

GOING TO THE PICTURES IN PORT MELBOURNE

REMINISCENCES
ON THE
PORT THEATRE AT
LIARDET AND BAY STREETS
AND THE
ECLIPSE THEATRE
AT CROCKFORD AND
PICKLES STREETS
IN PORT MELBOURNE

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A conversation with John and Win May, Ron Stranks and Barbara and Bob Gardiner, remembering the Port Theatre (1913-1952) in the 1940s and 50s.

John The two theatres in Port Melbourne were the *Port Theatre* and the *Eclipse* theatre. There were also two in Albert Park that we used to frequent quite often, but these were the main two in question. The *Port* was not a palace - lino on the floors, and the peanut galleries that were the inspiration for people who wanted to have a bit of a cuddle. (They thought they were out of the way; I don't know why, cause there were plenty of people sat in there.) I'm trying to recall - it had an upstairs, didn't it, Ron?

Ron Yes ...

John We never featured up there ...

Barb No, we never did.

Ron Oh, I did one night; I took a young lady up there one night that I wanted to impress, but that's the only time I ever went up there.

John 'Cause it was dearer upstairs, wasn't it? Cost more money.

Barb Oh, yes. Better seats, weren't they.

John What we used to do - we were pretty cunning for young blokes, didn't have a lot of money - we'd meet the girls inside. Save you paying her fare in. Well, that's the way it was. Bill Rogers was the owner, manager of the Port Theatre. Hereinafter known as Baldy - Baldy Rogers. And we all thought he was a bit of a goose, but - we didn't dislike him, but just kept trying to take a rise out of him. He'd have thrown us out of the place, and we'd come back all dressed up with hats and God-knows what, and he'd just wink at the usher and say, take 'em over there... If we didn't play up he'd let us stay, and if we did play up he'd put us out again. But he was an old bloke, wasn't he?

Ron He was the owner, but he was always in attendance, as manager/owner/usher. And then we had another fellow called Smith who was on usher, and then another guy who we never ever found out what his name was, but-don't ask me why - but his nickname was McGuntis.

John That's what we called him, anyway.

Ron And this said McGuntis was about 5 foot 3 tall, probably weighed about ten stone and was in his sixties, and he would be one of the toughest people you would ever meet. Was frightened of nobody. An absolutely incredible person. He would stand up against a guy six feet tall and throw him out.

How often did he need to throw someone out?

Oh, probably about one in every three movies, somebody got thrown out. She was a pretty rough spot.

John Nothing really bad...

Ron Just rowdy.

John ... I recall the night I'd taken a steel ball with me, about 25mm in diameter... Because they had the linoleum floors it'd make a noise. And I'd sit on the outside in the aisle seat, and during the movie rolled it down the aisle. Of course, boom-boom boom, and at the timber fascia where the screen was: Bang!

We thought that was hilarious. There was no harm done, but...

What were the seats like?

Barb Ooh ... hard! I remember they were hard.

John Yeah, pretty ordinary at the *Port*. They didn't have the plush coverings.

Barb Just with very small padding - hardly any padding at all.

Win With drawing pins round the padding ...

Barb I seem to remember them being sort of leather ...

John Vinyl, like a vinyl ...

Barb Well, leatherette or whatever they called it in those days.

John Yeah.

Ron Yes, the place must have been quite a lucrative business for Mr Rogers, because the place was bordering on at least three quarters full every Saturday night. And the funny part about it – I think you mentioned dress before - in those days, although it was a pretty poor area and things were pretty tough, people did in fact dress up to go to the movies, even at the Port. But there wasn't too many people who you could say looked really scruffy at the movies. You know, we're talking about the 40s, and things didn't really come good until about the 50s. People were, in fact, still getting over the depression and the war in the late 40s. It wasn't an easy time for our parents.

John I'm battling to recall at the *Port* a lolly boy as such. They had them at the *Eclipse*. *Well, did you read what Charles Hall said in the book? He was a lolly boy at the Port. He said there was a little ice cream/lolly shop next door, and they had to go out and get their trays from there.*

Quite right ... but as I said, I'm battling to recall lolly boys there - that's not to say there wasn't. That may have been before my time. Probably there in my time, but in my mind's eye I just can't seem to see them at the *Port* now ...

Ron Well, the thing that I can remember at the *Port* at interval was that everybody-almost the whole theatre - would empty out and go across the road to a shop that was in fact in turn owned by Alex James.

John Before that owned by Percy White.

Ron Yes. And that shop used to have glasses upon glasses upon glasses of sarsaparilla and orange lined up on the counter. You could take a glass of sarsaparilla and probably a Dixie, an ice cream in a cup with a spoon, and that would be your interval. Everybody would down that drink and take the glass back into the shop, and then get on back across the road into the movie.

John Except the Greeks. They used to smash their glasses.

Oh, stop! Well, they must not have had a lolly boy by then. It must have been earlier.

Well, see, what happened with lolly boys-you've gotta remember they didn't carry drinks in those days; just ice creams, Maltesers ...

Barb Violet Crumbles ...

John Yeah, well they were the big go, too. But the shop that belonged to the theatre wasn't all that big, and you get twelve people in there and that was about it. So people got jock of waiting, so some'd go over the rood, and some'd go a bit further down, to ... oh ... Smith's. They had a milk bar just down there near the butcher shop. Freddy Smith.

Barb I can also remember going diagonally across Liardet Street, the second shop, and there was homemade chocolates.

Ron Yeah, we've argued about that at length ...

John Well, those people, their name was Galatos.

Barb In my mind they were Chinese ...

John No, they had a little bit of something in them.

Barb ut they made the most beautiful chocolates.

John I went over to the Bulleen Pharmacy a couple of years ago and there was a young boy serving there; I hadn't seen him before ... and I saw his head and I said, How's the chocolate shop? *Chocolate shop?* Yeah, the chocolate shop down in Port. *Oh, that was me grandfather's.* He said, *How'd you know about it?* I said, I'm from Port. *But, how'd you ask me?* I said, You've got a Galatos head! And he did!

Barb Isn't that incredible!

John And the same boy's not there now, he's got a shop which I see on the corner of Chapel and Commercial Rood, in Prahran. There's another young fellow, their name's up there, Nick Galatos and Tom V ...

John Those people had that chocolate shop for years and years.

But that's not where you went for interval?

Barb I did ... I went for the chocolates.

Ron Most people went to the shop opposite. I'd say about 75% of the audience.

John This was before Perce White owned it, we're talking about. Perce had that actual shop years later.

Ron In fact, would I be right in saying maybe Frank Gomez had it at one time? Coach Gomez?

John I can't recall. ...

Ron (Frank, for the record, was the coach of the Port Melbourne third 18 for many, many years, and won seven premierships in a row with them. I have a feeling he might have owned that shop at one time.)

Did you all go to the Eclipse as well?

John Oh, yes, Monday and Friday nights.

Ron Just before we get to the *Eclipse*, I can remember in the very early 40s I used to go to the *Port* with my Mum when I was very little, on Saturday nights. And one of the first movies that I can remember, which at that time was classed as a horror movie - would you believe it was called *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*?

All Oh, yes ...

Ron I think they may have since re-made that movie. Strange to say, a very beautiful lady who has her own series at the moment on the TV, was a very young star of that movie - goodness knows how young she was - but that in fact was Angela Lansbury. And I can vividly remember everybody shrinking in fear when the picture came on the screen, this hideous creature that had supposedly aged with the person. I distinctly remember that that was in the very, very early days that I went to the *Port*.

John Well, I had a horrible experience at the *Port Theatre* myself. I was keeping company with a young lady name of Margaret O'Sullivan - and I don't mean the film actress - and we had a lovely cuddling session. I think I kissed her 132 times because some mongrel was counting in the background. And I think what happened after that was they gave her such a hard time over it that our get-together was no longer a get-together - she dropped me off! Didn't do me any harm, I suppose, but I was quite pleased at the time. I didn't mind getting the flick, but.

Bob She might have found a bloke who could kiss 150 times.

John Well, maybe so.

Ron But the ushers were very, very competent - I can remember the night that I was ejected from the joint. ...

John That means thrown out. He's showing off now with big words.

Ron I got turfed out. I'd decided that I'd have a bit of a whistle during the movie. I was whistling away, and unbeknown to me, Smithy the usher had moved into a seat directly behind me, grabbed me by the collar and said, *Come on son, let's go*. Marched me outside to old Rogers; he said, *I'm gonna throw this fellow out where he belongs, with the birds - he thinks he's a sparrow*. So out I went. But they let me back in the next week.

John Worst thing about it was you had to wait around outside till the second movie finished, for all your mates.

Barb Walking back home from the pictures, that was part of the fun. Because you'd talk to people in the street, chat away - that was all part of it, I felt.

Ron In those days it was a way of life.

Barb For us living in Cruikshank Street, we just had to go straight up Pickles Street ...

John And turn left ...

Barb Yes, to the *Eclipse* ... we'd all walk together, home, and you'd be talking to Auntie Oliy and Uncle Al next door, and the Malloms - well, they'd always be with us, we'd always be with the Malloms ... And then coming back from the *Port* was just the same, you'd chat away ... relive the film as you were walking home.

Win Most people did walk. Not many people had cars.

Barb No. That's right. I mean, we used to walk right over to Albert Park, too.

John What we used to do -there was quite a few of us; wouldn't call us a gang as such but we used to play cricket and handball together in the street; and some of the boys had girlfriends and some didn't. A lot of the girls were unattached, but we'd all be at the movies, and we'd walk the girls home - if they weren't with their fella then we'd always walk them home, see 'em to their door, then we'd push on and the numbers would be dwindling, dwindling, dwindling till there were two or three of the fellas left. But they were good days. I can recall a girl who was one of the best sorts in Port, Barbara Preston; we were all coming home one night, I said good-night and someone said to me, *Give it a good night, John, on your birthday* ... She

says, *Birthdays*? And she called me back and gave me a big kiss. A friendly one, you know-we were all mates. And I didn't mind, cause she was a good looking girl, wasn't she, Ron?

Ron Oh, if you don't mind.

John Yeah, that's how it was - it was just terrific. Everyone looked after each other. It was a pretty close-knit community. And that's the problem today, I suppose, that's all changed. And that's natural, cause most people who live there haven't been there long, are from all different countries, like you, Pat - everyone's died or moved out ...

Not everyone ...

No, but when before there was a million people there now there's only a thousand ...

You still get the feeling that ...

Oh, that's right; well, the area's got that-it's inbuilt. But the people that made that, you know ... well, we've got a saying, There's two types of people in this world -people who come from Port, and people that wish they did. That's how we feel in ourselves. But by the same token, people that come from Williamstown, they're proud of their city. Doesn't matter where you come from, you should be proud of where you were born; that's the way to go. But we come from the Borough.

Ron It is a funny thing, though - if you ever hear anything on radio or like that about Port, the caption always is, oh, they know how to stick down there. You don't hear that about any other community in Melbourne ...

Barb I think Willy ...

Ron ... but you hear it about Port.

Getting back to the *Port Theatre*, as I mentioned, my dad was a projectionist for twenty years. Not at the *Port* ... he was at the *Austral Theatre* in Collingwood. These operators - well, I can tell you that in those days -you mentioned the lights – the lights were on what they called a dimmer, which in fact was a big arm that projected out of the wall, and he would pull that from the top down to the bottom very, very slowly, and the lights would dim as you did that.

Up in the projection room?

That's right. And the movies themselves were – in fact the lighting system - was by carbon arc

lamp. That was two carbons burning in what they called the light cage; one was a long lasting carbon burning and the other was short. They had to be very, very careful that they replaced those short carbons in time for a reel of film to come up. They were, of course, double projectors, and as each reel of film was dispensed with, the next machine would come in with the next reel. My Dad had his own particular way of marking the spot where the second projector had to come in: he used to go out during the day and rewind all his film and have it all ready for the night's session, and he would place a penny in, say, 10 or 15 feet from the end of the reel of film, and when that penny dropped out of the film it would make a noise against the metal and he would immediately switch to the next reel and shut that one out. And that's how they switched reels in those days.

Win There used to be lots of problems, I remember, with the projection. And that's where the audience would go ...

Barb Mayhem!

John It was good fun.

Barb I was thinking about curtains at the *Port*. I can't remember curtains at the *Port* but there probably were.

John Oh, yes.

Barb It wasn't all the elaborate curtains of the *Eclipse*, was it? Simple curtains ...

People talk about it being very primitive, timber ... was it purpose built?

Win Oh, yes. I can remember the slant going down to the screen.

Bob That's how you could roll the steel balls. The front of the stage was probably 3-ply. It wasn't elaborate. But we didn't need elaborate, as long as the movies came over. Would have been nice if the seats were a bit more comfortable, but outside of that ...

Barb Of course they had the MGM musicals and that, you know, you could see Judy Garland and ...

Win Well, I can remember seeing Roy Rene; my parents taking me to see Roy Rene

In the city?

No, at the *Port Theatre*.

Live?

In a movie.

John He was at the Tivoli in person.

Well, he has played the Port Town Hall in person.

John I remember Dad telling me that.

Ron I did see Roy Rene in person at the Tivoli ... Somebody said, in those tapes, that nobody "went to see him" because he was, you know, risqué - but when he played, the place was absolutely chock-a-block. Yet nobody admitted to it ... He would, at the Tivoli, before the show would start, come from behind the screen, just pull the screens back and put his head through like that, and he'd just leer. And they'd all go berserk, and the show hadn't even started. That's the power he had. I've got several tapes of his I can play in the car.

They wouldn't ever have live {entertainment} at the Port though, would they?

Win Didn't they have a pianist?

No, you're talking sound now - it was too late.

Win I only remember black and white films at the *Port Theatre*.

John But they always had pianists in the city when we had sound.

Ron There was an absolutely magnificent organist by the name of Coleman who I in fact met and worked for, who lived in Eltham; this guy was an organist that used to play at the *State Theatre*.

John The fellow that took his place was unbelievable, too; can't remember his name.

Barb I can remember at the *Regent*, a whole band coming up out of the floor.

Win There was entertainment before the film, and at interval.

In the city? Everywhere?

Well, in a couple of big theatres.

Barb The *Regent* and the *State*.

Bob Where the organist used to rise up from the stage.

Barb I remember at the *Park*. I've got a feeling there was an organ on the side ...

Ron The guy that you're thinking of at the *Park* was ... oh ... Kenny something or other ... Larry? Lenny?

John But anyway, it'd be the same fellow.

Barb The *Park* theatre, you

know, where the Albert Park Library is, that was a huge theatre ...

A lot bigger than the Eclipse?

Oh, yes.

Ron We used to go over there occasionally, Saturday nights.

Barb And it would be packed!

But the Kinema was just across the road from it ...

Barb Yes, but there again they had different films. They had the MGM and Paramount ...

Ron We used the *Kinema* and the *Park* after the *Port* closed.

The *Port* closed ... I can't

remember what year the *Port* closed, but the *Port* closed early. And then the *Eclipse* closed up, which left the *Park* and the *Kinema* and we used to walk from Port across there every Saturday night.

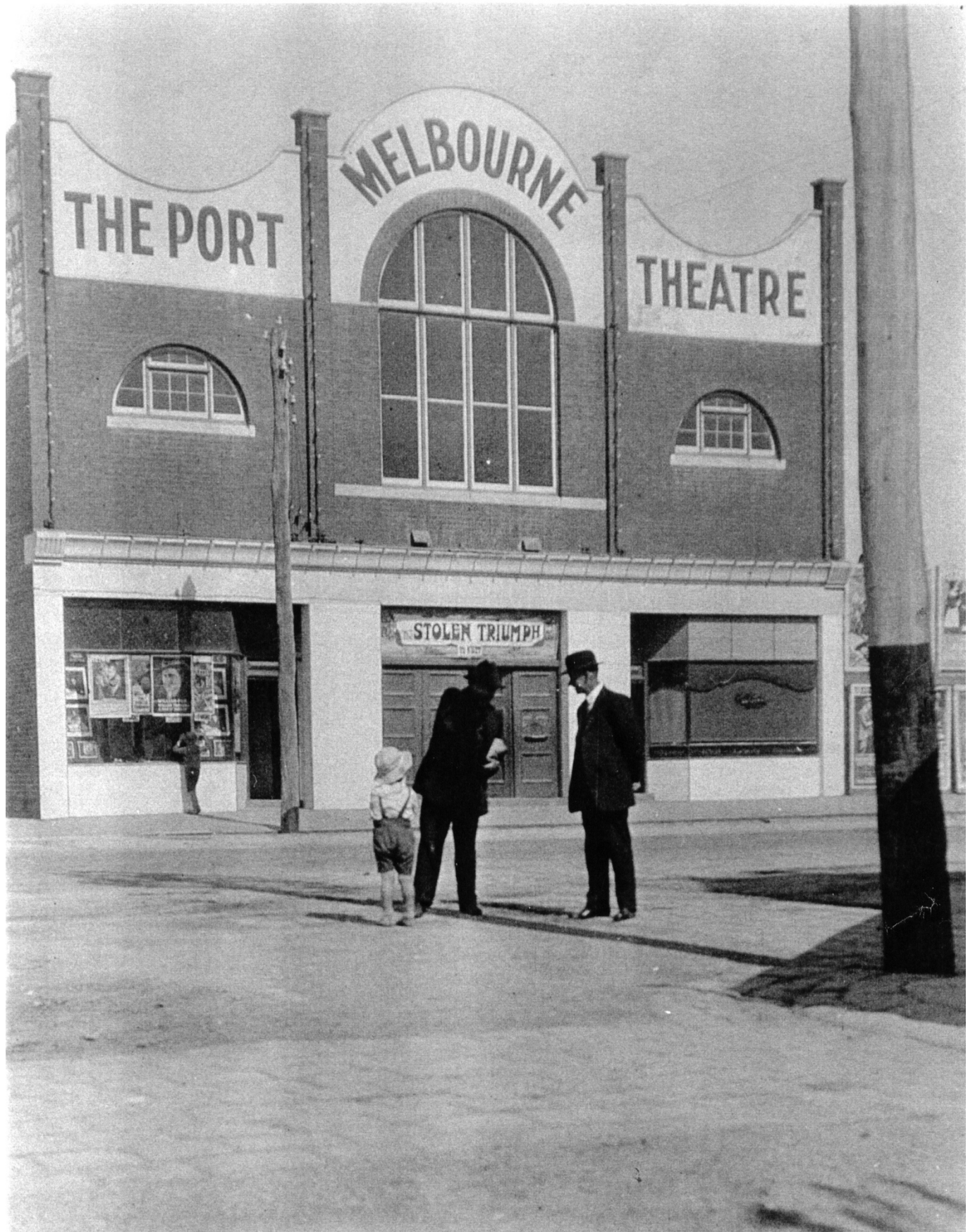
John The *Kinema* would be the least used of all of them.

Ron And then we used to call in to the Chinese shop, which had three very, very slow, elderly Chinese gentlemen running it. It was the local fish shop, almost on the corner of Bridge and Bay about two or three doors down. Yes ... they were named ... we nicknamed them 'Speed', 'Lightning' and 'Flash', because they were so slow.

John They were shockers, unbelievable.

Ron But they had beautiful stuff. One of them was a toothless little guy about 70, and we used to say to him ... we'd order a dozen dim sims, and he'd go out back and you could hear him, "One dun din din!"

[End tape. Recorded 20 Feb 1995, transcribed by Pat Grainger]



BAY STREET'S PORT THEATRE IN THE SILENT FILM ERA



April 1995: Kay Rowan of Pickles Street, Port Melbourne, questions her father Arthur Rowan on the now demolished Hoyt's Eclipse where he worked in the 1950s, then continues on to describe the theatre as she remembers it from childhood.

You worked at the Eclipse theatre from when?

In the 40s, that's all I can tell you. I don't know when.

Well, it wasn't in the 40s, it was in the 50s, 'cause I can tell you that. I was old enough to remember you there, so it must be in the 50s. Right?

All right, I agree.

How'd you get the job?

They needed another man, that's all.

Did you have any relatives who worked there?

Yes, I had a brother-in-law that worked there ... Eric LeGassick.

And how long do you think he'd been working there?

Oh, possibly ten years.

Before the second world war?

No ... I don't really know ...

Well, he was there for a long time before you started ...

Oh, yeah, that's right-for years.

Well, what were your duties?

Well, actually I was an usher, and occasionally I was on the door taking tickets.

How often did you work?

Once a week, Friday nights.

Friday nights. You remember how many were employed at the theatre?

Well, to the best of my knowledge there were two ushers, and the manager was there, and the girl in the ticket-box.

What was the uniform like?

The uniform was just ordinary black pants, and a short, maroon jacket. With gold buttons, a double row of gold buttons.

Do you remember what you were paid?

Well, whatever I was paid, it wasn't much.

Can you give me some anecdotes about working there?

Yeah, I possibly can. One night-oh, my nephew became manager-and this particular night attendance was very poor. We had two adults lined up, and when the manager came in for a head count, to see how things were going, he found ten kids and two adults. Then he called me up into the office.and asked, How come ten kids and two adults were there, when only two adults paid for tickets? So I told him it would be better to have ten non-paying kids, than to have two only adults in the theatre. He didn't like that and he started to tick me off, so I told him to keep his job, and I walked off there and then!

Would that have been when the theatres were losing customers when ...

Yes, and they were losing customers that fast ...

Because of the drive-in? Television?

Because of television.

So how many years do you think you worked at the theatre?

Oh, about two years.

Well in that case if they were losing it to television and we got television here in '56, it must have been '54, '55 that you worked there?

No, I think television was in.

Well, perhaps it was '56, '57? And your nephew-in-law, what was his name?

Peter Ive.

And how long was he there? Until it folded?

Until it folded, yes.

What do you remember about the building itself?

It was a squat sort of a building, on the corner of Pickles Street oh, I dunno, it was just an ordinary theatre, that's all. I lived about seven houses away from the theatre.

Is there anything else you can think of that would be of interest?

Yes - across the road there was a hamburger place and you could smell it night and day.

That's not quite what I meant ... do you have any more anecdotes about the theatre? Were there ever any fights there or anything like that? Or was it a rather nice place to go to?

It was quite good, because there were never any fights, to my knowledge. No drunks. No fights. The only thing is one night I walked in there after I'd been sacked some time, and I smelt a smell that was familiar to me, and I went to the manager and I said, have you got any electric motors in this building? And he said, no. All of a sudden it dawned on him, he said, Yes, I have! The one that works the curtains.

So I said, you'd better have a look at the curtain - at that machine - because I think it's on fire. And he went and found out, and it was. It had seized up and it had started to burn. So he promptly put it out. And that was it. That's the only exciting thing in the whole history.

This was just a job apart from your normal day job, wasn't it?

Yeah, I started off just to help them out till they got a regular man. And they took a while to get a regular man.

Do you remember much about the fittings inside of the theatre? ! mean, the colour of the seats, or ...

Yeah, they were all maroon. They weren't very well upholstered; they weren't really comfortable seats. Just with iron arms with a bit of material on top of the arms - nothing really exciting.

How many exits were there?

Two. One in Crockford Street, one in Pickles Street, and then the main entrance.

The shape of this building: it took up a corner position, didn't it, with the front coming to a point?

No, it was more of a square, but it was uh, let me see were at right angles to one another. It had a front that was in Pickles, and the side that was in Little Ingles Street, came to an angle. Not a big angle, just a small angle, so it was actually just off the square, really. ■

Kay Rowan describes the *Eclipse* during the 1940s/50s:

My name is Kay Rowan, and I live in Pickles Street, Port Melbourne. My house is built on the site of what used to be a woodyard situated on the corner of Little Ingles Street and Pickles Street, opposite the Little Ingles Street exit of the *Eclipse* picture theatre.

All my *Eclipse* picture-going years were when I lived at 201 Pickles Street, so close that I would go every Saturday afternoon to the kids' matinee and every Saturday night with my parents. My very first Saturday nights were spent there as a babe in arms. My mother used to take me and a small bottle of orange juice, so that if I cried she would get up and take me out to the exit are just behind her seat. This was the exit area to Little Ingles Street. It had a concrete floor and a large porcelain trough. It was rather secluded so I could have a cry in peace, on~ she would give me the orange juice to keep me quiet.

My father and mother always had the same seats, and then when I come along and could sit in a seat; they just added one on. And the some with my sister... so we always had the seats D 33, 34, 35 and 36. And I remember I was the one who used to go up every Saturday night at 5.30 to collect the tickets. We always had reserve seats. Most people did, because it was a very big thing to go out to the pictures on a Saturday night. You'd all get dressed up and my father would even wear a tie.

The only prices that I ever remember were for the matinees: sixpence downstairs and ninepence upstairs. I only ever went upstairs once.

My picture going years did start in the year that I was born, 1942, and continued right up until the theatre closed down. I can go through and describe various aspects of the *Eclipse* and going to the pictures, and the sorts of things that happened there.

At the children's matinee, I can remember they used to have - every Saturday - a short concert. The manager would come out on the stage, and there would be prizes, and sometimes there would be acts; some sort of a

dance, or a song, or a clown; and there'd be a Screen News - you'd buy a Screen News at the front of the theatre and there'd be a lucky number on it, and a prize for that. And I remember we would always sing. It was ... "*Come along and have a Peters Ice Cream*" ... There was also another song that we'd sing as well; it went something like [sings]

*"Here we are again, happy as can be;
All good friends and jolly good company..."*

This was rather a happy little interlude for the children. There was always a cartoon, and a serial, and then the film.

The *Eclipse* was a Hoyts theatre, so you saw RKO, 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros; you didn't see MGM or Paramount-you had to go over to the *Kinema* in Albert Park to see those. So you saw all the other ones, and the English films as well - all the London films, and all the others that come from England. And I remember that we used to have serials such as *Jungle Jim* and *Sir Galahad* and one a bit like *Biggles*; I remember they had aeroplanes and things in it.

You used to meet all your friends at the pictures I don't think I ever made a noise or anything, but a lot of the children screamed, yelled and kicked the seats when things didn't go right. Yet it was always a well conducted place.

The adults' programmes would change halfway through the week. At the beginning of the week you would see a lot of the second ... not the B pictures but the second-rate sort of pictures. And most of the English films were on at the beginning of the week because they didn't seem quite so important as films from Hollywood. They always had two films with an interval, and the B picture - what they used to call the B picture or the supporting film - would be on first, and the main film on after interval.

I can remember the clothing that the ushers wore ... there weren't usherettes. We had for many years a lady in the ticket box (her name was Jean Elmslie), and I can remember what she wore quite vividly, because I did admire it very much. It was a floor length, gored, maroon skirt, with a cummerbund of the same material. She wore a long, very full-

sleeved white blouse with a wide open collar. And with that she had a little bolero of maroon as well.

The ushers I think my father has said what the ushers wore. There was a lolly boy as well, and he wore a miniature version of the ushers, a maroon jacket with the gold buttons.

I can describe the building. In fact, I think I can describe the building a lot better than my father, and I suppose this is because I spent more time there. I found the interior of the building very interesting. The foyer was on three levels and it had wide, shallow, curved steps, an expanse of floor and then some more steps. The floor was granite (I can still see the shiny specks in it) – in swirls of cream, pale pink and pale green. I'd say three or four shallow steps and then foyer, and then more shallow steps, right across the foyer. So that we'd come out, my cousin and I, and we'd think we were Doris Day or Gene Nelson and dance out in the foyer, as it looked like one of those wonderful floors they had in the musicals. That always impressed me, the swirls of granite on the floor.

In the foyer the walls were a pale green colour, I remember that, and when you came out of the doors from the auditorium, on the right hand side were the two doors to the toilets and they were painted ... stained a dark brown, as were the doors to the auditorium.

Behind the ticket box was the manager's office. The ticket box was in the centre of the back wall of the foyer, and on the left of the ticket box was a staircase going upstairs. And I remember the carpeting on the stairs and the carpeting in the auditorium was a thick, red, plushy carpet with big, gold swirls on it.

I remember that the doors to the outside doors were a barrier of glass, right across the front of the building. Now, my father and I disagree on this aspect of the exterior of the building: it actually ... it come to a point. The square building sort of got chopped off a bit, and then it had this very small pointed bit which was a porch that faced into the corner of Crockford and Pickles Street. It was a covered in area, with a floor of ochre coloured tile. So that you had the theatre with this verandah-type covered area, making the building look as if it

come to a point. And you'd use that as a shortcut to go through to Crockford Street from Pickles, instead of following where the footpath went. You'd stand under there if it was raining.

On the large pillar outside they would have the showcards of what was coming or what was on at the present moment. The side of the building in Crockford Street had an exit right at the back. (Inside this was the exit on the right hand side of the screen.) When you left from this exit, right next door was the lolly shop – which was attached to the theatre.

When you were in the auditorium, down on the left hand side next to the stage and screen was a piano. It did disappear eventually, but I remember vividly when I was a kid the piano being there.

The seats: now, I remember the seats as being dark blue leather. In fact, I remember the seats being changed only twice. I think once there was a cloth - that heavy, furnishing material; and then later there was a blue leather. So I differ from my father in that.

It was a very big theatre. I don't know how many it sat, but it was very large; although when you look at the site now with the 7/11 convenience store on it, it doesn't look large. The walls inside the auditorium had been velvet or another material I'm not quite sure, but they were red. And I remember when Cinemascope came to the theatre they had big sound boxes erected on the walls. These had a fancy scroll pattern.

The theatre had a small sized screen until Cinemascope came along. Some of the other wider screens were perfected by Paramount-with Vistavision and other companies. But you'd find those at MGM theatres. This was a Hoyts theatre. I saw *The Robe* there, the first Cinemascope movie. Both it and *No Business Like Show Business* had intervals - what a novelty!

Sometimes if the film was exceedingly good, they'd replay the part that got the most attention from the audience. So that when we saw *There's No Business Like Show Business* in Cinemascope, they replayed the song that Johnny Ray sang.

Quite often there was audience participation at the films. They would show their appreciation of the film by clapping afterwards. Sometimes you go to the *Astor* now and get the same response from the audience.

Just to add a few more remembrances of the theatre: The seating was arranged so that on either side of the auditorium, seats were against the wall, with an aisle, and then a wide middle section of seats.

Above the staircase alongside the Crockford Street wall of the theatre was a tall, thin, arched window with an opaque glass in it.

I also remember that when you looked at the ceiling - when I go into a theatre I like to look up because they always do interesting things with ceilings in theatres - I spent some time looking at the ceiling in the *Eclipse*, and I think I remember it being a little bit stepped. There was some sort of ... not a pattern, but some sort of lines that looked like very narrow and shallow steps ... or ridges ... And the same goes for the walls.

I used to love that picture theatre and I loved living near a picture theatre, too. I've always loved films and I still do. It was so funny, because many years ago when we saw these films they were only on for two or three days. You thought you would never see them again, as there were no revival theatres, no television. So I was absolutely rapt when they were shown on television in the 50s, and are still shown now.

I'm a real buff, and am the sort of person that knows all the bit players in the old Hollywood and English films; I know all their names. I like to look at who did the costumes, and who was the director. I'm a credit freak. But as far as I'm concerned, for me, films finished in the 1960s. My interest is in the films of the 30s, 40s and 50s.

So I suppose you could say that I grew up with that picture theatre up at the corner. And it was the show picture theatre in Port Melbourne. The *Port Theatre* didn't come anywhere near the *Eclipse Theatre* insofar as polish, and being upmarket. In fact, all my life I never went to the *Port Theatre*; my mother wouldn't let me go there when I was a child.

Another local Hoyts theatre (in South Melbourne) was the *Empire Theatre*, a very old picture theatre from the turn of the century. Locally we all knew this theatre as 'the Flea Pit'; I only went there once, and did get bitten by a flea. The other Hoyts theatre in the vicinity was the Albert Park theatre at the corner of Bridport Street and Dundas Place. That was a very nice theatre and I only went there a couple of times. It was a little too far away from where we lived.

I haven't spoken about what we ate there. I can't remember how long interval was at the matinee or at night. I sometimes was allowed to go the pictures on a Friday night if there was really something special, and very occasionally a Monday or Tuesday night. My picture going years were mostly during the times when I was a school girl. At interval we used to have Dixies, the ice cream in the cardboard cartons. They used to have large and medium sized cardboard cups of cordial-lemon or orange cordial. I always liked the lemon. I used to buy the Fantales. You could get Pollywaffles and Violet Crumbles as well.

At interval they used to put up slides of local interest, such as ads for local businesses etc. At one stage just after my mother was married, an ad was flashed up on the screen. It was her picture, advertising her wedding photographers. And it wasn't local-it was a city photographer, too. It was on for some months ... that was a big excitement for my mother.

There was no smoking in the theatre. And God Save the Queen (or King) was played at the end of the performance. ■

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THE PICTURES

Flo Stark: Years ago there was an open air picture theatre in Graham Street, just behind the Victoria Hotel. There are drive-in pictures. but that was a 'walk-in' one! ('Cause nobody drove much.) You sat there on wooden seats ... and you had to wait till dark because you couldn't see the film otherwise.

Tippo Hayes: And they took me one night to the open air picture theatre in Port Melbourne. It was right behind the Victoria Hotel. And I could remember the picture that was on: 'The Battle of Waterloo' ... something that sticks in me nut. you know? Down Victoria Avenue, there was one down there as well.

Our family used to go down there. But if it was winter time, we'd be kicking a football over on the Lagoon. When we could get one.

Jack Porritt: I have fond memories of the picture shows in Port Melbourne. In my time there were three: the Port Theatre (Bay and Liardet), the Eclipse (Crockford and Pickles) and the Port Town Hall, known as the 'Ozone'. The Eclipse was the best of the three. I think Hoyts built it in the '20s and it was really their latest show-piece. Something in the laws at the time allowed Port theatres to operate on a Sunday and the cable trams did good business bringing people from other suburbs to the shows. All showed silent pictures, the pianist playing under a shaded light according to the type of picture being shown. The Port also had a trumpet player, named Sol. The Town Hall or 'Ozone' ceased after the talkies began but the other two installed sound equipment and carried on. Incidentally, the Town Hall had an opening roof that could be opened or dosed according to the weather.

Reg Oldham, now in his 80s, was a projectionist at various times in all three theatres. He tells of the primitive conditions in the bio boxes (the Eclipse was better) - veritable death traps in case of fire.

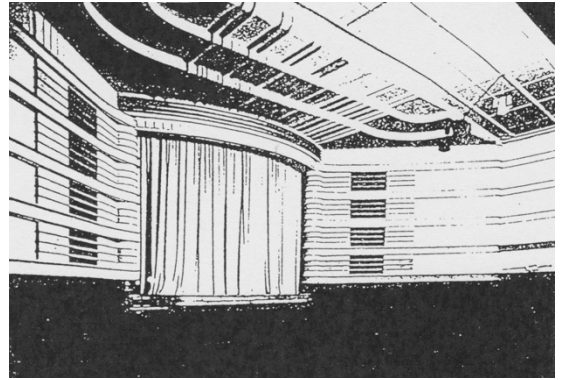
After the Town Hall pictures dosed down there were variety concerts there. Admission was by silver coin; I need hardly say the 3d bit was the most popular silver coin in those days. The shows were always bright and the comedian with the odd smutty yarn was most applauded. They usually commenced after the Church services, although they didn't get too many who had been to Church.

Charles Hall: I remember the 'threepenny operas' there, for the unemployed actors. There used to be fantastic shows, real top class stuff.

Vin McNamara: Roy Rene was so suggestive, nobody"went to see him". But every time he put a show on the house was full.

Sylvia Gleeson: The Eclipse was better. The Port Theatre was all wooden inside and back under the bio-box, as you came in, there were ... the best seats ... You'd go of a Saturday to the Eclipse, cowboys and Indians. Kids used to stamp their feet. For your tuppence you'd have an ice cream, or lollies, fourteen to a penny. ... or a quince for a ha'penny.

Gladys Gott: But we used to go to the Port Theatre. We'd go on a Saturday, and we'd have threepence to go into the pictures and we had threepence to spend. Well, that threepence used to buy lollies ... cream chocolates, like that. And Mum used to take us to the pictures sometimes in the city. And they'd have about three pantomimes on at Christmas and we would go to see them, but it cost about a shilling, two shillings. They were beautiful, they really were. The children of today don't know what they miss, really. I mean, we had hard times, but we had things that we could enjoy.



Interior of the demolished Hoyt's picture palace, the Eclipse, after modernisation in the 30s.

COURTESY OF LES TODD, BLACKTOWN

Marlene Mitchell: Every Saturday matinee went all the kids - the bus'd be full- down to the Eclipse theatre, which is now 7/11. The line went ... well, every kid in Port would be there. And sometimes on Friday night your big sisters would take you out with their boyfriends, to see Love is a Many Splendoured Thing or one of them, and that was great cause they'd take you upstairs (you'd always be downstairs at the matinees). You'd get to sit upstairs, and you'd get to get dressed up. You'd feel realiy big, sitting upstairs.

Delva Crawford: But if you went to the Port Theatre on a Saturday night you usually booked your seats. It was a popular night. The four of us used to go and the seats were always the same, booked from week to week.

Susie Fox: Saturday was the big day (at the Port). And if it was your birthday it was really exciting -cause they would put your name up on the screen.

Charles Hall: The Eclipse was a better theatre, but Port showed better pictures. They had Paramount and Metro, which were the top in those days, and the Eclipse had anything they could grab hold of. The Kinema was privately owned, and the Port also, and they used to have a chap on a motorbike - soon as the film was finished, he'd race on his bike to get back to Port to put it on in time after interval.

I was a lolly boy at the Port Theatre - owned by Alec Rogers, a Port Councillor, Mayor a couple of times. I think he had his first sixpence he ever earned. We'd sell before the picture, and at interval. And we were the only lolly boys, I would say, in Melbourne that had to pay to go in to see the pictures. It was 7d to go in, and he wanted his 7d even though we missed about 10 or 15 minutes of the first show, then we'd have to come out before the end of it to pick up our tray at the shop next door, and I suppose we lost about 3/4 of an hour of the show, but we still had to pay our money. Used to be 3 of us on a Saturday night and 2 during the week. Couple of friends of mine were at the Eclipse and the Park, got in for nothing. I didn't go in to see the pictures. I refused to pay full price to go in to see two thirds of it. I used to say, "All the other boys are getting in for nothing, at the Eclipse". 'Well," (real rough) "this ain't the Eclipse!"

Elsie Medina: I do remember the State theatre (Russell and Flinders Streets). Isadore Goodman used to have the band there and they used to play before the pictures started ... Then there was a Wurlitzer organ used to play. Beautiful. Fair carried you away with the organ, you know. And we used to sing at the State Theatre where it was like a garden, and the sky was like a night sky with the stars. And Johnnie McMahon, he'd stand up where this garden was and he'd sing. And the Tivoli had the Twoli girls and Stinky and Mo, and when we went to the pictures it was silent pictures. They always had a pianist. They'd play the old serials ... Perils of Pauline ... and Rudolph Valentino and Vilma Banky and Ronald Colman - all those ones used to be in serials. Used to get a terrible lot at the pictures for your threepence. Oh, my word, you'd get two pictures, you'd get cartoons, you'd get a bit of the newsreel and they were really very good pictures. It was very strange when the talkies came in because they'd be going all right and all of a sudden the thing'd break, and you'd just get no sound, and then when finally the sound come on it wasn't right up with where the picture was!



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