

Australian Visit – July 2009

Bryan and Dawn Ellis, John and Margaret Bell, Ian and Bev Fisher accepted an invitation from The Cinema and Theatre Historical Society (CATHS) in Melbourne, to attend their swap meeting. Prior to the meeting, Bryan, Dawn, Ian and Bev made a trip down to Venus Bay to visit one of our members, Harley Brown. He had a wonderful little ornate cinema called The Regent, which he had built and decorated himself. He was more than happy to show us some movies. We had a great afternoon with him and found him to be a very interesting and clever man.

Arriving back in Melbourne, we met up with our hosts, Mike and Barbara Trickett and enjoyed an evening meal at a lovely restaurant, along with other members of CATHS.

Mike had arranged for a group to meet us on Saturday at the Sun Theatre in South Yarraville for a tour of the complex and a demonstration of 3-D. We saw a promotional film for *Cars* along with some trailers. The theatre began life as one large cinema, owned by Mike Smith who, for many years ran a factory in part of the building, making screens, curtains and supplying other equipment for theatres around Australia. When the business ceased operating, Mike decided to turn the place into 6 cinemas. All but The Davis, have names of old movie theatres that were originally in the area. They are The Grand, The Barkley, The Lyric, La Scala and The Trocadero. The Grand is the largest and has been turned 180 degrees with the projection box now behind the original proscenium – a really beautiful piece of work – and the screen where the old projection box used to be. It was a joy to see curtains instead of a stark screen. The video projectors are monitored from a central room.

Our next visit was to the Science Works museum. This is a very interesting place with many hands on things for both young and old to experience. We had a light lunch here before walking a short distance to visit an old pumping station. This was housed in a beautiful brick building and was the main sewerage plant for Melbourne with everything operated by steam, powered by coal. At its peak, a total of 90 staff was needed to keep it operating. All the boilers are there and although quite a lot of sewerage still flows through here, it is all automated and the building is now a museum.

From here, we were taken into Melbourne to visit the ACMI (Australian Centre of Moving Image), to view the works of Len Lye. Len was born in New Zealand but spent much of his life in New York. Later in the evening, we had a meal in Chinatown at a very nice place called the Lemon Bistro.

Sunday morning, saw us head back to Yarraville and the Scout hall where the sales and auction was to take place. There were some very interesting items available and Bryan, John and Ian managed to get a bargain or two to bring home. After the auction, we went to a nearby hotel for lunch. We returned to the hall to pack up the unsold items and then headed down to Geelong for an evening with Mike and Barb and some friends from the society. They put on a really nice dinner for us, after which we proceeded into Mike's lovely cinema to watch the movie *The Dish*. All too soon, it was time to leave and head back to Melbourne.

On Monday, we drove to Sunbury to visit Peter Wolfenden's cinema. It is called the Austral and is a lovely stand alone cinema. The small foyer is filled with some wonderful pieces of memorabilia. He put on an interesting Power Point presentation on the history of the Garvie/Benbow projector mainly for our benefit as both these men were born in New Zealand, although Garvie's parents were Australian and moved back soon after his birth. He then showed some films which included early TV advertisements, a *Cinesound Review*, a *Popeye* cartoon, *Stained Glass Craft*, *The History of Communications* and a trailer of *Up Pompeii*. After a delicious lunch, it was time to say goodbye to our CATHS friends – our visit had come to an end.