

## POSTCARDS, MOVING PICTURES & THE NEW ZEALAND INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF 1906-7.

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Recently two interesting and unusual postcards came into my possession that shed light on a little known aspect of the history of the New Zealand International Exhibition held in Christchurch during the summer of 1906-7. The Exhibition opened in November, 1906 and its various attractions were subjects of interest to at least two pioneer 'moving picture men' or early film makers who met each other in Christchurch that summer. One of these men was the gifted Joseph Perry of the Salvation Army Limelight Division in Melbourne. Touring New Zealand in 1906, Perry exhibited Cinephone 'talking' pictures, a combination of gramophone and film and then, later in the year, visited the Exhibition. With his Biorama Film Company he made film of some Exhibition attractions including the dance performances. These were given by both the Maori and the Fijians in the Exhibition Pah and on the sports ground at the rear of the Hagley Park Exhibition site. Sadly, in common with the fate of a great deal of early film, none of Perry's work has survived and the Exhibition 'topicals' he made have disappeared along with all his other work from the years 1900-10. The other man known to have filmed at the Exhibition was the English entrepreneur and showman T.J. West. Remarkably 7.54 minutes of his work has survived and the film is now in the National Film Archive. This fragment of film, of Exhibition opening day, is one of the earliest surviving pieces of film in the archive.

In England T.J. West had been the proprietor of West's Modern Marvel Company, which exhibited scientific novelties such as X-rays and, after 1895, the first moving pictures. At some time in the 1890s West's company had become associated with the Brescians who were a touring group of light opera performers comprising three brothers named Hayward and their Italian wives, the Martinengo sisters, who were from the district of Brescia in northern Italy. West's Pictures and the Brescians decided to tour New Zealand where manager Henry Hayward had a sister living. The company arrived in Dunedin in 1905 and began a tour which opened in that city on 10 April. They were very successful and they went on to tour the rest of the country to packed houses. Early in 1906 they left to tour Australia and after more success returned to Christchurch where they had booked an entertainment concession at the Exhibition. John A. Lee recalls a visit in 1905. "Somehow we managed to get to a matinee performance of Hayward's pictures. The music of the Brescians was beyond me. I could not rise beyond the music hall song or a revival hymn, and waited eagerly for the picture. I am sure it was 'The Man in the Iron Mask'. I can say I was in at the birth of Hayward's pictures".

West's Pictures and the Brescians were one of the permanent attractions at the New Zealand International Exhibition which opened on 1 November 1906 and closed five and a half months later on 15 April 1907. Moving pictures were exhibited in West's Entertainment Hall, a small purpose built venue at the rear of the main Exhibition building with access from the amusement grounds that were called Wonderland. Interest-

ingly, although temporary, this little building may have been the first ever purpose built for showing moving pictures in New Zealand. The first permanent picture palace or cinema was built in Wellington in 1910. West's Moving Pictures, a programme of short film subjects, was shown to paying customers daily, every half hour, for the duration of the Exhibition. It is not known exactly what this half hour programme comprised, but it would have been a mix of documentary and dramatic films, each relatively short. This type of programme was characteristic of early performances. For many patrons the fact that the pictures moved was sufficient entertainment of itself. There was of course no colour or sound with the film, save the clatter of the hand crank projector. The Exhibition occurred at the time when moving pictures were undergoing the transformation from fairground novelty to powerful new entertainment industry, and the first specialist film production companies were becoming established.

The first of my recent finds is an unused advertising postcard with an undivided back. On this card both U. West and Henry Haywood are named as managers of West's Pictures. It provides the evidence that allows us to speculate that a particular well-known film by English pioneer producer Cecil Hepworth was probably included in their Exhibition programme. We know that the West/Haywood partnership was ended in April 1907 at the close of the Exhibition, with West going to Sydney and Haywood and the Brescians returning to England before touring New Zealand again in 1908. As can be seen the postcard features the dog 'Jock' who rescued a baby 'Violet'. This could only refer to the film 'Rescued by Rover' that was made in 1905 and appears in Hepworth's catalogue for 1906. A copy of the film must have been bought from Hepworth and brought to New Zealand as soon as it was available. The postcard must therefore date to 1906 and be a publicity giveaway for West's Pictures at the Exhibition. At the time 'Rescued by Rover' was said to be the most advanced film to have been made on either side of the Atlantic. It is now held to be one of the technical and artistic highpoints of early British film, a lead subsequently lost to Hollywood, and never regained.

Cecil Hepworth's film 'Rescued by Rover' was made in and around his studio at Walton-on-Thames, west of London. It was 425 feet long, which is a running time of about 7 minutes, and featured his wife and baby daughter and his dog. A synopsis of the story is that the dog is the faithful guardian of the household, especially the child. When out with the nanny the baby is taken from its pram by a gypsy woman whilst the nanny is distracted by her boyfriend. The child is taken to a poor part of town where she is stripped of her fine clothes and laid on filthy rags in a garret. The nanny rushes home and alerts the family. The dog, sensing the crisis, jumps out of the window and following a trail, swims a river, searches from house to house for, and eventually finds the child. The dog then leaves the

scene, swims back across the river, returns to the family home and alerting the father causes him to follow, again across the river and through the streets to the house where his child lies, and so the rescue is effected. The faithful dog, his master and the child return home to much rejoicing. This film had all the ingredients required of popular melodrama and was very popular. It is not known why West changed the name of the dog to Jock on his advertising postcard but he must have thought it would have more appeal than Rover for a New Zealand audience. Films of this period had no title sequence so a name change was perfectly possible.

The other interesting Exhibition postcard is a real photographic one of a scene on the sports ground at the rear of the Hagley Park Exhibition site. What is of special interest is the lineup of two English style upright hand crank moving picture cameras on their heavy tripods whilst the cameramen wait nearby to film a parade that is forming up in front of them. In 25 years of postcard collecting I have never before seen a card depicting film making, so to find one for the Exhibition is astounding. The back of the card has the following inscription: "Showing the

Pah, with riders, native Princesses & their escorts. In the rear are models of native grass houses on wagons. Note the machines in the foreground taking moving pictures." Given what we know about film in Christchurch in 1906 it seems very reasonable to conclude that this card depicts both T.J. West and Joseph Perry at work. These two men became friends and when West left New Zealand after the Exhibition to pursue a successful career in the Australian film industry as West's Pictures, many of his films were developed in the Salvation Army darkroom. West would periodically return to New Zealand with his camera to make films for his Australian audiences. 'Marvelous Maoriland' was one such film made at the request of the New Zealand Government. Joseph Perry would also make more visits to New Zealand in the next few years, filming its attractions, including on one occasion the famous porpoise Pelorus Jack. Henry Hayward took up the film business in New Zealand again in 1909 in association with his brother Rudall, and founded the successful firm of Hayward's Pictures. Rudall Hayward became New Zealand's famous pioneer cameraman and film maker.

