

## THE STAR CINEMA 1930's

I had been on this earth about eleven summers and twelve winters and I lived in the same house with my parents and sisters at Corner Café. The postal address of Corner Café was number eleven Market Place Barton-upon-Humber, Lincolnshire, England. So far I had managed to reach the age of eleven by chance or being alert and quick on my feet. Being alert is not easy but it has its moments I think the world would be a better place if we had more Lerts

However to the point of this story.

In the historical town of Barton we had the Star Cinema and the Oxford Cinema. To my young mind the Oxford Cinema seemed to cater for the more well to do, or to use one of my mum's pet phrases the, "the upper crust". My Father's views differed to my mother's views in that direction in that his were more explicit, his views on the upper class were slightly more anti social, "yer mean the arseholes wi' all the brass" Then he would purse his lips like a rubber duck's backside and imitating a rat with the runs he would eject a wet torpedo of tobacco juice that would hit what he was aiming at then run down and settle in a rancid pool. on the ground. If there happened to be any grass in the immediate vicinity it would be dead by the next morning.

The Star Cinema was situated on the corner of Fleetgate and High Street. It had probably been built originally as a meeting hall since it was an imposing building at the end of a row of houses. It was the focal point for most young lads and lasses on a Saturday afternoon, and for the handsome price of one penny one could buy a ticket to be entertained for a couple of hours by a film of some one going over a cliff in a car or some daredevil hanging upside down from the under carriage of an airplane. On one occasion in a news reel, one of these daredevils was asked by a news camera man, "don't you ever feel fear" And the daredevil replied, " I never did until I began wearing a belt" "Oh, so now you wear a belt so you don't fall" grinned the camera man. " No" said the stunt man, "I wear it round my waist to stop the shit running down to the back of my neck and backing up behind my goggles, now I can see when a tree looms up and I just shut my eyes and pray" "what would you do if you hit a tree going at that speed?" asked the camera man. " I'd stop praying most likely, and just trickle slowly down the trunk" said the stunt man.

Once past the usherette, one left the sunshine of the afternoon, and pushing through the heavy purple drapes at the doorway one entered the gloomy interior of another world of fantasy and make believe.

Since most films were silent with sub titles they were accompanied by a pianist who sat to one side of the screen and below it. Anyone getting a seat in the cinema early, might perchance spot the lady who looked like someone's maiden aunt as she would glide down the aisle, and cruising over to the side of the piano would put down the small knitted bag containing a flask, possibly full of hot tea. She also had a bag of doughnuts, but these delicacies she never got a chance to taste because at one stage when she visited the ladies room she returned to find the bag gone. About four rows back a bunch of kids from Vinegar Hill were crouched down wolfing the doughnuts. and giggling thinking how clever they were. The dear lady retaliated in the only way she knew how. She refrained from bringing any more doughnuts. The same kids retaliated by kicking over thus breaking her flask the moment it was unattended. The little old lady left and for a while there was no piano player. After about three days a new piano player appeared on the scene. Some of the kids who had the seats near the piano were now looking for different seats well clear of the piano because the first day he began to play they began to throw orange peel at him and laughing and he stopped playing and turned around.

The sudden silence that descended on the interior of the Star Cinema was magical, all that could be heard was the noise of the pinion as it engaged the Maltese cross that flicked another frame of film into the gate of the projector The tickerty ticking of the projector was suddenly ignored as the kids took in the face leering at them through the gloom from the piano The face of the pianist was a cross between the Mummy and Dracula and he suddenly snarled showing yellowed pointed teeth.

One kid jumped up and ran screaming up the aisle leaving a trail of urine like a leopard marking its territory. The kid's brain was sending so many desperate messages to his legs that his legs suddenly began to work together and he shot through the curtains and into the foyer doing the long jump where he collided into the manager. He screamed again as the manager grabbed him and wanted to know what was wrong. The kid suddenly kicked the manager's nearest leg and bit him on the hand and the manager let go of him a bit sharpish, and the kid was gone. All that was left of the lad was dust settling where he was last seen and the rapid staccato of feet as they pounded the pavement putting distance between them and the Star Cinema. The Manager then went through the curtains and shone his torch down the aisle and noted most of the seats near the piano were vacant, the pianist had removed the rubber mask from his face and had resumed playing and everything was normal again. The only difference was most of the orange peel throwing had ceased. At half time when the lights went up for the ice cream and choc-ice sellers the pianist rose and went to the men's room. On reaching the door he delved into his jacket pocket and withdrew the ugly rubber mask

and slipped it onto his face. He went in and suddenly all the bedlam ceased, the lads having a leak wet their legs and shorts and exited the men's room like lemmings going over a cliff.

It was reported later some of these lads had stopped growing, possibly due to shock, stress, fright, whatever, but from that day on the Star Cinema suddenly had it's own midgets every Saturday afternoon. Many parents complained and the pianist got the royal order of the boot and soon things were back to normal as another young lady came to play the piano. We did learn later the original little old lady had persuaded her nephew to play the piano and give the kids a scare to teach them a lesson. Funnily enough the orange peel throwers desisted in their effort in trying to control the piano and soon the Cinema settled down to it's normal Saturday afternoon matinee with just the odd rogue kid throwing peel or apple cores.

Once the cinema was half full the ones already in there would begin to get impatient and although the pianist was playing it would be drowned by the noise of the kids.

Eventually light would flicker on the red velvet curtains that were adorned with golden silk art work at the edges, and the curtains would glide back to the whine of an electric motor. The lights in the cinema would dim and the show would begin.

The Cinema would erupt with the cheers and whooping of the kids that would have matched the mob in Paris who had gathered with their little bags of sandwiches and drinks to watch the guillotine as it lopped off the heads of the aristocrats. The noise drowned out the piano and the usherettes who were running up and down the aisles with torches probing out the ring leaders. "You'r going to get thrown out if you don't shut it" shouted one usherette focusing her torch on one lad. "Shut yer gob, wern't me, it were 'im" sneered the lad. "Just watch it," shouted the girl with the torch. And the lads would all stand up and croon the Laurel and Hardy theme song as she turned around and walked away, the cheeks of her buttocks in tune with the crooning lads. " er rum te tum, er um te tum",

The screen lit up and Rudolf Valentino was charging across the desert on a fiery Arabian steed with it's mane flying in the wind.. One lad shouted, "if ah'd nawn this were on ad av' brung me buckit an' spade,. me dad needs some 'oss muck fer 'is mushrooms". The lady at the piano suddenly stopped playing the "dudderly dum, dudderly dum" bit and clutching at her hair was desperately trying to remove little bits of orange peel that had been thrown by some kid in the audience. The lights would come on and the Manager

would single out someone and wait with tapping foot while the culprit with down cast eyes struggled past all the seats being lifted to allow him to pass. Once within arms reach the culprit would be grabbed by the ear and marched to the exit and expelled. About ten minutes later there would be a fracas in the entrance to the cinema as the lads Father would demand the lads penny back. The parting shot as the humiliated lad and his irate father left the cinema would be something like, "We gor enough fleas at 'ome wi' oot comin' ter yur place fer more" and the lad's Father would cuff him and add more wisdom, "shut yer stupid gob, yer in 'nuff bloody trouble as it is"

Then the Star Cinema got sound. The price of Saturday afternoon entertainment went up double. My Mum said, "A penny was worth it to get you out of my hair for the afternoon, but two pence to see what you were watching for a penny is not on" " But mam, it's got sound now" I pleaded. "I don't care if it has the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by German Geordie, you are not getting another penny from me every Saturday afternoon" and she stood there like Nelson on his column. The only difference was she had two eyes that glared like hot coal when angry and two arms that I had learned to duck when they began to unfold from the folded position near the top of her pinny which resembled a roll top desk.

I had to find a way to get another penny for Saturday afternoon, otherwise my hedification regarding Chas Chaplin and Little Orphan Annie were about to take a steep dive. Then one day I was walking past Sempers butchers shop. Actually I was running, but on seeing the board which normally had information chalked on it, like, "this weeks special, Mint Sausages, One and six a pound. Sausages only a Shilling." One lady passing remarked to her friend, "Ah wonder weer 'e gets 'is mint from, Tibet I shouldn't wonder" But now the board was leaning on the brick work below the shop window and the new message ran, "Errand boy with bike wanted to deliver orders" I pulled up and was in the shop almost in the same breath. The butcher was wrapping up some meat for a lady and she was scanning the contents of the butcher's window. "Them chops look nice" she said.

Quick as a wink the butcher said, "Mrs .Sutcliffe, buy two an' al' gi' thee one fer nowt" Mrs Sutcliffe sniffed and said, "Ah cin git one fer nowt at 'ome, ah weern.'t bother" Stuffing the parcel of meat into a carrier bag and handing it to Mrs Sutcliffe the butcher turned to me and sniffed , "Nah mi'lad, wat does tha want?" I said brightly, "ah gor a bike.

"Oh 'ave yer now, well wor else wud yer like?"

" Nay, ah don't want tu buy owt, ah just want tu run them errands fer yer"

"Oh ah see you want tu deliver orders" said the butcher brightening up, " well I can gi' yer a tanner (sixpence) fer Saturday afternoons"

“Sat’dy twelve to one o’ clock an’ six till seven” I suggested, mentally assessing the pictures starting and finishing time.

“ You sure you wouldn’t rather serve in t’ shop an’ ah’ll deliver t’ orders” quipped the butcher with a leer.

“Gerroff, ah bet yu can’t even ride a bike” said I

“Ah kin so ride a bike” retorted the butcher, “ an’ gi’ yu a cuff on’t lug if’n yu git cheeky, awl reet then but be ‘ere Saturday”

And with a grin began hacking at a carcass with a meat axe.

I too had a huge grin, now my Saturday afternoons at the Star Cinema with sound were assured. The only fly that invaded my ointment was when I told my mum of my arrangement she said, “good, Now you are swimming in money you will not require the penny from me on Saturday for the pictures.. Later Dad who had overheard our penny debate, said, “yer gob works good, now try exercising yer brain”

Mrs Canty was an old dear who had a men’s and boys ware and apparel shop in George street. One Saturday she was in the butcher’s shop and on spotting me she enquired, “ you are Mrs Barker’s lad” I answered in the affirmative and she then suggested since she was getting past the long walk to Junction Square to collect the accumulator that made her wireless work, would I be willing to fetch it for her,. I said I would be delighted.

So I went to Canty’s shop and collected the accumulator, it was like a square jam jar with a wire handle. I delivered it to Mrs Clark’s house and she offered me two pence for doing the errand. I said I would take a penny but Mrs Clark insisted someone else would fetch it for two pennies so I might as well take the two pennies. My Mum said I aught to share the two pennies with my sisters. I said, O.K. let my sisters fetch the accumulators for Mrs Clark, my sisters wanted the two pennies but were adamant about toting glass jars full of acid. “I’m not carrying mucky accumulators they cried in unison. I got two pennies for the Saturday afternoon matinee and I got a bank book from the penny bank and put sixpence in it every week.

Then the serials began arriving at the Star cinema. Our Gang, Tim McCoy, Buck Rogers. Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, The Three Stooges, Boy Blue, Tom Mix, Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy, Harrold Loyd, Buster Keaton etc. These serials would always end up with some one going over a cliff or the damsel would be tied to a log and it would be creeping ever closer to the whirling circular saw and just as the saw was parting her hair a message would flash on to the screen,” don’t miss next weeks episode of will the hero be in time to save his sweet heart?” The lads leaving the cinema would be hotly debateing, “ app’n if the bloke on t’ ‘oss (horse) is a mile away ‘ow the bloody ‘ell can ‘e save ‘er, “ “aw she ‘ll show up next week wi’ a short back an’ sides ap’n”

Then the Star Cinema changed hands. Mr Cecil What's is Name who owned the Oxford bought the Star Cinema and it was never the same after that.

But I can still see all those happy kids on a Saturday afternoon giving a little cheer as the bloke on his bike rolled up and going to the side door he would unlock it and open it and push his bike through. Then we would patiently wait until we heard the bolts being drawn behind the main doors and they would swing open and the kids would surge toward the ticket office as if the world was going to end before they got a ticket. Soon it will be the year 2000 I wonder how many people today remember the Star Cinema and the acid jar two volt accumulator? The old scythe that cut corn before the binder was invented. The magneto ignition on an engine. The old pin hole camera, and the epidiascope. The polyphone. Aye indeed, we have come a long way since then.

Tom Barker 1999.