Almost an Institution: Sustaining Rural Exhibition in South Australia (1897-1935)

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Contents

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of film exhibition in rural South Australia up until the mid-1930s, a time when film exhibition in remote townships was threatened by advances in technology, economic depression and the tightening of government regulations. Unlike traditional film histories that focus on the production and aesthetics of film, the thesis aims to give agency to those who worked in the exhibition arm of the film industry and the major role they played in making cinema-going central to the culture of rural townships. A secondary purpose is to highlight the activity of film exhibition in general South Australian history, which has to date failed to recognise the importance of cinema-going in rural communities.

The thesis will explore the history of silent film exhibition in South Australia as a background to the structure of the industry in operation at the advent of the talkies and the onset of the Great Depression. Through the use of primary sources, mainly newspapers and government records, it will identify how the exhibition industry developed, how cinema as an institution was challenged by other institutions such as the church and morality groups, and how it was regulated at two levels of government – State and Federal. It will examine the models of exhibition that operated in rural South Australia, which ranged from cinemas linked to capital city circuits in the few large industrial towns to remote halls with wooden forms as seating. It will present two case studies of rural exhibition models, which were sufficiently different from each other to demonstrate that the diversity of exhibition and cinema-going.

The thesis will look at how the Great Depression, which began in South Australia one year before the Wall Street Crash of 1929, affected the exhibition industry and how this was compounded by new technology – the introduction of the talkies. A further challenge to the industry's survival was the extension of government regulations to remote townships. The ability of the small end of the industry to survive these challenges demonstrates how entrenched cinema-going was in the culture of rural communities. It will also examine the hierarchy of film distribution throughout rural regions and investigate whether, in the absence of detailed box-office information, film popularity can be determined by other measures.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed

Date 31st March 2017

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This thesis is dedicated to the South Australian cinema pioneers.

INTRODUCTION

> The practice of going to the movies in Australia has been regionally widespread, economically significant, relatively socially inclusive and certainly more consistent than the practice of making movies in Australia.
>
> Kate Bowles[1]

The vast majority of Australian film histories to date have been confined to the production or aesthetics of film with little attention to the actual consumption of films or to the business of exhibition and the socio-cultural history of audiences. This focus on production has presented an account of a struggling domestic industry competing against the dominance of the Hollywood product. Giving agency only to filmmakers ignores the history of film exhibition and audiences, which covers broader territories and includes the smallest of towns. By shifting the focus away from production and film text, a more inclusive, robust history of Australian cinema can be produced – one not of victimhood but of significant agency among exhibitors, picture show employees and the "undistinguished membership of cinema's audiences."[2] It also provides us with a richer account of cinema as an institution embedded in a range of social frameworks, providing the opportunity to study interactions with government, other institutions and communities, and to examine cinema's capacity to adapt to social and economic factors.

Over the last twenty years, academic interest in the history of cinema-going has developed into a movement often termed new cinema history. International scholars such as Robert C. Allen, Daniel Biltereyst, Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, Jeffrey Klenotic, Philippe Meers,John Sedgwick and Gregory Waller, and in Australia, Kate Bowles, Richard Maltby, Deb Verhoeven and Mike Walsh, and have been leaders in this new field.[3] By abandoning preoccupations with medium-specificity and close examination of individual filmic text, new cinema history has been able to draw scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and is not limited to those who, as Richard Maltby writes, "have not been schooled in the professional orthodoxy that the proper business of film studies is

[1] Kate Bowles, 'Three miles of rough dirt road: towards an audience-centred approach to cinema studies in Australia', p.247.
[2] Richard Maltby, 'How can cinema history matter more?' http://www.screeningthepast.com/2015/01/how-can-cinema-history-matter-more/
[3] Works by these scholars include Robert C. Allen, 'Relocating American film history', *Cultural Studies*, 20 (1), (2006), pp.48-88; Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley (ed.), *Hollywood in the Neighborhood*; Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers (eds.), *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*; Jeffrey Klenotic, 'Putting Cinema History on the Map: Using GIS to Explore the Spatiality of Cinema' in R. Maltby, et.al., *Op. Cit*.; John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures*; Gregory Waller (ed.), *Moviegoing in America;* Kate Bowles, ''Three miles of rough dirt road': towards an audience-centred approach to cinema studies in Australia', *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 1 (3), (2007); Deb Verhoeven, 'Film Distribution in the Diaspora: Temporality, Community and National Cinema' and Mike Walsh, 'From Hollywood to the Garden Suburb (and back to Hollywood): Exhibition and Distribution in Australia', in R. Maltby, et.al., *Op. Cit*.

the study of film."[4] In its ranks are economists, architects and geographers. By 2004, the movement had grown to such an extent that a forum for the exchange of research and ideas was warranted and the History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception (HoMER) project was founded to promote the understanding of international cinema-going. This growing interest raises the question of why this shift from traditional film history is warranted.

The exhibition arm of the film industry in Australia was significant both economically and socially. When the entertainment tax on cinema admissions peaked in the 1920-21 financial year, based on 68 million attendances, it netted the Federal Government £297,843 ($22.8 million at 2015 prices) accounting for 46 percent of all Entertainment Tax collected that year.[5] By 1928, the annual attendance was 110 million.[6] The exhibition industry was employing 20,000 people and represented an investment of £25 million ($1.9 billion at 2015 prices).[7] Ten years later, there were 2,581 screening venues with a total capacity of one million seats, or one cinema seat for every seven people in Australia.[8] At a state government level, revenue came from an additional layer of amusement tax (in some States), licensing and other regulatory fees, public transport fares in the metropolises and rail freight charges in rural areas.[9] As a branch of the Australian film industry, exhibition was clearly more economically important than production, and this was undoubtedly a factor in the failure of Australian governments to intervene effectively to encourage a production industry before the late 1960s. Historical investigations focused on the production or aesthetics of film overlook the primacy of the exhibition sector and the cultural contribution of exhibitors and audiences, the campaigns of special interest groups objecting to how the industry conducted itself, and the political debates and ensuing legislation which brought about government regulation of the exhibition industry. In adopting the perspective of new cinema history this thesis will examine film exhibition in rural South Australia during the early 1930s, in order to understand how cinema as an institution developed, how it was bound up with other institutions and how it was able to adapt itself to challenges posed by some of those institutions. While the thesis is itself a micro-study within a national context, it will use micro-studies from within the State to examine the geographical movement of films intrastate, the ways in which physical environments

[4] Richard Maltby, 'New Cinema Histories', p.8.
[5] Commonwealth of Australia, 8th Annual Report of the Commissioner of Taxation, Schedule No. 5 (1920-21), p.97. Due to the cessation of tax on admission prices less than two shillings and sixpence in 1925, the Federal Government's Entertainment Tax collections fell to £42,127 in 1928.
[6] 'Australia. Cinematograph Films' Report, Balcon Collection, British Film Institute.
[7] Dianne Collins, *Hollywood Down Under*, p.15.
[8] Anon. 'Summary of Theatres Throughout Australia', *The Film Weekly Motion Picture Directory 1937-38*, p.38.
[9] Up until the mid-1970s all State rail systems were government owned.

influenced patterns of exhibition and attendance, the interactions between exhibitors and local communities, and the impact that centralised regulations had on rural cinema exhibition. The results of this research will contribute to a growing collection of national location-specific studies, to demonstrate that film history did not just take place on screens but also off-screen throughout every community in Australia.

Of the 2,581 screening venues listed for Australia in 1938, eighty-one percent were located outside the capital cities and suburbs. Rural cinema provided a market for films that would otherwise have had a shelf life of only a few weeks after their first run in the metropolitan central business districts. Yet, to date, there is very little research on Australian rural cinema compared to that which is taking place overseas. In her study of small town audiences in the United States, Kathryn H. Fuller notes that in its earliest years, film exhibition was largely seen as an urban phenomenon despite cinema-going spreading across the land like a wildfire. She puts forward a case that cinema-going was as much a small town phenomenon as an urban one and that audiences from both sectors made an equal contribution to the creation of a popular culture of film.[10] The misapprehension that cinema-going was predominantly an urban phenomenon has created a situation in which the history of cinema-going has been largely confined to the metropolis and, as Robert C. Allen argues, encourages the assumption that the patterns of cinema-going experienced in the metropolis can be mapped to the smaller cities and towns in the United States.[11] The omission of the rural from the few Australian cinema histories that focus on the exhibition leads to the same assumption. The majority of these histories focus on the capital cities and their suburbs, with only an occasional reference to rural exhibition and even fewer to the itinerant exhibitors that traversed the continent for many decades. The diversity of rural Australia, from large industrial towns to remote outback stations, meant that no single pattern of cinema-going could be applied broadly. An audience of thirty in a small community hall in a remote town experienced cinema-going quite differently from an audience of over 1,000 in a purpose-built cinema in a rural industrial town. Equally important were the social benefits of cinema to rural audiences. Being an active participatory experience, not requiring any special skills or knowledge, it brought a community together in a common space. Karina Aveyard adduces that rural cinemas continue to have a myriad of functions within rural communities:

> They operate as sites of commerce, popular entertainment, enjoyment and cultural engagement. They … offer an alternative space for building community connections and

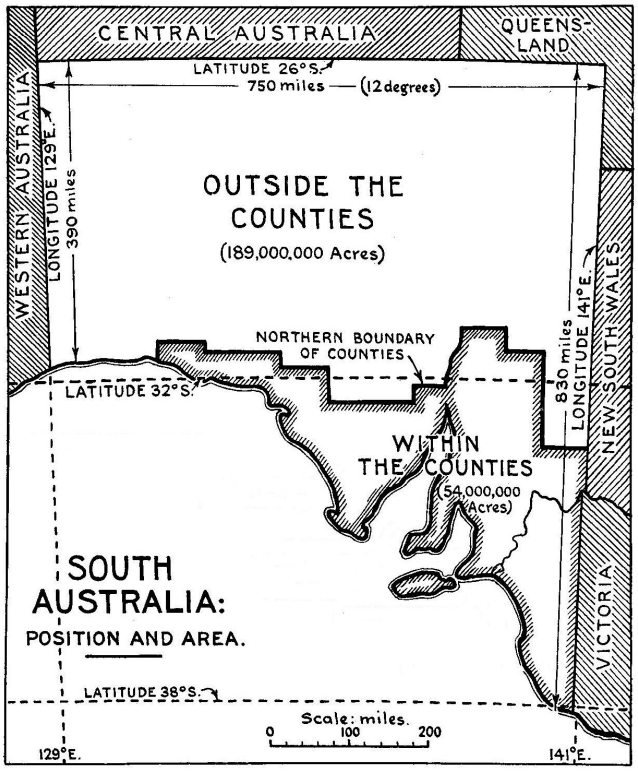
[10] Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show*, p.x.
[11] Robert C. Allen, 'Decentering Historical Audience Studies: A Modest Proposal', p.20.

> broadening social participation. Cinemas add to the vibrancy of rural places and make a contribution to local economies.[12]

Aveyard is discussing rural cinema as it is today and referring to the permanent cinemas in country towns, but her description is even more applicable to the screening venues in rural towns in the 1930s.

In recent years, research into Australian rural cinema has been undertaken by scholars such as Aveyard, Kate Bowles, Nancy Huggett and Anne Wilson.[13] Their work has made rural cinema studies more prominent, but this work has all been centred in the Eastern states of Australia. In film historiography, rural South Australia has been thrice excluded: by text-based film history, by Australian urban-centric new cinema history and by eastern-seaboard rural cinema histories. The cinema experience in rural South Australia that existed in the 1930s was quite distinct from that of the metropolis of Adelaide, the State's capital. The sheer size of the State (984,476 square kilometres) and its sporadic population density meant that the framework in which film distribution and exhibition operated in Adelaide could not be transposed to a rural setting. In 1933, 98 percent of the population lived in fourteen percent of the area of the State (the south eastern corner) shown as "within the counties" on Map 1 below. Of those living within the counties, 55 percent lived in Metropolitan Adelaide (2,954 square kilometres). The remaining 45 percent lived in what I have termed, for the purpose of this thesis, rural South Australia (216,725 square kilometres), which had a population density of two people per square kilometre compared to 750 people per square kilometre in Adelaide and its suburbs.[14]

[12] Karina Aveyard, *Lure of the Big Screen*, p.14.
[13] Karina Aveyard, *Lure of the Big Screen*; Kate Bowles, 'Rural cultural research: notes from a small country town', in *Australian Humanities Review*, 45 (2005); Nancy Huggett, 'A cultural history of cinema-going in the Illawarra (1900-1950)', PhD thesis; and Anne Wilson, 'Wonthaggi and Sale: two theatres, two communities, two experiences of cinema', in *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, 30 (2006), np.
[14] Statistical Register of South Australia, 1933-34, p.20ii. The calculation of population density for rural areas does not take into account the 9,814 people living in the remaining 764,855 square kilometres 'Outside the Counties'. Nomadic Aboriginals were not included in the 1933 Census.



Map 1: South Australia - Position and Area (Source: C. Fenner, *South Australia: A Geographical Study*, 1931)

The most obvious distinctions in such a disparity of population density are the audience size and the logistics of moving films from one venue to the next through an area nine-tenths the size of the United Kingdom or equal in size to the State of Idaho in the United States. Another distinction was the absence of competing leisure activities. In the Adelaide metropolis, cinema was not the only choice available as there were other organised events that could draw audiences away from the cinema. Mike Walsh gives the example of an Adelaide metropolitan cinema's profits being undermined by harness racing or motor racing at the nearby showgrounds.[15] In remote towns it would be rare for another leisure event to be concurrent with the monthly picture show. Local sporting fixtures were generally set for daylight hours and would be over by the time screenings were scheduled. As Kathryn Fuller-Seeley points out: "the movies came to rural crossroads that vaudeville, circuses, melodramatic stock companies … rarely touched."[16] The rural audience often had no other option but that of going to the pictures for their public leisure. Unlike those living in major cities, who had a choice of either travelling to a first or second-release house or to a smorgasbord of suburban cinemas that were serviced by public transport systems, the small-town audience was faced with Hobson's Choice – take what was being offered on the local programme or nothing at all. A further distinction was the

[15] Mike Walsh, 'From Hollywood to the Garden Suburb (and Back to Hollywood)', p.165.
[16] Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley, *Hollywood in the Neighborhood*, p.8.

community attitude to cinema, which generally mattered more in insular country towns than in the metropolis. There is a certain amount of anonymity in attending a 2,300-seater first release house in the city, but attendance at a 50-seater hall on the Eyre Peninsula was very public.

There were also distinctions in exhibition models. While there were some based on those used in city and suburbs (purpose-built cinemas and permanent picture shows in local halls), there were also those unique to towns outside of the metropolis, such as the itinerant exhibitor, and models that were not simply commercial activities, including municipality picture shows, community picture shows and those operated by Institute Committees. All of these distinctions created a rural exhibition framework that set the parameters within which exhibitors needed to work in order to successfully screen films in a range of contexts that varied from large industrial towns to small and sporadic audiences throughout the settled areas of South Australia. This framework had evolved since the first rural screening in 1897 and was not only influenced by demographics, the tyranny of distance, economics and community attitudes, but was also controlled by responses to what some authorities saw as an industry in need of regulation.

Literature Review

Kate Bowles proposes an audience-centred research approach to Australian film studies in which emphasis is on the significant role played by Australian cinema audiences in the public sphere rather than the one played by Australian films. While recognising the importance of recent research into the history of the Australian distribution and exhibition sectors, she argues these sectors are focused on the exploitation of content and do not take into account the audience experience. By the audience experience, Bowles distinguishes between the consumption model suggested by Albert Moran, which presumes that what is being consumed by the audience is the content of the film, and one that explores the non-filmic realm of cinema-going.[17] Bowles calls for the development of a companion research agenda focussed not only on the economic outcomes of cinema, but also on the socio-tactical nature of cinema attendance, one that asks questions about the uses of cinema from an audience rather than an industry perspective.

Such an inquiry requires different methods and sources from those used in the study of national cinemas previously and, by way of example, Bowles discusses oral history interviews conducted by herself and Nancy Huggett to recall local cinema-going in Cobargo in New South Wales. These

[17] Kate Bowles, 'Three miles of rough dirt road', p. 248.

revealed that, far from being a quasi-celebrity bringing glamorous, escapist entertainment to town the itinerant exhibitor, Allan Jamieson, who screened in the town, was:

> a local identity defined, like many rural projectionists and operators, as much by his everyday struggles, his other work as a rabbit-trapper, and some family difficulties, as he was by association with Hollywood or even with the Sydney-based distribution industry.[18]

Bowles stresses cinema as one institution among many in country towns and usefully leads us to focus on the nature of the interactions between those institutions. She uses Allen Jamieson and his "small, distracted audience" to demonstrate the overall diversity of the Australian cinema market and how the wider history of Australian film has something to gain by being open to historical glimpses of marginal figures, and by exploring how cinema intersected with cultural history beyond the screen.

Bowles points out that research that focuses on audience behaviours and experiences tends to convene around the local micro-study and that there is an obvious reason for this: the cinema-going experience varies in place and time and "to an extent, each film screening is a singular reconstitution of the text, shaped by the particular technical, architectural and social facilities of the screening environment."[19] The cinema-going experience was quite different for the thousands who attended the opening night of *Paddy, the Next Best Thing* (Lachman, 1933) at the 6,000 seater Radio City Music Hall in New York and those who saw it eighteen months later at Piednippie on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula, a place consisting of nothing more than a football oval and a 100-seater hall.[20] While the New York audience would have been impressed by the "Mighty Wurlitzer" organ, with pipes housed in eleven separate rooms, the Piednippie audience would have to be content at intermission with a local musician tinkering away on a well-played piano in an acoustically-bad hall. The quality of any film screened in the remote towns of the Eyre Peninsula, with their "uneasy splices, the perceptible hiss or mismatched dialogue of a damaged soundtrack", was an indicator of where those towns were placed in the hierarchy of distribution.[21] These contrasts exemplify how the cinema-going experience varied in place and time along a film's continuum from premiere to the end of the run. The local micro-study picks up on these

[18] *Ibid*., p.253.
[19] *Ibid*., p.250.
[20] Piednippie is best described in the poem by Fred Gerschwitz:

> *Where's Piednippie?*
> *No shop, no train, no hotel you'll find*
> *but where the roads meet there's a hall*
> *There's Piednippie!*

Fred Gwerschwitz, *Where's Piednippie?*, front-matter section.
[21] Deb Verhoeven, 'Film Distribution in the Diaspora', p.245.

variations and highlights how communities dealt with globalization, modernity and each other. They contribute significantly to the Australian new cinema history and "bring to international research an expanded appreciation of the diversity and locality of the global audience experience."[22]

Film distribution has a spatial aspect. While Bowles is interested in institutional relationships within country towns, Ross Thorne takes up the issue of how films moved between locations. This is particularly crucial to rural exhibition. His research in the use of the railways to transport film prints from one country town to another distinguishes the rural from the urban exhibition use of transport. Railways have featured largely in traditional film history since the first screenings, but their role has been confined to discussions of trains as the subject of film, used to develop a story or as a background prop or as a symbol of modernity.[23] Unfettered by traditional cinema history's focus on production, new cinema history has the scope to explore the significant contribution that railways made beyond the screen. Because of the lack of historical records, the task of writing a history of the logistics of film distribution and the crucial role played by rail transport can be as problematic as measuring film popularity by using box-office figures. Film distributors rarely archived such records and picture house proprietors either did not concern themselves with records beyond their currency or sentenced them to the rubbish tip when a picture house closed.[24]

Ross Thorne's micro-analysis of the movement of films in New South Wales in the 1950s is concerned with what he calls "the management of the 'nuts and bolts' of distribution."[25] It is based on documents detailing film bookings and film despatch instructions over two decades (1950s and 1960s), fortuitously discovered in 1999 in the rewind room of the Strand picture house in Canowindra, 300 kilometres west of Sydney. To organise and analyse the information contained in 3,500 of these documents for the 1950s, Thorne constructed a database. The database revealed that it was not only film that was being despatched by rail. Because mail was sent to the country by rail, the delivery of advance list notices, dispatch instructions, letters advising changes to bookings, and publicity material also depended on the rail network. One of

[22] Kate Bowles, *Op. Cit.*, p.245.
[23] For example, John P. McGowen, *Hollywood's first Australian : the adventurous life of J.P. McGowan, the movie pioneer they called 'The Railroad Man'* and Jiro Hanyu, 'Railways in Films', *Japan Railway & Transport Review*, No. 25, October 2000, pp.46-51. http://www.ejrcf.or.jp/jrtr/jrtr25/f46_han.html accessed 12 December 2016.
[24] Ross Thorne, 'Rethinking distribution: developing the parameters for a micro-analysis of the movement of motion pictures', p.315.
[25] *Ibid*., p.315.

his first observations was that there did not seem to be any pattern as to where films had been screened immediately before Canowindra or where they went afterwards. In chapter three of this thesis, the same conclusion is drawn that while the movement of film around South Australia relied on the rail system, the hierarchy of distribution was not determined by geographical location but by the relationship between distributor and exhibitor.[26]

By extrapolating from his database, Thorne estimated the amount of film and film-related movements across the New South Wales country rail system would be around a quarter of a million per year in the 1950s.[27] This estimation excludes mail and the regular deliveries of carbon rods and, on the occasion, projector spare parts. He suggests that without the rail system, "a service so omnipresent [that it] is overlooked for its importance to the fabric of society"[28], the distribution of films would possibly have been limited to major population centres or the occasional visit by itinerant exhibitors. Ross Thorne is an early contributor to new cinema history and one from outside the discipline of film studies. His earlier work is in the discipline of architecture in which he researched the social and architectural history of cinema buildings in Australia. His seminal work *Cinemas of Australia via the USA*, published in 1981, explores the architecture of cinemas in major cities. Both Bowles and Thorne see that the cinema is a multi-faceted institution: Bowles stresses the cinema as people, while Thorne sees it as involving a series of spatial practices.

One of the earliest scholars to write about cinema buildings in Australia in the context of the activity that took place in them is Diane Collins. Her book, *Hollywood Down Under*, published in 1987, covers the first ninety years of picture-going in Australia, beginning with the era of silent films and ending with the downturn in cinema attendances resulting from the introduction of domestic video recorders in 1979. Collins provides a social history of Australian cinema and, to a lesser extent, of the economics of the distribution and exhibition sectors of the industry. Collins' discussion of the early years of cinema-going and the development of the picture-going habit notes that rural communities did not lack recreation and amusement in the form of tennis matches, church fetes, agricultural shows and picnic races, but observes that these were

[26] The exception to this is when an iterant exhibitor secured a film at the end of the rural run and would follow a geographical pattern as much as was possible but not necessarily by rail. For example, on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia, the itinerant exhibitor in most cases would begin each screening in the coastal town of Cowell, where the films would arrive by coastal steamer, or Minnipa in the centre of the peninsula where the films would be transported by rail from Port Lincoln, the main shipping centre of the peninsula – a combination of shipping and rail to the first venue then road from thereon.
[27] Ross Thorne, *Op.Cit*., p.327.
[28] *Ibid*., p.329.

occasional events or domestic affairs and did not bring the community together on a regular basis. Before the advent of radio, the opening of a picture show or a regular visit by an itinerant exhibitor "meant a permanent wedge against isolation."[29] She cites a few anecdotes but in the main her account, while entertaining, provides a romantic picture of the welcome itinerant exhibitors received when arriving in towns. In some rural communities in South Australia, the picture show had to give way to church fetes and strawberry fairs (often a condition of the lease agreement with the local hall) and screened at agricultural shows and picnic races with admissions going to a local fundraiser in order to gain community acceptance.

A recurring issue in *Hollywood Down Under* is the domination of films produced in the United States and the impact on Australian culture, commenting that audiences "were particularly irked by the many American films that featured large doses of smug flag-waving" and that "Australians also expressed boredom with films of peculiarly American institutions (especially American football)."[30] Collins' concern about the American domination of film production and distribution and her claim that "the unpleasant fact is that the history of the cinema in Australia is the history of an industry entirely under Uncle Sam's grubby thumb" detracts from the much broader set of practices and relationships that constituted film exhibition in Australia.[31] Mike Walsh questions this victimhood history of Australian cinema history and argues that not until this idea is broken, can a history be written that "contains positions of agency for Australians, both as operatives within the cinema industries and as audiences."[32] While it was mainly American films that were screened at rural picture shows, largely due to the vast and reliable catalogue available, they were not necessarily the big drawcards, as the micro-study in chapter four of this thesis demonstrates. Even more revealing is the micro-study of the itinerant exhibitor in chapter five, which shows that in the remote towns of the Eyre Peninsula there was close to an even split of Australian/British and American main features screened. The important role of the itinerant exhibitor has been overlooked in Australian film histories but is a growing area of research in other countries.

Itinerant exhibition is a key factor that is distinctive to rural exhibition. The American academic Calvin Pryluck makes the point that "everyone seems to know of the itinerant movie show, but no one seems to know very much."[33] Pryluck attributes this to the difficulty in locating evidence, as

[29] Diane Collins, *Hollywood Down Under*, p.31.
[30] *Ibid*., p.64.
[31] *Ibid*., p.1.
[32] Mike Walsh, 'From Hollywood to the Garden Suburb (and Back to Hollywood)', p.169.
[33] Calvin Pryluck, 'The Itinerant Movie Show and the Development of the Film Industry', p.37.

road shows do not leave a dense paper trail. He sees a more crucial reason as being the teleological fallacy that for film history to be significant it must be causally linked to current practices. He rejects one scholar's description of the study of the itinerant exhibitor as "an obscure bypath of no importance"[34] but accepts that by the 1920s the travelling picture show had largely become such a bypath.[35] His essay was first published in 1983 and since then other research has been conducted into the itinerant exhibitor in the United States, which shows that they were still operating in the more remote regions of the country up until the 1950s.[36]

Pryluck's article highlights how different rural exhibition in the United States was from that in Australia, particularly South Australia in the 1930s. In the US, there was a constant displacement of touring picture shows as fixed-location picture shows were established in cities and in smaller and smaller towns. Rural Australia was more sparsely settled than the areas studied by Pryluck. In 1933, South Australia had only nine cities or towns outside the Adelaide metropolitan area that had a population of 2,000 and over, the largest being Port Pirie (11,677) and Mount Gambier (5,542). Permanent picture theatres were established in these places by the late 1910s and regular picture shows were being screened in the local halls of smaller towns. The smallest of towns on the Eyre Peninsula and mid-North were still being visited by itinerant exhibitors until the early years of the Second World War. In the context of itinerant movie shows, Pryluck leaves us with the question: "What were the conditions that made permanent fixed-location movie shows possible and preferable?"[37] Away from the larger towns in rural South Australia, permanent picture shows were never going to be viable because of the sparsity of the population.

There seems to be another distinction between itinerant exhibitors operating in Australia and those in the United States. Referring to the early years of cinema in the United States, Anne Morey points out that by definition the itinerant exhibitor was never a part of the community and was always booked through a local theatrical entrepreneur who had to gauge community taste so as not to alienate future audiences.[38] This implies that programmes selected by the itinerant exhibitor were in a way subject to a form of local censorship by having to meet the approval of the local theatrical entrepreneur. In South Australia, the itinerant exhibitor booked the halls, often

[34] *Ibid*., p.37.
[35] *Ibid*., p.46.
[36] *Ibid*., p.46. Pryluck mentions hearing stories, which he had not been able to verify, of itinerant exhibitors touring in places like west Texas and eastern Oregon into the late 1950s. He footnotes that Richard Alan Nelson makes a brief mention of itinerant exhibition in the 1950s in his book, *Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry*.
[37] *Ibid*., p.46.
[38] Anne Morey, 'Exhibition in Wilmington, North Carolina', p.55.

from local Institute committees without any discussion as to what the programme may contain. Programme content was always a contentious issue, drawing opposition from the clergy and morality organisations and not limited to the itinerant exhibitor.

Kathryn Fuller's *At the Picture Show* illuminates other distinctions in how the rural exhibition industry operated in the United States and South Australia. In her introduction, Fuller cites Mae Huettig, a 1940s sociologist and communications researcher, who warned that "[w]ithout an understanding of the intensity and suddenness of the demand for movies, much of the history of the industry is incomprehensible."[39] From the time of Huettig's warning in 1944 until the mid-1970s, when there was an increased interest in America in films and their influences on cinemagoers, there was a dearth of historical research into American film audiences. To address this, Fuller provides a social history of cinema-going in small towns during the silent era covering the transition from itinerant exhibitors to nickelodeons to picture palaces. Fuller uses the operations of the Cook and Harris High Class Moving Picture Company in discussing itinerant exhibitors and the construction of the small-town film audience. Based in Cooperstown, New York, Cook and Harris exhibited in small towns in their home state, New Hampshire and Vermont from 1904 until 1911, when the itinerant exhibition model was made redundant by the stationary picture theatre exhibition model. For four years, Cook and Harris managed a nickelodeon for other exhibitors before purchasing the Star Theatre in Cooperstown in 1915.[40]

In discussing Cook and Harris' relationships with the community, Fuller refers to sponsorship of exhibitions where exhibitors sought endorsements from civic groups. These endorsements were not given freely and were conditional on a percentage-share of ticket sales. About half of Cook and Harris' sponsorships came from civic groups with the other half from the managements of township opera houses.[41] I have found no evidence that this business practice was taken up by itinerant exhibitors in South Australia during the silent era. An attempt was made by an Institute Committee to enter a percentage-share of ticket sales arrangement (without endorsement) when Wybert Reeve screened for two nights at the Milang Institute in 1897.[42] Reeve's refusal of the arrangement, offering only the standard hall hire fee, set a precedent for the itinerant exhibition

[39] Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture*, p.x.
[40] *Ibid*., p.27.
[41] *Ibid*., pp.14-15.
[42] The Institute Committee offered Reeve £10 and two-thirds of the gross takings over that amount. He refused offering the standard hall hire fee. Reeve's decision was the correct one - the takings for the first night were £18 despite rough weather and the show was fairly attended the next night when the weather was worse. Anon., 'The Southern Districts', *The Mount Barker Courier*, 3 September 1897, p.3.

model in South Australia. From thereon, hall hire was negotiated on a set fee and not a percentage basis. The important point here is the variability of conditions and responses that characterized more marginal forms of exhibition operating under the more diverse contexts of rural settlement.

Another distinction is the era of the nickelodeon, which has been described "as a brief but intense period of business boom, gaudy showmanship, and tumultuous change in film exhibition, wedged between film's beginnings and the rise of the star system, Hollywood, and picture palaces"[43]. While the length of the era in the United States is subject to debate, Kathryn Fuller puts it around 1904 to 1915 at a stretch. It lasted longer in rural areas than in the big cities. As the nomenclature suggests, nickelodeons charged an admission price of five cents (sixpence) undercutting some itinerant exhibitors by up to eighty percent.[44] They were set up in opera houses, town halls and converted shops in practically every town with a population over five thousand. Their programmes included melodramas and comedies generally one or two reels in length. Rural South Australia did not have a nickelodeon era; for that matter, there were very few buildings dedicated to solely showing films. Most picture shows at this time were in town halls, institute halls and district halls, and over ninety-five percent of screening venues in rural South Australia were publicly owned. The few picture shows in commercial buildings charged a comparable admission price to the itinerant exhibitor, so unlike nickelodeons, affordability did not have an impact on itinerant picture shows.

Covering the same period as this thesis is Gregory Waller's research into Robert Southard, an itinerant exhibitor who operated in the American states of Kentucky and Arkansas during and after the 1930s Depression.[45] Like Bowles, Waller suggests that history "needs to take more into account the cultural power and presence of the movies beyond the screen, and outside of the theatre."[46] Waller has been able to assemble a history from below about an exhibitor who, although having spent many years in the film exhibition business, "would have no claim to, or at least no way to claim, our attention were it not that he kept a detailed record of these years."[47] Southard kept show diaries on the day in, day out business of running a travelling picture show, which has enabled Waller to reconstruct his programmes and routes in detail. The diaries give

[43] Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show*, p.47.
[44] *Ibid*., p.25.
[45] Gregory A. Waller, 'Robert Southard and the History of Traveling Film Exhibition', *Film Quarterly*, 57(2), (2004), pp. 2-14.
[46] *Ibid*., p.13.
[47] *Ibid*., p.2.

today's historian an insight into the challenges of taking a picture show on the road in the 1930s. This location-specific research from 16,000 kilometres from South Australia across the Pacific Ocean goes some way to addressing the question "can micro-historical research from one location generate findings that are usable by others?"[48] Waller's research into Southard shows as many similarities as differences with itinerant exhibition on the Eyre Peninsula and in the mid North of South Australia. For example, Southard screened in a tent in the summer months in Kentucky, a practice that would have been illegal and unnecessary in South Australia at that time: illegal because a canvas tent would not comply with the strict building requirements for places in which films were screened; and unnecessary because even the remotest towns with a population large enough to attract an itinerant exhibitor had a hall for hire. Southard's tent shows usually drew bigger-than-average crowds when he screened on a Sunday. By 1913, legislation was passed in South Australia to restrict Sunday screenings. Waller describes Robert Southard "as a seasoned travelling exhibitor who would prosper even more during the 1940s."[49] As discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis, the last of the itinerant exhibitors had called it a day by 1940. These differences highlight that itinerant film exhibition was not homogenous and that it was subject to extra-filmic conditions and environments.

Guide to Thesis

The challenges for constructing a new cinema history of exhibition in rural South Australia during the 1930s may at first appear similar to those faced nationally and internationally: most critically, a lack of historical records by those involved in the industry. In South Australia, however, rural cinema has left paper trails that few have wished to follow. Venues at which public film screenings took place were regarded as places of public entertainment, and since 1913 were required to be licensed under the Places of Public Entertainment Act. Until 1969, the Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment was responsible for ensuring that picture shows complied with the requirements of the law. The first Inspector, Thomas Smith, was fastidious in keeping meticulous records that provide a unique insight into how the cinema exhibition industry conducted itself from the inception of regulations specific to the industry. These records include applications for licenses, Inspector's reports and approvals, objections from members of the public to various entertainments, applications for projectionist's licenses and files related to censorship. The records have been preserved by the State Records of South Australia (SRSA) but to date little

[48] Richard Maltby, 'New Cinema Histories', p.13.
[49] Gregory A. Waller, 'Robert Southard and the History of Traveling Film Exhibition', p.6.

attempt has been made to translate these documents into a history of cinema in South Australia.[50] Rural exhibitors in the main were sole traders and dealt with the Inspector directly rather than through trade associations or other advocacy groups. Records of communications at this micro level are invaluable in understanding the relationship between exhibitors and government.

SRSA also hold records from other government departments which had a role in policing picture shows. For example, the regulations required picture shows over a certain seating capacity to have a fireman in attendance. The Fire Brigades Board Theatre Attendance Registers are a useful resource for showing the days on which venues were open and the number of sessions per day. There are also records of town and community Institutes, which contain minutes of meetings and occasionally data on screenings; and records of defunct companies, which contain half-yearly reports, profit and loss accounts and balance sheets. Most significant in this series is the company records of D. Clifford Theatres Limited, the largest suburban cinema chain.

There are challenges in locating specific documents, however. SRSA's electronic catalogue, *ArchivesSearch*, does not record a specific file unless someone has previously ordered the record. They are catalogued as a unit and there are a total of 145 units (containing up to fifty files each) listed under the series that covers the Inspector's jurisdiction. Of the approximately 7,000 files, only 90 have been individually catalogued. Therefore, pre-digital methods of research had to be employed to find documents in these collections that were relevant to early South Australian cinema.

Prior to the age of digital record keeping, all Government departments registered inwards and outwards correspondence. Fortuitously, the SRSA holds the Inspector's inwards correspondence register covering the years 1913 to 1932, which gives details of the sender and subject matter.[51] Alongside each entry in the register is the number of the file on which the correspondence was placed. The first piece of correspondence received generates the file, for example, a letter received from the Star Theatre, Torrensville, in 1915 submitting plans and specifications for approval by the Inspector, generated a new file, in this case 72/1915, and any further correspondence with the Torrensville Star would be placed on that file. The correspondence is not limited to issues relating to cinemas as the definition of a place of entertainment included other

[50] The exceptions being Ina Bertrand in her *Film Censorship in Australia*, John Thiele and Ross Lange in their *Thanks for the Memory*, Paul Paech in his BA Honours thesis, *Cinema in Adelaide to 1945*, and my own *Adelaide's Silent Nights*.
[51] SRSA, GRG24/96, Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment Correspondence Register.

social activities. As a result, it is a time-consuming process to identify correspondence specific to cinema. Once identified, it is necessary to approximate in which unit the file might be stored.[52]

Another government recordkeeping practice was to keep what was called "press copies" (later called carbon copies) of outward correspondence, which were leather-bound each year to form a volume. SRSA holds press copies for the Inspector's office for the years 1904 to 1962, which are catalogued in *ArchivesSearch* by units: there are two to three volumes per unit.[53] It was common administrative practice to put a file number on each letter, which has been useful in this research for locating correspondence particularly in relation to the Inspector's campaigns to extend the Places of Public Entertainment Act to rural regions. Once again, the research is laborious but is more efficient than going through each file.

Newspapers have been another primary source utilised in constructing the history of exhibition in rural South Australia. Ninety-two rural newspapers were published in South Australia in the period 1897-1935, and forty of these have been digitised on TROVE, a search engine that has been developed by the National Library of Australia. TROVE's digitised newspapers have been process by optical character recognition (OCR), allowing search across the electronically translated text. Compared to trawling through microfilm or hardcopy newspapers, searching across TROVE is a technological breakthrough in researching history, but it also creates some specific problems associated with the current limitations of OCR. The poor quality of newspapers often results in incorrect text translation, so that relevant articles can be missed in a search. A second issue which is particularly relevant to collecting information on screenings from newspaper advertisements comes from OCR's inability to translate the artwork used in much cinema advertising in place of standard type fonts.

Nevertheless, TROVE has been valuable in identifying newspaper articles in relation to screenings. Along with microfilm and hardcopy rural newspapers, I have used TROVE to construct a dataset of rural screenings for the two-year period from July 1933 to July 1935 to determine if the popularity of films screened in rural South Australia can be measured by the number of times a film is taken up by an exhibitor. (A Compact Disc version of the dataset, which I have called SARURAL.DB, is at Appendix 5.) The dataset contains information on 1,446 films screened at 126 rural venues over the two-year period (12,436 screenings). Rural newspapers have been the main source for

[52] Individual files can be retrieved manually by bypassing *ArchivesSearch*, which in itself is a laborious process. In recent years as units have been returned after retrieval, the SRSA have identified the units by file range.
[53] SRSA, GRG24/43, Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment Press copies.

screening data, while data on venue capacity and exhibitors has been sourced from official records and details for films has been sourced from a combination of a similar dataset built by John Sedgwick[54] and IMDB.

The use of newspapers as a primary source does have limitations, however. Firstly, not all rural exhibitors advertised their screenings in newspapers, or if they did so, they advertised only occasionally. To address this, assumptions can be made based on a subset of exhibitors that did advertise their screenings regularly. Secondly, when I commenced my research, I expected to find rural newspaper reviews that might indicate how audiences received a specific film in a specific town at a specific time. This was not the case. Rural newspapers developed a relationship with film exhibitors and quid pro quo deals of editorial for advertisements became commonplace. Editorial content given over to picture screenings generally took the form of previews copied from the film distributor's publicity sheet supplied by the exhibitor rather than reviews. Another limitation relevant to both the press record and that of government documents pertains to the issue of race and the segregation or integration of rural audiences. This has emerged as a major theme in American studies in particular, but any discussion of race in South Australia is striking in its absence.

The temporal specificity of the research in chapters three to four has been determined by two particular collections of documents. One set details box-office takings for each screening in a small country town, Snowtown, for the financial years of 1933-34 and 1934-35[55]. The films screened are not identified on the individual taking sheets, however, the exhibitor advertised the weekly programme in the local newspaper, *The Stanley Herald*. Although the newspaper is not digitised on TROVE, the State Library holds a hardcopy from which I have been able to harvest screening details. Additional information intrinsic and extrinsic to the films screened has been gathered using online databases such as IMDB for film details and the Australian Bureau of Meteorology's *Climate Data Online* for details of weather conditions in Snowtown on the screening dates.[56]

[54] John Sedgwick's POPSTAT Index spreadsheet built for his chapter, 'Patterns in First-Run and Surburban Filmgoing in mid-1930s' in R. Maltby, D. Biltereyst and P. Meers (eds.), *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, pp. 140-158. I thank John Sedgwick for allowing me access to the spreadsheet.
[55] The Australian financial year runs from July 1 to June 30.
[56] Australian Government, Bureau of Meteorology, Climate Data Online can be accessed at http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/data.

The other collection of documents that has determined the temporal specificity of the research is the Inspector's correspondence in relation to a campaign by the State government to expand its control to remote towns in the early 1930s. Supported by the dataset of rural screenings in the State for the same period, an understanding emerges of the differing practices involved in exhibition, the interrelations between distribution, exhibition and regulation, and regional variations in practices and tastes over a geographical area of 216,725 square kilometres.

Recollections of going to picture shows in rural South Australia particularly in the 1930s would be useful for understanding cinema-going from an audience perspective. Such recollections are, however, scarce and the opportunity to conduct an oral history project similar to that conducted by Bowles and Huggett has been missed. For someone to have a reasonable recollection of going to picture shows in the early 1930s, they would have to be born in the late 1910s, making them about one hundred years of age now. The recollection of events eighty years ago is fraught with patchy memory.

The following two chapters are organised chronologically to provide an historical background to the development of film exhibition in rural South Australia. They examine the challenges cinema constantly faced, and how this strengthened it as an institution by building up a resilience that enabled it to survive the challenges of new technology and economic depression it faced in the early 1930s. Chapter 1 discusses the development of cinema as a set of institutions that determined a framework in which rural exhibitors operated. A study of the key pioneers of rural exhibition in the State and the conditions and barriers that they had to face will give an insight into how models of exhibition were established. Cinema's transition from a novel technology to a central social institution brought with it concerns about film's power to influence and often put cinema in conflict with influential sectors of the community. There were also concerns about the laissez-faire nature of the exhibition business and about public safety in the event of a fire. These concerns brought about comprehensive government legislation imposing restrictions on cinema exhibition in the capital of South Australia as early as the early 1910s, and regulation spread to rural areas over the next twenty years. The legislation brought with it financial costs to exhibitors, reducing profit margins.

Chapter 2 will discuss how cinema in rural South Australia had developed into a structured industry with different models of exhibition by the late 1920s, with only a limited number of venues operating within the framework of government regulations. From 1928 to 1933,

economic, technological and legislative events had an impact on the industry that tested exhibitors' capacity to survive. Economically, the effects of the Great Depression were starting to impact on audience numbers. Technologically, the transition to sound and the increasing shortage of silent films forced cash-strapped exhibitors to wire for sound or close their show. In terms of regulations, the State government engaged in an active campaign to have the Places of Public Entertainment Act extended to approximately 192 rural towns. While compliance could be managed at times of economic prosperity, the campaign threatened the viability of film exhibition in the smaller rural communities. After outlining the different models for rural exhibition, this chapter will discuss the impact that these three issues had on rural exhibition, particularly on the picture show in small isolated communities, and how exhibitors responded to the challenges.

Using data about screenings advertised in local newspapers, Chapter 3 will follow Ross Thorne's example, examining the circulation of films through rural South Australia to determine if there was a hierarchy of exhibition once a film had completed its suburban run. This chapter will also pose questions about whether the popularity of a film can be determined by the number of venues where it is screened and the length of time it remains on the rural circuit. Following a similar template to that used by John Sedgwick to determine the POPSTAT index, I will also investigate whether the film preferences of rural communities are similar to those of urban audiences.

Chapters 4 and 5 are micro-studies of two different exhibition models operating in two distinct rural regions: the absentee exhibitor who had a circuit but rather than personally travel from town to town would arrange a picture show on behalf of an Institute Committee, and the travelling picture showman who travelled with his show. Using the box office takings for each screening at the South Australian mid-north town of Snowtown, Chapter 4 will examine the films screened by absentee exhibitor Bill Benbow, over a two-year period, and the factors which could affect cinema-going habits such as weather, along with variables that could determine a film's popularity, such as distributor, nationality or genre. The micro-study will not only provide a snapshot of an exhibitor's business in a small rural community, but will also provide a benchmark by which the study in the previous chapter can be compared, to determine if there is a correlation between film hire and film popularity.

With the exception of a biography on Allan Tom who toured his picture show in the central west of New South Wales and Joan Long's 1977 film, *The Picture Showman*, there appears to be very little material on the itinerant exhibitor who was central to the culture of small towns. Chapter 5

is a micro-study of two competing travelling picture shows on South Australia's then-remote Eyre Peninsula. It will discuss the industrial context of travelling picture shows and their programming strategies. It will also look at their relationship with other exhibitors on the Eyre Peninsula, their interaction with local communities and their relationship with centralised regulations.

My aim is to understand how cinema as an institution became prominent in rural South Australia by mapping the processes by which it evolved and became entrenched in communities, and adapted to technological, legislative and economic changes at a time of crisis. In doing so, I want to restore agency to the marginal figures that played a major role in bringing cinema to the rural. I anticipate that the resulting history will not only contribute to the growing number of micro-histories of cinema-going, in Australia and internationally, that demonstrate there is no single pattern of cinema-going, but that it will also address the absence of rural cinema in South Australian local histories.

1. Almost an Institution: the Establishment of Rural Exhibition in South Australia

When the first entrepreneurs of moving pictures traversed rural South Australia in 1897 demonstrating the latest advance in photography, they did so in the absence of a set of institutions and practices specific to the consumption of films. Initially, a model based on travelling live theatre was used, but as film exhibition began to grow at a rapid rate, particularly after 1907, the industry had to work through issues of what was acceptable to governments, other institutions and the consumers of cinema - the audience. While debates over the safety of buildings used for exhibition and the content of programmes in the main took place in the State's capital, Adelaide, rural exhibitors had to adjust to rural expectations of what constituted a picture show. This chapter will discuss the development of cinema as a set of institutions and practices that formed a framework under which rural exhibitors operated. This will provide a background for understanding the country picture show in the 1930s and its importance in local communities.

At the time of the first rural screenings in South Australia in 1897, 55 percent of the Colony's population lived outside of Adelaide and its suburbs.[57] More significantly, 89 percent of those living outside of Adelaide lived in towns with a population of fewer than 2,000. Cinema exhibition could not have been an economically viable industry in such a sparsely populated State had it not been for the availability of venues in which to screen films and a reliable, low-cost means of transport for exhibitors to get the films, projection equipment and themselves to those venues. Unlike many other emerging technologies at the time, much of the infrastructure for film exhibition was already in place. For example, before the telephone could be widely used, and hence economically viable, telephone exchanges had to be built and lines laid. Likewise, electric lamps were dependent on power plants and lines. As Calvin Pryluck points out, "[t]he economics of the road show enabled the movie industry to avoid the 'chicken-and-egg' difficulty that plagued many other new technologies."[58] In South Australia, most small country towns had an institute building, often with a hall attached, which provided a centre for social, cultural and

[57] By the 1930s, this percentage was reduced to 45 percent.
[58] Calvin Pryluck, 'The Itinerant Movie Show and the Development of the Film Industry', p.45.

educational activities, and the larger towns had a town hall.[59] These were often the venues for travelling live theatre performances that toured the State in the 1890s. Providing transport was a network of 2,773 kilometres of railway lines that linked the towns, forming a theatrical circuit. While the infrastructure was in place to initiate a cinema exhibition industry in rural South Australia, and a live theatrical touring model on which to base a tour of moving pictures, the early pioneers of cinema exhibition nevertheless had no way of knowing how country communities would receive the fledgling entertainment.

Rural Cinema Pioneers – Wybert Reeve

Wybert Reeve was the first person to screen films to a South Australian audience when he showed a selection of Edison's Kinetoscope films at the Theatre Royal in Adelaide in October 1896. He was an experienced theatre manager, having managed the Bijou Theatre in Melbourne, the Theatre Royal since 1887 and, prior to that, provincial theatres in England. He also toured as an actor and playwright with travelling companies in the United States, England, Australia and New Zealand. He was well-known throughout the Australian and New Zealand colonies and had valuable theatrical contacts such as the McMahon Brothers, J.C. Williamson and Walter Barnett – three entrepreneurs associated with early screenings in Australia. When the McMahon Brothers' agents, St Hill and Moodie, arrived in Adelaide for a three-week exhibition in one of the shops of the Beehive Building in Adelaide, they premiered their show at the Theatre Royal under Reeve's direction. Likewise, it was through Walter Barnett that the Lumière Brothers' agent, Maurius Sestier, teamed up with Reeve to screen the Cinématographe as the top billed attraction at the Theatre Royal using a cinématographe that had just arrived from Paris.[60] Following a successful season at the Theatre Royal, Reeve then embarked on a five-week tour of rural South Australia in February 1897.[61]

Moving pictures had been screened in a rural South Australian centre prior to Reeve's tour, but not as an entity on their own. As in the other Australian colonies prior to Federation, cinema was

[59] Institutes were the first adult education schools and libraries established to educate working class people who wished to better themselves educationally and culturally. In other Australian States they were called Mechanics Institutes or Schools of Arts. Ironically, the term mechanics institute was regarded 'too common' for South Australia so they were simply called institutes.

[60] Anon., 'Amusements: Theatre Royal', *The South Australian Register*, 23 December 1896, p.3.

[61] I have not been able to find any evidence that Sestier actually travelled with Reeve on tour. Although Chris Long suggests Sestier left South Australia for Western Australia at the conclusion of the first tour at the end of February 1897, there is no mention of Sestier in any local newspaper articles and the advertisements carried a standard line "Mr.Wybert Reeve has the pleasure of announcing by arrangement with Monsieur Sestier he will exhibit Lumière'swonderful Cinématographe" suggesting it was an arrangement rather than a joint tour. Lumière's Cinématographe was first screened in Perth on 1 February 1897, which suggests that Sestier may have left Adelaide before the commencement of the first rural tour of South Australia.

introduced to rural South Australia as a part of the programme of a much broader entertainment.[62] The Newbury-Spada Operatic and Musical Company screened moving pictures as a part of its show at Mount Gambier (population 2,403) for three nights in January 1897.[63] Although advertised as the "Cinematographe", Newbury's machine was a Paul's Theatrograph.[64] What is interesting about the Newbury-Spada tour is that it was a tour of the Victorian colony ending at Mount Gambier in South Australia. Theatrical circuits were not strictly based on the borders of the separate colonies. Broken Hill (population 18,000) was always included in South Australian travelling theatrical tours, and Mount Gambier was often included in Victorian theatrical tours. In the case of Broken Hill, this pattern was to become a feature of film distribution in later years.[65]

Map 1.1: South Australian Towns referred to in this chapter. **Click Here**

Wybert Reeve toured three times in 1897, with the first tour commencing on 1 February 1897.[66] This tour was modelled on live theatre tours of rural South Australia, which is not surprising given Reeve's background. He assembled a small entourage, which included an advance manager (E.F. Gallagher), an operator, a pianist (Mrs Gallagher), and an interlocutor (Alfred Sylvester).[67] This group embarked on a 1,650 kilometre journey by rail screening Lumière films in thirteen rural centres ranging in size from the township of Orroroo with a population of 500 to the city of Broken Hill with a population of 18,000. Unlike the Newbury-Spada Company's tour, and those of other travelling companies of the day, Reeve's tour was unique in that film was screened as an attraction of its own and not a part of a vaudeville show. Each night, with the exception of Sundays, Reeve screened two sessions of twenty pictures, modifying the screenings to one session of thirty pictures towards the end of the tour.

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[62] Up until Australia becoming an independent nation in 1901, European settlement consisted of six separate British colonies: New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

[63] Anon., 'The Cinematographe', *The Borderwatch*, 23 January 1897, p.2.
Note: Population figures used in this chapter are sourced from *Sands and McDougall's South Australia Directory* for the year being discussed. These are not necessarily based on an official census. The figures are to give an indication of the comparative size of towns and cities in rural South Australia at that time.

[64] The term "cinematograph" was used generically but often misspelt by some pioneering exhibitors. In later legislation it became the official term for equipment used to project moving pictures. In this thesis, the Cinématographe refers only to the Lumière's model.

[65] In 1913-14, the trade journal, *Australian Kinematograph Journal*, reported on picture shows at Broken Hill in its 'Adelaide Notes' column.

[66] An itinerary of Wybert Reeve's 1897 tours, including those in the colonies of Victoria and New Zealand, is at Appendix 1.

[67] The local newspapers reporting on the tour, do not mention the operator's name. In Reeve's subsequent tours, the operator is Gallagher. The operator in the first tour may have been one of Sestier's assistants. In a newspaper report on Sestier's arrival in Adelaide there is a mention of "and his assistants".

In the 1890s, a major theatrical tour of the colony would include performances in only the larger towns which had a railway station, either a town hall or a large institute hall, and a local newspaper. An advance agent would arrive in the town a few days before the performance, place an advertisement in the town's paper, post bills around the town advertising the upcoming performance and, in some cases, arrange with a local business to be an agent for advanced sales. A full tour of these towns (thirteen in all including Broken Hill) would take about 35 days to complete. Comparing Reeve's tour with that of a typical live theatre tour of the 1890s, such as the Ada Delroy Company's tour of the mid-north of South Australia in July and August 1896, demonstrates the way that Reeve's tour was modelled on the travelling live theatre circuit.

Ada Delroy's Company	Wybert Reeve's Tour
(1) Gawler	(1) Gawler
(2) Kapunda	(2) Kapunda
(3) Kadina	(3) Kadina
(4) Moonta	(4) Moonta
(5) Wallaroo	
(6) Jamestown	(10) Jamestown
(7) Port Pirie	(5) Port Pirie
(8) Port Augusta	
(9) Quorn	
(10) Orroroo	(8) Orroroo
	(9) Terowie
(11) Peterborough	(6) Peterborough
(12) Broken Hill	(7) Broken Hill

Table 1.1: Comparison of Wybert Reeve's February 1897 tour with that of Ada Delroy's Company's tour of July and August 1896. (Parentheses indicates order of tour)

The absence of Wallaroo (population 1,690) from Reeve's tour was due to the Wallaroo Town Hall being booked for another entertainment. The absence of Port Augusta (population 1,654) and Quorn (population 850) was due to time constraints and logistics. The addition of Terowie (population 900) is an interesting deviation from the touring live theatre model. Terowie was a small town but its *raison d'être* was that it is a "railway break-of-gauge town" where passengers and freight had to be transferred due to differing rail gauges. Unlike live theatre, which had tons of equipment to transload, the picture show screen and projection equipment could be expediently set up in the local hall of the smallest towns. Rail played an important role in determining which towns were included in tours. Reeve's decision to bypass the Mid-North town of Clare, which had a town hall, a population of 1,130, but no railway line into the town, supports the theory that his first tour relied heavily on the rail network.

Cinema's interconnection with transport infrastructure is an underexplored issue in most histories of exhibition. Ross Thorne argues that railways played a crucial role in the organization of the regional entertainment business. In an article on what he calls "the management of the 'nuts and bolts' of distribution", he has been able to demonstrate the importance of rail in transporting heavy cans of film across regional New South Wales.[68] Touring live theatre had tons of stage equipment to move from town to town and relied on what was, for a small colony in terms of population, an extensive rail network. Of course, this meant that people in the smaller rural towns had to travel to railway towns to see a live performance. Reeve's sole use of rail on his first tour would have simply been because that was the established model. However, by the end of that tour he would have recognised the advantage of the Cinématographe's portability.

In adopting the touring live theatre model for the tour, Reeve had no knowledge of how relevant this was to film exhibition, as he worked through issues of audience reception and what constituted a programme and a price.

Audience Reception

Personal accounts from those who attended early cinema screenings in South Australia are almost non-existent.[69] Therefore, the only insight we have into the successes and failures of the first screenings in rural South Australia comes from local newspapers of the day. These accounts raised issues that would distinguish cinema exhibition from live theatre tours and rural exhibition from that in Adelaide.

Wybert Reeve's rural tour commenced at Gawler (population 2,050), 42 kilometres north of Adelaide by train. Gawler's newspaper provides a first insight into rural audience reception expressing awe at the moving pictures:

> Imagine photographs of scenes of great interest viewed as one would see them in a good position, with every accompaniment of life save that of noise and odour, and it is no wonder that the beholders were enraptured.[70]

[68] Thorne, R., 'Rethinking distribution: developing the parameters for a micro-analysis of the movement of motion pictures', pp. 315-331.

[69] There are a handful of reminiscences in which time has blurred accuracy. For example, Frank Allen, an exhibitor who purchased Reeve's Cinématographe outfit, in reminiscing to *The Mail* told the paper Wybert Reeve's first screening at the Theatre Royal included a film of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee procession, an event that took place six months after the screening. 'Through the Stage Door 45 Years Ago', *The Mail*, 11 March 1933, p.1S.

[70] Anon., 'The Cinematographe', *The Bunyip*, 5 February 1897, p.2.

The newspaper picked up on an issue that distinguished rural exhibition from that in the city - the variable quality of the projection - commenting that the pictures were not quite as clear as those presented in Adelaide. Given that the same projection equipment was being used, the difference may have been due to the power source. The projection at the Theatre Royal was powered by electricity. In Gawler, and most of the other towns Reeve was touring, the moving pictures were thrown on the screen by an oxy-hydrogen light. Due to the risk of fire, this practice was later barred by government regulations.

In the early part of Reeve's tour, newspapers reviewed the screenings rather than previewed them. Given the size of his advertisements, two columns by ten centimetres, he could have expected *quid pro quo* of editorial for advertising but some newspapers did not even review the screenings. Those that did praise the entertainment included comments such as:

> On Saturday the attendance was not large, but those who had witnessed it on that occasion spoke so highly of it, that on Monday and Tuesday the hall was full. Everybody was satisfied that the exhibition was a marvellous one. We have certainly seen nothing like it before in Moonta.[71]

The Kadina & Wallaroo Times praised the cinématographe claiming, "it is impossible to do justice to this wonderful realistic show as everything appears as it is in life and must be seen to be appreciated."[72] Both reviews suggest the cinématographe was seen as a scientific novelty, even though it was operating along the lines of theatrical entertainment in terms of personnel, venues and ticketing. Cinema was an idea not yet fully formed in local communities or in the press. The Port Pirie newspaper did not report on the screening and this raises the question of the extraordinary range of responses with which local communities seemed to greet this institution that was in the process of coming into being. It could be ignored one night and praised as earth-shattering the next. *The Burra Record* commented the cinematographe "is at present one of the scientific wonders of 1897 and should be seen by everyone interested in the progress of art and amusement."[73] This highlights the nebulous space cinema occupied at the time. Reeve advertised the cinematographe as "the greatest marvel of the age", as if it were the apparatus itself that was the drawcard, but he described the show as an "entertainment consisting of 20 pictures." When the Cinématographe was screened for six nights in Broken Hill, the reporter for *The Barrier Miner* recognised that something of historical significance had arrived, commenting "without exaggeration it can be said that the coming hither of the cinematographe is an 'event'

[71] Anon., 'Cinematographe', *The People's Weekly*, 13 February 1897, p.2.
[72] Anon., 'The Cinematograph', *The Kadina & Wallaroo Times*, 10 February 1897, p.2
[73] Anon., 'The Cinematographe', *The Burra Record*, 24 February 1897, p.3.

in local history."[74] The review described every film with awe, declaring "It was not a picture that was thrown on the cloth, it was life itself, transferred to a film and cast out at will." It would take another decade before cinema was to become an institution in its own right with fixed venues and exhibition practices.

Towards the end of the tour, newspapers began to preview the cinematographe, not so much discussing its audience reception as its technical achievement. *The Mount Barker Courier* previewed the screenings, quoting slabs from *The Barrier Miner's* report on the Broken Hill screenings. A common practice for advanced managers was to provide newspapers with favourable reviews of previous performances as a part of a publicity strategy. The tactic worked, as people came from nearby Hahndorf, Nairne and other neighbouring townships to Mount Barker (population 1,246). Mount Barker Institute was full to capacity and many of the audience had to stand throughout the screening.[75] This practice of overcrowding was later barred by government regulations.

The last town of the tour was Strathalbyn (population 816) some thirty kilometres south of Mount Barker. The local paper observed that the pictures "as a scientific object … should speak volumes of the advance made in photography; as an entertainment they afford constantly increasing delight."[76] The paper reported that having heard so much about the cinematographe as it travelled through the colony, the audience agreed that the reports had in no way exaggerated the merits of the exhibition. This statement highlights the importance of newspapers in promoting screenings. Had the reports exaggerated the merits of the screening, it is unlikely that the final stages of the tour would have been as successful as they were. While local newspapers went some way to conveying the audience reception of South Australia's first rural picture show tour, and thus promoting it, they were also important in raising one issue that Reeve needed to address – the admission price.

Admission Prices

Reporting on the first screening of the tour, Gawler's newspaper picked up on an issue that had salience for the constitution of the cinema as an entertainment (that is, a commercial service) – a difference in the price of admission from that in the city. Reeve charged three shillings for the

[74] Anon., 'Amusements: The Cinematographe', *The Barrier Miner*, 17 February 1897, p.2.
[75] Anon., 'The Cinematographe', *Mount Barker Courier*, 5 March 1897, p.2.
[76] Anon., 'The Cinematographe', *The Southern Argus*, 4 March 1897, p.2.

front seats, two shillings for the second seats and one shilling for the back seats.[77] These were the same prices that were charged by touring live theatre companies. Reeve did make a concession to those in the front and second seats who remained for the second session by offering a discount of one shilling. The paper does not report on the actual attendance but comments, "seeing that occupants of the front seats had to pay 5s (five shillings) for an hour-and-a-half's entertainment, and other parts of the house had to contribute in proportion, the attendance was very good indeed."[78] The price for a single session in rural towns was the same as the Theatre Royal in Adelaide charged, but the city audience saw the cinematographe as a part of a much bigger bill that included magician Carl Hertz and other acts.

It is possible that the issue of admission was contentious in other towns. By the time of the Port Pirie screenings, nearly two weeks into the tour, the cost of a ticket for those attending both sessions was further reduced to half-price for the second session, although the discount was only available for those in the front and second seats. The absence of a discount for those in the back seats suggests that one shilling for each session was the lowest Reeve was prepared to go.

Reeve's strategy to split the programme into two independently ticketed sessions was unusual for an entertainment and drew comment further in the tour when Broken Hill's newspaper, *The Barrier Miner*, reported:

> The highest tribute that could be paid to the exhibition lay in the fact that everybody who saw the first series of pictures paid the extra money demanded and returned for the second. Opinions were strong prior to last night as to the wisdom of the double charge in the tariff of admission. Events proved that the new tariff was a smart business dodge: no one, on seeing half the entertainment, will let the second half pass.[79]

One reader was not as accepting and questioned why Broken Hill should pay double the admission charged in Adelaide for a quarter of the evening's programme, commenting:

> The arrangement for two separate exhibitions on the one evening is not a good one – indeed, it seems to me to tend towards coercion. It also savors of the side-show business. Why could not the management provide a full evening's bill, as in Adelaide?[80]

The comment suggests that as early as 1897 some would have recognised cinema exhibition as something akin to theatre rather than a travelling technological novelty to be relegated to the

[77] Prior to the introduction of decimal currency in 1996, Australia's currency was based on the imperial British money system. There were twelve pence (d) in one shilling (s) and twenty shillings in one pound (£). One shilling and sixpence would be expressed as 1s 6d.
[78] Anon., 'The Cinematographe', *The Bunyip*, 5 February 1897, p.2.
[79] Anon., 'Amusements: The Cinematographe', *The Barrier Miner*, 17 February 1897, p.2.
[80] Playgoer, 'To the editor of the Barrier Miner', *The Barrier Miner*, 17 February 1897, p.2.

status of a sideshow attraction once that novelty wore off. Reeve responded to the question of a high admission charge explaining that the cinematographe was not a cheap show and that the expenses for the week's screenings in Broken Hill would be over £170. He claimed that the takings for Adelaide's Theatre Royal were over £600 each week and that if he could be guaranteed £550 takings in Broken Hill, he would be pleased to send the same entertainment there.[81] What Reeve did not answer is the question of why he was charging so much for a quarter of such a programme? Exhibitors touring in the other Australian colonies at that time were charging from one shilling to two shillings for shows featuring only the cinematograph. For example, the Star Photo Company, which was touring rural New South Wales at the same time as Reeve, charged one shilling for adults and sixpence for children when screening in Maitland and two weeks later had dropped its admission to sixpence for adults and threepence for children when screening in Singleton.[82] Admittedly, the company was screening only ten films rather than Reeve's twenty. Other entertainments in Broken Hill at that same time had admission charges ranging from two shillings and sixpence to see Cornish-style wrestling at the Pig and Whistle Hotel to four shillings, three shillings and two shillings for the Fitzgerald Brothers' Circus, a large entertainment that had to be transported by a special train[83].

Towards the end of the tour, Reeve modified the programme to give better value for money by only having one session but screening thirty films for the same price. This seemed reasonable to *The Orroroo Enterprise*, the newspaper of a small mid-north town. When Reeve screened there during a second tour in May 1897, the paper commented, "the prices of admission are such as to place the Entertainment within the reach of all."[84] This was not the case when the Cinematographe was screened in Mount Barker at the conclusion of the first tour. Once again, the question of what constituted value for money was raised in the press. Reeve had declined encores with the excuse that it would take too long to rewind the films. The paper described the excuse as a trifle thin and added, "if all present had not been so charmed by the sight of a truly astonishing production of inventive skill they would not have been satisfied with the termination of the entertainment after little more than an hour's display."[85]

[81] Wybert Reeve, 'Mr. Reeve in Reply', *The Barrier Miner*, 18 February 1897, p.2.
[82] Advertisements, *The Maitland Daily Mercury*, 12 February 1897, p.3.and *The Singleton Argus*, 24 February 1897, p.3.
[83] Advertisement, *The Barrier Miner*, 4 January 1897, p.3; Advertisement, *The Barrier Miner*, 5 January 1897, p.3.
[84] Anonymous, 'The Cinematographe', *The Orroroo Enterprise*, 28 May 1897, p.2.
[85] Anon., 'The Cinematographe', *The Mount Barker Courier*, 5 March 1897, p.2.

Reeve must have sensed that the cost of admission would be contentious at the commencement of the tour, as his newspaper advertisements carried the line "Notwithstanding the great expense Mr. Reeve has decided on charging POPULAR PRICES." If we consider that the daily wage for a labourer in 1897 was six shillings, the prices Reeve was charging would have been quite burdensome on a family's disposable income. The cost of the cheapest seat was more expensive than some of the staples. One shilling would buy the contemporary equivalent of three loaves of bread, three litres of milk, two kilograms of beef or eleven kilograms of potatoes.[86]

Despite wanting to get the best return on his arrangement with Maurius Sestier[87] (for Reeve did not purchase the Cinematographe until May 1897), Reeve screened a special matinee for school children before leaving Broken Hill with the proceeds going to two charities – one in Adelaide and the other local.[88] This practice, the benefit show, took its roots from live theatre and was to become a feature of both urban and rural picture shows. By the time Reeve's entourage returned to Adelaide on 5 March 1897, they had travelled 1,650 kilometres by rail, screened in thirteen rural venues and had been away for thirty-two nights.[89] The success of the tour can be measured by Reeve's enthusiasm for further tours of the colony and beyond. Most newspaper reports were positive about the screenings, thus setting a benchmark for future travelling picture shows. The tour shows Reeve working his way towards what constituted a programme in terms of price and content. He had taken on board criticisms of the pricing structure by no longer splitting the programme into two independently ticketed sessions and adding an extra ten films to the programme, suggesting that as the novelty of the cinema as a technology declined, the emphasis would fall more on entertaining content. The first rural tour had also demonstrated that the cinematographe and associated equipment was easier to transport from town to town than live shows, making it profitable to screen in even the smallest of towns.

After four weeks of screening in Adelaide, Wybert Reeve commenced a second tour in April 1897. This tour crossed the Colony's border and visited western Victorian towns and cities

[86] South Australian Parliament, 'No. 52 – Return showing the retail prices of general produce at the markets in Adelaide in each month of the year 1897', *Statistical Register of the Province of South Australia for the Year 1897*, Adelaide.
[87] If Reeve was charged at the same rate for the use of the Cinématographe as Western Australia's *Ye Olde Englishe Fayre*, he would have been paying £500 per month. Source: Advertisement for *Ye Olde Englishe Fayre*, *The West Australian*, 19 January 1897, p.1.
[88] Anon., 'Amusements', *The Barrier Miner*, 19 February 1897, p.2.
[89] Reeve had returned to Adelaide after 18 days on tour to prepare for his next live production at the Theatre Royal. He left his advance manager, Gallagher, to complete the rest of the tour.

located on the Adelaide to Melbourne rail line, screening two nights each in Nhill, Dimboola, Horsham, Stawell and Ararat, and two weeks at Ballarat. The first night's screening saw the Nhill Mechanics Institute filled to overflowing. The second night's screening had to be delayed one hour to allow time for those returning from a cricket match in Dimboola. Reviewing that screening, the local newspaper waxed lyrical about the realism of Lumière's *Arrival of the Express*:

> We forgot ourselves for the moment and imagined that we were back again where we were a half an hour previously, namely, on the Nhill platform, waiting among the eager crowd as the train rolled in with the victorious cricketers from Dimboola.[90]

While audience reaction to this film is often invoked to stress the strangeness of cinema as an "attraction", this quote shows it being assimilated to local conditions. It neatly suggests the possibility that the cinematographe, which was doubly foreign to the bush, being from overseas and from the big city, could be linked to the reality of local life, creating a rapport with the Nhill audience. This account is at odds with what Martin Loiperdinger has called "cinema's founding myth", where audiences reacted with fear or fled from their seats as the train on the screen appears to come towards them.[91]

Returning from western Victoria, Reeve wasted no time in arranging further tours of South Australia. However, his monopoly on the country circuit quickly came to an end. His interlocutor, Alfred Silvester purchased a Lumière cinematographe of his own and toured the mid-north of the colony competing with Reeve. By the close of 1897 there were nine operators touring rural South Australia.[92] One of these, the Federal Cinematographic Company, is significant as being the first exhibitor to originate from a rural town. Founded by itinerant photographers, Norman Rossell and J. Rigby from Renmark, the company screened a collection of lantern slides and eight moving pictures in various towns in South Australia's mid-north and Riverland regions. They also screened across the border in Mildura in Victoria and Wentworth in New South Wales. On one tour in October 1897, they ventured by rail as far north as Hergott (now known as Marree) and Farina, some 750 kilometres from their hometown. Initially, they had a single price structure of one shilling for any part of the hall but then increased their admission to two shillings for the front seats and one shilling for the rest of the hall, with children paying half price on all seats. In late 1897, they added film of the Diamond Jubilee Procession to

[90] Anon., 'The Cinematographe', *The Nhill Mail*, 10 April 1897, p.2.
[91] Martin Loiperdinger cited in Gregory Robinson, 'Oh! Mother Will Be Pleased: Cinema Writes Back in Hepworth's How It Feels to Be Run Over', p.218.
[92] Anon., 'Local News', *Renmark Pioneer*, 3 December 1897, p.3.

their programme and increased their ticket prices further to three shillings, two shillings and one shilling with no half-price for children on the one shilling admission. This put them in an unfavourable competitive position. *The Renmark Pioneer* reported on their return from one tour that "[a]t places they had good houses, but at others very poor ones. Other similar shows, but much inferior, had spoiled their chances at several towns."[93]

Wybert Reeve's 1897 tours demonstrated that the rural cinema-going experience was going to be remarkably different from the urban experience. He had shown that the concept of the itinerant film exhibitor could be profitable providing four resources were available: a venue – a local hall; publicity – a local press; transport for both film and people - a railway line; and technology – a supply of films and quality equipment to screen them. It is worth noting that the majority of these factors involved the availability of local infrastructure. Writing 34 years after Reeve's first tour of 1897, a friend of his recalled him arriving in Strathalbyn: "It was an epoch-marking event, beginning to sound the knell of a lot of old-time entertainment providers, and to pave the way for the greater marvels of today's cinesound triumphs."[94] Reeve did not live to see cinema become a widespread popular entertainment as he died in 1906, the year in which permanent picture theatres began to open in Australian cities. The legacy of his 1897 tours, however, was an exhibition model that survived into the 1930s.

Other Rural Cinema Pioneers – The Marvellous Corricks and W.H. Bruce

As elsewhere, from 1898 to 1905 there was a hiatus in cinema exhibition with only the occasional exhibitor touring rural South Australia. There was a belief by some that the new form of entertainment was of merely ephemeral value. Even Auguste Lumière predicted that it would become nothing more than a scientific toy.[95] Some early film historians theorise that film had been devalued through the practice of using it as a "chaser" – that is, screening films at the conclusion of a vaudeville show to clear the house to make way for the next audience.[96] I have found no evidence that this was the case in South Australia. While I have found examples of moving pictures concluding vaudeville shows at that time, it appears that if it was the intent of the exhibitor to use film as a chaser, it did not work. For example, in 1899 when Hudson's Titbits of Novelties at the Bijou Theatre concluded the programme with moving pictures, the films

[93] Anon., 'Local News', *Renmark Pioneer*, 19 November 1897, p.3.
[94] Joseph W. Elliott, 'Jottings', *The Southern Argus*, 12 November 1931, p.4.
[95] Michael Chanon, *The Dream That Kicks*, p.33.
[96] This theory is known as the "chaser theory" and is discussed by Robert Allen in 'Contra the Chaser Theory' in J.L. Fell (ed.), *Film Before Griffith*, pp. 105-115. Allen argues that the theory misrepresents cinema exhibition history for the period 1898 to 1901.

"called forth rounds of applause. Numbers of them had to be repeated."[97] A parochial view as to why cinema had waned was expressed by an Adelaide newspaper in 1901: "Adelaideans are now accustomed to the 'living pictures' photography which developed so wonderfully in late years, and the novelty having worn off the attraction is not so great."[98] Two years later it was still regarded by some as a novelty as exemplified by one newspaper report: "Those who are fond of novelties should go and have a look at Edison's Wonderscope."[99]

In the United States, there was a nationwide boom in travelling picture shows between 1904 and 1907.[100] Although there were sporadic screenings in rural South Australia in 1904 and 1905 by such companies as the British Biographe Cinematographe and the Great American Vitascope Company, it was not until November 1905 that touring picture shows resurfaced as a popular entertainment. In that month, Edison's Marvellous Wonderscope did a two-week tour of ten towns on the Fleurieu Peninsula just south of Adelaide. The most extensive tour since Wybert Reeve's 1897 tour was that of the Marvellous Corrick Family Entertainers. For nine months, from May 1906 to February 1907, the family of musicians screened films, under the title of Leonard's English Biograph Company, on no less than 169 nights in Adelaide, the suburbs, Broken Hill and 53 country towns.

The Corricks' exhibition model was similar to Reeve's in that it was planned on the rail system with only the rare diversion by road and on one occasion by ship. As they moved around the State, their advance agent would precede them by two weeks, arriving in a town, booking the local hall, pasting handbills, placing advertisements in the local newspaper and providing the local newspaper editor with ready copy along with a review from a previous town. Being a hybrid entertainment of musical performance and film exhibition, the Corricks had the additional logistical problem of moving tons of equipment from town to town and, unlike Reeve's first tour of 1897, the Corricks were faced with competition as touring picture shows became more common in 1906. Touring rural South Australia at the same time as the Corricks were Bruce's Moving Pictures, the Salvation Army's Australian Biorama Company and several more. This presented the Corricks with the strategic problem of planning their tour so as not to perform in a town on the same night as another tour group. As an example, in October, Tait's cinematograph pictures were also touring South Australia and screened their popular film *Living London* in Victor

[97] Anon., 'Amusements', *South Australian Register*, 3 July 1899, p.6.
[98] Anon., 'Biograph at the Town Hall', *The Register*, 29 May 1901, p.3.
[99] Anon., 'Amusements: Edison's Wonderscope Company', *Port Pirie Recorder*, 6 June 1903, p.2.
[100] Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show*, p.17.

Harbor the night before the Corricks' show. The paper described the Taits' show as splendid but the attendance as small. However, there was a good audience at both Corrick shows the following evenings. (Ironically, two years later, the Corricks screened *Living London* as a part of their show in Rangoon in what is now known as Myanmar.) An interesting aspect of this part of the Corricks' tour is the use of coastal shipping as a means of getting to and from the southern Yorke Peninsula towns of Edithburgh and Yorketown. The absence of a rail network south of Moonta made touring in towns such as Edithburgh and Yorketown a logistical challenge. Using coastal shipping in conjunction with rail and road, the Corricks were able to perform on the southern Yorke Peninsula in between performances at Gawler, just north of Adelaide, and Victor Harbor, just south of Adelaide, without missing a day.

One of the few other touring companies to make use of coastal shipping in the absence of a rail network was Bruce's New Moving Pictures, which toured the seven small towns on the southern Yorke Peninsula in September 1906, commencing in Edithburgh (population of 500) and finishing in Ardrossan (240). Bruce and his entourage also sailed to Edithburgh, travelled the southern Yorke Peninsula by road and sailed from Ardrossan to Port Adelaide at the conclusion of the tour. In later years, films themselves were transported by ship to the remote Eyre Peninsula (west of the Yorke Peninsula). In 1908, W.H. Bruce had begun screening films as a part of his "Great Carnival Competitions" in a large canvas marquee at the corner of Victoria Square and Gouger Street in Adelaide. He then took this show on a tour of country towns, which seemed ambitious given that in his advertisements he claimed that the large marquee could accommodate an audience of 2,000. Such a marquee would hold more than the population of most towns outside of Adelaide. The Corricks' show was more expensive than Bruce's (3s, 2s and 1s compared to 2s and 1s) but their show did have an established reputation whereas Bruce was just starting out in the entertainment business. His reputation came from a successful retail career - he had tailor shops in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and several South Australian country towns. Bruce's pricing structure reflects how much more expensive entertainment was in rural areas. The show he took to the southern Yorke Peninsula charged the audience twice the price he charged Adelaide and suburban audiences.

The Corricks and W.H. Bruce are two examples of the travelling picture shows that were traversing rural South Australia in the period from 1906 to 1908. These touring shows would pass through towns, revisiting some, on an irregular basis. They differed from Reeve's 1897 tours in that moving pictures were screened as a part of the programme of a much broader

entertainment. Travelling cinema exhibition had been based on theatrical models and had become absorbed into theatre as its novelty phase ended. In 1909, a new exhibition model would emerge in country towns – the travelling picture show screening films in townships on a weekly basis.

Regular Picture Shows

> Pictures have come to stay until such time as invention provides as cheap and a better entertainment. To my mind the pictures have taken the place of the drama. They are the amusement bread of life of the populace.
>
> Edwin Geach, 1911.[101]

In late 1905, at the same time that cinema was resurfacing in rural South Australia, itinerant exhibitors in America were beginning to face competition from a new exhibition model – the regular picture show where an exhibitor toured a circuit, screening regular dates in fixed locations each week. Kathryn Fuller describes this as "a movement away from true itinerancy that foreshadowed the establishment of stationary movie shows."[102] The first exhibitor to take up this exhibition model in rural South Australia was Thomas (T.J.) West in 1909. West had opened Adelaide's first permanent picture house a year earlier in November 1908. The West's Olympia was located in a former skating rink in Hindley Street and had a seating capacity of 2,248. Initially, West leased the building but with the success of the enterprise, purchased it outright within six months of opening. Adelaide's first permanent picture house was an indication that cinema was beginning to be seen as a permanent entertainment institution in its own right

West had successfully ran picture houses in England before expanding his business, West's Pictures, first to New Zealand and then Australia in 1906. Within three months of opening the Olympia in Adelaide, one local newspaper noted, "West's Pictures are becoming an institution."[103] By 1910, West's controlled fifteen permanent picture houses in Australia and employed over 600 permanent staff. They were purchasing £600 worth of film each week[104], which allowed them to change programmes regularly, attracting an estimated 20,000 patrons each night.[105] At each picture house's nightly screenings, 8,000 feet of film of varying topics was used. West was of the opinion that "similarity of film subjects begets monotony in a programme" and programmed the screenings to be as varied as vaudeville. These permanent

[101] Bohemian, 'Picture Shows. Their Great Popularity', *The Register*, 14 November 1911, p.10.
[102] Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show*, p.17.
[103] Anon., 'At the Play', *The Critic*, 3 February 1909, p.20.
[104] Anon., 'West's Pictures. A Gigantic Enterprise', *Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 1 October 1910, p.3.
[105] Graham Shirley & Brian Adams, *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years*, p.22.

picture theatres provided Wests with a distribution chain for their purchased films. Additional screening venues would provide even better economies of scale and such venues were to be found outside urban Adelaide.

West's expansion into rural exhibition in South Australia was swift. In a period of two weeks in 1909 they opened six regular picture shows, each screening one night a week in leased halls in Kadina (Wednesdays); Wallaroo (Thursdays); Moonta (Fridays); Balaklava (Saturdays); Gawler (Mondays) and Port Pirie (Tuesdays). The circuit of these towns were linked by rail by which the projection equipment and films were transported. This was not only a business strategy to dominate rural exhibition, but also a means of working the prints which West's had purchased. In the following year, West's began touring shows to other towns, particularly for films that had had costly exhibition rights. The first of these was a series of films that included King Edward VII's funeral. Over a six-week period in 1910, West's screened these films in 36 rural towns or cities. The tour commenced in Gawler on 5 July, two weeks after another production of King Edward's funeral had been screened at the same venue by one of their competitors, Bruce's Pictures. Film was suddenly big business, especially when there was a big event from overseas captured on celluloid. West's Pictures were not the only exhibitor to have secured the rights to a series of pictures of the funeral.[106] In the morning of 18 June 1910, there were four exhibitors eagerly awaiting the arrival of the mail steamer *RMS Orontes* at Adelaide's Outer Harbour. They had all already advertised that they would be screening *The King's Funeral* that day, "provided that the mailboat arrives at her appointed hour."[107] The funeral had taken place on 20 May 1910, two weeks after the King had died. But the Orontes had sailed from Tilbury Docks in London on 13 May 1910. The way in which the films were dispatched shows the scale and acumen of the exhibitors. The films shot on the day of the funeral were dispatched overland to Naples where they were then transferred to the *Orontes* and reached Adelaide 29 days after the funeral.[108]

When *The King's Funeral* was screening at West's Olympia in Adelaide, the picture house's advertisements began carrying the sideline "under the patronage of His Excellency the Governor of South Australia." This gave an air of respectability to what had been regarded as an entertainment for the lower classes. Previously it had taken the series of local actualities, *Real*

[106] IMDB has six different 1910 productions of films of King Edward VII's funeral.
[107] Advertisements in *The Advertiser*, 18 June 1910, p.2.
[108] Anon., 'How it was done', *The Advertiser*, 23 June 1910, p.8. The article explains how *The Advertiser* managed to get the photographs of the funeral so quick. The exhibitors would have had to use the same strategy.

Australia, to lure the Adelaide establishment across the vestibule of a picture house when West's held a semi-official screening "in the presence of Ministers of the Crown, the Mayor and Council of Adelaide, and prominent citizens."[109] A month earlier, the Prime Minister of Australia, Alfred Deakin, and other Federal government ministers had attended a special screening at West's Palace in Melbourne. *Real Australia* was a series of films produced by Pathé Frères for the Australian government, showcasing Australian industry and scenery to the rest of the world. West's had secured the sole Australian rights for the films and, according to one newspaper report, Deakin "expressed his appreciation and approval for these."[110] Divorced from its vaudeville partners, cinema was gaining acceptance by "prominent citizens" as it grew in scale.

The increased investment in cinema exhibition was initially at the expense of rural operations as a distinctive split began to emerge between the ownership of urban and rural exhibition. It has often been noted that the formation of the Union Theatres/Australasian Films "combine" at this time led to the abandonment of local production, but it also entailed a centralization of investment in urban venues at the expense of rural exhibition. Towards the end of 1911, West's began to wind back on its permanent picture shows in rural South Australia, finding it "more convenient […] to confine their efforts to places in and around the city."[111] This is not to say that rural exhibition was not increasing in popularity. On the contrary, the competition emerging in that year made it less economically attractive to screen in some of the larger country towns. Such was the growth of rural exhibition that by 1912 the *Australian Kinematographe Journal* was reporting weekly on rural screenings in South Australia. In the mining city of Broken Hill, there were times when the city's four places of amusement, the Theatre Royal, the Crystal Palace, the Skating Rink and the Hippodrome, were all devoted to screening pictures.[112] Along with the permanency of rural screenings came the necessity to change programmes weekly. This created a situation where most rural exhibitors developed operating links to Adelaide cinemas, who were vertically integrating into distribution. As a distribution sector developed, rural venues became a conduit for a stockpile of films that had nowhere to go after a season in Adelaide.

One of the distinctive aspects of rural exhibition was that exhibitors who were not local were often looked upon with scepticism and had to work hard at gaining the acceptance of the local population. To quote a Wallaroo councillor "picture people are like Chinese, and took a lot of

[109] Anon., 'Pictures of Australian Industries', *The Advertiser*, 15 January 1910, p.13.
[110] Anon., 'Commonwealth Moving Pictures', *The Age*, 17 December 1909, p.10.
[111] *The People's Weekly*, 5 August 1911, p.2.
[112] Anon., 'Broken Hill News', *Australian Kinomatograph Journal*, 31 October 1912, p.8.

money out of the town."[113] The racism underlying the comment highlights a concern at the time about itinerant exhibitors drifting into towns and taking money out of the local economy. One exhibitor to adopt West's model of permanent picture shows in major rural towns was the Olympic Star Picture Company. In March 1911, the company began screening "pictures direct from their Adelaide house" in Wallaroo, Kadina and Moonta.[114] The majority of films on its weekly programmes had been screened one or two weeks earlier by the People's Picture Company at Semaphore, an Adelaide suburb. It is possible that the two companies were linked. As their title suggests, the People's Picture Company had its roots in working class consciousness and its programmes featured films starring E.J. Cole's Bohemian Dramatic Company, an Australian production company making films for Pathé Frères.[115] While not much is written on these films, which included *The Miner's Daughter* (1911) and *The Squatter and the Clown* (1911) – both listed in Pike and Cooper's *Australian Film 1900-1977* - descriptions of their stage plays suggests left wing sympathies. Their production, *The Coal Strike*, was described as a "political and socialistic drama depicting the strife between labour and capital."[116] The significance of the political leanings of the Olympic Star Picture Company is that, not being a local exhibitor, they worked hard to establish an affinity with the working class communities of the mining or industrial towns where they screened, on one occasion showing solidarity with striking workers in Gawler by putting on a benefit screening.[117]

In May 1911, George Holland, a former projectionist at the Casino Open-Air Theatre in Adelaide, took over as the proprietor of Olympic. Holland's Olympic Pictures grew into a circuit covering the Yorke Peninsula and the mid-North. Not being a local, Holland was keen to establish a good reputation in the Copper Triangle[118]. He would secure films before other picture showmen and when he managed to book the film *Quo Vadis?* (E. Guazzoni, 1913) for one night only, he impressed locals by screening it at Moonta, Wallaroo and Kadina that night by what became known in the exhibition industry as bicycling prints (even though it was done by car). The *Australian Kinematograph Journal* reported, "… it says volumes for the completeness of his arrangements, that not a single hitch occurred, and that none of his three audiences were kept

[113] Anon., 'Municipal Picture Shows', *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 22 January 1916, p.2.
[114] Advertisement, *The People's Weekly*, 11 March 1911, p.3.
[115] Anon., 'Adelaide's Latest Attraction', *The Mail*, 16 May 1914, p.10.
[116] Anon., 'Bohemian Dramatic Company', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 1906, p.3.
[117] Anon., 'Implement Workers' Strike Benefit', *The Bunyip*, 21 April 1911, p.2.
[118] The Copper Triangle was the name given to the area that covered the three copper mining towns, Kadina, Moonta and Wallaroo, which were in close proximity on the northern Yorke Peninsula.

waiting for the arrival of the next spool."[119] The Copper Triangle audiences were the first to see the film outside Adelaide. It was another four months before it would be screened at Port Pirie and in the Mid North.[120] As well as screening the latest films, Holland was able to gain respect through participating in the local community. He sponsored the local football league's annual trophy, and filmed regional events catering to his local audience's interest such as football matches and the official opening of Port Hughes jetty.

After West's Pictures retrenched their operations to places in and around Adelaide, Holland had the monopoly on screening in the Copper Triangle until 1913, when Harry Porter, who had operated the National Pictures circuit in Maitland and the southern Yorke Peninsula since 1911, moved north. Porter had heralded the arrival of his National Pictures circuit on the Yorke Peninsula in August 1911, by swinging the projector light around like a spotlight from the top of the Yorketown Town Hall.[121] The local newspaper, *The Pioneer*, was impressed with the quality of his screening and commented, "they were large, exceedingly brilliant and without a semblance of flicker". The newspaper also added, "the views shown were of an educational character, and nothing vulgar or improper was observed."[122]

Photograph has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Photograph 1.1: Source: *Kino Cinema Quarterly*, Summer 2001, No. 78.

In a short period, National Pictures were being screened in Edithburgh, Port Victoria, Curramulka, Warooka and Maitland. When Porter expanded to the north of the peninsula in 1913, his circuit then included Kadina, Moonta, Moonta Mines and Wallaroo. Whether the Copper Triangle could sustain two regular screenings per week is difficult to ascertain. In 1914 George Holland

[119] Anon., 'Adelaide Notes', *Australian Kinematograph Journal*, 31 July 1913, p.14.
[120] Anon., 'Adelaide Notes', *Australian Kinematograph Journal*, 18 December 1913, p.14.
[121] Warooka Historical Committee, *West of the Peesey*, p. 108. This practice later caused concern in rural Victoria in 1914 when locals reported to the Defence Department the possibility of Germans in the area. One local even deciphered the Morse code message being sent by the spotlight. Military intelligence officers tracked down the source of the light, asked the exhibitor to cease this form of advertising and 'went off to find the man who had read the code signals, but he kept out of the way'. Anon., 'Lights in the Night: A Dandenong Mystery Solved', *The Register*, 16 December 1914, p.6.
[122] Anon., 'National Pictures', *The Pioneer*, 26 August 1911, p.2.

disposed of his Peninsula Circuit, although within two years, he had returned to Wallaroo and converted the local skating rink into the Olympic Theatre.

Anne Morey suggests that "[t]he ability to draw an adequate audience might depend upon the ability to represent oneself as a member of the community, with the community's interest at stake."[123] Although in competition with each other, both Holland and Porter worked to establish and maintain the respect of the people of the Yorke Peninsula. This was a necessity in small country towns where any indiscretion or disrespect to the local community would certainly have had consequences. Prince's Pictures, an out-of-town exhibitor, incurred the wrath of the Yorketown community shortly after the Adelaide-based company began screening on Yorke Peninsula in 1912. Mainly confined to the south, their circuit included Ardrossan, Minlaton, Curramulka, Port Victoria, Edithburgh, Stansbury and Yorketown. Locals soon became dissatisfied with the company, which would advertise dates but then fail to screen. The final straw came in September 1912 when the company gave a benefit screening with profits going to the Yorketown's Young Men's Club. When calculating the profit, the company took out £15 for expenses, £10 more than they said they would. The president of the club requested an explanation from the company's Adelaide office and in response the managing director, W. Upton, travelled to Yorketown. Rumour was rife around town that he was there to make an apology in front of the town hall before the commencement of the following week's show. The Yorketown Brass Band played to the 200 people assembled in front of the hall waiting to hear Upton's apology. He did not apologise and the crowd dispersed. Later in the evening eggs were thrown at him on his way back to his hotel.[124] *The Pioneer* newspaper commented that the general opinion was that if Upton had spoken to the crowd and paid up the £10 to the Young Men's Club, the hall would have been filled to overflowing.[125] The following month the Prince's Pictures Company voluntarily wound up.[126] Harry Porter purchased their truck for use on his circuit, replacing his horse and cart. This particular dispute highlights the importance of itinerant exhibitors working with local communities, with local picture-goers effectively deciding on how a visiting picture show company should behave.

Cinema Regulations

[123] Anne Morey, 'Exhibition in Wilmington, North Carolina', *Hollywood in the Neighbourhood*, pp. 69-70.
[124] W.M. Upton, 'Egg-Throwing at Yorketown', *The Advertiser*, 18 September 1912, p.16.
[125] Anon., 'Prince's Picture Company', *The Pioneer*, 21 September 1912, p.3.
[126] Anon., 'News in Brief', *The Pioneer*, 5 October 1912, p.2.

The exhibitors who screened in rural areas of South Australia in the early years did so largely free from government regulation. There was legislation in place concerning places of public entertainment, but country institutes and public buildings under the control of municipal or district councils were exempt.[127] This meant that none of the venues in which Reeve, the Corricks or other exhibitors screened had been deemed a "place of public entertainment" and that rural cinema exhibition could develop and grow free from government intervention. This inevitably changed as cinemas were built or leased on an on-going basis. From 1897 to 1913, many debates took place on the regulation of cinema exhibition (particularly on the safety of buildings, risk of fire, Sunday screenings and censorship) and legislation was modified on a regular basis until 1913 when pre-cinema legislation was replaced with a new Act and Regulations. Compliance with the new regulations added costs for exhibitors and venue owners. For the rural exhibitor, however, there was some respite as the regulations could only be extended beyond Adelaide and the suburbs by proclamation. In some rural areas, the proclamation of the Act did not take place until well into the 1930s. A discussion of how these regulations evolved, and how they were applied, provides a background to the challenges that rural exhibitors faced, particularly in the remote parts of the State, in the early 1930s.

> The subject of preventing the sudden destruction of theatres by fire is one which must necessarily force itself on the attention of all who inhabit crowded cities, and especially of those intrusted (sic) with the protection of helpless masses of persons on the occasion of such catastrophes.
>
> Eyre M. Shaw, London Fire Brigade, 1876[128]

The development of a regulatory framework that would govern cinema exhibition in South Australia was at first driven by the fear of a major theatre fire catastrophe. The first official record pertaining to cinematograph exhibition in South Australia is a report from August 1897 by Adelaide Fire Brigade Superintendent, George Booker.[129] The first major film fire, the Charity Bazaar Fire in Paris, had occurred three months earlier and Booker was concerned that with the rapid increase of screenings, a similar incident might happen in South Australia. Booker reported, "after experiments with the working of the Cinematographe, experts are of the opinion that the late fire in Paris was caused by the ignition of the celluloid films upon which the pictures are printed."[130] He warned that camphorated cellulose nitrate burnt with great ferocity and

[127] *Places of Public Entertainment Act*, 1882, Section 2
[128] Eyre M. Shaw, *Fires in Theatres*, p.3.
[129] Adelaide City Council Archives, Town Clerk's Department (C15) Docket (S3) 2469 of 1897. Copy of Superintendent's report re Cinematographe dated 7 August 1897.
[130] *Ibid*.

estimated that at the end of a screening, the amount of film lying below the projector (early projectors did not have take-up spools) would produce a blaze of fifty to sixty feet in height. In his time Booker was considered to be something of a zealot,[131] and according to a history of the South Australian fire service his "zeal had extended into aspects of fire prevention and protection other than the brigades."[132] While the Charity Bazaar Fire alone would be sufficient to prompt Booker to raise the issue of dangers of screening moving pictures, the boast in a newspaper advertisement two weeks after the fire, that the Edison Vitascope would be exhibited in full view of the audience added further concerns. The object of his 1897 report was to obtain a clause dealing with the cinematographe in a proposed amendment to the Places of Public Entertainment Act.[133] The Places of Public Entertainment Act of 1882, which was current in 1897, was inadequate to deal with new technologies such as the cinematograph. Used mainly as a tool to address "violation of public decency or propriety", the Act's only concern with fire was with "proper means of egress for the public in the case of fire." While the advent of cinema did bring a new danger to public entertainment, Booker was being opportunistic in using cinema exhibition to progress a campaign he had been waging since 1894.[134] "From then onwards he was hot on the trail of commercial buildings or places of entertainment which were a threat to their occupants."[135]

Authorities overseas had begun to introduce regulations in the aftermath of the Charity Bazaar Fire. In 1898, a law was passed in Paris dealing specifically with precautions for motion picture screenings. In the same year, the London County Council passed regulations in response to a fire in Stafford that was relatively well controlled until someone yelled "Fire!" and a stampede of 200 people ensued, upending the projector and igniting the nitrate film.[136] In Adelaide, civic leaders were at the vanguard of theatre regulation reform. From 1897 to 1904, the Adelaide City Council made repeated demands to the Colonial, and later, State Government to change the Act. The reluctance to specifically regulate cinematographe screenings may have been due to a significant reduction in screenings after 1897. It is likely that authorities were under the impression that the novelty of moving pictures had passed. This was to change as a result of the rapid increase in

[131] The Editor, 'The Fire Brigades', *The Register*, 2 February 1903, p.4.
[132] Michael Page and Malcolm Bryant, *Muscle & Pluck Forever!*, p.226.
[133] Adelaide City Council Archives, Town Clerk's Department (C15) Docket (S3) 2469 of 1897, Copy of Superintendent's report re Cinematographe dated 7 August 1897.
[134] Michael Page and Malcolm Bryant, *Muscle & Pluck Forever!*, p.226.
[135] *Ibid.,* pp.226-7.
[136] H. Mark Gosser, 'The Bazar de la Charité fire : the reality, the aftermath, the telling', *Film History: An International Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 1, (1998), p.80.

picture shows in South Australia between 1906 and 1908, and the regulation of public entertainment then became clearly focussed on cinematographe exhibition.

In August 1908, the government passed regulations specifically related to cinematograph entertainments and mainly affecting Adelaide cinemas. If the Act had been extended to rural areas, significant limitations would have been placed on the committees managing country halls and the exhibitors themselves, since the cost of constructing a fireproof bio-box and meeting other requirements would have been burdensome to cash-strapped hall committees. The regulation specifying that "film which is passing through the lantern shall be rewound automatically upon another bobbin as fast as it emerges from the lantern front"[137] would have required exhibitors who used a box below the projector to gather the film to either modify their projector or purchase one with take-up spools. Fortunately for country hall committees and rural exhibitors, the definition of a place of public entertainment under the Act still excluded suburban or country institutes and public buildings under the control of municipal and district councils. A further amendment to the Act in 1909 was claimed by a local newspaper to contain nothing of a contentious nature[138]. One significant change overlooked by the newspaper was that limitations on Sunday entertainments were for the first time enshrined in legislation, and issue discussed further in this chapter when examining the churches' response to cinema.

It was not until 1913 that a concise Places of Public Entertainment Act and Regulations came into force. The resulting legislation and regulations, with amendments, were to remain in force until their repeal eighty years later. The new legislation cemented cinema as an institution, and also established the new profession of projectionist. From 1913, operators, as they were referred to in the legislation, would have to be over 21 years of age and licenced. No longer was it the case that a cinematographe salesperson could give someone a crash course on how to operate a projector. The legislation required potential projectionists to undergo a rigorous examination and satisfy a board of examiners on their knowledge of six subjects, including practical projection and safety precautions (especially fire prevention and extinguishing fires). Exhibitors were not opposed to this requirement, welcoming its setting standards for projectionists. Urban cinema was becoming more geographically intensive and reforming itself along industrial lines. Questions remained, however, about the appropriateness of this model of organisation and regulation in far-flung rural areas.

[137] *The South Australian Government Gazette*, 27 August 1908, p.420
[138] Anon., 'Places of Public Entertainment', *The Advertiser*, 17 November 1909, p.6.

Where the regulations had been proclaimed, halls had to be licensed whether they screened films or not. Before a license was issued the hall was subject to a meticulous inspection. The regulations specified seating space for each individual, lighting, the number of exits and separate sanitary accommodation for both sexes. If picture shows were to be held in the hall, there had to be a bio-box. The annual licence fee was determined by the capacity of the hall: £3 for a hall with a seating capacity of more than fifty but less than 350, which was the size of most rural halls. Projectionists also needed to be licenced. The fee to undergo the onerous test for a licence was £1 and one shilling with an annual renewal fee of five shillings. For the larger picture shows in regional centres with a seating capacity of 700 or more, there was the added burden of paying the local fire brigade eight shillings per screening to have a trained fireman in attendance.

Church and Cinema Exhibition

As cinema emerged as an institution, it had to arrive at workable relationships with other dominant institutions, such as government and religion. This was felt with additional urgency in rural towns, given that there were fewer competing social institutions and thus, the cinema—which was doubly suspicious for being new, foreign at the level of content, and at the level of exhibition, possibly run by outsiders in insular communities—was more likely to come into conflict with religious groups and other arbiters of public morality. An aspect of cinema exhibition arising during Reeve's 1897 tours, which was to become an ongoing issue, concerned screenings on Sundays. The 1882 Act did not prohibit Sunday entertainments and it is likely that Reeve did not screen on a Sunday because of convention or for industrial reasons. In discussing Sunday closing in South Australia, the historian Douglas Pike observes:

> Sunday was virtuously preserved for decorous clothes and solemnity. […] Concessions came very slowly; as Sabbatarian influence waned it was replaced by Labour demands for a day of rest and for over a century Adelaide was committed to formal observance of dull, purposeless Sundays.[139]

Wybert Reeve was a Unitarian, which put him at odds with the conservative religions in Adelaide. This is evident in a public lecture he delivered in both Melbourne and Adelaide in 1888 that incurred the wrath of the church. He claimed the church should not oppose the theatre as both institutions served a similar purpose.

> (D)id not the church introduce an element of show? People now must pray comfortably, and churches must be well fitted, and in some cases luxuriously so. We must have trained choirs

[139] Douglas Pike, *Paradise of Dissent*, p.515.

> and grand organs to draw people. Preachers effected the same end by advertising sermons with high sounding names.[140]

Reeve's explanation as to why actors do not attend church, that is, "[t]hey thought for themselves, and did not care to be preached to by intelligence that were frequently inferior to their own"[141], received the retaliatory explanation as to why religious ministers do not attend the theatre:

> "There is a strong and ever-deepening conviction that the modern play is not of an elevated character, and that the prosperity of the management is so much dependent upon hitting the popular fancy that almost all efforts at improvement have signally failed."[142]

Despite such an altercation, both institutions could work in accord under the right circumstances. In his case study on race, religion, and film exhibition in Norfolk, Virginia, Terry Lindvall observes that the city's churches "sanctified and blessed the cinematic apparatus by incorporating it into their evangelism, instruction and worship."[143] In 1897, at least one South Australian church, the Renmark Wesleyan Church, was sufficiently unconcerned about cinema to allow the Federal Cinematographic Company the use of their hall.[144] At the forefront of Australia's pioneer film exhibitors, and no better example of a religious organisation embracing film as a tool of religious instruction, was the Salvation Army.[145] By 1910, it was not unusual to read in Adelaide papers of screenings held by churches or religious organisations. In 1909, the exhibitor Arthur O. Thomas screened at a Semaphore fete held to raise money for the Semaphore Baptist Church building fund. Later in the year, the Reverend J.H. Sexton provided a running commentary to a screening at the annual meeting of a suburban branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society.[146] At the Hindmarsh Square Congregational Church, the Reverend G.J. Williams of the London Missionary Society screened films of the society's missionary work.[147] The following year, the Reverend A.N. Marshall delivered an illustrated address screening moving pictures of scenes in various lands as

[140] Anon., 'The Pulpit and the Stage', *South Australian Advertiser*, 11 June 1888, p.7.
[141] *Ibid*., p.7.
[142] Letters to the Editor, 'The Pulpit and the Stage', *South Australian Advertiser*, 14 June 1888, p.7.
[143] Terry Lindvall, 'Cinema Virtue, Cinema Vice', in *Hollywood in the Neighborhood,* p.99.
[144] Anon., 'Local News', *Renmark Pioneer*, 3 December 1897, p.3. The audience at these screenings may have been the first in rural South Australia to experience watching moving pictures from a sloped floor. The newspaper article reports, "The sloping floor should enable those on the back seats to see just as well as those in front."
[145] For a history of the Salvation Army's role in film production and film exhibition see Chris Long, 'Australia's First Films: Facts and Fables – Part Seven: Screening the Salvation Army', *Cinema Papers*, No. 97/98 (April, 1994), pp. 36-41.
[146] Anon., 'Fetes and Fairs: May Festival at Semaphore', *The Register*, 8 May 1909, p.6. Anon., 'The Bible Society', *The Advertiser*, 16 October 1909, p.12.
[147] Anon., 'Church Intelligence', *The Advertiser*, 1 May 1909, p.7.

a part of an event at the Jubilee Exhibition Building to celebrate the British and Foreign Bible Society's 106th year.[148]

There were nevertheless campaigns over Sunday screenings and censorship. Wybert Reeve laid down the challenge to Sabbatarianism when he wrote:

> Talking of amusements. Sunday is now the great day when people lay themselves out for recreation. The command to "rest on the seventh day" is a thing of ages ago, unknown to the young generation of the present. If the form of going to church is maintained the congregation must be amused. The service must not last beyond an hour […].[149]

The clergy's campaigns against Sunday entertainments in Australia predated cinema and gained momentum after the 1890 landmark case of Walker v. Solomon in colonial New South Wales. The defendant, John Solomon, was a theatre owner and the plaintiff, John Walker, was the honorary secretary and treasurer of the Council of Churches, an organisation intent on safeguarding the "day of rest".[150] Solomon had received permission from the Colonial Secretary to open his Criterion Theatre on a Sunday. The Chief Justice hearing the case ruled Solomon had infringed an old Imperial Act of George the Third, and that the Colonial Secretary had no power to issue a licence.[151] The Act, which was entitled "An Act for preventing certain abuses and profanations of the Lord's Day, called Sunday", passed in 1781, prohibited the giving of lectures and concerts on Sundays for the purpose of gain. Following the Chief Justice's ruling, the New South Wales government decided to bring in legislation which would make the 1781 Act obsolete, but failed because of an effective campaign ran by the Council of Churches.

The Council of Churches' campaign reflected a growing concern that the Church's role in the cultural sphere in Australia had been diminishing over the previous twenty years. Connell and Irving attribute the faltering of the Church's moral leadership to two factors: the passing of convictism, which "reduced the need for moral coercion as an object of state policy", and the demise of the Church's near-monopoly of education that resulted from the introduction of state education systems.[152] The first was not an issue in South Australia, but the introduction of compulsory education in 1875, which saw elementary education mainly delivered by government

[148] Anon., 'Church Intelligence: The Bible Society', *The Advertiser*, 4 March 1910, p.5.
[149] Wybert Reeve, 'Amusements in England: Old Times and New', *The Register*, 25 December 1903, p.8.
[150] Advertisment, 'The Day of Rest', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 February 1890, p.3.
[151] Anon., 'Sunday Theatricals. A Resurrected Statute. George III Still Rules in Sydney', *The Advertiser*, 23 May 1890, p.5.
[152] R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, p.127.

primary schools, limited the Church's proselytization of the young to Sunday schools and a few private schools.

The Church's role in the cultural sphere was further diminished by the mobilization of the working class in the late 1880s through to the 1910s. As this class-consciousness grew, trade unions and other workers' associations began to influence the cultural landscape in rural areas as well as urban. In the South Australian mining towns of the Copper Triangle, Kapunda, and Burra and in rural ports such as Port Pirie, there were union brass bands, co-operative stores, workmen's clubs and union halls. This was not unique to South Australia but a part of an international trend in socialist intervention. Biltereyst, *et.al.*, cite the same social transformation occurring in major cities in Belgium.[153] By 1890, the working class had established its own intellectual life and the churches at the time frequently complained of failing to reach the working class.[154] This disconnect continued to cause concern within Protestant churches, and as late as 1912 a Methodist newspaper commented that the Church was losing its control over the working class:

> Men who formerly were in our churches are now at the Botanic Park on Sabbath afternoons or at some other political gathering … The leaders of the Labour and Socialistic movements are largely outside our Churches.[155]

Southern Cross, a Catholic newspaper, suggested working-class indifference towards religion in South Australia was unique to Protestantism evidenced by the "industrial classes" being the great majority of the congregation at services at St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral and St. Patrick's, both in the Adelaide CBD. The newspaper was of the opinion that "[t]o a Catholic mind the failure of the Protestant Churches to secure the adherence of the masses is easily explained." It put forward the idea that the absence of the Protestant ministers from "the dwellings of the poor" was the cause of a disinterest in religion, whereas Catholic priests were "ever in sympathy with the working classes".[156] Regardless of this explanation, Catholicism, with its Irish base, was seen as synonymous with the working class, and the mobilisation of the working class was seen as a threat to what came to be called the Protestant Ascendancy that prevailed in South Australia. Gerard Henderson argues anti-Catholic sectarianism among the Protestant Ascendancy had prevailed in Australia from the first steps to self-government in the mid-1900s.[157] This was certainly the case

[153] Daniel Bilereyst, Philippe Meers and Lies Van de Vijver, 'Social Class, Experiences of Distinction and Cinema in Postwar Ghent', in R. Maltby, et.al., *Op. Cit.*, p.102.
[154] R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, p.186.
[155] Cited in Jim Moss, *Sound of Trumpets*, p.59.
[156] Anon., 'The Church and the Working Classes', *Southern Cross*, 12 February 1897, p.7.
[157] Gerard Henderson, 'What Irish Catholics did for Australian Democracy', *Meanjin Quarterly*, Winter 2016. https://meanjin.com.au/essays/what-irish-catholics-did-for-australian-democracy/ Accessed 28 March 2017.

in South Australia, whose non-convict origins had produced a strongly Protestant society. Catholics represented only fifteen percent of the State's population, compared to 25 per cent in New South Wales and Victoria. There were almost twice as many Methodists as there were followers of the Catholic faith in South Australia.[158] The regulation of cinema was to become a field in which these sectarian divisions would later figure.

It was in this cultural landscape that the first screenings of film took place in South Australia and cinema came to be seen as a working class entertainment. This patronage by one class has been attributed to the novelty of early film and the low prices of admission.[159] I would argue that it was not only the low price of screenings that attracted working class audiences but also the content of the programmes screened before the production of feature films. Films were of a variety of genres and produced in a range of countries providing education as well as entertainment.[160] This educational aspect of film was broadening working-class knowledge and it was generally secular. At this stage the Churches lacked influence over film content but they could mount a challenge to when films could be screened and that was not going to be on Sundays.

In 1904 the Council of Churches turned its attention to public buildings in Adelaide, particularly the Exhibition Building on North Terrace and the Adelaide Town Hall, which were being used on Sundays. They lobbied the government to prevent such buildings being let on Sundays "for other than distinctly religious purposes" and expressed its disapproval of admission charges on "the Lord's Day". The clergy also directed sympathy to those who had to work at Sunday entertainments:

> Apart from the more directly religious question, this council feels that if public amusements are provided on that day it will involve unnecessary Sunday work, which would affect a large section of the community, and the council regards these encroachments as a menace to the best interests of all, especially of the working class.[161]

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the Council's concern about the plight of the working class, but this was not their only concern. Their campaign coincided with the release of a

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[158] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1911, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/33ED60DCA510B0BACA25783A000D4199?OpenDocument

[159] Diane Collins, 'The 1920s Picture Palace', *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends*, p.61.

[160] For example, of the fourteen films screened on a single programme at West's Pictures' rural venues in January 1910, six were comedies, four dramas, two scenics, and one military and historical. Three of the films were produced in the United Kingdom, three in France, two in Italy, one each in the United States, Germany and Denmark, and three not specified.

[161] C. Eaton Taplin, 'Sunday Concerts: To the Editor', *The Register*, 7 November 1904, p.6.

manifesto by the Lord's Day Observance Society in London on the issue of Sunday entertainments. The manifesto was in response to the Sunday League, which was essentially a secularist organisation seeking to substitute a "rational Sunday for a theological Sunday," according to the manifesto. The London newspaper, *The Daily News*, commented on the manifesto: "There is some force in the declaration that such entertainments prejudicially affect the attendance at Sunday schools, Bible classes and religious services."[162] If this were a correct assumption, then a full house of 4,000 at the Exhibition Building on a Sunday, and 1,300 at the Adelaide Town Hall would most likely have an effect on church attendances in and around Adelaide.

The controversy of Sunday entertainments failed to hold media attention and very little was reported on it for just under two years. In July 1906, the Council of Churches gained a new ally in its campaign against Sunday entertainments – the Adelaide City Council. The Mayor of Adelaide was concerned about "certain unseemly entertainments" being held in Adelaide on Sunday nights. He sought an amendment to the Act that would not allow a Sunday entertainment without his sanction. In the wake of an incident at a Sunday night "Grand Rational Concert" held at the Tivoli Theatre in King William Street in July 1906, the City Council once again pushed for an amendment to the Places of Public Entertainment Act. According to a police report, "from the time the doors were opened the larrikin class swarmed the passageway and entrance to the theatre in a most turbulent manner."[163] One of the "larrikins" threw a stink bomb at the foot of the staircase leading to the gallery, filling the whole of the building with a foul odour. Later, some youths moved over from the gallery into the "high class of seats" and an altercation broke out between them and the usher. The youths won out and the usher retreated "amidst howls, hisses and cheers." Things quietened down once the performance commenced. The police report concluded:

> In my opinion, it only wants a little more of this sort of thing, and the larrikin element will become predominant, and probably cause serious consequences, and from a moral and religious point of view I consider this sort of thing most degrading and tending to draw the youth of the city from all religious paths.[164]

The division of the auditorium into a gallery comprising the majority of the seats and a few "high class of seats" reserved for those who enjoyed comfort and could afford to pay more to watch a film was a model that became a feature of cinema for many years. Cinema as an institution was

[162] Anon., 'Religious Notes', *The Register*, 5 March 1904, p.3.
[163] Anon., 'Sunday Entertainments. The City Council and the Government', *The Advertiser*, 9 October 1906, p.8.
[164] Anon., 'Sunday Entertainments. The City Council and the Government', *The Advertiser*, 9 October 1906, p.8.

linked to the lower classes and hence a matter of concern to the Protestant ascendancy. In regulating the cinema, they were attempting to regulate the working classes. The Adelaide City Council called upon the South Australian Government to update legislation to control such bad behaviour in theatres on Sundays, perhaps implying that bad behaviour in theatres from Monday to Saturday was not such a concern. It suggested a clause in the Act that would only allow a place of entertainment only if sanctioned by the Mayor.

It was not, however, until 1910 that the Act was amended to place limitations on Sunday entertainments. The amendment restricted Sunday picture shows and also, contrary to the changes the Adelaide City Council was seeking, centralised the approval process to the State government. When the amendment was debated in parliament, members were divided over who should be responsible for the approval of Sunday permits. One parliamentarian felt that to give the power to municipality mayors and district chairmen "would put into the hands of pettifogging poohbahs the right of dictatorship."[165] Another felt that it would give a mayor or district chairman the power to prevent an opponent from expressing views in a hall on Sundays.[166] Some parliamentarians felt that it should be left to the individual to decide whether or not an entertainment was in accord with their religious convictions. The resulting amendment to the Act gave the responsibility of approving Sunday entertainments to the Chief Secretary and limited permission to only sacred meetings and concerts. This meant that the only way a picture show could get approval would be by screening biblical films. Adelaide exhibitors argued that there were not enough sacred pictures being produced to allow for a weekly change in programme and even if there were, people would not go to see them.[167] Another provision that concerned exhibitors was the condition that there would be no admission charge and money could only be taken in the form of a silver coin donation. The lowest denomination for a silver coin at this time was threepence, half the amount of the cheapest picture show seat in Adelaide. Exhibitors claimed "the 'riff-raff of the town' will swarm into the best seats in the building and look quite unconcerned when the collection plate is brought around."[168] These new provisions were a direct copy of those in effect in New South Wales and the experience in that State gave credibility to the exhibitors' concerns. Sunday picture shows had soon come to an end in Broken Hill because of a lack of biblical films and the failure of collections, as collection boxes were filled

[165] *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 3 August 1910, p.230.
[166] *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 9 August 1910, p.264.
[167] Anon., 'Sunday Entertainments – New Regulations Issued – Word 'Sacred' Eliminated', *The Advertiser*, 10 March 1911, p.7.
[168] *Ibid*.

with copper coins (pennies and halfpennies).[169] In March 1911, the Government issued revised regulations deleting reference to the word "sacred" and, therefore, according to *The Advertiser*, "it appears the Chief Secretary is not compelled […] to refuse permission for picture shows to be held on Sunday."[170]

The issue of Sunday entertainments became a well-debated subject until legislation in 1913 transferred the administration of the Places of Public Entertainment Act to the State Government. The 1913 Act specified that no entertainment could be held on a Sunday, Good Friday and Christmas Day without the prior consent of the Chief Secretary, who could prohibit an entertainment if it, in his opinion, "might offend against public morality".[171] The new Act covered only Adelaide but could be extended to other areas of the State by decree of the Governor. The Council of Churches and other organisations opposed to Sunday entertainments had defeated the Adelaide exhibitors. The next confrontation between the clergy and cinemagoers took place in rural South Australia in the town of Port Pirie.

In his case study of local cinema-going in Norfolk, Virginia, in the USA, Terry Lindvall argues that the town's religious community's objection to the cinema was rarely about the apparatus or content of moving pictures, but predominantly concerned the issue of sabbatical observance.[172] This was no more apparent in rural South Australia than in Port Pirie, then the State's largest town outside of Adelaide, where a moral battle took place from 1913 to 1918 between the Council of Churches on one side and the municipal council, the Liberty League and Trades and Labour Council on the other.[173] The events demonstrate the complexities that exhibitors sometimes had to face when working with communities and other institutions. The absence of overt involvement in the debate by exhibitors shows how tenuous their relationship was with the community.[174] The events also demonstrate how cinema was received by different levels of government, with support from local government undermined by State government. The justification presented by those advocating Sunday picture shows highlights how those living in

[169] Anon., 'Advertising', *The Border Watch*, 7 June 1911, p.1.
[170] Anon., 'Sunday Entertainments – New Regulations Issued – Word 'Sacred' Eliminated', *The Advertiser*, 10 March 1911, p.7.
[171] Anon., 'Licensing Places of Public Entertainment', *The Advertiser*, 16 December 1913, p.8.
[172] Terry Lindvall, 'Cinema Virture, Cinema Vice', p.96.
[173] To avoid confusion with the municipal council, I will refer to the Council of Churches as 'the clergy' if not referring to it in full.
[174] I found no evidence of exhibitors expressing an opinion during the five-year debate, but there is no doubt that they would have been members of the local Liberty League branch as city exhibitors were of the Adelaide branch.

rural South Australia did not have the broad range of alternative entertainments available to them as those living in urban Adelaide.

Like Norfolk, Port Pirie was a seaport town with a migratory population. In 1913, the population was about 10,500 but grew to 12,769 during the First World War as a result of the expansion of its main industry, lead smelting.[175] The town had a large working class and had many single men living in boarding houses. As Port Pirie did not have many recreational facilities, cinema-going was popular with the workers, particularly on Sunday nights. Any attempt to close the town's three picture houses on a Sunday was bound to meet resistance. A common theme in support of Sunday picture shows was it gave young people somewhere to go on Sunday nights instead of walking up and down the main street in large numbers. One resident predicted that closing the picture shows in Port Pirie would have similar results to what had happened in the State's capital:

> Every Sunday hundreds of boys and girls attend picture shows and the streets are almost deserted. Shut down picture shows and what a different tale there will be to tell. Take Adelaide for instance. When pictures were showing there on Sunday nights the streets were almost as quiet as a wowsers' prayer meeting. What a difference now.[176]

This view was supported by the local constabulary, who reported the conduct of the town was much better on a Sunday night when the picture houses were open.[177]

In September 1913, the local Council of Churches, a union of the Protestant churches in Port Pirie, had written to the municipal council requesting it to approach the State government to have the pending Places of Public Entertainment Act extended to Port Pirie. The town's councillors had no objections to the safety requirements of the Act, but were divided on the requirement that picture houses could not operate on Sundays. Despite active debate through letters to the *Port Pirie Recorder*, the council was slow in dealing with the issue and the clergy decided to delay its campaign until after the imminent municipal elections. Following these elections, the new council's position was the same as the previous council: while it accepted the provisions of the Act *per se*, it was not prepared to close picture shows on Sundays. To address this dilemma, the council advised the State government that it would apply to have the Act extended to Port Pirie providing it could make its own regulations.[178] They were advised that

[175] Anon., 'Population of Port Pirie', *Port Pirie Recorder*, 3 September 1918, p.2.
[176] Phil McCormack, 'Sunday Pictures', *Port Pirie Recorder*, 1 November 1913, p.2.
[177] Anon., 'Sunday Movies: Novel Argument at a Deputation', *The Register*, 17 July 1918, p.7.
[178] SRSA, GRG67/33/89/1914, Letter from the Town Clerk, Port Pirie, to the Chief Secretary, dated 25 March 1914.

there were no provisions in the Act to allow municipal or district councils to make their own regulations.[179] The council did not pursue its application, leaving the matter in abeyance.

The Port Pirie Council of Churches decided that they would apply directly to the State government to have the Act extended to Port Pirie.[180] Initially, the Chief Secretary, the government minister responsible for the Act, was of the opinion that it was not essential that the request come from the Corporation,[181] but after consideration decided differently, possibly because it would open the floodgates to other non-government organisations. The debate was to continue for another three years, with regular editorials and letters to the editor in the local newspaper. It was finally resolved when a deputation of the Port Pirie Council of Churches met with the Premier, Archibald Peake, a devoutly religious person who was also the new Chief Secretary. Peake agreed with them that different rules should not apply to Adelaide and Port Pirie, and that the decision to extend the Act should not be left to local government.[182] The decision of the clergy to bypass local government and directly lobby the State government drew a response from the Liberty League, an organization whose professed aims was to oppose extreme and oppressive legislation. The League's State Committee consisted of Adelaide businessmen and theatrical entrepreneurs whose businesses had been, or would be, affected by Sunday closing laws. In April 1918, the League formed a branch in Port Pirie and bought into the debate.

On 9 May 1918, the Government Gazette proclaimed that the provisions of the Places of Public Entertainment Act would apply to Port Pirie. As a result, it was illegal to open picture shows on Sundays. The council was outraged and sent a telegram to the Chief Secretary:

> Consider action in gazetting Port Pirie under the Places of Public Entertainment Act most arbitrary. Why was this done without reference to the people or the council? Council emphatically protests and asks for reconsideration of the matter.[183]

The Chief Secretary replied that it was not necessary for the Governor to consult local municipal bodies to proclaim an extension to the Act.[184] In protest, the Liberty League organized a town hall meeting, which was well attended. The meeting was told that the Council of Churches deputation to the Premier was not a representative one and that crowded picture houses on

[179] SRSA, GRG67/33/89/1914, Letter from Under Secretary to Town Clerk, Port Pirie, dated 2 April 1914.
[180] SRSA, GRG67/33/89/1914, Letter from Port Pirie Council of Churches to W.J.C. Cole, MP, dated 7 January 1915.
[181] SRSA, GRG67/33/89/1914, Letter from the Under Secretary to W.J.C. Cole, MP, dated 22 January 1915.
[182] Anon., 'Sunday Entertainments', *The Express and Telegraph*, 1 March 1918, p.1.
[183] Anon., 'Public Entertainment Act', *The Advertiser*, 10 May 1918, p.7.
[184] Anon., 'Sunday Pictures', *Port Pirie Recorder*, 11 June 1918, p.2.

Sunday evenings were proof that residents wanted them open on the Sabbath. The meeting organised a petition and arranged for a delegation to meet the Chief Secretary.

In July 1918, the Liberty League's deputation met with the Chief Secretary and presented the petition with 3,300 signatures. Bert Sayers, a prominent exhibitor and the State's president of the League, pointed out that Port Pirie was different from Adelaide:

> Sunday picture entertainments constituted Port Pirie's one and only form of recreation. The working people of Port Pirie were cooped up in little houses, some of hessian and tin cans; and half of them were foreigners, who were used to the Continental Sunday. They should be shown some consideration, for those who worked at the smelters led a dog's life."[185]

But it was the ill-considered comments of C. Hones, the President of the Port Pirie branch of the League, which newspaper reports centred on and which played into the hands of those who saw cinema as lacking morality. In making a point on the importance of picture shows, Hones suggested if picture shows were closed on a Sunday people would wander about the streets aimlessly and be likely to frequent places of ill repute, such as sly-grog shops and gambling dens. He told the Chief Secretary, "It is an old adage, 'Of two evils choose the least' and I implore you to reinstate the Sunday pictures as the lesser evil."[186] *The Register*, in its editorial, commented that Port Pirie residents would be dismayed and indignant and exhibitors disappointed at the reason put forward for Sunday picture shows by their advocate.[187] *The Register* summarized its editorial with the view that the Sabbath is a social institution that the Government must treat equally regardless of class or place. The battle was over. The council, Liberty League, Trades and Labour Council and the cinemagoers had lost the case. Port Pirie was the fourth rural town to come under the Places of Public Entertainment Act.

The political struggle here demonstrates a number of things relevant to cinema exhibition at this time. The debate over Sundays was an indication of how central a role the cinema had attained. It might be observed that Sabbatarianism involved a false dichotomy as people had time to attend both church and cinema in the same day, a point to which Christian Churches might concede. However, the battle was a wider and more abstract one in which the intrusion of other secular activities devalued the place of religion. The cinema had become a representative not only of secularism, but the class structure as a whole. On a more strictly political level, it also

[185] Anon., 'Sunday Movies', *The Register*, 17 July 1918, p.7.
[186] *Ibid*.
[187] *Ibid*., p.6.

entailed the struggle of different levels of government, as it became a test for a centralised urban government to assert its will over rural communities.

Censorship

We have seen in the preceding section how easy it was for cinema exhibition to become a focus of moral struggles. One of the most contentious issues in cinema exhibition in South Australia was the control of content. It might be reasonable to think that objectionable films would not be an issue for rural exhibitors by the 1930s, given that they had to go through two layers of censorship, Federal and State.[188] However, this is worth discussing in the context of rural cinema exhibition as decisions on what audiences could and could not see in regional centres and remote public halls were being made by bureaucrats in Adelaide and Melbourne.

Moral offence at the cinema in rural South Australia began almost to the start of screenings. In July 1897, the American Cinematographe Company screened at the Moonta Institute, advertising that "readers will observe that this company is in no way associated with the company who have visited the town on two former occasions."[189] This was a reference to Wybert Reeve who had visited in February and May. Reeve would have been thankful for this clarification as reports in *The People's Weekly* pointed out that there was not a large audience at any of the American Cinematographe's screenings. The newspaper reported that "the nude picture which was shown on Saturday night was certainly no inducement for respectable folk to patronize the show."[190] The 1882 Places of Public Entertainment Act prohibited any entertainment that violated public decency or propriety but was not applicable in this instance as the Act did not apply to country institutes.

Censorship of films did not become a political issue in South Australia until 1911 when the newly appointed Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, Thomas Smith, suggested to the Chief Secretary that films should be inspected on arrival into South Australia and registered for screening. Smith felt that he would be the most qualified person to undertake this censorship role because he was in touch with exhibitors.[191] The Chief Secretary was not, however prepared to surrender the power given to him under the Act to a public servant, and announced his

[188] See I.Bertrand, *Film Censorship in Australia*, for a detailed account of the evolution of censorship at both Federal and State levels.
[189] Anon., 'Gossip', *The People's Weekly*, 10 July 1897, p.2.
[190] *Ibid*.
[191] I. Bertrand, *Film Censorship in Australia,* p.42.

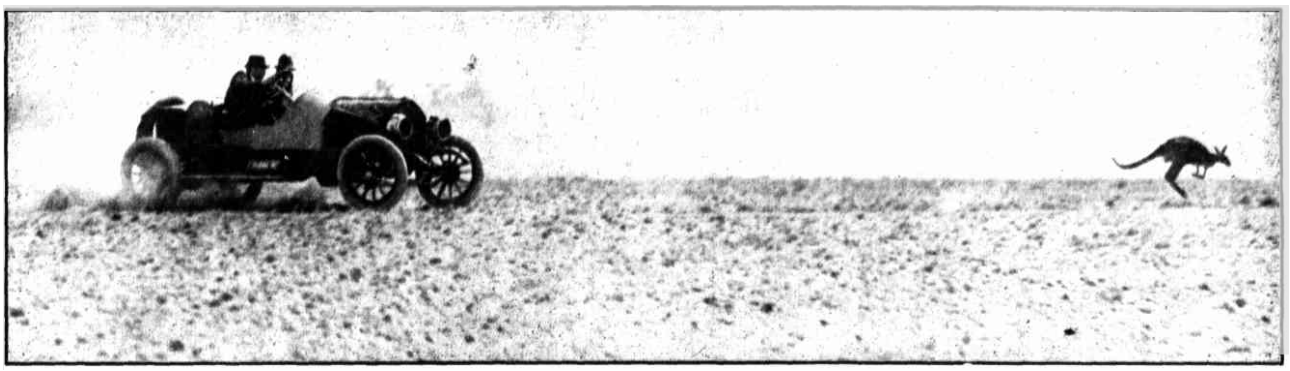
intention to prohibit objectionable films in November 1911.[192] He did not use his powers until 1913, when he banned *The Kelly Gang*,[193] citing nine objectionable scenes including "locking the police in their cells" and "wrecking the train line."[194] The first film banned in South Australia was a reaction to a fear of defiance of authority, not the concern over sexual immorality which was to dominate later censorship debates.

In the meantime, the morality of picture shows was being discussed in rural areas. On the Yorke Peninsula, a reader of *The Pioneer* complained in a letter to the editor in 1912 about the film *A Bad Night's Rest*[195] suggesting, "such a representation ought to have been censored."[196] Another reader complained about some boys being "cowboy mad" as a result of watching cowboy pictures, while those "of a more nervous temperament have troubled dreams and restless sleep."[197] The editor entered the debate warning, "[t]he moving picture is almost an institution and it behoves the managers to show pictures that will uplift their audiences rather than force their thoughts into the wrong channel."[198] One reader wrote a letter calling for picture show proprietors in future to "cater for the public support with better taste, remembering that some parents, even today, have a keen desire to pilot their children safely to manhood."[199] Not all letters to the editor were critical. A reader from Edithburgh wrote of attending 45 of the fifty picture shows that National Pictures had screened in Edithburgh, where he had never seen any suggestive pictures, adding: "It is a show that a man can take his mother, wife, daughter, or sister, to see and never be apprehensive as to what will appear next."[200] Film content had become a point of discussion and if there was any action to be taken then it had to come from the State or Federal Government.

The Chief Secretary's willingness to use the powers invested in his position, along with the introduction of military censorship at the outbreak of war in 1914, might have been enough to mollify those campaigning for film censorship. But the campaign was re-ignited in 1916 when a local film, *Hunting Kangaroos by Motor Car* shot by Harry Krischock, was screened at the Wondergraph in Adelaide. A number of complaint, were sent to the Chief Secretary asking if

[192] *Ibid*., p.42.
[193] This was probably a reissue of *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (Charles Tait, 1906).
[194] SRSA, GRG 67/33/1914/294 – Letter from the Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment to the Chief Secretary dated 13 November 1914.
[195] I cannot find any reference to this title on IMDB.
[196] Disgusted of Minlaton, 'Moving Pictures and the Children's Morals', *The Pioneer*, 17 August 1912, p.2.
[197] Anon., 'Cowboy Pictures', *The Pioneer*, 17 August 1912, p.2.
[198] The Editor, *The Pioneer*, 17 August 1912, p.2.
[199] Anon., 'Moving Pictures and the Children's Morals', *The Pioneer*, 24 August 1912, p.3.
[200] Fair Play of Edithburgh, 'Moving Pictures and the Children's Morals', *The Pioneer*, 24 August 1912, p.3.

there was any form of government censorship in existence, including one from the Society for



Photograph 1.2 – Taken during the shooting of *Hunting Kangaroos by Motor Car* (Photo: Harry Krischock Source: *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 29 April 1916, p.28)

the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.[201] There were also a number of letters to the daily newspapers expressing outrage that such a film could be screened. One letter told of expressions of disgust coming from the audience and another told of the audience hissing at the end of the film. On the same programme as *Hunting Kangaroos by Motor Car* were official war pictures of Ypres. One correspondent was able to vent anger with reference to both films: "These hunters would be men if instead of wasting their energy and bullets on a harmless animal they would go over to France and use them on the Germans."[202] Another thought the best way to deal with films like *Hunting Kangaroos by Motor Car* was to censor them, adding "they might suit the degenerate Huns, but they are not for us."[203] The government did not act on the public outrage immediately, but when the New South Wales government appointed a censorship board in December 1916, the South Australian Chief Secretary announced that a proposal was afoot to establish a similar board.

As with the issue of Sunday screenings, cinema was involved in a number of other social divisions that were both political, religious and gender-based. It is worth remembering that Federation was still relatively recent and that the distinction between State and Commonwealth powers was still being worked through. The power over the cinema was also an issue of social power, and hence it became the site of a sectarian struggle. The proposed composition of the board was quickly decided, without a Catholic on it. The Executive of the Australian Catholic Federation's state council met with the Chief Secretary claiming they should have a representative on the Board of Censors, given that "the Federation had taken active steps in the matter, and had been

[201] SRSA, GRG 67/33/1916/25 – Letter from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to the Chief Secretary, dated 22 May 1916.
[202] L.E.B., 'Kangaroo Hunting', *The Advertiser*, 22 May 1916, p.9.
[203] T.P.B., 'Kangaroo Hunting', *The Advertiser*, 29 May 1916, p.9.

largely instrumental in getting the board appointed."[204] One of the Executive members expressed concern that films attacking Catholics might appeal to certain people, making them profitable to the exhibitors.[205] The executive was advised the board was confined to public servants and was non-sectarian.[206] The composition of the board was not made public until May 1917 and consisted of the Chief Secretary, the Under Secretary, the Police Commissioner, the Director of Education, the Chairman of the Central Board of Health, the Inspector General of Hospitals and the Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment. The Inspector had responsibility for the bulk of the work and the others were only required to meet to view any films considered objectionable. Three months later two female representatives were appointed to the board: Emma Morris from the National Council of Women of South Australia and Agnes Goode from the Liberal Women's Educational Association. These appointments were progressive for their time. It would be another eleven years before another woman became an Australian film censor when Eleanor Glencross was appointed to the Commonwealth Film Censorship Board in December 1928. The absence of appointments of women in the intervening period was not through a lack of effort by women's organisations. As early as June 1917 the issue of women's representation on the censorship board was raised at the WCTU's biannual conference. One of the speakers, Eva Hurst, told the conference:

> However just, well-intentioned and competent the men on the board may be they require a woman's special knowledge to guide them in deciding as to what is desirable and suitable for children to witness at picture shows. … If a woman were given a place on the board an end would be made very speedily of pernicious plots, low-toned humor, vicious sentiments, and vulgarity.[207]

Four months before the announcement of the State board's membership, either the board acted clandestinely or the Chief Secretary used his powers under the 1882 Act to impose admission restrictions on the South Australian production, *Remorse* (J.E. Matthews, 1917). The film's central theme was a warning about venereal disease, but it was the hint of pornography that was more likely to draw an audience. The Chief Secretary restricted admission to those sixteen and over, inadvertently promoting the film. A correspondent to an Adelaide newspaper commented, "[t]o mark out certain pictures 'Adults only', as the Chief Secretary is doing, is merely to set a premium on the production of pictures whose influences raise a query."[208] *Remorse* not only screened to full houses in Adelaide, but also at rural venues. It played to "bumper houses" for

[204] Anon., 'Censorship of Pictures', *The Southern Cross*, 12 January 1917, p.18.
[205] *Ibid*., p.18.
[206] SRSA, GRG 67/33/1916/25, Letter from Chief Secretary to Catholic Church, no date.
[207] Anon., 'Picture Shows', *Weekly Times*, 9 June 1917, p.14.
[208] Rev. A.C. Stevens, 'Moving Pictures and Juvenile Crime', *The Register*, 4 January 1917, p.6.

the three nights it screened in Port Pirie. The Mount Gambier newspaper sang its praises. Its appeal to rural audiences was not so much in the film's warning about syphilis, but its description of the perils facing a country lad in the city. Mount Gambier's local newspaper commented, "[in] the city the pure-minded country lad is seized upon by those 'monsters of men' who seem always on the watch, like the spider for the fly, for the 'country man'."[209]

If a fictional account of a country lad contacting syphilis in the city was not everyone's idea of a film subject, touring on the heels of *Remorse* was the Reverend S.D. Yarrington with his *Red Plague* lecture. Yarrington had been touring Australia for two years lecturing on who was to blame for the epidemic and what could be done to bring it under control. According to him 20,000 people had died from syphilis in the year previous to his talk.[210] The lectures, supported by slides and moving pictures, were generally given over three nights, two for "men only" audiences and one for "women only", and according to his advertisements "teems with anecdote, both pathetic and amusing."[211] Ironically, his noble crusade was temporarily halted when he was not allowed to lecture on a Sunday in the Kadina Town Hall because the local authorities classified his lecture as an amusement.[212] It is difficult to ascertain whether Yarrington's lecture was in competition to *Remorse* or complemented it. When he visited Mount Gambier, the management of the Star Picture Company offered him the use of their theatre. *Remorse* screened to a full house whereas Yarrington's lecture drew a disappointing crowd. This suggests a trend away from the itinerant lectures, so prominent in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and towards picture shows.

Amusement Tax

Government control over cinema was not simply an abstract expression of social control or of contest with other levels of government or social authority. The state's control over cinema legitimised its taxation of the emergent industry. One of the most controversial pieces of legislation to affect cinemagoers was the State government's Amusement Tax, introduced on 1 November 1916. Originally put forward as a "war tax" by the Premier, it soon became apparent that it was a means of addressing the State's £380,000 deficit. The Government was in dire need of money and had failed in its attempt to tax company profits when the Upper House

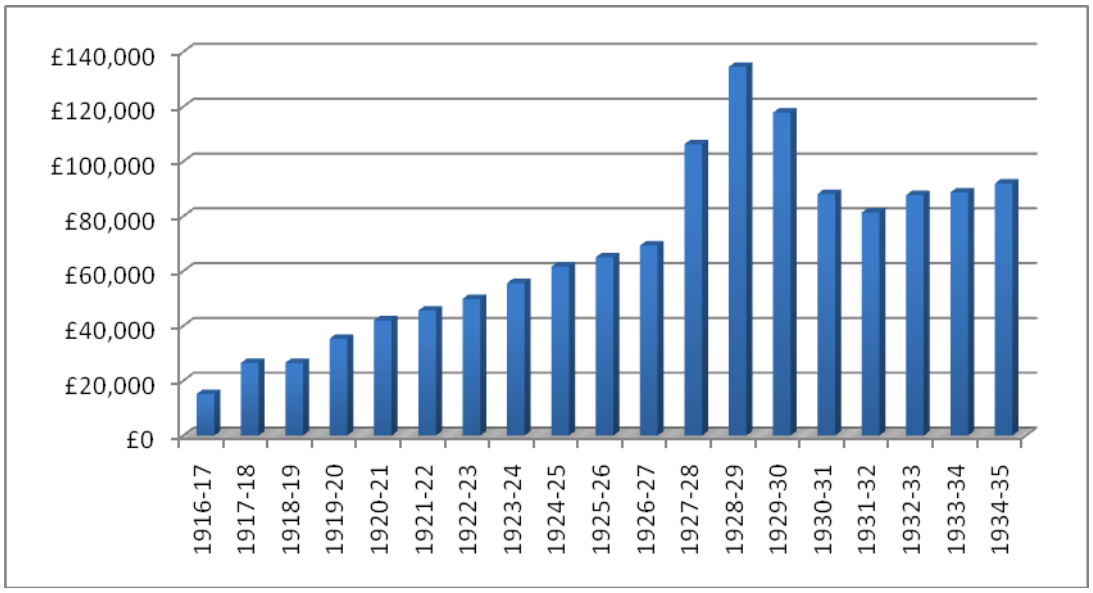
[209] Anon., 'Remorse', *The Border Watch*, 31 January 1917, p.2.
[210] Anon., 'Lecture by the Rev. S.D. Yarrington', *The Northern Argus*, 23 March 1917, p.5.
[211] Advertisement, *The Petersburg Times*, 9 February 1917, p.3.
[212] Anon., 'Lecture Classed as an Amusement', *The Transcontinental*, 9 March 1917, p.2.

would not support its legislation.[213] That the government should turn to the entertainment industry as a means of raising revenue led some to view the proposed Amusement Tax as a class tax. Fred Seager, the manager of West's Theatre, who represented Union Theatres in a deputation to the Premier, argued that "[t]he moving picture companies catered mainly for the lower-paid classes and the workers and their families. These would be the people the tax would affect."[214] The protest was not limited to exhibitors. In a letter to the editor of *The Advertiser*, one reader encouraged workers "to get busy and have a say regarding this latest class tax", to take the cause up with their unions and to "see that the tax is placed in the right place, and the right place is not on the backs of the already overburdened workers."[215] John Southwood, a member of parliament and the Secretary of the South Australian Branch of the Theatrical Employee's Union, presented a petition to parliament against the tax. It was signed by 1,381 petitioners, including 232 from the rural towns of Quorn and Petersburg. Calls to abandon the tax were, however, to no avail and the Legislative Council passed the Stamp Tax (Amusements) Bill on 4 October 1916. The provisions of the Act did not apply to agricultural, horticultural, dog and other similar shows and patriotic, religious, charitable, educational or scientific fundraisers could also be exempt. In short, it was a tax on the secular activities of the working class. This is not to say that cinema was restricted to a working class audience, but it certainly included them in very large numbers, and its effects were felt most intensely by that segment of the audience. The tax had its greatest impact on those cinemas that had cheap seats – the Pavilion, the Central Picture Theatre and the Empire Theatre. The Central charged only one penny for a child admission. Although the new amusement tax was one farthing for an admission of three pence or less, Australia did not have a farthing as a unit of currency, so the tax had to be rounded up to one halfpenny. This presented an inequitable increase: children going to the Central were faced with a fifty percent increase in admission cost, whereas a child's premium admission to West's Pictures increased by only 8.3 percent.

The government estimated that the tax would raise between £20,000 and £30,000 per year and that it would be limited to the period of the war and one year after.[216] It endured much longer

[213] Anon., 'The Amusement Tax: Proprietaries' Vigorous Protest', *The Daily Herald*, 19 July 1916, p.7. The Legislative Council, the Upper House of the South Australian Parliament, was not representative of the populace, least of all the working class and women. It had a narrow franchise that restricted voting to adult male property owners. This undemocratic method of electing the Legislative Council was not brought to an end until 1973.
[214] Anon., 'The Amusement Tax', *The Daily Herald*, 19 July 1916, p.7
[215] Class Tax, 'Amusement Tax', *The Advertiser*, 29 August 1916, p.8.
[216] Anon., 'A Tax on Amusements', *The Chronicle*, 22 July 1916, p.33.

and was only abolished during the Second World War. It raised substantial amounts of revenue, peaking at £134,520 in the 1928-29 financial year, as can be seen in the graph below.



Graph 1.1: State Amusement Tax collected from 1916 to 1935. (Source: South Australian Parliamentary Papers from 1917 to 1935.)

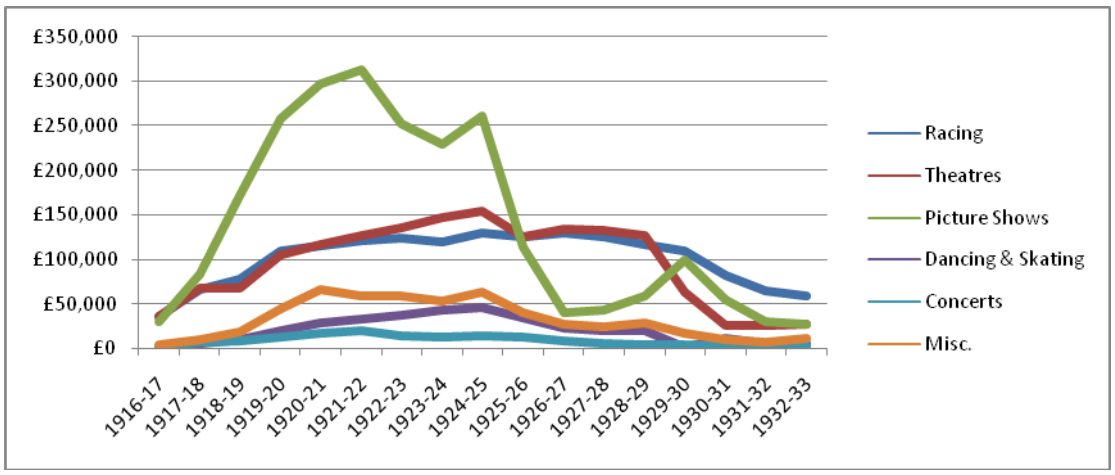
Two months after the State Amusement Tax was introduced, the Federal government also introduced an amusement tax on admissions of one shilling or more. As the taxes were covered by separate legislation to the Places of Public Entertainment Act, they applied to rural cinemagoers immediately. When the Federal tax was introduced, the amusement proprietors took an action that confirms the strength of cinema as an institution – they decided to boycott placing advertisements in *The Advertiser*. The newspaper did not necessarily support the tax but did make a virtue of its necessity, incurring the wrath of exhibitors, whereas the newspaper's competition, *The Register*, was more sympathetic to those opposing the tax. On 1 January 1917, the day the tax came into effect, page two of *The Advertiser*, which would normally have been filled by city cinema and theatre advertisements, only contained three. *The Register*, on the other hand, was not affected by the advertisement boycott, which lasted eight weeks. The resolution of the boycott is not apparent from the newspapers of the day, however, one rural paper, *The Bunyip*, observed:

> Have the amusement managers agreed that they can't run their shows without the newspaper and capitulated, or had the newspaper admitted vice versa, or has there been a compromise? A compromise there could not surely be after the heroics of both sides![217]

The Federal Amusement Tax was repealed in October 1933.[218] In just under sixteen years it raised £6.75 million, of which £2.36 million was from picture shows. The following graph shows

[217] Anon., 'The Advertisement Blockade', *The Bunyip*, 23 March 1917, p.2.

a comparison of revenue raised for each class of entertainment with the picture show being the dominant contributor. (The significant drop in revenue from picture shows in the 1924-25 financial year is due to the cessation of tax on admissions prices of less than two shillings and sixpence.)



Graph 1.2: Federal Amusement Tax collected from 1916 to 1933 (Source: Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers from 1917 to 1934.)

In the two decades since Wybert Reeve had toured rural areas with a novel technology, cinema had become a heavily regulated set of institutions and practices. The amusement taxes are an indication that cinema had become a well-entrenched institution and a source of revenue for government—although it remained an institution to be held at arm's length and frequently regarded with suspicion. By 1917, cinema exhibition in South Australia was a tightly regulated industry. Not only was it subject to regulations under the 1913 Places of Public Entertainment Act, but also to censorship and taxation laws at both a Federal and State levels. The number of rural picture shows continued to grow unimpeded by this regulatory framework, however. With the exception of towns to which the 1913 Act had been extended, rural halls did not have to comply with the strict screening legislation, which made them comparatively cheap venues for itinerant exhibitors to hire. Until 1922, only six proclamations had extended the Places of Public Entertainment Act, to Burra and Renmark in 1915, Wallaroo in 1917, Port Pirie and Port Augusta in 1918 and Murray Bridge in 1919. Had the regulations been enforceable in rural areas at this time, it is likely that prohibitive costs associated with compliance would have denied the culture of the picture show to small towns. From 1922 to 1932, the Act was expanded dramatically, being extended to 244 towns and leaving very few places in South Australia not covered by the legislation. The last big push in the early 1930s to widen the coverage of the legislation in rural regions coincided with the Great Depression and the introduction of sound technology.

[218] The Federal amusement tax was reintroduced in October 1942.

2. Rethinking Rural Exhibition in the Sound Era

> His wife says, 'Is that you Arthur?' 'Yes it is. What's left of me!' She said, 'What's wrong with that fine picture show you bought? I believe there was diamonds in it.' I said, 'Don't you believe it, Elsie, all I can find around the place is a piece of slag rubble!'
>
> Arthur Burgess, Rural Exhibitor[219]

Exhibition Models in rural South Australia 1914 to 1932

As film exhibition developed as an industry, the structure of exhibition in rural communities became distinctively different from that of Adelaide. Where city picture houses were serviced by a public transport system allowing audiences a relatively easy way to access a number of cinemas (the majority of Adelaide's suburban picture houses were built next to train or tram lines[220]), small populations, distance and lack of public transport meant that the communities of rural towns often had to become involved in film exhibition themselves. In most cases this was limited to providing a venue such as the town's community hall, although there were cases of councils and community groups becoming exhibitors themselves. In the rural centres, which could draw on a larger audience, independent exhibitors and suburban chains built or leased imposing buildings akin to large suburban picture houses. What developed was a heterogeneous, five-tier structure of exhibition: purpose-built picture houses, community-owned picture shows, local lessee exhibitors, itinerant exhibitors; and absentee exhibitors.

Purpose-built Picture Houses

The purpose-built picture houses dominated the streetscapes of the larger towns with populations that could sustain more than one picture show. The facades were never as ornate as the city picture houses but had enough ornamentation to distinguish the building from other two-storey offices and stores on the main street. They became landmarks and were often used as a reference point – local businesses advertising in newspapers would often describe their premises as "across the road from", "adjacent to" or "four doors from" the picture house.

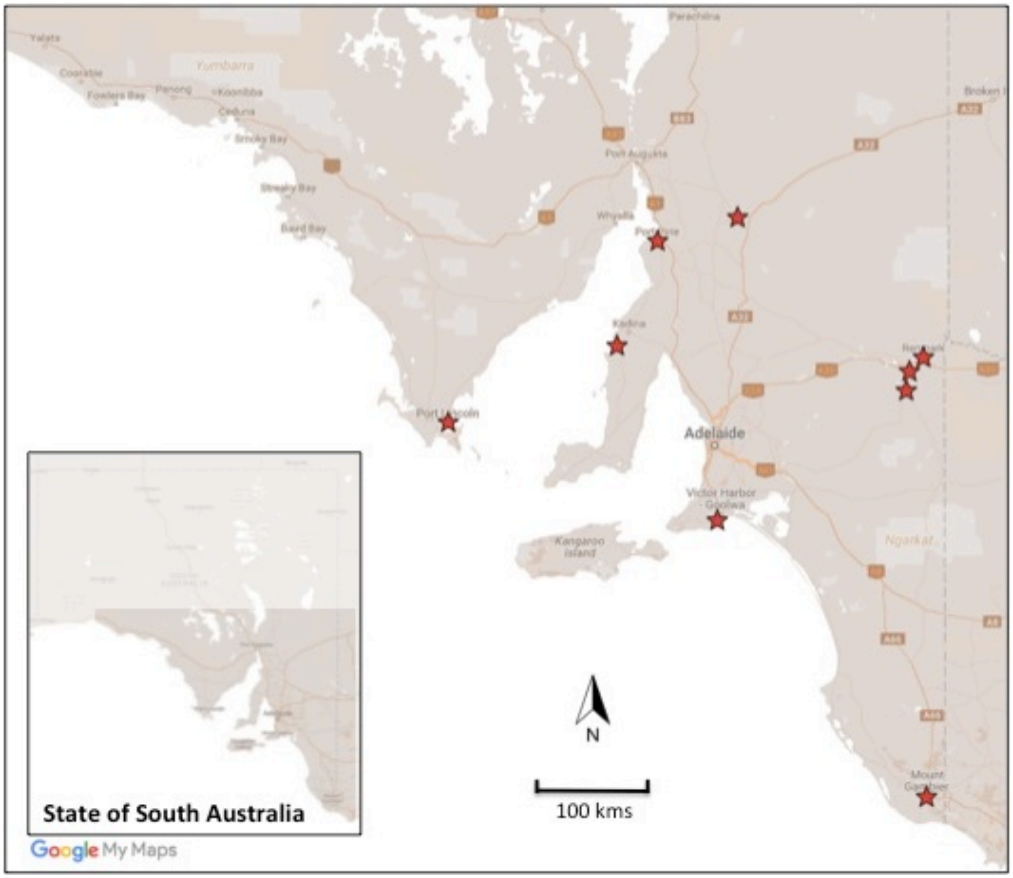
There were only twelve of these purpose-built cinemas in operation in rural South Australia before the 1930s. Table 2.1 lists these and Map 2.1 illustrates their dispersal across the State.

[219] Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour: An oral record of the 1930s depression in Australia*, p.284.
[220] See Mike Walsh, Richard Maltby & Dylan Walker, "Three Moments of Cinema," in *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*, eds Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby and Philippe Meers, (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

Two of these cinemas are worth briefly focusing on, as they point to the limited connections between Adelaide-based circuits and this top tier of rural exhibition.

City or Town	Population	Picture House	Capacity	Date Opened
Berri	1197	Rivoli	650	18 February 1922
Kadina	2503	Ideal	1045	20 July 1921
Loxton	2811	Corona	500	5 May 1923
Mount Gambier	3968	Capitol	1774	4 April 1928
Murray Bridge	4500	Lyric	928	16 April 1924
Peterborough	2189	Capitol	935	15 May 1926
Port Lincoln	1280	Flinders	847	26 December 1929
Port Pirie	9808	Alhambra Cooee/Austral	1150 1203	8 October 1914 10 July 1920
Renmark	3465	Arcadia Lyric	868 400	19 May 1924 23 December 1915
Victor Harbor	1818	Victor	849	1 December 1923

Table 2.1: Towns with purpose-built picture houses in the 1920s. (1921 population figures used and sourced from Sands & MacDougall Yearbook 1923)



Map 2.1: Locations of purpose-built picture houses in South Australia in the 1920s.

The first purpose-built picture house in rural South Australia was the Alhambra in Port Pirie. Although planned to be a live theatre, the plans were modified during the design stage so that it could be used as a cinema (including the installation of a fireproof bio-box). The theatre had a capacity of 1,150 and was opened on 8 October 1914 as a picture house, which became its main

function for many years. Initially, the lessee, W.J. Moller, booked his films through the Sydney-based Fraser Film Exchange with the opening night's film, *Dr. Fenton's Ordeal* (Wilson, 1914) being an Australian premiere.[221]

The Alhambra ran in competition with two other picture houses: the Casino Theatre in Florence Street, a slightly larger theatre with a seating capacity of 1,230 seats, and the People's Pictures, which screened at the much smaller Caledonian Hall in Ellen Street. During the warmer months, the Casino also ran an open-air theatre with a capacity of 2,000. The Alhambra had a three-tier admission of 6d, 1s and 1s 6d, which was on par with the Wondergraph in the Adelaide CBD and a little dearer than other rural picture shows at the time, but considerably more expensive than the 3d and 6d charged by People's Pictures.[222] Within a month of opening, the Alhambra and the People's Pictures amalgamated to form Alhambra Theatre Ltd. This new entity appears to have had a relationship with the Wondergraph in Adelaide. In the newspaper report on the amalgamation, there is mention that Alhambra Theatre Ltd had managed to secure the 30,000-foot series (to be screened over fifteen weeks), *Lucille Love: The Girl of Mystery* (Ford, 1914) that was then screening at the Wondergraph. The Wondergraph's main features for November 1914 were also screened two weeks later at the Alhambra.[223] This was a departure from the distribution pattern of the People's Pictures before the amalgamation, when nearly all of their films came directly from Broken Hill, with some of these being screened in Port Pirie before they reached Adelaide.

The first rural picture house to be operated by a major suburban circuit was the Ideal Theatre in Kadina on the Eyre Peninsula. It was purpose-built by the Peninsula Entertainments Company, a consortium of local investors. The 1,045 seat-capacity picture house cost £18,000 to build and was touted as a confidence booster for a local economy that was "passing through a grave crisis."[224] Opened on 20 July 1921, the Ideal was operated by Peninsula Entertainments for only two years. In July 1923, an extraordinary shareholder meeting was held to discuss an offer that had been made to lease the theatre on a long-term basis.[225] Clifford Theatres Limited entered into a twenty-one year lease, making this their first venture outside of Adelaide. Although the

[221] Fraser Film Exchange advertised *Dr. Fenton's Ordeal* as just arrived (*The Referee*, 29 September 1914, p.14.). A search of TROVE does not show a screening prior to the opening night of the Alhambra.
[222] Most advertisements for rural picture shows at this time did not advertise admission prices; they simply said "usual prices". Arcadia Pictures in Renmark did advertise prices (1s 6d, 1s and 6d), as did Theatregraph Pictures in Peterborough (1s 6d and 1s).
[223] Anon., 'Amalgamation of Picture Shows', *The Port Pirie Recorder and North Western Mail*, 27 October 1914, p.2.
[224] Anon., 'Ideal Picture Theatre: Memorable Opening Night', *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 23 July 1921, p.2.
[225] John Thiele and Ross Lange, *Thanks for the Memory*, p.53.

company later operated two more rural picture houses, the Capitol in Mount Gambier and Lyric Pictures at Murray Bridge, it did not expand in the country to the same extent that it did in the Adelaide suburbs during the 1920s. Both the Ideal and the Capitol provided the company with "layover houses," that is, venues in which features that had just completed their CBD screenings could be screened during the contractual hiatus before their exhibition in the suburbs.

Photograph 2.1: Purpose-built Picture House - Capitol Theatre, Mount Gambier c.1928. (Photo: State Library of South Australia B 29985)

Community-owned Picture Shows

The community-owned picture shows that screened in rural South Australia shared a common purpose: to provide what had by then become an essential piece of urban infrastructure, while keeping picture show profits in the community for the benefit of the community. There was a belief in some towns that travelling film exhibitors were making substantial profits and, other than paying for the cost of hiring the hall, were not putting any money back into the local economy. There were three types of community-owned picture shows that managed all aspects of film exhibition: municipal, institute and syndicate-operated.

The municipal picture show was a distinct exhibition model that operated in rural South Australia for only a brief period. It was managed by local government, staffed by councillors and films were booked by a committee. The concept had first been tried in the mining union-dominated town of Broken Hill in 1910, when the council had run a regular picture show at the Town Hall in conjunction with a Melbourne exhibitor. It was closed down after nine weeks because of a £13

loss.[226] There was a more successful enterprise in Western Australia where the Queenscliff council ran a municipal picture show from 1910 to 1918, a venture which was described by the local newspaper as an "excursion into municipal socialism."[227]

South Australia's only municipal picture show was in the Yorke Peninsula copper mining town of Wallaroo. The idea was first put to the town's council in January 1916 as a means of wiping out the town hall debt, while retaining any future profits. The proponent of the idea told the council meeting that "one man made £800 in Wallaroo in one year, £400 of which was clear profit."[228] While some councillors supported the proposition, others were doubtful. It required an outlay of at least £100, an amount that council could ill-afford at the time. It was agreed that a committee should be formed to consider the idea, and after deliberating for four months, the committee recommended the municipality go ahead. The council purchased a Power's Bioscope from an Adelaide camera specialist, Harrington's Ltd., at a cost of £117, and began screening on 26 August 1916. Despite a heavy thunderstorm, the Town Hall was well attended on the opening night. The Mayor told the audience that the decision to run a picture show was a progressive one.[229] In the first five weeks of operation it had taken £92 gross at the ticket box. Taking into account expenditure of £37 (which excluded the purchase of the projection equipment), the fledgling picture show was capable of returning a profit of £11 per week. The breakdown of expenses for the first five weeks gives an idea of the outlays associated with this exhibition model. The relatively low cost of film hire indicates the savings that were possible for rural exhibitors who were prepared to play films that had been in release for some time and were now available for flat rate rental prices.

	£	s	d
Attendant's wages	11	16	0
Film Hire	15	0	0
Printing and advertising	6	9	3
Carriage, etc.	4	5	0
Total	37	10	3

Source: Kadina and Wallaroo Times, 30 September 1916, p.2.

The Municipal Picture Show screened on Saturday nights in competition with George Holland's Olympic Theatre. An Adelaide newspaper questioned whether Wallaroo could support two

[226] Anon., 'Municipal Picture Show', *The Advertiser*, 11 August 1910, p.11.
[227] Anon., 'News and Notes', *The West Australian*, 21 December 1912, p.11.
[228] Anon., 'Municipal Picture Show', *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 22 January 1916, p.2.
[229] Anon., 'Municipal Pictures', *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 30 August 1916, p.2.

picture shows in one evening,[230] but since it was then the second biggest rural town in South Australia with a population of 4,000[231], it would be reasonable to assume there would have been enough cinemagoers to support two picture shows. Towns such as Berri, Port Lincoln and Victor Harbor, with populations below 2,000 could support commercial cinemas. The Municipal Picture Show had a competitive edge over the Olympic Theatre in that it did not pay for doorkeepers or ushers because councillors did this free of charge,[232] and it also did not increase admission charges to cover the State and Federal amusement taxes.

The first three months' takings inspired a councillor from the nearby town of Kadina to propose to his council the concept of municipal pictures, but the motion was defeated in council by eight votes to two. Besides being opposed to municipal enterprises, the council envisaged the risk of future competition. Instead, they leased the Kadina Town Hall to the local exhibitor, Harry Porter, for £3 10s for Thursday nights and £5 5s for Saturdays,[233] guaranteeing an income of £455 per year with no expense other than the supply of electricity. Ironically, in August 1924 , Harry Porter closed his show at the Kadina Town Hall because he could not compete with an opposition venue, the Ideal Theatre, 300 metres away, operated by the Adelaide-based Clifford circuit.

The Wallaroo Municipal Pictures operated for three years. In its first full year, it had taken £1,154 at the ticket box. Expenditure amounted to £973, leaving £181 profit. Compared to the £455 that the Kadina municipality received by leasing its hall, the municipal pictures did not appear to be a wise economic decision. What needs to be taken into account, however, is that the profit was purposely low as the municipal pictures absorbed £141 in State and Federal amusement taxes rather than pass them on to its patrons, and the profits of the Wednesday night screenings went to various local patriotic funds.[234] Nevertheless, by 1919, the Corporation of Wallaroo felt that much time and energy had been expended on an enterprise that never realized its expectations. The Mayor felt that the Corporation was not "in the ring," and could no longer secure the best films, while their competition was doing better.[235] In August, it agreed to lease the town hall to a local syndicate, Wallaroo Entertainment Company, for two nights a week

[230] Anon., 'Municipal versus Private Enterprise', *The Advertiser*, 7 September 1916, p.8.
[231] Anon., 'Population of Peninsula Towns', *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 1 February 1911, p.2.
[232] Anon., 'Municipal Picture Shows', *The Chronicle*, 23 December 1916, p.11.
[233] Anon., 'Kadina Town Hall and Municipal Pictures', *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 13 December 1916, p.2.
[234] Anon., 'Municipal Pictures', *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 5 December 1917, p.4.
[235] Anon., 'Exit Municipal Movies', *The Register*, 10 July 1919, p.6.

at a rate of £10 a week. The excursion into municipal socialism ended, but what emerged from it was another type of community-owned picture show, a syndicate-operated picture show.

This model was based on selling shares to locals and paying a dividend. Wallaroo Entertainments registered as a company in 1919 with £1,000 capital, raised locally by selling 4,000 shares at 5s each. It paid the first year's rent in advance and purchased the plant from the municipal pictures. This was such a successful venture that it was able to loan the Wallaroo Corporation £500 at six percent per annum for liquidation of the town hall debt, and in the following year a further £400 at the same rate. In the 1926-27 financial year Wallaroo Entertainments had made a profit of £914.[236] In the period from 1919 to 1930, shareholders received 20s 4d for each 5s invested.[237] Perhaps the best indicator of its success as a financial venture is that when the corporation voted to renew the company's lease on the town hall for a further five years in 1953, only two councilors were eligible to vote as the rest were shareholders. In effect, the change from municipal ownership to a private syndicate meant that councillors sold the asset to themselves, and in the process, converted the cinema to a profit-making proposition. Wallaroo Entertainments Company continued to screen at the Wallaroo Town Hall until 1969.

While very few communities adopted this model of exhibition, several operated as Institute picture shows, the most common type of community-owned picture show in the period of this study. A number of rural towns had Institutes that housed a library, reading room and often a hall where dances, picture shows and live theatre were held. The Institute picture show was an ambitious model as it relied on volunteers to assist with running the picture show, although in most cases the projectionist was paid. The demise of this model of exhibition was generally due to either the volunteers' enthusiasm or community support waning, or the inability to raise funds to wire for sound.

There were at least nine Institute picture shows in rural South Australia, of which the longest-running was Australia's first community-owned picture show, Angaston Institute Pictures. Local people lent £50 at six percent return to set up the picture show.[238] The first show was in April 1914 and screenings continued until 1966. Other Institute picture shows in rural South Australia included Mannum Institute Pictures, which had started operating in January 1921 and at first made considerable profit averaging £340 per year in its first five years. However, towards the end

[236] Anon., 'Town Hall Pictures: Ratepayers' Meeting', *The Times and Northern Advertiser*, 13 April 1928, p.1.
[237] Anon., 'Wallaroo Talkies Opened', *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 24 December 1930, p.3.
[238] This is according to the plaque that is currently in front of the Angaston Town Hall. I have not been able to substantiate this detail.

of the 1920s profits started to fall to a point where the picture show started to make a loss. In the Mid-North region, Balaklava Institute Pictures, which opened in May 1922, raised the £500 required to purchase projection equipment in the same way as Angaston Institute Pictures, by issuing debentures to locals. In the first six months of screening, 3,900 cinemagoers attended 26 screenings, averaging an audience of 150 per screening.[239] The profits in the first three years were used to clear the debentures and thereafter went to the Institute. Also in the Mid-North region, Snowtown Institute Pictures, took over the operation of the local picture show in 1922. At the time, the township was experiencing difficulties in raising money for a new Soldiers' Memorial Hall and it was thought that the picture show takings would contribute significantly to the funds. The Institute Committee ran the picture show until 1932 when it gave way to a new innovative exhibition model, that of the absentee exhibitor. In the Murray Mallee region, Karoonda Institute Pictures, which opened as a community-owned picture show in May 1929. Previously pictures had been screened in the Karoonda Institute Hall since it was built in 1914.

Local Lessee Exhibitor

The most common exhibition model in rural South Australia was one in which a local exhibitor, generally a local entrepreneur, leased the local hall and screened films on a regular basis, generally on a Saturday night and on public holidays. In most cases, film exhibition was not their only business; they were often the town's electrician or mechanic, trades valuable when anything went wrong with the projection equipment. One such exhibitor, A.W. Murray, an electrical engineer, wrote two extensive articles for his local newspaper, one on his entering the exhibition industry in Bordertown in February 1928, and the other fifteen months later.[240] Murray's articles provide a detailed insight into the operation of the local exhibitor exhibition model in a rural town before the advent of sound.

Bordertown is located in South Australia's south-east, 310 kilometres from Adelaide by rail and twenty kilometres west of the Victorian border. Murray took over the lease for screening weekly picture shows in the Bordertown Institute from F.J. Green who had been screening regularly under the name of Lyric Pictures since 1920. The Institute's licence stipulated a maximum seating capacity of 400: 360 in the main hall and forty in the balcony. As in the case of many

[239] Anon., 'Cinema Committee's Report', *The Wooroora Producer*, 2 November 1922, p.2.
[240] A.W. Murray, 'Moving Pictures as Modern Entertainment', *The Border Chronicle*, 3 February 1928, p.4 and 'Present-Day Photoplay Entertainment', *The Border Chronicle,* 24 May 1929, p.4.

small rural halls, the number of physical seats was considerably fewer than that stipulated on the licence.

Murray had a three-tiered pricing structure: 2s to sit in the main hall, 2s 9d to sit in the balcony and children half price.[241] At the time that Murray took over Lyric Pictures in 1928, the State Amusement Tax doubled, but he had decided to absorb the increase rather than pass it on to the cinemagoer. This was a business decision that many rural exhibitors made at the time, indicating their estimation that audiences could not afford price increases as South Australia's rural sector declined. If Lyric Pictures had a full house, £36 excluding tax would be taken at the ticket box. But, as Murray explained, many of the seats were sold to children for half-price and it was only on the rare occasion the hall was full. He considered himself to be fortunate to average "half-house," and there were some nights on which he would only cover his expenses. When films classed (and priced) by distributors as specials were shown, the admission price would be increased to 3s plus 9d tax, but this increase generally went to the distributor in rental fees. According to Murray, more had to be spent on advertising these films, which meant that the exhibitor's share of the takings was less than for ordinary films. He failed to mention that more tickets were sold when specials were screened which meant his profits for the night would be higher. He made an effort to avoid booking specials close together, but this was sometimes unavoidable if he was to secure the films. In one instance, three specials, *Camille* (Niblo, 1926), *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Pollard, 1927) and *Rose Marie* (Hubbard, 1928), were screened two weeks apart. To avoid losing patrons who may not have been prepared to pay extra in such a short period, Murray only increased the prices for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Booking specials so far in advance also presented the problem of not knowing what other attraction would be in town at the same time. The evening before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was screened, a vaudeville show performed in Bordertown.

Murray's screening programme was standard: two feature films, a newsreel and a cartoon. As he only had one projector and had to change spools every twenty minutes, he considered the two-feature programme too long. The audience would have been of a different opinion, because

[241] In later years, Murray had an unusual two-tiered structure for children distinguishing between children and children who had left school but were still under the age of 16. The concession for children was limited to the main hall. Murray wrote to the Deputy Prices Commissioner in 1943, "Frankly we do not want them in the balcony which has limited seating capacity of 40, due to poor exits and we even advise adults, when asked, to sit downstairs." He did not extend this structure to his other picture show at Keith because in Bordertown "we know the children and when they have left school". (Source: NAA: AP5/1, 40/926A - Letter from A.W. Murray to the Deputy Prices Commissioner, 26 March 1943.)

by the late 1920s, the two-feature programme was standard for city, suburban and rural picture houses and seen as value for money. Programme length was more likely to be of concern to those in the Bordertown audience who travelled fifteen kilometres from nearby Wolseley by train. The Melbourne express was the only means of getting home and, if on time, would depart Bordertown at 10.30 pm. If a programme was too long, Wolseley patrons would have to leave before the end of the second feature (usually the main feature). To cater for these patrons, a clock was installed to the side of the stage so that they could leave ten minutes before the Melbourne express was due. Murray would check with the railway staff during the screening and, if the train was going to be considerably late, he would show a slide advising the audience. Such consideration was not unique from a rural exhibitor. The Clare picture show in the State's mid-north would often schedule a special feature before the interval so that patrons from Spalding, forty kilometres away, could catch the last bus home.[242]

Within a month of taking over the picture show in 1928, Murray built what he called an "electrical reproducer of records" to replace the piano player. He first used it for the screening of *Ben Hur* (Niblo, 1925) which ran three nights at Lyric Pictures. This, he claimed, "will enable me to provide music of every kind: orchestra, band, vocal, etc. at considerable volume and with perfect reproduction." He installed what he called an Orchestron and went into detail in his second article as to the technical specifications. It was no more than an elaborate gramophone with two turntables.[243] These types of system were quite common precursors of synchronized sound systems.

Absentee Exhibitor

Another in this heterogeneous set of options for rural exhibition was the absentee exhibitor. These were Adelaide-based contractors who organized picture shows for rural institutes or town halls for a management fee. They would employ a local manager and projectionist and book, schedule, transport and advertise the films. In some instances, the absentee exhibitor installed and retained ownership of the projection equipment in the hall.[244] This arrangement could disadvantage a town if the picture show became economically unviable. For example, in October 1931, Imperial Pictures, which was operated by an interstate exhibitor, Mil Symonds, decided to cease screening in Pinnaroo and transferred the projection equipment to his Merbein venue

[242] Anon., 'Spalding Line Picturegoers and 'On Our Selection'', *The Northern Argus*, 9 December 1932, p.5.
[243] Anon., *Encyclopaedia of Australian Theatre Organs – Lyric Pictures, Bordertown, SA*, http://www.theatreorgans.com/southerncross/South%20Aust/Bordertown.htm accessed 3 January 2001.
[244] Alan Jones, *Snowtown: The First Century 1878-1978*, p.291.

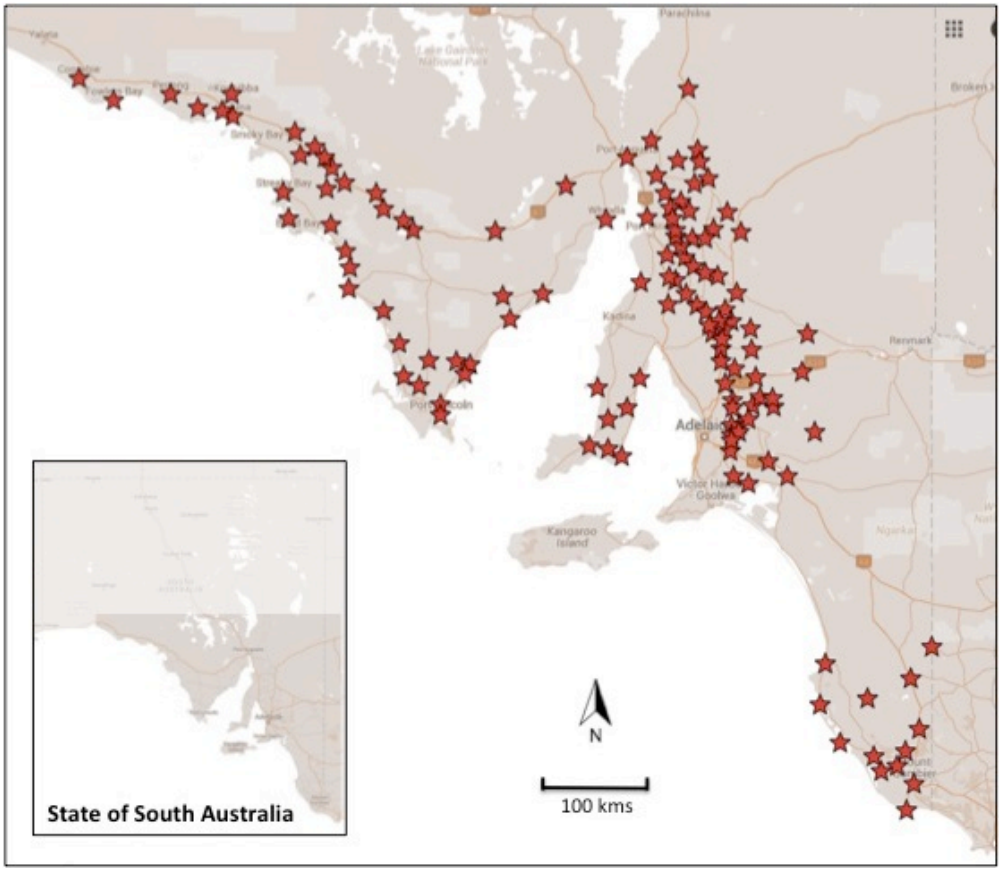
across the border in Victoria.[245] This would make it difficult for the Institute Committee to restart the picture show should the economy improve. The Adelaide-based projector manufacturer, Bill Benbow, was a pioneer of the absentee exhibitor model and by 1938 he was operating in twelve towns. His *modus operandi* in the mid-north town of Snowtown is discussed in Chapter 4.

Itinerant Exhibitor

The exhibition model traditionally associated with rural cinema is the itinerant exhibitor. Of all occupations in the exhibition industry this was the toughest. It often involved traversing regions for weeks, sleeping on the side of the road or in the van, screening to small audiences and being exposed to flooded roads, dangerously high temperatures, and vehicle and equipment breakdowns. One example is Jack Wilson's West Coast Pictures, which screened on the western coast of the Eyre Peninsula in the 1920s. In 1924, when Wilson was screening at Goode, a remote town 23 kilometres north of Ceduna, the hall caught fire. It was a galvanized iron hall lined with matchboard; when the film ignited the whole building was ablaze within five minutes and was a smouldering ruin in under an hour. The loss of a hall was devastating to a remote community as it had many functions including housing the local school. Furniture and books were destroyed in the fire, and other arrangements had to be made for local schoolchildren.[246] Wilson's projector and piano were also destroyed and he had to cancel all shows until he procured a replacement projector from Adelaide.

The business of the itinerant exhibitor was best exemplified by Herb Lester (nee Rees, AKA Leslie Lester), whose ubiquitous Lester's Perfect Pictures, screened across the State in over 135 South Australian rural towns during the silent era, as seen in the map below.

[245] Anon., 'Cessation of Pictures', *The Pinnaroo and Border Times*, 30 October 1931, p.1.
[246] Anon., 'Disastrous Fire at Goode: Hall Destroyed', *The West Coast Sentinel*, 6 December 1924, p.7.



Map 2.2: Towns in which Lester's Perfect Pictures screened during the silent era.

Lester began in the exhibition industry in 1903. He purchased an Edison Kinetoscope and toured country Victoria by train with his brother Tom Rees,[247] who wrote of the pioneering days of travelling picture shows in an article in *Everyones* in 1928:

> In those days the touring showman's life was not exactly a bed of roses. In direct contrast to the jolting goods trains of my day is the comparatively luxurious mode of travel prevailing today when the motorcar whisks the tourer from town to town. And modern equipment has done away with many a heartache that was part and parcel of the antiquated apparatus that served twenty years ago.[248]

Despite these improvements, this exhibition model remained by far the most onerous, and in most cases, operators were young men who had the stamina for the demanding occupation. Herb Lester was 22 years of age when he started touring and by the time he was in his fifties and living in Adelaide, he had employees touring his picture show. One of those was Max Whittle, whose first association with Lester was as a boy living in Booleroo Centre.[249] He put the posters up in the town for Lester's Perfect Pictures and in return got a free ticket to the show. At the age of nineteen, Whittle joined the show as an assistant operator. The first picture show he toured

[247] Wilmington Centenary Book Committee, *Beautiful Valley: A History of Wilmington and District 1876-1976*, p.138.
[248] Anon., 'Tom Rees, of Peterborough', *Everyones*, 12 September 1928, p.3.
[249] Interview with Max Whittle conducted by me in 1984.

with was *Daddy Long Legs* (Santell, 1931) travelling 400 kilometres from Auburn to Hawker and screening in fifteen towns. Once he obtained his operator's licence at the age of twenty-one, Lester left him and another operator to run the circuit and returned to Adelaide.

Max Whittle described what it was like travelling from town to town. They drove a Graham Brothers truck that had been extended to about fifteen feet in the tray and modified to accommodate the four-cylinder water-cooled engine. The engine, which had an AC/DC generator (AC for the amplifiers and DC for the projector motor and arc lamps), was not offloaded but left in the back of the truck running all the time the show was on. To keep the engine cool, the canvas was rolled up slightly and the exhaust channelled through the gap. In winter, Whittle would drop the rolled canvas down about fifteen minutes before the end of the show to warm up the back of the truck where he and the other operator slept. Their bed was the foyer advertising boards made from floorboards. At the end of the evening they would lay them down in the back of the truck and then roll out a mattress over the top.

The operators had all their meals in the supper rooms of the halls in which they were screening.

> We never went to hotels or anything like that. Meals in the supper rooms with two primuses and something like that with saucepans, cups and saucers – buy your own food, whack it in and sleep in the truck.

It was a daily routine of assembling the projection equipment in the hall's bio-box, dismantling it, loading it into the truck "go on to another town and put it all together again and get it going the next night … Over rough roads too - no bitumen for us in those days." A normal circuit took three weeks and an extended circuit, when they travelled to the Eyre Peninsula, took five weeks. Max Whittle's recollections contribute to our understanding of the itinerant exhibition model and the rough life on the road taking films to remote towns. A case study of itinerant exhibition on the remote Eyre Peninsula is at Chapter 5.

In the 1920s film exhibition was an established and essential institution within rural towns that varied considerably in their size, wealth, and in the availability of competing leisure activities. Rural exhibition involved a diverse set of activities, and no one model was capable of servicing the spectrum of towns that comprised rural Australia. With the exception of the purpose-built picture house, all of the exhibition models discussed here emerged in response to the particular needs of rural communities. Cinemas were run for a range of purposes, including not limited to profit. Exhibitors might be central figures within a local community, or visitors, or absentees

employing local agents. There was one town, Peterborough, which experienced all five exhibition models over the period from 1910 to 1931.

Case Study – Peterborough: the five-tier structure of exhibition in one town

Peterborough, or Petersburg as it was known up until 1918, is located 250 kilometres north of Adelaide and was a rail town. In 1927, two-thirds of the Peterborough Division of the South Australian Railways' workforce of 1800 resided in the town, making it very much a working class town.[250] Moving pictures were first screened in the town as a part of Wybert Reeve's first tour of rural South Australia in February 1897. In the 1910s, itinerant exhibitors and a local exhibitor screened in the old town hall and in 1925, the first purpose-built picture house, the Capitol Theatre, was opened. The following year, the Corporation of Peterborough opened its new town hall, the largest in rural South Australia, and considered the idea of running a municipal picture show in opposition to the Capitol. Instead, it engaged an absentee exhibitor to screen in the hall. This exhibition model was short lived, and from 1928 to 1931 a local syndicate operated the town hall picture shows. This case study also reveals competition between public and private enterprise and the alliance of an established exhibitor with the film distributors.

The Capitol Theatre, which was located on Main Street West, dominated the streetscape. It had a seating capacity of 1,020 and an orchestra pit that could fit ten performers. The owner-exhibitors, Tom and Herbert Rees (Leslie Lester), had been screening as Theatregraph Pictures in the Peterborough Town Hall, and in other nearby towns, since 1912. In 1925, the council did not renew their lease, so the Rees brothers built their own picture house, which opened in May 1926.

The Rees brothers had good business acumen and knew the importance of the relationship between exhibitor and distributor. This was best demonstrated when the Municipality of Peterborough proposed to build a new town hall which would be designed to screen films. The Clifford, Ozone and National Pictures chains had initially shown some interest in leasing the hall, but when tenders were called only Tom Rees submitted an offer. No other tenders were submitted because potential bidders became aware that the film distributors in Adelaide had sold the rights of pictures for Peterborough to Tom Rees.[251] The council did not accept Rees' offer of £350 per annum for two nights per week, and mooted the idea of operating a

[250] *Our Peterborough* website, http://www.ourpeterboroughsouthaustralia.com.au/history.htm accessed 29 June 2016.
[251] Anon., 'Town Hall Pictures: Ratepayers' Meeting', *The Times and Northern Advertiser*, 13 April 1928, p.1.

municipality picture show similar to that in Wallaroo. Legal advice suggested that it was illegal for municipalities to operate picture shows and the council instead entered into arrangement with Frank Harcus, an absentee exhibitor.[252] Harcus was well-known in the industry, having toured with his brother as Harcus Bros. Pictures since 1922 in the Mallee and later on the Yorke Peninsula. The arrangement met with no success in the first thirteen weeks, returning only £10, and Harcus advised the council that "owing to the pictures being tied up, it would be impossible to make the scheme pay until the new pictures were released."[253] A minority of councillors doubted that Peterborough could sustain two picture houses in close proximity to each other, and the issue of a hall designed to screen pictures lying dormant dominated the council meetings. Any venue capable of screening films was seen as a potential revenue earner, although it also required a capital outlay and an on-going supply of patrons, films, and labour. In an attempt to keep competition off the street, Tom Rees took advantage of the council's dilemma, reducing his previous offer to £250 per annum and adding conditions. Although he proposed only leasing the hall on a Saturday night, with no intention of screening pictures, he required that the council not lease the hall to any other exhibitor during the week. This would be a five-year lease with a right to renewal for a further ten years. Council was divided, so they called a ratepayers' meeting to decide on what to do.

The councillors were faced with the choice of making money for (screening) nothing, or the prospect of making money for themselves. One exhibition model discussed at the ratepayers' meeting was the syndicate model that had been operating in Wallaroo since 1919. This model was based on selling shares to local residents and paying a dividend. From this meeting, the Peterborough Entertainments Society Ltd was formed on similar lines to the Wallaroo syndicate. The society would float 4,000 shares at 5s each and pay £500 per annum for the lease on Peterborough Town Hall. With this capital, one councillor "failed to see why they would be refused any films when they were in a position to buy them."[254] . Purchasing films was not an option for a rural exhibitor screening in only one town, as they could not be screened enough times to recoup the outlay. The larger point however, was that success of the business would be dependent on the syndicate succeeding where Harcus had failed. They needed to demonstrate

[252] When the Berri Council mooted with the idea of purchasing and operating the Rivoli Theatre, its legal advice was "under Section 383, 17, of the Local Government Act the District Council could operate a picture theatre." Anon., 'New Institute for Berri', *The Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record*, 15 August 1935, p.10.
[253] Anon., 'Town Hall Pictures: Ratepayers' Meeting', *The Times and Northern Advertiser*, 13 April 1928, p.1.
[254] Anon., 'Town Hall Pictures: Company to be Formed', *The Times and Northern Advertiser*, 20 April 1928, p.4.

that they were sufficiently capitalised to win a bidding war with the competition for rights to an on-going supply of competitive films.

Town Hall Pictures (later Town Hall Talkies), opened with the German film *Variety* (Dupont, 1925) on 28 July 1928. The local newspaper reported that there were 750 people who had paid admission, which suggests that some members of the audience were admitted free on opening night.[255] The Peterborough Entertainments Society boasted that *Variety* was direct from the Adelaide Regent and that they had entered an arrangement to secure future releases from the Hoyts' "new Regent circuit".[256] *Variety* did not in fact come direct from the Regent; it had moved over to one of the CBD's second-release houses, the New Pavilion, before opening in the suburbs at the Alberton Ozone on the same night as Town Hall Pictures. It is doubtful that the Society's arrangement with the Regent was secure, because in the following week, Tom Rees was screening *Sorrell and Son* (Brenon, 1927) at his Capitol Theatre, direct from the Regent.

The Town Hall Talkies operated in opposition to the Capitol only until June 1931 when Peterborough Entertainments Society Ltd went into liquidation "owing to the impractibility (*sic*) of arriving at a working arrangement with the film and machine creditors".[257] Tom Rees continued to manage the Capitol until he sold it in 1949. It screened for another 28 years.

This case study demonstrates how more than one exhibition model could be employed as conditions changed in both the town and the film industry. Peterborough was unique in having experimented with all of the five exhibition models. The five-tiered structure of exhibition that evolved and operated in rural South Australia provided a cinema-going culture to a wide range of communities. The purpose-built pictures houses in the large rural towns and cities were built to the scale and specifications of large suburban picture houses and provided a cinema-going experience akin to that experienced in the suburbs. At the other extreme were the basic halls of small remote towns, where itinerant exhibitors screened films at the end of the run. Somewhere between these extremes were the committees of the community-owned picture shows, local entrepreneurs and absentee exhibitors who provided exhibition models best suited to medium sized venues. This heterogeneous five-tier structure functioned well, but by the end of the 1920s it faced three crises: economic depression, the technological challenge of the introduction of

[255] Anon., 'Town Hall Pictures', *The Times and Northern Advertiser*, 3 August 1928, p.2.
[256] Anon., 'Peterborough Entertainments Society, Ltd.', *The Times and Northern Advertiser*, 13 July 1928, p.3.
[257] Anon., 'Peterborough Corporation', *The Times and Northern Advertiser*, 3 July 1931, p.1.

talkies, and the political challenge of the extension of the Places of Public Entertainment legislation to the smaller towns.

The Great Depression

> South Australia is suffering from a general financial depression. Money is getting scarce and the position is acute in some circles. A number of banks are calling up their overdraft accounts. This State also has a large number of unemployed, by far the largest number for some considerable time. Amusements must be affected in consequence.
>
> Stuart F. Doyle, 1927[258]

South Australia's economy was in crisis well before the economic downturn that became known internationally as the Great Depression of 1929 to 1932. Public debt had doubled in the 1920s and had reached £90.5 million at the close of the 1927/28 financial year.[259] The withdrawal of overseas finance in 1927, severe drought and the instability of produce prices brought about the collapse of the South Australian economy two years prior to the 1929 crash. For seven years, from 1928 to 1934, the State's unemployment rate was the highest of the Australian states. It peaked to 34 percent in 1932 and did not drop to below twenty percent until 1935.[260] The number of factory closures reached 200 and the value of factory output halved between 1927 and 1932. In rural areas, farmers suffered financial difficulties because of poor crops in 1928, 1929 and 1930, even before wheat prices began to drop. At the beginning of the 1929-30 season, a bushel of wheat brought 4s 4d but during the harvest, this dropped by as much as 65 percent to a low of 1s 6d per bushel. The price of wool also fell from the average of 1s 6d per pound in 1928 to an all-time low of 7½d in 1931.[261] Despite the severe economic downturn, picture shows found ways to survive. This raises a question about the extent of the Depression's effect on the cinema exhibition industry in rural South Australia.

The number of rural picture shows that closed as a result of the economic downturn is difficult to ascertain. According to official records, 170 theatres and public halls in South Australia were screening films in 1930, along with five touring picture shows.[262] These figures included city and suburban venues, but not venues in towns that had not yet come under the Places of Public Entertainment Act, making it difficult to determine the number of rural picture shows at this time. My estimation is that there were at least 176 rural venues in which picture shows took

[258] Anon., 'Money Depression Will Hurt S.A. Business', *Everyones*, 31 August 1927, p.3.
[259] Susan Martin, 'South Australia and the Great Depression', in *Cabbage and Kings*, vol. 23, p.10.
[260] Based on figures of unemployment among trade unionist in Ray Broomhill, *Unemployed Workers: A Social History of the Great Depression in Adelaide*, p.13. The only official records were those of the Census which are regarded as being understated due to the stigma of being unemployed.
[261] Alan Jones, *Snowtown: The First Century 1878-1978*, p.308.
[262] SRSA GRG67/33/1/1930, Letter from the Under Secretary to American Vice Consul, dated 3 January 1930.

place.[263] According to the Secretary of the Exhibitors' Association, E.M. Waterman, at least twenty-seven rural pictures shows had closed down in South Australia in 1931.[264] While Waterman used this statistic to strengthen his campaign for the government to scrap the requirement for firemen to attend theatres, he provided no information about whether these closures were a consequence of the audience's reduced spending capacity or of other factors such as exhibitors not being able to afford to wire for sound. Official records do not give much indication as to why venues ceased screening, recording only whether or not a licence had been renewed. There are only a few letters written to the Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment (hereafter, the Inspector) discussing the economic circumstances of an exhibitor, but these do give some insight into the effects of the Depression.

Under the Places of Public Entertainment Act, venues had to be licenced annually. This incurred a fee that varied according to the seating capacity of the venue. Exhibitors struggling financially found the annual impost burdensome. The Inspector was officious when it came to ensuring fees were paid. On the Eyre Peninsula, the local constable at Tumby Bay had to ride eighteen kilometres by horseback to Ungarra to ascertain from the Secretary of the Ungarra Hall committee why the outstanding licence fee for the hall had not been paid. The reason had been because the hall funds and money of most people concerned with the hall had been frozen through the closing of the Primary Producers Bank.[265] The closure of the bank was most felt on the peninsula as three of the bank's seven branches were there.

In the Riverland, William Turner, who operated the Rivoli Theatre in Berri, wrote to the Inspector requesting that he pay only half of his annual licence and the other half in six months time "as things are still in a very bad way up here".[266] He received an unsympathetic response and the only way he could pay the £7 10s was by a post-dated cheque. One year later Turner wrote to the Inspector, "things have been very bad on the River, but prospects are looking bright for a big improvement next year". His optimism was shared by other exhibitors. With his application to screen pictures on Christmas Day 1929, the operator at Burra Institute commented, "business not too good, in fact quite on the over-ripe side lately, but we are hoping for the best"[267] In the

[263] See Appendix 2 for details.
[264] Anon., 'Firemen at Picture Shows', *The Advertiser*, 6 November 1931, p.14.
[265] SRSA, GRG67/33/37/1930 – Police Report from Tumby Bay Police Station, 20 July 1932.
[266] SRSA, GRG67/33/108/1922 – Letter from W.A. Turner to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, 28 August 1928.
[267] SRSA, GRG67/33/246/1929 – Letter from G.E. Dane to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, dated December 1929.

middle of the Murray Mallee region of the State, the community-owned Karoonda Institute Pictures, which had taken over the running of the local picture show in May 1929, was running at a loss by mid-1931. Audience numbers would also have been low due to the hall not being wired for sound. Its programme policy changed from weekly to fortnightly to monthly and, according to the historian Alan Jones, probably ceased altogether within a year.[268]

Varying the frequency of screenings was one means of reducing expenses, although it typically also meant significantly lowering takings. Another tactic involved reducing expenses by varying the seating capacity. Labouring under the misapprehension that it would lower his licence fee, the owner of Goolwa Centenary Hall wrote to the Chief Secretary hoping to convince him to reduce the capacity of the hall from 350 people to 100. He wrote that he had decided to close down the hall "on account of the bad times and excessive taxation". He enclosed his takings return as an indication – 27 sixpenny admissions for four nights.[269] Another expense related to cinema capacity that cash-strapped exhibitors found burdensome was the requirement to pay for the attendance of a fireman where a venue's seating capacity exceeded 700. The newly opened Flinders Theatre in Port Lincoln on the Eyre Peninsula closed for several months in 1931, and when it re-opened screening Talkies in mid-1932, the manager argued that although the seating capacity of the theatre was 847, the number attending was very small. Through the representation of the local Member of Parliament, the Inspector agreed to reduce the capacity to 690, bringing it under 700 and thus eliminating the requirement to have a fireman in attendance.[270]

For the itinerant exhibitor a different story emerges. In most cases, the only annual fees they were required to pay was for the projectionist licence, and then only if the projectionists themselves had not paid the fee. They were also more flexible, working in a less rigid framework in which they were generally not liable for expenses related to venues. Over ninety percent of rural venues in South Australia were publicly owned and multi-functional. Exhibitors using those venues did not have capital invested in bricks and mortar. Not having capital investment to consider, they could be more flexible in adjusting to trying economic circumstances. Max

[268] Alan Jones, *Karoonda East Murray: A History to 1986*, p.491.
[269] SRSA, GRG67/33/231/1929 – Letter to the Chief Secretary from Percy M. Wells, dated 25 January 1932. Ironically, five years later, the same exhibitor was taken to task by the Inspector for overcrowding, sometimes squeezing 400 to 500 people in to the hall.
[270] SRSA, GRG67/33/131/1929 – Letter from the Chief Secretary to E.J. Craigie, MP, dated 1 August 1931.

Whittle, who toured the mid-north of South Australia and Eyre Peninsula for Lester's Talkies, recalled that:

> I don't think that the Depression at the time in the country would have been as bad as probably what it was in the city. I think in the country everybody made a winning post by trying to get as much money as they could. By working for anybody for two shillings and six (pence), three bob[271], or five bob, or anything like that and made everything a winning post. If they wanted to come to a show that was worth two bob, two (shillings) and fourpence and they genuinely only had a shilling in their pocket you'd let them in. You could do that. I think the country people really realized that way and that's what happened. They never let you down they'd come along and see the show and didn't seem to affect them - still carried on and we still ran on all the time. [272]

This suggests that itinerant exhibitors, operating as sole traders further away from the sources of urban regulation had the capacity to cut corners and vary their business practices. Informally dropping prices would mean that audience numbers on the circuit did not necessarily decrease significantly, although the profit margin did. As regulation was extended further into rural South Australia during the Depression, this flexibility would come under threat.

The introduction of Sound

> Australian suburban and country exhibitors have reason to be very thankful to the Raycophone and Auditone companies for placing on the market machines of such excellent quality at prices somewhere within their reach, with which to equip their theatres.
>
> Rural Exhibitor, Port Pirie, July 1929[273]

The effects of the Depression on cinema exhibition in rural South Australia were further compounded by the effects of the introduction of talking pictures occurring roughly at the same time. Exhibitors who had been facing a loss of revenue either through smaller audiences or reduced admission prices (in some cases both) were now faced with the additional expense associated with replacing or converting their silent equipment to screen talkies. The expense was not necessarily limited to the installation of talkie equipment. There was an increase in the cost of film rental and, attached to some purchase or lease arrangements, there was also a cost for the mandatory servicing of the equipment. Yet rural exhibitors had no choice but to take up the new technology despite it resulting in leaner margins. To date there is very little written on the diffusion of sound technology in rural areas, and an analysis of how South Australian rural exhibitors dealt with the new technology reveals that the rural experience was significantly different from that of the urban experience. Within the five-tiered structure of rural exhibition,

[271] A 'bob' was colloquial for one shilling.
[272] Interview with Max Whittle, 1984.
[273] Anon., 'The Talkies Tangles: An Exhibitor's Impressions', *The Recorder*, 4 July 1929, p.4.

there were distinctively different forms of adaptation to the new technology, each a response to the specific challenges faced by each exhibition practice.

Diane Collins's claim that "the unpleasant fact is that the history of the cinema in Australia is the history of an industry entirely under Uncle Sam's grubby thumb" implies the Australian cinema industry passively followed foreign direction in all aspects of film distribution and technology.[274] Mike Walsh offers an alternative view, putting forward a more complicated model in which influence was not one way but based on multiple, shifting and internally-conflicted sets of relationships between distribution and exhibition, and between theatrical and cinema interests within Australia. These relationships included competition between sound equipment suppliers, competition between exhibitors and the diminishing supply of silent films. A study of the introduction of sound to South Australian city, suburban and particularly rural sectors of exhibition, supports Walsh's argument that fluctuations in these relationships were crucial to the innovation of sound in Australia.[275]

Talking pictures opened in the Adelaide CBD on 2 March 1929 with *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927) at Union Theatres' Wondergraph in Hindley Street and *The Red Dance* (Walsh, 1928) at Hoyts' Regent in Rundle Street.[276] The simultaneous opening was no coincidence, but the result of a simultaneity clause in the contracts that Hoyts and Union Theatres had with Western Electric, the supplier of their sound equipment.[277] By the close of 1929, the remaining CBD picture houses on the major first release cluster in the Rundle-Hindley Street belt, West's Olympia, Grand, York and New Pavilion, (all under the control of Hoyts' opposition, Union Theatres), had Western Electric sound equipment installed. The close proximity of these picture houses and the timeframe in which they wired for sound might lead us to expect intense market competition in play as one picture house competes to be ahead of another. This was not the case. Adelaide's CBD first-run and second-run picture houses were controlled by interstate organisations, and these houses followed eastern-seaboard direction in relation to the installation of talkies, as part of a national schedule of rollouts.

[274] Diane Collins, *Hollywood Down Under*, p.1.
[275] Michael Walsh, 'The Years of Living Dangerously: Sound Comes to Australia', in *Twin Peeks: Australian and New Zealand Feature Films*, pp.69-83.
[276] Hindley Street is the western continuation of Rundle Street. In 1929, there were seven first-run or second-run picture houses in the Adelaide CBD of which six were located on this one street in a stretch of 750 metres.
[277] *Ibid*., p.72.

The Western Electric sound system was the first wave of sound technology. Western Electric-ERPI had began wiring for sound in Australia in November 1928 and the initial cost of between £6,000 and £7,000 per theatre, (not including the weekly service fees of about £8)[278], made installation only viable for those CBD picture houses which ran several sessions per day for six days a week. Stuart Doyle, the managing director of Union Theatres, saw this as an issue as early as 1928:

> … unless some method is devised to cut down the cost of equipment, reproducing records and particularly the terrific cost of maintenance, talkies are a commercial impossibility for suburban and small town shows.[279]

By mid-1929, a second wave of sound technology reduced the cost of equipment when the American RCA Photophone and Australian sound systems, such as Raycophone and Australtone, came on the market in competition with Western Electric. This competition, and that between exhibitors, provided an environment for the talkies to spread to the suburbs in 1930.

Adelaide had two major suburban chains in 1929: Clifford Theatres' Star circuit and Waterman's Ozone circuit. Together they operated eighteen picture houses in the suburbs and three in rural South Australia. It might be assumed that this would have resulted in either an Ozone or Star screening the first talkies in the suburbs. The first suburban picture house to have sound equipment installed was, however, an independent, the Strand, operated by Glenelg Theatres in the beachside suburb of Glenelg. Using a Western Electric sound system, the Strand screened talkies for the first time on 21 September 1929. The major chains did not introduce talkies in the suburbs until three months later.

Glenelg Theatres made a decision to wire only its premium theatre, the Strand, for sound. It had one other cinema, the Glenelg Theatre 500 metres away, which continued to screen silent films until it closed at the end of 1931. With only one picture house, compared to Clifford Theatres' twelve and Ozone's six, it was less of a financial strain to wire for sound than the significant cost to wire a whole circuit. Another factor was the Strand's screening policy: it was probably the only independent picture house outside of the CBD to run shows six nights a week with a Saturday and Wednesday matinee. This policy would provide sufficient returns to provide an economic justification for screening talkies, but within weeks the expected increase at the box

[278] Brian Yecies, 'Talking Salvation for the Silent Majority' in *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the History of Sound*, p. 134.
[279] *Everyones*, 14 November 1928, p.7. Cited in Brian Yecies, 'Talking Salvation for the Silent Majority', p.137.

office did not materialize, and Glenelg Theatres reduced the Strand's screening nights.[280] The two major chains also delayed introducing talkies because of their scepticism that sound might be a short-lived novelty, a position held particularly strongly by the Watermans. Meanwhile, Clifford Theatres was experiencing some financial difficulties stemming from its aggressive theatre building policies.

Mike Walsh points out that the trade magazine *Everyones* was sceptical about sound film in 1928, possibly reflecting a significant body of opinion within the trade, but that these sceptical predictions were swept away by immediate smashed records at the Sydney box-office early in 1929.[281] It was, however, still unknown if the novelty of the talkies would last and if they would ever go beyond first runs. This scepticism was certainly reflected in the business decision of the Waterman Brothers not to rush into wiring their picture houses. In March 1928, the company had signed a contract with Adelaide musician Jack Fewster to supply an orchestra of union musicians[282] to ten Ozone picture houses in South Australia over a lengthy period.[283] Ozone's decision to enter such a significant contract, which was reported to be worth £25,000 ($1.9 million AUD at 2015 prices), indicates that the company then had confidence in the future of silent films and saw sound technology as a novelty limited to first-release houses.

A trip to Sydney in January 1929 to investigate the possibilities of talkies for the Ozone circuit turned Clive Waterman's scepticism to enthusiasm, but his company was still prepared to wait until some decision had been reached over the universal adoption of one system, and until the price of the sound technologies had dropped as a result of competition. By November 1930, Western Electric systems were available for £3,000 as more suppliers of sound technology entered the market.[284] In December 1929, the Ozone chain had begun screening talkies at its picture house in the beachside suburb of Semaphore, using RCA-Photophone equipment. Two months later, it announced that due to the success of the Semaphore Talkies, all other cinemas on the circuit would be converted to sound but would be fitted out with Western Electric sound systems. The rollout was completed in the suburbs in December 1930.

[280] Anon., 'The Suburbs and the Talkies', *Everyones*, 6 November 1929, p.4.
[281] Michael Walsh, 'The Years of Living Dangerously: Sound Comes to Australia', p.72.
[282] As a result of an industrial dispute ten years earlier, one of the conditions of the contract was that each orchestra had to be made up of union players.
[283] Anon., 'Ozone Theatres: £25,000 Contract Signed', *The News*, 22 March 1928, p.19.
[284] Anon., 'Talkies for Victor Harbour: £3,000 equipment for Victor Theatre', *The Victor Harbor Times,* 14 November 1930, p.3.

The other major circuit, Clifford Theatres' Star chain, began wiring its suburban picture houses for sound at the same time as the Ozone chain, but completion across the circuit was at a much slower pace. It took one and a half years to install sound equipment in nine of its twelve suburban picture houses.[285] The slow pace at which South Australia's largest exhibitor transitioned to sound was due to the financial constraints the circuit was under following the building of its most expensive picture house to date, the New Unley Star, in 1927. In the first half of the 1928-29 financial year, the company declared losses of £3,384[286] ($262,500 AUD at 2015 prices). The chain was unable to pay the annual licence fees for a number of its picture houses and by 1931 was in financial difficulties with film exchanges.[287] This created commercial tensions between knowing that it had to wire its theatres for sound in order to remain competitive with the Ozone chain and not being in a financial position to do so. The imperative was to wire, but the only way of achieving this was to delay wiring until sound systems reduced further in cost. One month before the Norwood Star, the circuit's first picture house to be wired for sound, Clifford Theatres was still in negotiations with Western Electric, but instead chose to install equipment regarded as a part of the second wave of sound technology. [288] This was the Adelaide-made Shadowtone, marketed by Unbehaun & Johnstone Ltd.[289] Shadowtone was designed and built by three locals: the projector manufacturer, Bill Benbow, L.C. Jones, who was the manager of the Electrical Department at Unbehaun & Johnstone, and R.M. Wigg who specialised in acoustics and speakers. The Shadowtone system came on the market in August 1929, and within one year, had been installed in eleven suburban and rural picture houses.[290] Another local product that was in the second wave of sound technology was the Kaytone sound equipment manufactured by Kinema Products (SA) Ltd., whose directors were associated with Fox Film Corporation (Australasia) Ltd.[291] It cost £1,000 making it considerably cheaper than the Western Electric system. This was installed in the independent picture houses in Kilkenny

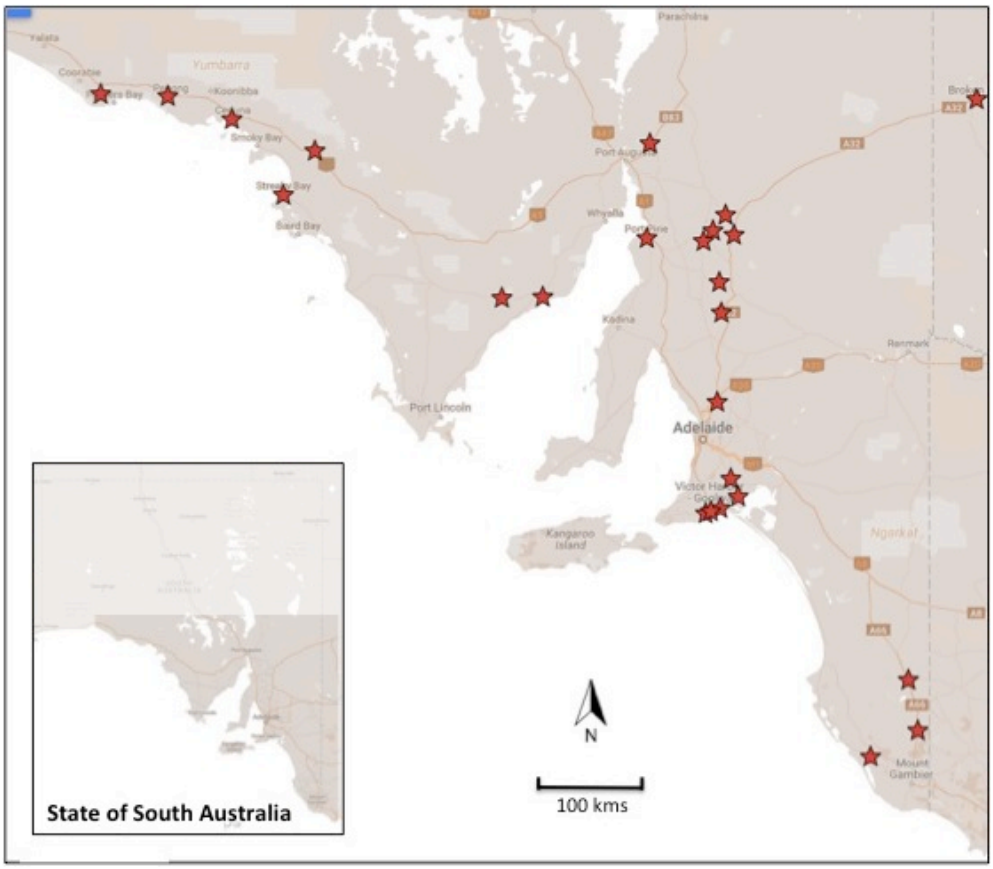
[285] The Port Adelaide Star was not wired for sound until March 1932 as it had been closed for several months. The Torrensville and Old Unley Stars were operated as silent picture shows for some years after the advent of talkies.
[286] Mike Walsh, 'Cinema in a small state: distribution and exhibition in Adelaide at the coming of sound', p.311.
[287] See John Thiele and Ross Lange, *Thanks for the Memory*, pp.61-62.
[288] Anon., 'In South Australia', *Everyones*, 4 December 1929, p.46.
[289] Anon., 'Talkie Equipment: Local Invention Demonstrated', *The Advertiser*, 7 August 1930, p.15.
[290] Up until a demonstration at the Goodwood Star in August 1930, it was not widely known the Shadowtone was an Australian sound system. *The Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record* (5 June 1931, p.2) reported: "That public mention of the fact that Shadowtone was an Australian product was carefully avoided in the earlier stages of its introduction to Australian theatres, because of the certain realization that such an announcement would have prejudiced its unbiased reception by Australians is, however, a sad commentary on the attitude of many Australians towards the products of their own land."
[291] SRSA GRS513/00007/38/1928 - Memorandum of Association of Cine-Ads (SA) Ltd. The company changed its name to Kinema Products (SA) Ltd. in April 1929.

(March 1930) and Croydon (September 1930). At the same time as the sale to the Kilkenny Theatre, three were ordered for country venues.[292]

While the city and major suburban cinemas were wired for sound within two and a half years, the exhibition industry in rural South Australia was disaggregated and installation took place, if at all, over a longer period of time. Brian Yecies describes the transition to sound as an uneven process, taking place in a seemingly unorganized way.[293] This was nowhere more apparent than in rural South Australia. The expense of the first wave of sound technology was prohibitive to most rural venues. The second wave, the challenge to the dominant American influence on sound technology that in part came from what Yecies calls "Australian sound companies, freelance inventors, backyard tinkerers, business men and manufacturers"[294], brought less expensive systems on the market. Adelaide-made sound systems such as Shadowtone, Kaytone, Jeffrey and Garvie, although not considered of comparable quality to Western Electric and other imported systems, played a significant role in the adoption of sound technology by rural exhibitors.

We might expect that those rural exhibitors with a lot of capital invested in purpose-built picture theatres would be the early adopters of sound technology and it would be their audiences that would be first to experience the talkies, but again, this was not the case. George Holland, an itinerant exhibitor, toured the rural areas of South Australia from May to July 1929 with an inferior precursor of sound equipment, the Vivagraph. Starting in Naracoorte in the south-east of the State and finishing in the remote town of Coorabie on the West Coast, he screened in at least 24 towns.[295] (See Map 2.3 below.)

[292] Anon., 'Success of Katone: Locally-made Talkie Machine', *The News*, 15 April 1930, p.11.
[293] Brian Yecies, 'Talking Salvation for the Silent Majority', p.144.
[294] *Ibid*., p.153.
[295] Given that itinerant exhibitors screened intensively but did not advertise all screenings, this number is more likely to be higher.



Map 2.3: George Holland's First Talkie Tour of South Australia - May to July 1929

The Vivagraph was an all-Australian sound system manufactured by Talkies Pty. Ltd. and claimed to be similar to that used at the Wondergraph in Adelaide. This claim is questionable given that the Wondergraph had Western Electric equipment. Like A.W. Murray's Orchestron mentioned earlier, the Vivagraph was no more than an elaborate gramophone system wired to loud-speakers, with the addition of a mechanism for alerting the operator when the film was moving too slowly or fast.[296] The first screening of the tour at the Austral Picture Show in Naracoorte was so bad that the regular exhibitor, who had allowed Holland to use his venue and projection equipment, disassociated his business from it in the local newspaper and regretted "the dissatisfaction and disappointment which the programme caused."[297] Given that he was screening a Vitaphone production, *Domestic Troubles* (Enright, 1928), and that the accompanying discs had a life of twenty plays before deteriorating in quality, the sound in the closing stages of the tour would have been close to inaudible in a small rural hall if Holland was not travelling with sufficient replacement discs. The acoustics of small rural halls were significantly inferior to purpose-built picture houses or large institute halls. Speaking about the halls on the Eyre Peninsula, a travelling picture show operator recalled "acoustics in the halls was very bad so we

[296] Anon., 'Talkies Come to Peterborough', *The Times and Northern Advertiser*, 28 June 1929, p.3.
[297] D. Caldwell, 'Talkies', *The Border Chronicle*, 7 June 1929, p.1.

use to carry feltex around with us and we (would) stretch it up in some halls".[298] In July 1930, *Everyones* commented that many country exhibitors were experimenting with their own devised disc systems, not all of them successfully.[299] The Vivagraph appears to have been one of the unsuccessful systems as there are no further references to the system in newspapers of the day.

If talkies were to become more than of novelty value, it was important that there be a distribution chain beyond the CBDs and suburbs. There was a potential market in the large rural towns, but it could not be exploited until the cost of sound systems decreased. An alternative was for distributors, sound system manufacturers and exhibitors to collaborate in touring travelling sound units around rural areas. In September 1929, Hoyts began rural talkie tours with RCA-Photophone portable plants. The company had four trucks travelling through Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, screening talkies that had already played at its city picture houses. At the same time Australtone, in conjunction with Greater Australasian Films, took Columbia's first talkie, *The Donovan Affair* (Capra, 1929), on the road, screening in country New South Wales.[300]

George Holland also toured *The Donovan Affair* employing a similar scheme to that of Hoyts, in which an arrangement would be made with local exhibitors for the use of their venue in return for a share in the profits or loss of the night's screening. He screened in rural Victoria before travelling through rural South Australia from March to May 1930, screening in at least twelve towns. As with his earlier tour with the Vivagraph, he began screening in the South East and finished on the Eyre Peninsula. On this occasion, however, he did not screen in the smaller remote halls. To reassure audiences after the poor reception of his Vivagraph tour, Holland guaranteed that he would refund all admission charges if his new show failed to "deliver the goods" as advertised.[301] Although there is no information as to what sound system Holland was using, it is likely to have been Australtone because of the earlier association with touring *The Donovan Affair*. In a full-page advertisement placed in *Everyones* he assured exhibitors:

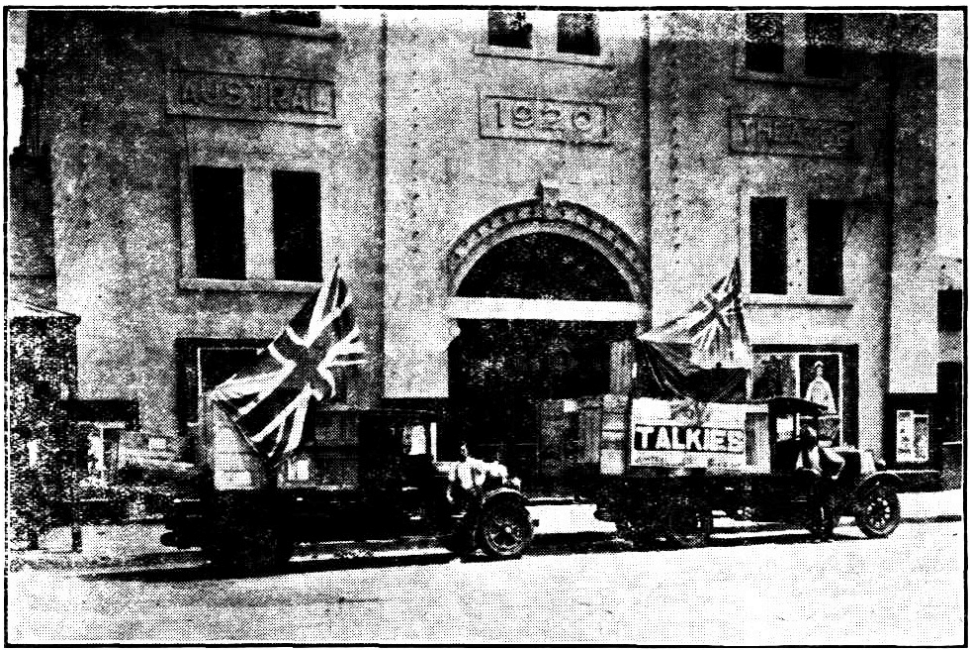
> Any equipment for sound reproduction must be O.K. before the exchanges will service it, consequently demonstrations were given to the distributors in three distinctly different halls (not theatres), and then satisfactory arrangements were made to service me.[302]

[298] Interview with Max Whittle, 1984. Feltex was a non-woven, woollen carpet underlay manufactured by compressing scrap pieces of wool.
[299] Anon., 'In South Australia', *Everyones*, 23 July 1930, p.33.
[300] Anon., 'Hoyts Start Country Talkie Tours. Four Units on Road', *Everyones*, 11 September 1929, p.7.
[301] Anon., 'Holland's Talkies', *The South Eastern Times*, 11 March 1930, p.2.
[302] Advertisement, *Everyones*, 30 October 1929, p.33.

What is significant about this tour is the excessive admission prices he charged in some towns. The variation in prices from one town to another was also a feature of the Hoyts' talkie tours – Stan Perry, general manager of Hoyts Productions, told *Everyones*, "admission prices will depend on local conditions".[303] In the Loxton and Renmark Institutes in the Riverland, Holland had a two-tier admission of 3s plus tax and 2s plus tax (children were admitted at half-price). To see *The Donovan Affair* eight months earlier at a deluxe evening session sitting in the front stalls of Adelaide's most salubrious picture house, Hoyt's Regent, would have cost 2s plus tax. Such a vast difference between city and rural hall admissions had not been charged since Wybert Reeve's first tour of 1897.

Fixed sound conversion began with purpose-built cinemas as these had considerable capital invested in them. The first purpose-built picture house to be wired for sound in rural South Australia, the Austral Theatre in Port Pirie, screened talkies for the first time on 4 November 1929. As with the Glenelg Strand, it preceded the wiring for sound of either the Clifford or Ozone chains. The Austral was the first picture house in the State to take advantage of the second wave of sound technology by installing Raycophone sound equipment. The proprietor at this time, M.W. Forrester (Pirie Theatres Ltd), had attended the first demonstration of the Raycophone at the Winter Garden Theatre in Rose Bay, Sydney, in June 1929. He was impressed with the performance of the machine and immediately placed an order for one to be installed in the Austral as well as a tentative order for five more at a cost of £1,750 each.[304] If Forrester could consider a £10,500 investment in six plants, it would appear that neither the Depression nor the expense of wiring for sound had yet affected Port Pirie Theatres' economic base. The total outlay of £10,500 was thirty percent of what he would have had to pay if he had chosen to purchase the Western Electric system.

[303] Anon., 'Hoyts Start Country Talkie Tours. Four Units on Road', *Everyones*, 11 September 1929, p.7.
[304] Anon., 'The Talkies: An Australian Success', *The Recorder*, 27 June 1929, p.4.



Photoraph 2.2: The talkies arrive at the Austral Theatre, Port Pirie (source: Laura Standard and Crystal Brook Courier, 1 November 1929, p.4.)

At first there was an issue with picture houses purchasing the Raycophone system as Paramount, Fox and Universal stipulated that their films had to be screened using the Western Electric system. By the time the Raycophone was installed in the Austral, however, the distributors had capitulated and lifted restrictions on that system.[305] The feature for the opening week was a Fox Movietone film, *In Old Arizona* (Cummings, 1928) but the first film thrown on the screen was "the Australian flag floating in the breeze" as the Austral's orchestra of ten played *The Song of Australia*. This would have appealed to the nationalist sentiment of that time as there was a push to make *The Song of Australia* the national anthem.[306] This was also an attempt to localise the screen, something that exhibitors worked to foreground wherever possible.[307]

The installation of the talkies in the first rural venue signified that they were now permanent and no longer seen as a passing fad. Port Pirie's newspaper proclaimed:

> The Talkies have come to Pirie to stay. The field for reproduction is almost without limit, and as the "silent" recede, so will greater perfection be approached by the sound film.[308]

The choice of *In Old Arizona*, which had screened at the Regent in the city six months earlier, as Port Pire's first talkie points to an initial shortage of talkies, resulting in a long lead-time from

[305] See Michael Walsh, 'The Years of Living Dangerously: Sound Comes to Australia', pp.76-77.
[306] The Australian Natives' Association had began campaigning for *The Song of Australia* to be the Australian National Anthem as early as 1929. Anon., 'Local and General: The Song of Australia', *The Bunyip*, 22 February 1929, p.6.
[307] Mike Walsh, 'From Hollywood to the Garden Suburb (and back to Hollywood)', p.168.
[308] Anon., 'The Talkies Arrive: An Auspicious Opening', *The Recorder*, 5 November 1929, p.1.

screenings in the CBD. Within a few weeks, however, films were taking no more than four weeks after the closing night in the city to travel to Port Pirie, and *Where East is East* (Browning, 1929) came directly from Wests.

The rush to wire a rural picture house for sound came at a cost. Forrester ordered the Raycophone at a time when it had only been installed and tested in one picture house - the Rose Bay Winter Garden. While the Raycophone later became a popular choice for sound equipment, the Austral's was plagued with problems, and this may have been why Forrester chose to install the Adelaide-made Shadowtone in his other Port Pirie picture house, the Alhambra, in April 1930. Two years after the Raycophone was installed in the Austral, the plant had to be overhauled and reconditioned.[309] Nevertheless, Raycophone was the most successful of the alternative sound systems made in Australia, and lasted well into the 1950s.[310]

The second rural venue to install talkies was the Enterprise Pictures Syndicate in Port Augusta in December 1929. The company, a local syndicate of investors leasing the town hall, had entered discussions with the Port Augusta council as early as April 1929. It wanted to install a Western Electric system in the town hall, but as its lease was due to expire in June 1930, it sought an extension to the lease by five years at the same rate of hire, using the new technology as a bargaining chip to consolidate its lease. Enterprise Pictures told a meeting of council "no company would consider wiring the hall for the Syndicate unless they could guarantee a longer tenure than eighteen months"[311]. This suggests the syndicate were considering a lease arrangement with Western Electric, but by October 1929, they had decided to install two Simplex projectors and an Australsound sound system at a cost of £1,500. The Australtone was a sound on disc system and was mainly installed in South Australia and Western Australia. By the end of 1930, South Australia had thirty Australtone disc-only systems and 24 dual-system projectors.[312] In June 1930, *Everyones* was reporting that almost without exception, exhibitors in rural South Australia were experiencing poor business despite the installation of sound; it mentioned that the Port Augusta show was experiencing a particularly bad run.[313]

[309] Anon., 'Talkie Plant', *The Recorder*, 7 March 1931, p.1.
[310] Brian Yecies, 'Talking Salvation for the Silent Majority', p.144.
[311] Anon., 'The Talkies for Port Augusta', *The Transcontinental*, 12 April 1929, p.1.
[312] Brian Yecies, *Op. Cit*., p.141.
[313] Anon., 'Gloomy Outlook for Country Shows in S.A.', *Everyones*, 25 June 1930, p.26.

Even though the competition of Adelaide- and interstate-made sound systems contributed to a reduction in the cost of installing talkies[314], there were a number of rural exhibitors who were not prepared to commit to conversion or who still could not afford sound equipment. Those exhibitors who had heavily invested in purpose-built picture houses had wired their houses for sound by 1931, but the community-owned picture shows were forced to decide whether to continue as an exhibitor or to lease their hall to an entrepreneur. The committee of the Kapunda Institute, in the mid-north of the State, which had begun operating as a community-owned picture show in March 1926, had taken £732 gross in its first full year of operation.[315] Revenue had declined after that and by 1930 the Great Depression had taken a severe toll on attendance. The Institute Committee announced that "the receipts from this source no longer warranted the Committee continuing to show moving pictures"[316] and screened for the last time as a community-owned picture house on 30 May 1931. The hall was leased to E. Nerlich who installed sound equipment and screened for the first time on 4 July 1931 as Kapunda Talkies. The committee of the Mannum Institute Pictures was similarly not prepared to invest in the installation of sound and leased the institute to a local syndicate headed by A.F.E. Axer, who installed sound equipment in June 1932.

Other community-owned picture shows remained as exhibitors by employing other initiatives. In 1931, the Angaston Institute's Cinema Board issued debentures to pay for the £700 needed to install sound equipment, with the guarantee that the participants would be the first to be repaid from profits of the venture.[317] The first sound film screened in Angaston Institute Talkies, on 27 June 1931, was *The Vagabond King* (Ludwig Berger, 1930), which was very popular with locals as Angaston-born O.P. Heggie was in the cast. Parochialism rated his acting on a par with that of the leading actor: "The acting of Dennis King is superb; perhaps only on a minor scale rivalled by that of O.P. Heggie in the role of the superstitious Louis XI."[318]

Some exhibitors continued to screen silent films until stocks started to diminish. In 1932, the Balaklava Institute Committee found it could no longer source silent prints from distributors and was faced with the decision of spending £500 on the installation of sound equipment or closing

[314] This was also due to Western Electric manufacturing a large percentage of its projectors in Australia.
[315] Anon., 'Kapunda Institute', *The Kapunda Herald*, 30 March 1928, p.3.
[316] Anon., 'Kapunda Institute', *The Kapunda Herald*, 18 March 1932, p.3.
[317] Anon., '*Vagabond King* First Talkie', *The Leader*, 25 June 1931, p.3.
[318] *Ibid*.

down the venture. [319] The committee agreed to install talkies subject to two conditions: "that the equipment should, if possible, be South Australian made, and that a fair proportion of British films be screened."[320] The first condition was met – a Shadowtone sound system was installed, but in the first three months only two British out of twelve main features were screened. Balaklava Institute Talkies opened on 20 May 1932 and continued screenings into the 1950s.

Although local competition had made less-expensive sound equipment available, the cost was still prohibitive to a hall which at the most would have fifty people in its audience. The breakthrough for the smaller halls in rural South Australia was the availability of portable outfits which itinerant exhibitors could take from hall to hall. As early as June 1930, Astor Sound Equipment was advertising the Astorex Portable Outfit, including a van, for £1,850[321], but by 1932 RCA had its portable talkie equipment on the market for £900. The South Australian projector manufacturer David Garvie developed a sound-on-disc synchronization system that he advertised was "at a price within reach of all exhibitors" (see Illustration 2.1). His later advertisements targeted country exhibitors.

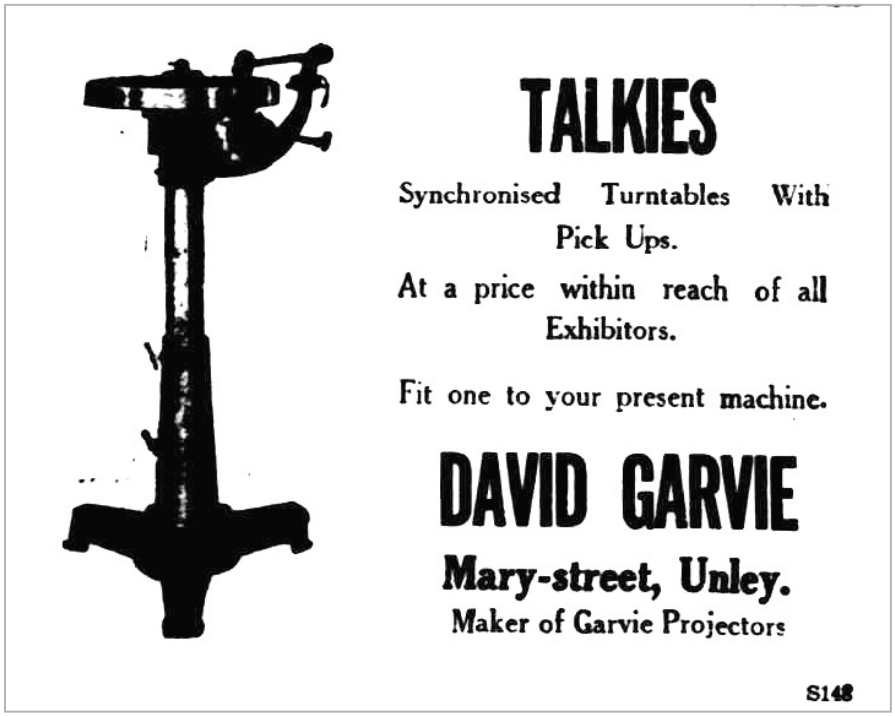


Illustration 2.1: Advertisement for Garvie synchronized turntables (*The Advertiser*, 28 May 1930, p.2.)

[319] As early as December 1930, Wallaroo Entertainments installed talkies as they were having difficulty obtaining silent pictures. Anon., 'Wallaroo Talkies Opened', *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times,* 24 December 1930, p.3.
[320] Anon., 'Balaklava Institute', *The Wooroora Producer*, 24 March 1932, p.6.
[321] Advertisement, *Everyones*, 25 June 1930, p.27

There were three itinerant exhibitors regularly touring large circuits in rural South Australia: Cleve Talkies and Paragon Talkies on the Eyre Peninsula, and Lester's Talkies mainly in the Mid-North but also touring the South-East and the Eyre Peninsula. Norm Stubings' Cleve Talkies began touring with talkies in November 1931 with a Shadowtone portable outfit. Lester's Talkies began touring in January 1932 with a Garvie silent projector converted to sound with a soundhead attachment that was manufactured in Adelaide by Cooper, Spencer and Clark and cost £50.[322] Information on this system is scarce, however, it was similar to the Vocaltone soundhead (see photo 2.3), developed and manufactured by a Victorian electrical engineer, George Glynne,[323] and priced at £350 to £500.[324]

Photograph 2.3: Vocaltone soundhead attachment (Photo: Ross King collection. Source: *CinemaRecord*, Issue 90, Edition 2, 2016, p.36.)

Coinciding with the Great Depression, it could be thought that the coming of sound could not have come at a worse time for exhibitors in rural South Australia. Conversion became a necessity to stay in business as the supply of silent films diminished. The prospect of paying £6,000 for a venue to screen talkies would have been seen as the death knell for country exhibition. , Competition from local manufacturers of sound systems reduced the cost to less than £1,000 by mid-1930, however, and the availability of £50 kits to convert silent projectors in 1932 meant that even the audiences of small halls in the remote parts of South Australia had access to the talkies in some form. This suggests that the introduction of sound may have not had a widespread impact on exhibition in rural South Australia. There was another factor that would have an impact, however: government regulations.

The Effects of Extending the Act

[322] Interview with Max Whittle, 1984.
[323] Based on Max Whittle's description and a description of the Vocaltone in Ross King, 'OK for Sound: The Vocaltone', in *CinemaRecord*, Issue 90, Edition 2, 2016, pp.36-37.
[324] Advertisement, *Everyones*, 19 February 1930, p.33.

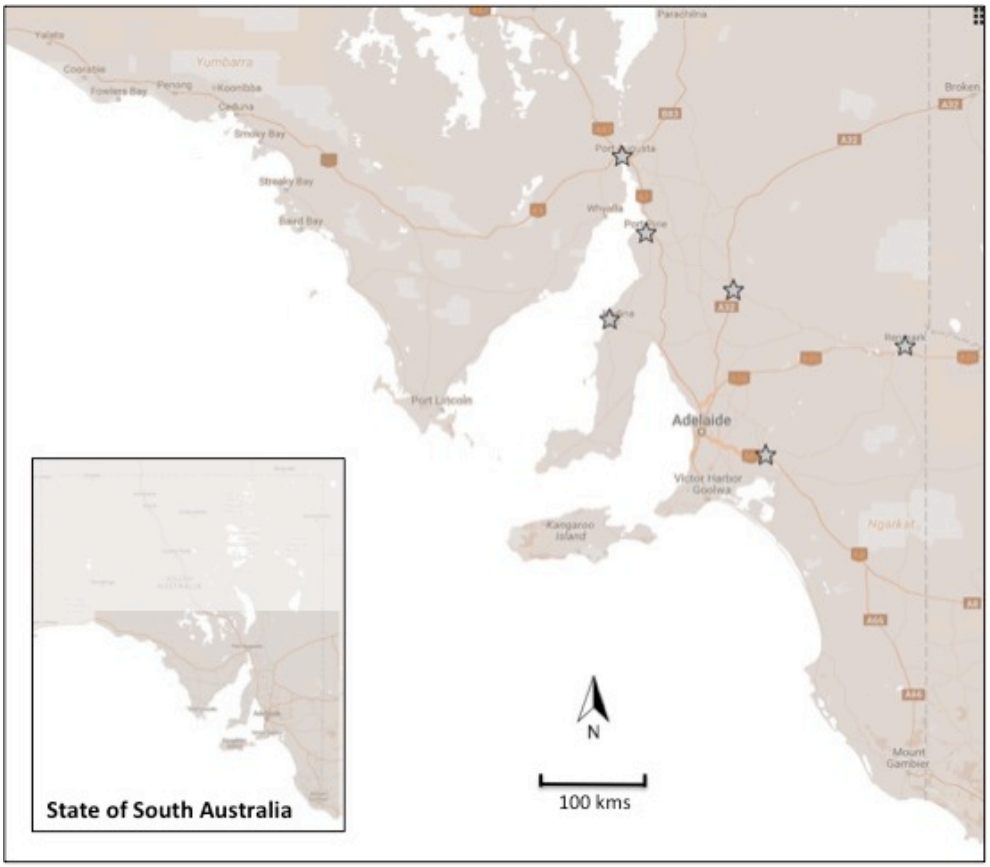
> The old Wolseley Institute building that had done duty since the beginning of the century and had seen the town and district develop remarkably, was doomed by the Places of Public Entertainment Act.
>
> *The Border Chronicle*, 1928[325]

Until 1922, the State Government had largely left to local government the decision as to whether the Places of Public Entertainment Act should be extended to their district or town. There had only been six towns to which the Act had been extended: Burra and Renmark (1915), Wallaroo (1917), Port Pirie and Port Augusta (1918) and Murray Bridge in (1919) (See Map 2.4 below). In August 1922, the Act was extended to 35 districts in a blitz. I have not been able to find any records in the Inspector's files or newspaper reports that can explain why this should happen at that time. The answer is found in a box of records of the Snowtown Institute that contains a transcript of a meeting between the Institute's secretary and the Chief Secretary, the Minister responsible for the Act. The Chief Secretary explained:

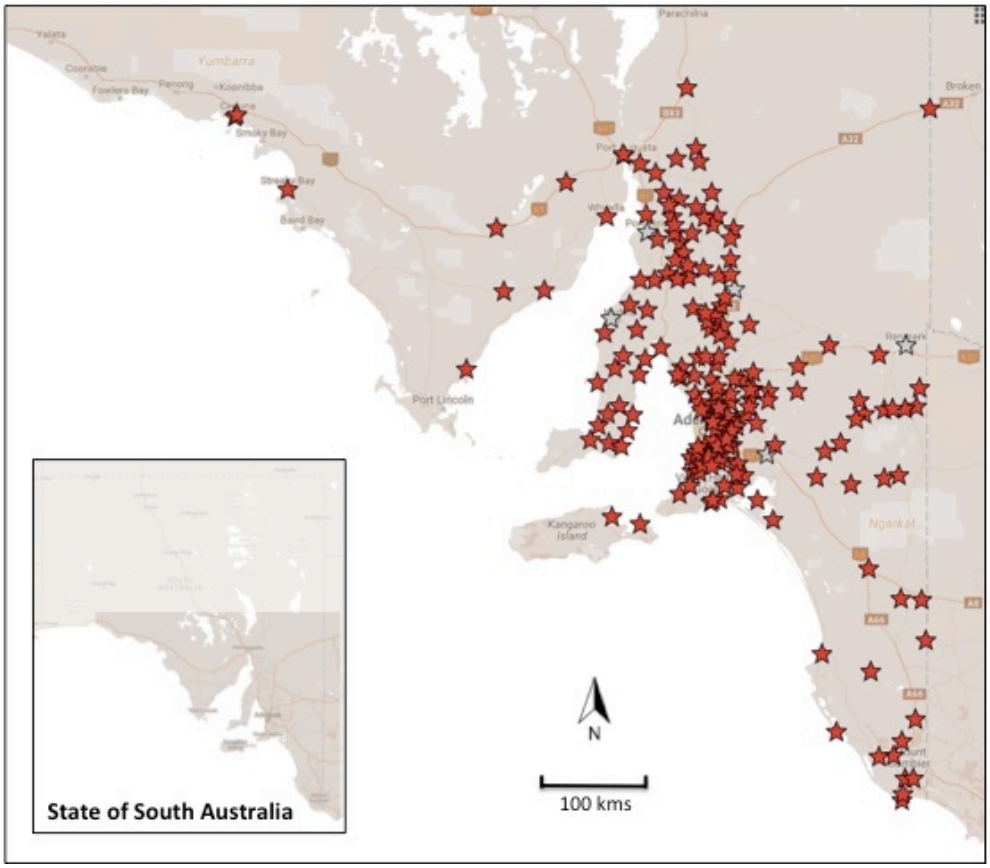
> The position was that Pictures shown in the City were being censored, while those in the Country had not been. The result was undesirable films were being screened in the Country. … The public had to be protected and the only way to do it was to extend the provisions of the Act to Country towns.[326]

The Chief Secretary's reasons are perplexing as rural exhibitors were sourcing their films from Adelaide exchanges and they had already been screened in the CBD and suburbs. Whatever its logic, the argument carried sufficient political weight to generate government action. Cinema's increasing importance as a social institution still meant advancing social control. By the close of the 1920s, the Act had been extended to a further 198 towns (see Map 2.5 below).

[325] Anon., 'Wolseley New Institute', *The Border Chronicle*, 8 June 1928, p.3.
[326] SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12, Record of interview with D.T. Cronin, Secretary of the Snowtown Institute, with Hon. J.G. Bice, MLC, Chief Secretary, dated 15 September 1922.



Map 2.4: Extension of the Places of Public Entertainment Act from 1915 to 1919



Map 2.5: Extension of Places of Public Entertainment Act from 1922 to 1929

The effects of extending the Act to these districts were generally felt by Institute committees, which had limited financial resources to undertake the necessary alterations to comply with the regulations. The challenges faced by Institute committees is encapsulated in this newspaper report on the Auburn Institute Committee:

> Owing to this district having been proclaimed a district under the Places of Public Entertainment Act, the institute committee has had an anxious time of late. Doors have had to be altered, exit lamps provided, and a cinema box erected. The cinema box has been placed outside the building, and holes knocked through. The screen has to be placed at the front end of the building.[327]

The Institutes' Association of South Australia responded to these challenges by inaugurating a debenture system to raise money for projection equipment and alterations to halls to comply with the legislation. The Association's involvement seems to have been limited to advice only, based on a report to its 1922 annual meeting that it had "advised several institutes with regard to the issue of debentures".[328] In 1924, the Association appointed an honorary architect to deal with the many enquiries it had received from institutes about structural alterations or the erection of a new institute building to meet the requirements of the Places of Public Entertainment Act.[329]

One of the first Institute committees to use the debenture system to raise funds for a new hall was Pinnaroo, a small town 260 kilometres east of Adelaide. In 1922, the committee thought "the present Institute building is not in keeping with the progress and stability of the town and district" and that a new institute building would provide "a splendid advertisement of the growth and prosperity of the district." The amount needed was £6,000, of which the State Bank was willing to advance £2,000. The Institute Committee would raise the remaining £4,000 through a debenture scheme offering five percent per annum and redeemable in five years. The State Government Treasury Bills at this time offered five percent per annum,[330] but would have been a more secure investment. The Institute Committee had to appeal to community spirit claiming the "debenture holder will have the satisfaction of knowing that he or she has helped materially to assist the growth of our town and district."[331]

[327] Anon., 'Country News: Auburn', *The Register*, 7 September 1926, p.2.
[328] Anon., 'Institutes', *The Daily Herald*, 15 September 1922, p.6.
[329] Anon., 'Institutes' Association: The Annual Conference', *The Chronicle*, 20 September 1924, p.73.
[330] Anon., 'Easing in Loan Rates', *The Observer*, 20 May 1922, p.28.
[331] Anon., 'Pinaroo's Proposed New Institute', *The Pinaroo and Border Times*, 5 May 1922, p.3.

The building of a new hall is an extreme example of complying with the regulations, but all towns to which the Act had been extended in the 1920s were faced with spending money on their halls. In some towns this was done at a minimal cost. For example, the Hahndorf Institute spent just under £12 on materials for a biobox, as one of the Institute's committee members erected it free of charge. He also erected the engine and electric generator house free of charge.[332] Another approach was to recoup some of the cost from the travelling exhibitor who used the hall for screenings. To offset the cost of building a biobox to comply with the regulations, the Bordertown Institute Committee decided the exhibitor, A.W. Murray, should make a ten percent contribution.[333]

Regardless of the imposing costs of complying with the regulations, there is a sense that the institutes acquiesced. The alternative, of the town losing its focal point for entertainment, was not desirable. Because film exhibition was a growing industry in the first half of the 1920s, hall committees still expected to recoup their losses. What is surprising is the lack of protest when the Act was extended to 202 towns in the years 1928 to1932, given that the South Australian economy was in a depressed state two years before the general downturn in the Australian economy in 1929.[334] A search of TROVE's digital newspapers has failed to find any reports on exhibitors or hall committees affected by the Act's extension to those 202 towns.

In mid-1933, the State Government embarked on another campaign, this time to ensure that the last frontier of unregulated exhibition, the small isolated towns of the Eyre Peninsula, complied with the Places of Public Entertainment Act. This campaign best illustrates the impact of regulatory, economic and technological challenges testing exhibitors' capacity to survive. The Eyre Peninsula is one of South Australia's largest regions, 70,000 square kilometres in area. While it is only 200 kilometres from Adelaide as the crow flies, it was regarded as isolated. Port Lincoln, the peninsula's main town, was 650 kilometres from Adelaide by a tapestry of roads in various conditions. Shipping was the peninsula's main connection to Adelaide and this was the means by which booked films were transported to and from the Peninsula.

Of the five-tiered structure of exhibition operating in rural South Australia, four of the models co-existed in the same space at the same time on the Eyre Peninsula. In Port Lincoln, the Peninsula's main town and port, there was the Flinders Picture Theatre, the only purpose-built picture house

[332] Anon., 'Ambleside Institute', *The Mount Barker Courier*, 5 March 1923, p.3.
[333] Anon., 'Bordertown Institute', *The Border Chronicle*, 21 December 1923, p.4.
[334] Ray Broomhill, *Unemployed Workers: A Social History of the Great Depression in Adelaide*, p.3.

on the peninsula. It was owned and operated, by Rebecca McGregor, the editor of a local newspaper. Also screening in Port Lincoln was a local lessee exhibitor, Len Hawkes, who screened twice weekly at the Memorial Hall. He also had regular picture shows at Tumby Bay, Kimba, Cleve and Cowell. On the northwest coast of the Peninsula, another local lessee exhibitor, West Coast Pictures, screened in the Streaky Bay Institute Hall and a community-owned picture show screened in the Ceduna Memorial Hall. There were also itinerant exhibitors: Len Hawkes toured his Paragon Pictures and Norm Stubing toured his Cleve Pictures in a variety of halls scattered across the peninsula. (The Hawkes and Stubing circuits are discussed in more detail in a case study at Chapter 5.) There were two other itinerant exhibitors that occasionally toured the peninsula as a part of a much broader tour of the State – Lester's Perfect Pictures and Holland Pictures, the latter being operated by George Holland who by now was Melbourne-based.

The ostensible reason for extending the Act to rural areas in the 1920s was because the Chief Secretary was under the misapprehension that "undesirable films were being screened in the Country".[335] All films screened on the Eyre Peninsula had, however, been previously screened in Adelaide and any "undesirable films" would have already been subjected to the South Australian censors. If it was not about censorship, what were the Chief Secretary's reasons for wanting to further extend the Act in 1933? Part of the answer is contained in a minute from the Inspector to the Chief Secretary later in the campaign:

> Before the question of extending the Act to other places be considered, I would recommend that the owners of all the Halls on Eyre's Peninsula, be requested not to let buildings for cinema picture shows, dancing, or other entertainment *on Sundays* [my emphasis], also Picture Show Proprietors, and if it is found that no notice is taken, a proclamation should be gazetted bringing the whole of the area under the provisions of the Act.[336]

The issue of Sabbatical observance discussed in the previous chapter had been resurrected. There was also a concern about public safety that similarly dated back to the early days of exhibition. The Inspector wrote to the hall committees on the Eyre Peninsula expressing concern at the practice of itinerant exhibitors placing the projectors on the floor inside the hall. He pointed out that the practice not only contravened the Regulations, but also nullified insurance policies should the building be destroyed by fire. His letters concluded that the letting of the halls for talkie pictures shows must be discontinued.

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[335] SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12, Record of interview with D.T. Cronin, Secretary of the Snowtown Institute, with Hon. J.G. Bice, MLC, Chief Secretary, dated 15 September 1922.
[336] SRSA, GRG67/33/164/1933, Minute from Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment to Chief Secretary, dated 2 November 1933.

The Inspector's threat drew various responses from the hall committees. The committee of Denial Bay Hall advised the Inspector that besides not having the funds to build a bio-box on the outside of the building, there would be little return for their investment as the picture show was held only every three weeks and would be lucky to have more than thirty people attend.[337] The committee of Mount Hope Hall held picture shows every two months and had audiences of less than 50. They suggested that instead of having a bio-box they could get the itinerant exhibitor to set up the projector outside the building and screen into the auditorium through the front door, an innovation rejected outright by the Inspector.[338] In July 1933, the Secretary of the Yeelanna Hall Trust wrote to the Inspector explaining that they were not aware they were breaking the law, and that given the hall was let out only occasionally to itinerant exhibitors, they had to consider whether it was worth the expense of erecting a bio-box. They assured the Inspector that they would cancel picture shows until their next annual meeting when the issue could be discussed.[339] Out of all the towns on the Cleve Pictures' tour, Yeelanna seems to be the only one that discontinued its picture show. It was not until a new hall was built in 1937 that Stubing began screening in the town again.[340]

One hall committee challenged the Inspector's concerns, saying that according to their itinerant exhibitor, "it is impossible to cause a fire from their machines, as there is 2 feet of film exposed, and if this ignited it could not burn through a fire trap each end."[341] This extraordinary challenge to the Inspector's authority on these matters suggests that the practical knowledge of the itinerant exhibitor on the ground was, perhaps not surprisingly, regarded more highly than that of a bureaucrat sitting in an office 650 kilometres away. The threat to close down the halls on his circuit was enough for Norm Stubing to travel to Adelaide to meet with the Inspector. There is no record as to what was discussed at the meeting, although the Inspector's files held at the State Records are reasonably complete. It might have suited the Inspector for the discussion not to be on record, as one thing discussed at the meeting might have been be regarded as a breach of probity: a public servant promoting a private scheme. It is evident from follow-up letters to the hall committees that during the discussions Stubing put forward an offer to build bio-boxes

[337] SRSA, GRG67/33/108/1933, Letter from Denial Bay Hall to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, undated (circa 1933).
[338] SRSA, GRG67/33/112/1933, Letter from Mount Hope Hall to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, undated (circa 1933).
[339] SRSA, GRG67/33/120/1933, Letter from the Secretary of Yeelanna Hall to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, dated 19 July 1933.
[340] Yeelana Book Committee, *From a Sea of Mallee: An Illustrated History of Yeelanna and District*, p.139.
[341] SRSA, GRG67/33/113/1933, Police Report, Elliston Police Station, dated 21 August 1933.

for halls to comply with the legislation. To those hall committees that wrote to the Inspector explaining that they could not afford to erect a bio-box, the Inspector responded:

> Mr Stubing the Proprietor of the Cleve Picture Show called on me recently, and stated that in the event of the Hall Committee not erecting the Cinema Room, he could be prepared to construct this room, provided of course your Committee were agreeable … he has been furnished with full particulars, and will confer with you in the matter.[342]

This became a standard paragraph in the Inspector's letter and indicates that regulators and exhibitors worked cooperatively at times. It is evident that a number of halls on the Eyre Peninsula took up Norm Stubing's offer, since in January 1934, Cleve Talkies advertised screenings at a number of halls to which the Inspector had written. The offer was the only alternative for cash-strapped hall committees but how viable was it for Stubing? The cost of building a bio-box was around £40.[343] Given that some of the screenings attracted audiences as small as twenty and that these screenings were held only every three or four weeks, it would have taken Stubing over two years to recoup his costs. Such an offer may have been attached to exclusive arrangements for screening in those halls, but it is unlikely that Stubing entered into any long-term contracts for the hire of the halls as his competitor, Paragon Talkies, also screened in them from 1934 onwards. Stubing's offer may also have been a tactic to shift the responsibility away from him, as there is no evidence that it was followed through. Writing to the Inspector in October 1933, the secretary of the Mudamuckla hall committee points out that "we have now made an offer to Mr Stubing but up to date have not received a reply".[344]

Stubing's persistence in screening films in those halls that had been warned indicates that he knew he was not contravening the Act. The Inspector had no legal basis for placing demands on the many small halls on the Eyre Peninsula as the Act had only been extended to ten major towns in that area by 1933. A number of representations had been made to the Chief Secretary with a view to extending the Act to the rest of the peninsula. From the letters on file, this appears to be an orchestrated campaign with petitions arriving within days of each other from various groups, such as the Cleve Progress Association, and individuals of whom at least two were at pains to point out, "we are staunch supporters of the Liberal Party, we stand for sound principles and good government". As a result of the campaign only four towns were brought under the Act: Mudamuckla, Lock, Karkoo and Warramboo. The other towns remained on the

[342] SRSA, GRG67/33/115/1933, Letter from Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment to the Secretary of Calca Public Hall, dated 10 August 1933.
[343] Anon., 'Yorketown Talkies', *The Pioneer*, 8 January 1932, p.3.
[344] SRSA GRG67/33/100/1933, Letter from Honorary Secretary of Mudamuckla Hall to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, dated 19 October 1933.

itinerant exhibitors' circuit. It is likely that the itinerant exhibitors ceased screening on a Sunday and the hall committees complied with the Inspector's request to install bio-boxes. The Inspector's reluctance to seek an extension of the Act may have been due to the difficulties of policing it: the police constables who were gazetted as authorised inspectors were required, or felt compelled, to write extensive police reports for the most trivial breaches of the regulations.

Conclusion

The period from 1928 to 1933 was one of uncertainty and anxiety for rural exhibition in South Australia. Despite the odds, the industry survived the challenges it faced, on account of the adaptability and flexibility of the exhibition models within the distinct five-tier structure. Economically, the purpose-built picture houses were most at risk of closing because of the high investment in their bricks and mortar. They were not, however, affected by the Inspector's campaign to extend the regulations as they were in areas that had been subject to the Act since 1922. The high cost of wiring for sound was overcome with the second wave of sound technology and its associated reduction in price, as technological innovation adapted itself to the different levels of exhibition. The major threat to the continuation of exhibition businesses came from the Depression. Because of the high level of capital invested in the purpose-built picture houses, exhibitors had to adapt to the challenge through such measures as reducing screenings and admission prices. The fact that all twelve purpose-built picture shows were still in operation in 1933 indicates that keeping the picture show going at a leaner profit margin, and even going into the red at times, was a better alternative than closing and having no return at all on their real estate investment. Despite claims of community engagement by the exhibitors, their *raison d'être* was to make money. The other four exhibition models operated out of publicly-owned venues and while profit was a motive, there was also a social consideration.

It is difficult to ascertain if the Depression and the advent of talkies affected the community-owned picture shows. The life of this model of exhibition was always tenuous, because it relied heavily on volunteers to reduce overheads and community spirit for support. The Depression and talkies caused Institute committees to reassess their situation. Where a community-based picture show was making a loss or barely making a profit, handing over the picture show to local syndicates or exhibitors guaranteed the Institute income from hall hire fees. Handing over exhibition rights to an absentee exhibitor guaranteed a monthly income and a weekly picture show. Those communities that continued to operate their own picture shows were able to do so

by adapting debenture schemes, in effect, extending their capital through local debt. The itinerant exhibitors were flexible and worked in a less rigid framework, screening in remote towns and varying prices to those patrons who fell short of the admission price. The availability of inexpensive portable sound equipment enabled them to transition to sound. The absentee exhibitor thrived on the opportunity to offer an alternative model to those institutes and memorial hall committees that would otherwise have failed. The rural picture show most clearly demonstrated its resilience in responding to the extension of the regulations to rural areas. Although the campaign to bring the remote towns under the requirements of Places of Public Entertainment Act and Regulations caused a deal of anxiety to hall committees, only a small number of halls ceased to hire their hall to itinerant exhibitors.

By 1933, the South Australian economy was slowly recovering. Unemployment had peaked in 1932, and began declining at a slow rate. While a few exhibitors ceased operating in the period from 1928 to 1933, cinema exhibition in rural South Australia had proven resilient and survived economic recession, technological change and government control. There were two significant factors that underpinned the survival of rural exhibition in the period 1928 to 1933. Firstly, there were those "Australian sound companies, freelance inventors, backyard tinkerers, businessmen and manufacturers"[345] who challenged the dominant American influence on sound technology and provided inexpensive systems affordable to even the smallest model of exhibition. Sound, which had begun as an imposition from Hollywood, was adapted to suit the needs of a diverse range of local situations. Secondly, over ninety percent of rural venues in South Australia were publicly-owned and multi-functional. Exhibitors using those venues did not have capital invested in bricks and mortar. Not having to capital investment to consider, they could be more flexible in adjusting to trying economic circumstances.

[345] Brian Yecies, 'Talking Salvation for the Silent Majority', p.153.

3. Circulation of Films 1933-35

In 1933, the Australian economy had begun recovering from the Great Depression. Nationally, 32,000 unemployed workers had re-entered the workforce in the second half of 1932.[346] In South Australia, the unemployment rate had fallen by 4.1 percent to 29.9 percent, returning to a single digit unemployment rate by 1937. There had been an increase of £871,728 ($81 million at 2015 prices) in deposits at the South Australian State Savings Bank in the 1932-33 financial year compared to £3.5 million ($326.5 million at 2015 prices) worth of deposits withdrawn in the three previous years.[347] There was also an upward trend in building approvals for 1933. For the rural economy there were additional signs of improvement, with wool prices at the Adelaide sales in November 1933 returning to pre-depression levels.[348] It was felt by many that the trough of the Depression had been passed, producing cautious confidence. The film exhibition industry in rural South Australia had survived and for exhibitors, 1933 could be anticipated with more hope and confidence than its immediate precursor. Having survived the economic, technological and regulatory challenges outlined in the previous chapter, the film exhibition industry operating in rural South Australia in 1933 remained largely unchanged[349] until the advent of television in rural areas in the 1960s. This chapter will examine the variations in film distribution and exhibition that occurred in rural South Australia in the period 1933-35. It will trace the ways films moved through each region and map the distribution of films by six regions to determine if there is a pattern from which a model can be developed to measure variations in the popularity of films in rural communities, and attempt to answer questions about the ways that distribution and exhibition relations affect the flow of films through the State. It will also address questions about patron preferences and whether these preferences are based on national origin of production.

South Australian Screening Venues 1933-35

In answering the questions posed in this chapter, film exhibition in South Australia has been divided into three geographic areas: Adelaide CBD, Adelaide suburbs and rural. This follows the geographic breakdown used by *Film Weekly* in its annual motion picture directories from 1936 to 1971. Table 3.1 below gives a breakdown of the strength of the exhibition industry in the State

[346] Anon., 'Youth's Legacy', *The Advertiser*, 19 January 1933, p.8.
[347] Anon., 'The People's Bank', *The Advertiser*, 8 September 1933, p.24.
[348] Anon., 'A Pastoral Christmas Gift', *The Advertiser*, 21 November 1933, p.14.
[349] Petrol rationing during the Second World War had some effect on the itinerant exhibitor model.

during this period. While the Adelaide CBD figures are accurate, the Adelaide suburbs and rural figures are understated as a result of a lack of screening data for all venues in these areas. A first impression would suggest the Adelaide CBD was well-serviced with a cinema seat for every two people, but the CBD picture houses drew their audiences from those living in the suburbs, and a more accurate figure would be one picture house seat for every six people.

	Adelaide CBD	Adelaide Suburbs	Rural SA
Screening venues	11	28	176
Seats	17,757	32,613	54,527
Population	31,390	281,368	256,303
Persons per seat	1.8	8.6	4.7
Persons per screening venue	2,854	10,049	1,456

Table 3.1: Screening Venues in South Australia, 1933-35 (Source: Various – See Appendix 2)

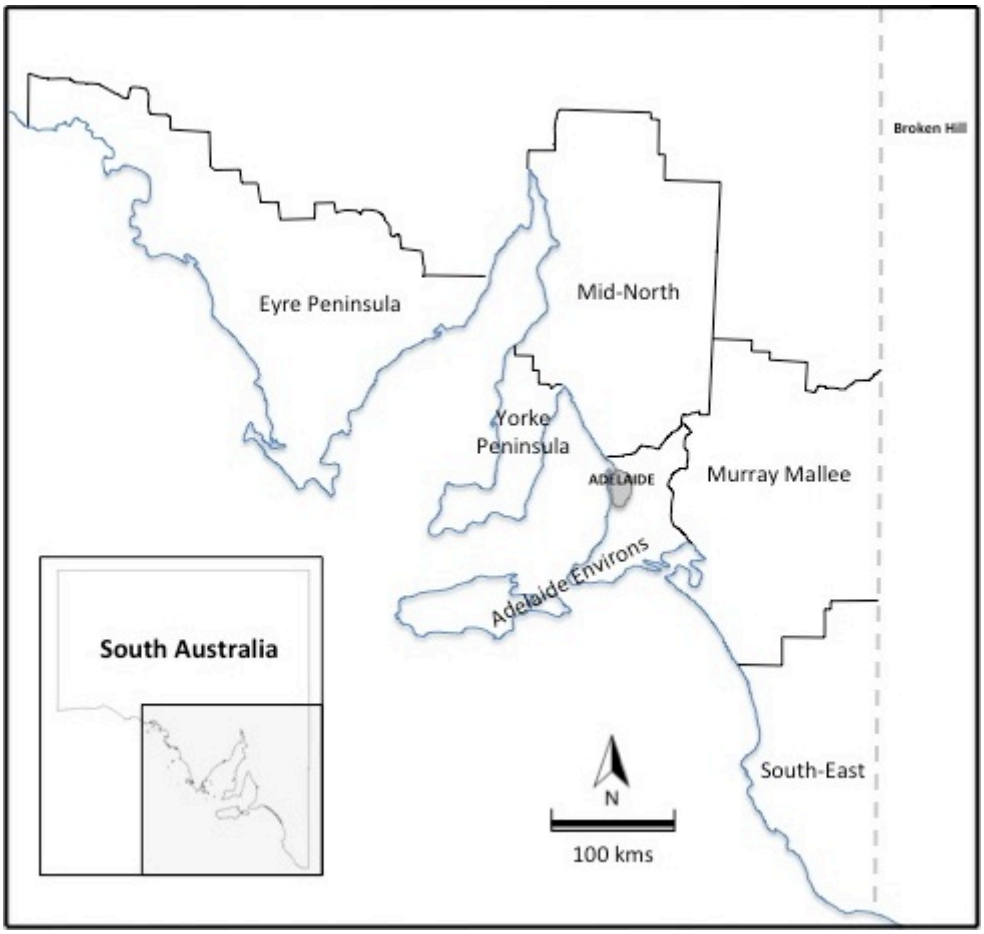
With very few exceptions, films premiered in South Australia at one of the CBD first-run picture houses. Before moving to a CBD second-run picture house or exhibition at suburban picture houses, films would often have one or two screenings during the protective period at a select rural venue.[350] These venues would either be owned by one of the two major suburban chains, Ozone or Star, or be located within a 100 kilometre radius of the Adelaide CBD: not too far to quickly move the prints back to the suburbs but far enough so as not to compete with the suburban release.

During 1933-35, eleven picture houses operated in the Adelaide CBD, all within close proximity to each other mainly along Adelaide's shopping belt of Rundle and Hindley streets. A cinemagoer could take a 750 metre walk from Wests to the Rex and pass five picture houses on the way. On a typical night in the early 1930s, cinema patrons had a choice of twelve first-release films (six main features and supports) screening in the Adelaide CBD. Once these films had finished their run and protective period, there were at least 28 suburban cinemas in which they could be screened.[351] Films would generally be screened first at the Star and Ozone chains before moving through independent picture houses and screenings in suburban halls. They

[350] First-run exhibitors demanded protective periods, sometimes known as clearance windows, before films could be screened at suburban picture houses. Distributors would rent the films out to select rural exhibitors during the protective period.
[351] This study is limited to those suburban cinemas that advertised in the local press.

would be released to rural venues while still travelling the Star and Ozone suburban chains or not long after.

The third geographical area is the one central to this thesis – rural South Australia. For the purpose of this study, I have divided the area outside of urban Adelaide into six regions (as shown in map 3.1 below), following the divisions used by the Local Government Association (LGA) of South Australia but slightly modified to take into account LGA boundaries at the time of the 1933 census.



Map 3.1: Six Regions of Rural South Australia (Broken Hill is included in the Mid-North Region).

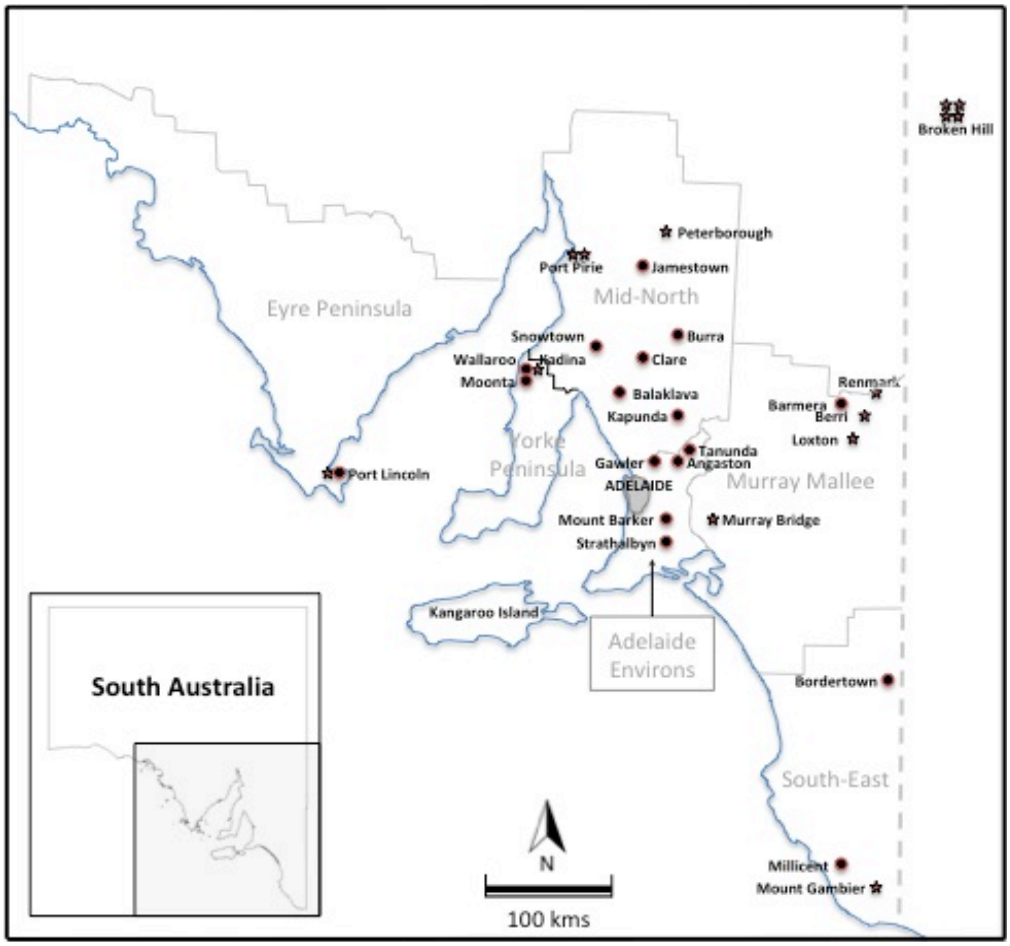
The number of venues and seating capacity in each region is shown below in Table 3.2.

	Adelaide Environs	Mid-North	Yorke Peninsula	Eyre Peninsula	Murray Mallee	South East	Total
Screening venues	34	45	15	53	18	11	176
Seats	11,160	15,382	7,038	10,160	6,685	4,402	54,827
Population	63,530	78,813	22,836	20,815	44,797	25,512	256,303
Persons per seat	5.7	5.1	3.2	2.0	6.7	5.8	4.7
Persons per screening venue	1,868	1,751	1,522	393	2,489	2,319	1,456

Table 3.2: Screening venues by region in rural South Australia (Source: Various).

Complete screening details for each of the 176 venues are not available. To identify the level of activity of each distributor and exhibitor, and to test if the popularity of films in rural South Australia can be measured by the exhibitor's confidence in them attracting a large audience, I have built a dataset, SARURAL.DB, to identify as many screenings as possible that took place in the study period, 1 July 1933 to 30 June 1935.[352] There are 32 venues for which there is a complete set of screening data. These venues provide a statistically significant and representative sample as they represented a total seating capacity of 25,240 (46 percent of total rural SA seating capacity) and include fourteen purpose-built pictures houses (of which four were in Broken Hill) with at least one in each rural region.[353] As the data has been collected from those cinemas that advertised in the press, we can assume that these cinemas filled their seats on a more regular basis than smaller cinemas that operated only sporadically. Hence, the data would cover well over 46 percent of rural screenings and admissions. Map 3.2 below shows the spread of the 32 venues.

[352] The data was collated mainly from amusement advertisements in rural newspapers accessed through the National Library of Australia's TROVE website and the State Library of South Australia. In addition, some screenings were taken from the official records where exhibitors had applied for permits to screen on Good Friday and Christmas Day.
[353] The only purpose-built picture house that is not included is the Victor Theatre in Victor Harbor which rarely advertised screenings in the local newspaper.



Map 3.2: Location of 32 selected rural venues (stars indicate purpose-built picture houses).

As illustrated by the map, they range from close proximity to urban Adelaide to the remote Eyre Peninsula. However, distance did not necessarily determine how films moved around the State. Table 3.3 below shows the average time it had taken for films to reach rural regions and venues after they had completed the CBD run. It is reasonable to assume that cinemagoers in the Adelaide Environs would on average wait the shortest period of time for main features after their CBD run. The table confirms this, but it also shows that within the region there are two venues, Acme Pictures at Mount Barker and Strathalbyn, that on average screened films later than two venues on the Eyre Peninsula.

	Weeks after CBD run
Adelaide Environs	**12.2**
Tanunda Talkies	4.3
Strand Theatre, Gawler	8.7
Angaston Talkies	11.0
Acme Pictures, Mt Barker	17.8
Acme, Strathalbyn	19.0
Mid-North	**15.6**
Ozone, Port Pirie	4.8
Kapunda Institute	8.0
Austral, Port Pirie	10.3
Hillside, Broken Hill	10.6
Lenard's, Broken Hill	10.8
Metropole, Broken Hill	11.1
Johnson's, Broken Hill	11.2
Clare Talkies	16.1
Capitol, Peterborough	21.3
Jamestown	21.7
Snowtown Institute	23.6
Burra Talkies	24.4
Balaklava Institute Talkies	29.3
Yorke Peninsula	**17.1**
Ideal, Kadina	10.4
Wallaroo Talkies	17.6
National Moonta	23.2
Eyre Peninsula	**16.9**
Memorial Hall Pictures, Port Lincoln	16.1
Flinders Theatre, Port Lincoln	17.7
South East	**23.0**
Capitol, Mount Gambier	8.5
Lyric Talkies, Bordertown	25.3
Austral Pictures, Naracoorte	28.8
Globe Talkies, Millicent Institute	29.4
Murray Mallee	**23.3**
Lyric Theatre, Murray Bridge	18.5
Arcadia, Renmark	21.9
Bonney Theatre, Barmera	23.2
Rivoli Theatre, Berri	25.0
Corona, Loxton	27.8

Table 3.3: Average length of time in weeks for films to reach rural regions and venues after the CBD run.[354]

This anomaly suggests that a venue's geographical location did not necessarily determine its position in the distribution chain and that the distribution of films in rural South Australia was not a straightforward progression radiating from urban Adelaide to the most distant venues. There was a complexity of layers with films being screened at the larger rural venues during the protective period or directly following the conclusion of the CBD screenings. On a few occasions films premiered in the State at a rural venue or were screened concurrently with the CBD run.

[354] Based on main features that completed the CBD run in 1934 and the 32 rural venues that screened weekly and advertised their programme in the local newspaper.

On one occasion, a film was screened in the CBD and the smallest of rural towns but never screened on the major suburban circuits. A study of the hierarchy of distribution reveals that the movement of film around the State was largely dependent on the relationship between distributor and exhibitor, the competition between cinemas within a town, and the status and programming policy of a cinema.

Hierarchy of Distribution

There were 203 main feature films released through the Adelaide CBD picture houses in 1934, of which 198 were screened in rural South Australia. The supply of films was geared to the needs of the more densely populated capital cities, but virtually everything got some kind of exposure in the rural areas, where greater distances and lower population densities made the circulation of films a more problematic proposition. If space was a problem for distributors, time needed to be used intensively. Prints had to be kept working on as many nights as possible. On some occasions there were two prints in circulation with one being screened at a rural venue the same night it was being screened at a suburban venue. Excluding those films screened during the protective period, forty-one percent of these releases began circulating through rural areas within one week of the end of the CBD run and fifty-four percent within two weeks. Very rarely did a film finish its suburban run before being screened at a rural venue for the first time.

There were three venues that had the majority of the screenings during the protective period and first of the rural run screenings: the Port Pirie Ozone, Gawler Strand and Tanunda Talkies[355]. See Table 3.4 below. The Gawler Strand and Tanunda Talkies would on occasion screen the same print on the same night by switching films at intermission. There was a connection between these three venues that explains their position at the top of the hierarchy. Ewan Waterman was a director of Ozone Theatres Ltd., South Australian Theatres Ltd., and Times Theatres Ltd., (which controlled the Gawler Strand and Tanunda Talkies from July 1934).

	Port Pirie Ozone	Gawler Strand	Tanunda Talkies	Gawler& Tanunda Switch
Premiere		1		1
Protective Period	10	6	6	10
Concurrent with CBD		1		
Beginning of rural run	37	12	6	10

Table 3.4: Top three rural venues first to screen 1934 releases (main features).

[355] There is a possibility that the Ozone's Victor Theatre, for which there is no data, was also used to screen films during the protective period.

The dominance of and the interrelationship of these three venues is apparent from an analysis of the films that premiered in South Australia at the Theatre Royal. In August 1934, South Australian Theatres Ltd. had taken over the lease of the Theatre Royal in Adelaide's CBD and began operating it as an MGM first-release house. Unlike other CBD first-release houses, the Royal did not have a move-over, second-release house. Its sister venue, the Chinese Gardens, which opened in November 1934, was an open-air picture house that screened films concurrent with the Theatre Royal (weather permitting) and only screened during the warmer weather. The same print was bicycled the one-kilometre distance between cinemas. The main features premiered at the Royal would premiere in rural areas at Gawler, Tanunda or Port Pirie. These in effect were South Australian Theatres' move-over, second-release houses. As an example, *The Dancing Lady* began a three-week season at the Theatre Royal on 11 August 1934, and then went directly to Tanunda and Gawler to be screened on the same Saturday night.[356] As MGM distributed only one print in South Australia, any two screenings on the same night was done as a switch. The following Saturday, it opened at the Port Pirie Ozone (for three nights) and then commenced the Ozone's suburban circuit screening at all of its picture houses over a period of three weeks, 15 September to 5 October 1934. It was not until the 6 October, five weeks after the film completed the CBD run, that the Ozone's competitor, Clifford Theatres' Star circuit, was able to screen *The Dancing Lady* at its suburban and rural venues, opening at its rural picture house, the Mount Gambier Capitol on 10 October. Similarly, where films premiered in the suburbs on the Star circuit, they would premiere at Clifford's Mount Gambier Capitol or Kadina Ideal. This demonstrates the power of the two major suburban chains in determining how a new release would move around rural areas.

There were exceptions to this pattern and one of the most unusual was at Renmark's purpose-built picture house, the Arcadia. On five occasions in 1934, the Arcadia held State premieres of new releases, the most notable being *A Ticket in Tatts* (Thring, 1934). The theatre's proprietor, Mil Symonds, publicised the film as coming direct from a record season in Melbourne and Mildura.[357] Symonds ran a circuit across the State border screening in Mildura, Ouyen and Merbein in Victoria. (Distribution circuits were not rigidly based on State borders, as evidenced by Broken Hill's inclusion in the South Australian circuit.[358]) Symonds would have rented the film from Universal's Melbourne-based exchange rather than the one in Adelaide. This would explain

[356] Tanunda and Gawler are 30kms apart.
[357] Anon., 'Australia's Foremost Comedy Film', *The Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record*, 1 March 1934, p.10.
[358] Nulty's Pictures that screened in Pinnaroo was another circuit that traversed State borders. Jim Nulty was based in Ouyen, Victoria, and he screened in twelve towns in the Mallee region of Victoria.

why he was able to screen films before they were premiered in Adelaide. Three weeks later, *A Ticket in Tatts* opened at the Regent in Adelaide. The other four films that premiered in Renmark in 1934 were screened from three to eight weeks before the Regent and were from different distributors (Fox, Warner-FN and United Artists). These premieres were anomalous in that the average time it took for a main feature to be screened at the Arcadia after it had finished its CBD run in 1934 was 22 weeks, which was higher than the 17.6 weeks average it took films to reach the 32 select rural venues and 14.9 weeks for those that were purpose-built picture houses. I have not been able to find any evidence of the Regent expressing concern at this arrangement and can only assume that an 868-seat picture house, screening twice a week, in a town 260kms from Adelaide was not seen as competition.

Another noticeable pattern occurred when an exhibitor screened in more than one venue. As discussed in the previous chapter, Herb Lester had an interest in the Capitol Theatre with his brother Tom Rees. He also screened weekly at the Jamestown, Burra and Crystral Brook Institutes in addition to touring the smaller halls of the Mid-North region. In most cases, Lester would book a film and screen at all three regular venues consecutively and on occasions would tour the print straight afterward. For example, *Tess of the Storm Country* (Santell, 1932) screened at the Peterborough Capital on Saturday, 30 September 1933, the following Saturday at the Burra Institute, Jamestown the following Saturday and then was taken on tour for one week commencing Saturday, 7 October, screening in five Mid-North towns. It was then screened at Lester's weekly show at Crystal Brook on 4 November 1933. The Daniel brothers who operated weekly shows at Strathalbyn and Mount Barker would also screen a film in one venue and in the following week at the other.

Distribution in South Australia

The exhibition industry in South Australia was significant enough for the major distributors to establish film exchanges in Adelaide. The role of these exchanges was to develop and maintain relationships with exhibitors to promote their product and increase their market share. Despite their significant role, there are few sources to inform the researcher on how the distributors conducted their business in rural areas.[359] The trade journal, *Everyones*, had a weekly column which reported on the activities of the distributors' Adelaide-based representatives and South

[359] Mike Walsh discusses the relationship between distributors and a suburban exhibitor in 'From Hollywood to the Garden Suburb (and Back to Hollywood): Exhibition and Distribution in Australia', in *Exploration in New Cinema History*, pp.159-170.

Australian rural exhibitors. Although this column was not detailed and read more like a gossip column than a business report, it does give a sense of the relationships that distributors had with exhibitors when selling booking contracts in a large state with very few large rural towns and only a few rural venues screening more than once a week. South Australia was remote at two levels: it was remote from the eastern seaboard (Adelaide was 700kms from the nearest capital, Melbourne, and twice that distance from Sydney), and many of the rural towns were remote from Adelaide. It is evident that different distributors had different links with different regions and rural exhibitors. The column often reported on which of the smaller rural exhibitors were seen in Adelaide visiting the distributors' exchange. This suggests that those exhibitors who booked films at a flat rate rather than on a percentage basis were more likely to visit the exchanges in Adelaide whereas exhibitors with large venues or in more lucrative regions received regular visits from the exchanges' representatives. Broken Hill, with four venues owned by the same exhibitor, and the river towns, Renmark, Berri and Barmera, with three purpose-built picture houses in close proximity, were the most frequented by the nine distributors operating in the State. Of the twenty distributors' South Australian rural tours written up in the 1934 editions of *Everyones*, only one, British Empire Films, was specifically in the South-East. The absence of other distributors could be explained by the fact that the only venue in the South-East screening more than once a week was the Clifford's Capitol Theatre in Mount Gambier, for which the contracts would have been arranged through Clifford's head office in Adelaide.

How effective were these distributor tours to rural areas? Reg Perry, the SA representative for Universal, made three trips to rural areas in June-July 1934. Included in the towns he visited were seven for which there is complete screening data for the period of this research. The data shows that he managed to increase the bookings in Berri from six in the 1933-34 financial year to nine in the 1934-35 financial year and from none to one in Angaston. In Mount Barker, Tanunda, Loxton and Barmera the very few bookings for Universal films decreased, and they remained the same in Renmark. These show little overall improvement in Universal's bookings and indicate that Perry's visits had little effect beyond maintaining the status quo.

Dominance in the market did not necessarily reflect popularity, however. Universal represented ten percent of the fifty most screened films discussed later in the chapter, with only 7.4 percent of overall market share. Paramount had 15.9 percent of the market share but only four percent of the fifty most screened films. Table 3.5 lists each distributor's share of main features

circulating around rural South Australia from July 1933 to June 1935. Five distributors had a combined share of 72 percent of the market compared to the other five's 26 percent share.

Distributor	No.	%
Fox (including 23 Gaumont-British and 10 Gainsborough)	171	18.3
Paramount	148	15.9
Warner-First National	130	14.0
RKO-Radio	117	12.6
MGM	103	11.0
GAF (including 35 Columbia and 19 BDF)	72	7.7
Universal	69	7.4
BEF	53	5.7
United Artists	37	4.0
British Dominions	16	1.7
UTF	6	0.6
Other	10	1.1

Table 3.5: Number of main features screened by distributor.

Paramount's market share was boosted by "Paramount Week", an active campaign which the company had been running every year since 1920. It was a worldwide campaign in which Paramount would flood the market with what they claimed were special feature films.[360] The success of this saturation marketing is evidenced by 22 of the 32 venues participating in Paramount Week in 1933 and 24 in 1934. Nevertheless, only one Paramount film, *The Torch Singer*, was in the fifty most screened films. The average age of the films screened in rural South Australia as a part of Paramount Week in 1934 was 74 weeks (since their release in the U.S.), which is at odds with a newspaper article heralding the event by claiming that "it acts as the curtain raiser for the new-season pictures."[361] Paramount Week is an example of aggressive marketing. Staff were encouraged to be in fierce competition with each other and were subjected to pledges of support during campaigns.[362] Exhibitors benefitted from free advertising by having the name of their venue included in large newspaper advertisements placed in the city newspapers. Newspaper proprietors benefitted from exhibitors expanding their display advertisements to include advertising copy that they were participating in Paramount Week. Paramount also offered an annual Silver Shield with prize money to the exhibitor making the best publicity material during Paramount Week.[363] Despite the saturation publicity there were some exhibitors who booked Paramount films only for Paramount Week.

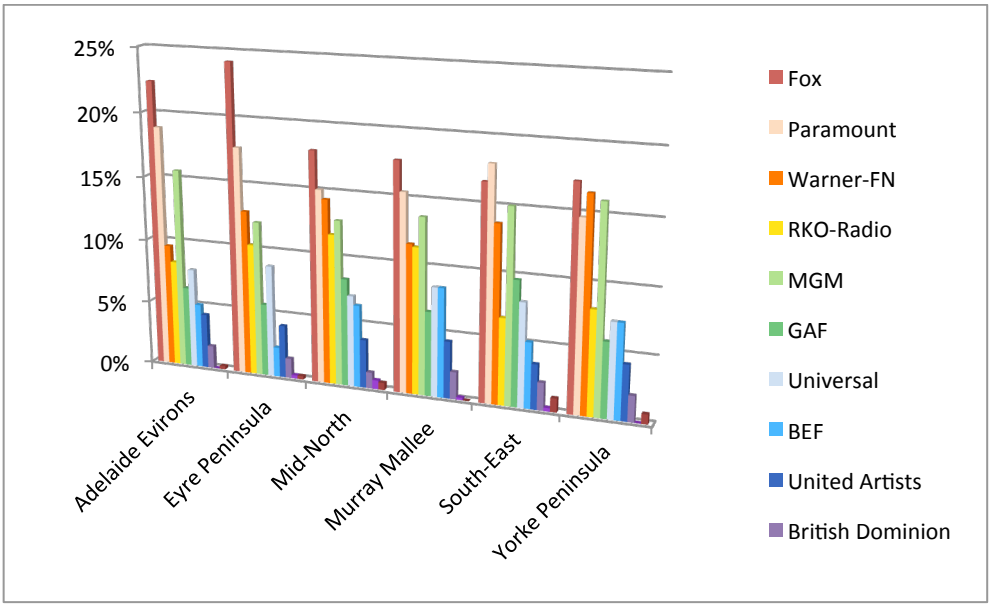
[360] Anon., 'Celebrating Paramount Week', *The Sunday Times*, 11 July 1937, p.21.
[361] Anon., 'Paramount Week', *The Advertiser*, 1 September 1934, p.21.
[362] Diane Collins, *Hollywood Down Under*, p.148.
[363] Anon., 'Paramount Offering $500 Silver Shield to Australian Exhibitors for Exploitation', *Exhibitors Trade Review*, 10 October 1925, p.28.

Rather than acting as a unified force, Hollywood distributors clearly pursued different business strategies. Fox dominated the purpose-built picture houses and town, memorial and institute halls whereas Universal and BEF supplied most of the films to the itinerant exhibitors. Table 3.6 below shows the distributors' market share sub-divided by exhibition model as identified in Chapter 2. Warner-FN's and United Artists' market share with the itinerant exhibitors was insignificant and reflects those distributors' focus on exhibition models that paid a percentage of takings and preferably screened more than once a week. It did not suit some distributors to have prints tied up for long periods on small returns, whereas this was of less concern to smaller distributors like Universal and BEF.

	Purpose-Built Pictures Houses		Town, Memorial & Institute Halls		Itinerant Exhibitors		Rural SA *(from Table 3 above)*
Fox	448	20.5%	724	21.3%	164	17.6%	18.3%
Paramount	300	13.7%	475	14.0%	81	8.7%	15.9%
MGM	355	16.2%	381	11.2%	61	6.6%	11.0%
Universal	189	8.6%	305	9.0%	260	28.0%	7.4%
Warner-FN	249	11.4%	470	13.9%	9	1.0%	14.0%
GAF	189	8.6%	353	10.4%	104	11.2%	7.7%
BEF	142	6.5%	267	7.9%	199	21.4%	5.7%
RKO-Radio	220	10.1%	301	8.9%	38	4.1%	12.6%
United Artists	89	4.1%	97	2.9%	0	0.0%	4.0%
Other	6	0.3%	20	0.6%	14	1.5%	3.4%
	2187		3393		930		

Table 3.6: Distributors by Exhibition Models

Graph 3.1 below shows that Fox dominated the rural market in all regions with the exception of the South-East where Paramount had the largest market share.



Graph 3.1: Distributors' market share by region.

While Fox and Paramount were the dominant suppliers with one third of the rural market between them, it was Fox that supplied the more popular films if popularity can be measured by the number of exhibitors on the rural circuit booking a film.[364]

Contractual Arrangements

The contractual arrangements between distributor and exhibitor are difficult to ascertain in the absence of commercial records and distribution contracts. Mike Walsh was fortunate to discover the minute books of the Colonel Light Gardens Theatre, archived in the Greater Union Collection at the State Library. Walsh's analysis of the minute books provides an insight into the contractual arrangements and relationships that an Adelaide suburban exhibitor in the 1930s had with distributors.[365] He calls into question the generalisations that distributors of the Hollywood product had the upper hand in negotiations with exhibitors appearing as victims. He argues that negotiations were more complex and that distributors on occasions conceded to the exhibitors' demands. This appears also to be the case with rural exhibitors.

In the absence of any commercial records that would give an insight into the rural exhibitor's dealings with distributors, assumptions can be made by analysing the booking preferences of the 32 venues for which there is a complete set of screening data for the 1933-35 fiscal years. Table 3.7 details the distributors of the main features screened at these venues.

[364] Fox's domination of Eyre Peninsula is statistically unreliable as it is based on only two venues, which were located in Port Lincoln: Flinders Theatre and Memorial Hall Pictures.
[365] M. Walsh, 'From Hollywood to the Garden Suburb (and Back to Hollywood)' in *Explorations in New Cinema History*, pp.159-170.

Region	Screening Venue	Fox	MGM	Paramount	Warner-FN	RKO	Universal	GAF	BEF	UA	BDF	Other
Adelaide Environs	Acme Pictures, Mt Barker	38%	4%	3%	18%	5%	18%	7%	7%	1%	0%	0%
	Acme, Strathalbyn	35%	5%	3%	14%	11%	13%	9%	8%	2%	0%	0%
	Angaston Talkies	8%	5%	52%	2%	6%	1%	13%	4%	4%	5%	1%
	Strand Theatre, Gawler	30%	22%	8%	8%	7%	5%	9%	3%	8%	1%	1%
	Tanunda Talkies	37%	34%	1%	5%	3%	5%	4%	2%	9%	0%	0%
Eyre Peninsula	Flinders Theatre, Port Lincoln	39%	21%	1%	0%	16%	9%	5%	0%	6%	2%	0%
	Memorial Hall, Port Lincoln	0%	0%	59%	37%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Mid-North	Austral, Port Pirie	16%	4%	35%	4%	9%	18%	8%	6%	1%	0%	1%
	Balaklava Institute Talkies	21%	6%	17%	18%	15%	2%	16%	0%	3%	1%	0%
	Burra Institute	27%	3%	11%	13%	8%	7%	14%	16%	0%	0%	1%
	Capitol, Peterborough	27%	3%	11%	12%	15%	6%	12%	12%	2%	0%	0%
	Clare Talkies	38%	6%	4%	0%	14%	5%	7%	13%	9%	2%	1%
	Hillside, Broken Hill	22%	17%	12%	18%	9%	9%	5%	6%	1%	0%	1%
	Jamestown	21%	3%	8%	20%	8%	8%	13%	16%	1%	0%	2%
	Johnson's, Broken Hill	19%	18%	12%	20%	12%	7%	7%	4%	1%	1%	0%
	Kapunda Institute	39%	3%	8%	3%	12%	18%	5%	8%	5%	0%	0%
	Lenard's, Broken Hill	22%	18%	13%	16%	11%	7%	5%	6%	1%	1%	0%
	Metropole, Broken Hill	19%	16%	12%	20%	11%	7%	7%	5%	2%	1%	0%
	Ozone, Port Pirie	19%	22%	6%	17%	11%	1%	9%	5%	6%	2%	0%
	Snowtown Institute	12%	14%	18%	13%	6%	14%	11%	9%	0%	2%	2%
Murray Mallee	Arcadia, Renmark	23%	19%	21%	13%	6%	9%	0%	5%	5%	0%	0%
	Bonney Theatre, Barmera	13%	11%	20%	12%	10%	10%	8%	11%	3%	2%	0%
	Corona, Loxton	13%	16%	11%	14%	3%	11%	12%	15%	1%	5%	0%
	Lyric Theatre, Murray Bridge	0%	16%	6%	22%	12%	12%	11%	9%	11%	2%	1%
	Rivoli Theatre, Berri	21%	12%	20%	0%	14%	10%	6%	10%	4%	3%	0%
South-East	Austral Pictures, Naracoorte	23%	17%	14%	16%	0%	14%	12%	1%	0%	4%	0%
	Capitol, Mount Gambier	20%	18%	17%	10%	7%	7%	9%	6%	5%	3%	1%
	Globe Talkies, Millicent	13%	21%	9%	22%	4%	10%	9%	9%	1%	2%	1%
	Lyric Talkies, Bordertown	5%	12%	30%	11%	15%	6%	15%	1%	3%	0%	3%
Yorke Peninsula	Ideal, Kadina	24%	19%	16%	6%	5%	11%	6%	6%	4%	2%	0%
	National Moonta	13%	21%	15%	12%	12%	9%	5%	8%	1%	1%	2%
	Wallaroo Talkies	11%	5%	5%	40%	10%	1%	8%	6%	11%	3%	0%

Table 3.7: Percentage of main features booked with distributors – 1 July 1933 to 30 June 1935.[366]

Eighteen of the 32 venues mainly dealt with Fox, six with Paramount, five with Warner-FN and three with MGM. Noticeable in Table 3.7 is the booking arrangements of two exhibitors in one town, Flinders Theatre and Memorial Hall Pictures in Port Lincoln. Thirty-nine percent of the main features screened at the Flinders Theatre were sourced from Fox and 21 percent from MGM. None of Memorial Hall Pictures' main features came from these distributors. Conversely, 59 percent of Memorial Hall Pictures' main features are sourced from Paramount and 37 percent from Warner-FN. The Flinders Theatre screened two Paramounts and none from Warner-FN. This suggests that both exhibitors were able to negotiate an exclusivity clause whereby their main suppliers would not provide films to the exhibitor's competition. The trade-off for an exclusivity clause would possibly have been the exhibitors had entered into a block booking with

[366] Included in Fox are Gaumont-British and Gainsborough and GAF includes Columbia and BDF up until when BDF opened their own exchange in Adelaide.

the distributor. This is where an exhibitor booked films in a block rather than on an individual basis in order to secure star attractions. In some cases, exhibitors' expectations of a quality film were not met or were committed to films that had not yet been produced. This may explain why some of the other venues in close proximity have a large percentage of films from a distributor and their competition has an extremely low percentage. The distance between competitors would have to be a consideration for a distributor to concede to such an exclusivity clause. Table 3.8 lists those venues whose bookings of Fox main features were in the high thirty percent.

Venue		Nearest Venue		Distance between venues
Acme, Mt. Barker	38%	Lyric, Murray Bridge	0%	49km
Acme, Strathalbyn	35%	Lyric, Murray Bridge	0%	45km
Clare Talkies	38%	Blyth Institute Talkies	0%	15km
Kapunda Institute	39%	Angaston Talkies	8%	30km
Tanunda Talkies	37%	Angaston Talkies	8%	10km

Table 3.8: Percentage of main features sourced from Fox.

The Mt. Barker and Strathalbyn Acmes were 20km apart but controlled by the same exhibitor, Daniel Brothers and were not in competition with each other. The nearest rural venue to both Strathalbyn and Mount Barker that was comparable in capacity to the Acmes was the Lyric Theatre at Murray Bridge, 45km and 49km away respectively. These distances would seem too great to impact on attendances at the Acmes, however, the Lyric Theatre did not screen any Fox films as main features in the study period. The towns between Murray Bridge and Strathalbyn/Mount Barker were not of a size to cause the exhibitors to compete for their attendance. Yet both the Mount Barker Acme and the Murray Bridge Lyric advertised their programmes in the same newspaper, The *Mount Barker Courier*, suggesting there might have been competition between them. In which case, the Daniel Brothers would have negotiated an exclusivity clause with Fox.

Clare Talkies' closest competitor was Blyth Talkies, which did not screen any Fox films as a main feature.[367] The distance between Tanunda Talkies (37 percent Fox main features) and Angaston Talkies (six percent) was 10km. As seen in Table 3.7 other exhibitors might have been engaged in negotiating exclusivity clauses with distributors. Thirty-five percent of the main features at the Port Pirie Austral were booked through Paramount which only provided six percent of the Port Pirie Ozone's main features. On the Yorke Peninsula, Wallaroo Talkies sourced forty percent of

[367] Blyth Talkies is not included in the select 32 venues as there is not a complete set of data for the study period. However, there are details of 53 screenings on SARURAL.DB, which is a sufficient sample for the purpose of determining if Clare Talkies had an exclusivity clause in their contract with Fox.

its main features from Warner-FN which provided only six percent of the main features at the Ideal at Kadina, 9km away. These exclusivity clauses would have been negotiated on an exhibitor-to-exhibitor basis demonstrating that exhibitors did hold bargaining chips in their dealings with distributors.

Audience preferences

> Films that allow members of an audience to make a connection with their own social environment, whether depicting life as it is or as they wish it could be, are the most popular and allow for greater emotional identification.
>
> Emilie Altenloh, 1914[368]

Academic research into cinema audiences is not a recent phenomenon. As early as 1913, Emilie Altenloh wrote a doctoral thesis, *ZurSoziologie des Kino* (A Sociology of Cinema), which studied the habits of cinemagoers in Mannheim, Germany. Published in 1914, her research was based on statistics provided by four exhibitors for four months in 1912-13 and underpinned by 2,400 responses to a survey conducted in the town. While only one of the eleven questions in the survey touched on film popularity in asking about genre preferences, Altenloh's thesis provided an early picture of how society responded to early cinema. In 1936, Simon Rowson's *A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934* was published in the Royal Statistical Society's Journal.[369] He was able to access printers' returns to the British Excise Department which related to 650 million tickets supplied to exhibitors in 1934. Unfortunately, such resources are ephemeral and rarely archived, making the task of measuring film popularity decades later problematic. For the researcher, the absence of box office takings leaves little to assess how well films might have done as they traversed the circuit.

In the American context, the trade press was conscious of the importance of rural exhibition and the differences in rural and urban reception. Columns such as "What the Picture Did for Me" in the US trade journal, *Motion Picture Herald*, provided non-metropolitan exhibitors with a forum in which to discuss the particular challenges they faced and to lobby for the production of films suited to their audiences.[370] Historians who are seeking to write on rural exhibition in America have a resource with which to write. In Australia, and particularly in South Australia, there is by

[368] Emilie Altenloh, 'A Sociology of the Cinema: the Audience', p.259.
[369] S. Rowson, 'A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934', in *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (1936), pp. 67-129.
[370] Kathryn Fuller-Seeley discusses some of the contributions to the *Motion Picture Herald*'s column and their value in understanding varied local and regional reception of films in rural America. Kathryn H. Fuller Seeley, 'What the Pictures Did for Me', in *Hollywood in the Neighborhood*, pp. 186-207.

contrast only fragmented evidence to inform research. Some small pockets of information can be gleaned from the occasional media stories that looked back on the year.

Tools for measuring broad box office takings and economic models predicting how well films will be received were not available to exhibitors in the 1930s. While the weekly trade magazine, *Everyones*, provided some guidance, it is likely that the exhibition industry was based on intuition where block booking and blind bookings were not involved. The longer a film had been on the exhibition circuit, the more intelligence there was on which to base a judgement. But the exhibitors' haste to secure bookings for the most up-to-date films ahead of their competitor did not give enough time to assess how South Australian rural audiences might receive a film. Many rural exhibitors would have booked a film through block booking contracts or blind bookings before it had finished the suburban circuit and, in some cases, before it had finished its CBD run. For the few rural exhibitors who screened six nights per week, poor judgment could mean a barren auditorium multiplied by six – a much more significant loss than that faced by an exhibitor with empty hall for only one night. Those with the greatest insight into how well a film might be received were the itinerant exhibitors who had the benefit of observing the success of a film in the CBD and suburbs before making a booking.

At the close of 1934, *Everyones* published a list what it thought was the ten best films released in Australia in that year.[371] The magazine's selection was not based on box-office performance but "on the merit of each production from the standards of acting, appeal and general artistry."[372] , Critical acclaim does not necessarily equate with audience appeal, however. As Robert Ray has argued, there has been "an enormous discrepancy … between the most commercially successful movies and those that have ultimately been seen as significant."[373] To gain a sense of perspective, *Everyones* listed the films that grossed the highest total of rentals for each distributor in 1934. Only three of the films in *Everyones*' top ten, *Little Women*, *Paddy the Next Best Thing* and *The Masquerader* were on the distributors' list.

To get an exhibitor's perspective, the magazine checked an unidentified rural exhibitor's box office takings to determine the top three drawcards for comparison. *The Squatter's Daughter* and *The Kid from Spain* grossed the most but as these were 1933 releases, neither appeared on *Everyones* nor the distributors' list. *Paddy the Next Best Thing*, which was the rural exhibitor's

[371] The selection was limited to films that the magazine reviewed between 13 December 1933 and 5 December 1934.
[372] Anonymous, 'Everyones Chooses Ten Best Pictures Screened This Year', *Everyones*, 12 December 1934, p.32.
[373] Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, pp.140-141, cited in Kate Bowles and Richard Maltby, 'What's New about New Cinema History?' p.10.

third highest box office receipt, appeared on both lists. The exhibitor commented on the distributors' highest grossing films without being aware of what the list represented.

Distributors' Highest Grossing Films for 1934	Rural Exhibitor's Comments
Yes, Mr Brown (BDF)	Not screened.
Silence of Dean Maitland (British Empire Films)	Business one-third below *The Squatter's Daughter.*
Paddy the Next Best Thing (Fox)	Excellent.
I Was a Spy (Gaumont-British)	I had to play another special with this in order to pull through.
It Happened One Night (Greater Australasian – Columbia)	Fair.
Riptide (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)	Very disappointing. Country doesn't want this type of picture.
I'm No Angel (Paramount)	Business decreased every performance.
Little Women (RKO-Radio)	Fair.
The Masquerader (United Artists)	Just Payable.
Only Yesterday (Universal)	Fair.
Gold Diggers of 1933 (Warner-First National)	Not screened.

Table 3.9: Rural exhibitor's comments on highest grossing rentals for distributors in 1934. (Source: *Everyones*, 12 December 1934, p.32.)

These are comments by a single anonymous exhibitor and may not necessarily reflect how other rural exhibitors and audiences received the films. *Everyones* was a Sydney-based trade magazine and while it does not identify the rural exhibitor, other than one operating in "one of the most important inland cities," it can be assumed it is one who is based in an eastern State, most likely New South Wales. *Everyones'* rural exhibitor found *Riptide* disappointing and claimed that rural audiences do not want this type of picture, yet it was one of the fifty most screened films in rural South Australia (see Table 3.10 below), although it was not even screened by any of the itinerant exhibitors. This suggests that not only might there be a difference in rural audience reception from state to state, but also from region to region within the State.

There were never any trade magazine polls conducted in South Australia to determine audience reception, nor any involving distributors. During the study period, both *The Advertiser* and *The News* reported on public polls to determine film popularity. *The Advertiser*'s poll was conducted on behalf of the Rex in the Adelaide CBD, and was limited to films that had finished their run some time ago. It was more a promotional campaign to get a sense of what would be good to rerun than any genuine desire to find out what audiences wanted to see. It went as far as limiting the choice to eight British films, claiming that "the selected films include not only all the Record Breakers, but the productions most often asked for."[374] Each of the films had been screened over a year before at the Majestic Theatre. The problem with these types of promotions is that much is made of poor responses, which indeed is exactly what this survey

[374] Advertisement, *The Advertiser*, 18 December 1934, p.2.

received. Topping the list was *Sunshine Susie* with 281 votes followed by 230 votes for *Tell Me Tonight*. Given that *Tell Me Tonight* had run for twelve weeks at the Majestic, this was a very small number of votes.

The other poll did not appear to be in the interest of any particular cinema, but was rather a newspaper promotion for *The News*, offering its readers prize money of £2 and 2s and £1 and 1s. Readers were asked to make a selection of ten films from all those screened in Adelaide during the previous twelve months. Included in the most popular ten films chosen were *Tell Me Tonight*, *The Sign of the Cross*, *The Squatter's Daughter*, *Paddy the Next Best Thing* and *Cavalcade*, films that were also exceptionally well-received by rural audiences. *The News* drew the inference that the outstanding quality of these films was their wholesomeness:

> There were no unsavoury bedroom scenes, no promiscuity of the sexes, few women in scanty attire, and no dialogue which could be given a double meaning. Adelaide people like their entertainment bill of fare to be clean.[375]

A problem with both of these newspaper surveys is that they were limited in scope; their methods were questionable in clearly pushing agendas for British cinema or "wholesome films" in contrast to the core content of Hollywood films, for which exhibitors had been castigated for years. Even if they had been credible, the results would reflect only urban Adelaide cinemagoers' taste in films. In reference to *The News* poll, Ewan Waterman, the Secretary of the South Australian Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association (SAMPEA), commented:

> This should give some idea of the city and suburban section of the State's taste in entertainment. The "News" being an evening paper does not record the opinion of country districts.[376]

Waterman had interests in both urban and rural exhibition through his family's Ozone chain and was conscious of rural reception as being distinctive and worthy of comment. Unfortunately for the cinema historian, rural newspapers never sought or reported on the opinion of rural cinemagoers. They would often report on screenings, but these reports often drew heavily on distributors' press sheets. Readers typically got publicity material rather than reviews of films.

The only accurate way to determine the popularity of films in rural South Australia would be through screening attendance returns which, for amusement tax purposes, had to be submitted to the government on a regular basis. Unfortunately, once these were collated there was no

[375] Anon., 'Ten Best Films', *The News*, 26 March 1934, p.1.
[376] Waterman, E., 'The S.A. Suburbs Speak: How Adelaide Shows Fought Through the Depression', *Everyones*, 12 December 1934, p. 45.

reason to retain the original copies. Copies of returns can occasionally be found in the archived records of rural institutes, but I have only been able to find one set for the 1930s in the records of the Snowtown Institute, which was located in the mid-north of the State. In the following chapter, I will undertake a microstudy of the popularity of films at Snowtown based on takings. The lack of such a resource for other rural venues does not allow us to make the assumption that the success or failure of films screened at Snowtown was typical of all South Australian rural venues. Therefore, other indicators need to be employed.

In the absence of reliable data, a methodology for identifying the popularity of films has been developed by the economic historian, John Sedgwick.[377] Sedgwick has built datasets based on exhibition records for various cities and regional centres, including one for screenings in Sydney and its suburbs in the mid-1930s.[378] By means of his POPSTAT formula, Sedgwick can calculate a relative measure of a film's popularity over a specified period of time.[379] He assumes that exhibitors act as informed, rational agents and/or that they make decisions that contribute to popularity. Applied to rural exhibitors, this suggests that a film screened widely is an indication that the film was popular with rural audiences. Given that the POPSTAT index relies on harvesting screening data from newspapers and takes into consideration admission prices, its methodology becomes problematic when applied to rural areas. With the exception of the 32 venues that advertised regularly in the period under investigation, most rural venues would either advertise sporadically or not at all. Very few exhibitors advertised admission prices other than to entice potential patrons with mention of "popular prices." To address the lack of information on screenings, I have focused on the 32 select rural venues in my dataset to produce a list of the fifty most screened films. The POPSTAT index for Sydney and suburbs in 1934[380] will be used to compare rankings of relative popularity later in this chapter.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of the data. The popularity of a film can be determined by the number of venues where it was screened and the length of time it remained on the rural circuit. Once determined, an analysis of the top fifty most screened films for the period can indicate any audience preference in regards to country of origin. It can also

[377] John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures*
[378] John Sedgwick, Michael Pokorny and Peter Miskell, 'Hollywood in the world market – evidence from Australia in the mid-1930s', *Business History*, 56:5, 689-723.
[379] The POPSTAT formula is explained in detail in J. Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*, pp.70-73.
[380] J.Sedgwick, 'Patterns in First-Run and Suburban Filmgoing in mid-1930s', in *Explorations in New Cinema History*, pp. 140-158.

determine if there are any differences in how urban and rural audiences received the films by comparing the top ten most screened films with Sedgwick's POPSTAT rankings.

The following table lists the fifty most screened films at the 32 select rural venues.

	Film Title	Venues	Screening Days	Distributor	Nationality	Sydney CBD POPSTAT Ranking	Sydney Suburban POPSTAT Ranking
1	Tell Me Tonight	30	57	GAF-BDF	German/British	6	4
2	The Sign of the Cross	28	48	Paramount	US	-	n.l.
3	The Squatter's Daughter	26	58	BEF	Australian	5	12
4	Paddy the Next Best Thing	26	44	Fox	US	2	5
5	Forty-Second Street	26	40	Warner-FN	US	-	>500
6	Cavalcade	25	53	Fox	US	-	>500
7	The Silence of Dean Maitland	24	43	BEF	Australian	10	6
8	Rio Rita	24	30	RKO	US	-	>500
9	The Hayseeds	23	42	BEF	Australian	9	14
10	Gold Diggers of 1933	23	42	Warner-FN	US	15	23
11	A Ticket in Tatts	23	35	Universal	Australian	19	11
12	There Goes the Bride	23	29	GAF-BDF	British	-	n.l.
13	King Kong	22	32	RKO	US	-	>500
14	Riptide	22	31	MGM	US	22	46
15	Moonlight and Pretzels	22	27	Universal	US	80	113
16	A Successful Calamity	21	27	Warner-FN	US	42	382
17	Peg o' My Heart	20	29	MGM	US	-	>500
18	Dancing Lady	20	27	MGM	US	20	32
19	The Midshipmaid	20	24	GAF	British	-	>500
20	I Was a Spy	19	28	Fox - GB	British	7	47
21	The Torch Singer	19	26	Paramount	US	113	273
22	I Am Suzanne	19	25	Fox	US	68	116
23	The King's Vacation	19	25	Warner-FN	US	-	457
24	Bottoms Up	19	24	Universal	US	109	35
25	The Invisible Man	19	23	Universal	US	134	25
26	The Cat's Paw	19	22	Fox	US	157	39
27	Carolina	18	25	Fox	US	76	16
28	My Weakness	18	22	Fox	US	53	55
29	A Southern Maid	17	21	BEF	British	173	199
30	Baby, Take a Bow	17	21	Fox	US	272	58
31	Yes, Mr Brown	17	21	GAF-BDF	British	37	45
32	You Said a Mouthful	17	21	Warner-FN	US	-	424
33	Handy Andy	17	20	Fox	US	274	203
34	Marry Me	17	20	GAF	British	-	>500
35	My Song for You	16	30	Fox - GB	British	35	n.l.
36	That's a Good Girl	16	23	BDF	British	77	212
37	Tugboat Annie	16	22	MGM	US	-	>500
38	Fra Diavolo	16	21	MGM	US	-	>500
39	The Kiss Before the Mirror	16	19	Universal	US	-	>500
40	The Kid from Spain	15	31	UA	US	-	403
41	The Good Companions	15	24	Fox - GB	British	23	267
42	Kiss Me Again	15	23	Warner-FN	US	-	78
43	Bring 'em Back Alive	15	21	RKO	US	-	n.l.
44	Rasputin and the Empress	15	20	MGM	US	-	>500
45	The White Sister	15	20	MGM	US	-	n.l.
46	The Power and the Glory	15	19	Fox	US	143	162
47	Lady for a Day	15	19	GAF-Columbia	US	49	13
48	This Week of Grace	15	19	RKO	British	65	125
49	Central Airport	15	19	Warner-FN	US	-	>500
50	Zoo in Budapest	15	18	Fox	US	-	>500

Table 3.10: Fifty most screened films in rural South Australia - July 1933 to June 1935 (n.l. = not listed)

What is noticeable is that four of the films above (8 percent) are Australian productions and these rank highly. This is out of proportion to the number of Australian films screened as main

features in the study period – seventeen (less than two percent). These four films (*The Squatter's Daughter, The Silence of Dean Maitland, The Hayseeds* and *A Ticket in Tatts*) also ranked highly in Sedgwick's top thirty films screened in Sydney's first-run and suburban cinemas for 1934 calculated by POPSTAT.[381] This suggests that Australian films were popular across the three geographic areas: CBD, suburban and rural. In comparing the popularity of films in rural South Australia with the Sydney POPSTAT, the time difference in release dates has to be taken into consideration: films were released in South Australia some time after their release in New South Wales. For example, *One Night of Love* (Schertzinger, 1934), which opened in Sydney on 24 December 1934 but not released in Adelaide until 18 May 1935, ranks first in both the POPSTAT index for Sydney's first run and suburban cinemas but does not rank in Table 3.8 above as it begun its rural run at the end of the study period. The case study of Snowtown Talkies in the following chapter, which is based on actual audience size, shows that the average audience for an Australian production was fifty percent higher than that for a US production. Seventy-nine percent of films screened in rural South Australia during the study period were US productions and represent seventy percent of the fifty most screened films. Eighteen percent were British films (including co-productions) representing 22 percent of the fifty most screened.

A detailed examination of each of the films in the top ten of the most screened films will flesh out some of the exhibition patterns sketched thus far, as well as throwing up substantial information on some of the localised factors in play that might be relevant to more informed conjecture about the factors driving film popularity in South Australia.

1. ***Tell Me Tonight*** (Litvak, 1932), a comedy with songs, starring the Polish tenor Jan Kiepura, screened at thirty of the select 32 venues.[382] A British-German co-production distributed by GAF, it was popular nationwide having ran for 26 weeks at the Athenaeum in Melbourne (6 May to 3 November 1933), 21 weeks at the Mayfair in Sydney (12 June to 29 October 1933) and twelve weeks at the Majestic in Adelaide (1 July 1933 to 22 September 1933). Previously only one other film, *Viennese Nights* (Crossland, 1930), had such a long run in Adelaide. *Tell Me Tonight* ranked 6thin the Sydney first-release POPSTAT and 4th in the Sydney Suburbs' POPSTAT. (It ranked behind *One Night of Love* (Schertzinger, 1934) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Lee, 1934) two films that were not widely distributed in rural South Australia.) *Tell Me Tonight* screened at fourteen Ozone/Star suburban picture houses, indicating the two major chains' confidence in its

[381] John Sedgwick, 'Patterns in First-Run and Suburban Filmgoing in Sydney in the mid-1930s', pp.148-149.
[382] Thirty venues is the maximum in which a film would be screened as Port Pirie and Port Lincoln both had two picture houses that did not screen a film if it had already been screened by its competitor in the town.

success.[383] The protective period ran for three months opening in the suburbs at the Port Adelaide and Semaphore Ozone picture houses on 7 October 1933. During the protective period it screened at fifteen rural venues, including the four venues in which Ozone had a financial interest: Gawler Strand, Tanunda Talkies and Port Pirie and Victor Harbor Ozone. The film's popularity was demonstrated by a rescreening at the Semaphore Ozone three weeks later concurrent with the Alberton Ozone and Unley Star screenings. It was rare for a film to be rescreened in the suburbs before it had finished its suburban run. The two Ozone cinemas were in close proximity (five kilometres) and as only two prints were circulating the suburbs, one print would have been switched between those two cinemas.[384] *Tell Me Tonight* had taken six weeks to move across the major suburban chains, which was about average time, and 55 weeks to move across the rural circuit finishing at Balaklava Institute Talkies on 11 August 1934. There was a print circulating after this date as evidenced by a week's screening at the Rex in the CBD in March 1935 and a repeat screening at the Arcadia in Renmark two years after its first screening at that theatre.

Another indicator of a film's popularity is the number of screenings on an itinerant exhibitor's circuit. As this is usually towards the end of the rural run, itinerant exhibitors have had sufficient time to see how well it has performed on the suburban circuit and at other rural screenings. Two itinerant exhibitors toured the film in rural areas: Paragon Talkies on the Eyre Peninsula and Lesters' Talkies in the mid-north. Paragon toured *Tell Me Tonight* over a three-week period screening in at least 20 towns.

A pattern emerges as to the hierarchy of distribution. *Tell Me Tonight* premiered in the suburbs at Ozone's Port Adelaide and Semaphore picture houses and was screened early in the rural run at Ozone's Port Pirie and Victor Harbor pictures houses and at the Strand in Gawler and Tanunda Talkies. The second most screened film, *The Sign of the Cross* (De Mille, 1932), premiered in the suburbs at the Star's Port Adelaide and Semaphore picture houses and was screened early in the rural run at its Kadina Ideal and Mount Gambier Capitol picture houses. This confirms that whichever of the major chains secured the suburban premiere that chain would screen the film first in rural areas.

[383] It would be very rare for the Star chain to screen a film at its Port Adelaide and Semaphore cinemas if the film had already been screened at the Ozone cinemas in those suburbs and vice versa. Similarly, the independent Unley City Hall Talkies would not screen a film that had already been screened at the Unley Star.
[384] Switching prints, also known as bicycling prints, was a contractual arrangement with the distributors.

2. ***The Sign of the Cross***, an historical melodrama distributed by Paramount, premiered in Adelaide at the Rex Theatre on 29 July 1933 and, according to a newspaper advertisement, 26,349 people had seen the film in the first two weeks it had screened there.[385] Its first rural screening was at the Strand, Gawler, on 19 August 1933. It then moved across to Clifford's Ideal in Kadina and then to the Capitol, Mount Gambier. *The Sign of the Cross* opened in the suburbs, after these rural screenings, at the Port Adelaide and Semaphore Stars and the independent Strand at Glenelg. It had taken four weeks to move across the major suburban chains and above average time to move across the rural circuit. The film finished the rural circuit on 26 September 1934 at Collie on the Eyre Peninsula, following a three-and-a-half week tour by Cleve Talkies which screened in at least 24 towns. The rural exhibitors' confidence is illustrated by screening it for two nights in venues that would normally screen one night a week. The management of the Globe Talkies at Millicent Institute advertised that it would only screen for one night owing to the enormous cost of hiring.[386] This is more than likely to have not been the reason: considering that it had been on the rural circuit for four months, and that it had only been three weeks since the itinerant exhibitor Leslie Lester had screened it as a part of his annual South-East tour, it would have been unlikely to still have commanded a high rental fee by this time. It was more probable that the print had been booked by another exhibitor for the following night. It appears that once the film had finished its run at the two major suburban chains, there was only one print moving around the State. There were five dual screenings on the rural circuit and the screening venues were not close enough to do a switch. But at each of the five dual screenings, a venue is within a short distance to the Victorian border for a print to have come from the Victorian distributor. The question of how prints moved around has particular salience for Australia and generates some questions. It needs to be a subject of further research.

Timelines for each of the top ten most screened films in rural South Australia is at Appendix 4.

[385] Advertisement, *The Advertiser*, 12 August 1933, p. 2. The capacity of the picture house in 1933 was 1,211. At three sessions per day for two weeks the potential audience would have been 43,596.
[386] Advertisement, *The South Eastern Times*, 23 January 1934, p.2.

Illustration 3.1: Newspaper advertisement for *The Sign of the Cross* screening at Globe Talkies, Millicent, drawing the reader's attention to the "great expense of securing this mighty production".

The Sign of the Cross became a favourite for screenings on Christmas Day and Good Friday beyond 1933. Under the Places of Public Entertainment Act, a film exhibitor had to apply for a permit to screen on Christmas Day or Good Friday. As discussed in Chapter 1, the church had influenced legislation banning Sunday screenings. They conceded to screenings on Christmas Day and Good Friday subject to the films being of a wholesome nature, and this requirement was embodied in the legislation. Exhibitors screening films with a religious theme were guaranteed approval but unfortunately, as exhibitors twenty years earlier had complained, there were not enough religious films produced. *The Sign of the Cross* was worked hard, and two years after its release, two prints of the film were still available for screening at Blythe Talkies in the Mid-North and at the Naracoorte Austral in the South-East on Good Friday 1935.

The film also complicates any equation of religious and morally wholesome films. There has been much discussion around whether de Mille's biblical advocacy was really a disguise for audience titillation. Scenes such as Claudette Colbert bathing in asses' milk and, a nearly naked

woman tied to a stake as a gorilla approaches her were a little risqué for the time. In America, the infamous "same-sex dance" became central to concerns by the Catholic Church on a lack of censorship for Hollywood films.[387] It is surprising that such titillation escaped the notice of the virtuous South Australian Film Censorship Advisor Board or that the board did not object to one of the film's publicity lines "Sixty Christians to be killed in a novel and diverting manner."[388] I have not been able to find any South Australian newspaper articles of the day that raise the issue of the titillating scenes.

The film does not appear in the POPSTAT rankings as it circulation through Sydney and suburbs precede the scope of Sedgwick's research period.

3. ***The Squatter's Daughter*** (Hall, 1933) was an Australian drama, the most popular genre with rural audiences, and distributed by BEF. The timeline of the film's distribution in South Australia at Table 3.9 indicates there were two prints in circulation in the State, as it opened at four Star cinemas on the same night. One print was switched between Port Adelaide and Semaphore and another between Norwood and Unley.

The Squatter's Daughter was screened during the protective period at the Mount Gambier Capitol for three days and then the Millicent Globe for two days. This is a deviation from the usual Mount Gambier/Kadina nexus and suggests that on this occasion it may have been the distributor moving the film to a nearby town to keep the print working hard as possible. Another break from the normal pattern was the screening of the film at the Austral Theatre in Port Pirie just two months after the Ozone had screened it in the town and at the same time Herb Lester was touring it in nearby towns. The Austral management's confidence that the film could still draw a large crowd demonstrates the popularity of *The Squatter's Daughter*.

It opened at the Mount Gambier Capitol at the Saturday afternoon matinee on 18 November 1933, the day after West's closing night. The management of the Capitol took advantage of the currency of the film with large advertisements in the local press proclaiming "coming by special aeroplane from West's" and arranging for the Mayor of Mount Gambier to be at the local aerodrome to take delivery of the film.[389] It opened on the rural circuit at the Ideal Theatre in Kadina on 2 December 1933, the day following the closing night at the Grand (West's moveover house in Adelaide). In a newspaper advertisement for the final day's screening, the Ideal claimed

[387] Jon Solomon, *The Ancient World in Cinema*, p.11.
[388] Dorothy Chatterton, 'Looking at the Latest Shows', *The News*, 27 July 1933, p.2.
[389] Anon., 'The Squatter's Daughter', *Border Watch*, 16 November 1933, p.5.

"over 2,000 patrons have witnessed this picture and still more booking seats."[390] The Ideal had a seating capacity of 1,047 – given that it had already screened the film at four sessions, 2,000 would indicate an average of 500 per session. To ensure that patrons in the nearby towns of Wallaroo and Moonta did not wait for *The Squatter's Daughter* to come to their local picture house, the advertisement also carried the by-line "according to information received, *The Squatter's Daughter* may only be screened in Kadina." Four months later it was screened at Moonta.

The Squatter's Daughter was screened on three travelling picture show circuits: Harry Porter's on the Yorke Peninsula, Cleve Talkies on the Eyre Peninsula and Lester's Talkies in the mid-north. Porter and Cleve Talkies screened the film concurrently, confirming that there were two prints in the State. Cleve Talkies' tour took four weeks and screened in at least twenty towns. Like *Tell Me Tonight* and *The Sign of the Cross*, there was still a print of *The Squatter's Daughter* in circulation two years after it began its run in rural South Australia. Given that the typical commercial life of a feature film in the 1930s was usually less than twelve months,[391] these films had unusually long runs. Although this may have been a characteristic of the exhibition circuit, rather than the film. The screening of *The Squatter's Daughter* at Broken Hill towards the end of its run in South Australia suggests on this occasion its screenings there were a part of a rerun on the New South Wale's distribution circuit rather than the usual South Australian one.

It ranked 5th in the Sydney first-release POPSTAT rankings and 12th in the Sydney suburban rankings. The even greater popularity of *The Squatter's Daughter* with rural audiences may have been largely due to it being an Australian film set in a familiar landscape with characters overcoming familiar adversities and having an optimism much needed at that time. This is in accord with Emilie Altenloh's observation that where an audience can make a connection with a film and their own social environment, there is greater emotional identification and the film will be popular with that audience.[392] One might then ask why Viennese operettas and films of Christian martyrs were also popular, and reach the explanation that there are many different ways in which films can connect with audiences. Having the film set in same immediate environment as rural Australian audiences is a particularly direct way of achieving this.

[390] Advertisement, *The Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 6 December 1933, p.3.
[391] J. Sedgwick, 'Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s', p.3.
[392] Emilie Altenloh, 'A Sociology of the Cinema: the Audience', p.259.

	CBD	Suburban	Rural	
Week 1	Wests, Adelaide - 21/10-17/11 (24)			
Week 2				
Week 3				
Week 4				
Week 5			Capitol, Mt. Gambier - 18-21/11 (3)	
			Globe Talkies, Millicent - 22-23/11 (2)	
Week 6	Grand, Adelaide - 25/11-1/12 (6)			
Week 7			Ideal, Kadina - 2-6/12 (4)	
			Lyric, Murray Bridge - 8-9/12 (2)	
Week 8				
Week 9			Strand, Gawler - 16-18/12 (2)	
Week 10			Show Hall, Willunga - 25/12 (1)	
Week 11		Star, Port Adelaide - 1-5/1 (5)		
		Star, Semaphore - 1-5/1 (5)		
		Star, Norwood - 1-3/1 (3)		
		Star, Unley - 1-5/1 (5)		
Week 12		Star, Parkside - 6-10/1 (2)		
		Star, Goodwood - 6-10/1 (2)		
		Star, Hindmarsh - 6-10/1 (2)		
		Star, Woodville - 6-10/1 (2)		
Week 13		Ozone, Enfield - 13-16/1 (3)		
		Ozone, Prospect - 13-16/1 (3)		
		Star, St. Peters - 16-18/1 (3)		
		Col. Light Gardens Theatre 17/1 (1)		
		Star, Thebarton 17-18/1 (2)		
Week 14		Ozone, Alberton - 22-26/1 (5)	Wonderview, Victor Harbor - 20-22/1 (2)	
		Ozone, Marryatville - 22-26/1 (5)		
Week 15		Star, St. Peters - 31/1 (1)	Capitol, Peterborough - 27-29/1 (2)	
		Star, Thebarton - 31/1 (1)		
			Ozone, Port Pirie - 2-6/2 (4)	
Week 16				
Week 17			Clare Talkies - 10-12/2 (2)	
			Rivoli Theatre, Berri - 14-15/2 (2)	
			Corona, Loxton - 16-19/2 (2)	
Week 18				
			Bonney Theatre, Barmera - 20-21/2 (2)	
			Institute, Cowell - 23/2 (1)	
Week 19				
Week 20			Cleve Talkies Touring 5-30/3 (20)	
Week 21				Porter's Talkies Circuit - 12-16/3 (4)
Week 22				Arcadia, Renmark - 22-23/3 (2)
				Institute, Jamestown - 23-24/3 (2)
Week 23				
Week 24		Lockleys - 31/3 (1)		
		Strand, Glenelg - 2-6/4 (5)	Institute, Burra - 6-7/4 (2)	
Week 25				National Moonta - 7-9/4 (2)
Week 26			Lester's Talkies Touring - 14/4-5/5 (9)	
Week 27				Austral, Port Pirie - 21-23/4 (2)
Week 28				
Week 29				
Week 30			Institute, Kapunda - 12-14/5 (2)	
Week 31				
Week 32			Johnson's, Broken Hill - 1-7/6 (6)	
Week 33				Lenard's, Broken Hill - 2-6/6 (2)
				Metropole, Broken Hill - 2-6/6 (2)
				Hillside, Broken Hill - 2/6 (1)
Week 34				
Week 35				
Week 36			Institute, Snowtown - 29-30/6 (2)	
Week 37				
Week 38				
Week 39				
Week 40			Angaston Talkies - 21/7 (1)	
Week 41				
Week 42			Acme, Strathalbyn - 4/8 (1)	
Week 43				
Week 44				
Week 45			Acme Pictures, Mt Barker - 25/8 (1)	
Next advertised screening was at the Pinaroo Institute nine months later on 8/6/1935				

Table 3.11: Timeline for The Squatter's Daughter – 21 October 1933 to 25 August 1934

4. ***Paddy the Next Best Thing*** (Lachman, 1933) was a romantic comedy set in New York, starring Janet Gaynor and Warner Baxter. It was an American remake of the 1923 British film of the same name (Cutts, 1923) which was set in London. The 1933 remake was one of *Everyones*' top-ten pictures screened in 1934 and was Fox's highest grossing film in Australia for that year. It was the panacea for which exhibitors had been waiting. It ran for one week at the Adelaide Regent with full houses every evening and on New Year's Day 1934, broke all records for any one-day receipts at the Regent since the theatre had opened.[393] Similarly, when it screened at Port Adelaide and Semaphore Ozones, the management had had their best Saturday night at both theatres for over three years.[394] Its first rural screening was at the Port Pirie Ozone; this was a second print as it was still being screened at the Regent in Adelaide. Every seat in the 1,357-seat picture house was taken on the opening night and according to the local newspaper, and more than 200 people were turned away.[395] After its run at the Port Pirie Ozone it screened at another ten rural venues before beginning its suburban run.

The film's rural screenings indicate that a film of proven box office success may not necessarily follow the usual distribution pattern. Instead of moving to Tanunda or Gawler after the Port Pirie Ozone run, the exhibitor R.C. Williams screened it at the Kapunda Institute before returning the print to the CBD for a two-week run at the Grand. When it returned to the rural circuit both the Ozone and Star chains had a print screening at Tanunda Talkies and the Kadina Ideal at the same time. Cleve Talkies toured *Paddy the Next Best Thing* a year later, screening it in sixteen towns in just over two weeks. The last screening date in the dataset is at Coorabie, 940kms north-west of Adelaide. It ranked 2nd in the Sydney first-release POPSTAT rankings and 5th in the Sydney Suburbs POPSTAT ranking.

5. ***Forty-Second Street*** (Bacon, 1933), a musical distributed by Warner-FN, also had an unusual run through the State, veering away from the usual pattern of distribution. This is perhaps because Warners did not have a regular first-run releasing contract with either of the major circuits operating in Adelaide. Opening at the Hoyts Regent on 5 August 1933, it does not appear to have been screened at a rural venue before it played at the second-release CBD house, Union Theatres' Civic. It commenced its rural run at Wallaroo Talkies on the Yorke Peninsula (which was not connected to either the Star or Ozone chains, but was nevertheless a large venue with a

[393] G.V.G. Malone, 'South Australia', *Everyones*, 10 January 1934, p.11.
[394] G.V.G. Malone, 'South Australia', *Everyones*, 28 February 1934, p.16.
[395] Anon., 'Many People Unable to See Paddy', *The Recorder*, 8 January 1934, p.2.

seating capacity of 942) at the same time it was screening at the Civic. It opened in the suburbs at two independent picture houses, the Strand at Glenelg and the Colonel Light Gardens Theatre, and screened at three other independent suburban picture houses between its appearances on the Ozone and Star circuits. Towards the end of its distribution it was screened consecutively at the Peterborough Capitol, Jamestown and Burra, but Herb Lester did not take it on tour of the Mid-North and it was not picked up by any of the other itinerant exhibitors. This confirms that Warner-FN either did not rent its films to itinerant exhibitors or that the rents were too expensive to take on tour to small country halls. *Forty-Second Street* did not rank in either of the Sydney POPSTAT rankings.

6. *Cavalcade* (Lloyd, 1933), distributed by Fox Films, "was one of the 11 top grossing films of 1933" according to one American source, eventually winning the Academy Award for Best Picture.[396] It had an interesting journey through the picture house circuit in South Australia. It ran at West's from 27 May to 30 June 1933 and, prior to moving on to Union Theatres' second release house, the Grand, it screened in Tanunda and Gawler. It did not screen at either of the Star or Ozone theatres in the suburbs or country centres. Some light as to why it was not screened by these chains is contained in a letter from the South Australian Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association to the Chief Secretary dated 6 February 1934. The association was expressing concern that "a concerted move is being made by General Theatres which is known as the Combine (a merger of the Union Theatres and Hoyts circuit during the Depression), to gain full control of the business throughout Australia" claiming:

> During the past twelve months or so the Combine has increased their protection period from two or three weeks to four and six weeks, and in the case of the feature "Cavalcade" the protection period was three months. It is obvious that this is at the expense of our Members.[397]

The dispute shows that the exhibition sector was by no means unified, and that first-run exhibitors were keen to improve their financial situation at the expense of suburban circuits. *Cavalcade* became a flash point in this struggle as the Ozone and Star chains and other exhibitors who were members of the SA Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association boycotted the film. The itinerant exhibitors, Lester's Talkies and Cleve Talkies, managed to hire the film for exhibition in remote towns just six months after it opened in the city. It was unprecedented for towns as remote as Denial Bay on the West Coast to be seeing an Academy Award-winning film so soon

[396] A.G. Fetrow, *Sound Films, 1927-1939: A United States Filmography*, p. 93.
[397] SRSA, GRG67/33/1934/107 - Letter from South Australian Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association to the Chief Secretary, dated 6 February 1934.

after its city release. Like *Forty-Second Street*, *Cavalcade* did not rank in either of the Sydney POPSTAT rankings.

7. *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (Hall, 1934), an Australian drama, was BEF's highest grossing film in Australia in 1934. It screened for one week at the Adelaide Regent and then at the Ozone-connected venue, the Gawler Strand, before moving over to the Civic for one week. It opened its rural run at Tanunda Talkies and its suburban circuit at the Enfield Ozone. Its screening at Acme Pictures, Strathalbyn, on 3 November 1934, is an example of exhibitors facing competing events in town, which on this occasion brought screen and pulpit into conflict once more, somewhat ironically since the film deals with the moral dilemma of a clergyman. The local newspaper commented that the film "attracted a capital attendance" and in the same article noted "the many counter-attractions on Saturday accounting for the absence of many who would have been present by choice".[398] These counter-attractions included the Apostolic Church's open-air Saturday night meeting, the Church of Christ's bible school picnic and the opening of the nearby Langhorne Creek Memorial Hall followed by a first class concert. While Sabbatarianism involved fears of the cinema stealing the religious audience, religious organisations were capable of reversing the situation on Saturdays—the special day of the film exhibitor. Supporting *The Silence of Dean Maitland* was another Australian production, *Cinesound Varieties*, a low-budget film specifically produced to make an all-Australian unit programme.[399] *The Silence of Dean Maitland* ranked 10th in the Sydney first-release POPSTAT rankings and 6th in the Sydney Suburbs POPSTAT ranking.

8. *Rio Rita* (Reed, 1929), a musical distributed by RKO, was re-released in Adelaide in August 1933, three and a half years after its premiere at the Majestic Theatre in March 1930. It did remarkably well the second time around, ranking eighth in the fifty most screened films in rural South Australia. This second run moved slowly around the circuit premiering in rural areas at the Gawler Strand and Tanunda Talkies on the same night and finishing screening for the last time during the study period on 23 January 1935 at the Lyric Theatre, Murray Bridge. The film was not picked up by itinerant exhibitors on this occasion. Lester's Talkies had toured it across the mid-north and Eyre Peninsula in April to May 1932 and this suggests that on the more remote circuits, audiences were not interested in reruns. *Rio Rita* did not rank in either of the Sydney POPSTAT rankings.

[398] Anon., 'The Silence of Dean Maitland', *The Southern Argus*, 8 November 1934, p.3.
[399] Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p.220.

9. *The Hayseeds* (Smith, 1933), an Australian musical comedy distributed by BEF, opened at the Star's Port Adelaide and Semaphore picture houses at the same time that the Ozone chain was screening *Paddy the Next Best Thing* at their Port Adelaide and Semaphore venues. Like the Ozone chain, the management had had their best Saturday night at both theatres for over three years.[400] Clare Talkies in the Mid-North booked *The Hayseeds* for two nights and had a full house on the Saturday night; despite the heat on the Monday night, it again drew a large audience.[401] *The Hayseeds* screened at 23 of the select 32 rural venues. Between the first and second runs in the CBD, it screened at Clare Talkies, an independent rural venue operated by S.J. McLean. As the Star chain screened the film at the beginning of the suburban run, the Kadina Ideal and Mount Gambier Capitol opened the rural run. Paragon Talkies toured *The Hayseeds* across Eyre Peninsula screening in nineteen towns in three weeks. It ranked 9th in the Sydney first-release POPSTAT rankings and 14th in the Sydney Suburbs POPSTAT ranking.

10. *Gold Diggers of 1933* (LeRoy, 1933), a musical comedy distributed by Warner-FN, was one of a few films to premiere in South Australia at a rural venue, once again suggesting that the distribution of Warners films was quite anomalous in South Australia at this time. It screened for two nights at both the Gawler Strand and Tanunda Talkies in April 1934. Tanunda Talkies' newspaper advertisement was larger than normal and boasted "the management have secured this extravaganza one week before the Regent Theatre, Adelaide".[402] The film's popularity was evident from the Regent not abiding by its weekly change policy and holding it over for a second week. Advertisements leading up to its screening at the Regent warned that *Gold Diggers of 1933* would not be shown in the suburbs for some considerable time. It opened at the Port Adelaide and Semaphore Stars four weeks after the Regent season and two weeks after the Civic's season, which is not a considerable time compared to the protective period for *Cavalcade*. On the last two days of the Regent season it was also shown at the Arcadia in Renmark, an independent picture house. This is a break from the normal nexus with the suburban chains. Like the other Warner-FN film in the ten most screened, *Gold Diggers of 1933* did not tour the remote towns of the Eyre Peninsula. It ranked 15th in the Sydney first-release POPSTAT rankings and 23rd in the Sydney Suburbs POPSTAT ranking.

[400] G.V.G. Malone, 'South Australia', *Everyones*, 28 February 1934, p.16.
[401] G.V.G. Malone, 'South Australia', *Everyones*, 24 January 1934, p.24.
[402] Advertisement, *The Barossa News*, 12 April 1934, p.2.

Conclusion

The distribution and exhibition of film in rural South Australia in the early 1930s is more complicated than might be assumed. There was a pattern at the beginning of a rural run, which depended on distributors maximising their returns and either of the two major suburban exhibitors competing to be first to screen a film in towns they controlled, and a pattern at the end of the run where itinerant exhibitors worked a flat-rate print hard before it went out of circulation. In between were venues scattered around the State but no distinct pattern as to how films moved between each. What is apparent is that the movement of film across the rural areas of the State did not simply radiate geographically out of Adelaide, screening first in the suburbs then sequentially in those venues close to urban Adelaide, finishing at the most distant point from the State's capital. Unlike the early years of rural exhibition discussed in Chapter 1, by the 1930s the use of the rail network was confined to transporting film to and from venues and no longer determined a hierarchy of distribution. Rather than distance, the distribution of film now depended on relationships between exhibitors and distributors.

This chapter has shown that contractual arrangements between distributor and exhibitor were not locked into a fixed template but could be modified through negotiation. The two major suburban chains, Clifford Theatres and Ozone Theatres, which were the first to release films to the suburbs, accounting for the greater part of a film's revenue in South Australia, had the upper hand with distributors when booking films for their rural venues. While few in number, these were the largest cinemas outside of Adelaide (Clifford's Capitol in Mount Gambier had a seating capacity of 1,774) and screened more regularly than once a week making them box-office rich. This powerful negotiating position was demonstrated by Clifford and Ozone's boycott of the film *Cavalcade* in both suburban and rural cinemas in protest of long protection periods. The analysis of distribution in this chapter confirms that the rural venues associated with the two major suburban chains had priority over other rural venues, although there was the occasional case, such as the screenings of *Forty-Second Street* and *The Hayseeds*, when a film did not have its rural premiere in those venues. When South Australian Theatres, an arm of the Ozone organisation, had taken over the Theatre Royal in the Adelaide CBD and used it as a first run house for MGM productions, the rural cinemas affiliated with the organisation in effect became second-run houses for MGM. Because of the influence the Ozone and Clifford organisations

were able to exert through their control of the suburban market, the distributors only had influence on the hierarchy of film in rural South Australia after Ozone and Clifford screenings. But it was not only the two major suburban chains that could negotiate with the distributors.

Those exhibitors signed to block bookings with one or more distributors could negotiate exclusivity clauses to ensure their venue would be the only one screening the distributor's film within a certain radius. While advantageous for screening star attractions, the exhibitor could sometimes be committed to screening average films. Even at the end of the distribution chain, the itinerant exhibitors, while generally not in a position to negotiate the amount of a flat rate, had choice in selecting a programme from a smorgasbord of films that still at audience appeal but could no longer attract a percentage of takings. But these are assumptions based on screening data and not on any hard evidence.

It is unfortunate that there are no surviving commercial documents that could give an insight into the relationships between distributors and rural exhibitors. As discussed, the occasional report of distributors' Adelaide-based agents visiting rural regions in *Everyones'* weekly report on exhibition in South Australia, was no more than an itinerary of what towns were visited. According to John Tulloch, the trade papers always portrayed distributors as beyond reproach in their dealings with the smaller rural exhibitors, who were in the weakest position to negotiate. After all, the distributors' advertisements accounted for most of the revenue of magazines such as *Everyones*, so it is unlikely to portray a poor image of distributors. Tulloch cites examples of unscrupulous business methods employed by distributors when dealing with rural exhibitors, but these examples are mainly occurring in Queensland.[403] In the absence of documentary evidence, an accurate account of the relationship between distributors and rural exhibitors is difficult to ascertain.

Data in the SARURAL.DB dataset does give a sense of each distributor's market share in rural South Australia. Five distributors had a combined share of 72 percent of the market, but I have demonstrated dominance in the market did not necessarily reflect the popularity of their films. Paramounts 15.9 percent of the rural market, second to Fox's 18.3 percent, was boosted by the annual "Paramount Week" campaign which entailed aggressive marketing and concentrating one-off bookings in a single week in September. Measuring the popularity of a film based on the

[403] John Tulloch, *Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning*, pp. 68-70.

number of rural venues that had booked the film, showed Paramount has having only four percent of the fifty most screened films despite having 15.9 percent of the market share.

Measuring popularity by the number of films booked by rural exhibitors identified a preference for Australian films for which rural audiences had an affinity. Comparing those films in the top ten that also screened in the research period used by John Sedgwick for the Sydney POPSTAT rankings, there are about six with comparable popularity. Beyond the top ten there is considerable disparity between urban Sydney audience preferences and rural South Australian audiences. An investigation into exhibition on a more micro level may produce different results. The following two chapters examine exhibition at this level by case studies into a small rural hall in the Mid-North and two itinerant exhibitors competing for a share of business in the remote towns on the Eyre Peninsula.

4. A Case Study of Audience Tastes: the Snowtown Institute, July 1933 to June 1935

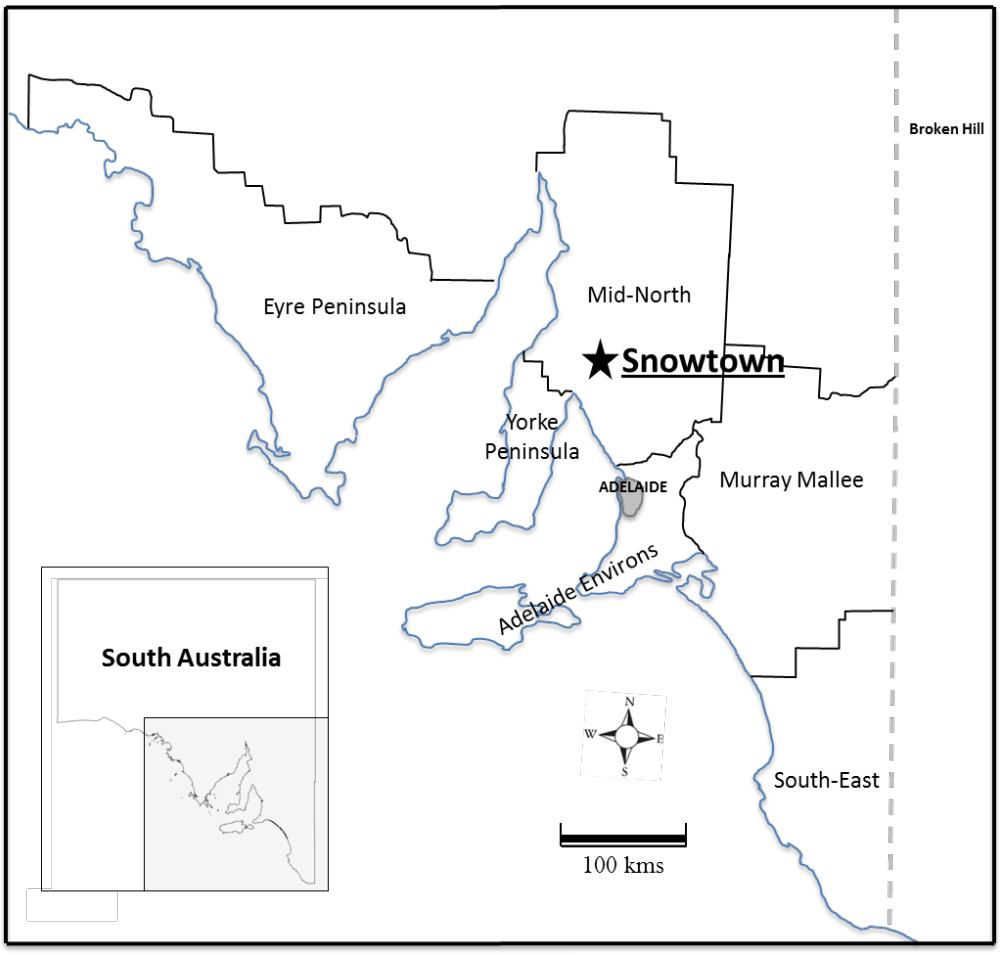
Richard Maltby argues that for cinema history to matter more "it must engage with the social history of which it is a part".[404] Instead of solely concerning itself with those film producers, directors and actors, cinema history needs to be written from below, restoring agency to exhibitors and the audiences in local communities. It "needs to take more into account the cultural power and presence of the movies beyond the screen, and outside of the theatre."[405] Such histories tend to be microhistories, that is, small-scale investigations that link small cinema histories with broader histories. They are "historical glimpses at marginal figures" as noted by Greg Waller, and they generally stem from the serendipitous discovery of small isolated caches of information. The value of these microhistories is they provide the foundation on which much larger comparative analysis can rest.[406] This case study will look at the Snowtown Institute picture show and its operation under two models of exhibition – the community-owned picture show and the absentee exhibitor – operating at two different periods. It will examine the films screened at the Snowtown Institute from July 1933 to June 1935 and factors which could affect cinema-going habits, such as weather, and variables which determined a film's place in the programme and its popularity, such as distributor, nationality or genre. The analysis will not only provide a microhistory of an exhibitor's business in the Mid North of South Australia during the study period, but it will also provide a benchmark by which the study in the previous chapter can be compared to determine if there is a correlation between film hire and film popularity.

The choice of Snowtown as a case study is based on the availability of box office data. State Records of South Australia holds the Treasurer's Nightly Statements for the Snowtown Institute Talkies covering the 1933-34 and 1934-35 financial years. For amusement tax purposes, these statements provide the admissions to each screening, broken down by ticket price. Although the statements do not specify what films were screened, the Snowtown Institute Talkies did advertise weekly in two country newspapers, *The Stanley Herald*, which circulated through towns up to a 26km radius of Snowtown, and *The Port Wakefield Monitor*, which circulated throughout Port Wakefield and surrounding towns and districts. The collation of these two sets of data, taking into consideration other variables which may affect a person's decision as whether or not

[404] Richard Maltby, 'How Can Cinema History Matter More?' in *Screening the Past*, http://www.screeningthepast.com/2015/01/how-can-cinema-history-matter-more/
[405] Gregory Waller, 'Robert Southard and the History of Traveling Film Exhibition', p.13.
[406] Richard Maltby, 'New Cinema Histories', p.13.

to go to the pictures, provides a microhistory of the business conducted by a rural picture show for two years during the Depression and goes some way to indicating rural exhibition practices and audience preferences.

Snowtown is a rural town situated about 145 kilometres north of Adelaide in South Australia's Mid-North region. In 1933, the District of Snowtown, which took in the marginally smaller neighbouring towns of Lochiel and Barunga, covered 111,600 hectares in area and had a population of 2,199.



Map 4.1: Location of Snowtown

Until 1922, itinerant exhibitors, including Herb Lester who has been mentioned in previous chapters, used the Snowtown Institute Hall on a regular basis to screen films. In 1922, the Institute Committee took on the responsibility of screenings in the hall, operating as a community-owned picture show. At the time, the township was experiencing difficulties in raising money for a new Soldiers' Memorial Hall and it was thought that the picture show takings would contribute significantly to the funds. The hall had a seating capacity of 250 and the new hall would be able to accommodate 450 patrons. Keeping labour costs low was clearly an

important consideration. A local railway mechanic, George Francis, offered his services as the projectionist, so that the Institute Committee was able to avoid the additional expense of hiring an experienced operator from Kadina, sixty kilometres away, and paying for the operator's train fare to and from Kadina.[407] According to the local newspaper, it also was "anticipated that sympathetic local musicians (would) contribute the music."[408] A plant was installed and the first show run by the committee screened on 24 April 1922. For the opening night a single feature, *The Kentuckians* (Maigne, 1921), was screened supported by a short, the Mack Sennett comedy, *Ladies First* (Del Ruth & Grainger, 1918). Admission prices were two shillings for the back seats and one shilling for the front seats, with children being admitted for half-price. The night's takings were £16 6s 6d and, according to the local newspaper, it was a "very fine result … with sustained public support, little time should elapse before the desire of many is realised."[409]

The Institute Committee encountered only one problem in the first year of operation. Snowtown was not subject to the Places of Public Entertainment Act at the time that the venture was being considered, nor for the first few months of operation. When the Act was extended to the town in August 1922, strict regulations came into force, including the requirement that projectionists be licenced. The Committee did not seem to be aware of this regulation until four months later, when they closed the hall to picture shows for three weeks in January 1923 because George Francis did not have an operator's licence. Either because the Inspector did not pursue the issue or because the Committee chose to ignore the regulations, the weekly screenings resumed with an unlicensed operator until June 1925. The local paper reported that "… in order to comply with the regulation, Mr Francis has been adding to his already considerable knowledge of machine manipulation, and intends entering an examination for this, about March."[410] There was, however, some difficulty in Francis taking time off from his employment with South Australian Railways to travel to Adelaide to undergo the examination and it was not until June 1925 that he became a licensed operator.[411]

By 30 June 1922, the Snowtown Institute had outlaid £236 ($18,728 AUD at 2015 prices) on the picture show plant and £54 on the hire of films, freight and advertising. The returns were

[407] SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12 – Record of Chief Secretary's interview with D.T. Cronin, Secretary of the Snowtown Institute, dated 15 September 1922.
[408] Anon., 'Snowtown Pictures', *The Stanley Herald*, 23 March 1922, p. 2
[409] Anon., 'Snowtown Institute', *The Stanley Herald*, 27 April 1922, p. 2.
[410] Anon., 'Snowtown Institute – Annual Report', *The Stanley Herald,* 27 July 1922, p. 2
[411] SRSA, GRG67/33/1925/63, Operator's Licence, G.E. Francis, Snowtown, dated 17 June 1925

promising. It had taken £107 at the ticket box in the first three months.[412] Taking into account the initial outlay and ongoing expenses of film hire (usually a flat fee of £3 per film), freight, advertising, entertainment tax and the operator's wages (ten shillings per screening), by October 1923, eighteen months after the opening night, the books were in the black after paying off all establishment expenses.[413] One year later, the construction of the new Snowtown Memorial Hall commenced. The plant was transferred from the old Institute Hall to the new hall and a new "bio machine" was installed at a cost of £120. The new hall's licence allowed for 450 seats, although it is unlikely that so many seats were actually installed.

Snowtown Institute Talkies

As discussed in Chapter 2, the advent of the talkies presented a problem for community-owned picture shows, which were by then experiencing a downturn in patronage because of the Depression and a declining supply of silent films. The latter factor presented an immediate crisis as the Institute Committee was faced with discontinuing as an exhibitor or finding an alternative exhibition arrangement. In June 1932, the South Australian manager for Paramount Film Service wrote to inform the Institute Committee of an exhibitor's approach to lease the Memorial Hall and install talking equipment. This would not be a touring show visiting the town each week bringing along its own talkie plant, but would be a stationary plant.[414] Although relations between distribution and exhibition were often adversarial, this was an example of cooperation when it was in the interests of the distribution sector. It seems that the exhibitor had approached the distributor for information on places still running silent picture shows. While it was likely that Paramount would have written the same letter to several rural hall committees, there may have been an additional benefit in encouraging Snowtown to install talkies. In November 1931, the Snowtown Institute Committee had entered into a block booking arrangement with Paramount for thirteen programmes consisting of two features and short films to be screened fortnightly commencing 5 December 1931 and expiring 28 May 1932.[415] This arrangement continued until the screening of the first talkies in Snowtown on 18 November 1932. If the exhibitor referred to in Paramount's letter had a strong relationship with them, Paramount would be able to retain Snowtown in its territory.

[412] Anon., 'Institute Pictures', *The Stanley Herald*, 25 January 1923, p. 2.
[413] SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12, *Papers relating to Snowtown Institute*, various dates.
[414] *Ibid*.
[415] *Ibid*.

It is quite possible that the exhibitor referred to in Paramount's letter was Fred Jeffery of Adelaide, as the following month the secretary of the Institute Committee wrote to two picture theatres and three Institutes, seeking an opinion on the "Jeffery Talking Picture Plant." Jeffrey not only manufactured sound projectors, but also began operating as an absentee exhibitor in Mannum in early 1933, having taken over screenings from Mannum Institute Pictures, which was also a community-based picture show. The Snowtown Institute Committee's letter sought information as to whether there was any increase in admission charges, any increase in attendance and any further insurance risk.[416] There is one lengthy letter of advice on file, but it seems that the committee decided to take another approach and advertise for tenders in an Adelaide newspaper.[417]

Paramount's letter could not have arrived at a better time for the Committee. There had been a downturn in cinema-going in Snowtown in the early 1930s and screenings had been reduced from weekly to once a fortnight. Compared to the takings of £512 in the 1922-23 financial year and £718 in the 1923-24, the 1930-31 financial year brought only a dismal £176.[418] Takings dropped further, to £159, in the following financial year, while film hire costs only dropped from £66 to £65.[419] Given that the Snowtown region was feeling the effects of the Depression, the Committee would have had great concerns that the potential revenue from screening Talkies was an unknown. By relinquishing the running of picture shows to an exhibitor, the Institute Committee was not only guaranteed an income, but also would avoid the cost of installing Talkies. The drawback was that the Committee was giving away the upside potential profit if the show was a success and when economic conditions improved.

The successful tender was submitted by Bill Benbow of Benbow Amusements, a projector manufacturer and exhibitor based in Adelaide. He installed his Shadowtone talking picture equipment in the Snowtown Memorial Hall; according to the local newspaper, the equipment was worth approximately £700 ($65,300 AUD), and Shadowtone projectors had been installed in over thirty venues in South Australia.[420] Although permanently installed in the Hall, the equipment remained Benbow's property. In November 1932, Benbow signed a five-year lease on the Memorial Hall. As he had done in other districts, he was responsible under the lease for

[416] *Ibid*.
[417] Tenders and Contracts column, *The Advertiser*, 26 August 1932, p. 4.
[418] SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12, *Papers relating to Snowtown Institute*, various dates.
[419] Anon., 'Snowtown Institute – Annual Meeting', *The Stanley Herald*, 28 July 1932, p. 2.
[420] Anon., 'Snowtown to Have Talkies', *The Stanley Herald*, 3 November 1932, p. 2.

employing local residents as manager and projectionist, and for booking the films from the distributors.[421] In return the Institute Committee would receive twenty percent of the takings which averaged £2 13s 10d per week.[422] This was an attractive offer compared to the flat rate of £1 5s per screening that Benbow later paid the Gladstone Institute for a similar arrangement.[423] The Benbow arrangement guaranteed screenings every week and, as he dealt with several distributors, provided the Snowtown cinemagoer with a broader selection of films than was screened under the Paramount block package arrangement. With the new arrangement, the exhibition model at Snowtown Institute had changed from being a community-owned picture show to an absentee exhibitor. Benbow was a pioneer of the absentee exhibitor model and was already arranging picture shows for the Tweedvale (Lobethal), Mt. Pleasant and Lameroo Institutes at the time of the Snowtown lease. By 1938, he had installed his Shadowtone equipment in twelve halls and was moving his bookings around this circuit.

The price of a ticket to the Snowtown Institute Talkies, which included tax, was 2s 4d for the back seats and 1s 9d for the front seats, with children's prices at 1s 2d for the back and 7d for the front seats. These admission prices were considerable given that in 1933 the advertised price of a good brand tea was 2s 4d per pound, pork sausages 8d per pound, rabbits 6d each and cheese 8d per pound.[424] In comparison to other rural picture shows such as at Burra and Tanunda, admission to the front seats of the Snowtown Institute Talkies was more expensive by 6d (7d including tax). However, the greatest disparity was with the admission price in city and suburban picture houses. The city and suburban picture houses generally did not advertise their admission prices unless they had a special price. For example, a first release house in the city might advertise a special price of one shilling for the morning sessions. The Grand, which by 1933 was a move-over, second release house for Greater Union Theatres, advertised their admission prices, including tax, as 1s 9d and 1s 2d for the dress circle and 1s 2d for the stalls. In the suburbs, only the Ozone chain advertised admission prices – also 1s 9d (including tax) for the dress circle and 1s 2d (including tax) for the front stalls. Their advertisements included a line declaring that "we do not increase prices on Saturday nights", indicating that some suburban cinemas may have had a dual pricing structure. Given that films screened at Snowtown on

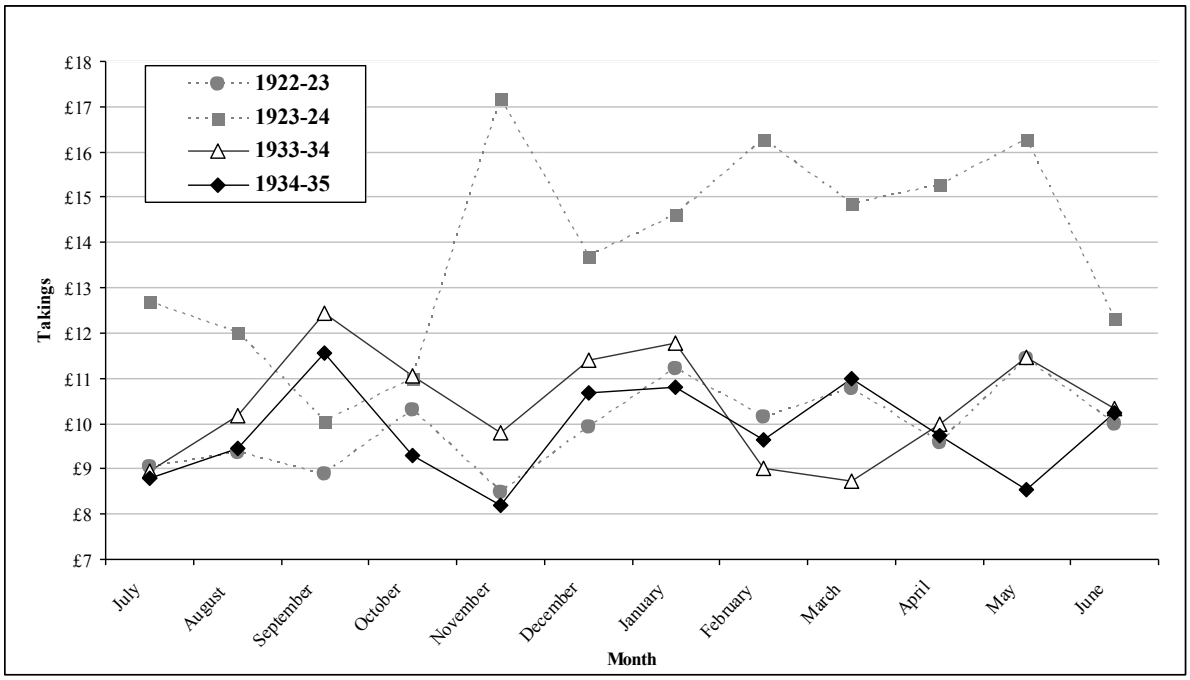
[421] Alan Jones, *Snowtown: the First Century 1878-1978*, p. 291.
[422] This is based on the expenditure and receipts for ten screenings, from 16 May to 14 July 1934, which were scribbled on the back of the Treasurer's Nightly Statements. SRSA, GRG58/256/0/12, *Papers relating to Snowtown Institute*, various dates.
[423] Anon., 'Gladstone Institute', *The Areas' Express*, 16 February 1934, p.1.
[424] Central Provision Stores Advertisement, *The Advertiser*, 10 November 1933, p. 24.

average 23weeks[425] after finishing their CBD run, cinema-going in Snowtown was certainly expensive. The disparity between city and rural admission prices had not been resolved since Wybert Reeve's tours of 1897. The lack of competing entertainment options in the small country town undoubtedly gave exhibitors a higher degree of pricing power.

The records of the takings for each screening for the two years from June 1933 to July 1935 provide an insight into the popularity of specific films. Screenings were generally double features, held on Saturday nights and on both Friday and Saturday nights if the main feature was likely to draw a large crowd. Occasionally, Wednesday night screenings were held either because a star attraction was travelling through the area and the Memorial Hall was not otherwise available for a Saturday night screening, or because the hall would be booked out by another community event, for example, the Church of England dance or Methodist Cricket Fair. Over the period of my study, there were five screenings on a Monday night, mostly public holidays, and one on a Tuesday night (New Year's Day 1935), but Saturday night was the night for the large audiences.

State Records of South Australia holds the cashbook for the Snowtown Institute showing the amounts taken at the ticket box for the period April 1922 to June 1924. Comparing the data in these documents with the June 1933 to July 1935 data shows a contrast in cinema-going during the relative economic prosperity of the early 1920s and the depressed early 1930s. As the pricing structure for 1922-24 is different from that of 1933-35, the 1934-35 monthly takings have been rendered comparable to the earlier figures by recalculating them using the 1920s admission price structure of 2s for the back seats, 1s for the front seats and children prices at 1s for the back seats and 6d for the front seats.

[425] Based on films finishing their CBD run in 1934.



Graph 4.1: Monthly Average Takings - 1922-23, 1923-24, 1933-34 and 1934-35.

The low average takings per month for the 1922-23 financial year, shown in Graph 4.1, are perhaps due to regular cinema-going in Snowtown taking a while to be accepted. In November 1923 the average takings per month peaked at £17 and then remained in a range between £13 and £17 until June 1924, the beginning of winter. In comparison, the 1933-35 average takings per month only once exceeded £12 (September 1933), a 29 percent drop on the November 1923 peak. This comparison shows the severe impact of the Depression on cinema-going in Snowtown, causing families to reconsider their spending priorities.

Attributing a drop in takings solely to a person's spending ability ignores other potential factors that might determine audience size, however. For example, the smallest audience to attend during the period of July 1933 to June 1935 was 63 for the double feature, *The Big Cage* (Neumann, 1933) and *It's Tough to be Famous* (Green, 1932) screened on 16 September 1933 and taking only £5 1s 7d at the ticket box. *The Big Cage* had taken twenty weeks to reach Snowtown after its CBD run, which was faster than the average time of 42 weeks it took main features to get to the town. Factors extrinsic to the programme were most likely responsible for the poor takings: Snowtown received 63 points (22mm) of rain on the weekend that these films were screened, while the temperature was 63° F (17.2° C), and this may well have had an impact on audience attendance.[426] June and July represented an annual trough in each year's takings, indicating that cold and wet winter weather could be a significant disincentive to cinema

[426] Prior to 1974 rainfall was measured in Australia in points (one point equalled one hundredth of an inch).

attendance. The availability of alternative leisure attractions also provided a potential explanation for poor takings. The night of *The Big Cage* screening was also the last night of the 1933 Royal Spring Show in Adelaide. An analysis of the audience size, testing possible explanatory factors intrinsic to the programme, such as genre, distributor, time taken to reach Snowtown after CBD run, and country of origin, as well as factors extrinsic to the programme such as local weather conditions and other competing events may give an insight to the film preferences and cinema-going habits of Snowtown audiences.

Programme Intrinsic factors

A preliminary analysis suggests that cinema-going was a broad habit with audiences responding equally to a range of types of film. To test if the genre of a film had an influence on the popularity of films screened at Snowtown in the study period, a genre has been allocated to each film based on the previews in *The Stanley Herald*. Where a film had not been previewed, or the genre had not been identified in the preview, the primary genre given in the IMDB website has been used. The most frequent genre screened at Snowtown Institute Memorial Hall in the study period was comedy. Of the 226 films screened, 71 (31 percent) were comedies and of the 114 main features, 27 (24 percent) were comedies. Drama was the next popular genre with 47 (21 percent) of both main and support features, and 26 (23 percent) main features, followed by musicals with 28 (12 percent) of both features and 25 (22 percent) main features. Comedies and musicals attracted an average audience size of eighty and drama 79 indicating that they had roughly equal appeal for Snowtown audiences. While the average audience size for the horror and romance genres were higher, the sample size of each of these is too small for drawing inferences. This would indicate that audience size was not particularly reliant on genre. If anything, it informs us of Bill Benbow's assumptions about audience preference when constructing programmes.

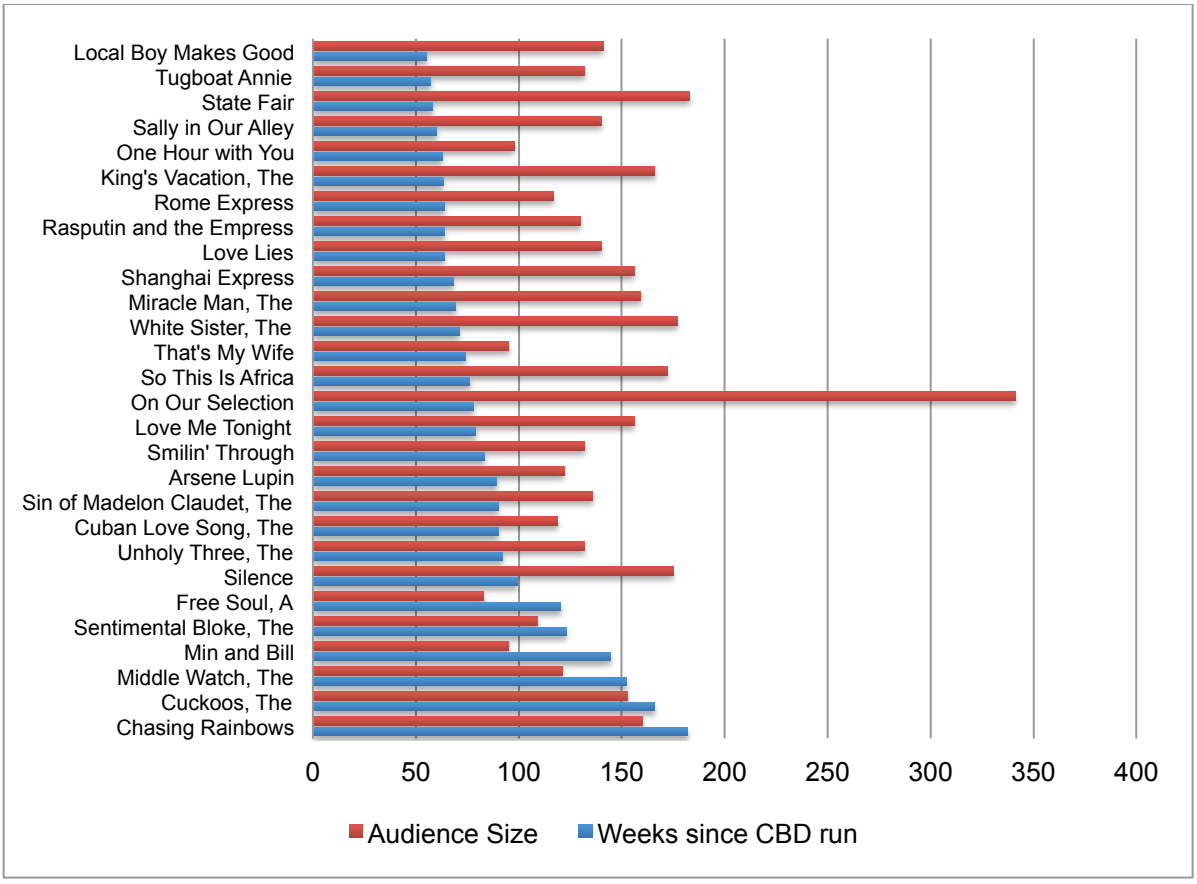
Benbow enjoyed a wide range of relationships with distributors in constructing programmes for Snowtown audiences, and this alone is significant in revising any preconceptions of Australian exhibitors being held captive by block-booking contracts forced by Hollywood distributors. 218 of the 226 films screened at the Institute from July 1933 to June 1935 were distributed by eight main distributors. This spread demonstrates Benbow's local industry power as block bookings were not as restrictive as when it operated as a community-owned picture show. Universal and Paramount distributed the largest number of the films (35 and 34 respectively) followed by

Greater Australasian Films (the Australian distributor of Columbia) with 30, Fox Films (29), MGM (28), Warner-First National (26), British Empire Films (20) and RKO (16). With the exception of Fox Films, the main and support feature were not necessarily from the same distributor, suggesting that Benbow's arrangements with Fox were more restrictive than with other distributors. Benbow had contracts with all major distributors with the exception of United Artists, and had significant scope in putting together individual programmes. There is no evidence that Bill Benbow had such a strong relationship with film distributors at this time that it would allow him to gain preferential treatment. In the late 1940s, however, when his circuit was much larger, the extent of his influence was more apparent, when his lease on the town hall at Minlaton, a town some 150kms south-east of Snowtown, expired. Out-tendered by the Community Centre, he set up opposition in the Parish Hall a few metres down the road. The new manager of the Town Hall pictures, Harry Porter, found it difficult to get films as he "found the film suppliers bowing to the wishes of Benbow Amusements."[427]

In determining Benbow's preference for distributors, a concentration on main features makes the analysis more precise. Paramount supplied the most (18) followed by Universal and MGM (16 each) and GAF and Warner-FN (15 each). Attributing the audience size to the main feature alone, Paramount rates first with 2,576 admissions, GAF next with 2,558, followed by BEF with 2,319 and MGM with 2,270. At a glance it would appear that Paramount films were more appreciated by the Snowtown audience than any other. The average audience size drawn by each distributor reveals a different picture, however. BEF main features draw the largest average audience of 193 with an average take of £7 18s 7d, followed by GAF with 170 (£7 16s 6d), Fox with 161 (£7 0s 9d), Paramount and Warner-First National with 143 (£6 7s 5d and £6 9s 11d respectively), MGM and RKO with 142 (£5 19s 2d and £6 11s 3d respectively) and Universal with the smallest average audience of 121 and the lowest average takings of £5 1s 10d. BEF specialised in British films and it may be for this reason that their films attracted the highest average audience and the highest average takings. Preference for films based on nationality is discussed later. Benbow's preference for dealing with Universal may be based on the speed with which he could obtain prints for screening at Snowtown believing that recent films would be an attraction. But this assumes that the Snowtown audiences concerned themselves with how long a film had been released.

[427] Diana Cook, *The Striding Years: A History of the Minlaton District Council Area*, p.22.

Graph 4.2 compares audience size with the time that a selection of main features that had taken more than one year to be screened in Snowtown after the end of the Adelaide CBD run. There are two, *Rainbows* (Reisner, 1930) and *The Cuckoos* (Sloane, 1930) that had taken more than three years to reach Snowtown. The average audience size of screenings at Snowtown over the study period was 151. Eleven of the 28 films shown in the graph, including *Chasing Rainbows* and *The Cuckoos*, attracted above average audiences. *On Our Selection* stands out having taken 78 weeks to reach Snowtown it drew an audience of 341, the second largest audience for the study period. The graph does not reveal any noticeable correlation between film recency and audience size suggesting that the age of a film did not necessarily concern the Snowtown audiences.



Graph 4.2: Films screened at Snowtown more than one year since the finish of the Adelaide CBD run and their Audience Size

Snowtown Institute Talkies can be considered to be close to the end of the film distribution chain in the Mid North region of South Australia. Its closest competition was the nearby town of Clare, some 52 kilometres away. Of the 39 main features screened at both Snowtown and Clare, it would take nineteen weeks on average to be screened at Clare following the finish of the CBD run and 26 weeks at Snowtown. Main features screened at Snowtown distributed by Universal

took an average of 23 weeks to arrive from the city. However, Benbow's decision to screen *The Sentimental Bloke* (Thring, 1932) some 124 weeks after its city debut distorts this average. With *The Sentimental Bloke* taken out of the equation, the average is reduced to seventeen weeks. Yet Universal films only managed to attract an average audience of 121 to their screenings, the lowest of the eight main distributors. BEF films, which had the highest average audience and the highest average takings, took an average 38 weeks to reach Snowtown. This confirms the recency of the release was not necessarily a causal factor in explaining the popularity of films for Snowtown audiences. It is possible that the country of origin may have been.

Films produced in the United States were prolific and their appeal to exhibitors was the consistency of their supply, although my evidence suggests that Australian and UK films were relatively more popular with audience members. Most of the films screened at Snowtown from July 1933 to June 1935 were produced in the United States. The 172 US films dwarf the forty films from the UK and the nine Australian productions. Of the 114 main features, 86 were produced in the USA, nineteen in the UK and seven in Australia. By allocating the takings evenly across main and support features, the total takings for US films screened was £1,094 averaging £6 7s 2d per film. While the gross takings for the forty UK films screened was £326, the average per film of £8 3s 2d was 28 percent higher than US films. The largest average ticket box takings of £8 15s 11d was for Australian films. Comparing only main features, the disparity is greater with Australian films averaging £9 0s 9d, UK averaging £8 15s 7d and the US main features averaging the same as all US features, £6 7s 2d. This popularity is also reflected in audience size. The largest average audience of 211 for Australian films is significantly higher than an average audience of 141 for US productions. The number of US films screened at Snowtown during the study period was more likely to be a result of the scale and consistency of supply rather than simply quality or popularity.

The popularity of Australian films can also be measured by their prominence in the twenty most popular main features screened at Snowtown during the study period (see Appendix 3). Australian films represent six percent of all main features screened at Snowtown during the study period, but twenty percent of the twenty most popular. These results confirm the popularity of Australian films indicated in the previous chapter. At the 32 rural South Australian venues analysed in the previous chapter Australian films represented two percent of the films screened but eight percent of the fifty most-screened films at those venues. Films from the USA represent 75 percent of all films screened at Snowtown but only fifty percent of the top twenty

main features. The other thirty percent were British productions. The view about Australian films expressed by Dan Clifford to the Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in 1927 was no longer valid. Asked if Australian films are really not good enough, Clifford replied, "one or two pictures have been successful, but generally speaking, they are very ordinary."[428] If Clifford's assessment was a true reflection of Australian films up until 1927, the popularity of Australian films in rural South Australia may have been due to an improvement in the quality since then or it may have been that rural audience reception of Australian films differed significantly than that of city and suburban audiences. Based on research by John Sedgwick, the latter may not be the case. The POPSTAT index for Sydney's first-run cinemas in 1934 ranked three Australian films, *The Squatter's Daughter*, *The Silence of Dean Maitland* and *The Hayseeds*, in the top ten.[429] These three films also rank in the top ten of the select thirty-two rural venues listed in the previous chapter and the top twenty films screened at Snowtown based on ticket sales. It seems more likely that the hostility to Australian films expressed by exhibitors at the Royal Commission was based not on the popularity or quality of films, but rather on the importance of scale of supply. This was the major advantage offered by Hollywood distributors to exhibitors who needed a constant supply of fresh material.

Factors Extrinsic to the Programme

Traditional film history places the film or films at the centre of the cinema-going experience without any regard to other aspects that may draw or deter an audience. In discussing the ephemerality of film, Robert Allen argues that the film being screened was only one part of the cinema-going experience. The experience of a cinema event constituted non-filmic aspects such as architecture, spaces and technologies and even experiences such as "tastes, smells, sounds and sights".[430] Among other non-filmic aspects, Kate Bowles suggests an ecological approach to understanding non-filmic influences that may have affected individual rural screenings by exploring the relationship between conventional historical sources and local geographical factors. Bowles puts forward a worse case challenge for the rural exhibitor:

[428] National Archives of Australia, Minutes of Evidence of the Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in Australia, 1927-1928, p536.
[429] John Sedgwick, 'Patterns in First-Run and Suburban Filmgoing in mid-1930s', p.148.
[430] Robert C. Allen, 'Reimagining the History of the Experience of Cinema' in R. Maltby, et.al., pp.54-55.

> Persuading townsfolk out along unsealed and unlit roads in the rain to see a film of uncertain print quality in an unheated hall on an uncomfortable wooden bench was the challenge faced by any rural business reliant on after-dark patronage.[431]

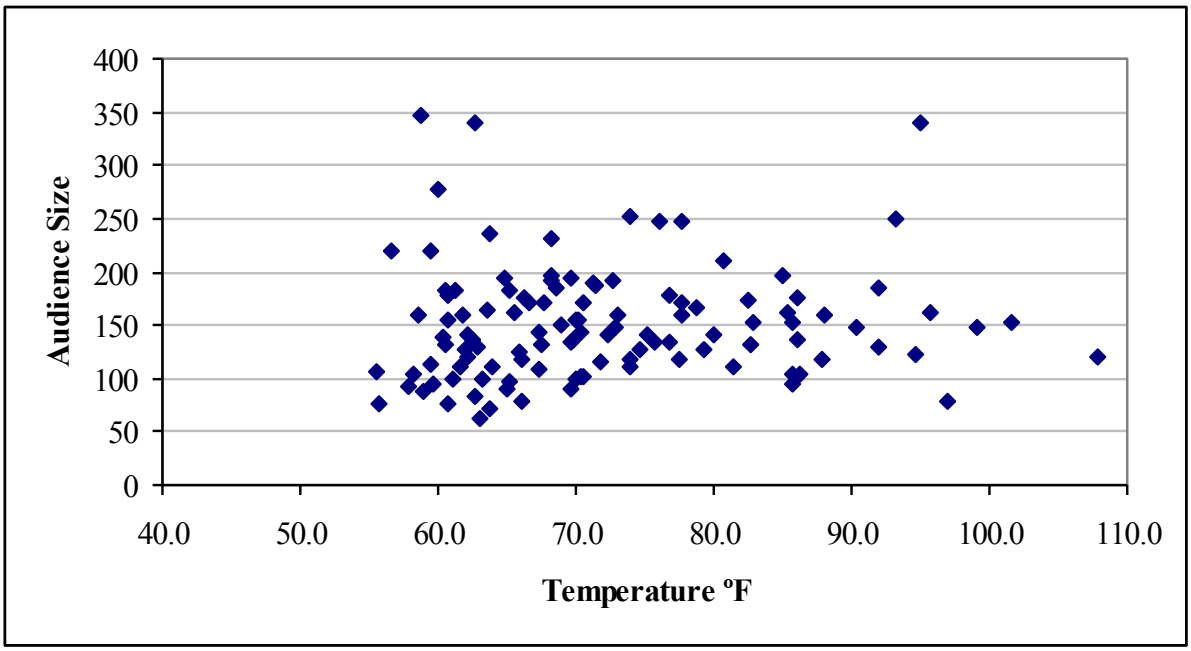
All of these factors could affect audience attendance in rural towns and it is worth testing whether meteorological conditions might explain variations in attendance.

Exhibitors were constantly complaining in trade papers about the weather being too hot or too cold. High temperatures in the city and suburbs in January and March 1934 regularly affected picture house attendances. In January, *Everyones* was reporting that a prolonged heatwave with temperatures as high as 108° F (42° C) was resulting in low attendances at those picture houses that did not have cooling plants, which included most of them.[432] George Malone reported that "thousands found their way to the seaside, while the picture theatres have had rows and rows of empty seats." Of the suburban picture houses, one was fortunate to take £20 on a Saturday night, and one of the biggest picture houses on the same circuit had taken only £3.[433] Adelaide suffered another heatwave in March 1934 when for twelve consecutive days the temperature ranged from 91° F to 110° F (33° C to 43° C).[434] For eight of those days the temperature was above 100° F (37.8° C). Ewen Waterman stated it was the worst fortnight the Ozone chain had experienced in the 22 years it had been operating.[435]

Graph 4.3 shows that attendances were typically high in the early summer months December and January and then declined in February. This indicates that other factors such as holiday patterns might be more important than just temperature alone. High temperatures in Snowtown did not necessarily deter patrons from going to see a film, however. The third most popular film screened in the research period was *Tell Me Tonight* which drew a crowd of 319 over two nights when the mercury rose to 91.5° and 98.4° F (33° and 36.9° C). Most picture shows (48) were screened in the temperature range of 60° to 90°F (15.6° and 32.2° F), drawing an average audience size of 151, which was the same average audience size for the temperature ranges of 70° to 79° F (21.1° and 26.1° C) and 80° to 89° F (26.7° and 31.7° C). This suggests that the optimum range in temperature for cinema-going in Snowtown was 60° to 89° F (15.6° to 31.7° C). While the lowest attendance at the Snowtown Talkies in the research period was on a

[431] Kate Bowles, ''All the evidence is that Cobargo is slipping': An ecological approach to rural cinema-going', *Film Studies*, Issue 10, Spring 2007, p.92.
[432] Prior to the 1970s, temperature was measured in Australia in Fahrenheit.
[433] George V.G. Malone, 'South Australia', *Everyones*, 24 January 1934, p.24.
[434] Meterological data has been prepared through the Australian Bureau of Meteorology's Climate Data Online – http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/data.
[435] George V.G. Malone, 'South Australia', *Everyones*, 21 March 1934, p.16.

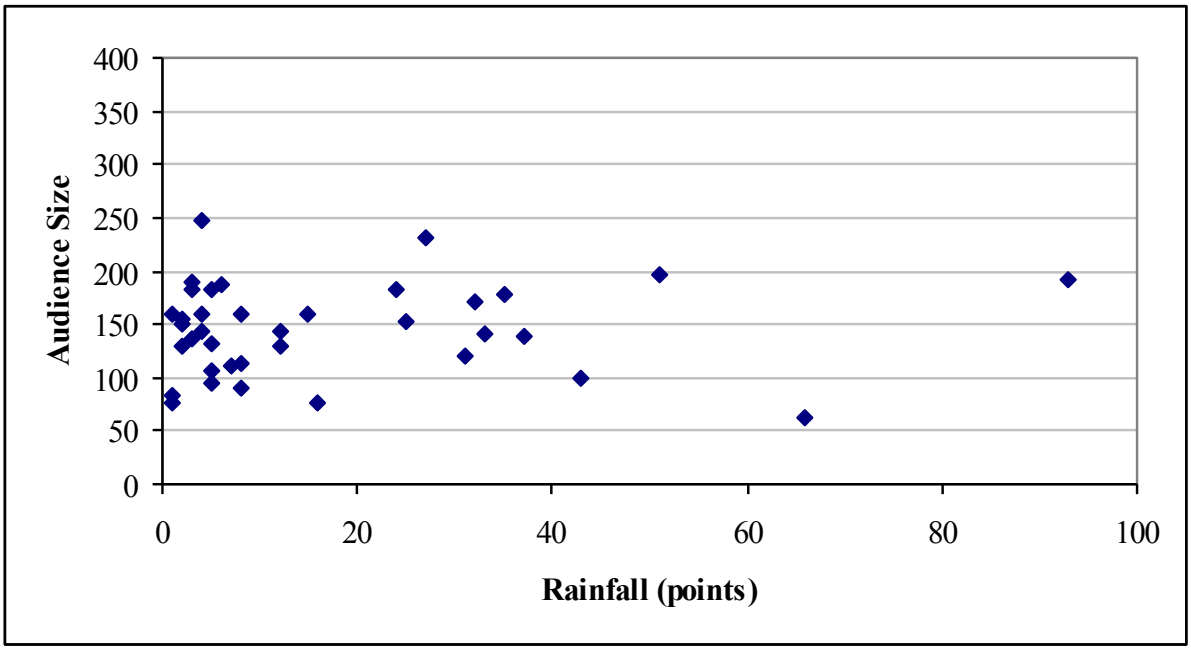
cold day, the fourth most popular film, *The Squatter's Daughter*, was screened on a day when the maximum temperature was only 57° F (13.9° C). This suggests that extreme temperature had an effect on attendances, but not if the film screened was popular.



Graph 4.3: Scatter plot of audience size against maximum temperature, July 1933 to June 1935.

While the data suggests that the optimum range in temperature for cinema-going in Snowtown is 60º to 89º F (see Graph 4.3 above), and that the audience numbers are up in summer, it does not indicate that the size of the audience is affected by rainfall.

One would expect rainfall to affect cinema attendance in rural areas as, at the time, very few roads were bitumen, but this does not appear to be the case. There was no rainfall for 63 screenings and 1 to 20 points (0.35 to 7mm) of rain for 25 screenings. The samples over 20 points of rain are too small and inconsistent to draw any conclusions. For example, the 61 to 80 points (21.5 to 28mm) range contains only one night's screening, the double feature, *The Big Cage* and *It's Tough to be Famous*. It is difficult to ascertain if it was the 63 points (22mm) of rain that weekend which was responsible for the low audience turnout of 63, considering that three weekends earlier 93 points (33mm) of rain fell and 193 cinemagoers attended the double feature *Marry Me* (Thiele, 1932) and *The Painted Woman* (Blystone, 1932). There does not appear to be any correlation between wet weather and the number of people who ventured out to the Snowtown Institute Talkies. This suggests that most of the audience were from within the township rather than the outlying district.



Graph 4.4: Scatter plot of audience size against rainfall, July 1933 to June 1935.

The table below indicates that there was not much seasonal variation. Spring and Summer 1933 had particularly high attendances, but each of those could be attributed to three star attractions. While Winter 1933 was low, the 1934 Winter had a higher average audience than Autumn and Spring.

	Season Audience	Average Audience	Average Temp.	Average Rainfall	Average Takings
Winter 33 (2 months data only)	1220	136	60.8	11	£12 3s 10d
Spring 33	2383	159	68.6	6	£14 8s 1d
Summer 34	2365	169	83.2	1	£13 19s 10d
Autumn 34	2044	146	77.8	1	£12 14s 4d
Winter 34	2381	149	62.7	5	£12 16s 3d
Spring 34	1851	142	72.6	6	£12 18s 5d
Summer 35	2211	158	80.9	4	£13 12s 4d
Autumn 35	2169	145	71.9	9	£12 10s 0d

Table 4.1: Audience sized and weather conditions, Winter 1933 to Autumn 1935. Note: The average temperature and rainfall reflects screening nights only.

Testing the Assumptions against the Ten Films with the Largest Audience

Working through each of these possible explanatory factors separately yields no immediate result. To determine if there is a correlation between cinema attendance and some combination of the variables, it might be more useful to proceed inductively, testing the assumptions against

the ten films screened at Snowtown from July 1933 to June 1935 that drew the largest audience and three films that drew the smallest audiences.

Jack's the Boy (Forde, 1932) drew an audience of 347, the largest audience for any film screened at Snowtown during the study period. The single feature was screened over two nights, 1 and 2 September 1933, taking £6 11s 10d at the ticket box on the Friday night and £25 7s 6d on the Saturday night. There were only seven occasions when a screening took place on both the Friday and Saturday night and the Friday night's share of the audience was always low, averaging 66. Friday, 1 September 1933 was a cold, wet day with a maximum temperature of 55.9° F (13.3° C) and 6.4mm of rain. The preceding day had the highest daily rainfall for August on record with 29mm of rain. The night temperature would have been even colder yet *Jack's the Boy* managed to draw an average size audience. The maximum temperature for the next day only reached 61.7° F (16.5° C), but this popular film nevertheless drew a record audience of 280.

Jack'sthe Boy was a comedy with songs, the type of film that had the potential of lifting the spirits of a depressed rural community. The film's star, Jack Hulbert, described the film as a "tough adventure and a hero doing mad things, but coming out on top in the end."[436] *Jack's the Boy* was distributed by Greater Australasian Films whose films enjoyed an average audience size of 170 when screened in Snowtown, second highest to BEF. The film was British and therefore likely to draw a larger audience in Snowtown than a US production. *Jack's the Boy* had a six-week run at the Majestic Theatre in Adelaide and after that, there was no pattern to how it moved around the State. It took 22 weeks to reach Snowtown and arrived just two weeks after screening in the nearby town of Clare. It then travelled east to be screened at Port Pirie for three nights before moving onto the Yorke Peninsula. It was unusual for Snowtown to screen a film soon after Clare and before Port Pirie. The film was still on the rural circuit two years after its city premiere, indicating that it was popular with rural audiences.

On Our Selection (Hall, 1932) screened as a double bill with *Central Park* (Adolfi, 1932) over two nights, 27 and 28 April 1934. The Friday night audience of 83 was the largest audience for any Friday night screening, although it was still dwarfed by the following night's audience. On the Saturday night, 261 people attended the screening and the night's takings was £22 19s 8d.

The Saturday screening was on a cold autumn night when the day's temperature did not get higher than 61.6° F (16.4° C). So what was it about *On Our Selection* which coaxed people away

[436] Rachael Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain*, p. 132.

from their hearth? The film was self-consciously Australian, with a grass-roots rural folk hero battling adversity. It premiered in Brisbane in August 1932 and according to *Home* in its 1 June 1937 issue, "it went on to screen continuously throughout Australia for the next three years."[437] Given that the typical commercial life of a feature film in the 1930s was less than twelve months,[438] *On Our Selection* had an unusually long run. In describing what it was that struck a chord with the audiences, Graham Shirley and Brian Adams comment that Dad Rudd's "talk about battling floods, drought, fires and foreclosure had a new relevance to Australians thrown back on their own resources."[439] This was particularly so for rural audiences such as Snowtown. The three Australian films that are in the ten most popular films screened in Snowtown are all set in the bush. Films set in the city, such as *The Sentimental Bloke*, did not fare so well at Snowtown.

Tell Me Tonight (Litvak, 1932), with the support feature *The King's Cup* (Cobham, 1933), attracted an audience of 319 over two nights, with 62 seeing the film on Friday, 12 January 1934 and 257 on Saturday. One film reviewer described it as having a shallow plot but superb photography, and being a "picture for parents and children alike."[440] Of the 319 admissions, 64 were children. *Tell Me Tonight* starred Jan Kiepura as an Italian opera star who ends up travelling to Switzerland with a dubious character. The film's big attraction was the songs. It had been screened three months earlier in the nearby towns of Blyth and Clare. The significance of this is Blyth was less than 30kms by road from Snowtown and Blyth Talkies was a formidable competitor of Clare Talkies, which operated at the Clare Town Hall. With only 13kms separating the two towns, the Blyth and Clare picture shows vied with each other for an audience. Two days before the Blyth screening, an advertisement was placed in *The Stanley Herald* announcing *Tell Me Tonight* as coming soon, even though it would be another three months before it was screened at Snowtown. When it did screen at the Snowtown Institute Talkies it was 98.4° F (36.9° C), but the temperature did not deter the audience from seeing one of the most popular films of 1933. *Tell Me Tonight* ranked first in the fifty most screened films in rural South Australia in the previous chapter and second in *The News*' poll of the ten best pictures screened in Adelaide in 1933.[441]

[437] Andrew Pike & Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 117.
[438] John Sedgwick, *Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s,*p. 3.
[439] Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years*, p. 117.
[440] The Cameraman, 'Screen Notes', *The Shepparton Advertiser*, 16 April 1934, p.6.
[441] Anon., 'Ten Best Films', *The News*, 26 March 1934, p.1.

The Squatter's Daughter (Hall, 1933) was supported by *Little Orphan Annie* (Robertson, 1932) and drew an audience of 277 over two nights, with 69 at the Friday night screening of 29 June 1934 and 205 at the next night's screening. The Saturday was a cold day with the thermometer reaching 57.7° F (14.3° C) which, taking into consideration the audience size of *Jack's the Boy* and *Tell Me Tonight*, suggests that temperature may not have had any bearing on the number of people prepared to attend a popular film. This film also represents strong evidence for the argument that the recency of the film's release was not necessarily crucial in rural areas. *The Squatter's Daughter* took thirty weeks from the end of its Adelaide CBD run to its screening in Snowtown. By the time it had reached Snowtown, it had been screened on the three travelling itinerant exhibitor circuits. On Lester's tour it was screened twice in two weeks in the small town of Wirrabarra Institute two months before the Snowtown screening. According to Max Whittle, Wirrabarawas a "very, very good town for pictures, you could go there on a Saturday night and get a full house."[442] To emphasise how far down Snowtown was in the hierarchy of distribution in regards to *The Squatter's Daughter*, it was screened in the remote town of Penong 600kms north east of Adelaide three months before Snowtown.

The Squatter's Daughter was a drama, the second most common genre with the Snowtown audiences, and distributed by BEF whose films drew the largest average Snowtown audience. But its popularity was probably more to do with it being an Australian film. *The Squatter's Daughter* ranked third in the fifty most screened films and in *The News*' poll of the ten best pictures screened in Adelaide in 1933.

Cavalcade (Lloyd, 1933) was the fifth most popular film screened at Snowtown and the Academy Award-winning film probably could have drawn a bigger audience than the 253 that attended had it been screened on a Saturday night rather than on Wednesday, 27 September 1933. *Cavalcade*, distributed by Fox Films, "was one of the 11 top grossing films of 1933"[443] and it was screened at Snowtown with another Fox Film, *Walking Down Broadway* (Von Stroheim, 1933), which has been described as a box office dud.[444]

If *The Squatter's Daughter* suggests that recency of release is not necessarily crucial*, Cavalcade* immediately brings out the complexity of finding patterns by suggesting the opposite*. Cavalcade* was screened at Snowtown two months after it finished its CBD run and before it was screened

[442] Interview with Max Whittle, 1984.
[443] Alan G. Fetrow, *Sound Films, 1927-1939: A United States Filmography*, p. 93.
[444] *Ibid*., p. 271.

at independent suburban picture houses. This would have contributed significantly to its popularity among the Snowtown population. The weather was not too cold reaching 73.9° F (23.3° C) during the day and *Cavalcade* was of the second most popular genre, drama. Although it is not a British film, it is a film about Britain and British history. *Cavalcade* ranked sixth in the fifty most screened films and first in *The News*' poll.

Yes, Mr Brown (Buchanan, 1933), a British musical, was just as popular as *Cavalcade* and also screened mid-week. While the number of tickets sold was three less than *Cavalcade*, the takings were a lot less, £21 10s 6d compared to £24 4s 9d, because the audience comprised more children and adults opting for the less expensive seats. The temperature was a hot 93.3° F (34° F) on 24 January 1934, the day *Yes, Mr Brown* was screened at Snowtown, but as with *Tell Me Tonight*, the hot weather did not appear to deter people going to the pictures. *Yes, Mr Brown* doubled with another British film, the comedy *Up for the Derby* (MacLean Rogers, 1933). A British musical doubled with a British comedy distributed through GAF and screened two months after finishing on the suburban circuit were characteristics that would attract a large Snowtown audience.

The Sign of the Cross (De Mille, 1932) was another film screened on two nights at the Snowtown Institute on 20 and 21 October 1933. Of the 248 patrons who saw *The Sign of the Cross*, 182 saw it on the Saturday night when the weather was a pleasant 81.4ºf (27.4ºc). It was screened as a single feature and took £22 13s 10d at the ticket box over the two nights. Benbow would have been confident of a good size audience at Snowtown Institute even though a lot of people would have been attending the Clare Show on that Saturday. *The Sign of the Cross* was by far the most popular of the Paramount features screened at Snowtown during the study period. In a newspaper survey of readers' ten best pictures screened in Adelaide in 1933, *The Sign of the Cross* ranked fourth.[445]

Sleepless Nights (Bentley, 1932) was the main feature supported by *Mr Bill the Conqueror* (Walker, 1932) when it screened at the Snowtown Institute on 23 December 1933. It had all the ingredients to be a successful film in Snowtown: a British musical comedy distributed by BEF and shown on the day when the temperature was a pleasant 77.6° F (25.3° C). Just as many people who saw *The Sign of the Cross* over two nights attended the one evening screening of *Sleepless*

[445] E. Waterman, 'The S.A. Suburbs Speak: How Adelaide Shows Fought Through the Depression', *Everyones*, 12 December 1934, p. 45

Nights but the takings were slightly lower at £22 1s 7d as more adults opted for the cheaper seats.

The Hayseeds (Smith, 1933) supported by a B-grade comedy, *Peach O'Reno* (Seiter, 1931) screened over two nights on 31 August and 1 September 1934. It opened in Adelaide on 23 December 1933, running for two weeks at West's and screening in Clare before moving to Greater Union's second release CBD house, the Grand. Screening in nearby Clare eight months before the Snowtown screening did not appear to affect the size of the Snowtown audience with 236 people paying a total of £17 14s 4d at the ticket box. As with *On Our Selection* and *The Squatter's Daughter*, *The Hayseeds* struck a chord with the Snowtown audience with its rural location and its comic central character rising above adversity. It was screened on a wintry cold night when the daytime temperature did not rise above 58.8° F (14.9° C).

Paddy, the Next Best Thing (Lachman, 1933) was the tenth most popular film screened at the Snowtown Institute Talkies in the study period. Screened on 2 June 1934, with the support *Uptown New York* (Schertzinger, 1932), the ticket box takings were £20 7s 2d from an audience of 231. The film, a musical comedy, was distributed by Fox and it was screened on a reasonably pleasant night for winter with the day temperature reaching 68.2° F (20.1° C) and 27 points (7mm) of rain falling. In a newspaper survey of readers' ten best pictures screened in Adelaide in 1933, *Paddy, the Next Best Thing* ranked fifth.[446]

Of the fifty most-screened films discussed in the previous chapter, 39 were screened at the Snowtown Institute in the study period. Table 4.2 provides a comparison by which we can test the popularity of films measured by take-up by exhibitors against actual box office takings.

[446] *Ibid*.

	Film Title	Snowtown Ranking
1	Tell Me Tonight	3
2	The Sign of the Cross	7
3	The Squatter's Daughter	4
4	Paddy the Next Best Thing	10
5	Forty-Second Street	16
6	Cavalcade	5
7	The Silence of Dean Maitland	15
8	Rio Rita	19
9	The Hayseeds	9
10	Gold Diggers of 1933	48
11	A Ticket in Tatts	32
12	There Goes the Bride	61
13	King Kong	75
14	Riptide	34
15	Moonlight and Pretzels	53
16	A Successful Calamity	106
17	Peg o' My Heart	17
18	Dancing Lady	-
19	The Midshipmaid	39
20	I Was a Spy	40
21	The Torch Singer	62
22	I Am Suzanne	-
23	The King's Vacation	36
24	Bottoms Up	-
25	The Invisible Man	24

	Film Title	Snowtown Ranking
26	The Cat's Paw	-
27	Carolina	40
28	My Weakness	-
29	A Southern Maid	85
30	Baby, Take a Bow	77
31	Yes, Mr Brown	6
32	You Said a Mouthful	16
33	Handy Andy	109
34	Marry Me	18
35	My Song for You	-
36	That's a Good Girl	52
37	Tugboat Annie	71
38	Fra Diavolo	84
39	The Kiss Before the Mirror	105
40	The Kid from Spain	-
41	The Good Companions	-
42	Kiss Me Again	83
43	Bring 'em Back Alive	81
44	Rasputin and the Empress	72
45	The White Sister	28
46	The Power and the Glory	-
47	Lady for a Day	33
48	This Week of Grace	-
49	Central Airport	73
50	Zoo in Budapest	-

Table 4.2: Fifty most screened films in rural South Australia (July 1933 to June 1935) with ranking of Snowtown audience size.[447]

There are three significant anomalies in the table that are worth discussing where a film has ranked poorly at Snowtown.

A Successful Calamity (Adolfi,1931), a Warner-FN comedy about a millionaire who pretends to be bankrupt to test his family, ranked sixteen in the fifty most screened films yet ranked 106 in the Snowtown screenings. It was screened on 23 June 1934 with the support feature *The Lodger* and drew an audience of 91. June 1934 was the coldest month for that year and on the day of the screening the temperature ranged from a low of 46.9° F (8.3° C) to a top of 64.9° F (18.3° C). It did not rain that day and only four points (1.5mm) fell in the previous seven days. *The Squatter's Daughter*, which received the third largest audience for the study period, was screened one week

[447] There were two programmes screened at Snowtown that had a main and support feature listed in Table 4.2: *Forty-second Street* screened with *You Said a Mouthful* and *I Was a Spy* screened with *Carolina*.

later over two nights with a maximum daily temperature of 61° F (16.1° C) on the Friday and 57° F (13.9° C) on the Saturday. Not only was it colder, but also over the previous five days 33 points (11.7mm) of rain fell. This suggests that weather was not a factor in the low attendance at the screening of *A Successful Calamity*. The time the film had taken to reach Snowtown after the finish of the Adelaide CBD run, 49 weeks, may have contributed to its failure to attract a large audience but it is more likely that a Depression-weary community was not interested in the antics of a city millionaire and preferred to wait a week to see a film more akin to their own environment.

The Fox comedy *Handy Andy* (Butler, 1934) ranked 33 in the fifty most screened films but only attracted an audience of 79 when it was screened at Snowtown ranking it 109. It was screened on 28 November 1934, a Wednesday night, as the hall was not available for the following Saturday night due to a church strawberry fair. The average for a Wednesday night screening was 151 but there were three films screened on a Wednesday night that drew audiences in excess of 200: *Cavalcade*, *Yes, Mr. Brown* and *Damaged Lives*. The day *Handy Andy* was screened the temperature reached 96.1° F (35.6° C) and only eight points (3mm) of rain had fallen in the previous eighteen days. The high temperature may have been a contributing factor to the low attendance but it is more likely to have been affected by the film being screened in nearby Clare fourteen weeks earlier. Once again, the Snowtown community may have preferred to wait to see an Australian film, *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, which was screened the following week.

The third discrepancy is with *The Kiss Before the Mirror* (Whale, 1933), a Universal production set in Vienna about a lawyer representing a man for killing his adulteress wife only to find the same circumstances happening in his own life. The film ranked 39 in the fifty most screened films and 105 at Snowtown drawing an audience of 91. The temperature on 14 April 1934, when it was screened, ranged from 59° F (15° C) to 71.1° F (21.7° C) and nineteen points (6.6mm) of rain fell in the two days prior to that day, which would not have been inclement enough to deter cinema-goers. The film had taken twenty weeks to reach Snowtown after the end of the Adelaide CBD run. Once again, an Australian film, *On Our Selection*, screened not long after, in this case two weeks later.

The pattern of poor attendance at a film that ranked in the fifty most screened films and is followed the next week by an Australian production occurs on two other occasions: *Gold Diggers of 1933* ranked tenth but ranked 48 at Snowtown was followed the next week by *The Hayseeds*;

and *The Torch Singer* that ranked 21 but ranked 62 at Snowtown was followed the next week by *A Ticket in Tatts*. Five of the seven Australian films screened at Snowtown in the two-year study period may have impacted on the attendances of the previous week's show by budget-conscious cinema-goers deferring a visit to the cinema in order to watch an Australian production. The sample is too small to draw a firm conclusion but it is something to consider in any future microstudies of Australian rural towns where attendance data becomes available.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Snowtown data has provided an insight into the cinema-going preferences of one rural town in the early 1930s and factors that may marginally affect audience size. It shows us that there is no simple explanation of popularity. Every week presented a new programme with a new set of incentives and disincentives with which the exhibitor had to contend. While inclement weather does not appear to have impeded the weekly pilgrimage to the Snowtown Institute Talkies, there is a general pattern of success with British comedies or musicals or with contemporary Australian films set in the bush. The time taken for a film to reach Snowtown after the CBD run was not necessarily a consideration: the film with second highest ticket box takings, *On Our Selection*, took 78 weeks. Recency of release could function as an incentive to attendance (as in the case of *Cavalcade*), in a situation where it might be advertised as an additional incentive to attend. In rural areas, we might speculate that lack of recency was less of a disincentive, given that cinemagoers would have fewer opportunities to see the film at competing cinemas.

The analysis of the Snowtown data shows a decline from September 1934 in features which would attract a large audience with the monthly takings dropping to £32 15s 6d in November 1934, the lowest in the two-year period. The Snowtown Institute's arrangement with Bill Benbow meant that they were guaranteed a percentage of these takings for no outlay other than making the hall available for the screenings. For Benbow, the arrangement freed him from the worry of the overheads associated with maintaining a venue, and owning the projection equipment was sufficient to guarantee him the lease of the hall. It also gave him the advantage of hiring films as a package and touring them through other towns where he had a similar arrangement. Towards the end of a film's run he had the added advantage of seeing how a film went in the city and the suburbs before it arrived at Snowtown. The absentee exhibitor model provided cash-strapped institute committees with a permanent, regular picture show, made

screening films in rural and regional towns viable, and ensured the survival of the rural picture show.

5. Itinerant Exhibitors: Paragon Talkies and Cleve Talkies, July 1933 to June 1935

The exhibition model least discussed in Australian cinema exhibition history is that of the itinerant exhibitor, a rural occupation romanticised in Joan Long's 1977 film, *The Picture Show Man*. Set in the 1920s, the film was based on the experiences of Lyle Penn, a young man who took to the road with his father travelling the backroads of northern New South Wales screening in small towns. Since Long's film there has been little historical interest shown in a component of cinema exhibition that provided isolated rural communities with relatively up-to-date entertainment. This lack is particularly vexing given the amount of work that has been done on itinerant exhibitors in the United States. With the exception of Aileen Roberson's biography of Allan Tom, who operated Amusu Touring Talkies in the central west of New South Wales during the 1930s, there is a dearth of material on how the itinerant exhibitor functioned in an industry more focused on servicing city, suburban and large regional cinemas.[448] Even in small town histories the travelling picture show is mentioned only in passing and generally in the context of the functions of community halls rather than an entertainment integral to town activities. Furthermore, there is a misconception that the itinerant exhibitor was exclusively associated with the silent era and early talkies, although travelling picture shows were visiting remote areas of the State where television reception had not reached until the early 1960s.[449] This case study aims to provide some insight into the activities of the itinerant exhibitors on the Eyre Peninsula, who were at their most active in the 1930s, and will discuss the industrial context of itinerant exhibitors and their programming strategies. It will also look at their relationship with other exhibitors on the Eyre Peninsula, their interaction with local communities and their relationship with centralized regulations.

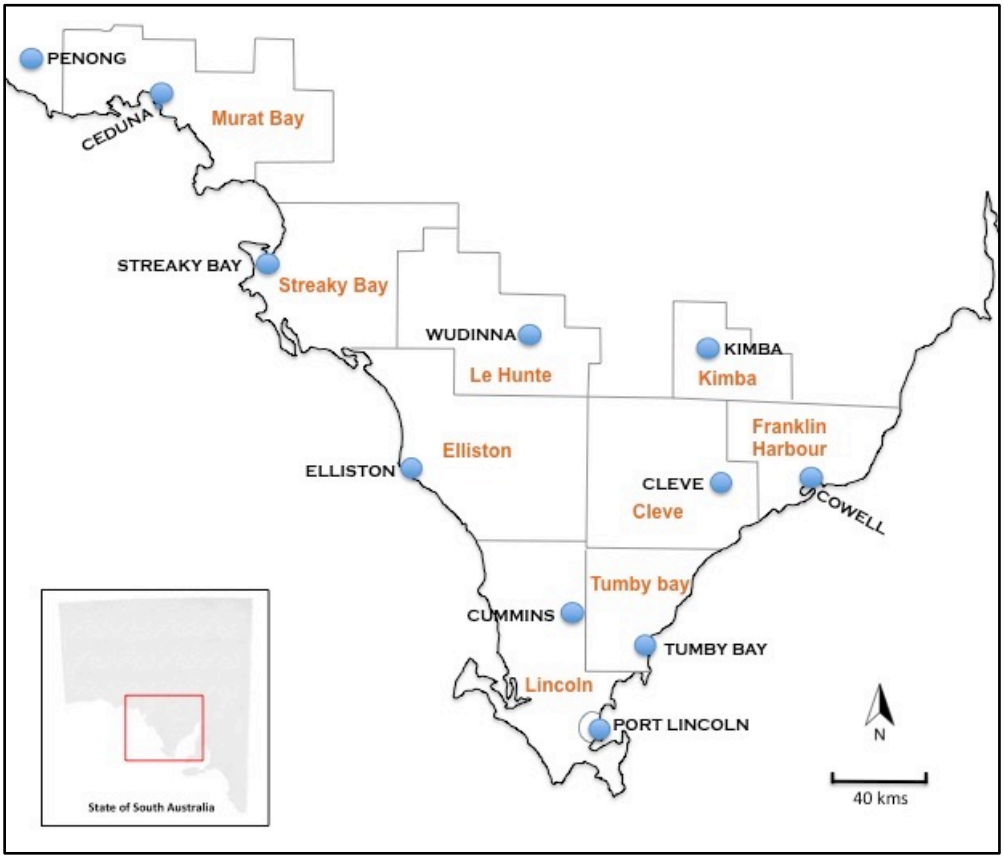
There were three itinerant exhibitors operating above-average sized circuits in rural South Australia in the study period of July 1933 to June 1935. Two toured the Eyre Peninsula and a third traversed the mid-north region of the State. The most prolific itinerant exhibitor on the Eyre Peninsula was Norm Stubing, whose Cleve Talkies covered over forty remote towns. Competing with Stubing was Hawkes' Paragon Talkies. Both would often tour at the same time, narrowly missing each other as they crossed the peninsula.

[448] Aileen Roberson, *Allan Tom: The Picture Show Man.*
[449] *The Film Weekly Motion Picture Directory 1966-67* lists touring shows still operating in Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia.

The Eyre Peninsula is one of South Australia's largest regional areas, being some 38,872 square kilometres in area.[450] In 1933, it consisted of nine district councils and one municipal corporation. Table 5.1 and Map 5.1 show the size of each of these districts, their population and population density. A comparison to the population density of Adelaide and its suburbs in 1933 (664 people per square kilometre) highlights how isolated the communities on the Peninsula were at this time.

District or Corporation	Area (km²)	Population	Population per km²	Principal Town
Corporation of Port Lincoln	21.5	3,006	140	n/a
Lincoln	4,739	2,396	0.5	Port Lincoln
Cleve	5,236	2,046	0.4	Cleve
Elliston	5,957	1,219	0.2	Elliston
Franklin Harbour	3,160	1,287	0.4	Cowell
Kimba	1,722	1,190	0.7	Kimba
Le Hunte	4,338	2,117	0.5	Wudinna
Murat Bay	5,088	2,356	0.5	Ceduna
Streaky Bay	6,209	2,854	0.5	Streaky Bay
Tumby Bay	2,402	2,344	1.0	Tumby Bay

Table 5.1: Eyre Peninsula Districts - Area, Population and Population Density (1933 Census)



Map 5.1: Eyre Peninsula Districts with Principal Towns in 1933

[450] Varying sources show a range in the area of the Eyre Peninsula. For the purpose of this thesis, I have confined it to the proclaimed district councils shown in the Official 1933 census.

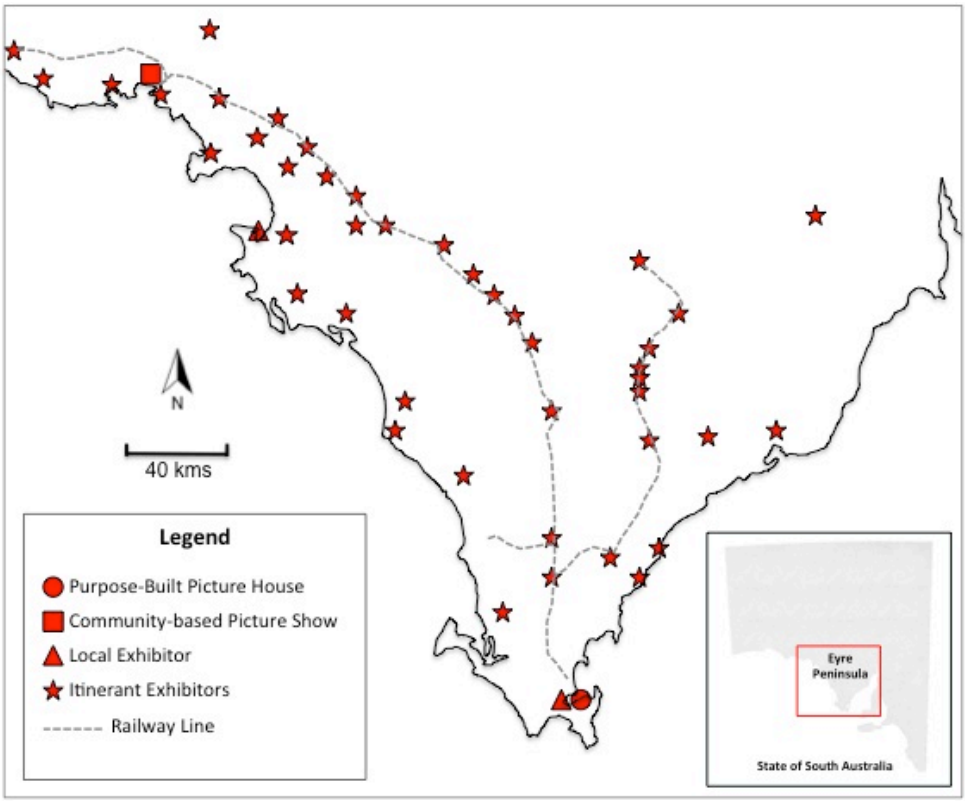
Although the Eyre Peninsula is only 200 kilometres from Adelaide as the crow flies, it was regarded as isolated in the first half of the twentieth century. Port Lincoln, the peninsula's main town, was 650 kilometres from Adelaide by a tapestry of roads in various conditions. Shipping was the peninsula's main connection to Adelaide and as cereal growing became the dominant industry, the cost of transport limited farming, and the townships, to the coast. Such was the reliance on shipping that the residents referred to Adelaide as being on the mainland.[451] It was not until the first rail line opened in 1905, linking Port Lincoln to Cummins, that agriculture expanded into the inland areas. Prior to the coming of the railway, only one town, Ceduna, existed on the 480 kilometre route that the rail took from Port Lincoln to Penong.[452] As the tracks were laid, towns emerged along the way.

Initial research into 1930s cinema exhibition on the Eyre Peninsula suggests that there was a pattern supporting Ross Thorne's thesis that "the railways played a crucial role in the organization of the regional entertainment business."[453] The picture shows followed the rail line as far west as Penong, leading one to believe that the railways provided the means of transporting films from one town to another. However, further research revealed that this was not necessarily the case on the Eyre Peninsula. Rail timetables did not match the movement of the films from one town to the next and there were tours that deviated from the rail line to visit townships even more remote than the rail towns.[454] As many of these railway towns had only small galvanized-iron halls with no electricity and no projection equipment, projectors and generators, needed to be transported to the towns as well as films. Electrification of projection and amplification equipment had made film exhibition a much less easily transportable proposition than in Wybert Reeve's day. Loading such equipment on and off trains on a daily basis would have been cumbersome. Instead, the itinerant exhibitors on the Eyre Peninsula travelled the roads that followed the railway and those roads linking the coastal towns.

By the close of 1932 exhibitors on Eyre Peninsula were screening sound films. The decision by distributors to discontinue the importation of silent prints and the rapid technical innovation of cheap and portable sound reproduction equipment meant that the transition to sound was

[451] Peter Knife, *Peninsula Pioneer*, p.1. This view of Eyre Peninsula as being isolated from the rest of South Australia is epitomised in an interview with Max Whittle who toured with Lester's Talkies mainly in the mid-North region of the State, but occasionally the Eyre Peninsula. Commenting on finishing a tour on the Peninsula he commented, "Anyhow, we use to work our way back and then come back into South Australian territory".
[452] *Ibid*., p.xi.
[453] Ross Thorne, 'Rethinking distribution: developing the parameters for a micro-analysis of the movement of motion pictures', p.315.
[454] The rail was sometimes used to freight films from Port Lincoln to the town at which a tour commenced.

accomplished throughout the industry relatively quickly in Australia. By this time, the structure of the industry on the Peninsula comprised the range of the competing exhibition models laid out in Chapter 2. There were five exhibitors operating with four different models: purpose-built picture house, community-based picture show and local exhibitor in the principal towns and itinerant exhibitor in the smaller towns. Map 5.2 shows those towns for which screenings were advertised. There was only one purpose-built picture house on the Eyre Peninsula – the Flinders Theatre in Port Lincoln, owned and managed by Rebecca McGregor, the local newspaper proprietor, and her two sons, Stan and Frank. Its competition came from the Memorial Hall where Len Hawkes screened twice weekly in partnership with the Institute Committee until the hall was destroyed in a fire in November 1934. Hawkes also screened on a regular basis in his home town, Tumby Bay, fifty kilometres north of Port Lincoln. In the north-west of the Peninsula, the local Institute Committee operated Ceduna Talkies screening weekly on Saturday nights at the Ceduna Memorial Hall. The Saturday night picture show at Streaky Bay was screened by West Coast Pictures Company, which had a sole proprietor, Alwyn Mudge. All of these forms of exhibition were reliant on there being towns of around 2,000. The remaining settlements relied on itinerant exhibition. There were at least 46 towns on the Eyre Peninsula (the majority being railway towns) that were on the itinerant exhibitor circuit toured by Stubing's Cleve Talkies and Hawkes' Paragon Talkies.



Map 5.2: Exhibition Models on the Eyre Peninsula 1933-35.

Len Hawkes began screening pictures on the Peninsula in 1925 in Tumby Bay where he also supplied the town's electricity. He expanded his circuit to include Cowell and Cleve in 1927 and two years later secured a lease on the Parish Hall in Port Lincoln, screening on Wednesday and Saturday nights in competition with the Flinders Theatre and the Moran Brothers' Pictures, which screened in the town's Memorial Hall. Following William Moran's retirement from the exhibition industry in April 1930, Hawkes entered a partnership with the Institute Committee and moved from the Parish Hall to the Memorial Hall, taking his 200 seats with him. With additional seats purchased by the Institute Committee, the Memorial Hall had its full licence capacity of 670, making it comparable in size to the Flinders Theatre.[455] In late 1932, Hawkes purchased a portable talkie plant and began touring the Eyre Peninsula as Paragon Talkies screening in Cowell, Cleve and Kimba.

There are no advertisements in the local newspapers to indicate that Hawkes had been touring earlier with silent films. The licence application for one of Hawkes' operators indicates that in 1929 he was employed by Hawke's Touring Picture Show, however,[456] suggesting that Hawkes had been touring some years before Paragon Talkies began advertising as a touring show in 1934.[457] Len Hawkes died in 1933 and his wife, Ellen Hawkes, and sons took over the running of the business. It was unusual at that time in what was essentially a male-dominated industry to have two women, Rebecca McGregor and Ellen Hawkes, functioning as the major exhibitors in the one town.[458]

Hawkes' competition on the touring circuit was Norm Stubing's Cleve Talkies. Stubing began screening at Cleve on a regular basis after he installed a plant in the Institute Hall in 1929. In 1932 he commenced his touring picture show. Prior to entering the exhibition industry, both Hawkes and Stubing had mechanical backgrounds working in the motor business, and both had an association with the electricity supply in their towns. Innovation in sound technology made the theatrical skills of the pioneering itinerant exhibitor redundant. As Charles Musser suggests, "the 'sound era' brought the practice of road-showing special features with orchestra and effects trucks

[455] Anon., 'Port Lincoln Institute', *The Port Lincoln Times*, 1 August 1930, p.9.
[456] SRSA, GRG67/33/263/1929, application for cinematograph operator's licence from C.A. Schramm.
[457] An article in the local newspaper in relation to the first advertised tour calls it Hawkes' next visit. This would also indicate tours were taking place before 3 May 1934. Anon., 'Paragon Pictures', *The West Coast Sentinel*, 27 April 1934, p.1.
[458] Both expanded their territory and were operating many years later. Ellen Hawkes screened at Streaky Bay up until 1946 and Tumby Bay up until 1953. The earliest available edition of *Film Weekly*'s directory of theatres is for 1938-39. By this period there were five women operating screening venues in South Australia. For a history of women exhibitors in the USA see Kathryn Fuller-Seeley and Karen Ward Mahar, 'Exhibiting Women: Gender, showmanship, and the Professionalization of Film Exhibition in the United States, 1900-1930', *Women Film Pioneers Project*.

to an abrupt end"[459]. Not that any of the remote towns experienced travelling picture shows on the scale of Lyman H. Howe's, but after Leslie Lester, who was an accomplished singer, wired his travelling show for sound, he no longer sang at intermission. As the film producers now controlled the image and sound, a background in entertainment was no longer a prerequisite, and by the 1930s exhibitors were more likely to have previously been in the electrical or mechanical trades. These provided the necessary skills to deal with the unforeseen circumstances that occurred while touring, such as electrical or mechanical problems with the plant or vehicle breakdowns on remote roads.

Photograph 5.1: Cleve Talkies on tour of the Eyre Peninsula. (Source: *Cleve on the Yadnarie Plains*.)

The travelling picture show circuit on the Eyre Peninsula mainly screened in towns with populations too small to make a permanent picture show economically viable. As an entertainment, it would pull an insular community together to gather at the local hall, sometimes regardless of what film was being screened. Karina Aveyard points out that this sociality often took place outside the venue rather than in a darkened room with everyone's attention fixed on the screen.[460] At the same time, it would also pull an insular community in the other direction, towards an outside world, either through American features set in foreign locations or the experience of newsreel shorts such as the Melbourne Cup or the Third Test Match in Adelaide.

The films screened by the itinerant exhibitors were at the end of the distribution chain and had finished their CBD run an average of forty to forty-seven weeks earlier. Because the films were old, they could be booked for a longer period and for a flat fee (generally three weeks at an

[459] Charles Musser, *High-Class Moving Pictures*, p.273.
[460] Karina Aveyard, 'What the country tells us – the place of the 'rural' in contemporary studies of cinema', p.10.

estimated cost of £7 10s per week).[461] This meant that Hawkes and Stubing could operate a more drawn out circuit screening more widely to a larger number of smaller audiences. When Stubing managed to secure *Sunshine Susie* (Saville 1931) he made the most of the print and screened it in 35 towns in six weeks covering over 1,600 kilometres in the process.

Illustration 5.1: Example of an itinerant exhibitor's contract with a distributor. (Source: A.M. Robertson, *Allan Tom: The Picture Showman*)

While film rental might have been cheaper, taking into account other expenses such as hall hire (generally around £1 10s per night), petrol and wages, touring films around the Eyre Peninsula was expensive, and this was reflected in admission charges. In comparison to the Flinders Picture Theatre, which charged 1s 2d for the stalls and only 1s 9d for the more salubrious dress circle (prices on par with the city second-release houses and suburban chains), picture-goers in the remote towns paid 1s 2d to sit on wooden forms in the front rows and 2s 4d for wooden fold-up chairs in the back rows. To make tours economically viable, the itinerant exhibitor had to work the print hard. There is no record of their returns for each tour and it is not possible to make assumptions based on the seating capacity of halls as not all of them were licensed at the time (as discussed in Chapter 2). Audience size in halls such as those in Denial Bay, Mount Hope and Sheringa give some indication as to what an itinerant exhibitor might take in the small halls. Based on letters held in the State Records, screenings took place in Denial Bay every three weeks to an audience of 30; every two months at Mount Hope to an audience of less than 50; and at Sheringa to an audience of less than 40.[462] Based on actual audience, Stubing or Hawkes could expect to take at the most £14 in ticket sales over three nights, of which £2 was amusement tax and £3 15s

[461] I have no documentation of any of Stubing's contracts with distributors. This estimate is based on a typical contract of a similar itinerant exhibitor operating at the same time. Aileen Roberson, *Allan Tom: The Picture Showman*, p.117.
[462] SRSA, GRG67/33/108/1933, Correspondence relating to Denial Bay Hall; GRG67/33/112/1933, Correspondence relating to Mount Hope Hall; and GRG67/33/119/1933, Correspondence relating to Sheringa Hall.

would have been paid for film hire.[463] Added to these outlays were the hall hire, wages for the operator, advertising and petrol costs, which left very little return on three nights of screenings.

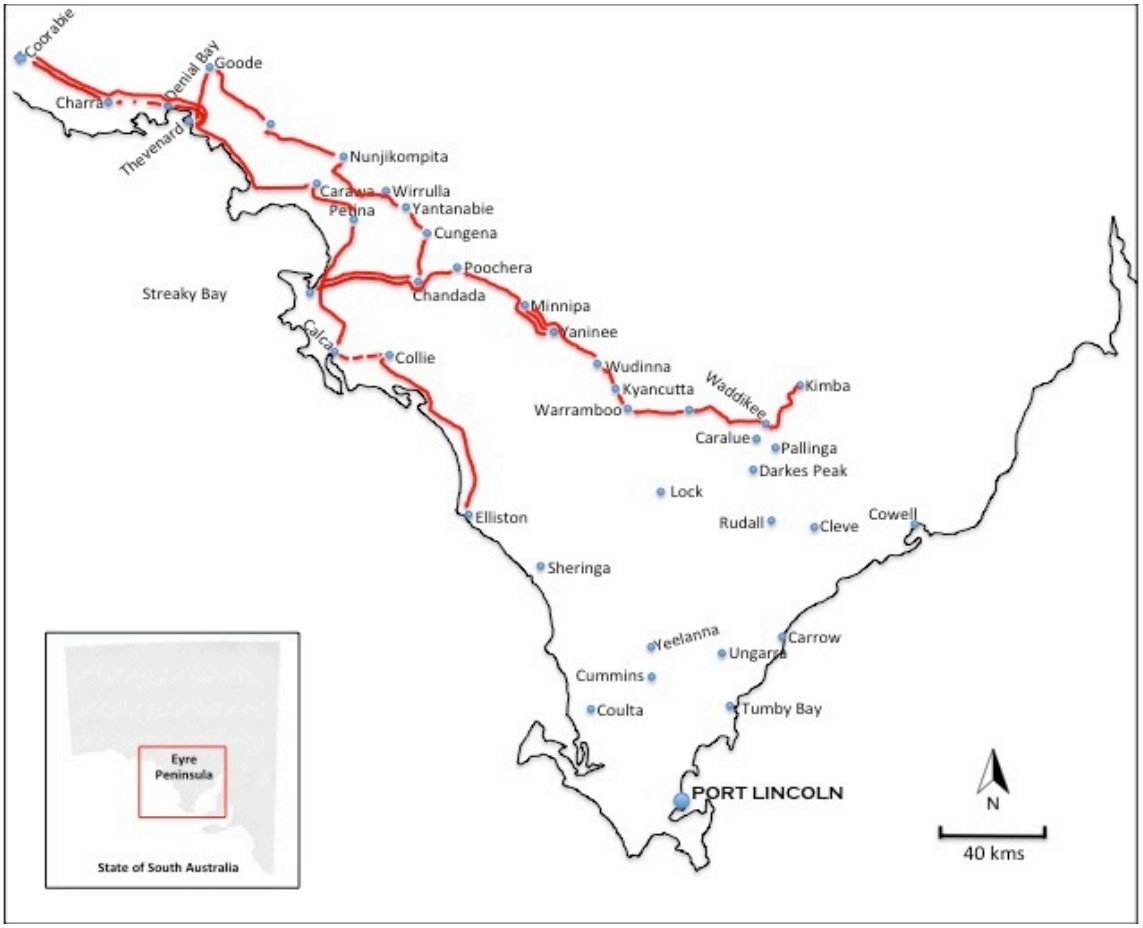
Table 5.2 below outlines the tours that Stubing and Hawkes travelled around the Eyre Peninsula during the period July 1933 to June 1935. It shows the main feature, the length of the tour and the number of venues. Stubings' Cleve Talkies toured the Eyre Peninsula 29 times in this period, whereas Hawkes' Paragon Talkies advertised only nine tours for the same period. Not all Eyre Peninsula newspapers are available through TROVE or the State Library of South Australia, and it is possible that any tours in the southern Eyre Peninsula close to Ellen Hawkes' hometown, Tumby Bay, may have been advertised in those newspapers that are not available. It was more likely that the travelling picture show was secondary to Hawkes' more lucrative interests, such as supplying Tumby Bay with electricity, screening weekly at the 690-seat Memorial Hall in Port Lincoln, and her regular picture shows at Tumby Bay, Kimba and Cleve. She would only tour a film if it was certain to pull an audience. Of the nine main features toured in the research period, five are in the fifty most screened films in rural South Australia as listed in Chapter 3. On the other hand, Norm Stubing's sole occupation was that of an itinerant exhibitor after he left his motorcar agency in 1929. He was single and did not have any commitments back in his hometown of Cleve, so he was able to give greater priority to touring. In the two-year period of this research, Norm Stubing's units were on the road for at least 588 days. Given that some of his tours overlapped, it is reasonable to assume he had two units for touring. A newspaper article confirms this reporting that "Mr. F.N. Stubing has had two picture show plants going for some time and appears to be successful in this rather hazardous venture."[464] His shows continued even when, due to poor health, he was advised to take time off from touring and to take a sea cruise, which he did in May 1934.[465]

[463] Based on a weekly flat rate of £7 10s per week equals £1 5s per night.
[464] Anon., 'Cleve Talkies', *The Eyre's Peninsula Tribune*, 7 December 1933, p.3.
[465] George V.G. Malone, 'South Australia', *Everyones*, 16 May 1934, p.27.

Exhibitor	Main Feature	Distributor	Country of Origin	Commenced	First Town	Finished	Last Town	Days	Venues	Days Between Tours
Cleve Talkies	His Royal Highness	Universal	Australia	17 June 1933	Kimba	19 July 1933	Ungarra	32	28	Overlap
Cleve Talkies	Over the Hill	Fox	USA	14 July 1933	Yaninee	4 August 1933	Elliston	21	19	0
Cleve Talkies	Cohens and Kellys	Universal	USA	4 August 1933	Yaninee	25 August 1933	Elliston	21	19	0
Cleve Talkies	Ambassador Bill	Fox	USA	25 August 1933	Minnipa	12 September 1933	Petina	18	15	0
Cleve Talkies	Air Mail	Universal	USA	22 September 1933	Penong	7 October 1933	Elliston	15	13	10
Cleve Talkies	The Big Cage	Universal	USA	9 October 1933	Poochera	28 October 1933	Elliston	19	18	0
Cleve Talkies	Love Lies	BEF	UK	30 October 1933	Streaky Bay	18 November 1933	Petina	18	18	0
Cleve Talkies	Harmony Row	Universal	Australia	18 November 1933	Minnipa	7 December 1933	Colton	19	14	0
Cleve Talkies	Diggers in Blighty	Universal	Australia	8 December 1933	Poochera	20 December 1933	Streaky Bay	12	10	0
Cleve Talkies	Soldiers of the King	Fox	UK	12 January 1934	Yaninee	25 January 1934	Elliston	13	12	22
Cleve Talkies	Cavalcade	Fox	USA	16 January 1934	Warramboo	10 February 1934	Elliston	25	22	Overlap
Cleve Talkies	Sleepless Nights	BEF	UK	9 February 1934	Yaninee	2 March 1934	Elliston	21	17	Overlap
Cleve Talkies	The Squatter's Daughter	BEF	Australia	5 March 1934	Poochera	24 March 1934	Cummins	19	18	1
Cleve Talkies	The Flag Lieutenant	GAF	UK	23 March 1934	Yaninee	13 April 1934	Elliston	21	19	0
Cleve Talkies	In the Wake of the Bounty	Universal	Australia	14 April 1934	Minnipa	5 May 1934	Cummins	21	19	0
Paragon Talkies	Tell Me Tonight	GAF	Germany/UK	3 May 1934	Wudinna	24 May 1934	Elliston	21	19	
Cleve Talkies	His Wife's Mother	BEF	UK	5 May 1934	Minnipa	31 May 1934	Elliston	26	23	0
Cleve Talkies	Looking on the Bright Side	BEF	UK	28 May 1934	Poochera	15 June 1934	Elliston	18	17	Overlap
Cleve Talkies	Moonlight and Pretzels	Universal	USA	16 June 1934	Minnipa	7 July 1934	Cummins	21	18	0
Paragon Talkies	The White Sister	MGM	USA	21 June 1934	Wudinna	14 July 1934	Cummins	23	20	28
Cleve Talkies	Nagana	Universal	USA	7 July 1934	Minnipa	27 July 1934	Elliston	20	18	0
Cleve Talkies	Peg O' My Heart	MGM	USA	28 July 1934	Minnipa	21 August 1934	Cummins	24	21	0
Paragon Talkies	Bring 'em Back Alive	RKO	USA	2 August 1934	Wudinna	25 August 1934	Cummins	23	19	19
Cleve Talkies	Waltzing Matilda	Universal	Australia	18 August 1934	Minnipa	29 August 1934	Cummins	11	10	Overlap
Cleve Talkies	Sign of the Cross	Paramount	USA	3 September 1934	Lock	26 September 1934	Collie	23	22	Overlap
Paragon Talkies	Hell Below	MGM	USA	14 September 1934	Wudinna	6 October 1934	Cummins	22	18	20
Cleve Talkies	Her First Mate	Universal	USA	20 October 1934	Minnipa	10 November 1934	Cummins	21	19	24
Paragon Talkies	Love on Wheels	GAF	UK	26 October 1934	Wudinna	17 November 1934	Cummins	22	19	20
Cleve Talkies	The Invisible Man	Universal	USA	24 November 1934	Minnipa	14 December 1934	Elliston	20	18	14
Paragon Talkies	Damaged Lives	Independent	USA	25 January 1935	Yabtanabie	9 February 1935	Cummins	15	13	69
Cleve Talkies	A Ticket in Tatts	Universal	USA	21 January 1935	Lock	16 February 1935	Elliston	26	25	38
Paragon Talkies	The Hayseeds	BEF	Australia	28 February 1935	Kyancutta	23 March 1935	Ungarra	23	19	19
Cleve Talkies	Paddy the Next Best Thing	Fox	USA	16 March 1935	Yaninee	1 April 1935	Coorabie	16	16	Overlap
Cleve Talkies	Only Yesterday	Universal	USA	9 April 1935	Warramboo	2 May 1935	Colton	23	21	8
Cleve Talkies	The Silence of Dean Maitland	BEF	Australia	17 May 1935	Pallinga	6 June 1935	Elliston	20	19	15
Paragon Talkies	Yes Mr. Brown	GAF-BDF	UK	10 May 1935	Wudinna	1 June 1935	Elliston	22	19	48
Cleve Talkies	My Song for You	Fox	UK	19 June 1935	Rudall	13 July 1935	Colton	24	24	11
Paragon Talkies	Little Women	RKO	USA	21 June 1935	Wudinna	13 July 1935	Ungarra	22	19	20

Table 5.2: Cleve Talkies and Paragon Talkies Tours of the Eyre Peninsula - July 1933 to June 1935.

The table shows that Stubing generally commenced his tours in one of the railway towns along the Port Lincoln to Penong line. This indicates that on these occasions the film arrived by ship at Port Lincoln and was freighted by rail to the opening town of the tour. The last screening of a tour was usually Elliston, which allowed Stubing to head for his base at Cleve 166 kilometres to the east. Paragon commenced their tours at Wudinna on the rail line and finished at either Elliston or Cummins, the latter being only forty kilometres from Hawkes' hometown Tumby Bay. The itinerary of each tour was advertised in the *West Coast Sentinel*, but if Stubing had already commenced the tour one or two days prior to the newspaper's publication day of Friday, those towns visited would not be in the advertisement. The average tour lasted three weeks, screening in nineteen towns, but this could be extended in the case of a special. The Cleve tour of the Australian film, *His Royal Highness* (Thring, 1932), for example, lasted 32 days, screened in at least 28 venues and covered 1,157 kilometres (see Map 5.3).



Map 5.3: Cleve Talkies tour of *His Royal Highness* (note the backtracking on three occasions).

Stubing's tour itinerary was planned and always included eight regular towns that were visited every three weeks on average. The rest of the itinerary would include eleven other towns that were visited less frequently. His itineraries did allow for flexibility, and at times towns that had not been advertised were added en route. For example, *Sign of the Cross* (DeMille, 1932) commenced at Lock on 3 September 1934. A newspaper article relating to another matter mentions that on the previous Tuesday evening Norm Stubbing screened it at Rudall which was not on the advertised itinerary. Other unscheduled screenings occurred on Sundays, an issue I will discuss later in this chapter.

Exhibiting in the remote towns of the Eyre Peninsula was not a straightforward process of screening in one town then moving on to the next. The tour required careful planning to take into account not only the competitor's screenings but also any community events such as dances or social events linked to religious or sporting groups. This would sometimes mean backtracking to avoid either situation, adding more distance to a typical circuit of 800 kilometres. An example of competing with each other and with other community events occurred during Stubing's Cleve Talkies tour screening *His Wife's Mother* (Hughes, 1932) in 23 towns during May 1934. At the

same time, Hawkes' Paragon Talkies commenced its tour of *Tell Me Tonight* (Litvak, 1932) covering the same territory. In most cases, the two exhibitors managed to screen in towns seven days apart, but there were occasions when clashing itineraries could not be avoided and they screened within a few kilometres of each other on the same night. Half way through the May 1934 tour, Stubing screened in the railway town Nunjikompita and Hawkes screened eighteen kilometres away in Carawa. The following night Stubing screened in Wirrulla, competing with the local tennis club which was holding its annual Grand Cabaret Ball. Ninety kilometres away (which was not a considerable distance in the remote areas) Hawkes was screening in Piednippie, which was in the catchment area for West Coast Pictures at Streaky Bay. Piednippie's local football team was playing Wirrulla's and, as was the tradition, the at-home team held a dance after the game. In summary, there were four screenings, one cabaret ball and one dance within two days and a short distance from each other. Stubing would have been affected the most by the close encounter on this occasion as he was travelling with a film which had been on the rural circuit for eleven months, while Hawkes was screening the most popular film of that time. This example illustrates the vigorous competition there was in a small area for what few shillings locals may have set aside for entertainment purposes.

The circuits worked out ways of dealing with each other and with other exhibitors. Profit margins were not so expansive that anyone could afford a competitive war. While in competition with the regular picture show at Ceduna, both Hawkes and Stubing would sometimes screen in conjunction with the management of Ceduna Talkies. Although both screened in Thevernard, only four kilometres from Ceduna, neither ever screened in competition with Ceduna's Saturday night screenings. If either of the itinerant exhibitors were touring with a special, the Memorial Hall Committee permitted a screening on the Thursday night but only on the basis that proceeds were shared. Examples of these specials would be screenings of *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, *The Hayseeds*, *Paddy the Next Best Thing* and *Yes, Mr Brown*.

In addition to competing with each other, Paragon and Cleve Talkies had to contend with other exhibitors who had secured leases for Saturday nights in some of the major towns. With the exception of Kimba, where both had the lease on the hall for alternate Saturday nights, they had to plan their tours so that Saturday night screenings were in the smaller towns. They had to settle for the less lucrative weeknight screenings in places like Streaky Bay where West Coast Pictures had the lease for Saturday night screenings. Stubing would often screen a double feature in these towns, using films that were not a part of his tour, having the films arrive by ship

and be shipped back to Adelaide the next day. Weeknight screenings during harvest were often poorly attended. Reporting on a poor attendance at a Paragon Talkies show at Cleve, the local newspaper commented that "[t]he public are evidently not keen on weeknight pictures, and as the evenings are short and the harvest is in full swing, few country folk will spare the time to come in to Cleve on a weeknight."[466]

In addition to their circuits, both Stubing and Hawkes had lease arrangements with Kimba, Cleve and Cowell Institutes[467] to screen on specific days of the week. While sometimes incorporated into the touring circuit, the regularity of these screenings required the exhibitors to book additional films for these venues. Kimba, Cleve and Cowell were the principal towns of their respective districts and had a larger population from which to draw an audience than the more remote halls. This gave the Institute Committees of these halls the upper hand when negotiating with the exhibitors, as these were premium venues in terms of their capacity and potential audience. The exhibitor's lease was always a result of a tender process by the Institute Committees and there was never a guarantee that it would be extended. In the case of Kimba, the Institute Committee could not decide between Stubing and Hawkes and awarded the tender to both with one screening one Saturday night and the other the next.

What stands out about Stubing's 29 tours is the ratio of Australian and British films to American – 52 percent to 48 percent. He screened eight main features that were produced in Australia (28 percent), seven (24 percent) British and fourteen (48 percent) produced in the United States. Paragon Talkies' tours also had close to an even split between Australian/British and American productions. These ratios are significantly different from the two regular picture shows in Port Lincoln. Of the 73 main features screened at the Memorial Hall during the study period, one was British and the remaining 98.6 percent were American. Of the 203 main features screened at the Flinders Theatre for the same period four were Australian, three co-productions, forty British (twenty percent) and 159 (78 percent) were American. This ratio is more akin to the availability of films in South Australia during this period – of 1,065 films being screened in the State, 212 (twenty percent) were Australian/British productions and 814 (76 percent) were American. With fewer films to screen in one year, a constant supply of fresh films was less of an issue and consequently the itinerant exhibitor had a larger pool from which to choose. If the itinerant exhibitors' choice of films was based on the preference of audiences in the remote towns of Eyre

[466] Anon., 'Cleve and District Items', *The Eyre's Peninsula Tribune*, 8 December 1932, p.3.
[467] Cowell Institute and Franklin Harbour Institute are interchangeable names used in Eyre Peninsula newspapers.

Peninsula for British films, then it is possible that audiences had some influence over exhibitors. As some of those audiences were as small as thirty, the relationship between exhibitor and patron would have been closer than that experienced by 690 patrons attending one of the picture shows in Port Lincoln. Norm Stubing felt he knew his audience. On one tour he scrapped after one night the forty-five minute short, *Immediate Possession* (Varney, 1931), because it was not up to standard.[468] He replaced it with an Australian short, *What a Night* (Thring, 1932), starring George Wallace. On another tour he replaced *Delicious* (Butler, 1931), a musical comedy of a group of Europeans arriving in the United States and having romantic and immigration troubles, with *Down to Earth* (Butler, 1932), a comedy about a family dealing with the trappings of wealth until the depression begins to affect them, because he felt it was "more to the liking of West Coast patrons".[469] Another reason why the itinerant exhibitor may have screened a higher proportion of British films is that they were available for longer periods and cheaper rentals.

Because the itinerant exhibitors were at the end of the distribution chain in South Australia, they were in a position to see how films had performed in the suburbs and other rural areas before booking them for their circuits. The downside to this was that audiences in the remote towns were watching films that had been on the rural circuit for an average of forty to 47 weeks. Table 5.3 below shows the average time taken for main features to be screened on the Peninsula after completing the CBD run in 1934. The Port Lincoln venues were screening films that had been on the rural circuit for on average sixteen to eighteen weeks. Although they occasionally screened films that were recently premiered in Adelaide, in the main their audiences waited a considerable time to see a film.

Memorial Hall Pictures, Port Lincoln	16 weeks
Flinders Picture Theatre, Port Lincoln	18 weeks
Ceduna Talkies	28 weeks
West Coast Pictures, Streaky Bay	33 weeks
Cleve Talkies (Touring)	40 weeks
Paragon Talkies (Touring)	47 weeks

Table 5.3: Average time for main features to reach exhibitors on Eyre Peninsula after the CBD run.

The table indicates that Hawkes had a different policy for each of her business operations. Memorial Hall Pictures was her premium venue at which she screened films that had finished the

[468] Advertisement, *The West Coast Sentinel*, 2 September 1932, p.8.
[469] Anon., 'Cleve Talkies', *The West Coast Sentinel*, 14 April 1933, p.1.

CBD run on average sixteen weeks earlier. Once the films had been screened in Port Lincoln, they were returned to the Adelaide exchange or forwarded onto the next venue if instructed by the exchange. Competition with the Flinders Theatre was also a factor in programming relatively recent films. There were a few occasions when Hawkes would screen the film at Cowell two weeks after the Port Lincoln screening and it is quite possible that she may have screened it at her Tumby Bay venue in between.

The main features for Hawkes' nine advertised touring shows were sourced from different exchanges: GAF (3), MGM (2), BEF and Independent (1 each). Her competition, McGregor's Flinders Picture Theatre, sourced most of its main features from Fox and RKO. It is evident that McGregor was locked into a block booking arrangement with Fox for the Flinders' Wednesday night screenings as often its advertisements did not even name the films but simply read "Fox Specials". The ship would arrive with the films on Tuesday, only one day before screening. Stubing also sourced his films from different exchanges but most of them were Universal (48 percent), followed by BEF and Fox (20 percent each). The rarity of films distributed by industry leaders Paramount and United Artists is notable. Clearly, they put no emphasis on the relatively slow and small returns from dealing with these exhibitors.

The popularity of films screened by Cleve Talkies and Paragon Talkies is unknown as there are no hard attendance figures. Occasionally a newspaper would refer to the success or failure of a film and this perhaps gives some idea of how audiences received the films screened. When Hawkes screened *Damaged Lives* at the Collie Hall it was to a poor house.[470] This film was popular when it was screened at Snowtown across the Spencer Gulf during the same period, rating as the 12th most popular film screened there, drawing an audience of 219. When *Cavalcade* was screened two nights in succession at Streaky Bay by different exhibitors (West Coast Pictures on the Monday night and Cleve Talkies on the Tuesday), the house was packed on both nights.[471]

Relationship with Communities

In discussing the operations of a small exhibitor in Freeport, Illinois, David Resha acknowledges Gregory Waller's work in describing how theatres in the United States competed with each other by interacting with, and integrating themselves into, the communities in which they screened.[472] It was important for the itinerant exhibitors in rural South Australia to demonstrate this

[470] Anon., 'Mt. Cooper News', *The West Coast Sentinel*, 15 February 1935, p.6.
[471] Anon., 'Cavalcade: For All West Coast Towns', *The West Coast Sentinel*, 12 January 1934, p.5.
[472] David Resha, 'Strategies for Survial: The Little Exhibitor in the 1920s', p.12.

community spirit. Both Stubing and Hawkes were well respected on the Eyre Peninsula mainly because they were long-term residents. References to Norm Stubing in local histories speak highly of him and his involvement in community events, often providing a film for a fundraiser and donating the profit to the event.[473] There is not much evidence in the local newspapers of community opposition to the itinerant exhibitors based on their business practices or the morality of the films they screened. There was occasionally concern about picture shows monopolising local halls to the detriment of other community groups, although these tended to sporting groups rather than religious ones.

Dances and balls were community events that were organised by a town's sporting clubs, school or church rather than by people outside the community such as itinerant projectionists. Fundraisers required organisation and time commitment by volunteers. These would sometimes be in competition with the travelling picture show for what little money was available for entertainment in the community. It was the practice of the home football team to hold a dance to entertain visiting teams following a game. The games were played on a Saturday and where a picture show was held on a regular basis in the local hall on Saturday nights this became contentious. There was a belief that picture shows were making money at the expense of sporting clubs. Film was the most economically powerful form of entertainment, if not always the most politically powerful in the local community. While the discontent was directed at the regular picture shows, it was yet another consideration for the itinerant exhibitor to take into account when planning a tour.

Sporting clubs versus picture shows played out in Streaky Bay where the local football club was relegated to weeknight dances as West Coast Pictures had the lease for Saturday nights. The club believed it would receive more revenue by holding its entertainments on a Saturday night rather than a weeknight. A proposal was put to the Institute Hall Committee that tenders for lease of the hall on a Saturday should be called on a quarterly basis. That way during the football season the local team could tender. The committee did not accept the proposal as they would have to forego £126 per year they received from West Coast Pictures to collect £11 from football clubs.[474] The following year, in order to secure a new lease on the hall, West Coast Pictures agreed to the local football club having alternate Saturday nights to hold dances for a trial period

[473] Laurel Spriggs & Else Wauchope (eds.), *Cleve on the Yadnarie Plains*, p.127 & 149.
[474] Anon., 'Institute Carnival', *The West Coast Sentinel*, 7 July 1933, p.1.

from August 1934 to June 1935.[475] A similar proposal was put forward by the Methodist Ladies' Guild to the Ceduna Institute Committee complaining of "Saturday nights being monopolised by pictures, to the exclusion of the public."[476] Those hall committees that restricted picture screenings to alternate Saturday nights generally suffered losses in revenue and soon went back to leasing their venue to the exhibitors every Saturday. Cinema not only enjoyed the advantage of regularity, but in comparison to the organisation of social events such as dances, it was a much less labour-intensive activity.

Occasionally an itinerant exhibitor could attempt to conciliate opposition to cinema's stranglehold on local entertainment venues by branching out of film exhibition and staging their own dance events. Norm Stubing is remembered for the annual Movie Balls he organised in Cleve, Kimba and Cowell. The prospect of someone from outside of the community prepared to organise a ball and donate the proceeds to a local cause would have been welcome. If that person was the itinerant exhibitor, then an added benefit would be there would be no likelihood of two competing entertainments on the same night. Norm Stubing was successful in bridging the gap between dances and the picture show in at least three towns on the Eyre Peninsula.

Stubing's Movie Balls became an annual event in Cowell for fifteen years and contributed significantly to the Institute funds. The first Movie Ball was held in nearby Cleve in April 1930. An advertisement in the local newspaper offered prizes for the best lady, gent and couple dressed as movie stars and for the best advertisement for Cleve Pictures. There would be novelty dancing and coloured lighting. Ladies were asked to bring baskets for supper. The language of the advertisement had a hint of Hollywood – movie star instead of film star and coloured spelt "colored" in the American Style. While very few dressed as their favourite film star the local newspaper reported the evening as a great success and "hoped that more will appear next time in costumes as there will be better prizes and more novelty dances."[477] This was not the case and *The Eyre Peninsula Tribune* commented the following year's ball was movie in name only.[478] Nevertheless, it was regarded as the most popular function of the year, taking £30 at the door.[479] By the third annual Ball 300 people were attending and instead of prizes for

[475] Anon., 'Streaky Bay Institute – Long Sitting of Committee', *The West Coast Sentinel*, 15 June 1934, p.5.
[476] Anon., 'Ceduna Memorial Institute Hall', *The West Coast Sentinel*, 17 May 1935, p.2.
[477] Anon., 'Cleve and District Items: Movie Ball', *The Eyre's Peninsula Tribune*, 1 May 1930, p.3.
[478] Anon., 'Movie Ball', *The Eyre's Peninsula Tribune*, 30 April 1931, p.3.
[479] $2,900 AUD at 2015 prices.

dressing up as film stars they were awarded for the "lucky cap" and "balloon dance". The fourth and fifth annual Movie Balls each raised £30 clear profit for the Institute.

Enthused by the success of the Cleve Movie Balls, Stubing organised one for Kimba, seventy kilometres north of Cleve. *The Kimba Dispatch* reported that Stubing had organised similar events in other townships with outstanding success.[480] "Other townships" suggests that by 1933 he had held Movie Balls in other towns as well as Cleve. Once again, large numbers attended and "according to general opinion there were more present than at the Hospital Ball"[481] which must have been regarded as the benchmark for a successful event. As in Cleve, very few dressed up as a film star. In 1935 Stubing organised the first Cowell Movie Ball, forty kilometres east of Cleve and three weeks after the Cleve Movie Ball. Despite being close to each other geographically, the Cowell Ball was one of the year's most successful functions in that town. The local newspaper commented, "With the Pirians Orchestra and the smart frocking, it made one feel as though one were at a Lord Mayor's Ball, instead of a two-bob hop in Cowell."[482] The Movie Ball became a permanent fixture on the Cowell social calendar and continued until the 1950s. There were many newspaper articles in which Stubbing was reported as having involved himself in other community events such as race meetings, football socials and fundraising by screening a film as a part of the event. He would either donate the profits of the picture show or share them with the event organiser. These were tactics that dated back at least to the time of Wybert Reeve, and demonstrated the lengths to which itinerant film exhibitors would go to appear local, while simultaneously bringing forms of entertainment that would connect isolated people to the wider world.

Relationships with Centralised Regulation

Despite the Places of Public Entertainment Act prohibiting Sunday screenings, there were Sunday screenings on the itinerant exhibitor's circuit. As the Act had not yet been extended to most of the remote towns on the Eyre Peninsula, the Inspector could not legally force the itinerant exhibitors to comply with the regulations.[483] Nevertheless, he decided to intervene after he received a number of complaints in October 1933. These complaints appear to be a part of a concerted campaign, as they were all written within a ten-day period. One of those complaining

[480] Anon., 'Movie Ball', *The Kimba Dispatch*, 21 April 1933, p.2.
[481] Anon., 'Movie Ball a Success: Elaborate Function', *The Kimba Dispatch*, 5 May 1933, p.2.
[482] Suze An' Anne, 'Merry Moments at the Movie Ball', *The Eyre's Peninsula Tribune*, 29 August 1935, p.2.
[483] At the time of the complaints, the Act applied only to ten Eyre Peninsula towns of which nine had regular picture shows.

had a low opinion of cinema, writing to the Chief Secretary, "I think healthy, unorganized, or private sports on Sunday in country districts are an aid to real Divine Worship and moral training, but I think you will agree that a great many moving pictures are the opposite."[484] The comments, coming from a Justice of the Peace in the tiny town of Yantanabie is interesting in conjuring up a moral coalition between sport and religion on one hand, and the challenge of cinema on the other. We have seen in the previous section, the basis of this struggle over the issue of which institution was more local, and which had the greater right to the venues, leisure expenditure and time of local communities.

The Inspector wrote to Stubing and Hawkes advising that the government had received reports and that a full enquiry was being made by the Police Department.[485] The enquiry was to no avail; all police stations on the Eyre Peninsula reported that no pictures shows had been conducted on Sundays in their districts.[486] This suggests that the local constabulary were either not aware that screenings were occurring on Sundays, or had a better relationship with the itinerant exhibitors than with a bureaucrat on the other side of the Spencer and St Vincent Gulfs. Localism is once again an issue: an itinerant exhibitor picture show man might be less local than the football club, but he was much more local than the Adelaide government. The Inspector was not satisfied and requested Stubing attend an interview in Adelaide, where he admitted to three Sunday screenings at Cootra. One of these would have been for the popular film *His Royal Highness* that he toured for 32 days. He opened the tour on a Saturday night at Kimba and Cootra was en route to his next advertised screening at Waddikee Rock on the Monday night. Stubing was directed to pay the Amusement Duty for the three screenings and ordered not to repeat the offence.[487] The Inspector's warning indicates that he must have had a reasonable relationship with exhibitors. Although there was no legislation he could use to force Stubing to cease Sunday screenings, Stubing had contravened the Stamp Duty Act, which *did* cover the whole State. Had the Inspector wanted to pursue the issue, Stubing could have also been fined £50 for each screening where he either failed to collect Amusement Duty or failed to pass it on to the Commissioner of Taxation. If he failed to collect the duty, then each audience member could be

[484] SRSA, GRG67/33/164/1933, Letter from Frank Robinson JP, Yantanabie, to Chief Secretary, dated 21 October 1933.
[485] SRSA, GRG67/33/164/1933, Letters from Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment to F.N. Stubing and G.L. Hawkes, dated 6 November 1933.
[486] SRSA, GRG67/33/164/1933, Minute from Inspector P.A. Giles, Port Augusta, to Commissioner of Police, dated 21 November 1933
[487] SRSA, GRG67/33/164/1933, Minute from Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment to Chief Secretary, dated 5 January 1934.

fined £5 each.[488] Another example of Stubing's maverick approach to centralised regulation is when he attempted to book Yeelanna Hall for his forthcoming tour of *The Cohens and the Kellys*. A month earlier, the Inspector had advised the Hall's Trust that it was contravening the law by letting the hall to travelling shows as the building was unsuitable for screening picture shows.[489] Stubing told the secretary of the hall he had written authority to screen at Yeelanna for a further six weeks. Uncertain of the veracity of Stubing's claim, the secretary telegrammed the Inspector and received an immediate reply rebutting Stubing's claim.[490] A study of Cleve Talkies' screenings show that Stubing continued to screen in halls that did not have a bio box after the Inspector had written to the hall secretaries instructing them to cease letting the halls for picture shows until a regulation bio box was installed. In these halls, Stubing would set the projector up on the floor in the middle of the hall or screen through the entrance or supper room door into the hall. These practices contravened fire regulations and further demonstrated the limited force of such regulations away from Adelaide.

As discussed in Chapter 2, life was harsh for the itinerant exhibitor. Distance, unsealed roads and inclement weather tested their mettle. Added to these adversities was the vagary of film delivery to the exhibitors. Films often did not arrive in time for the first screening because of coastal shipping delays. There are many newspaper articles carrying apologies on behalf of the exhibitor. There was one incident where the box carrying the films fell into the sea as it was being offloaded at Cowell. Fortunately, the films survived and were sufficiently undamaged to be screened. On another occasion, a box carrying the films was missing the main feature. Boxes would sometimes arrive with missing reels. Unlike the suburban exhibitor, the rural exhibitor was unable to call in at the film exchange to either sort out the problem or pick up a replacement film. There were also occasions when generators would break down and vehicle breakdowns were a frequent occurrence.

Photograph has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

Photograph 5.2: Disruption to a tour due to a broken axle - Eyre Peninsula 1931 (Source: Kino Cinema Quarterly, Summer 2001, No. 78.)

[488] *Stamp Act Further Amendment Act, 1916*, Part I, Para 7(2).
[489] SRSA, GRG67/33/120/1933, Letter from Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment to Secretary, Yeelanna Hall, dated 14 July 1933.
[490] SRSA, GRG67/33/120/1933, Telegram to and from the Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, dated 7 August 1933.

Having survived challenges such as distance, shocking roads, inclement weather, opposition to screenings and the stringent regulations, it was finally the Second World War that brought the era of the itinerant exhibitor on the Eyre Peninsula to a close. In Adelaide, picture house attendances rose steadily during the Second World War, as a result of the large number of troops returning from overseas and being billeted in the city.[491] Rural South Australia, on the other hand, experienced an exodus of young men, depleting potential audiences. Unlike urban areas, rural towns did not have the compensation of an increase in manufacturing and the associated increase in disposable income. Petrol scarcity also affected the travelling picture shows,[492] and according to *The Eyre's Peninsula Tribune*, Norm Stubing had decided to abandon screening for the duration of the war as there were so many functions being held to raise money for patriotic funds.[493] Cleve Talkies' final tour screened *Sweethearts* (Van Dyke, 1938) commencing in Port Kenny on 19 June 1940 and finishing in Wudinna ten days later. Norm Stubing had toured for eight years. His dedication was summed up by a Cleve historian:

> The programme of the month-long tour and the delights provided to isolated communities must be experienced to be believed. This entertainment provided was only made possible because one man was prepared to risk capital and to make an effort of self-sacrifice.[494]

He moved to Whyalla in the north of the Peninsula for six years and returned to Cleve in 1946 at the time Cleve Institute installed new projection equipment, which he operated as a volunteer up until 1977.[495] His opposition, Hawkes' Paragon Talkies had finished touring the Eyre Peninsula three years earlier in June 1937. After this time, Hawkes concentrated on her permanent picture shows, which by now included Streaky Bay.

This case study of cinema exhibition in one rural area demonstrates that itinerant rural exhibition was a good deal more complicated than romantic notions of loners arriving in towns with projectors and white sheets. While many associate this form of exhibition with early cinema, its survival for such a long period of time demonstrates the way that the film exhibition business involved more than just screening films. There were several ways in which films could circulate through areas, and there was a pronounced element of regulated competition - regulated both by maintaining relations with the other participants in the exhibition business, with other

[491] National Archives of Australia, AP5/1, 42/1548, Dan Clifford quoted in a minute from Investigation Officer to Deputy Prices Commissioner, Adelaide, dated 17 November 1944.
[492] Anon., 'Behind the scenes', *The Eyre's Peninsula Tribune*, 6 December 1973, page not known.
[493] Anon., 'Picture Show Abandoned', *The Eyre's Peninsula Tribune*, 18 July 1940, p.3.
[494] Laurel Spriggs & Else Wauchope (eds.), *Cleve on the Yadnarie Plains*, p.149.
[495] Graham Rich, 'Long Service by Institute', *Scope*, 1977, no page number.

institutions in small and often closed communities, and with government regulators, who were ready (if not always able) to act on perceived dangers that were both physical and moral.

CONCLUSION

Cinema as an institution had faced numerous challenges since its introduction in South Australia in 1896. The rate at which film exhibition had become the dominant amusement put it in conflict with other institutions and different layers of government. These conflicts, however, helped to shape the industry into a powerful institution resilient enough to withstand economic downturns and technological change. Even faced with its biggest technological challenge, the advent of television in the late 1950s, cinema-going has been able to adapt and although it is not as ubiquitous as it was pre-television, it survived. In the twenty-first century film can be viewed on a multitude of platforms, but people congregating in a public space to watch a film remains part of our civic culture, especially in rural areas where social isolation is increasingly being recognized as a significant problem. While films are necessary for cinema to function, they are not in themselves sufficient for the culture of cinema-going. To understand the history of cinema-going we need to not only take into account of what is on the screen but, more importantly, consider the social, economic and political environments in which exhibition operates.

Gregory Waller puts forward the proposition that since the first screening in America, exhibitors have shaped the history of cinema as much as those in the production arm of the industry.[496] Exhibitors in any country have had to adapt to the time and environment in which they operated. Rural exhibition is different in every country. South Australia, with its increased distances, low population density, and single dominant capital city, presented distinctively different conditions from those encountered by rural exhibitors in the United States and United Kingdom. In rural South Australia, the first itinerant exhibitor, Wybert Reeve, applied an established theatrical exhibition model to tour the State. Like touring theatre, he used the railway system to travel between towns, but because of the portability of the cinematographe he was able to visit the smaller towns that had been bypassed by live theatre. This distinguished cinema as an entertainment in that it was a modern technology accessible to many in a short period of time. It is an overestimation to attribute the model solely to Reeve, but his ingenuity and entrepreneurship quickly became hallmarks of rural exhibitors, who consistently demonstrated their ability to adapt to the environment in which they operated. Reeve expanded his model to include towns other than those on railway lines, and this practice was later modified by other exhibitors in their development of road tours, which became the standard itinerant exhibition

[496] Gregory A. Waller, *Moviegoing in America*, p.3.

model. It is important to stress that no single pattern of exhibition could be applied broadly and as cinema developed as an institution, exhibitors employed other models to suit social, economic and geographic considerations. For example, we have seen that some components of the rural exhibition circuit, particularly in towns that were relatively close to the Adelaide metropolis, had close links to suburban exhibition. These venues were important not only for the profit they generated in their own right but also as a means of keeping film prints active during clearance periods between first run and suburban releases. Just as there was no single way of screening films, there was no single way of distributing them, and this study has shown that, rather than act as a unified bloc, Hollywood distributors had a diverse range of engagements with these different strands of exhibition.

This study of exhibitors, whether commercial or public, has made an attempt to give them agency and acknowledge their role in shaping cinema history. It also acknowledges the role of the institutions that challenged cinema, such as the church and the state, in shaping the history of exhibition. The lobbying by the Fire Brigades Board to regulate safety requirements, the campaigns by the church to preserve the sanctity of the Sabbath, and the concerns of the Adelaide City Council about lower class, larrikin behaviour in cinemas, shaped the 1913 regulations that controlled exhibition in the State for the next sixty years. The large exhibitors in Adelaide and the suburbs were able to adapt to the changes brought about by the regulations because of the scale of their enterprises, but had the regulations been applied to all rural exhibitors at that time, it is doubtful that small town exhibition would have survived. By the time small town exhibitors were faced with having to comply with the legislation, cinema-going was so entrenched in remote rural areas that losing the local picture show was a significant issue. Despite the opposition of entrenched authority, which sometimes saw it as a challenge to their social hegemony, cinema was not going away. By the time of the Depression, it had become a civic essential, to the extent that municipal councils were willing to spend their own money to ensure that their town had access to a picture show.

Other institutions that shaped the history of cinema exhibition in South Australia were those interest groups and morality organizations lobbying for a second layer of censorship. Prominent among these were the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the National Council of Women of South Australia (NCWSA). The SPCA were concerned about cruelty to animals in film and the NCWSA concerned that the Federal Censors may not have had the same standards of morality as South Australians. I have found no evidence that any film screened by

rural exhibitors generated a sitting of the State censors to determine its suitability, despite the State government using this as a pretext for extending the regulations to rural areas.

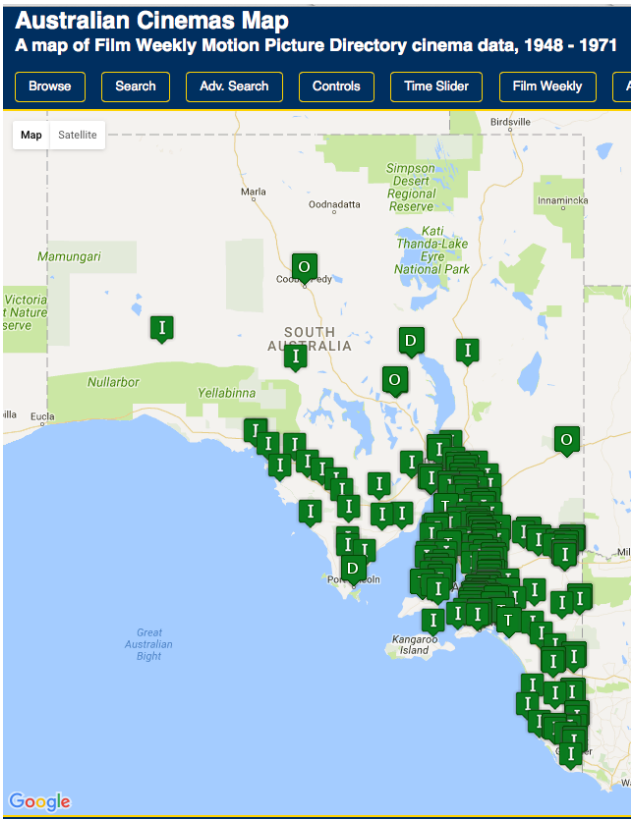
Sound technology challenged the exhibitors, just as the recent conversion to digital projection has represented greater challenges for exhibition than for production. While the larger exhibitors found it necessary to wire for sound early so as to keep pace with their competitors, most rural exhibitors had to wait for the second wave of sound technology to afford the costs of wiring for sound. The diminishing supply of silent film stock added pressure to struggling Institutes which were faced with closing the local picture show or handing the operation over to an absentee exhibitor. The absentee exhibitor model was a saving grace for a number of Institute Committees in South Australia. Added to the challenge of wiring for sound was the economic challenge of the Great Depression. Once again, exhibitors in rural South Australia found themselves fighting to stay in business. The resilience of the exhibition industry and the on-going demand by audiences in rural South Australia is demonstrated by the survival of film exhibition despite these significant challenges.

Resilience in the face of change and the ability to adapt became a trait of the exhibition industry until the present day. The greatest challenge was the falling cinema attendances from 1950 onwards. Nationally, audience numbers dropped by 68 percent from a peak of 145 million in the 1949-50 financial year to a low of 47 million in the 1968-69 financial year.[497] The closure of screening venues was largely attributed to the advent of television, but according to an industry magazine other factors came into play such as competition from other leisure activities, effects of increases in the cost of film hire and city long-runs holding up the release of films to subsequent run houses.[498]

The impact of television on rural exhibition in South Australia came much later than in suburban Adelaide.[499] Transmission did not expand to rural areas until 1965, when the first two rural television stations opened in Mount Gambier, 400 kilometres south of Adelaide, and Port Pirie, 200 kilometres north of Adelaide. Television did not have an immediate impact on rural cinema audiences for two reasons: people did not buy or hire televisions at a single moment, and reception in rural areas was still of poor quality until the late 1960s. Maps 1 and 2 show the decline in rural screening venues from 1948 to 1971. What is noticeable is the emergence of the

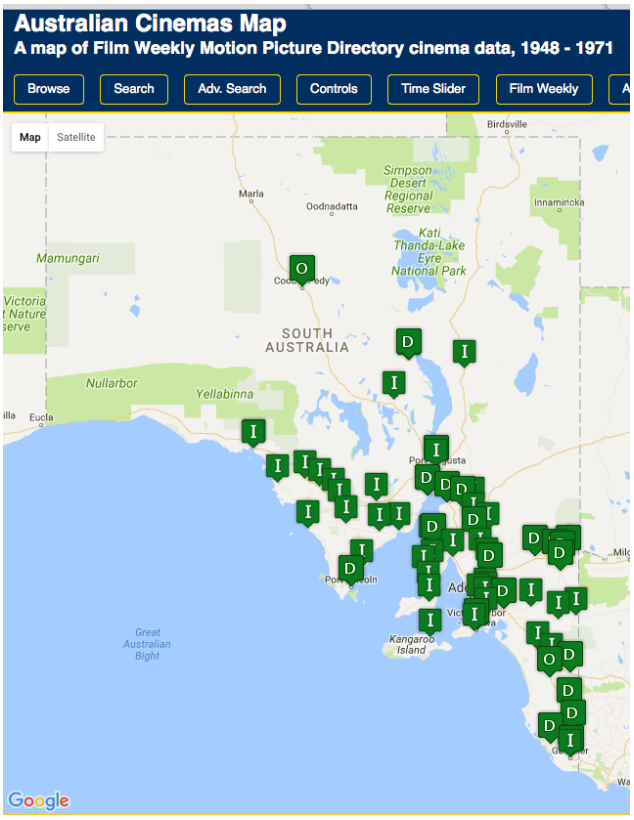
[497] Peter Beilby (ed.), *Australian Motion Picture Yearbook 1980*, p.302.
[498] Anon., 'Australian Summary', *The Film Weekly Motion Picture Directory 1966-67*, p.6.
[499] For a discussion on the impact of television on cinema exhibition see Mike Walsh, 'Calamity Howling: The Advent of Television and Australian Cinema Exhibition', pp.121-139.

drive-in theatre in the interim years as indicated by the letter D on Map 2 (refer to Auscinemas website for more detailed information http://auscinemas.flinders.edu.au). Rural exhibition had been affected by television but had adapted a new exhibition model that by 1971 represented one-third of the 63 screening venues still in operation. In more recent times, rural exhibition has also survived the challenge of the digital age. There are currently at least twenty rural cinemas operating on a weekly basis in South Australia.



Map 1: Rural screening venues in 1948

(Source: auscinemas.flinders.edu.au)



Map 2: Rural screening venues in 1971

Audience response to the exhibition industry is best measured by attendance and by the programming policies adopted by exhibitors. The database of films screened in rural South Australia from 1933 to 1935 has highlighted that the majority of films screened were produced in the United States. This was due to the quantity of the American product available. It is important to stress that as cinema became an essential component of public life, the scale of supply was the major advantage enjoyed by Hollywood-based distributors. The few Australian films that were screened ranked highly in the top fifty most screened films in rural South Australia, indicating the appeal of localism. John Sedgwick's description of a similar trend in Sydney's first-run cinemas in

1934 suggests that Australian films were popular in both the city and the rural areas.[500] The limitations of Australian film production were not so much audience-based, as supply-based. Australian exhibitors required a scale of supply that was beyond the capacity of the production sector.

Just as film exhibitors conducted their businesses in diverse ways, there is no single explanation of audience behaviour. The case study of audience attendance at the Snowtown Institute did not show external factors such as recency of a film or weather to have had a significant effect on cinema-going. There does not appear to be any single predominant factor that determines what drew the audience to the picture show one week and not the next. Any explanation of audience preference and attendance behaviour must forego easy answers and look for the complex interplay of factors that include, but go beyond, what was presented on the screen. This case study is a microhistory that would benefit from more comparative microstudies based on ticket sales. This history of cinema exhibition in rural South Australia has demonstrated the important role that exhibitors and others within the State have played in shaping the history of cinema-going in one specific location. The reliance on primary documents to construct a history that took place over eighty years ago will invariably focus on the institutions and exhibitors that newspapers chose to write about or those whose business dealings were captured in government records. In my introduction I made the point that recollections of going to the picture show in the 1930s would be useful for understanding cinema-going from an audience perspective. The lack of oral histories has meant that those audiences that did not leave paper trails, including Aboriginal people and other marginalized social groups, have largely been excluded from this history. We know from research conducted in other states and from anecdotal stories that Aboriginal people were treated differently from other cinemagoers.[501] However, in the period of this study I have found only two references that connect Aboriginal people to cinema-going: a newspaper report of a fire at a picture show in Port Victoria being attended by an audience of 200 consisting mainly of Aboriginal people from the nearby Point Pearce mission,[502] and a request for a permit to screen on Christmas Day 1937 at Point Pearce mission.[503] Future research into Aboriginal people's cinema

[500] John Sedgwick, 'Hollywood in the world market – evidence from Australia in the mid-1930s', p.704.
[501] For example see, Nancy Huggett, 'Everyone was watching! Strategies of self-presentation in oral histories of cinema-going', pp.261-274.
[502] Anon., 'Fire at Picture Theatre', *The Advertiser*, 13 March 1933, p.7.
[503] SRSA, GRG67/33/93/1937, Letter from MGM Ltd. to Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment, dated 17 December 1937.

experience in rural South Australia might need to be set in a more recent period to be informed by oral interviews.

The Places of Public entertainment records accessed in researching this thesis represent only a small portion of those held by the State Records of South Australia, leaving plenty of scope for further microstudies of different phases of exhibition post-1930s. These might profitably focus on the impact that the Second World War had on rural exhibition, the advent of television, the era of drive-in theatres and the impact of the home video. The number of primary sources available for researching this period are much greater than previous eras (for example, the National Archives of Australia holds detailed financial statements from rural exhibitors for the war years) and there are people available who can relate stories of their cinema-going experience. These histories would make a significant contribution to local history and to New Cinema History more broadly.

Appendix 1: Wybert Reeve's 1897 Screenings

Month	Date	Location	Colony
January	1-29	Adelaide	South Australia
	30	Port Adelaide	South Australia
February	1-2	Gawler	South Australia
	3-4	Kapunda	South Australia
	5	Kadina	South Australia
	6-9	Moonta	South Australia
	10	Kadina	South Australia
	11-13	Port Pirie	South Australia
	15	Petersburg	South Australia
	16-22	Broken Hill	New South Wales
	23	Orroroo	South Australia
	24	Terowie	South Australia
	25	Jamestown	South Australia
	26	Burra	South Australia
	27	Glenelg	South Australia
March	1-2	Mount Barker	South Australia
	3-4	Strathalbyn	South Australia
	5-3 April	Adelaide	South Australia
April	6-7	Nhill	Victoria
	8-9	Dimboola	Victoria
	10-12	Horsham	Victoria
	13-14	Stawell	Victoria
	15-16	Ararat	Victoria
	17-1 May	Ballarat	Victoria
May	6	Semaphore	South Australia
	7	Norwood	South Australia
	8	Port Adelaide	South Australia
	10	Glenelg	South Australia
	11	Gawler	South Australia
	12-14	Moonta	South Australia
	15	Wallaroo	South Australia
	17	Kadina	South Australia
	18-19	Port Pirie	South Australia
	20	Jamestown	South Australia
	21	Petersburg	South Australia
	24-27	Port Augusta	South Australia
	28	Orroroo	South Australia
	29	Petersburg	South Australia
	31-5 June	Broken Hill	New South Wales
June	7	Terowie	South Australia
	8-9	Burra	South Australia
	10	Saddleworth	South Australia
	11-12	Kapunda	South Australia
	14	Tanunda	South Australia
	15	Angaston	South Australia
	16	Mount Pleasant	South Australia
	17	Nairne	South Australia

Month	Date	Location	Colony
June	19-26	Adelaide	South Australia
	28	St Peters	South Australia
	29-30	North Adelaide	South Australia
July	1	Semaphore	South Australia
	2	Norwood	South Australia
	3	Unley	South Australia
	5-6	Hindmarsh	South Australia
	7-8	Mount Barker	South Australia
	9-10	Strathalbyn	South Australia
	12	Wolseley	South Australia
	13-14	Naracoorte	South Australia
	15-16	Penola	South Australia
	17-24	Mount Gambier	South Australia
	26-27	Millicent	South Australia
August	2-3	Lucindale	South Australia
	5	Naracoorte	South Australia
	7-9	Murray Bridge	South Australia
	14-16	Port Elliot	South Australia
	21	Burnside	South Australia
	23	St Peters	South Australia
	24-25	Mitcham	South Australia
	26	Goodwood	South Australia
	27-28	Brighton	South Australia
	30-31	Milang	South Australia
September	1	Woodside	South Australia
	9-11	Clare	South Australia
	14-15	Laura	South Australia
	16	Gladstone	South Australia
	21	Riverton	South Australia
	23	Saddleworth	South Australia
	24	Gumeracha	South Australia
	25	Blumberg	South Australia
	27	Woodside	South Australia
	29	Murray Bridge	South Australia
October	5-9	Ballarat	Victoria
	12	Leaves Adelaide for New Zealand	
	23	Invercargill	New Zealand
	30	Gore	New Zealand
November	1	Balclutha	New Zealand
	2-3	Bruce	New Zealand
	4-10	Dunedin	New Zealand
	18-20	Timaru	New Zealand
	24-25	Ashburton	New Zealand
	26-4 December	Christchurch	New Zealand
December	9-15	Wellington	New Zealand
	16-18	Wanganui	New Zealand
	27-31	Auckland	New Zealand

Appendix 2: Rural Venues 1933-35

Notes: Capacity shown in italics is an estimate.

Licence files are held at the State Records of South Australia. They are preceded with GRG67/33/.

LOCALITY	REGION	TYPE OF VENUE	CAPACITY	EXHIBITOR	Licence File GRG67/33
Alawoona	Murray Mallee	Institute	350		1927/53
Angaston	Adelaide Environs	Institute	450	Angaston Institute Committee	1922/66
Ardrossan	Yorke Peninsula	Institute	450	C.T. Baird	1925/77
Balaklava	Mid-North	Institute	600	Balaklava Institute Committee	1922/81
Barmera	Murray Mallee	Memorial Hall	500	L.R. Appleton	1926/182
Berri	Murray Mallee	Theatre (Rivoli)	689	J. Najar	1922/108
Blyth	Mid-North	Institute	300	Blyth Institute Committee Benbow Amusements	1925/243
Booborowie	Mid-North	Institute	*100*	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1926/71
Booleroo Centre	Mid-North	Institute	*100*	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1925/227
Bordertown	South East	Institute	300	A.W. Murray	1922/73
Bridgewater	Adelaide Environs	Institute	*100*		1925/274
Brinkworth	Mid-North	Institute	200	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1922/67
Burra (Kooringa)	Mid-North	Institute	516	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1915/58 and 1931/139
Bute	Mid-North	District Hall	350		1925/33
Calca	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/114
Caltowie	Mid-North	Memorial Hall	*100*	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	
Cambrai	Murray Mallee	Institute	*100*		1926/129
Caralue	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	
Carawa	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/122
Ceduna	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	350	Ceduna Talkies	
Chanadada	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	350	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/116
Charra	Eyre Peninsula	Woolshed Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/116
Clare	Mid-North	Town Hall	675	S.J. McLean	1922/90
Cleve	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	*300*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	
Cockabindie	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	
Collie	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/97
Colton	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/113
Coorabie	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	220	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	
Cowell	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	300	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes) Cowell Talkies (C.B. Turner)	
Crystal Brook	Mid-North	Institute	380	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1922/102

LOCALITY	REGION	TYPE OF VENUE	CAPACITY	EXHIBITOR	Licence File GRG67/33
Cummins	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	250	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1936/41
Cungena	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1933/107
Curramulka	Yorke Peninsula	Institute	350	H. Porter	1925/73
Darke Peak	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1933/126
Denial Bay	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1933/108
Edithburgh	Yorke Peninsula	Institute	340	H. Porter Benbow Amusements	1922/75
Elliston	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1927/173
Eudunda	Mid-North	District Hall	400	R.C. Williams	1922/69
Farrell Flat	Mid-North	Institute	*100*	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1926/155
Frances	South East	Institute	*100*		1927/141
Freeling	Adelaide Environs	Institute	350		1922/65
Gawler	Adelaide Environs	Theatre (Regal)	988	Regal Amusements	1934/93
Gawler	Adelaide Environs	Institute (Strand)	650	S. Wills Times Theatres Ltd.	
Georgetown	Mid-North	Institute	300	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1925/46
Gladstone	Mid-North	Institute	380	F. Rock Benbow Amusements	1925/38
Goode	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1933/126
Goolwa	Adelaide Environs	Institute	320	C.A. Dunstall	1925/46
Gumeracha	Adelaide Environs	Institute	*100*		1926/244
Hamley Bridge	Mid-North	Institute	380	R.C. Williams	1922/72
Hawker	Mid-North	Institute	*100*	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1925/229
Houghton	Adelaide Environs	Rechabite Hall	250		1925/25
Iron Knob	Eyre Peninsula	Memorial Hall	350	Iron Knob Pictures Association	1925/95
Jamestown	Mid-North	Institute	500	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1922/76
Kadina	Yorke Peninsula	Theatre (Ideal)	1047	Clifford Theatres	1920/55
Kadina	Yorke Peninsula	Town Hall	600	C.A. Dunstall	
Kapunda	Mid-North	Institute	420	R.C. Williams	1922/79
Karkoo	Eyre Peninsula	Public Hall	*100*		1934/64
Karoonda	Murray Mallee	Institute	200	A. Gillis	1926/170
Kimba	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	350	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	
Kingscote	Adelaide Environs	District Hall	300	H.S. Mansell C.A. Dunstall	1926/6
Kingston	South East	Institute	200	A.W. Backler	1925/56
Koolunga	Mid-North	Institute	*100*	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1928/88
Koongawa	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	
Kyancutta	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	
Lameroo	Murray Mallee	Institute	350	Lameroo Institute Committee Benbow Amusements	1925/202
Langhorne Creek	Adelaide Environs	Memorial Hall	300		1934/53

LOCALITY	REGION	TYPE OF VENUE	CAPACITY	EXHIBITOR	Licence File GRG67/33
Laura	Mid-North	Town Hall	250	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1925/31
Lock	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	350	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1933/118 1934/20
Lock 7	Murray Mallee		*100*	Lock 7 Mutual Benefit Society	
Loxton	Murray Mallee	Theatre (Corona)	500	H.O. Quast	1922/71
Lucindale	South East	District Hall	*100*		
Lyndoch	Adelaide Environs	Institute	250		1926/174
Maitland	Yorke Peninsula	Institute	360	G. Rinder	1925/27 1931/286
Mallala	Adelaide Environs	Institute	300		1925/32
Mannum	Murray Mallee	Institute	450	F. Jeffrey	1922/74
Manoora	Mid-North	Institute	300	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1925/228
Marrabel	Mid-North	Oddfellow's Hall	*100*		1926/164
McLaren Flat	Adelaide Environs	Institute	*100*	Southern Talkies (K.R. Gill)	1933/151
McLaren Vale	Adelaide Environs	Public Hall	*100*	Southern Talkies (K.R. Gill)	1933/151
Meadows	Adelaide Environs	Show Hall	*100*		1927/81
Melrose	Mid-North	Institute	300	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	
Millicent	South East	Institute	350	Globe Talkies (C. Willshire)	1922/84
Minlaton	Yorke Peninsula	Institute	600	H. Porter	1925/49
Minnipa	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1927/163
Moonta	Yorke Peninsula	Institute	675	National Pictures	1922/85
Moorook	Murray Mallee	Institute	200		1924/90
Morgan	Murray Mallee	Institute	300		1922/97
Morphett Vale	Adelaide Environs	Institute	*100*	Southern Talkies (K.R. Gill)	1933/151
Mount Barker	Adelaide Environs	Institute	350	Acme Pictures (Daniel Bros.)	1922/95
Mount Bryan	Mid-North	District Hall	*100*		1926/196
Mount Gambier	South East	Theatre (Capitol)	1774	Clifford Theatres	1927/69
Mount Hope	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	250		1933/112
Mount Pleasant	Adelaide Environs	Memorial Hall	350		
Mudamuckla	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1933/100
Mundoora	Mid-North	Institute	*100*		1927/9
Murray Bridge	Murray Mallee	Theatre (Lyric)	928	Murray Bridge Picture Palace Co.	1923/19
Nairne	Adelaide Environs	Memorial Hall	250		1925/48
Naracoorte	South East	Town Hall	778	Austral Pictures (D. Caldwell)	1922/83
Narrung	Adelaide Environs	Institute	200		1929/206
Nunjikompita	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/99
Nuriootpa	Adelaide Environs	Institute	526	Marston & Orrock	1923/113
Orroroo	Mid-North	Institute	396	Renown Pictures (J.H. McDougal)	1922/114

LOCALITY	REGION	TYPE OF VENUE	CAPACITY	EXHIBITOR	Licence File GRG67/33
Owen	Mid-North	Institute	*100*		1925/241
Pallinga	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	
Paruna	Murray Mallee	Institute	*100*		1929/243
Penola	South East	Institute	250	Penola Palace Pictures (P. Reid)	1925/30
Penong	Eyre Peninsula	Public Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1927/177
Peterborough	Mid-North	Theatre (Capitol)	935	Tom Rees	1925/190
Petina	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	
Piednippie	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/129
Pinaroo	Murray Mallee	Institute	450	Regent Pictures Nulty	1922/101 & 1931/214
Pinkawillinie-Buckleboo	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	200	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	
Point Pearce	Yorke Peninsula	Hall	200	Harry Porter	
Poochera	Eyre Peninsula	Public Hall	700	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/117
Port Augusta	Mid-North	Town Hall	700	Enterprise Pictures	1918/83
Port Broughton	Mid-North	Institute	300	G. Tothill	1926/151
Port Elliot	Adelaide Environs	Institute	380	C.A. Dunstall Southern Talkies (K.R. Gill)	1925/26
Port Kenny	Eyre Peninsula	Public Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/146
Port Lincoln	Eyre Peninsula	Theatre (Flinders)	690	Rebecca L. McGregor	1929/131
Port Lincoln	Eyre Peninsula	Memorial Hall	600	Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1922/93
Port MacDonnell	South East	Institute	*100*		1927/50
Port Noarlunga	Adelaide Environs	Institute	250	Port Noarlunga Institute Committee	1925/274
Port Pirie	Mid-North	Theatre (Austral)	1203	M.W. Forrester	1919/27
Port Pirie	Mid-North	Theatre (Ozone)	1357	Ozone Theatres	1933/47
Port Victoria	Yorke Peninsula	Institute	390	A. Craddock	1925/67
Port Vincent	Yorke Peninsula	Institute	250	Harry Porter	1925/41
Port Wakefield	Mid-North	Hall	250	W.D. Evans	1925/58
Quorn	Mid-North	Town Hall	350	Enterprise Pictures	1922/92
Red Hill	Mid-North	Institute	250	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1926/7
Renmark	Murray Mallee	Theatre (Arcadia)	868	M. Symonds	1931/96
Riverton	Mid-North	Institute	280	R.C. Williams	1922/140
Robe	South East	Institute	*100*	Mr. Hatley	1925/261
Rudall	Eyre Peninsula	School Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1931/55
Saddleworth	Mid-North	Institute	260	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1925/208
Salisbury	Adelaide Environs	Institute	200	L.M. Tothill	1925/35
Sheringa	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/119

LOCALITY	REGION	TYPE OF VENUE	CAPACITY	EXHIBITOR	Licence File GRG67/33
Smoky Bay	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	
Snowtown	Mid-North	Institute	350	Benbow Amusements	1922/70
Spalding	Mid-North	District Hall	170	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1925/257
Stansbury	Yorke Peninsula	Institute	300		1925/36
Stirling West	Adelaide Environs	Institute	350	A.J. Pepper	1925/21
Strathalbyn	Adelaide Environs	Institute	439	Acme Pictures (Daniel Bros.)	1922/123
Streaky Bay	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	300	West Coast Pictures	1927/179
Swan Reach	Murray Mallee	Institute	*100*		1927/54
Tailem Bend	Murray Mallee	Institute	300	W. Bartlett	1922/127
Talia	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	
Tanunda	Adelaide Environs	Institute	500	S. Wills	1922/82
Terowie	Mid-North	Institute	310		1925/24
Thevenard	Eyre Peninsula	Waterside Workers Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1929/79
Tweedvale (Lobethal)	Adelaide Environs	Institute	308	Benbow Amusements	1925/34
Ungarra	Eyre Peninsula	District Hall	300	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1930/37
Uraidla	Adelaide Environs	Institute	500		1922/11
Victor Harbour	Adelaide Environs	Theatre (Ozone)	849	Ozone Theatres	1923/81
Waddikee Rock	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	
Waikerie	Murray Mallee	Picture Hall	200	W.H. Foster	1922/125
Wallaroo	Yorke Peninsula	Town Hall	942	Wallaroo Entertainments Co.	1917/16
Warooka	Yorke Peninsula	Memorial Hall	140	Harry Porter	1925/55
Warramboo	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	200	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1933/80
Wasleys	Adelaide Environs	Institute	*100*		1925/270
Watervale	Mid-North	Forresters Hall	*100*		1926/168
Whyalla	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	600		1925/29
Willunga	Adelaide Environs	Show Hall	350	C.A. Dunstall	1931/219
Wilmington	Mid-North	Institute	300	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1924/63
Wirrabara	Mid-North	Town Hall	350	Lester's Pictures (H.W. Rees)	1925/225
Wirrulla	Eyre Peninsula	Memorial Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1934/20
Wolseley	South East	Institute	350		1931/80
Woodside	Adelaide Environs	Institute	250	C.A. Dunstall	1925/74
Wudina	Eyre Peninsula	Public Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1927/165
Yacka	Mid-North	Institute	170	H.W. Rees	1926/39
Yallunda Flat	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1925/48

LOCALITY	REGION	TYPE OF VENUE	CAPACITY	EXHIBITOR	Licence File GRG67/33
Yaninee	Eyre Peninsula	Institute	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1927/174
Yankalilla	Adelaide Environs	Agriculture Show Hall	250	C.A. Dunstall	1925/256
Yantanabie	Eyre Peninsula	Memorial Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing) Paragon Pictures (I.E. Hawkes)	1933/96
Yeelanna	Eyre Peninsula	Hall	*100*	Cleve Pictures (F.N. Stubing)	1933/120
Yongala	Mid-North	Institute	*100*		1926/153
Yorketown	Yorke Peninsula	Town Hall	394	H. Porter	1925/65

Appendix 3: Top Twenty Screenings at the Snowtown Institute Talkies by Audience Size (July 1933 to June 1935)

The material is arranged as follows:
Audience Size, Takings (including tax), Screening Date(s), Temperature (ºF)
Billing, **Title** (Director, Year), Genre, Distributor, Country of Origin, Weeks since end of Adelaide CBD run.

347, £31 19s 4d, 1 & 2 September 1933, 55.9º & 61.7º
Single Bill: **Jack's the Boy** (Forde, 1932), Comedy, GAF, UK, 22

341, £29 17s 11d, 27 & 28 April 1934, 63.8º & 61.6º
Main Feature: **On Our Selection** (Hall, 1932), Comedy, BEF, Australia, 78
Support Feature: **Central Park** (Adolfi, 1932), Crime, First National, USA

319, £29 1s 7d, 12 & 13 January 1934, 91.5º & 98.4º
Main Feature: **Tell Me Tonight** (Litvak, 1932), Comedy, GAF, UK, 16
Support Feature: **The King's Cup** (Cobham, 1933), Drama, GAF, UK

277, £23 10s 9d, 29 & 30 June 1934, 62.7º & 57.7º
Main Feature: **The Squatter's Daughter** (Hall, 1933), Drama, BEF, Australia, 30
Support Feature: **Little Orphan Annie** (Robertson, 1932), Comedy, RKO, USA

253, £24 4s 9d, 27 September 1933, 73.9º
Main Feature: **Cavalcade** (Lloyd, 1933), Drama, Fox, USA, 10
Support Feature: **Walking Down Broadway** (Von Stroheim, 1933), Comedy, Fox, USA

250, £21 10s 6d, 24 January 1934, 93.3º
Main Feature: **Yes, Mr Brown** (Buchanan, 1933), Musical, GAF, UK, 14
Support Feature: **Up for the Derby** (Rogers, 1933), Comedy, GAF, UK

248, £22 13s 10d, 20 & 21 October 1933, 81.4º
Single Bill: **The Sign of the Cross** (De Mille, 1932), Drama, Paramount, USA, 9

248, £22 1s 7d, 23 December 1933, 77.6º
Main Feature: **Sleepless Nights** (Bentley, 1932), Musical, BEF, UK, 34
Support Feature: **Mr Bill the Conqueror** (Walker, 1932), Romance, BIP, UK

236, £19 15s 6d, 31 August & 1 September 1934, 63.7º & 58.8º
Main Feature: **The Hayseeds** (Smith, 1933), Comedy, BEF, Australia, 30
Support Feature: **Peach O'Reno** (Seiter, 1931), Comedy, RKO, USA

231, £20 7s 2d, 2 June 1934, 68.2º
Main Feature: **Paddy, the Next Best Thing** (Lachman, 1933), Musical, Fox, USA, 18
Support Feature: **Uptown New York** (Schertzinger, 1932), Romance, World Wide Films, USA

219, £23 8s 5d, 15 August 1934, 56.6º
Main Feature: **Damaged Lives** (Ulmer, 1933)**,** Drama**,** 11, Weldon, Canada/USA, 8
Support Feature: **Doss House** (Baxter, 1933), Crime, Baxter & Barter, UK
219, £19 9s 1d, 22 July 1933, 59.5º
Main Feature: **Tess of the Storm Country** (Santell, 1932), Drama, Fox, USA, 11
Support Feature: **The Painted Woman** (Blystone, 1932), Drama, Fox, USA

211, £16 13s 1d, 12 May 1934, 80.8º
Main Feature: **Adorable** (Dieterle, 1933), Musical, Fox, USA, 30
Support Feature: **Frontier Marshal** (Seiler, 1934), Western, Fox, USA

197, £17 7s 1d, 19 January 1935, 85.0º
Main Feature: **Only Yesterday** (Stahl, 1933), Drama, Universal, USA, 14
Support Feature: **Uncertain Lady** (Freund, 1934), Comedy, Universal, USA

197, £16 18s 4d, 8 December 1934, 68.2º
Main Feature: **The Silence of Dean Maitland** (Hall, 1934), Drama, Cinesound, Australia, 21
Support Feature: **Hawley's of High Street** (Bentley, 1933), Comedy, BEF, UK

194, £17 7s 0d, 26 May 1934, 69.6º
Main Feature: **42nd Street** (Bacon, 1933), Musical, First National, USA, 38
Support Feature: **You Said a Mouthful** (Bacon, 1932), Comedy, First National, USA

194, £17 2s 5d, 15 September 1934, 64.9º
Main Feature: **Peg O'My Heart** (Leonard, 1933), Drama, MGM, USA, 46
Support Feature: **The Pride of the Force** (Lee, 1933), Comedy, BEF, UK

193, £18 4s 0d, 26 August 1933, 68.3º
Main Feature: **Marry Me** (Thiele, 1932), Comedy, GAF, UK, 28
Support Feature: **The Painted Woman** (Blystone, 1932), Drama, Fox, USA

192, £16 14s 3d, 4 November 1933, 72.7º
Main Feature: **Rio Rita** (Reed, 1929), Musical, RKO, USA, 10
Support Feature: **Dance, Fools, Dance** (Beaumont, 1931), Crime, MGM, USA

189, £16 9s 0d, 29 December 1934, 71.3º
Main Feature: **The Desert Song** (Del Ruth, 1929), Musical, First National, USA, 5
Support Feature: **She Learned About Sailors** (Marshall, 1934), Comedy, RKO, USA

Appendix 4: Timelines for Each of the Top Ten Most Screened Films in Rural South Australia, 1933-35

(Excel Spreadsheet attached separate to thesis. A copy will be supplied on Compact Disc with hardcopy.)

Appendix 5: SARURAL.DB – Dataset of Screenings in Rural South Australia, July 1933 to June 1935

(Excel Spreadsheet attached separate to thesis. A copy will be supplied on Compact Disc with hardcopy.)

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