

STRATFORD-ON-AVON PICTURE HOUSE.

An Interview with the Manager.

Cinematography—Old & New

MR. WALLER JEFFS ON THE NEXT STEP—STEREOSCOPIC
PICTURES TO COME—REMINISCENCES OF THE EARLY
DAYS.

Reprinted from "The Birmingham Mail," August 2nd, 1935.

Many persons in Birmingham still remember the early cinema shows given by Mr. Waller Jeffs, now the manager of the smart little picture house at Stratford. Mr. Jeffs, as one of the pioneers of the industry, is naturally a member of the Cinema Veterans and has occupied the president's chair of this venerable body. He was in the cinema industry before the beginning of this century, when screen entertainment could truthfully be called "the flickers," and indeed did little else beyond flick. But Mr. Jeffs will not talk of the past—that is directly; his whole life is wrapped up in the future of the cinema industry, and his views on this subject from one who has watched the growth of the cinematograph from the magic lantern stage are naturally of great interest.

"People are not interested in what has gone," he almost fired at me when I went over to Stratford to have a chat with him this week. "They want to know what is in store for them as entertainment from the cinema. We have long had sound—if not absolutely perfect, an enormous improvement on the initial efforts.

"Mind you, sound is not so new as all that. Over 30 years ago I visited a show in Paris where an attempt was made to synchronise sounds of voices with motion pictures. I myself tried it at the old Curzon Hall (now the West End Cinema) in Birmingham with a gramophone, but it was not altogether a success.

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"There was an occasion in 1906 when I was with Gaumont, the founder of the present British firm, in a cellar in 'Flicker Alley,' off Charing Cross Road, experimenting with sound synchronisation. A policeman on his beat outside, hearing noises and voices coming from beneath his feet, became suspicious and promptly planned a round-up of the 'thieves.' When we were able to explain they just passed us over as cranks."

Stereoscopic Pictures.

But this was dipping into the past. The next move in pictures is colour. We have it already, of course. "Have you seen 'Becky Sharp'?" Mr. Jeffs asked me abruptly. I replied that I had, and was only partially impressed.

"Oh, the colour effect was mixed," he went on, "but I was not thinking of that so much. There was one scene in that film which to me was definitely stereoscopic; the figures stood out from the screen."

"In three dimensions?" I ventured to interrupt.

"That's it," he agreed, almost excitedly. "Three dimensions; this is the next big move in the cinema. The effect obtained in 'Becky Sharp' was quite accidental, of course, and probably appeared stereoscopic only to a few of the audience. I recall experiencing a similar sensation when watching a film called 'The Bohemian Girl' years ago, but nobody else seemed to see it. That appears to be the trouble. You are no doubt familiar with the coloured pictures which when looked at through similarly coloured spectacles appear to 'come out' of the picture at you. Some people get the desired affect from these spectacles immediately, but to others the picture becomes merely blurred. Therein lies the difficulty. No two pairs of eyes are the same. If coloured spectacles of a standard make and design were supplied to cinema audiences it is safe to say that the screen would appear different to everyone of them."

It is the firm belief of Mr. Jeffs, however, that the three-dimensional screen play is not far distant. It will evolve from the science of cinematography, as have all things in this vast industry. There is one thing, however, which he will not believe, and that is that some day the screen may become such a living thing that it will oust the theatre.

"Such talk is so much nonsense," he declared. "How can it come about when the cinema is so dependent on the stage for its actors and actresses. Did you ever hear of anyone being trained to act on a studio set? The academic art of acting must always work hand in hand with the scientific art of making films. If the theatre dies the cinema dies with it! The aim of the cinema industry has always been to entertain. While it continues on those lines it cannot go far wrong."

Early Days.

So we have reached this stage in an organisation which began with what Mr. Jeffs referred to as an "optical toy," and when in the 90's Friese-Green gave a display of moving pictures in a Piccadilly shop window. It is indeed a wonderful development, and Mr. Jeffs has seen it all, as well as playing a considerable part in its earlier progress. His was the day when Lumiere's first apparatus was brought over here from France and the first public exhibition of cinematography was given at the Polytechnic in Regent Street, London. He was contemporary with the scores of showmen who later invented their own names for various machines and flicked their crude films on screens up and down the country.

There was Alfred West, who actually made his own films. One of them, "Our Navy," was shown before Queen Victoria at Osborne and afterwards throughout India and the Colonies. Irving Bosco is a great friend of Mr. Jeffs, so was A. D. Thomas, who added the finest military bands to his show, and Sidney Carter, who inaugurated the first circuit of cinema halls outside London.

Like his colleagues, Mr. Jeffs produced his own films in those days and one of his earliest efforts was the Sunday parade of the Royal Artillery at Woolwich taken by Captain Jack Smith. Another man to take films for Mr. Jeffs was Hepworth, whose name is still prominent in the cinema industry.

Many Birmingham people will recall an early "feature" film called "Voyage Across the Atlantic." It was shown by Mr. Jeffs at the Curzon Hall and ran for 13 weeks. The longest run of a film in Birmingham comparable with this since was "The Singing Fool" at the Futurist. The next will probably be the first stereoscopic film.

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A Cinema's Tree.

To have a tree within the precincts of the cinema is a distinction of the Stratford-on-Avon Picture House. It is a mulberry tree, and is flourishing in a few square yards of ground just outside one of the rear exit doors.

The tree has been there for a great many years, and is the survivor of a number. When the cinema was built the trees were left standing, but when the old memorial theatre was burnt down and the festival was temporarily transferred to the cinema, dressing-rooms had to be built behind, and the trees suffered. Each year mulberries fall from the boughs of the surviving tree in great clusters. It is thought to be one of the many mulberry trees planted by the Stuarts in the Midlands.

Mr. Jeffs has many reminiscent pictures and cuttings of bygone days, but a possession of which he is particularly proud is a telegram of thanks sent by King Edward's equerry in reply to a message of condolence sent by an audience of the old Curzon Hall during King Edward's prolonged illness.

STARS OF THE SCREEN

WHO WILL SHORTLY APPEAR AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON

GEORGE ARLISS

in a repertoire of his successes, including "DISRAELI" (first time here), "THE WORKING MAN," "THE MILLIONAIRE", "THE SILENT VOICE," &c.

GRACE MOORE

in her latest Musical Production.

MADELEINE CARROLL and CLIVE BROOK

in the spectacular Drama "THE DICTATOR."

MAURICE CHEVALIER

who plays a double role in a jolly film, with songs and dances, entitled "THE MAN FROM THE FOLIES BERGERE."

ELIZABETH BERGNER

in a screen adaptation of the highly successful Drama, "ESCAPE ME NEVER."

RONALD COLMAN

in a great love story, "CLIVE OF INDIA."

GRACIE FIELDS

who is now everybody's favourite, and brings new and catchy songs in "LOOK UP AND LAUGH."

PAUL ROBESON

(for the first time in Stratford) in Edgar Wallace's enticing story of African life, "SANDERS OF THE RIVER."

MATHESON LANG

in a great historical play, "DRAKE OF ENGLAND."

JACK BUCHANAN

in a reproduction of the well-known play, "BREWSTER'S MILLIONS"

And a host of other favourites of the Screen.

TO SEE A GOOD FILM
**COME TO THE STRATFORD-ON-AVON
PICTURE HOUSE.**

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