

***PLACES OF ENTERTAINMENT
IN EDINBURGH***

Part 7

***The Cinema in Edinburgh and
Developments in the Industry***

***Edinburgh Picture Houses
in Alphabetical Order***

***Some of the Mummers
who played at the Edinburgh Empire***

Edinburgh Pantomimes

Traverse Theatre Club

***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 (ETCC)*, 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 booklets for various localities in Edinburgh. Already published are: Part 1, The South Side; Part 2, Tollcross and its environs; Part 3, Leith; Part 4, Portobello; Part 5, Morningside, Craiglockhart, Gorgie and Dalry, Corstorphine and Murrayfield, Pilton, Stockbridge and Canonmills, Abbeyhill and Piershill, Duddingston, Craigmillar; and Part 6, Princes Street and the Top of the Walk. This booklet, the seventh and final Part in the series, deals mainly with material in Chapters 29 and 30 of *ETCC* on the cinema in Edinburgh and lists all of the cinemas mentioned in Parts 1 to 6; thus all of the material in *ETCC* is now available in booklet form.

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: 3, 8, 22, 29 and 30 of the History. References to sources of information have been abbreviated by using the following conventions- **S:** *The Scotsman*; **WS:** *The Weekly Scotsman*; **EN** (sometimes contracted to **N**): *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
January 2002

THE CINEMA IN EDINBURGH AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INDUSTRY

Beginnings in Edinburgh; Some firsts, latests etc; Cinerama comes to Scotland but not to Edinburgh; The South Side and its many Picture Houses; Cinemas open for business in December 1913 and January 1914; Extracts from the 1915 Kinematograph Year Book: The First Coloured Film, 1896; £70 per week Rental Charge in London; Seating Capacity in Bombay; Montreal: City of Cinemaniacs; Filming the Wells-Bell Boxing Match; Perlatino Projection Screen; Local Film Censors; Sunday Openings for Concerts; Safety First – Traffic Films, 1914; Length of a Screen Kiss. Cinematograph Pictures in Schools, 1910 proposal turned down, 1938; War Time Concerts, 1939-1945; 1954 Kinematograph Year Book, Admissions and Gross/Net Takings, 1936-1953; 300 more cinemas to close, 1963; Public Support for Serious Cinema Called in Question, Allen Wright; Music Not Vital at Pop Concerts held in Cinemas - Case brought by Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association to reduce the amount paid to the Performing Rights Society; First film performance in Palace of Holyroodhouse; Gracie Fields' Ave Maria 'blue-pencilled' by the BBC; Serials in the Silent Days; The House, Look Ma, I'm on TV - Cinerama Telcan.

N Saturday, January 1948 Precis of an article by “D.B.”

“Development of Cinema Industry in the City

Fifty years ago may be said to embrace the whole history of the gigantic cinema industry. About 1897 some of us had our first experience of that modern miracle, the ‘moving picture’. We remember all its crudities, but principally the quick jerky movements of men as they walked across the screen.

How did it begin in Edinburgh?

.....there are no official records, none at any rate that are easily come by. It seems pretty well established, however, that the first permanent cinema in the city was the **Operetta House**, Chambers Street, which opened in 1902. and after gradually extending seasons became a permanent house some four years later... that it was followed about a year later by the Cinema House, 100 yards away in Nicolson Streetand that the **Albert Hall** in Shandwick Place, **Pringle's Picture Palace**, Elm Row, and **St Bernard's Picture House**, St Bernard's Row, Stockbridge, were among the pioneer houses.”

My comments on “D.B.’s” on what comprised the ‘pioneer’ cinemas, are as follows:

Operetta House, Chambers Street. Opened on December 20th **1892** as a theatre, and an advertisement for moving pictures appeared in the *News* of December 31st **1900**, see pages 26 and 27 of Part 1, The South Side.

Cinema House, Nicolson Street. Opened on Monday September 11th **1911**, see page 37 of Part 1, The South Side.

Albert Hall, Shandwick Place. Opened as a place of amusement on March 13th **1882** with *The Wardroppers*. Under the title ***B.B. Pictures*** it opened on September 25th **1908**, see page 38 Part 6, Princes Street etc.

St Bernard’s Picture House, St Bernard’s Row. There was a ‘Grand Re-opening’ on April 12th **1912**, see page 48 Part 5, Morningside etc., on the same site there was the ***Palace Picture House*** which opened on Monday, April 10th **1911**, see page 47 Part 5.

I give below a few names of Houses and their Dates of Opening, so that the reader can judge for himself whether “D.B.’s” houses can properly be designated as being in the ‘pioneer class’.

1. ***Queen’s Hall***, Queen Street. *The Scotsman* Monday December **1897**.
2. ***Pavilion Theatre***, Grove Street, Hillcoat’s Cinematograph, *News*, December 15th **1902**.
3. ***Synod Hall***, Fisk Jubilee Singers and Animated Pictures., *News*, Thursday, January 2nd **1902**.
4. ***Central Hall, Methodist Church***, Tollcross. *News*, Saturday 22nd **1901**
5. ***Moss’s Empire***. *The Scotsman*, Tuesday, April 13th **1896**.
6. ***Moss’s Carnival, Waverley Market***. *The Scotsman*, Saturday, December 22nd **1894**.
7. ***Swallow’s Booth***, Iona Street Showground, **1893**. See item on **James Salvona**, Part 3, Leith.

In the following paragraphs I bring together information that is relevant to determining which cinemas in Edinburgh were the first, or among the first, with reference to certain aspects of the cinema industry.

1. The **first moving pictures to be shown** were in *Moss's Waverley Market Carnival* in the shape of "Edison's Latest and Most Wonderful Invention, the Kinetoscope" (S Saturday, 22 December 1894). It is, however, claimed that the first moving pictures, not only in Edinburgh, but in Scotland, were shown in the *Empire Palace Theatre*, Nicolson Street on Monday April 13th 1896 (S Tuesday, 14 April 1896); the *Dispatch* article of August 1946, under 'Moss' Empire Palace of Varieties', stated that Edison's Kinetoscope was used for the 'first time in Scotland' in April 1896. I record in Part 3 James Salvona's claim that when he was aged 15 he saw moving pictures in Mr Swallow's booth in the Iona Street Showground in 1893.
1. The **first cinema to be expressly built** as such was *The Haymarket*, Dalry Road, which opened on December 1912. Previously, all 'houses' showing 'movies' had been converted from theatres or halls for the purpose.
2. The **last cinema to be built** in Edinburgh was *The County* (now *The George*), Bath Street Portobello, which opened on Thursday, March 30th 1939. News, March 25th 1939.
3. The **oldest 'moving picture house'** was the *Operetta House*, Chambers Street. My father took me to the *OP* in 1898. On page 127 I give details of a 'short season of Edison's Animated Pictures' (*News* December 31st 1900). See also references to *Queen's Hall* on page 67, Part 6 Princes Street etc.
4. The **oldest building in the city still functioning as a 'play house'** is the *La Scala*, Nicolson Street, which was erected as the *New Alhambra* in 1862, see page 21 Part 1, The South Side.
5. The **first cinema to advertise 'continuous performance'** was the *Picture House, 111 Princes Street*, which advertised that "Performances will be continuous." when it opened on July 20th 1910.

6. The *Cinema House* was the **first to institute a free Cup of Tea and Biscuit**: *News*, September 11th **1911**, “Afternoon Teas served *gratis* to all Visitors between 3.30 and 5.30 p.m.”
7. The *Monseigneur* was the **first cinema to concentrate on ‘News’**. It opened on Monday December 2nd **1935** on the site of the *Princess Cinema* which opened on September 14th **1912**.
8. The **first ‘talkies’** were heard in the *Silver Kinema*, 30 Nicolson Square : *News*, Tuesday, December 23rd **1913**, “Edison’s Kinetophone Talking Pictures.” Hereabouts the late Professor Joad might well have asked “what is the definition of a Talking Picture?” My definition would be a reproduction of the human voice, whether it is by gramophone or sensitised tape. **Poole’s Synod Hall** claimed to have the first talkies in Edinburgh with the presentation of *Till the Bells Rung* in **1926**; here the sound was from a gramophone. *The News*, August 6th **1946** gave the following information about the first Talkie

“*New Picture House*, 56-57 Princes Street,
The Singing Fool, First Talking Picture with **Al Jolson**,
June 10 to Saturday July 13th **1929**”

Fred Mitchell, chief operator at the *New*, confirmed in an interview that the ‘sound’ was provided by a gramophone record. See page 46 of Part 1, *The South Side*, “How Talkies Came to Town”, in particular the article by **Colin N. Bennett**.

9. The **first cinema in Princes Street** was the *Picture House*, 111 Princes Street, which opened on July 20th **1910**. *News* Tuesday, July 19th **1910**.
10. The *Playhouse* was the **largest cinema** with 3,250 seats and the *Monseigneur* the **smallest**, with 347 seats.
11. The **first ‘Wide –Screen’** was installed in *Poole’s Roxy*. **ED** May 29th **1953**.

EN Monday, 26 October **1953**, page 5, A precis

“The One That Got Away New Cinema Planned for Leith Street

A project for a new cinema in Leith Street, Edinburgh, to replace the *St Andrew Square Cinema* which was destroyed by fire on 12th November **1952**, has received the Approval of the Edinburgh Corporation as planning authority.

The site chosen for the new cinema is at the corner of Leith Street, at Nottingham Place, which at the moment incorporates the well-known restaurant premises of Fairley and Son and the *Victoria Palais* dance hall.

This is the site which three years ago was mentioned in connection with a scheme to erect a super cinema with seating of over 3,000 and with new shops, offices and restaurants adjoining

Modified Plan

Due to complicated title-deeds for the property in the district, a Birmingham firm of architects prepared a new scheme. Instead of a cinema with seating accommodation of 3,000, a cinema with only half of that amount of accommodation has been designed. Provision is still made for garages, shops and offices in the new scheme.

Application to the Corporation for planning sanction was made on behalf of the Circuits Management Association Ltd., 5 Bainbridge Street, London, W.C.1. Ministry of Works permits will be required before any move can be made to bring the project to fruition.”

Note: Extract from Planning Register 630/53, “Erection of Cinematograph Theatre – Granted 23 September **1953**”

EN Thursday 8 December **1960**

“Redevelopment of Leith Street Area

It is proposed to demolish, among other places, the following: Land and Buildings at 1 to 7 Waterloo Place, 1a, 1 to 45 Leith Street and 2 to 14 Calton Road.

Land and Buildings at 47 to 91 Leith Street, and land and buildings to the rear of those properties up to and including 8 to 14 Calton Hill and subjects comprising Nottingham Place and Nottingham Terrace.

The scheme is expected to cost £20 million and will embrace St James' Square and area."

As at September **1963**, many houses in the St James' Square area are empty. There is great activity in the Council Chambers; huge Property Companies are ganging up – there is much Lolly at stake, £20 million and how much more.

EN Tuesday, 24 September **1963** A precis

"Cinerama Comes to Scotland but Not To Edinburgh

Cinerama comes to Scotland this week. It has been installed in a renovated cinema in Glasgow at a cost of £100,000.

'We estimate that our Cinerama Cinema will be accessible to most of Scotland's population', said Mr **Ronald A Lee**, an official of Cinerama Inc. The first Cinerama cinema in Britain opened in London in **1954**. Altogether there may be 20 Cinerama cinemas in Britain by the end of **1964**. Current estimates indicate that a potential audience of just under one million is necessary to support a Cinerama cinema.

'It might be theoretically possible to open one in Edinburgh,' said Mr Lee, 'but we have no plans to do so in the foreseeable future.'

Cinerama's home in Glasgow is the *ABC Coliseum Cinerama Theatre*, Eglinton Street, converted to seat 1,300 persons. It opens on Thursday evening (September 26th) with the £5 million feature film *How The West Was Won*. It is expected to run for a year. Block bookings by out-of-town coach parties are expected to be an important part of their custom. Said Mr Lee, 'It is now part of the film business; in five years it may be the backbone'

Glasgow Evening Times, Saturday, October 5th **1963**.

"Prices – 12s.6d.; 10s.6d.; 7s.6d.; 6s.6d.; and 5s.
Evenings at 7.45. Saturdays at 2; 5 and 8.
Matinees Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 2.30."

An extensive note on **The Sooth Side and its Many Picture Houses** is given in Part 1.

CINEMAS OPEN FOR BUSINESS IN DECEMBER 1913 AND JANUARY 1914

In the *Dispatch* article of November 7th 1952 relating to the sale of the Palace Cinema, Princes Street, it was stated that, “..nearly 20 cinemas were already in existence” when it opened in December 1913. I think it would be useful to put that statement into context by listing **all places of entertainment** that advertised in the *News*, on Thursday, January 1st 1914 **and also those cinemas that were open for business in December 1913-January 1914, but did not advertise in the News of 1st January 1914.** I have indicated for what purpose the premises are now (1963) used.

Empire Palace of Varieties, 19 Nicolson Street.

King’s Theatre, Leven Street.

Theatre Royal, Broughton Street.

Lyceum, Grindlay Street.

Waverley Market, Waverley Bridge, Lumley’s Carnival.

Olympia, Annandale Street.

Royal Choral Union, Scottish Concert, Music Hall, George Street.

Central Hall Methodist Church, Tollcross.

Tollcross Carnival on Showground, West Tollcross (where City Wash-house is now sited)

Cinemas are in the order in which they appeared in the advertising columns

Operetta House, 5 Chambers Street. Adam House built on site.

New Picture House, 56-57 Princes Street. Now Marks & Spencer.

Palladium, East Fountainbridge. Variety Theatre.

Pringle’s Picture House, Elm Row. Gateway Theatre.

Gaiety, Kirkgate, Leith. Demolished in 1963.

Tivoli, Gorgie Road. Rebuilt as New Tivoli in 1934; Still Open.

Salon Baxter’s Place. Still Open

Cinema Theatre, 189 High Street, Portobello. Premises used by Portobello Baptist Church.

Leith Picture House, Laurie Street, Leith. Woolworth’s now on the site.

Poole’s Synod Hall, Castle Terrace. Still Open, but just.

King's Cinema, Home Street. Now Cameo; Still Open
Princess Cinema, 131 Princes Street. Now Jacey's Cinema; Still Open
Palace, Foot of Walk, Leith. Still Open.
Silver Kinema, 30 Nicolson Square. Now a Furniture Store.
La Scala, 50 Nicolson Street. Still Open.
Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street. Now Salvation Army premises.
Tron Picture House, 235-241 High Street. Now Furniture Store.
Palace, 15 Princes Street. Woolworth's extended into site in 1955.
Haymarket, Dalry Road. Still Open.
Coliseum, 125 Fountainbridge. No longer operating as a cinema.
It will be seen that of the 20 cinemas listed, 8 are still operating as cinemas, which means they have been in the business for over 50 years at time of writing, November 1963.

The following 22 cinemas were open for business during December 1913 and January 1914, but did not advertise in *The News* on 1st January 1914.

Albert Hall, Shandwick Place. Now a restaurant.
Bungalow, Bath Street, Portobello. Now a furniture store.
Falconer's Pictures., Jane Street, Leith. Now a Telephone Exchange.
Imperial Electric, Kirkgate, Leith. Property demolished in early 1960's.
Lauriston, Lauriston Street. No longer shows films.
Leith Cinema, Tolbooth Wynd, Leith. Property demolished in early 1960's.
Magnet, Parliament Street, Leith. Site redeveloped for housing.
Marine Gardens, Seafield Road. Would have been closed during the 1913/14 Winter break; now occupied by S.M.T.
Morningside Photo Play House, Springvalley Gardens. No longer shows films.
Paddy's Coal Fauld, Dudley Bank, Leith. Now a supermarket.
Palladium, Raeburn Place. Site acquired by Woolworth's in 1962.
Petit Paris, Shrubhill, Leith Walk. Edinburgh Corporation premises demolished in 1962.
Picture House, 111 Princes Street. Occupied by Lotus Delta, shoe shop.
Picture Theatre, Blackfriars Street. No longer shows films.
Picturedrome (later Eastway), Easter Road. Now a supermarket.
Pringle's Picture Palace, Grove Street. Now Martin's Bakery.
Queen's Hall, Queen's Street. Now B.B.C. studios.
Royal Electric Theatre, Royal Hotel Buildings, Princes Street.
No longer shows films.
St Bernard's (now Tudor), Stockbridge. Still Open.
Star Picture House, St Mary's Street. No longer shows films.

Tollcross Cinema, Lauriston Place. Now a furniture store.
*Waverley Picture House, 6 Infirmary Street. The original 1d. 'scratcher'
or admission by a jelly jar.* No longer shows films.

Only one of the 22 is still open for business as a cinema. Probably my statistical friends may make something out of this, e.g. Does it pay to advertise?

The writer of the *Dispatch* article almost certainly based his 20 cinemas on those which advertised. It turns out that there were 42 premises open for presenting moving pictures in the period December 1913 and January 1914. True, many of them were very small, but they all had this in common: they had an admission price ere admittance could be gained to the cheapest or the dearest.

Cash is a great leveller...

I wrote the above note on November 18th 1963. That evening the B.B.C. announced the *Edinburgh Evening News* had taken over the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* and that from Tuesday November 19th 1963 the evening paper would be known as *The Edinburgh Evening News and Dispatch*.

**‘SOME POINTS OF INTEREST
IN CONNECTION WITH THE CINEMA INDUSTRY, INCLUDING
A COMPLETE LIST OF ALL PRESENT AND FORMER
EDINBURGH CINEMAS**

EXTRACTED FROM THE 1915 KINEMATOGRAPH YEAR BOOK

It has been my endeavour to bring to the notice of the reader a number of items which had the tag ‘the first’ to be used, or invented, in connection with the Cinematograph World. Without assistance we can do little by ourselves. It is with a sense of gratitude that I have extracted the following ‘firsts’ which appeared in the 1915 Year Book. Of all the Year Books I examined, that for 1915 contained more historical information than any subsequent one. This Year Book and others may be seen in the National Library for Scotland, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, where *The Scotsman, News*, etc may also be examined.

I extracted the following article entitled *Talking Pictures*, by **Colin Bennett**, from pages 33-40 of the **1915** Year Book. As so many unauthenticated statements have been made anent the advent of the **first talking pictures**, it is as well, I think, to read the voice of authority on the subject.

**“TECHNICAL PROGRESS of the YEAR
“Talking Pictures by Colin N. Bennett, F.C.S.**

Since the 1914 Year Book went to Press the public have had an opportunity of judging one more kinematograph photo synchronising device, the **Edison Kinetophone**. Referring to some words I penned last year, before I had listened to the Kinetophone in operation, I see I laid stress on the necessity for a phonograph or gramophone capable of doing better justice to the human voice than any then in common use. I am glad I said as much as when I did, for as far as the synchronisation itself goes the Edison device appears perfect. Only I do not think the sound production in itself, and judged apart from all question of synchronisation, is better than hitherto. Therefore, while fully admitting the wonderful precision in mechanical tonal reproduction of sound, however, and wheresoever this is as yet unrealised, scientific miracle shall make its appearance.

Photographed upon Kinematograph Film

Meanwhile in his own quiet way, M. **Eugene Lauste**, an elderly French experimenter and former assistant to Edison himself, has succeeded in constructing a wonderful apparatus whereby sound waves may be photographed upon a Kinematograph film in such a way that the kinematograph record is capable of being made to reproduce the original sound again, not through contact of any needle or sapphire, but by the simple action of light acting through it upon an electrically energised resistance cell. When you have seen and heard *Temptation Rag* played to you in rousing style through the means of an arc light, a kinematograph film, and a couple of telephone receivers you begin to realise something of what **Shakespeare** had in mind when he wrote:

*There are more things in Heaven and earth
Than are dreamed of in your philosophy”*

When I read that I thought I knew when ‘Talking Pictures’ were born.

Fairy Tales Accepted As Facts!

In any age a new industry is beset by too many 'historians'. In the early days the Cinema history was made too fast and there were few or none with the time, knowledge and inclination to observe with exactitude what was passing. This has resulted in a variety of misstatements being so frequently repeated that they have now almost come to be regarded as facts. And not a few professional journalists are too eager to get a 'fast buck', and who continue to 'tell the tale'. It will now be apparent why I have hit those people who were too lazy to give a little time to the subject.

THE FIRST COLOURED FILM, 1896 Page 47, paragraph 14 An article by **Will Day**.

"Amongst the visitors to *Olympia* to see the marvellous real life pictures was **Cecil Hepworth**, from whom Mr **Paul** was the purchasing hand-fed lamps to work in his projectors, and it was at this time that a contract was entered into (March 24th **1896**) for showing pictures at the London *Alhambra*. So successful did they prove, the contract eventually ran continuously for nearly four years. **Trewey** made the point of showing comic pictures at the *Empire* (London) with **Lumiere's** apparatus, whilst **R.W.Paul** showed London Street Scenes, and an extremely successful picture which had quite a record run – a sea scene showing waves breaking against a wall on the shore. In referring to the first advertisement of moving pictures in colours, the *Evening News* (London) of April 10th **1896**, states that, "Mr R.W. Paul has been able to overcome the difficulties of presenting his wonderful animated photographs in colours, and upon that occasion an Eastern dance was depicted upon the screen, in all the gorgeous colours the scene warranted.

One month to execute 40 feet of film by hand painting
This was the first public display of coloured animated pictures by Mr Paul. The film which was about 40 feet in length, was coloured by hand and the work was ably executed by the painter of the Polytechnic lantern slides, Mr **Doubell**. Although the film was of such short length, it took considerably over one month to execute the work."

Moving pictures were shown at the *Empire Palace Theatre*, Nicolson Street, on Monday, April 13th **1896**, using Lumiere Brothers' instruments.

£70 PER WEEK RENTAL CHARGE IN LONDON Page 48 Article by **Will Day** “With the advent of animated pictures at the *Olympia*, the *Empire* and *Alhambra*, it is little wonder that other music halls followed suit, and in April 1896, contracts were entered into with the *Britannia Theatre* and the *Canterbury Music Hall* to show animated pictures, the figure charged being nearly £70 per week.”

SEATING CAPACITY OF PICTURE HOUSES

In this work-a-day world (1963) we must have a standard or yard-stick by which to judge certain goods, whether cars, clothes, or houses. This also applies in modern sport: how fast, how far, how many... In the item which follows, it is size, or if you like, capacity which will be judged, taking into consideration the time or date factor; in one case prior to 1915; the other case, 1929.

The houses mentioned below may be of interest to some readers who ‘have been there’.

BOMBAY PICTURE HOUSES The *Year Book* states that the city of Bombay had the following Cinemas and seating capacity: Royal Opera House, 3,000; Excelsior Theatre, 3,000; Gaiety Theatre, 2,000; La Scala, 1,000; Parsee Theatre, 2,000; Ameroca India Theatre, 600; Imperial Cinematograph, 700; Alexandra, 600; Grant Road Royal, 600; Olympia, 700; and Coronation Cinema, 500.

While the five largest Bombay picture houses had a combined seating capacity of 11,000 in 1914/15, Edinburgh’s five largest, in 1914/15 according to the *1915 Kinematograph Year Book*, were as follows:

Cinema Theatre, Marine Gardens	2,000
Coliseum, Fountainbridge	1,800
Palace, Foot of Walk	1,650 (Seating not given in 1915 Year Book, but in the 1954 edition 1,650 was given; when it opened the News, December 1912, stated it was ‘capable of accommodating 2,000’)
Salon, 5 Baxter’s Place	1,000
New Picture House, Princes Street	<u>960</u>

8,050

No Comment!

In **1929**, the Playhouse in Edinburgh opened with a capacity of 3,048

MONTREAL: A CITY OF CINEMANIACS Pages 55 to 59

“..eight hundred thousand people a week pass through the seventy-five moving picture houses of Montreal, viewing 200,000 feet, or close on 40 miles of film.

The exact seating capacity registered at the City Hall is 57,526. Eight hundred thousand people! That represents a quarter as much again as the population of the Island of Montreal”

Note: 800,000 cash customers represented a nice handful of Lolly; Hollywood had not yet been heard of; London was the chief centre in the world for making films

FILMING A BOXING MATCH “How the Wells - Bell Fight was Taken” Page 83 “Today, in 1963, we can watch a Boxing Match, blow by blow, from virtually any part of the world, by means of Television. This is the story of how the Wells-Bell fight was filmed.

“**Barker’s Motion Photography** filmed the fight at a distance of 40 feet from the ring; twenty 4,000 Candle Power open-type **Westminster arcs** being used for lighting. They were backed up by green baize to act as a reflector and diffuser, whilst the ring side was laid out with baize for a similar reason.

The cameras were in use under the direction of Mr Smith, and between them they exposed some 4,000 feet of stock. It should be noted, however, that before the fight a large amount of time had been spent in testing the lighting and general arrangements, and for this purpose Mr Pearson indulged in 30 seconds of ‘shadow’ boxing as hard as he could go. He said afterwards he felt as though he had been doing three minutes of it. Directly the exposure had been made the stock was hurried back to Soho Square, where negatives were ready by one o’clock the following morning.

The first copy was sent out by 10 a.m., while 24 copies had been completed by night, and on the following day they supplied every customer.”

Note: Bombardier **Billy Wells** was a handsome man, in every way. He was one of the top English boxers pre-First World War. He lacked the ‘killer instinct’; as a consequence he got the nickname *The Horizontal Heavyweight*. If memory serves me right, he lasted less than half a round with **Georges Carpentier**, the French champion, in London.

He was an excellent sprinter and appeared on several occasions at the New Year Powderhall Sprint during the **1910’s**. [I believe Billy Wells was seen striking a huge gong with a hammer as a prelude to films produced by a British company – Rank?; rather like 20th Century Fox’s searchlights, RKO’s signals circling the earth, and Paramount’s mountain G.F.B.]

PROJECTION SCREENS Page 34 I know that, on occasion, clouds have been used for the purpose of a Projection Screen, but what a crick in the neck one could get watching, for example, *Gone With The Wind*; approximately 2 and a half hours’ showing.

“About the beginning of **1914** several good-sized London theatres installed **Perlantino** screens. This screen is purely German, hailing from Berlin... it is quite a good thing for halls of the long and narrow description (such as the Princess Cinema, later the Monseigneur and Jacey’s).

Briefly the **Perlantino** screen consists of a sheet of canvas coated with white flatted oil colour, upon which has been sifted a fairly liberal sprinkling of small colourless transparent glass beads. The dead white surface between the beads acts in the usual way as a plain projection screen, and the beads act as small prisms reflecting a portion of the incident light very brightly back upon itself... There is still a fairly good reflection for those who view the picture at an angle.”

I have also referred to the ‘mirrored’ screen, under the *King’s Cinema*, News, Monday January 12th **1914**; and the Plaster screen, under the *Roxburgh Picture House*, News, Tuesday, December 30th **1919**.

BED SHEET

The screen which gave me more pleasure, as a child, than any other was the Bed Sheet which was hung on a wall, and pulled tight, to eliminate the wrinkles. This was the magic lantern screen – no movies at that time.

TYPES OF SCREENS All told, I count four types of projection screens, plus the one provided by nature, namely, suitable clouds:

1. Perlantino **1915** *Kinematograph Year Book* Page 34.
2. Mirrored Screen King's Cinema, **1914**.
- 3 The Plaster Screen, Roxburgh, **1919**.
- 4 Large Wide Screen, Poole's Roxy, **1953**

No doubt there are other types of screens of which I am unaware.

We have come a long way in the history of Edinburgh Cinemas, and, believe it or not, I was here before the First Moving Picture was shown in Edinburgh. People in my age group have seen a great many firsts, too many to enumerate here. The last 'first' that I think it would be appropriate to mention is **Telstar**, which has a direct bearing on the screen, albeit the small screen.

LOCAL FILM CENSORS Page 121 "Edinburgh – A letter to the local branch of magistrates from the **British Board of Film Censors**, containing the suggestion that the magistrates should compel all licensed exhibitions to be composed entirely of films passed by that Board, was submitted to the bench. The magistrates concluded there was no necessity for taking such a step."

SUNDAY OPENINGS FOR CONCERTS Page 125 "Throughout the year 1914 a fierce battle has been waged on this question. It is pleasing to record those instances where the matter has been handled in a fair-minded manner, and the evidence clearly shows that the opening of picture theatre on Sunday is beneficial as regards conduct in the streets, as well as tending to minimise drunkenness. On the other hand, the blind obstinacy of some authorities, coupled with the feverish activities of self-righteous meddlers, has created an enormous amount of trouble for exhibitors. Surely no body of men catering for public recreation have ever been so persecuted and harassed as the picture theatre proprietors. The great mass of the public, however, is with the exhibitor, and patience, unity, and perseverance will eventually win the day."

Note: Patience was rewarded 49 years after as shown in this extract from the *News*, Friday, December 6th **1963**, "Edinburgh Town Council agreed that two cinemas, in rotation, could open on Sundays for a 6 month period" Patience? Thirteen cinemas desired to open; three did not.

SAFETY FIRST – TRAFFIC FILMS - 1914 Page 160 “Traffic – The American Safety First Society arranged for a kinematograph in a covered van to take records in congested streets in New York, with a view to showing films arousing interest in traffic problems.”

DOES ANYONE CARE ABOUT SAFETY FIRST?

Forty-nine years after the above item, I quote from *The Scotsman*, Thursday, December 26th **1963** Front page, “39 KILLED ON ROADS, CHRISTMAS EVE TOTAL ‘SHOCKING’ ”

S Friday, 27 December **1963** Front page

“BLACK CHRISTMAS ON THE ROADS - Death-toll of 94, for two days, that is between midnight Sunday and midnight Wednesday, the provisional total was 94 – EIGHT KILLED IN SCOTLAND.”

The final total in Christmas Week, **1963**, was 120 killed. Yes, we progress – in increasing numbers of Road Accidents and in numbers killed. Safety Last!

LENGTH OF A SCREEN KISS! Page 122 “Pennsylvania - The Film Censor ruled kisses must not exceed three feet.”

Writing in December **1963**, when progress is said to have speeded up to the nth degree in the last decade, in some respects I find it hard to believe – kisses not to exceed three feet. That is specific. Today, 33 or 66 feet does not seem to be long enough for the sex starved wantons who appear on the TV, or little screen. Perhaps the British Board of Film Censors had a point in **1914**.

CINEMATOGRAPH PICTURES IN SCHOOLS

At first glance the reader might well say to himself – Well, that’s a common event in schools – and – TV as well, he might add. To which I could agree **but** for the date which follows.

Of all the many hundreds of notes I have taken in connection with the history of *Edinburgh Entertainments*, the one about cinematograph pictures in schools is, I think, the most fortuitous, in this respect. Like the chappie at the organ one night, who struck a chord divine (*The Lost Chord*) I also in

another sense struck gold when I came across the following item in the Minutes of the Edinburgh School Board for **1910**, page 634, item 64.

“Cinematograph Pictures in School

Read letter, dated 19th September **1910**, from Mr **John Stewart**, 1 Shrub Place, Leith Walk, suggesting that the cinematograph provides a new and most useful, as well as interesting method of education, and offering to place his premises together with his instruments at the disposal of the Board, for any experimental exhibition they might desire to make.

The offer was declined.”

Several of the Chief Officials in the Education Offices, 12 St Giles’ Street, were flabbergasted when they read this Minute. The John Stewart of No 1 Shrub Place was the owner of the *Petit Paris Picture House*. Our forefathers, in many respects, were far-seeing, but it has been agreed that they flopped badly when they decided, “The offer was declined.”

The following article which appeared in *The Scotsman* of Tuesday, February 22nd **1938**, has relevance to the **1910** Minute.

“EDUCATIONAL FILMS SCOTTISH EFFORTS

What were described as the first fruits of the efforts of the film-production groups, formed under the auspices of the **Edinburgh branch of the Scottish Educational Film Association**, were shown in the Library of the Education Offices, St Giles’ Street, Edinburgh, yesterday afternoon, before members of the Town Council and Education Committee.

Mr **James B. Frizell**, City Education Officer, who introduced the films, explained that some of them were not yet completed, and that they were intended for use in the Corporation Schools. Notes would be supplied for the aid of teachers.

The first film shown, *The Port of Leith*, was designed to give a child a visual impression of how trade operates in a big port. *From Cloud to Tap* is the story of how Edinburgh’s daily consumption of 28 million gallons is brought to the reservoirs from the outlying country.

The introduction of natural colour added to the interest of a short film, *Peeps At Little Jean’s Farm*, designed schools. The exuberant delight of the small

scholars when they see it, will hardly exceed that of the Education Committee yesterday, who hailed graceful swans, lambs, kittens, young foals, and ‘piggies going for a walk’ with equal abandon.

The thanks of the Committee to **Mr Kirkness, Mr Rush**, and others concerned with the production of the films, was voiced by Sir **William McKechnie, K.B.E., C.B.** (an H. M. Inspector of Schools). Thirty-two schools under the management of the Corporation are now equipped with cinematograph projectors, and are using films for instructional purposes. A central library of films for school use is being built up at the Education Offices, and contains some 36 films.”

John Stewart was certainly ahead of his time. A pity his offer was declined.

[In **1938 or 1939** the Education Authority (or perhaps it was the School) asked parents to buy scented cards to help raise funds to buy a cinematograph for my Primary School, Tollcross. There was great excitement when we attended a show in the smaller of the two Halls showing: the life cycle of a butterfly, suitably speeded up; a beaver building a dam; and the Post Office’s classic film about the overnight mail train from Edinburgh to London. G.F.B.]

TALKING MOVING PICTURES

EN Tuesday, 31 December **1912** page 4 “The *Daily Telegraph* New York correspondent wires: America’s New Year gift to the world will be moving pictures which will talk, not in mechanical, automatic fashion, but with a power that moves to tears and laughter. Something of the kind has not been attempted before, but the demonstration I have seen and heard of Edison’s latest **Kiteophone** marks the difference between imperfect attempt and definite achievement. It works in harmony with moving pictures.

Within a short time it is predicted, London productions will thereby be given the mining camps of America’s West. Great Musical Comedies, it is expected, will be ‘canned’ by the machine. Mr Edison thinks it is only a question of time ere the best actors will be performing their best roles before the camera.

After four years of the hardest work Mr Edison has perfected the machine so that it is what he refers to a ‘Fool Proof’ ”

I only record the ‘facts’ as I come across them. **Truth**, we are told, is the first casualty in War; but **Truth** is murdered every day between Wars.

WAR TIME CONCERTS 1939-1945

That the Government of the day sponsored Concert Parties for the benefit of H.M.Forces, both at home and abroad, is simply a matter of history. I will show that the Cinemas in Britain never ‘had it so good’ as during the Second World War. As the Telly was brought out of cold storage – in England – slowly in the post-war years, and as the number of TV sets increased, conversely, the attendances at cinemas decreased.

It is well to record that during those dark days between September 1939 and May 1945 the Local Cinemas, up and down the country, did much to maintain the morale of the civilian population, and thus greatly contributed to beating the dastards – the Nazis.

Even as I pen these words on Sunday, August 18th **1963**, we are still officially at war with them, as no Peace Treaty has yet been signed.

ADMISSIONS AND GROSS/NET TAKINGS 1936 TO 1953 According to C.E.A. Accountants

Kinematograph Year Book 1954 Page 517

Year	Number of Admissions in millions	Gross Takings £ Millions	Net Takings £ Millions*
1936	917	38.6	33.4
1937	946	39.9	34.5
1938	987	41.5	36.0
1939	900	41.7	36.1
1940	1,027	44.9	38.2
1941	1,309	65.0	52.2
1942	1,494	87.2	64.0
1943	1,541	103.5	68.8
1944	1,575	111.8	72.1
1945	1,585	114.2	73.4
1946	1,635	118.3	75.9

1947	1,462	105.4	67.7
1948	1,514	108.8	70.0
1949	1,430	103.3	66.8
1950	1,396	105.2	68.0
1951	1,365	108.3	68.9
1952	1,352	109.6	71.9
1953	1,295	108.6	71.1
1961	472) see Daily Herald extract of March 1 st 1963, below		
1962	414)	

- After deduction of Entertainment Tax but before all other payments

VISITS TO KINEMA

Average visits to the kinema per head of the population in **1933** was 20, rising to 34 in in the year **1946**.

AVERAGE PRICE OF ADMISSION Rough estimates say that the attendances were 903 million in **1933**, and that the average price of admission was 10.3 d.

SEAT PRICES Most popular seat prices in the first quarter of **1951** were 1s.3d and 1s.10d., being 19 per cent. and 27.15 per cent. of total admissions respectively. Average price paid in **1952** was 1s.8d.”

Daily Herald, Friday, March 1st **1963**

“**300 MORE CINEMAS TO SHUT**”

Fewer people are going to the cinema. Attendances were down 12 per cent. last year, the Board Of Trade reported yesterday.

It is forecast that 300 more cinemas will close by the end of **1963**, bringing the total over the past three years to more than 1,000.

Last night Mr **Ellis Pinkney**, General Secretary of the Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association, blamed the slump on the changing habits of the public and the death of the star system, bringing a decline in American film production.

Total admission figures for **1962** are estimated at 414 millions, compared with 472 million for **1961**”

WHAT ‘THEY’ ARE SAYING IN DECEMBER 1963

S Monday, 9 December **1963**

“PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR SERIOUS CINEMA CALLED IN QUESTION By ALLEN WRIGHT

‘Thanks to Wardour Street, British cinema-goers are about as debauched with trivia as any I have found anywhere in the world’. **Peter Baker**, editor of *Films and Filming*.

There is a tendency to exaggerate the amount of support that exists for serious theatre and cinemas.’ **J.K.S. Poole** (Synod Hall), past chairman, Scottish Exhibitors’ Association.

These two comments seem to sum up the conflict of opinion between critics and cinema owners, which has been such a monotonous accompaniment to the succession of crises that has dogged the film industry. Writing in the new edition of *Film Review* Baker says, ‘If book publishers were to behave like British cinema owners, there would be nothing to read except **Mickey Spilane** and **Hank Janson**.’

Mr Poole presented the exhibitors’ case in a letter rejecting my suggestion that films like *The Caretaker* demonstrated the need for a third circuit, independent of the Rank and A.B.C chains. Pointing out that *The Caretaker* had a smaller-than-average audiences at the **Cameo**, Edinburgh, he writes, ‘The query arises as to whether, in these troublesome days, there are too many people studying the art of the cinema as distinct from the art of entertainment.’

SAD COMMENTARY

Mr Poole adds that the stage is approaching when ‘serious’ films like *The Caretaker* or Antonioni’s *L’eclipse* can only be shown provided they are offset by the showing of films that have more general appeal with their box-office value acting as a form of subsidy.

This seems a reasonable suggestion, until you pause to reflect that out of the hundreds of cinemas in Scotland, only two cater for minority tastes.

CARNIVAL STATUS

At this rate, the specialised cinemas will not be worthy of the name – if they continue to use films of obvious box-office value to bolster up a few works of distinction and originality, then it is a sad commentary on the discrimination of film-goers – showing the same films that can be seen in dozens of other larger cinemas.

If the *Cosmo*, owned by Mr **George Singleton**, Glasgow, and the *Cameo*, owned by Mr Poole, do not encourage experiment, then there is no one else who will take the risks and the cinema will revert to its original status as a form of amusement, no more stimulating or intelligent than a carnival.

But I am told that the specialised cinemas are feeling the effects of the depression in the film trade less severely than the general cinemas.

Some exhibitors feel that the future of the cinema lies in specialisation – whether the ‘circus’ type of entertainment like **Cinerama**, repertory like the *Classic, Glasgow*, or Continental and ‘art’ films like the *Cosmo and Cameo*.

Mr George Singleton, has demonstrated his confidence in the future of specialised cinemas by establishing a new ‘art’ cinema in Aberdeen, *Cosmo 2*, which is to open next month (January **1964**). A very small cinema, it is attached to a ballroom which may act as a form of subsidy. This seems a better policy than diluting the quality of the programme.”

To which I may add *Quo Vadis?* Is this article a warning of further cinemas about to close down in the next year or two?

It seems that an ‘under-ground’ battle is going on in the cinema industry to **force** a particular type of programme on the public; on the other hand, it would further appear the public are **not** falling for it and it may very well be that the cinema industry will fall between the two stools.

That, therefore, is what No.1 had to say; what follows is given over to what No. 2 crowd have to say.

END Monday, 9 December 1963

“MUSIC NOT VITAL AT ‘POP’ CONCERT

Screaming teenagers made so much noise at popular ‘beat’ or ‘pop’ concerts at cinemas that the music was scarcely audible and certainly not vital to the programme, Mr **Duncan Rankine**, for the Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association and other interested parties, told the **Performing Rights Tribunal** in London today.

The Association and Harold Fielding Ltd., Harold Davidson Ltd., impresario **Vic Lewis** and artist manager **Larry Parnes**, were contesting the rate of payment being sought by the Society for the use of ‘pop’ music at Concerts. They are claiming that four per cent. of box office takings is not justified.

Mr Rankine said that he would like to take the members’ tribunal, if they agreed, to a performance of **The Beatles** so that they could hear just what went on.

‘BEAT’ MUSIC

The chairman, Mr **W.Raeburn**, Q.C., smiled when he said, “We are not expected to scream or dance?” Mr Rankine replied, “Although the concert cannot be given unless there is music available, the music is by itself of no audience drawing power at these concerts.” He added that the 4 per cent. tariff as ‘oppressive and unreasonable’ and ‘grossly excessive’. He said that two thirds of the concerts held in cinemas were of ‘beat’ or popular music. ‘Beat, music, he said, was an entirely modern phenomenon dating from **1956**. Possibly it was a misuse to call such concerts by that name. It would probably be more accurate to call them ‘musical entertainments’.

NO MELODY

‘The music which is played has in fact little or no melody. To some extent the performers play the fool on the stage, grimacing and dancing, and they are often dressed in an unusual and outlandish way’. He added, ‘ The performers enjoy quite fantastic popularity among the young people in Britain. Their popularity is such that very often they have to go to and leave the Cinemas under police protection or in secret.

Instead of sitting quietly and attentive as they would when they listened to a symphony by Beethoven or a serious performance the audience kept up a very “loud and hysterical screaming.”

The rest of the article is taken up with the Economics, as is usual when Vultures gather round the body. I have included this article in the history, firstly because it deals with **entertainment** and, secondly, because the entertainment is conducted in **cinemas**.

By way of comment I may add – Yeah! – Yeah! – Yeah!

I do, however, have a good word for the Young People and their Screaming in this history – Yeah, I do.

‘SPACH A’ NEWS

To write the full title of the merged evening papers, *Edinburgh Evening News and Dispatch*, every time, at this kind of work, could use up a lot of valuable time and space. [I agree with my father’s observation and soon after starting to key up the History, I shortened the titles to *News and Dispatch* G.F.B.]

A year or two before the First World War a newsvendor stood against **Craik**’s tobacco shop at No. 1 Leith Street, in a convenient niche. He never seemed to be without an overcoat – all the year round. He had a pale face and affected what is termed in the 1960’s a **Weirdie** beard. He stood about 6 feet and had an even temperament. He never seemed to speak to his neighbours. Across the road from ‘beardie’, at the wall of Register House stood **Blind Boab**, who sold boxes of matches; his plaintiff cry was, “Match a Boxes”

It was ‘beardie’ whom I first heard calling evening news papers thus, “Spach A’ News”, omitting to sound the ‘d’ - ‘Spach A’ News was long enough for him. In closing I would add that I miss the *Dispatch*.

FIRST IN HISTORIC HOLYROOD

The Royal Palace story which follows, is extracted from the Poole’s Brochure, *100 years of Showmanship, Poole’s, 1837-1937*, page 13.

“The occasion, **1935**, Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Kent were in residence at Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh. John R. Poole was entrusted with the presentation of Sound Pictures to Their Royal Highnesses.

By arrangement with **Radio Corporation of America** a sound set was installed in the picture gallery. With the Royal ancestors looking down upon them, *Royal Cavalcade*, *The King! God Bless Him*, *Mickey Mouse*, *British Movietonews*, *Roberta*, *Gold-Diggers of 1935*, and other subjects were screened for the Royal party.

One wonders what the spirits of Mary, Queen of Scots, Darnley, Bothwell and Rizzio thought as they witnessed this unique entertainment.

I came across the following item when browsing among my notes; although not applicable to Edinburgh, it could have...

EN Tuesday, 21 December 1937

“GRACIE’S ACT ‘BLUE-PENCILLED’ BY B.B.C.

AVE MARIA BAN AT CINEMA OPENING

Gracie Fields (says the *News Chronicle*) who sang, at the opening of the *Kilburn State Cinema, in London*, accompanied by **Sidney Torch** at the organ, was told very politely by **John Watt**, Variety Director, at the B.B.C., he would be unable to broadcast that part of the programme, because the B.B.C. would not allow religious songs in a music hall show.

A cinema organ accompaniment might aggravate the offence, said Mr Watt”

Comment: Instead of saying that “he would be unable”. he could simply have said that he would not allow the aria to be sung, or ‘Put a beggar on horse-back and he will ride to hell.’

Was it coincidental that I penned this item about Gracie Fields on Christmas Night 1963, when the B.B.C. T.V., at 8.50 p.m., broadcast **Kenneth McKellar**, the Scottish tenor, singing *Ave Maria*. Old Aunty B.B.C., in the interval from 1937, has mellowed, or perhaps John Watt has seen the error of his Puritanical upbringing. In any case we have come a long way since 1937.

SERIALS IN THE ‘SILENT DAYS’

In the early days of the Silent Films serials were a must in the vast majority of picture houses.

True, the films were silent – but that is about all that was silent during the showing of the serial. The children who lived from episode to episode did so in a welter of fear, apprehension, worry or dread; this came about as most episodes ended with the hero or heroine, or both, being left in a state of peril. The fate of their heroes was something real to children – I know, as my children asked me – Would the ‘baddies’ be captured next week? Or would the Hero be saved from falling off the cliff? I assured the children, in every case, that the hero or heroine would be saved next week and that the bad men would go to jail, and, of course, that is how it ultimately turned out, as all ‘Once upon a time stories’ end.

Two exciting serials I remember very well were *The Clutching Hand* and *The Exploits of Elaine*. **Pearl White** was the ruling Queen of the serials – she reigned supreme. Meanwhile the lone pianist had to adapt her tempo to suit the fast moving events on the screen. Along with my wife and children I enjoyed the weekly episode of the current serial. [In **1940** I watched a sound version of the *Clutching Hand* serial in the *Coliseum* G.F.B.]

FROM PENNY BOOTH TO PENNY SCRATCHER, THENCE TO ROYAL PALACE

Thank goodness the common people and Royalty have this in common – all can laugh their heads off at the antics of **Charlie Chaplin**. Does it really matter where a film is shown?

Writing in Christmas week 1963, I am glad to remember the Old Story of how Christ was born in a manger and, fortunately, not one of us could choose his first bed – nor his last.. How often have we heard or said, “I wouldn’t be found dead there.”

Had the tycoons of the Moving Picture Industry decreed top prices for all cinemas, I am afraid many, many thousands would never have seen moving pictures; or should I write millions, ad lib.

Did the tycoons evolve the saying, “A picture house to view our films- to each according to his ability to pay? (With apologies to **Karl Marx’s** “From each according to his abilities; to each according to his needs”)

“THE HOUSE, LOOK, MA, I’M ON TV”

Extract from *Time*, the weekly News Magazine, December 20th 1963, Page 40

“It will now be possible to record any program to keep for ever. The **Cinerama Telcan** does the trick. It is a video-tape recorder no bigger than a bread-box. Wired into a home TV set, it can record programs off the air as they are being watched. Then with a flick of the switch, Telcan can play them back immediately, or at any future time as desired... The neatest part of the trick is the price: under \$300 (approximately £100)... With the addition of a tiny TV camera (about \$150, equal to about £50), Telcan can turn the living room into a studio so that shots of the family, and pets, can be immortalised on the family TV set, like Polaroid movies...

Telcan is as simple to operate as any other tape recorder, uses standard one-fourth-inch triple-play recording on oversize reels... Telcan records half track so that 44 minutes of programming can be recorded on a single reel. Telcan can record TV programs when no-body is home - by means of a timing device. In fact, the day may come when plays, concerts, or operas are video-taped by professional companies and sold to the home market the way gramophone records are.

Is this the ultimate in the Moving Picture world?”

I have tried to take the reader through every facet of the industry. I have had as much pleasure in compiling these notes, as I had in watching the Silent Pictures in the old *Op*, before the dawn of the 20th Century.

It is Hogmany 1963 and whether you are looking at your own Telcan or kicking an old tin can in the year 2000, I wish you luck in whatever viewing may be the vogue at that time.

GEORGE BAIRD

[Thank you Dad for your efforts and kind thoughts; in June 2000 I am watching **Ondigital** through my TV set G.F.B.]

EDINBURGH PICTURE HOUSES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Newspaper advertisements main source for establishing when cinemas opened; impossible task to identify when some cinemas closed; Thanks from Management of Cinema House when it closed in 1930; Alpha and Omega – Swallow’s Penny Booth, 1893, to Jacey’s News Theatre, 1964; The Lot As Far As I Know – an Alphabetical List of the 120 cinemas identified, showing those still open in January 1964, and the booklet - Parts 1 to 6 - in which the story about each of them is to be found.

On the B.B.C. 1 o’clock News on October 4th **1956** I heard the following sentence which made a deep impression on me: “The mere cutting out of an item from a report, or the omission of an Historical Incident, is no proof that the statement had never been uttered or that a certain incident had not taken place.” The relevance which the statement has to my efforts to trace the various places of entertainment within Edinburgh is that I am humble enough to realise that I did not find them all. I was able to trace the **vast** majority of the Picture Houses through advertisements in Newspapers; those not so treated will have their origin and source mentioned. Where a picture house has been given two names, like the **Blue Halls**, opened on January 1st **1930** and the **Beverley**, opened April 26th **1954**, I have treated them as separate picture houses, in the main to suit the various age groups who would have known the house by a particular name.

Final Close Down of Cinemas!

Should a Cinema have been advertised in the Press regarding its Opening Date, that will be duly noted as a matter of routine. On the other hand, it is an almost impossible task to even guess at the month or year when many picture houses closed down.

For example, when did the Blue Halls change to the Beverley? And, this question applies to a number of houses in Edinburgh. Sometimes it was a fairly simple task to find an answer. But when did a cinema finally close down, is, as stated above, ‘an almost impossible task.’

When closing dates are known they have been recorded and that is as far as I can commit myself to this aspect of the story or history on Cinemas in particular.

Thanks From The Management

On the last day of the *Cinema House*, 18 Nicolson Street, on Saturday May 24th 1930, the manager, Mr C. Drysdale, took the trouble to thank his patrons for their support. I will show the advertisement in full, later. This was the only public form of thanks that I came across during my long research.

ALPHA AND OMEGA

From *Swallow's Id. Booth*, the first at Iona Street Show Ground in 1893, to *Jacey's News Theatre*, 131 Princes Street, the latest cinema to open in January 1964, I have endeavoured to name every known Edinburgh house during the intervening 70 years, **all** of which operated during my life time.

In the following list I have indicated the cinemas which are still open as at January 20th 1964 – the wonder is that that there are 20 in this category. The ‘stories’ about the cinemas are given in Parts 1 to 6; the relevant Part is given against each entry.

The *Lyceum Theatre*, Grindlay Street, showed moving pictures for about three weeks in 1912 but, so far as I could determine, it has not shown any films on a commercial basis since then; I have therefore ruled it out of the reckoning. Likewise the *King's Theatre* is ruled out, although fitted up to show moving pictures. The Empire, Lyceum and King's Theatres, as well as the Waverley Market, were all listed in the 1915 *Kinematograph Year Book*.

THE LOT AS FAR AS I KNOW

Name and address of cinema	Date of opening; 'Yes' indicates it was still open as at 24 January 1964
Abbey Picture House, North Richmond Street. Part 1.	6 August 1921
Albert Hall, 22 Shandwick Place. Part 6. Site occupied by B.& B., Bright and Beautiful, Tindle's Pictures, West End Cinema.	
Alhambra, Leith Walk. Part 3.	28 December 1914
Allison, Laurie Street. Part 3. Also known as Leith and Laurie Street Picture Houses	1944, News Advice
Astoria, Manse Road. Part 5.	1 January 1930 Yes
Atmospheric Theatre, Elm Row. Part 3.	6 January 1930
B. & B, Bright and Beautiful, Part 6: Albert Hall	28 September 1908
Beverley, Lauriston Street, formerly the Blue Halls. Part 2.	26 April 1954
Blue Halls, Lauriston Street, later the Beverley Part 2.	1 January 1930
Bungalow, Bath Street. Part 4. also known as the Electric Theatre and Victory	1912/13 Street Directory
Cadona's Pictures and Varieties, Parliament Street. Pt 3. Magnet built on site.	7 September 1912
Caley, Lothian Road. Part 2.	1 January 1923 Yes
Cameo, 38 Home Street, form'ly the King's Cinema. Pt 2.	7 Mar. 1949 Yes
Capitol, Manderson Street Part 3.	10 September 1928
Carlton, Piersfield Terrace. Part 5.	23 December 1935
Central Hall Methodist Mission. Part 2.	21 September 1901
Central Kinema, Hope Street Part 3.	2 December 1920
Central Picture House, 281 High Street, Portobello Also known as George. Part 4.	22 March 1915
Cine Playhouse, 12 Springvalley Gardens. Part 5. See entries for Morningside Halls and 12 Springvalley Gardens	1920/21 Street Directory
Cinema House, 18 Nicolson Street. Part 1.	11 September 1911
Cinema House, Tolbooth Wynd. Part 3.	14 April 1913
Cinema Theatre, 189 High Street Portobello. Part 4. Also known as Portobello Theatre and Cinema and Star Hall.	7 March 1913
Coliseum, 125 Fountainbridge. Part 2.	14 December 1911
Cooke's Circus Picture Palace, East Fountainbridge Pt 2. Subsequently the Palladium Picture House.	2 April 1908

County, Bath Street, later known as the George. **Part 4.** 30 March 1939

County, Wauchope Avenue, formerly the Rio. **Part 5.** 29 August 1950

Dean, 28 Dean Street, formerly the Pavilion. **Part 5.** 12 May 1930

Dominion, Newbattle Terrace. **Part 5.** 31 January 1938 Yes

Eastway, 14 Easter Road, formerly the Picturedrome. **Part 5.** 17 May 1943

Electric Theatre, Bath Street. **Part 4.** 11 August 1913

Also known as the Bungalow and Victory
Elm Row, 41 **Part 3.**

Site occupied by Pringle's New Picture Palace,
Atmospheric Theatre and Gateway Theatre; plus some theatres.

Embassy, Boswall Parkway. **Part 5.** 2 August 1937 Yes

Empire Palace of Varieties. **Part 1.** 13 April 1896

Empire Picture House, Henderson Street. **Part 3.** 31 December 1917

Evan's Picture House, 12 Springvalley Gardens. **Part 5.** 19 December 1914

See entry for 12 Springvalley Gardens,
Falconer's Picture House, Jane Street. **Part 3.** 1899

Gaiety, New Kirkgate. **Part 3.** 6 January 1900

Gateway, 41 Elm Row. **Part 3.** 21 October 1946

Also known as Pringle's New Picture Palace and the Atmospheric

Gaumont, Canning Street, formerly the Rutland. **Part 2.** 6 March 1950

George, Bath Street, formerly County. **Part 4.** 22 Nov. 1954 Yes

George, 281 High Street Portobello, formerly the Central. **Pt 4.** 12 Nov 1942

Grand Picture House, St Stephen Street. **Part 5.** 31 December 1920

Grove Street, **Part 2** Site occupied by the Pavilion,
Pringle's Picture Palace plus some Variety Theatres.

Haymarket Picture House, subsequently the Scotia. **Part 5.** 13 Dec. 1912

Imperial, 123 Kirkgate **See Part 3.** 22 April 1911

Jacey's News Theatre, 131 Princes Street. **Part 6.** 20 January 1964 Yes

Formerly Princess Cinema and Monseigneur.

King's Cinema, Home Street, later the Cameo. **Part 2.** 8 January 1914

La Scala, 50 Nicolson Street. **Part 1.** 31 December 1912 Yes

Laurie Picture House, Laurie Street. **Part 3.** 1931, News Advice.

Also known as Leith Picture House and the Allison.

Laurie Street Picture House. **Part 3.**

Site occupied by Leith Picture House, Laurie Picture House and Allison
Cinema

Lauriston Hall, Lauriston Street. **Part 2.** 23 December 1912

Leith Cinema, Tolbooth Wynd. **Part 3.** 14 April 1913

See under Cinema House.

Leith Gaiety, Kirkgate, Sunday Concerts. **Part 3.** 5 April 1912

Leith Picture House, Laurie Street. **Part 3.** 27 November 1911
 Also known as Laurie Picture House and the Allison.

Lyceum Picture House, Slateford Road. **Part 5.** 8 November 1926

Lyric, 30 Nicolson Square, formerly the Silver Kinema. **Part 1.** 15 Aug. 1914

Magnet, Parliament St. formerly Cadona's Pictures etc. **Pt 3.** 14 Nov. 1913.

Marine Cinema Theatre, Seafield Road. **Part 4.** 16 May 1913

Modern Marvel, see Queen Street Hall, **Part 6.**

Monseigneur News Theatre, 131 Princes Street. **Part 6.** 2 December 1935
 Formerly, Princess Theatre; subsequently Jacey's News Theatre.

Morningside Cinema, 12 Springvalley Gardens. **Pt 5.** 27 December 1915
 See entry for 12 Springvalley Gardens

Morningside Picture House, 12 Springvalley Gdns. **Pt 5** 23 December 1912

Morningside Photo Play House, 12 Springvalley Gdns **Pt 5** 1915 Kine. Yr Bk.

Moss's Carnival, Waverley Market. **See page 55.** 22 December 1894

Music Hall, George Street. **Part 6.** 31 December 1900

New Electric Theatre, Shrubhill, subsequently the Petit Paris. **Part 3.**
 1 January 1909

New Palace Cinema, 20 High Street. **Part 1.** 15 October 1929

New Picture House, 56-57 Princes Street. **Part 6.** 21 October 1913

New Tivoli, Gorgie Road, formerly the Tivoli. **Pt 5.** 1 January 1934 Yes

New Victoria, 7 Clerk Street. **Part 1.** 25 August 1930 Yes

Oddfellows' Hall, Forrest Road. **Part 1.** 1 January 1903

Old Church, West Port. **Part 2.** 31 December 1901

Olympia Palace, Annandale Street. **See page 55** 5 February 1912

Operetta House, 5 Chambers Street. **Part 1.** 31 December 1900

Paddy's Coal Fauld, Dudley Bank, Paddy Faulkener's Picture House. 1908
Part 3.

Palace Picture House, 15 Princes Street. **Part 6.** 24 December 1913

Palace Picture House, St Bernard's Row. **Part 5** 10 April 1911
 Also known as St Bernard's Picture Palace, Savoy and Tudor

Palace, Foot of the Walk. **Part 3.** 1 January 1913 Yes

Palladium Picture House, Raeburn Place. **Part 5.** 1915 Kine. Year Book

Palladium Pictures, East Fountainbridge. **Part 2.** 18 November 1912

Pavilion, Dean Street. **Part 5.** 1912

Pavilion, Dean Street. **Part 5.** 27 March 1917

Pavilion Theatre, Grove Street. **Part 2.** 15 December 1902

People's Picture House, 19 Blackfriars Street. **Pt 1.** 1913 Street Dir.

Petit Paris, Shrubhill, formerly New Electric Theatre. **Part 3.** 31 Dec. 1909

Picturedrome, 14 Easter Road, later the Eastway. **Part 5.** 2 September 1912

Picture House, The, 111 Princes Street. **Part 6.** 20 July 1910

Picture Theatre, Harbour Green, Portobello. **Part 4.** 1915 Kine. Year Book
Playhouse, 18 Greenside Place. **Part 6.** 12 August 1929 Yes
Poole's Roxy, Gorgie Road. **Part 5.** 20 December 1937
Poole's Synod Hall. **Part 2.** December 1906 Yes
Portobello Theatre and Cinema, 189 High Street. **Pt 4.** 31 December 1900
Princess Cinema, 131 Princes Street. **Part 6.** 14 September 1912
Subsequently the Monseigneur and Jacey's News Theatres
Pringle's Picture Palace, 41 Elm Row. **Part 3.** 2 January 1911
Pringle's Picture Palace, Grove Street. **Part 2** 16 October 1908
Pringle's, Synod Hall, Castle Terrace. **Part 2.** 3 October 1907
Queen's Hall, Queen Street, Modern Marvel. **Part 6.** 27 December 1897
Regal, Lothian Road. **Part 2.** 10 October 1938 Yes
Regent, 12 Abbey Mount. **Part 5.** 1 August 1927 Yes
Rio Picture House, Wauchope Ave. later the County **Part 5.** 6 February 1936
Ritz, Rodney Street. **Part 5.** 10 September 1929
Yes
Ritz Kinema, 12 Springvalley Gardens. **Part 5.** 8 October 1913
Roxburgh, Drummond Street. **Part 1.** 1 January 1920
Royal Cinema, 241 High Street, formerly the Tron. **Pt1.** 27 December 1928
Royal Electric Theatre, Royal Hotel Buildings, Princes St. **Part 6.**
1915 Kine. Year Book.
Rutland, Canning Street, later the Gaumont. **Part 2.** 28 April 1930
St Andrew Square, Clyde Street. **Part 6.** 1 January 1923
St Bernard's Picture Palace, St Bernard's Row. **Part 5.** 15 April 1912
St Bernard's Row **Part 5.** Site occupied by Palace
Picture House, St Bernard's Picture Palace, Savoy, Tudor
Salisbury Picture House, South Clerk Street. **Part 1.** 17 December 1925
Salon, 5 Baxter's Place. **Part 6.** 16 October 1913 Yes
Savoy Picture House, St Bernard's Row **Part 5.** 28 March 1921
Also known as Palace Pic.House, St Bernard's Pic. Palace and the Tudor
Scotia, 90 Dalry Road, formerly the Haymarket. **Part 5.** 1 Sept. 1949 Yes
Silver Kinema, 30 Nicolson Square, subsequently the Lyric. **Pt 1.** 15 Sep 1913
Springvalley Cinema, 12 Springvalley Gardens. **Part 5.** 1 January 1931
Springvalley Gardens, 12. **Part 5**
Site occupied by Morningside Picture House; Ritz Kinema;
Morningside Photo Playhouse; Evan's Picture House; Morningside
Cinema; Cine Playhouse; and Springvalley Cinema
Star Hall, 189 High Street Portobello. **Part 4.** 1920 Street Directory
Star Cinema, 189 High Street, Portobello. **Part 4.** 1910
Star Picture House, St Mary's Street. **Part 1.** 1914/1915 Street Directory

State, Great Junction Street. Part 3.	19 December 1938	Yes
Swallow's Booth, Iona Street Show Ground. Part 3.	1893	
Tindle's Pictures, 22 Shandwick Place. Part 6.	7 February 1910	
Tivoli Picture House, Gorgie Road, later the New Tivoli. Pt 5.	2 Sep. 1913	
Tollcross Cinema, 140 Lauriston Place. Part 2.	31 December 1912	
Tower Pavilion, Tower Street. Part 4.	23 July 1907	
Tower Picture Palace, Tower Street. Part 4.	9 August 1910	
Tron Picture House, 24I High Street, later the Royal Pt 1.	17 April 1913	
Tudor Picture House, St Bernard's Row. Part 5.	25 July 1960	Yes
Also known as Palace Picture House, St Bernard's Picture Palace and Savoy.		
Tynecastle Parish Church, Gorgie Entertainments. Part 5.	2 January 1905	
Victory, Bath Street, formerly Bungalow Cinema. Pt 4	12 November 1942	
Waverley Picture House, 6 Infirmary Street Pt 1.	1915 Kin. Year Book	
Waverley Market Concerts Part 6.	3 December 1904	
Wesley Hall, Hamilton Place. Part 5.	21 October 1911	
West End Cinema, 22 Shandwick Place. Part 6.	17 December 1915	

SOME OF THE MUMMERS WHO PLAYED AT THE EDINBURGH EMPIRE

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

At one time or another during my life the undermentioned 'played' the *Empire* *In toto*, they gave untold pleasure – literally to many millions in its 69 years as a Music Hall. **1892 - 1961**

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

The Show Must Go On

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

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

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

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

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

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

Both the War and the Show carried on.

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

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

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

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

Booed Off

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

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

Charles Chaplin Having given the subject some thought regarding who, in my opinion, should come first, my choice fell on the little man with the bowler hat, the cane, the quarter-to-three feet and the wee tash – yes, Charlie Chaplin, born on 16th April **1889** and still with us as I write in the Spring of 1963. I saw Charlie Chaplin in **Fred Karno**’s *HummingBirds* a year or two before the 1914 War. Chaplin never looked back. During April 1914 he joined the *Keystone Film Company*. The stage saw little of Chaplin from that date onwards. He became the the world’s most loved comedian – and could be understood in any country.

Lottie Collins She made her debut in the Empire in 1900; I first saw her in the second half of the 1900’s. She and her theme song *Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ayill* long be remembered. Lottie was the mother of one of the most beautiful women in the world – **Jose Collins**, who was the number one

among *Principal Boys*. I frequently saw Jose at the old Theatre Royal, Broughton Street.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Albert Wheelan I remember when Albert Wheelan made his debut in the Empire. He was, I think, the finest dressed man on the stage – apart from

Vesta Tilley. On his entry from the wings he whistled *The Jolly Beggar's Waltz* while he divested himself of his evening cloak, tile hat, and white gloves; lastly he placed his cane, just so, on top of his clothing. His song about *Daniel in the Lion's Den* always provoked a round of applause. He had another song about the *Bear and the Tree* which ended thus: "Oh Lord, if you can't help me, for goodness sake don't help that bear."

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

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

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

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

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

For over 40 years Gracie brought untold joy to many lonely hearts, especially in the 1920's and 1930's to the home-bound, whose only means of hearing her was on the old Steam Radio. Like many who made good in

the profession she had a humble beginning. As a mill girl she gave impromptu concerts to her work mates and soon “Our Gracie” had arrived.

Two of her most famous songs will go down the line as long as songs are sung: *I took my Harp to a Party* and *The Biggest Aspidestra in the World*. I believe she last appeared in a concert in Edinburgh on Wednesday November **1949**. As a write in the Spring of **1963** Gracie is enjoying a well earned retirement in Capri. At least we have her records.

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

For many years his ‘song’ was that popular ditty *Twelve and a Tanner a Bottle*. Alas, that was many years ago as the 1963 price tag of £2.2s.6d. will indicate. In my boyhood days the *cratur* only cost 2s.6. a ‘boattle’. Does Time March On? Or is it just the price? In any case, it’s an awfu’ loat to spend on a drappie o’ medicine. [My father was a life-long teetotaller G.F.B.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Harry Gordon The Man from Inversnecky I first saw Harry Gordon at the *Beach Pavilion, Aberdeen*. I frequently saw him in Edinburgh, not, perhaps, at the Empire. Like Will Fyffe, he was a character actor. He and Dave Willis were partners at the *King's Theatre*, Edinburgh, *Half-Past-Eight Show* for several seasons.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the course of my life I have come across a certain type of individual who delighted 'to hand it out', on any occasion, in the office or workshop. He tried to act 'big'; at heart he was a coward and a bully; in short, he *is* the type who would, without any compunction, 'push his granny off the bus'. I

have seen this type reduced to utter impotency, a fish out of water, or a cornered rat, by a simple action. For example, the chairman at a social gathering has asked Mr C. to 'say a few words...' On rising to his feet, C became rooted to the floor, his face blanched, helpless; the 'life and soul of the party' a moment ago, the Smart Alex who always had a cutting or caustic remark on the tip of his tongue, was unable to say a word. You may have met him. You may, then, have some consideration for a 'first time artiste', trying to earn a living the hard way. The person who coined the phrase "Don't shoot the pianist, he's doing his best", certainly had a point; or, should I say in **1963**, "he was with it".

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

It was not an isolated incident when both H.E.Moss and John Henry Cooke went to the assistance of Sam Hague on Tuesday September 13 **1887**. Members of the entertainment profession are always in demand to open bazaars, giving their time and services, all too often free of charge, for some charitable object. Intolerance is as old as civilisation but it is an evil that is acquired since no man was born with it. In the words of the ageing song *Thanks for the Memory*.

EDINBURGH PANTOMIMES

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

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

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

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

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

The **Tivoli**, Stockbridge, opened in November 1901, but re-opened as the **Grand** on Saturday, December 10th 1904, with the pantomime *Cinderella*, starring Miss **May Martin**, Miss **Millie Engler**, Miss **Fanny Wright** and

Miss **Vera Schlesinger**, along with Mr **George Taverner**. Miss Wright was a regular visitor to my home and invited my mother, sisters and myself to a performance.

The persons who delight in spreading stories to children of tender years, in the 1960's, "There is no Santa Claus, that Pantomimes are a lot of hooey and just bunk, etc. should be classified as virtual criminals with intent to corrupt the morals of children. In support of this statement, Vital Statistics show that there is an ever growing tendency for 13 year old girls to have children. For such children there can be no happy memories 20, 30, or 40 years hence.

The 1914-1918 War

It is on record that the following pantomimes were produced during the **1914-1915** Season: *Cinderella* at the **Royal** and *Jack and the Beanstock* at the **King's**.

In the 1915-1916 Season three pantomimes were produced: *Little Boy Blue* at the **Royal**; *Dick Whittington* at the **King's** and *Mother Goose* at the **Gaiety**, Leith.

Soon after the Armistice on November 11th 1918, King Pantomime was again in full cry with: *Puss in Boots* at the **King's**; *The House that Jack Built* at the **Royal** and *Aladdin* at the **Alhambra**, Leith Walk

The 1939-1945 War

The Show Must Go On and Did Go On

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

For the Home Coming of the Warriors in **1945**, four pantomimes were produced: *Sleeping Beauty* at the **Palladium**; *Jack and the Beanstock* at the **Gaiety**; *Mother Goose* at the **King's** and *Babes in the Wood* at the **Royal**.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Space Age

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

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

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

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

Has *Mother Goose* laid her last egg?

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

Will *Humpty Dumpty* become a Spaceman?

0

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

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

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

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

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

TRAVERSE THEATRE CLUB

JAMES COURT, LAWNMARKET

OPENED JANUARY 2nd 1963

It will never become a full-blown theatre; the space is so restricted that there is no room for expansion. It is well to record it, so that its future progress may be kept under review.

The above may be termed Omega? as I know not of any other such theatres which are, or may have existed, in Edinburgh.

A special feature, however, will be made of Leith Theatres of which there were quite a number in the days that have gone. Alas, as I write in **1963**, July, not one is left standing.

CORRIGENDA

Omitted from Part 3:

OLYMPIA PALACE, ANNANDALE STREET, 1912

EN Tuesday, 6 February 1912

“Olympia Palace, Annandale Street was re-opened last night as a Cinematograph Theatre and Variety Entertainment. Internally the place has been reconstructed, and seating accommodation has been provided for 1,800, while at the north end a stage has been erected. Two houses nightly at 7 and 9 and if the place does not eventually turn out a success it is not for the want of resource and enterprise on the part of the management.

The vaudeville turns were of a high-class standard. The principal being **Victor Newman**. The pictures included two dramas from the Wild West, and two humorous films of a new order. Altogether a really excellent entertainment was provided.”

1915 *Kinematograph Year Book*

“Olympia, Annandale Street. Proprietor: Olympia (Edinburgh) Ltd.”

ROYAL ITALIAN CIRCUS

EN Tuesday, 23 December 1913

“OLYMPIA ANNANDALE STREET

THE ROYAL ITALIAN CIRCUS FOR FOUR WEEKS

PRICES: 3s., 2s., 1s. AND 6d.”

Omitted from Part 6:

MOSS' CARNIVAL, WAVERLEY MARKET, 1894

Ever on the look-out for new forms of entertainment, Moss included a moving picture show in his 1894 Carnival. **S** Saturday 22 December 1894:

**“EDISON'S LATEST & MOST WONDERFUL INVENTION
THE KINETOSCOPE**

**Marvellous and Living Pictures. Every Picture in Motion.
Pronounced by the Press and all who have seen it to be the Most
Remarkable of Mr. EDISON'S INVENTIVE GENIUS”**

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