
CHAPTER 2

SCENE SETTING or "Shedding a Little Lumière"

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It is just one hundred years since the first moving pictures were exhibited in Australia. These were shown in Thomas A Edison's Kinetoscopes (Figures 1 and 2) which were single-person-only viewing machines (similar to a peepshow machine).² It was not until late 1895 that Louis and Auguste Lumière (Figure 3) exhibited the first projected 35mm motion picture (Figure 4) to a mass audience in the basement (known as the 'Salon Indien') of the Grand Café in Paris.³ (Figure 5) There was also a display of moving pictures in America in the same year by a family of the name Latham.⁴ Probably the thoughts of financial gains from screening moving pictures nudged the Lumière brothers into despatching representatives to various places throughout the world, complete with projectors and films. The following year, 1896, saw the first public screenings in Australia to mass audiences. While there were some private screenings of films during the year, Carl Hertz is regarded as the first person to screen moving pictures for public viewing in Australia. He did this, using a Theatrograph projector at the Melbourne Opera House on Saturday, 22 August 1896.

¹ In English, the French word "lumière" means "light".

² C. Long, "Australia's First Films Pt. 2", in Cinema Papers No 92, April 1993, p. 37. (H. Du Feu, The Story of the Cinema, London: Wayland, 1974, p. 23, states that the Kinetoscope was invented by Thomas Edison and William Dickson.) Edison's films could have been projected onto a large screen for larger audiences but Edison believed that more money could be made by restricting each film to one viewer at a time and he did not see the need to develop a suitable projector. It was not until after the Lumière Bros showed the way in 1895 that Edison set about making a suitable projector. This idea is also borne out in R. Griffith, A. Mayer and E. Bowser, The Movies. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981 (3rd ed.), p. 2. (E. Reade, Australian Silent Films, Melbourne: Lansdowne Press Pty Ltd, 1970, Ch. 1 provides another detailed history of the early years of motion picture exhibition.)

³ H. Du Feu, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

⁴ ibid., p. 25.

FIGURE 1
AN EDISON KINETOSCOPE
(Source: Du Feu, H.
The Story of the Cinema.
London: Wayland, 1974, p. 22.)

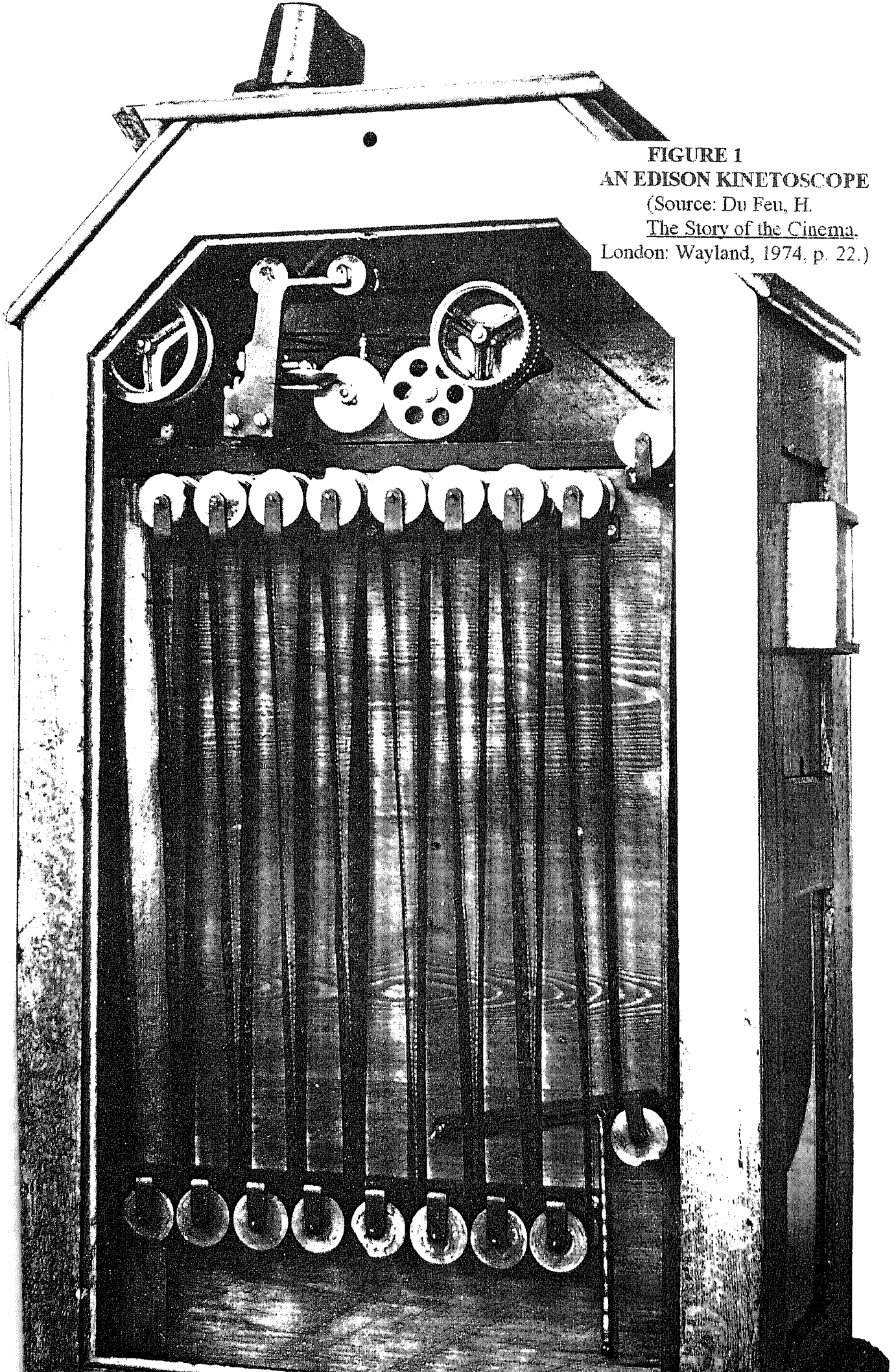


FIGURE 2

AN AMERICAN KINETOSCOPE PARLOUR

The Australian Kinetoscope displays would have been similar, but with fewer machines.

(Source: Thurman, J. and David, J., The Magic Lantern. New York: Atheneum, 1978, p. 85.)

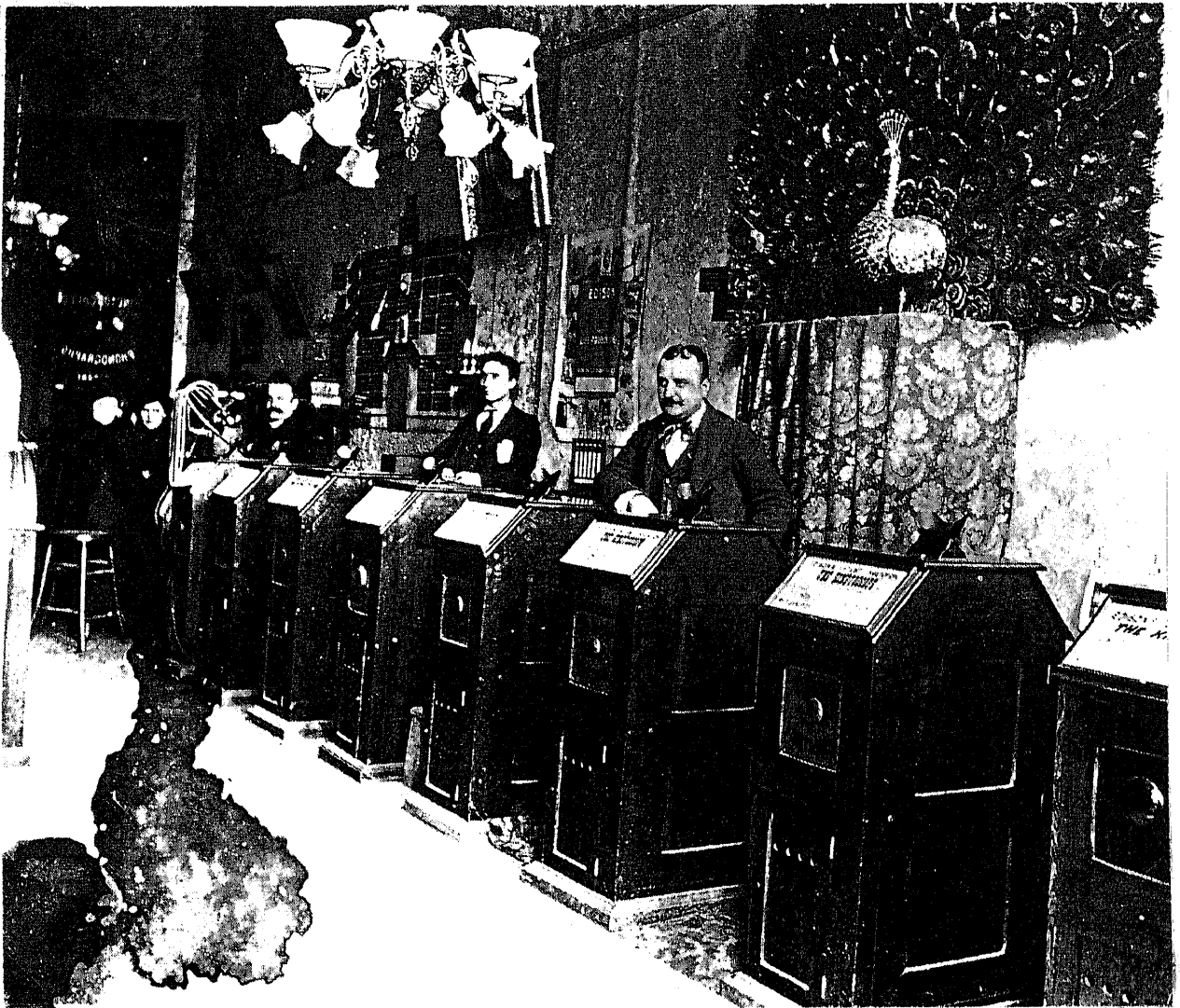


FIGURE 3
LOUIS AND AUGUSTE LUMIÈRE

(Source: Thurman, J. and David, J., *The Magic Lantern*. New York: Atheneum, 1978, p. 89.)



FIGURE 4
THE LUMIÈRE PROJECTOR

(Source: Thurman, J. and David, J., The Magic Lantern. New York: Atheneum, 1978, p. 93.)

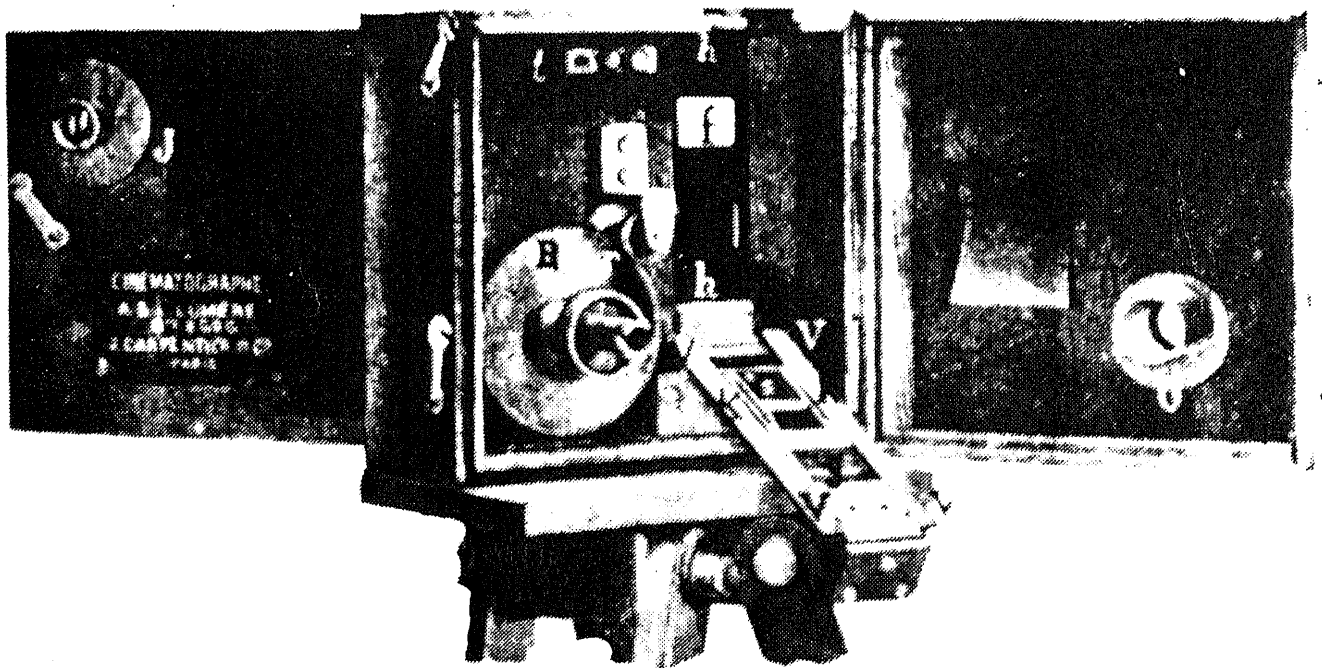


FIGURE 5

OVERSEAS' ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE LUMIÈRES' CINEMATOGRAPHE

(Source: Thurman, J. and David, J., *The Magic Lantern*. New York: Atheneum, 1978, p. 92.)

The advertisement is a black and white graphic with a decorative, ornate border. At the top left, the word "LUMIÈRES" is written in a large, bold, serif font. Below it, the word "CINEMATOGRAPHE" is written in a similar font, with the letters "CINEMATO" on one line and "GRAPHE" on the next. In the top right corner, there is a portrait of a man with a mustache, identified as Auguste Lumière. Below this portrait, the name "AUGUSTE LUMIÈRE" is printed. In the bottom left corner, there is another portrait of a man, identified as Louis Lumière. Below this portrait, the name "LOUIS LUMIÈRE" is printed. In the bottom right corner, the name "TREWEEY" is printed in a large, bold, serif font. The word "SOLE" is partially visible above "TREWEEY". The background of the advertisement is filled with decorative floral and leaf patterns.

In September, Hertz moved his enterprise to Sydney where he opened at the Tivoli Theatre, Castlereagh Street.⁵

The Salon Lumière (Australia's first all-film venue) was opened by Lumière representative, Marius Sestier at 237 Pitt Street, Sydney on 28 September 1896. He was assisted by W Barnett and C B Westmacott (representing the well-known actor and theatrical entrepreneur, J C Williamson). Twelve films, each running about one hundred feet, comprised the programme. The Salon closed on 27 October and Sestier moved to Melbourne. Of special interest is the closing day on which Sestier and Barnett screened the first Australian-made film. It had been shot on Sunday, 25 October and showed passengers disembarking from the paddlewheel ferry, the Brighton, at Manly wharf. (Figure 6) Sestier opened at the Princess, Melbourne on 31 October and the Sydney Salon was taken over by Messrs Goodman and Westmacott from 2 November. It closed at the end of the week owing to the quality of the projection. From 7 November the Macmahon Brothers took over and continued operating under the name Salon Cinematographe for the next year. While in Melbourne, Sestier and Barnett filmed the 1896 Melbourne Cup. About ten short films were shot that day (3 November) and what has survived has become an important part of our cinematic and cultural history.⁶ On returning to Sydney, Sestier opened at the Criterion Theatre on 24 November and presented the first all-Australian film presentation. After the fortnight, he moved to a shopfront theatre at 478 George Street and exhibited there (Figure 6) from 9 December 1896 to 6 March

⁵C. Long, "Australia's First Films Pt. 2", in *Cinema Papers* No 92, April 1993, pp. 38-43. The article provides detailed information about Perier, McMahon and Hertz. Long suggests 17 September but refers to an item in the Melbourne Argus 17.9.1896 which indicates that Hertz opened in Sydney on 19th September.


⁶According to the National Sound and Film Archive, Sydney, (18.5.1994) only part of that day's footage has survived. What has survived shows spectators, part of the race and the winner. Other early films (eg Boer War footage, Federation Ceremony in Centennial Park 1901) survive.

FIGURE 6

PROGRAMME FOR THE LUMIÈRE CINEMATOGRAPHE, 478 George Street, Sydney.
Note film number 8 on Programme 2. (The "New Markets" was the Queen Victoria Building.)
(Source: Exhibitor, Wed., 29.7.1925, Sydney, p. 8.)

The Lumiere Cinematographe
478 GEORGE STREET, NEAR ROYAL ARCADE,
OPPOSITE NEW MARKETS.

The Only authorised Machine
In Australasia.



Mons. **MARIUS SESTIER**,
Sole Representative for Australasia.

CHANGE OF PROGRAMME, New Pictures.
Afternoon and Evening Exhibition.
ALTERNATE PROGRAMMES.

PROGRAMME No. 1.

1. AN UNEXPECTED BATH.
2. ARRIVAL OF CALAIS EXPRESS.
3. **The Czar and Czarina accompanied by President F. Faure, Paris.**
4. **Algerian Rifles, "Turcos," escorting the Czar in Paris.**
5. **The Czarina's Return from the Russian Church, Paris.**
6. **Chasseurs a Cheval escorting the Czar through Paris.**
7. BABY'S DINNER.
8. NEWHAVEN IN HIS QUARTERS.
9. POST OFFICE, SYDNEY, FROM GEORGE STREET.
10. N.S.W. ARTILLERY DEFILING.
11. THE RUSTIC FORGE.
12. LIGHTNING CHANGE ARTIST.

PROGRAMME No. 2.

1. PUSSY'S DINNER.
2. CHARGE OF THE 7TH CUIRASSIERS.
3. BABY'S QUARRELL.
4. **The Marriage Cortège of Princess Maud, London.**
5. **Arrival in Gondola, "Beautiful Venice."**
6. **The Tigers at the London "Zoo."**
7. **A Javanese Dance.**
8. PASSENGERS LEAVING S. S. "BRIGHTON," MANLY.
9. SADDLING Paddock BEFORE THE CUP RACE.
10. FINISH OF THE HURDLE RACE, CUP DAY.
11. "DAYLIGHT ROBBERY."
12. ON THE RAFT WITH BATHERS.

12 of these Animated Photographs will be shown daily
AFTERNOON—1.30, 2.0, 3.0, 3.30, 4.0, 4.30, 5.0 p.m.
EVENING—7.30, 8.0, 8.30, 9.0, 9.30 p.m.

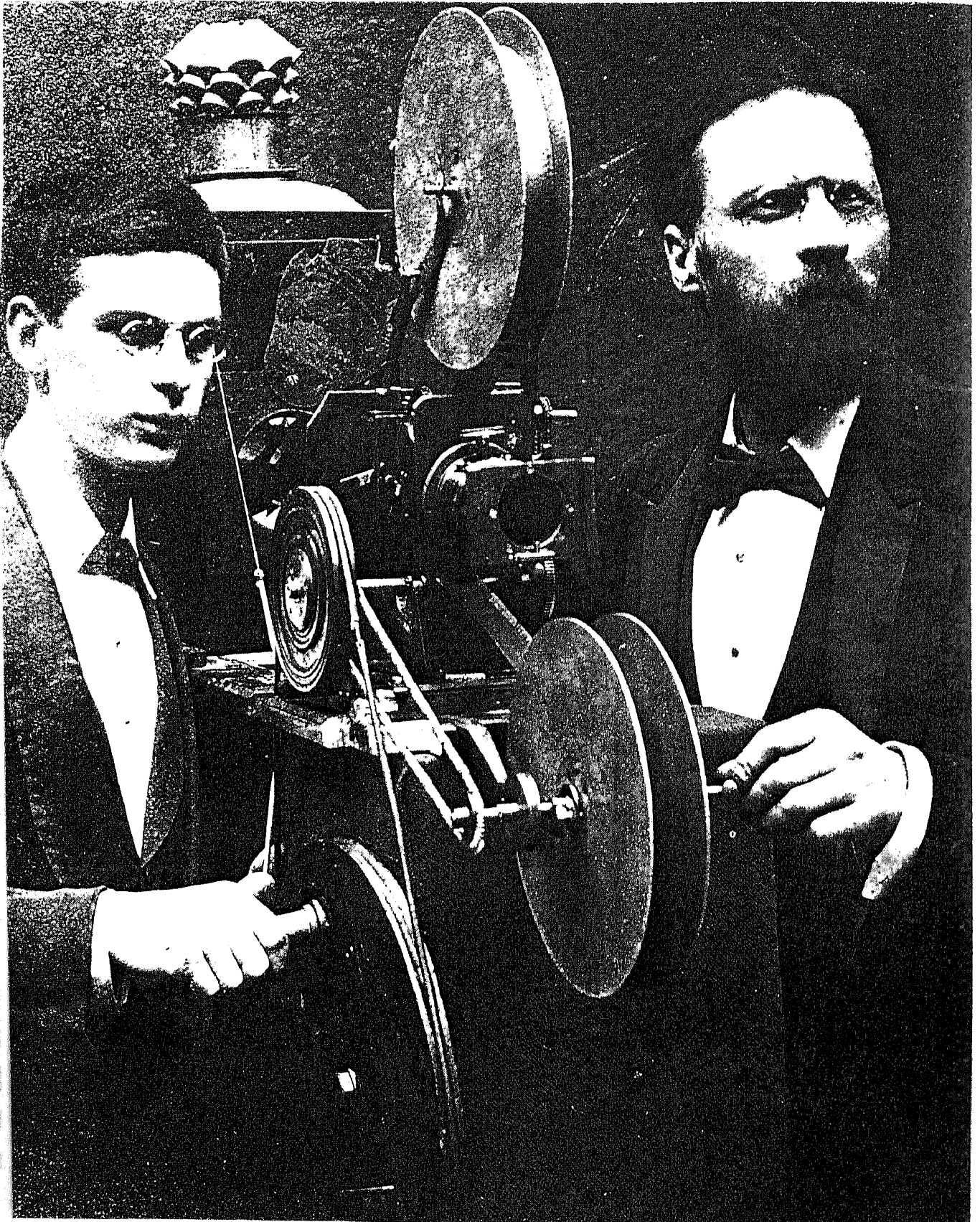
ADMISSION, 1s. CHILDREN, HALF-PRICE.

Bakewell & Co., Ltd., Printers, Sydney. PIANO BY FLEYEL.

FIGURE 7
EARLY TRAVELLING PICTURE SHOW MEN.

The older man is the operator and the younger man works the generator. This portable projector would have been similar to those used by travelling exhibitors in Australia in the early years of film exhibition.

(Source: Du Feu, H., *The Story of the Cinema*. London: Wayland, 1974, p. 28.)



1897. Sestier left Australia sometime prior to June 1897. He had played an important part in Australian film-making because he had introduced the technology and had trained people to make and exhibit films.⁷

In Sydney, several shopfront picture theatres operated for a time and films were also included in vaudeville shows at the larger, live theatres. Exhibition was not confined to the city. Travelling theatrical companies saw the possibility of making extra money and were quick to acquire a projector and films and include the new medium in their tours throughout the state. (Figure 7) By 1898, the Polytechnic (82 King Street) was the only surviving picture show. During the next twelve months (before its closure in April 1899), many Australian-made short films were screened there. Picture exhibition in country areas continued for a slightly longer time because of the touring companies but interest had waned by c1901. It has been suggested that, after the initial novelty, the public seemed to tire of the pictures because the films lacked any sort of storyline.⁸ Diane Collins suggested *"As early as 1900 people lost interest in the sheer novelty of moving pictures. What lured them back as regular patrons was the promise of a good belly laugh and a little enlightenment. Comedies and factual films were the industry's first staples."*⁹

Eric Reade expanded upon this idea.¹⁰ *"It took the Boer War to revive interest in the Australian*

⁷ C. Long, "Australia's First Films Pt. 3", in *Cinema Papers* No 93, May 1993, pp. 36-60. The Lumière projector also doubled as a camera. Sestier had been trained in the processing of the film as well as the exhibiting of it.

⁸ E. Reade, *Australian Silent Films: A Pictorial History 1896-1929*, Sydney: Lansdowne Press, 1970, pp. 10-14.

⁹ D. Collins, *Hollywood Down Under. Australians at the Movies: 1896 to the Present Day*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1987, p. 36.

¹⁰ E. Reade, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

screen." This was especially so in Sydney when, on 16 April 1900, the Boer War Biograph ("direct from London") opened at 478 George Street and screened 3000 feet of film. Although these films were received enthusiastically, their appeal was constrained by time and picture exhibition returned to being the exception rather than the rule for the next few years. Short seasons of pictures at various venues were tried and they were also included as part of vaudeville shows. Country areas followed suit.

It was not until 1905 that pictures started on their road to permanence as a mass medium. That year saw the beginnings of Australia's first picture show men - C Cousens Spencer and his American Biocope, T J West and West's Pictures, J S Phelan, Johnson and Gibson.¹¹ Programmes consisted of a mixture of mainly overseas and some Australian-made films. Films (both overseas and Australian) started to become more plentiful and were being screened in a wide variety of venues - from football grounds to town halls and purpose-built live theatres and, in many cases, by travelling showmen. The years between 1910 and the early 1920s witnessed many picture theatres built in New South Wales. The architecture of these buildings fell into three categories: "*...new or rebuilt, richly-fronted buildings; existing buildings converted with little exterior change; and large shed- or barn-like buildings.*"¹² Often, the facades were constructed from Wunderlich (or similar) pressed metal and gave the appearance of dressed stone and castellation. Others relied on asbestos cement sheeting or undisguised, galvanised iron facades. In the main city centre of Sydney, picture theatres tended to be more substantial and architects relied heavily on

¹¹ Spencer and West were both overseas men who thought that Australia would be a land of plenty. For both, it was. Phelan, after some years of touring, retired to the Newcastle area where he and his family operated cinemas. Johnson and Gibson, besides exhibiting films, became pioneers in film production as well as operating a film distribution centre.

¹²R. Thorne, Picture Palace Architecture in Australia, South Melbourne: Sun Books Pty. Ltd., 1976, p. 10.

the arch (singly or in multiples) as a feature. The facades required that architects provide a "definite visual statement".¹³ Suburban and country theatres tried to emulate their city cousins although to a lesser degree of decoration. Open air cinemas were constructed both in the city and the country and ranged from the crude to the more substantial. *"They may not have matched up quite to contemporaneous U.S. designs, for U.S. architects were following a far more flowery tradition of theatre design than their Australian colleagues. Nevertheless, the same concept of making the major cinemas richly decorated environments and pleasant places to be was being pursued simultaneously in the two countries."*¹⁴

The years before the World War I witnessed the beginnings of two cinema chains that still control a large market share in Australia. In 1908, a dentist, Arthur Russell leased the St George's Hall in Bourke Street, Melbourne and commenced exhibiting pictures. His enterprise's name was Hoyts,¹⁵ a name that was to become synonymous with Australian film exhibition.¹⁶ In 1913 Union Theatres (later to emerge as The Greater Union Organisation) was formed. This occurred through a series of takeovers and mergers that led to an extremely powerful organisation which controlled a large chain of picture theatres and possessed production and distribution divisions. From c1910, individuals and companies set up picture theatres across the nation, using available halls, erecting make-shift cinemas, constructing fine theatre buildings, or travelling from place to place with a tent or similar.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁵ S. Brand, *Picture Palaces and Flea-Pits*, Sydney: Dreamweaver Books, 1983, p. 34.

¹⁶ The company was incorporated in 1926 following a number of mergers. Acquisitions followed as did a steady building programme.

Wherever they were shown, Australians quickly incorporated going to the pictures into their way-of-life and the most populous state, New South Wales, was typical of the nation in this regard. Available figures¹⁷ reveal this. The Official Year Books of New South Wales¹⁸ provide brief, but specific, details about this part of our social history from 1913. As at 31 December 1913¹⁹, there were 1171 theatres and public halls licensed to screen pictures in the state, with a total seating capacity of 564,500. Considering that the population of the state in 1913 was estimated to be 1,830,444²⁰, the ratio of seats per head of population was quite high.²¹ There are a few problems associated with interpreting the facts and figures provided in the Year Books. One of them is that there is no listing of theatres per se before 1913 and the listing is altered to "*Picture Shows*"²² from 1921. Between 1913 and 1921, the figures given for "*Theatres*" may be weighted by the inclusion of legitimate theatres.²³ Another problem with this source is that certain years do not list total seating (eg 1939/40), and by the 1950s the number of licensed premises appears to have been

¹⁷ See Appendices.

¹⁸ Copies of The Official Year Book of New South Wales are available at the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Sydney.

¹⁹ The Official Year Book of New South Wales - 1913, Sydney: N.S.W. Government Printer, p. 607.

²⁰ The Official Year Book of New South Wales - 1914, Sydney: N.S.W. Government Printer, p. 87

²¹ Appendix A shows total licensed theatres and public halls and total seating capacities in relation to state and national populations. Perusal of this list shows a continuing increase over the pre-television years of both premises and seating capacities.

²² A picture show is a cinema: a legitimate theatre is one that is used for live performances only.

²³ After 1921, there was a steady decline in live performance theatres so the official figures would probably be closer to the truth than those of earlier years.

replaced by 35mm picture theatres²⁴ only, the public halls (licensed to screen films) having been deleted from the figure. Thus, for example, 1940/41 shows 2766 venues, while 1954 shows only 610.

A second, and more detailed, source is the Film Weekly's Motion Picture Directory²⁵ which commenced in 1936/7 and was published annually until 1971. These directories provide a breakdown of 35mm picture theatres in city, suburbs and country towns for each state of Australia, as well as the number of towns covered, number of touring shows in operation, seating capacities for city, suburbs and country towns, and the total population of each state. (The directories only include the licensed theatres and public halls that were actually screening 35mm films. The 16mm operations were listed separately once that ratio of exhibition became more popular, ie from 1951 to 1962.) Appendices B and C contain figures from a range of available directories. A minor problem with this source is that from 1950/51 to 1968/69, the total Australian suburban and country venues were added together, although the state totals were not combined. A similar problem is that total seating capacity figures are only given from 1950/51 onwards. Despite these two short-comings, the directories reveal important information about the growth of cinema exhibition in Australia and a few representative samples will illustrate this. The figures indicate that New South Wales was a major market for films, in relation to the rest of Australia. Besides what one might expect in terms of city and suburban areas, the figures for the country areas until the late 1960s appear to be quite impressive. Figures for New South Wales are shown over the total figure for Australia.

²⁴ 35mm was the standard film ratio and was used by nearly all cinemas. There were a few 16mm venues but these were not part of 'mainstream' exhibition.

²⁵ Copies of Film Weekly Motion Picture Directory available at the State Library of NSW.

DIRECTORY	CITY CINEMAS	SYDNEY SUBURBAN	NSW COUNTRY	No OF TOWNS COVERED	TOURING SHOWS	16mm SHOWS
1937	21/67	146/373	200/750	280/826	19/62	n/a
1947/48	26/84	166/473	391/1081	583/1638	11/54	n/a
1956/57	23/86	177 *	437*/1679	637/1765	4/40	40/126
1969/70	21/81	49/142	157/522	228/744	0/0	0/2

(* - This Directory gave a combined suburban and country total - 1679.)

Since the directories ceased to be published in 1971, the only source of information about picture theatres after that is from The Official Year Book of New South Wales. The 1976 edition lists country centres for the last time which is probably an indication that their numbers had declined substantially. In it, 35mm pictures theatres are given as: Sydney and its suburbs: 69; Other NSW districts: 126; NSW drive-in theatres: 38.²⁶ (It should be remembered that, while television came to Sydney in 1956, it did not reach many of the country districts until the early/middle 1960s.)

The Official Year Book of New South Wales of 1990 provides the figures for 1986/87 as "64 enterprises"²⁷ but gives no breakdown of the figure. When one considers that the picture theatre was only ninety years old by then, as a mass medium it had made a phenomenal rise and an equally phenomenal decline within a relatively short period of time once the extension of hotel opening hours in 1955, the arrival of television in 1956, the growth of licensed clubs in the 1960s and the introduction of colour television and video from the mid-1970s took hold.

²⁶ The Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1976, p. 769.

²⁷ The Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1990, p. 240.

Appendix C, "Seating in 35mm Picture Theatres" shows a comparison of seating capacities for the picture theatres in New South Wales in relation to Australia as a whole. Seating is also given in relation to overall population. Unfortunately, annual issues of The Film Weekly Motion Picture Directory only provide figures from 1950/51 to 1971 and they are not the same as those given in Appendix A that included all licensed theatres and public halls whether they were screening pictures or not. However, it would appear that in relation to the seats per one thousand head of population column, New South Wales people were well-served by picture theatres.

A selection of country towns, using Census figures for 1961, appears in the table below. It shows the ratio of theatre seats to the stated population in relation to the number of picture theatres in each town.²⁸ The year was selected because it was the 'twilight' of the picture theatres in country areas of New South Wales - just before television made its impact. The towns selected are from various parts of the state and are similar in size to Parkes and Forbes, two of the towns that feature prominently in the area under examination in this thesis. As at 1994, only four of the towns listed below have a cinema (one of which, a video cinema, contains only 66 seats) and none of them capable of seating anywhere near what the 1961 figures show.

TABLE A. Comparing various NSW towns in relation to population, theatre seats and theatres.

NSW TOWN	POPULATION (Census 1961)	THEATRE SEATS	SEATS TO POPULATION	THEATRES IN TOWN
Camden	6372	725	1 : 8.78	1
Casino	8091	990	1 : 8.17	1

²⁸Population figures were taken from The Official Year Book of New South Wales 1964, p. 58. Seating capacities and number of theatres are from Film Weekly Motion Picture Directory 1961/62, Sydney, various pages.

Cootamundra	5939	1068	1 : 5.56	1
Forbes	6826	1586	1 : 4.30	2
Gunnedah	6543	889	1 : 7.36	1
Inverell	8209	1325	1 : 6.20	1
Kiama	5239	919	1 : 5.70	1
Moree	6795	1082 / 960 *	1:6.28 / 1:7.09	2 *
Parkes	8223	1545	1 : 5.32	2
Singleton	4519	1345	1 : 3.36	2
Young	5448	964	1 : 5.65	1

(Note re the Moree theatres: the hard top (1082 seats) was used in cooler months and the open air (960 seats) was used in the warmer months.)

Finding figures to show numbers of venues is relatively easy. It is much more difficult trying to find figures of attendance at picture theatres in Australia. Sources are very limited. The Official Year Book of New South Wales gives taxable admissions from 1921 to 1953, these years covering most of the existence of the Commonwealth Entertainments Tax. Introduced in 1919, the Federal Government taxed admissions (above a certain amount) to live theatre, picture theatres, racing, skating, dancing and miscellaneous functions. During the years when the tax was collected, picture theatre admissions far outweighed all other taxable entertainments.²⁹ (See Appendix D.) Considering that the population of New South Wales increased over those years (as is shown in Appendix A), the taxable admissions figures seem to indicate at the most basic level that everyone (from babies to senior citizens) attended the pictures many times in any one year. In reality, this would not have been the case for each person. However, the figures suggest that the people of

²⁹ The Official Year Book of New South Wales 1930/31, p.404: "There was a marked increase in taxable admissions to picture shows in 1929/30, as a result of the introduction of sound-equipment, and there was a decrease in respect of nearly all other classes of entertainment, especially theatres."

New South Wales attended regularly. It should also be noted that only taxable admissions were recorded officially. The cheaper, untaxed tickets (see Appendix D for notes) were not recorded. It would be impossible to ascertain total admissions to picture theatres prior to the introduction of television in 1956³⁰ but they would have been higher than those given in Appendix D.

Knowing that, in pre-television times, Australia boasted many picture theatres and that they were, generally, strongly supported, the question remains: Why was this so? Elwyn Spratt, writing in the Sun-Herald in 1962, suggested that, for thousands of people, a night at the pictures before the days of television was a "...*get-together in an atmosphere of low-hum gossip that was not stilled until the lowering of the lights brought three hours of escapism to the screen.*"³¹ The idea of a "get-together" with "gossip" suggests a strong social aspect. The suburban centres that provided two shows each weekday were supported by a largely female patronage, keen to do their shopping or whatever, then spend the afternoon at the pictures. So much a social thing was it in the 1930s that in some Sydney suburban cinemas Dress Circle patrons could order afternoon tea and have it brought to them at their seats during Interval³² (probably while they listened to Knight Barnett or equivalent at the theatre organ). In a similar vein, Donald Horne, suggested, "*Since in the suburban shopping centres everything shut down at six o'clock, the packed suburban cinemas*

³⁰ The year 1956 saw the introduction of television to Sydney. By 1958, its effect had started to spread to picture audiences and the decline in attendance patterns commenced. By 1964, there were 691,652 television viewers' licences issued in a population of 4,116,706. The number of unlicensed sets could not be estimated. (Gregory's Guide to New South Wales, 21st Edition, 1964, Sydney, p.9.)

³¹ "Fade-out of the Cinemas", article by E. Spratt in Sun-Herald, 1962. (Day, month and page unknown.) Copy of article in possession of writer.

³² Information from J Jennings, Winston Hills, 1981, who was a former theatre manager for Western Suburbs Cinemas in Sydney from the late 1920s to the late 1940s, before moving into a supervisory role with Hoyts Theatres Ltd.

were the main opportunity for the people from a suburb to gather together and look at each other... Other than these, the suburbs provided no sense of community...³³ Thus, from the 'toons until the mid-1950s in New South Wales, with the exception of the occasional dance at the local hall, the picture theatre was the 'light' that drew the 'moths' night after night (and Saturday matinee after Saturday matinee). Shopping centres were closed on Saturday afternoons and in the evenings (except for some limited pre-World War II late night shopping). Once school and work had finished, the picture theatre became the major social gathering place and provider of visual entertainment, far out-stripping churches, lodges, dances, race-meetings and everything else. (See Appendix D.)

It is commonly acknowledged that places hold strong significance for people, either as groups or as individuals. English environmental psychologist, David Canter, believed that wars throughout history have related to people wanting to either retain or regain places of special significance. He explained this by saying that it was, "*Possibly because places represent in the most concrete fashion the great mixture of associations, actions and emotions which contribute to our conceptions of ourselves.*" Furthermore, "*The concept of self, then, that system of thoughts and experiences which enables each one of us to regard ourselves as unique and to distinguish ourselves from others, is an integral aspect of the psychology of place.*"³⁴ Picture theatres did hold a special place for Australians and, for far too long, this 'place' has not been acknowledged.

³³ D. Horne, The Australian People: Biography of a Nation, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973, p. 232. It should be remembered that, after a referendum was held in 1916, NSW hotels were forced to close at 6pm. This situation remained until a referendum in 1954 reversed the decision and the infamous 'six o'clock swill' came to an end on 31 January 1955.

³⁴ D. Canter, The Psychology of Place, London: The Architectural Press Ltd, 1977, p. 179.

Perhaps the most poignant thought about sense of place came from a chance meeting on a bus after the 1989 Newcastle earthquake between Margaret Henry, associated with The National Trust, and a lady. While passing the severely damaged, former Century Theatre at Broadmeadow, then in the process of being demolished, the lady recalled,

"You know, my husband died ten years ago, and I remember the Century and I can't pass it without tears in my eyes. I remember that he used to book seats, that he used to get dressed up - men don't do that any more - and he used to buy me a box of Old Gold chocolates - and I can't pass that building", she said to me, 'without feeling sadness'.³⁵

The architects who designed the picture theatres of yesteryear knew what the picture-goers wanted and gave it, when economics and clients allowed. Little was done before 1950 to systematically study the reactions of non-architects (ie cinema patrons) in relation to picture theatres and other public buildings. Since the 1970s, Australian architectural historian Ross Thorne³⁶ has undertaken research into this field. He has commented that theatre architects from c1913 to the 1930s *"...argued their case on psychological grounds and evaluated their success through patronage"* (ie ticket sales). Some architects have labelled cinema buildings as *"pastiche of architecture"* or, simply, *"non-architecture"*. These 'purists' (as they liked to think of themselves) ignored the *"need to identify the initial objectives or goals for the creation of the place"*³⁷ and dismissed the

³⁵ R. Thorne, "Introduction" to K.J. Cork, and L.R. Tod, Front Stalls or Back? The History and Heritage of the Newcastle Theatres, Sydney: AHS Inc, 1993, p. ix.

³⁶ R. Thorne, "The Environmental Psychology of Theatres and Movie Palaces", in D. Canter, et.al. 1988. Ethnoscopes Volume 1, Avebury, U.K., p. 167.

³⁷ D. Canter, op. cit., p. 164.

buildings out of hand, much to their own and posterity's detriment.³⁸ Picture theatres, whatever their physical appearance or location, met certain criteria when they were designed and built and were judged successful or not by the number of tickets sold. Thorne concluded his study by saying that picture theatre architects of old aimed *"to create environments which would provide feelings of emotional well-being"*. They possessed *"a sensitivity to the nature of an environment, and proceeded to communicate to the patron a strong sense of place."*³⁹ No more is this evident than from a New South Wales' selection of contemporary opening night programmes from various years.⁴⁰

Leichhardt New Strand, Monday, 9 May 1921:

"...one of the most Up-To-Date and Luxurious Photoplay Houses in Sydney...introducing gorgeous and majestic decorations, lavish appointments, together with the best in the world of Music and Pictorial Drama."

Haberfield Theatre, Monday, 24 August 1925:

"This Theatre has been built for you, our patrons - your comfort, your convenience, has been studied to the last detail."

Lindfield Theatre, Friday, 21 May 1926:

³⁸ In the past decade or so people have come to value the historical nature of cinema buildings but, in most cases, they have been demolished or converted beyond restoration. Consequently, at a time when these buildings might have been recognised for what they were worth, they no longer exist.

³⁹ R. Thorne, *op. cit.* 1988, p. 183.

⁴⁰ All of those cited are in the possession of the writer and have come mainly from exhibitors. Only a few similar programmes exist in public libraries.

"The appointments, lighting effects and novel constructional design are supreme achievements of the brains of architects and engineers...You believe that nothing but the best will suffice. So do we..."

Forbes New Strand Theatre, Monday, 27 June 1927:

"A Message from the Home of Happy Hours."

"It has been my humble inspiration to attempt to give it (Forbes) a Theatre worthy of its progress and traditions...and each month I trust to add just 'that little more' in improvement and refinement, and so ere the year closes, nothing for your comfort and entertainment will be lacking."

Auburn Civic Theatre, Tuesday, 13 February 1934:

"Nothing that goes for the comfort of its guests has been left out...surroundings that are the envy of every eye...with restful ease and refinement radiating from its every point...TO YOU...the future guests...is dedicated this veritable fairyland, that will leave a lasting memory indelibly printed on your mind."

Hurstville Savoy Theatre, Wednesday, 4 August 1937:

"One step into the Savoy and its true grandeur dawns - dawns into the glow of sunrise, fades softly into purples of night, changing its hue with each mood of music"⁴¹...craftsmen have built a

⁴¹ A theatre organ was installed in this theatre and the auditorium lights were equipped with several colours that changed as the mood of the piece being played changed. Hence the "sunrise", the "purples of night". From interviewing past patrons and a former manager of the theatre, the lighting was quite startling. It was not uncommon in some theatres to go through lighting colour changes prior to the commencement of the show. Hoyts was renowned (pre World War II) for this in a number of its theatres. The atmospheric Sydney Capitol went from 'daylight' through 'dusk'

palace...The lounge and seating are a study in comfort...The new Savoy, in its sparkling dignity, symbolises Suburban Cinemas Pty. Ltd. progress and solidity in Hurstville."

Wellington Macquarie Theatre, Saturday, 21 May 1938:

"In the construction and fitting of this Theatre, no expense has been saved in providing comfort, and an atmosphere of charm to the surroundings. Wellington has thus been provided, after months of intense work, in matching materials, negotiating for the latest fittings, selecting designs, etc., with theatre conditions unequalled in inland New South Wales."

Blacktown Warrick, Wednesday, 30 March 1949:

"It has been our object to provide a modern, attractively-designed Theatre to meet the demands of this important provincial centre...We hope that, in 'the Warrick', will be found a suitable environment for the presentation of the products from the outstanding science of the Motion Picture Industry."

Exhibitors constantly sought to improve their picture theatres in one way or another so that patrons would be provided with *"an environment of entertainment rather than an environment for entertainment"*.⁴² Early in 1994, one of the writer's supervisors casually remarked that he thought people went to the pictures only to see the film. This statement, from one of the generation of 'television-children', may be true to a greater extent today, although the sense of occasion is still present among picture-goers. (See Appendix E.) In pre-television times, going to the pictures

to the 'setting of the sun and 'night' (complete with twinkling stars) prior to the pictures starting.

⁴² R. Thorne, *op. cit.* 1988, p. 176.

meant going to the building (as has already been discussed in Chapter 1) and experiencing all that it had to offer. Harking back to 1926, American theatre architect John Eberson stated, "*I want to create theatres where pictures can be enjoyed in restful and beautiful surroundings rather than one that would be a mere flaunt of lavishness. I want my theatres to create the feeling that one wants to come back and enjoy the restfulness of its surroundings.*"⁴³ Australian picture exhibitors, where practicable, usually endeavoured to give their patrons pleasant surroundings (as well as a few hours of entertainment), thereby seeking to create some sense of occasion about going to the pictures and establishing a sense of place for their theatres in the minds of the patrons. The exhibitors thought they were doing it to make money, but the patrons came because the more the exhibitors did, the greater was the sense of occasion created and the intrinsic excitement of a social outing. This was not restricted to city and suburbs. It was equally so in country areas of New South Wales (where people often had to travel long distances in order to attend) and the following chapters present this. Chapter 4 (The History) traces the development of the picture venues in a rural area from early film exhibition days to the present, and Chapter 5 (Personalising The Picture!) presents the qualitative research findings.

⁴³ "The Atmospheric Theatre - An Interview With John Eberson, Architect", in Motion Picture News (Better Theatres Section), USA, November 1926, no pagination. Eberson's designs were used for four Australian 'atmospheric' theatres, including Sydney's Capitol Theatre, and a fifth borrowed his ideas.