

DOWN MEMORY LANE : THE VICTORIA,
NEWCASTLE'S FIRST GRAND THEATRE

L.E. Fredman

The faded and peeling exterior of Eastham's Theatre Store in Perkins Street is a poor reminder of the Victoria, dubbed at its opening in September, 1891, "Newcastle's First Grand Theatre". Inside is a strange contrast of jeans and mod. gear, the costume of today, with the original royal blue curtain, stage, flies and dress circle which served the performance and costume of yesteryear.

"And let us, ciphers to this great accmpt,

On your imaginary forces work", to quote Chorus in Shakespeare's Henry V. Let us, while the building survives, try to recall the great tradition of such theatres and the way in which they served their communities and reflected their times.

"Think when we talk of horses that you see them

Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth".

Techniques and taste constantly change. The Victoria had its share of the realistic melodrama of the Victorian age with real horses and an approximation to "the perilous narrow ocean", to be followed by the moving pictures and literally hundreds of thundering hoofs. The theatre then had a new lease of life to be finally overwhelmed in March, 1966 by the pressures of TV and the blockbuster movie.

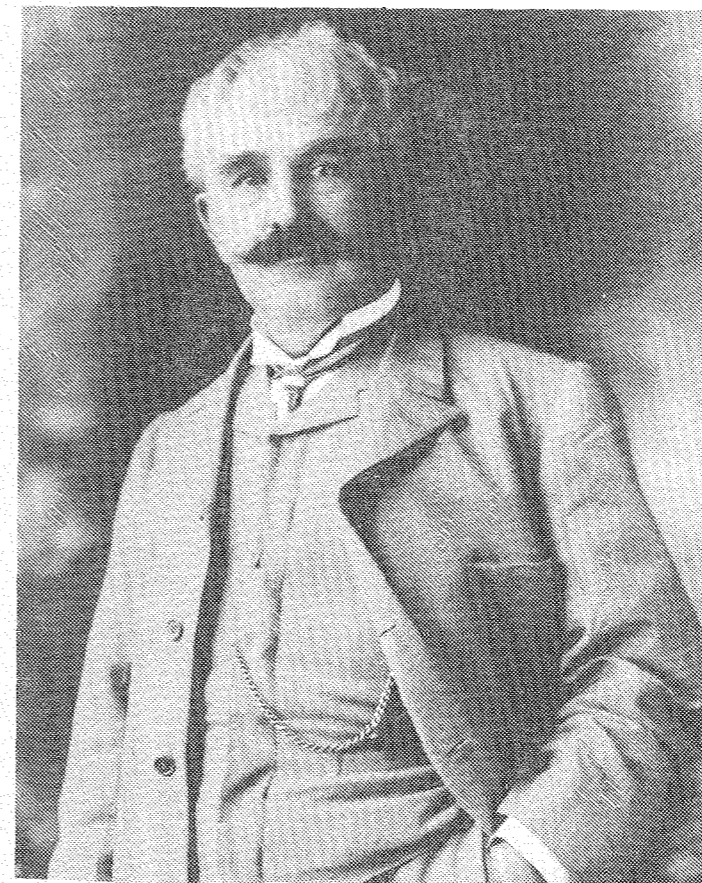
There have been three theatres named the Victoria. The first, in the 1850's, was converted from a wooden building backing onto a hotel in Watt Street, the main street, with an entrance in Hunter Street. The second, in Perkins Street, opened in April, 1876 as the first theatre in Newcastle built for that purpose and soon became the main venue for touring productions. They usually came by the Sydney steamer, opened on Saturday and ran for a week whether melodrama, vaudeville or opera. In July, the ubiquitous Clarence Hannell, son of James, the first Mayor, added yet another personal service to the city when he led a group fo amateurs in a production of Hamlet to raise money for the hospital. It was this building with its hotel which was bought by a Syndicate incorporated in April, 1887 as the Victoria Theatre Company and rebuilt in 1890-91.

The Syndicate first met at the Great Northern hotel in March, 1886 and agreed to pay a first instalment on the theatre property. It was in turn sold to the Company for 4,000 pounds. The first share list in April, 1888 comprises 14 persons holding 10,000 shares of one pound each, some with 1,000 and some with 500. Within a few years they were increased to 18,500 and the holders eventually grew by sales and the division of deceased estates to fifty. The initial group included the three Capper brothers, hardware merchants of Maitland; Neville Cohen, Maitland partner of David Cohen and Co.; Richard Young, a Maitland solicitor and Mayor, 1890-93; the two Wood brothers, Newcastle brewers, who described themselves in the list as "capitalist"; C.B. Ranclaud, a Newcastle shipping agent; and W.B. Lockhead, Newcastle merchant and managing director.

Though the big news between August and November, 1890 was the Maritime Strike the building trade was busy. The theatre, courthouse, and Cohen's warehouse at the Sandhills were among the projects changing the face of a grimy coalport singularly lacking in amenities. The architect, James



*The Victoria Theatre
Courtesy of the Newcastle Region Library Service*



*Alfred Dampier, 1904
Courtesy of the Australian Opera Trust*

Henderson, visited several Sydney theatres to develop his ideas. His plans were accepted in June, 1890. He had strict instructions not to disturb the existing theatre and hotel and their patrons until absolutely necessary and to show special concern for ventilation and safety. This was commendable in an age of theatre fires and cesspits. After fourteen months of construction and fitting, the theatre was ready to open on Saturday, 12th September, 1891.

The street frontage was 66 feet with 32 feet of depth taken by the hotel, then 68 feet of depth for the auditorium and 40 feet for the stage. It was four storeys of brick and iron beams topped by a promenade roof. A verandah with iron columns sheltered the entrance. The deep stage was 60 feet high to "fly" the realist sets so much a part of popular melodrama. Capacity was 520 in the stalls, 270 in the dress circle and a cramped 550 in the upper circle. Electric lighting was rejected as too expensive and gas retained until 1909. The tender price was 5,330 pounds plus 4,700 pounds for the stage and interiors.

The Newcastle Morning Herald scribe welcomed the occasion with a column of lush prose describing the decorative scheme and colours. Apollo and the nine muses were the inspiration and if the bemused and inspired audience looked upwards they could observe a roof dome "of softened azure blue with the sun's rays worked in gold" which could be opened on hot nights. The drop curtain, of Venice and the lagoon, was painted by the celebrated George Gordon of the Princess theatre, Melbourne. The hotel was well equipped with bars, public rooms, thirteen bedrooms, and spectacular harbour views from the promenade.

The lessee, James McMahon of the Opera House, Melbourne, waxed eloquent on "the first grand theatre in Newcastle" and his opening production, *Evangeline*, "the most popular operatic extravaganza of the day". It would be performed by a company of seventy-two with the American composer, Edward Rice, in personal charge of the orchestra. Newcastle now had a theatre and presentation equal to the capital cities and commensurate with its importance.

The new theatre and its owners caught the high-tide of popular melodrama and realistic presentation and a number of talented actor-managers included Newcastle in their tours. Bland Holt came in November, 1892 as lessee and manager and his wife as star of the company. They presented *A Sailor's Knot*, "finest sea play of the period", with the usual "gorgeous costumes", and a melodrama, *Never Despair*. Even more spectacular was Alfred Dampier's company which celebrated the centennial of Lieutenant Shortland's discovery of Newcastle in September, 1897 with a week of nightly changes. James McMahon was again lessee.

The opening melodrama, his own adaptation of Rolf Boldrewood's Australian classic, *Robbery Under Arms*, was packed out while Shakespeare's *Hamlet* played to a small but "appreciative" audience. But Newcastle was no different to the capital cities; it was Dampier's usual experience and a tribute to his determination that he wanted to mix the fare. He really gave two for the price of one as star, manager, producer and occasional author adding his wife, Katherine, and two daughters in prominent roles. One play in the season was *Monte Cristo* with Dampier as Edmund Dantes, the play which Eugene O'Neill's father monopolised for many years; another was that old stand-by, *East Lynne*, from the popular novel by Mrs. Henry Wood, and another was *The Transvaal Heroine*, based on a novel by H. Rider Haggard and the contemporary crisis in South Africa. Dampier presented thirty-one Australian plays and a varied repertoire between 1873 and 1902 and Newcastle shared his remarkable career.

Prices in the 1890's usually ranged from 3/- in the circle to 1/- in the gallery. The opening production of 1891, which was certainly elaborate, carried a top price of 5/-. A Sutherland night at the subsidised Sydney Opera House is a similar proportion of a skilled worker's wage.

Assessed valuation from the HDWB Ratebooks indicates the effects of the Depression. It began at 900 pounds for the theatre, fell to 810 pounds in 1894, was 450 pounds in 1898 and 540 in 1906 when renovated. A prime location had halved in value. The use of one-man shows coincided with the Bank Crash of mid-1893. The theatre closed late May, reopened briefly in June with Charles Harrison, the noted traveller, lecturing to men only with stereo views, and then reopened again mid-August with a lecture on "Health and Disease" to women only by the eminent physician, Mrs. Longshore Potts MD, also with stereo views. She also advertised for patients. Short-term lettings or weekly lease for 15% of the gross were the usual terms for the theatre's first decade.

In 1904 J.C. Williamson, who had the Australasian rights to Gilbert & Sullivan, formed a repertoires company to present the first revivals for many years. After Sydney, they played a four-night season in Newcastle in February, 1905. Howard Vernon, who had played Bunthorne in *Patience* in the first Australian production of 1881, was again in the cast. They returned as JCW's Comic Opera company in March, 1906 with *The Gondoliers* and the rarely-performed *Utopia Limited*.

Late in 1905 the theatre was remodelled returning to service in January, 1906. It was a comprehensive project, enlarging the stage and proscenium opening, building new dressing rooms and repainting the auditorium. It was called "an epoch in the annals of Newcastle" and inspired an article on the history of theatre in the city. First to enjoy the improvements was William Anderson's Famous Dramatic Organisation a three-week season starring Eugenie Duggan. One advertisement combined local pride and theatrical realism. *A Woman of Pleasure* listed a dozen "triumphs of scenic art" and special effects hitherto unknown outside the luxury-laden metropolis of Sydney or Melbourne.

Eugenie Duggan was one of several genuine Australian stars who rose with local theatre in the late 19th century. She was the sister of another actor-manager-author, Edmund Duggan, and married Anderson in 1898. Formed soon after from the old Holloway company, she was the feature attraction in the "organisation" which leased the Theatre Royal in Melbourne and went on tours. Pleased with the packed houses and scores turned away, the impresario announced he would return.

Duggan wrote four plays with Australian themes: *The Southern Cross*, final version of a play with a Eureka Stockade theme (1891); *The Squatter's Daughter* (1907), *Man from Outback* (1909), and an adaptation of *On Our Selection* (1912), all with comic actor, Bert Bailey. In September, 1907 Anderson announced a four-night season at the Victoria of *The Southern Cross*, "for the first time on any stage", although Eric Irvin, the historian of Australian melodrama, considers it a third re-working of an earlier play. Eugenie starred, as usual, and Bailey played the comic relief. The synopsis begins in an English manor house and ends with the hero, now wealthy, representing Ballarat in Parliament. Any resemblance to Peter Lalor is coincidental. Though compelled to flee England because of his democratic beliefs the hero is accompanied by his valet. The spectacles include the wreck of the "Dunbar" and the hoisting of the Eureka flag. Such were the rewards of gold (or coal) in the 19th century.

In September, 1906 an offer was made and refused to buy the property

at 15,000 pounds. A regular dividend of 3% was being paid each half-year.

In February-March, 1909 Anderson returned for a ten-night season of two melodramas and the Newcastle revival of *The Squatter's Daughter*. They claimed that one million people around Australia had seen this "Australian play for Australian audiences". A packed house enthused over real horses, sheep shearing, sunrise over the mountains and the feats of the bushranger, Ben Hall. Eugenie, interviewed before leaving for London, said she liked Newcastle folk who had provided her first big success. Her favourite play was *Dumas' Camille*. Some Newcastle theatre-goers will recall seeing Vivien Leigh playing the doomed courtesan in Sydney during her last Australian tour in 1961.

Preceding Anderson in February, 1909 was a one-night presentation on pay Friday under the auspices of the Trades and Labour Council in aid of the victims of the Broken Hill lockout including a complete play, *The Blind Witness*, City band, orchestra and musical items. The radicals of the time saw no incongruity in adopting conventional anti-Semitic prejudice. *Shylock and Fagan* at least are rounded characters. Popular melodrama, with its simple verities, offered Ikey Ikenstein, "a wily old Jew", obviously a stereotyped pawnbroker and money-lender, ready to exploit the misfortunes of the sturdy workers, for whom the synopsis closes with "the Jew in trouble". Perhaps the squatting themes were healthier in more ways than one.

A splendidly-mounted panto was described as "the event of the year", in February, 1914 for who could then anticipate the assassination of an Archduke, let alone the war which followed. George Willoughby, sub-lessee, arranged for two special trains to bring the costumes, properties and the 260 people associated with the production of *Aladdin* after an eight-week season in Sydney. An insert was the popular Ragtime Revue which was based on contemporary song-hits and does not mention Scott Joplin's accomplished "ragged-time" pieces which have been so successfully revived. Carrie Moore, another genuine star, played *Aladdin*. Still only thirty-one, she had appeared with J.C. Williamson's Comic Opera company, played principal boy in *Aladdin* and other pantos in England and returned in 1908 to appear as Sonia in the first Australian production of that most durable of operettas, *The Merry Widow*.

In the original production in Vienna in 1905, the *Merry Widow's* name is Hanna. The London production at Daly's in 1907 engaged translators who made several changes including the name, Sonia, for the Widow. After many revivals and recordings in both languages the discrepancy remains.

After this week of panto, Messrs. Dix and Baker returned with vaudeville. In June, 1906 they had begun presenting permanent vaudeville at Kings Hall, converted to a theatre, which was only a few doors away on the corner of King and Perkins Streets. By 1908, more ambitious, they were offering a lease for the Victoria which was rejected in favour of regular lettings and Anderson's shorter lease. During 1914 they were using various locations, including the Victoria, and halls in the nearby towns. It was hardly the legendary East of *Aladdin* although the Bill was topped during one March week of packed houses by "a dream of loveliness and a realisation of exquisite beauty" who remained, amid her shapely poses and spectacular lighting effects, as the anonymous *La France*.

Dix and Baker finally negotiated a lease in March, 1912 for ten years from July, including repairs, at 325 pounds payable quarterly. In July, 1914 they were offering "continuous photo plays" between 12 and 4 and their vaudeville turns in the evening. The former consisted of several films, including the first Australian version of *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, in

two continuous sessions. This version was made by the much-admired Raymond Longford in 1913; the second and available version was directed by Ken Hall in 1934. Late in the month, J. and N. Tait offered a three-night season of Harry Lauder, "the world's greatest entertainer". For once, the hyperbole seems accurate. It did not seem unusual that the arrival time of his train should be advertised and that he should be tendered a complimentary dinner. The little Scot was a legend in his own lifetime and his remarkable performance, with orchestra and supporting acts, was a highlight in the theatrical history of Newcastle. Yet it occurred on the eve of the gloom and destruction of World War I. The perceptive review by an unknown reporter deserves a mention. It described his performance in detail noting the "magnetic power" and extraordinary control which explains why he was so famous and successful.

By November, 1914 Dix and Baker were managing three houses. Their Vaudeville Players occupied the Victoria and a straight play occupied King's Hall, both with weekly Saturday changes. Central Hall screened movies with war newsreels a regular feature. In April, 1915 they added the Lyric, then entered via Thorn Street, which offered seven continuous daily sessions. Prices were 1/-, 2/- and 2/6 for the Victoria, 6d., 1/- and 2/- for the Kings and 6d., 1/- and 1/6 for the Central. The short sessions at the Lyric were a mere 3d. and 6d. Was it an unusually hot summer that the proprietors should advertise that the Victoria was "the coolest theatre in Australia" with its three sliding roofs?

Older folk will recall the great days of vaudeville at the Victoria in the 1920's, first under Dix and Baker's management, then from April, 1922 under Benjamin and John Fuller who became the proprietors. In March, 1923 it was added to their chain of thirteen theatres in Australia and six in New Zealand as listed in Fuller News, a combination of house magazine and theatre programme. The brothers had followed their father as performers and entrepreneurs in New Zealand then in 1914 formed a company which expanded their activities and crossed the Tasman. In 1921, Benjamin was knighted, probably because of his generous endowments to education, but he typically and generously described it as a recognition of the theatrical profession.

In 1920 Dix and Baker were paying weekly rentals and arguing over the terms of their lease. In March, 1922 they assigned it to Fullers who took their own lease in July at 585 pounds a quarter, probably for 15 years paying rates and repairs. The company was doing well paying a half-yearly dividend of 8%. In 1938 their lease had 13 years to run on the same terms and had evidently been renewed. They too became restless and it was cancelled in 1948 to be leased to Marine Theatres and later Newcastle Theatres on the Hoyts circuit.

Popular favourites of the 1920's included "Mo", (Roy Rene), Jim Gerald, Queenie Paul and Mike Connors, and George Wallace often heading their own companies in a Revue at the Victoria. Prices at 1/- and 2/- were moderate for live theatre. The theatre would occasionally offer a play, sometimes an Australian play, and a pantomime for Xmas and the school holidays in which the vaudeville stars would show their versatility as the Dame or in a comic interlude. Dix and Baker's "Laughter-getters" appeared during 1920 at the School of Arts, Branxton and other towns, as in the past. Newcastle was already playing its part as a regional, cultural centre.

One of Fuller's contract players recalls visiting Newcastle in a straight play on loan to J. & N. Tait. Now Mrs. Leila Cohen, a vivacious grandmother of four, (one of whom is the professional actress, Shani Wood, who has played in Newcastle more recently), she was then Leila Dabscheck

known as "Leila, the child wonder" in vaudeville and panto and Lola Darling in straight plays. In July, 1920 she arrived in Newcastle, all of eight years old, with her mother as manager and dresser, to appear for a week in John Hobbles' "charming romantic comedy", Daddies. They stayed at a hotel opposite the beach and a school inspector enrolled her at Newcastle East PS in Bolton Street for the mornings. However, the other pupils insisted she skip lessons and entertain them and their teachers with songs and dances from her shows. Her memorabilia include Xmas pantos on the same Bill as legendary "Stiffy and Mo" (Nat Phillips and Roy Rene).

Local talent was not missing. In September, 1922 Fullers' vaudeville topped the Bill with "Little Lorna, the West Maitland Wonder, the Girl with a Wink, the Cleverest Child who Ever Walked the Australian Stage", and on and on. Local films were proposed and screened. In May, Herbert's theatres (Lyric, Broadmeadow and Islington) advertised William Firth's Newcastle, production, A Newcastle Nut or a Farmyard Romance, "together with his gorgeous prologue of 15 Newcastle beach beauties".

Despite the popularity of vaudeville and local talent business was sometimes erratic and the movie houses were doing better. In January, 1922 the Victoria was advertising as Newcastle's "newest picture theatre" and could rightly boast that it was "a revelation in artistic genius and architectural design" by comparison with the draughty converted halls around the suburbs. A singer and orchestra were added attractions. For the holiday panto in late March, Fullers moved Dick Whittington, cast, cat, orchestra and staff to the renovated Lyric theatre in Wolfe Street. That BHP was almost out of orders was ominous news. The comparatively new steel works did actually close between June, 1922 and March, 1923 affecting all other business. Fullers however could support the theatre with their national chain. They offered vaudeville in April, 1922, closed in May and June, and returned with vaudeville in July. They ran plays with weekly changes in 1923 up to the Mother Goose panto in March. The improvement preceded another legendary performer. In July, Bert Bailey offered his famous characterisation of Dad in On Our Selection which he also produced and co-adapted. Showing his versatility he remained for another play which is worth noting for he is as much identified with this character as O'Neill with Dantes and William Gillette with Sherlock Holmes over 30 years.

The more prosperous late 1920's coincided with the great days of operetta and permitted a higher top price of 3/- or 4/- on Saturday, or even 10/- preferential booking for the combined Fullers and JCW presentation of Friml's Rose Marie in December, 1927. After all, ballerina Stephanie Deste and "the famous totem girls" were included. Conditions were reflected in the valuations which were now 2,500 pounds (NAV) and 6,930 pounds (UCV). The Xmas panto which followed was Aladdin played by the celebrated and still-active Australian actress, Neva Carr-Glynn. Gladys Moncrieff, "artiste supreme", and what theatre-goer would dispute it, appeared in Rio Rita in November, 1928. Thirty-four years later, in July, 1962, she was a guest at the opening night of a local production by the John Laman company at City Hall.

The big Xmas-New Year attraction for 1928-29 was the Fuller-Gonzalez Grand Opera season of nine-productions over eleven nights. The cast were prefaced by Signor this and Signora that and the reviews suggest a respectful and also large audience. Then it was more vaudeville before the well-known Sigmund Romberg pair, Desert Song and Student Prince, were presented in May, 1929. The important entertainment news in June was, "The Strand starts talking".

Australia shared an Anglophone culture with the United States and Britain and the products of their large film-making and film-exporting



Harry Lauder
Courtesy of the Australian Opera Trust



Roy (Mo) Rene
Courtesy of the Australian Opera Trust

industry. In the absence of adequate statistics of our own, theirs will serve to show the revolution in popular habits. Average weekly attendance in American movie-houses peaked at 95 million in 1929, dropped to 60 million in 1933, and rose to 88 million in 1936, and kept rising. Census population was 123 million in 1930 and 132 million in 1940 indicating for most people it was a weekly or fortnightly habit. In Britain the figure was 23 million or 990 million a year in 1939. A survey of Merseyside in 1934 found that 40% of the population went to the cinema in any one week.

The Granadas and Plazas of the time provided vicarious luxury, romance and service, the embodiment of the exotic screen products, all the more welcome amid the Depression and bleakness of the daily news. Habit, psychological need, and the novelty of sound enabled the industry and its dependent theatres to surmount the economic collapse without great difficulty. In 1931, the Hollywood studios compelled the distribution chains to accept block bookings and the individual proprietors in their turn offered a double bill to encourage business. The system quickly spread to Australia.

The Victoria switched to sound, "its new and startling policy", with *Madame X* (alias Ruth Chatterton) screening four shows a day, in late November, 1929. Prices were 1/6 and 1/-. As the average weekly wage in that year was about five pounds, much higher than before World War I, then entertainment for the masses was indeed cheaper. Three weeks later the Civic, "wonder theatre of Australia", began operations with "a 100% all-talking sensation", *Behind that Curtain*. It was owned and operated by the City of Newcastle and designed, together with the Town Hall, Wintergarden and shops by Henry White, who gave his theatre a Spanish interior design "quite new to Australian audiences". He designed it as a picture palace, though it could be used as a live theatre, whereas the Victoria was designed as a Victorian-age theatre with hotel, subsequently and unexpectedly used as a cinema. There were now four cinemas in the central city and eight or more were advertising together.

The advertising suggests the transition from silents to sound. Dubious patrons were reminded of the actors' stage experience or invited to hear Joan Crawford actually speak! Already a star in 1930 she had another forty years in films to come. The presentation sometimes suggested the block-busters of today. The Victoria took four columns width and eight inches length to offer Trade Horn and exotic illustrations. A Swahili native visited Newcastle to add to the chorus of praise. It had a long run in 1930 and starred Duncan Renaldo better known to a younger TV generation, years later, as Cisco Kid. Fullers converted to a weekly rental in 1931 suggesting business was uncertain.

But revue was still available. In November, 1930 Edgley and Dawe and their company appeared followed by George Wallace and his company in January, 1931. The war years reveal conventional Hollywood fare with a rare and welcome play. Benjamin Fuller and his new partner, Garnet Carroll, presented Charles Norman in Brandon Thomas' comedy classic, *Charley's Aunt*, for a five night season in October, 1940. Norman had played the part many times in Australia and overseas. But the news provided a painful backdrop. The Vichy government in France had concluded an agreement with Germany and there was regular bombing of English targets. In April-May, 1942 there were revivals of *Gone with the Wind* and *Fantasia*, two exceptional films, which barely preceded the shelling of Newcastle by Japanese submarines in June.

Older folk recall Sunday night concerts at the Victoria in the late 1930's and early 1940's with admission by a silver coin. The smallest, then a three-pence or "thruppence", would suffice. The programme consisted



*John Shaw as Scarpia in the Australian Opera's production of Puccini's Tosca
Courtesy of the Australian Opera Trust*

of community singing and musical items by local performers.

By mid-century, the Victoria was now a busy cinema with four shows a day and a staff of twenty and weekly changes. It was attached to the Hoyts circuit but it was common knowledge in the trade that the Civic received the more prestigious and profitable films. They had bought Herbert's three cinemas in 1933. Advertisements were much smaller and more prosaic than the early 1930's when audience habit was influenced by restricted incomes and the novelty of sound. It was the assistant manager's job to deal with the daily banking and the weekly changes of newspaper advertising, the outside, hand-painted banner and the foyer showcases. Occasionally a play or musical appeared. In July, 1952 there was Worm's Eye View, and Sumner Locke Elliott's successful Rusty Bugles, "as Australian as a ghost gum", to quote the reviewer. Prices were 8/-, 5/- and 3/-.

The second-last major theatrical event was a spectacular Elizabethan Theatre Trust Opera season of eight nights and four ballet matinees in August, 1957. It was quite a change from the film which immediately preceded it, Ray Milland and Anthony Quinn in a cinemascope western, Rivers Edge, with an English second feature. They offered La Boheme, with Elsie Morison, Tosca with Joan Hammond and John Shaw, and The Tales of Hoffman. Shaw, whose Scarpia is now famous, was then thirty-five. He grew up in Newcastle, sang in a church choir, and while working at BHP studied with Colin Chapman. I saw him in Melbourne in an early principal role in Menotti's The Consul in 1953. Here his height was an advantage though some Scarpias have been short. The reviewers, Leo Butler and Ian Healey, praised the two ladies for their exceptional characterisation as well as their singing and insisted that Shaw too was a worthy partner for Hammond's Maria. Ronald Dowd, singing Mario, who graced Australian opera for many years in tenor roles, told a lunch audience that on a previous visit they had given lunch-time concerts in an attempt to stimulate interest. This time, he was an invited guest and could join Hammond and Shaw in eight curtain calls. Newcastle and its fine, old theatre responded with enthusiasm and big houses and saluted a local singer on the eve of an international career. Unfortunately, the Trust reported a considerable loss on the season.

One big event was a cinema spectacular. Michael Todd had broken new ground with Around the World in Eighty Days in 1956, the first film on the wide 70mm screen with extensive location shooting and 44 stars in cameo roles. After a long Sydney season it opened in Newcastle in late August, 1960 and ran a month. The gala opening night charged the prices of a live show and revived the costume parade, band, lights and after-show supper at the Great Northern hotel of yesteryear.

The last theatrical event was a twenty-two night season in May-June, 1963 of The Sound of Music presented by Garnet Carroll and the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Top prices were now 30/-. The advertising suggests much... "See it with someone you love"... however the reviewers and audience were enthusiastic and a large and talented cast had a long run in which to find the appropriate style. It was headed by Renee Guerin who had played Maria on Broadway, alternating with the legendary Mary Martin, and Rosina Raisbeck as the Abbess who, like John Shaw, was a local prodigal. While in Newcastle she renewed acquaintance with Estelle Peat of Jesmond, a member of the old Eckford family of Maitland, who had given her first piano and singing lessons. Her brother and parents still lived in Newcastle and attended the performance. A win in the Sun Aria contest had taken her to England in 1947 and a career in opera. She had returned to Australia for the opening of The Sound of Music in Sydney in October, 1961 and would remain to join the Australian Opera company. Then it was film business as usual with a double bill in which Humphrey Bogart and Gregory Peck indulged

in a rash of gunplay.

In March, 1966 the Newcastle Morning Herald announced that the Victoria would close. The last picture screened, Who is Buried in My Grave, enabled a true star of the screen, Bette Davis, to bow out the theatre-turned cinema. It inspired a sensitive appreciation of its memories by the film critic, Alan Watkins. In November, a company controlled by the present owner, Mr. W. Eastham, bought the site for 33,000 pounds from the Victoria Theatre company which later went into liquidation in May, 1982. After the sale, the company had intended to wind up when practicable which meant when the fifteen year term of the sale-by mortgage was completed. It was still paying a reasonable dividend but, nostalgia aside, its purpose had gone.

Cinemas continued to close in the suburbs and adjacent towns. Maitland's three were no more although the Chelsey was attractively restored as a market for antiques and bric-a-brac. It seemed part of a relentless surge of the clubs and TV and VCR machines which absorbed a movie habit and the more mediocre product. In time, the custom-built multiple cinema emerged, even further removed from a grand theatre and reminders of Apollo and the nine muses.

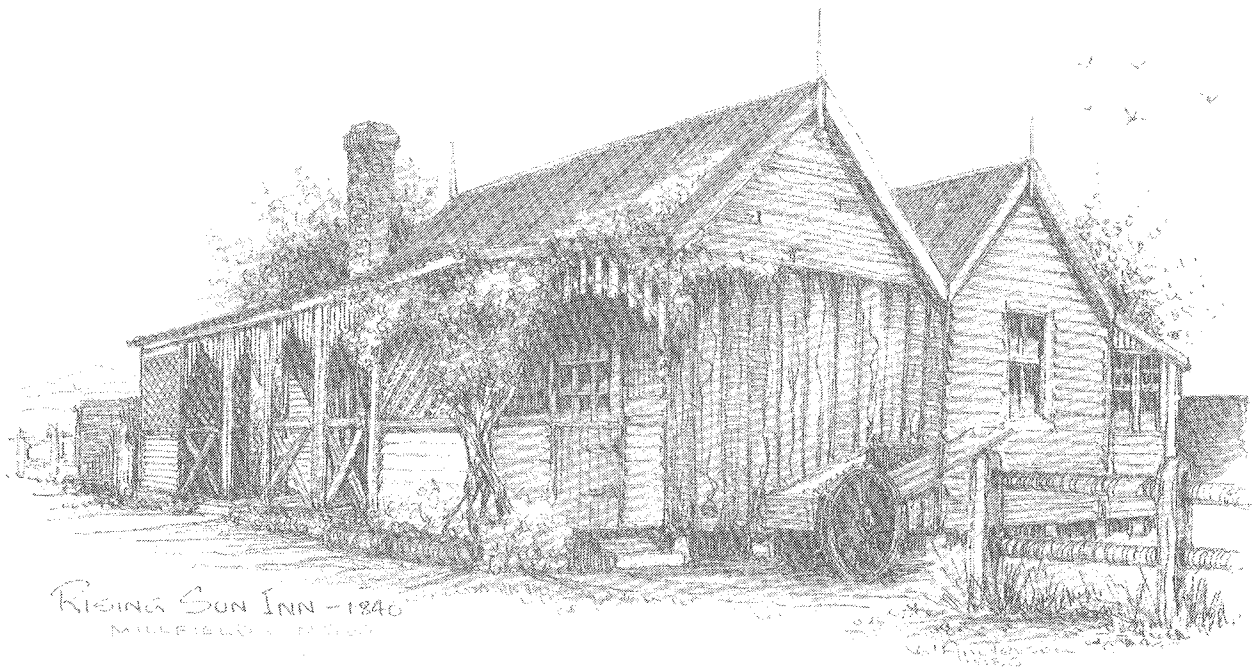
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES AND REFERENCES

The main source is microfilm of the Newcastle Morning Herald (now Herald). The Regional Library holds bound press-cuttings, mainly advertisements of films, 1927-30, and some clippings in the flat files. The University of Newcastle Archives holds a volume of Dix & Baker Ltd. The press-cuttings evidently complete from the Herald for 1914-15. The Mitchell Library has a MS collection on the Fuller Trust, a scholarship endowed for overseas training in agriculture, 1921-63, and a collection of the house-magazine, Fuller News, 1922-25. HDWaterBoard Ratebooks (Regional Library) furnished information about valuation and occupancy. The Victoria Theatre Co. Papers (1886-1982) in eight bound volumes, in the hands of Mr. Bruce Brown, Accountant, of Newcastle, furnished information about the Company, leases and the building.

A useful article is W.J. Goold, "Amusements of Newcastle", Jo. NHDHS, IX (June, 1955), 129-36. Several books provided background on film and theatre history particularly, Eric Irvin, Australian Melodrama: Eighty Years of Popular Theatre (Sydney, 1981) and Jeffrey Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939 (London, 1984), 11-33. Cobbett Steinberg, Film Facts (New York, 1980) is an ideal concise reference. Australian Dictionary of Biography, 10 vols., (Melbourne, 1966-86) was useful. Personal recollections were provided by Mrs. Leila Cohen (nee Dabscheck) and Mr. Maurice Edmunds, assistant manager of the Victoria, ca. 1960, not forgetting many former patrons. I would like to thank two helpful librarians, Ms. Jennifer Sloggett (Newcastle Regional Library) and Mr. Paul Bentley (Sydney Opera House).

Millfield
12/1888
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*The old cottage at Millfield believed to be the former Rising Sun Inn
from a painting by Val Anderson in Author's possession*

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