment of them

The cinematograph alone was not then considered of sufficient importance or to be interesting enough to provide all the evening’s fare, and was treated more as a scientific wonder to be shown at intervals between turns on the stage.

The *Operetta House* programme was run on these lines, alternating flesh and blood with celluloid ones. The *Queen’s Hall* pinned its faith to a preponderance of pictures and thus attracted a more scientifically-minded clientele. Its turns were of a quieter nature than those of its competitors.

Natives of different parts of the world would give demonstrations of the customs of their respective countries, and I remembered seeing there an exhibition of some Orientals being punished by the *bastinado*, i.e. pummelling a criminal's upturned feet with a sort of drumstick

SOME OF THE SILENT STARS

Florence Turner, small and wistful; **Flora Finch**, the angular comedienne; **Maurice Costello**, the curly haired hero; **John Bunny**, the corpulent, smiling comedian; **John Dory**, the handsome one; **Mr and Mrs Drew**, and many more.

In the old Silent Days it was a thrilling moment when the conductor tapped his lamp-shade with his baton, the musicians struck up the overture, the curtains moved aside – that is – those cinemas which had curtains, and the ‘pictures began’. M.F.”

1915 *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 468

“Queen’s Hall, 5 Queen Street. Proprietor: T.J. West”

Note: The extract names the person who held the licence to show moving pictures.

MUSIC HALL, GEORGE STREET

See under Bits and Pieces, opened 31 December 1900.

ALBERT HALL, 22 SHANDWICK PLACE

See Albert Hall Chapter: B. & B. Bright and Beautiful, opened 28 September 1908; Tindle's Pictures, 1 February 1910; and the West End Cinema, 17 December 1915.

SALON, THE 5, BAXTER'S PLACE

This is one of the few of Edinburgh's cinemas which has passed its half century.

EN Thursday, 2 October 1913 First Advertisement

“THE SALON BAXTER'S PLACE

(A Few Doors From The Tabernacle)

Absolutely The Last Word In Kinema Houses”

WILL OPEN SHORTLY

The House Which Will Accommodate 1,000 People

Is Being Luxuriously Furnished and Decorated In

PERSIAN STYLE

HAS FIRST-CLASS TEA-ROOMS AND AN ORCHESTRA PAR EXCELLENCE”

EN Saturday, 11 October 1913

“THE SALON 5 BAXTER'S PLACE - LEITH WALK

(TWO DOORS FROM LONDON ROAD)

WILL BE OPEN ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16 th , 1913 AT 6 p.m.

AS A HIGH-CLASS KINEMA HOUSE

With A First-Class Orchestra

AND TEA-ROOMS A SPECIALITY”

Note: No admission prices were advertised.

EN Tuesday, 21 October 1913

“THE SALON The Baxter's Place Picture House, opened the other afternoon seems to have already established itself in popular favour, a packed attendance being present last night. The finishing touches to the decoration of the interior have now been made, and the scene is one of tasteful beauty. The lighting effects are particularly pleasing.

The programme presented last night was composed of well-chosen and varied subjects. Bizet's famous opera was 'tapped' to provide the theme for *Carmen*, and the picture version gives scope for some charming photography.

The Lady of Shallott, detailed Tennyson's touching poem from the *Idylls of the King*. There was a Travel film showing *Picturesque Roumania*, while on the humorous side was *Dick Turpin's Ride To York*."

When the salon opened the doorman and the door-women attendants were dressed in Eastern fashion. The men wore turban styled head-dress, loose pantaloons, and the toes of their slippers were delicately turned up. The women affected the garb of the 'Dancing' or *Nautch Girls*. Needless to say the clothing was of many colours.

Inevitably the Salon received the nickname the *Harem*."

1915 Kinematograph Year Book Page 468

"Salon, 5 Baxter's Place.

Proprietor: Regent Photo Playhouse Ltd. Seats: 1,000"

When the Playhouse opened in August **1929**, it was thought the Salon would 'pack up'. True, the more fashionable Playhouse attracted big crowds, with consequent long queues. The waiting period did not suit patrons who were in a hurry to see some action – the Salon met their needs.

ST ANDREW SQUARE PICTURE HOUSE, CLYDE STREET

The site at the north-west end of Clyde Street, between Elder Street and St Andrew's Street, which the *Square* occupied, to give it the name by which it was known throughout the city for 29 years, had an interesting history; I append a summary.

The Royal 'Dick' Veterinary College Professor Dick was born in White Horse Close in **1793**. His father was a blacksmith. In **1833** he founded the Veterinary School in Clyde Street, which he maintained at his own expense. From time to time the building was enlarged.

Professor Dick died on 11th April **1866** and he left his estate in trust to the Town Council for the endowment of the college. In **1906** it was incorporated under Act of Parliament and was named **Royal Dick Veterinary College**. In **1914** the college authorities acquired ground at Summerhall, near the east end of the Meadows, part of which was occupied in **1916**.

In the First World War the strength of the Military Police grew in ratio to the Armed Forces. The War Department seized the premises of the former Vet. College which were ideal for the purpose of housing a number of men. The address of the Military Police, as shown in the 1920/21 Street Directory in Clyde Street was simply 'Provost Marshall'. In course of time, the Military Police, their job completed, returned to civvy street; thus, the old Vet. College was on the market to be exploited by the highest bidder.

What is left of Clyde Street as at December **1963** is passable. However, up until the fire in **1952** it was a dump. It was little more than a lane; depressing, uninviting and altogether a blot on the landscape.

That was the location where the *St Andrew Square Picture House* held sway for 29 years, from January 1st **1923** to November 12th **1952**.

When it became known the old 'Dick Vet College' was to be converted into a picture house many citizens shook their heads in a knowing manner and forecast it would be a failure. It was unthinkable that a house billed as a 'super cinema' should be located in a side street, when, close at hand, Princes Street had four excellent cinemas; current reports were to the effect that the New Clyde Street picture house was to seat 1,400 approximately.

People, it was said, would not go into a **side street** for first-class entertainment. Subsequent events proved how completely wrong were the prophets of failure and how right **Fred Graham-Yooll** was in his first cinema venture. He had an 'interest' in a number of Edinburgh cinemas: Astoria, Rutland, Blue Halls, Regent, and other smaller theatres. Whether the opening of the *Square* had anything to do with the closing of the *Picture House*, 111 Princes Street, on 24th November **1923**, may never be known.

The Square picture house occupied an 'island' site and it was a common sight to see the queue completely circle the cinema. The police were happy as no crowd control was necessary.

EN Wednesday, 3 January **1923** Advertisement
"OPENED JANUARY 1 1923, ST ANDREW SQUARE PICTURE
HOUSE CLYDE STREET
A MOST SUCCESSFUL OPENING
MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY 1st, 2nd and 3rd JANUARY

***A SAILOR-MADE MAN* HAROLD LLOYD
And GENERAL JOHN REGAN
TWO BIG FEATURES
CONTINUOUS FROM 2 p.m. DAILY
PRICES: 1s. 3d. BALCONY (CHILDREN HALF-PRICE, 2 to 5)
9d. STALLS. BUSES & TRAMS ALL LEAD TO ST ANDREW
SQUARE.”**

EN Tuesday, 2 January 1923

“ST ANDREW SQUARE PICTURE HOUSE Although not yet completed, it was able to be thrown open to provide for the New Year needs and shared largely in meeting the big demand for amusement at this time.

There is seating for about 1,500 and on entering one is impressed with the spaciousness of the building and with the excellent view of the screen obtainable from all parts. Included in yesterday’s (Monday) programme were: *The Silent Barrier and The Sailor-Made Man*”

Note: The *Caley*, Lothian Road opened on the same day, January 1st 1923, as the *Square*

As stated above the *Square* continued to prosper for the next 29 years, until on Wednesday, November 12th 1952, at half-past one the dreaded shout ‘Fire’ was heard. I append a few paragraphs from *The Scotsman*, Thursday, November 13th 1952, regarding the fire:

“The staff in the cinema were going about their usual duties, preparing for the afternoon when, without any warning, someone shouted ‘Fire!’, and within half an hour the building was almost totally destroyed, except for the projection box. Soon after one of the employees had put a ‘999’ call through to the Fire Brigade, five engines in all, were soon on the scene. In about fifteen minutes from the time the fire was first noticed, the roof fell in, and, as it fell, the west wall of the cinema burnt out and collapsed.

The cinema employees were unable to take out the projection machines, but saved films and some valuable lenses when the roof fell in. Fortunately, no one was injured, although four firemen escaped death in a miraculous fashion when the west wall collapsed. Only the fact that the cinema was empty at the time averted a disaster.

It has been estimated that it would cost between £250,000 and £300,00 to replace the cinema, but executives of the **Gaumont-Odeon Circuit** have grave doubts about the authority to build.

The Burgh Engineer ordered the charred remains of the cinema to be demolished. Mr. **J.S. Dunbar**, the Gaumont-Odeon group's district controller and Mr **L.B. Fancourt**, an executive hurried from London immediately they heard of the fire. Mr Dunbar was appointed manager of the *Square* when it opened in **1923**."

PLAYHOUSE, 18 GREENSIDE PLACE OPENED MONDAY, AUGUST 12, 1929

The site of the Playhouse Cinema in Greenside Place and the immediate area, including the Calton Hill, is so rich in history that it would be a shame not to record the 'highlights' of the first 'playground' in Edinburgh.

Greenside was the site of probably the first 'Sports and Amusement Park' in ancient Edinburgh. In this respect the city has recorded 'Sporting' history going back over 500 years, namely, to **1459** when the Area to the east of the Playhouse Cinema, namely the valley of the Calton Hill, was used by the sporting fraternity of those far off days to practise the art of mimic warfare and so it became known as a Tilting Ground (See Grant's *Old and New Edinburgh*)

A LEPER HOSPITAL IN GREENSIDE

In the year **1516** a leper hospital was erected to the north-east of the Playhouse site, almost on the location of Greenside Parish Church, which R. L. Stevenson called "The Church on the Hill"; this was built in **1836**.

CARMELITE MONASTERY OF GREENSIDE

The monastery was in being in **1518**. The Whitefriars first took up residence there in the 13th Century. On an old Edinburgh map the monastery is shown on the site of Greenside Parish Church. There is no mention of the monastery after **1543**.

The name is perpetuated in Rome In the convent of the Carmelites of Rome, an official bears the title of "Il Padre Priore di Greenside." (I obtained this information from Lectures on the Antiquities of Edinburgh, 1845)

So much for Greenside being so weel kent in far off Rome. I have written a short, but comprehensive history of *Ancient and Modern Greenside*; a copy is lodged with the Edinburgh Room.

Greenside Place was developed in **1801**; the tenements are still occupied as at November **1963**. Greenside Place, prior to 1801, was in the country and, in the 15th Century it was the ‘top row of a natural grandstand’ whereon citizens were wont to gather to watch the Fun and Games in the ravine far below. That it is a ravine can be seen by anyone who cares to stop for a moment or two at the top of the flight of broad steps, between Hillside Church and the Playhouse; from that stance can be seen the west slope of the Calton Hill which completes the ravine.

The ravine, the floor of which was converted into a Car Park, was where the first performance of Sir **David Lindsay**’s play *The Pleasant Satyre of the Three Estaits* took place in **1539** and at various dates until **1544**. “It was played in the presence of the Queen Regent in 1544 and an immense concourse of people.”

Henry Charteris, an Edinburgh bookseller, sat patiently for nine hours on the slope to witness the play, which started at nine in the morning and finished at six in the evening; this surpassed the most prolix efforts at Bayreuth or Oberammergau.

In the 1940’s 2 and a half to 3 hours was thought to be a **long, long** time to watch such as *Gone With The Wind*. You might appreciate the fortitude of your forefathers who could ‘stick it out’ a mere 9 hours – and nae soft seats to rest the bottom on.

So, after a period of 500 years the Playhouse carries on an old Greenside tradition, namely, the Play, even though it is on celluloid. It is fitting, therefore, that the cinema should be named the ***Playhouse***, as it rests on the site of an ancient Playground

THE TABERNACLE, GREENSIDE PLACE Fred A Lumley, secured the Tabernacle, on which he and several Edinburgh businessmen erected a super-cinema, **The Playhouse**. The Tabernacle was the first building to be erected on that site in the year **1801**. Its first preacher was the **Rev James**

Alexander Haldane, a former ship's captain. He preached there for over 40 years, gratuitously, until his death in **1851**.

The Tabernacle could seat 3,200 persons in comfort and on occasion 4,000 could be crowded within its walls. In **1864** it ceased to be house of religion; the congregation transferred to the Baptist Church in Upper Gray Street, Edinburgh.

On my way to and from school in the mid **1890's** and early **1900's** I passed the Tabernacle at least four times a day. Its distinguishing feature was the single word 'TABERNACLE' in 6 foot letters, or larger, painted on the roof. For many years Messrs Underwood used the premises as a furniture store.

We take a giant stride to the year **1929**.

"THE PLAYHOUSE SCOTLAND'S SUPER PICTURE THEATRE
THE DIRECTORS BEG TO ANNOUNCE
GRAND OPENING TODAY (MONDAY) 12th AUGUST 1929
WITH THE SPLENDID ALL-TALKING PICTURES
THE DOCTOR'S SECRET Based on the Play *HALF-AN-HOUR* , by Sir
J.M.BARRIE

And

MISS INFORMATION (An Amusing Comedy Drama)

ALSO ALL SILENT PICTURE *THE FLEET'S IN* starring CLARA BOW
ADMISSION (Including Tax)

ADULTS: BACK BALCONY, 9d., FRONT BALCONY, 1s.,

STALLS, 9d., CIRCLE, 2s. 4d.

CHILDREN: BACK BALCONY, 6d., FRONT BALCONY, 6d.,

STALLS, 9d., CIRCLE, 1s.3d.

Children as above to all parts Saturdays and Holidays till 2.30

NOTE: TODAY 12th AUGUST 1929. ADMISSION BY TICKET ONLY
FROM 1 TO 4.30 P.M.

THE PUBLIC WILL BE ADMITTED FROM 5.15 P.M. ONWARDS"

EN Tuesday, 13 August **1929**

"THE PLAYHOUSE At last the Playhouse is opened, and from now on Edinburgh's share of talking pictures will be strengthened. The Playhouse was opened yesterday by Mr **F.A. Lumley** and Councillor **Gorman**, the

latter complimenting the directors on providing Edinburgh with such a fine cinema.”

From the above date crowds started to congregate in this part of Greenside as their forebears had done up until **1864**. Their purpose today is also to hear sermons (or otherwise) in celluloid at the Playhouse.

In every sense of the word the Playhouse is a super place of entertainment and, if need be, can take over the function of a theatre. It has a commanding position and will be standing long after its near neighbour, Hillside Church, known in my youth as Lady Glenorchy’s Church, built in **1844**, is demolished, which may come about in 1980 [The façade of the church, supported by scaffolding, is still standing as at November 2001, while the building of *The Drum* continues apace alongside. G.F.B.] As at December 1963, the Playhouse is the oldest super-cinema in Edinburgh.

THE BUILDING The front elevation to Greenside Place is 102 feet, and the south elevation, measured from Greenside Place to Marshall’s Court which rests in the ravine far below, has an average depth of 215 feet. About 1,250,000 bricks were used in the building of the cinema. Messrs Robert Bruce & Son, Ltd., of Edinburgh were the builders. Other measurements are as given in the **1954** *Kinematograph Year Book*, pages 415-416:

“Playhouse, 18 Greenside Place.
Proprietor: Playhouse (Edinburgh) 18 Greenside Place.
Seats: 3,048. Proscenium Width, 45 feet; Screen, 35 feet.
Three Dressing Rooms. Showing from 12.30 p.m.
Prices: 1s. 9d. to 4s.”

THE BUILDING DEVELOPS A LIST During building operations the structure began to develop a list in the south-east corner; this was thought to have been caused by a seepage from the old Greenside Burn.

Mr **D. Allan Stevenson, M.Inst. C.E.** was called in to make a survey and to report his findings anent the list. Mr Stevenson told me in a telephone conversation in November 1961, that a fault in the strata was responsible for the list. Suitable action was taken and the fault was corrected; since when (**1928-29**) it has not occasioned anxiety. Mr Stevenson was a cousin, twice removed, of Robert Balfour Louis Stevenson.

On Friday, October 26th 1962 I had a long chat with Mr **Ronnie Maguire**, manager of the Playhouse. He was greatly interested to learn about the link between the Stevenson family and Playhouse; I have no doubt it would surprise many Edinburgh citizens.

Mr Maguire assured me he had no idea that the Playhouse was carrying on the tradition of the **play** which was such a feature in the district over 400 years ago; but now carried out under more congenial conditions.

Whether *The Three Estaits* was the first play to be performed by actors in Edinburgh is a matter of conjecture. It is accepted that the first theatre in Edinburgh was, strange to relate, the **Playhouse** in the Canongate, the foundation stone of which was laid in 1746, the theatre being completed in 1747. Before the presentation of *The Three Estaits* in 1539, plays took place throughout Scotland by local gentry. The same play or subject then, could have a different set of words for each presentation. Unfortunately, **no** records of the plays have been handed down to us.

EN Wednesday, August 7th 1963 From The Turret Window

“New Ground The 3,000-seat Playhouse, an Edinburgh landmark since 1929, will break new ground during this year’s Festival. **Chris Barber** and his wife **Ottillie Patterson** are to star in a late night jazz session on August 22. It is an experiment which will, no doubt, be closely watched. If it is a financial success it may be the first of a series of such ventures.

“It is not generally realised that the Playhouse was built as a theatre”, Mr Ronald Maguire told me at the cinema yesterday. “We have lots of dressing room accommodation. Someone had the foresight to see that it might be useful sometime in the future to have a big stage and dressing rooms.”

It has taken 34 years to justify the prophet! Actually the performers will not be able to use the entire stage because of the curve in the **Cinemascope** screen. They will employ the ‘mobile orchestral pit’ which can be raised almost to the level of the stage. The two-hour show begins at 11.30 p.m. Tickets, from 4s. to 8s.6d. are now on sale.”

The first advertisement on August 12th 1929 was worded thus:

**“SCOTLAND’S SUPER PICTURE THEATRE
PLAYHOUSE HAS THE TOP SITE IN EDINBURGH!”**

Of all the many Edinburgh cinemas which feature in this history, only the Playhouse has such a romantic and historical background. I have not required to use the word 'about'; all the information relating to dates has been extracted from recorded history sources.

PLAYHOUSE IN THE YEAR 2057? It is only the second building to be erected on the site and, given that the Tabernacle lasted from 1801 to 1928/29, it is possible that the Playhouse will have the same life expectancy, or even longer. So it might still be there in 2057! Few people born in 1963 will still be alive in 2057, or about then (about in this case may be capable of being proved in or nearly 94 years' time).

Well, it is a passing thought.

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