

CINERAMA

NEWSLETTER No 11.

WE DID IT! CINERAMA IS BACK.

A few minutes after 2-30pm on the sunny English summer afternoon of June 16th 1993, CINERAMA rolled again at a public performance for the first time in 21 years.

The last act in this drama, for such it was at times, began in the first week in March when Willem Bouwmeester and John Harvey arrived in Bradford to begin the final installation of the equipment. Assisted by the Museum staff and Sound Associate's Engineer, the long, intricate task of wiring up the three projectors, Xenon lamphouses, Cineramasound machine and the control console began. Little did we know the many problems that were about to beset us, parallelling, in an uncanny way, those of the original 1952 premiere.

With this work under way, attention turned to hanging the 1300+ louvre strips that would form the new screen. The drama now started! Harkness Screens had already installed the new screen frame and Willem had painstakingly restored the legendary louvre guide boards. These are fitted at the top, centre and bottom of the screen to hold the 1 inch louvre strips at exactly the correct angle to the audience. The boards, which had been recovered from a Brussels Theatre, had been originally set for a different screen curvature and Willem had previously realigned them, a task involving over 5000 spot welds.

CALAMITY! When the louvres, which had been donated to the Museum from an unused order of 1967 were unpacked, they were discovered to be too short as well as to have become discoloured during the long period in storage.

Luckily John knew of a supplier in the U.S.A. that still produced these, and a series of frantic calls to Hurley's in Baltimore resulted in 1350 brand new louvres being flown, overnight, to the Museum. This, however, brought with it a bonus, the screen could now be slightly bigger than originally planned. The bad news was that the delays were mounting. What had been estimated as a two week task became three and the work still continued. John and Willem agreed to stay a third week after which they must leave as they were committed elsewhere. The last louvres were finally hung hours before departure. The projectors and sound system were fully operational but the lenses had not yet arrived. At this point the 30 year old main drive motor of the Sound machine decided to seize up. Luckily a spare was available. Equipped with the RENAULT COMMERCIAL, the prologue to THIS IS CINERAMA, the line up loops for HOW THE WEST WAS WON and a long list of incomplete tasks from Willem, the partially completed installation was left in the enthusiastic hands of the Museum staff.

During April Harkness Screens arrived back to install the screen masking and measure up for the CINERAMA Wine-Red Curtain. The curtain itself was quite an achievement as, to maximise the screen size, it was necessary to evolve a system whereby the material gathered up as the curtain opened could be parked on a curved track to the rear, there being insufficient space beside the screen to park both the Cinerama curtain and the theatre's flat screen curtain. The curtain was finally installed in mid May but, a few days later, it overshot it's stop switches, destroying the winding mechanism. It was finally successfully commissioned the day before the opening.

Two weeks before opening Willem returned to complete the line up and technical side.
THEN THE SECOND BOMBSHELL HIT!

Due to problems in Los Angeles, the new print would not be ready on time. Some eighteen months ago, an *answer* print had been struck from the original negative. This is a straight, uncorrected print to identify what colour corrections will be needed for the *show print*. It was found that the colour of the negative had faded with a severe shift to blue though the labs felt this to just be correctable. Time passed and the project had progressed enough to order the show print when it was found that some sequences were bouncing and weaving to an unacceptable degree.

Investigation revealed that the deterioration of the negative had accelerated over the intervening period and that it had now physically shrunk causing the new problem. Unfortunately, by now, the invitations had already been mailed for the opening ceremony and people were already on their way from all over the world.

Again the transatlantic telephone companies increased their profits as the Museum desperately tried to get in contact with John Harvey back in Dayton, Ohio. John, of course, has a full Cinerama installation in his Ohio home. He also has a print of THIS IS CINERAMA. Salvaged from several copies, his print is mostly Technicolor and the colour is excellent though somewhat scratched in places. He very generously agreed to ship it immediately to Bradford. However the finale of Act 1 on John's print was in difficulties. To overcome this, sections of the answer print had to be cut in. There then followed a mammoth editing session to synchronise this veteran print to the new soundtrack. The print was sent for cleaning and finally assembled one day before the opening. This is the print currently in use, though we have been assured that the printer difficulties will be overcome and a new print will be sent to Bradford as soon as possible. The new soundtrack itself is a masterpiece of restoration as the sound master in the U.S.A. had shrunk, was warped at two foot intervals and some sections had become partially demagnetised. Luckily these sections were redeemable from other copies.

THE BIG DAY ARRIVED. The opening was to be part of the 10th birthday celebrations of the very successful National Museum of Photography, Film and Television. The guests were greeted in the Imax Theatre by Colin Ford, Head of the Museum, who introduced the first part of the festivities, the opening of a new gallery called TV HEAVEN. This exhibit allows members of the public to select and view vintage television programmes past and present, the opening ceremony being performed by the prominent acting partnership of Timothy West and his wife Prunella Scales. Presentations were also made to film producer David Puttnam, Photographer Don McCullin, Imax founder Graeme Ferguson and Thornton Bridgewater, a pioneer of Television engineering who had worked with John Logie Baird and continued to become the BBC's Head of Engineering..

After Lunch it was a short walk across the forecourt to the PICTUREVILLE CINEMA for the reprimiere of THIS IS CINERAMA. So 21 years after the last public performance of Fred Waller's wonderful process, the triple projectors rolled again. Yes the film does look dated all these years on. The merge lines are more prominent than we remembered though they always were on this, the first production, shot with Fred Waller's Camera No 1, which is on display in the foyer of the Theatre. The later cameras were much improved. After the performance there were speeches from David Puttnam and Graeme Ferguson who, it transpired, had never seen Cinerama before and finally, the ultimate guest of Honour was introduced, Mrs. Fred Waller who, aged 87, had flown over specially from her home in Long Island.

The guest list looked almost like a who's who of Cinerama.

Amongst those present were: Doris Waller Caron (Mrs. Fred Waller), John P. Caron (Fred's Stepson who was with Cinerama throughout its 3-strip days), Robert Bendick (Co-Producer TIC & Director CH), John Vorisek (Sound Recordist TIC), Jim Morrison (7 Wonders), Gunther Jung (Representing Cinerama Inc, who was with Cinerama at the Forum and is now restoring the print) and, of course, John Harvey. Graeme Ferguson, inventor of the Imax process flew in from Canada. From Australia came John Mitchell (who has the other privately preserved installation) and David Coles (Chief Researcher for the I.C.S.).

From the UK, David Puttman (Film Producer), Ralph Miller (Once a projectionist for Cinerama in London) and Chris Usher (The last man to project Cinerama in the UK), and, of course, yours truly. Last but not least, from the Continent, Willem Bouwmeester (ICS European Rep who obtained, restored and installed the equipment) and Isidor Salien who discovered the elusive louvre guide boards in the disused Brussels Cinerama theatre.

The show had not been without it's own moments of drama. The elderly print ran off the bottom sprocket of Baker machine 5 minutes into Act 2 and had to be held in position by hand for the rest of the performance. Then, in almost a re-run of opening night 1952, Able panel broke as the end credits faded jamming up the machine and bending the top sprocket shaft. The projection staff performed emergency repairs to enable the evening performance to proceed.

I could not help notice that the majority of the evening audience filing in were probably not born when the last UK showing occurred. It is interesting to conjecture what they would think of this resurrected piece of Cinema History.

But fear not, it was worth the anguish and toil. The old Cinerama magic still works. The question is where do we go from here? The first priority is to make Bradford commercially viable. We already know of a group from New York being organised. Bradford must be made to pay if any more films are to be reprinted and presented there...and time is running out quickly for the negatives. It's up to you to spread the word and publicise the Bradford operation. The I.C.S. must now aim for 3 or 4 other venues elsewhere around the world to enable the costs of restoring the prints to be shared and to bring this magical, old process back to a whole new generation of moviegoers. Why no American institution has shown any interest in a similar operation in the States remains a mystery. It is the obvious next step forward.

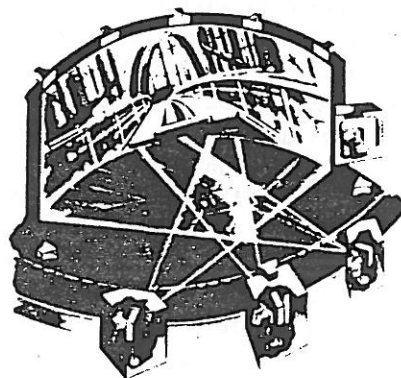
THIS IS CINERAMA is currently shown daily at 1-30pm (*excepting Mondays*), and on Wednesday evenings at 7-30pm until September 5th. All enquiries and bookings **MUST BE MADE DIRECTLY** with the Museum. Box Office: (0)274 732277. Fax:(0)274 723155. Information:(0)274 727488. or write to: National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, Pictureville, Bradford, West Yorkshire, England. BD1 1NQ.

We would recommend you allow a complete day for your visit if you are to view the exhibits and visit the Imax Theatre as well. A combined Cinerama and Imax ticket is available if you wish to compare processes.

THIS IS CINERAMA runs for just over two hours plus an interval.

ONE GLANCE TOLD HIM THAT HE WAS SEEING THE MOTION PICTURE OF TOMORROW

Said of Lowell Thomas in the London Casino
'This is Cinerama' booklet, 1954.



THIS IS CINERAMA 1952. USA.

It was reported that President Eisenhower wept and sang aloud the words of 'America the Beautiful' as it was played during the screening of This Is Cinerama. But don't let that put you off. Forty years later the film still offers a giddy, white knuckle ride, and is about as fun a piece of Americana as you are ever likely to see.

Newscaster and Explorer Lowell Thomas, one of the prime movers behind Cinerama, wrote: 'a hundred years from now- who knows?-our great-great grandchildren may similarly visit, by means of Cinerama, the hot red plains of Mars or the vast and airless valleys of the moon. For modern science, that has already split the atom and begun the conquest of space, has made at last a practical reality of the mythical flying carpet'.

Here is a bold, fascinating, and at times unintentionally amusing, insight into 50's America. The Cold War had begun and cinema promoted all-American values. The Congressional Record reported that This is Cinerama was 'an important instrument through which the American way of life could be illustrated to other nations'.

To see This Is Cinerama in a newly restored print from the original negative, projected in a brand new Cinerama Theatre, is an extraordinary chance to travel back in time to a world that walked tall, thought big and knew right from wrong.

(Museum Promotional Article).

ENDLEADER.

The former Warner Cinerama on Hollywood Boulevard is reported to be up for sale and may be purchased by a group intending to convert it to a motion picture museum.

In a very dilapidated state, the Cooper Cinerama in Minneapolis has closed. This was one of the few theatres left intact less the 3-strip equipment.

Though current plans for This is Cinerama at the NMPFTV only run up to Sept 5th, the Museum intend Cinerama to be an ongoing attraction and they will reappraise their future plans for the installation based on the demand this Summer. Contact Rod Varley, Curator Film for details.

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of the **WORLD'S
GREATEST
Theatrical
Attraction!**

**THIS IS
CINERAMA**

A Lowell Thomas-Morris C. Cooper Presentation. Print by TECHNICOLOR