

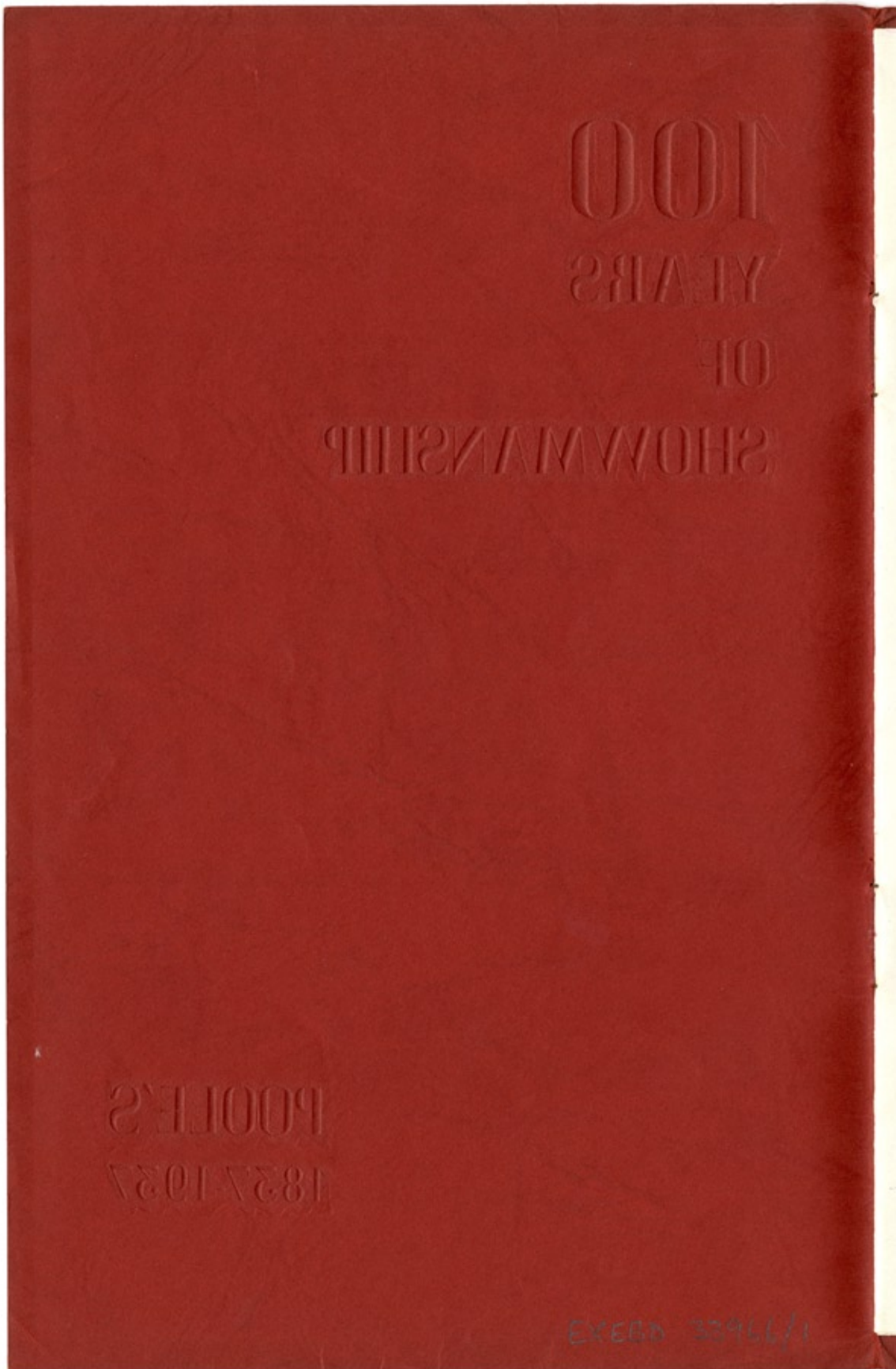
100
YEARS
OF
SHOWMANSHIP

POOLE'S
1837-1937

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Book: One Hundred Years of Showmanship: Poole's 1837-1937

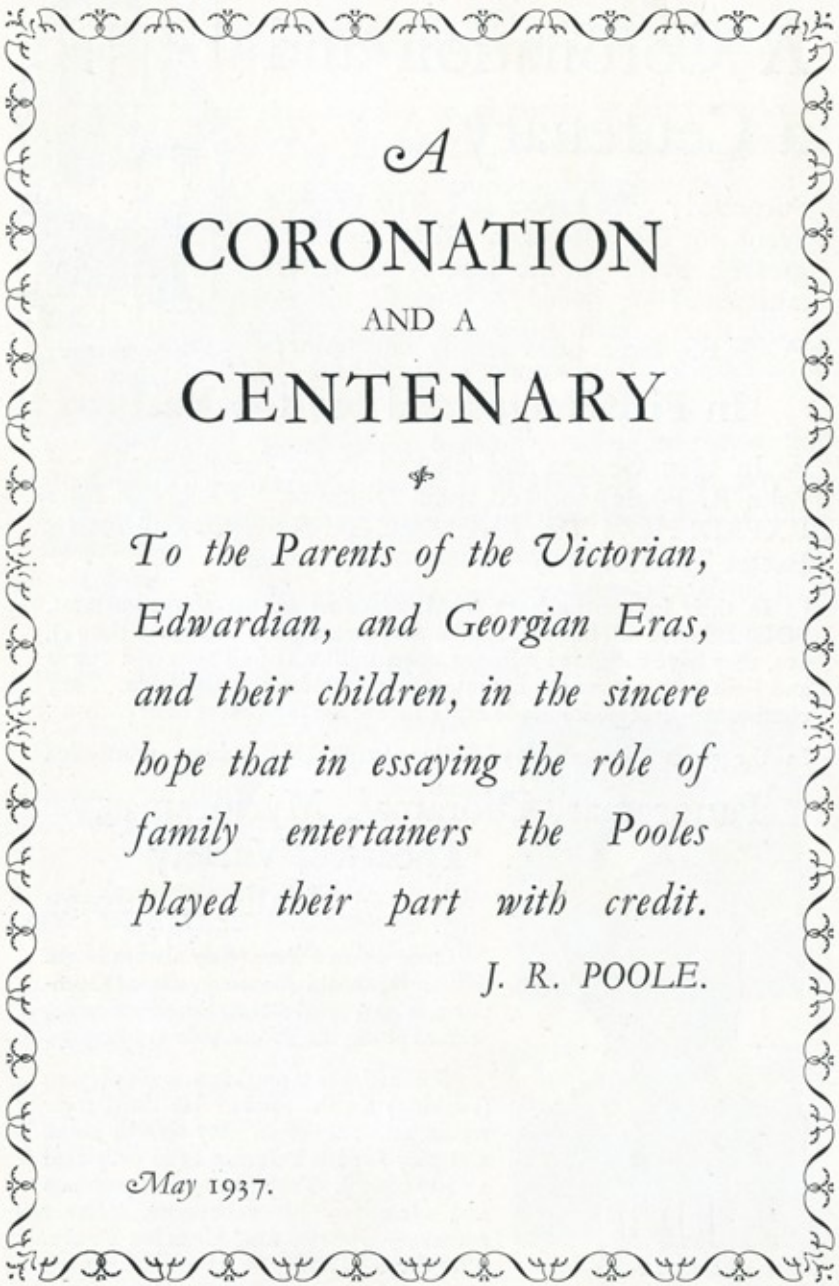
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Book: One Hundred Years of Showmanship: Poole's 1837-1937

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A
CORONATION
AND A
CENTENARY



*To the Parents of the Victorian,
Edwardian, and Georgian Eras,
and their children, in the sincere
hope that in essaying the rôle of
family entertainers the Pooles
played their part with credit.*

J. R. POOLE.

May 1937.

[1]

A Coronation and a Centenary

Surprised? We expect so! The greatest event in the life of a King, and the greatest event in the history of entertainment.

POOLES have been family entertainers



M. GOMPERTZ

In Five Reigns and for 100 Years

In 1837 George and Charles Poole (grand uncles of John R. Poole) showed their Diorama, "FRANKLIN'S EXPEDITION TO THE ARCTIC REGIONS," at the Exeter Theatre.

In their long experience of all branches of the show business, POOLES have not become millionaires (what great showmen have?), but, they have delighted millions upon millions of all ages and creeds and built up a reputation for integrity matchlessly unassailable. They continue to place their unique experience at the disposal of their patrons.

In the years between 1837 and 1937 POOLES have controlled

Panoramas, Dioramas, Myrioramas, Theatres, Variety Halls, Cinemas



CHARLES POOLE

Once upon a time (they always begin that way), an old showman named Gompertz, who owned a travelling Panorama, walked along the Promenade at Margate.

Some itinerant musicians were playing (busking) on the sands. He liked their music, and suggested they should come and play for his Panorama (he only had a rusty piano). They became his partners and ultimately his successors. **Their names—George and Charles Poole. The date—1837.**

And what was a Panorama?



COL. BURNABY



ZULU CHIEF

It was a series of pictures, usually entitled "A Trip Round the World," starting with a picture of London and finishing in England.

Away one went, from Charing Cross, across the Channel to Calais, Paris, Rome, Brindisi, North and South Africa, Australia, North and South America, and back across the Atlantic to Liverpool and home.

The Pictures were on rollers and moved *across* the stage. Mechanical ideas were numerous. Model trains puffed out of stations. Ships sailed across seas.

There were sunsets, moonrises, storms in the Alps, and at sea, shipwrecks, disasters, fire scenes, battles, bombardments, and explosions.

In the early days the *pièce de résistance* was the "Bombardment of Alexandria," showing the British Fleet bombarding and destroying the land batteries. Later on, the "Loss of the 'Titanic,'" which was mechanically illustrated, showing The Departure from Liverpool, Off the Needles Lighthouse (Illuminated), then, The Crash into the Iceberg, The Rockets, The Lifeboats, and the Rescue of Survivors.

And in the "seventies":—

"The entertainment is designed to refine, instruct, and amuse, and aims, not merely to beguile a fleeting hour, but to afford food for intellectual culture."

Not much "kick" about that!

[3]



RORKE'S DRIFT



BATTLE OF TAMASI

JOHN POOLE, was a brother of Charles and George, and was a worker on the land. He had five sons, and all, in the course of time, joined their uncles and ultimately became proprietors of shows.

The reproduced photograph shows a typical Panorama Company of 1876.

George Poole, jun., and his wife, a comedian with his wife, Felix Somers the ventriloquist, Fred Medix the lecturer, Robinson the pianist, and Fuge the advance advertising representative.

The greatest scenic artists of the day painted the pictures. Sebastian Estelos took eighteen months to paint "The Halt by the way of the Viceroy of India's State Elephants," and it cost C. W. Poole £350 (a lot of money



JOHN POOLE (SENIOR)



TYPICAL PANORAMA COMPANY, 1876

at that time) for a single canvas. William Telbin got £150 for a picture of Edinburgh.

Tom Rogers painted for years, using an old chapel in London till he found bodies in the hitherto unsuspected vaults below. *That* upset his sense of humour!

When George and Charles Poole ran their show there was a band of three—a piano and two other instruments.

A man in evening dress, with a long pointer, described the pictures in the most difficult wording possible (to impress his hearers). He also made jokes at times to relieve the monotony. Here is one which was told round about the year 1860:—

He had been pointing to Père Lachaise Cemetery (in a picture of Paris).

A lady visiting this famous cemetery was greatly impressed by an epitaph to the memory of a musician, which read as follows:—“He was a good husband, and a kind father, and he has gone to the only place where his beautiful music can be surpassed.”

She thought this would be very appropriate for her late husband, who, during his lifetime had been a fireworks manufacturer, so she ordered a tombstone with a similar epitaph.

On completion, it read as follows:—
“He was a good husband, and a kind father, and he has gone to the only place where his beautiful fireworks can be surpassed.”

[5]

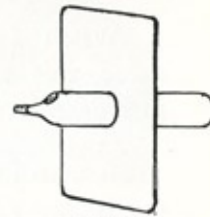


LECTURER WITH POINTER



The "Bombardment of Alexandria"

The British Fleet was painted formed in line in the foreground. The forts and town of Alexandria were in the middle distance. All along the sea-line and on the forts there were holes punched, in which were inserted small pieces of brass tubing, closed at one end with a touch-hole, called "shoots." These were loaded with a small piece of gun-cotton and finely ground gunpowder. The touch-holes were at the back of the canvas, facing upward. The gun discharges on the ships were painted transparently on the back. A piece of gas-pipe about 4 feet long, with a small flame called a torch, was placed behind the transparent gun discharge and guided by a white line over a series of pin-holes, which gave the appearance of the gun-fire and trajectory of the shells to the forts. Then, in turn, the "shoots" were ignited and gave a realistic appearance of the return fire from the forts. The conclusion was the hoisting of the Union Jack on the light-house fort.

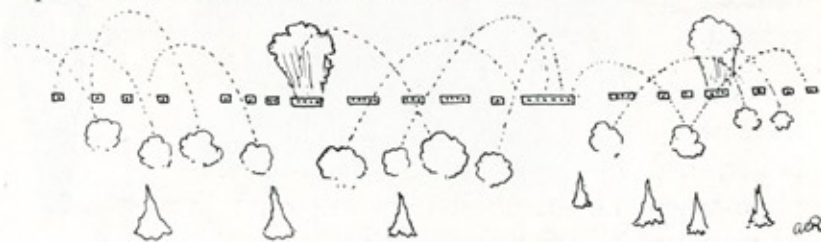


A "SHOOT"



A TORCH.

In Darlington, owing to the carelessness of the effects man in charge of the powder department in placing the magazine box near the picture, a spark back-fired from a "shoot" and the resulting explosion blew some of the windows out and extinguished the gas, also illuminated the hall with red fire. Luckily, the audience thought it all part of the show and said it was lovely.



BACK VIEW OF EFFECTS ON ALEXANDRIA

EXEBB 32946

Many years after, the "Battle of Port Arthur" was produced at the Colston Hall, Bristol.

An old battery of nine cannons, mounted on a heavy wooden block bound with iron, was brought out of its retirement.



EXPLOSION BEHIND THE STAGE

Arthur St George, who knew nothing about these matters, loaded each of the cannons *to the brim*, and ramm'd the charge well home.

The "touches" were pinches of gunpowder, and each gun was about 12 in. from the next.

The result of the explosion was astonishing!

All the "touches" fired simultaneously, and likewise the cannons.

The concussion blew all the gas out of the fit-up, leaving the stage in darkness, and about 26 sq. ft. of plaster from the ceiling of the hall (over 70 ft. above the stage) descended in a cloud, fortunately hurting no one.



acR.

FUNNY "CHEF"

There was something of a thrill in talking to a big audience when you knew you had a successful show.

We sometimes had an audience of 3000 in tears with our production of the "Loss of the 'Titanic.'" Conversely, when George Snow and John Poole were doing their double "cross-talk" act, they had so perfected it by long experience (trying new comedy spontaneously, keeping in everything that caused a laugh and eliminating most that didn't), they had their audiences rocking in their seats for from ten to fifteen minutes.

From the stage the audience resembled a field of corn with a gentle breeze wafting across it.

And, as the public needed more amusement, and less instruction, so the importance of the lecturer decreased. It was then that he had to descend from his pedestal; a clown or negro comedian would constantly interrupt his descriptions of pictures with comic action or remarks, and this ultimately developed into the "cross-talk" act mentioned above.

One of the most successful of these was "Chef" (George Parker), who has been with the firm forty-four years.



CHARLES W. POOLE

CHARLES W. POOLE (father of John R.) first called his show a Myriorama (from the Greek *Myrio*—many, *Horama*—views).

By that time, Poole's had special trains for many of their journeys.

Three or four pantechnicons, a few more baggage trucks, and from forty to fifty people, which included an orchestra of ten, vaudeville artists, and a staff of about fifteen men.

In Ireland, showing "The Prince of Wales' (afterwards Edward VII.) Entry into Agra" caused a disturbance, and the Prince's face was made *black* the following day, the title of the picture being altered to "A Native Maharajah's Visit."

At Killarney one of our company noticed, on emerging from the hotel, a woman with a very cross-eyed boy.

"That's a sad affliction the boy's got, mother," said our friend.

"Sad indade, sorr! He happened to be born in the middle of the week and he's looking both ways for the Holy Sabbath."

And during the Boer War, a picture, "Hoisting the British Flag at Pretoria"—a voice from the gallery, "*Hoist* the blasted thing down again"—and the final query after the show was over, "Which is the *entrance* out?"

PUBLICITY

The cream of the advertising men were supposed to come from the circuses, where a squad of men had to "bill" a town in a day, and then on to the next town.

When the great Barnum and Bailey's came over, Poole's expected they could teach their people something. When they returned to America the firm acquired some of their best men and found that although they were good, our best men were better.

In towns like Manchester or Leeds the agent often had a staff of forty or fifty men, consisting of sandwich men, window billers, hand-billers, and ticketers; the latter distributing half-price tickets from door to door.

And during a four to nine weeks' season the agent has been responsible for the supervision of 11,000 sheets of posters on the hoardings, and the distribution of, amongst other publicity matter, one million half-price tickets.

A word about the half-price ticket.

This originated with the Panorama, as far as can be ascertained. After the show had been in a town for a few weeks, or after a big holiday season, such as Christmas, money was scarce with the amusement-going public, and these tickets were instituted as a sort of entertainment "sale."

They were genuine, and admitted patrons to seats at half-price. 3/- seats at 1/6, 2/- seats at 1/-, and down to 6d. seats at 3d. The usual result was a rush of business, just at a time when it would be doubly welcome. After the holidays, it was better to have a "house" packed at half-prices than one-third or even half-full at full prices.

In later years coupons were inserted in the newspapers (to be cut out and presented at the Box Office). The vast circulation of the Press proved a big asset, and an economy in printing and distribution costs.

CHEAP EXCURSIONS TO THE EAST.
COMPLEMENTARY CHEAP FAMILY TICKET.
 COGN EXCHANGE ASSEMBLY ROOMS, PRESTON.
 POSITIVELY CLOSE SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2nd (Inclusive).
 POOLE & YOUNG'S NEW ENTERPRISE.
The Russo-Turkish War
 CONSTANTINOPLE and the
BATTLE FIELDS OF EASTERN EUROPE & ASIA.
 Also the PRINCE OF WALES' Tour to and through
SOUTHERN, CENTRAL, AND UPPER INDIA.

REDUCED RATES.—This Ticket will pass one, two, three, or any number of Persons at the Reduced Price—

5s.	each to the Bank of the River.	Children, 3s.
4s.	each to the Area Road.	Children, 3s.
3s.	each to the Extended Seats.	Children, 2s.
2s.	each to the Reserved Seats.	Children, 1s.

Admission without this Card 1s. 6s., 1s., and 6s., which will be strictly enforced.
 Every Evening at 8. Wednesday and Saturday at 7 and 8.
PLEASE BRING THIS TICKET AND PAY AT THE BOX OFFICE

A HALF-PRICE TICKET

[9]

THE THEATRE OF ARTS, LONDON

ODDFELLOWS HALL
 SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 21st, 1902

POOLE'S
 20th CENTURY
COMBINE
NAVAL WARFARE

CINE-PRONO-MATAGRAPH
 ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA

SINGING PICTURES
 Poole's First Amusement Apparatus!

MILTON'S MARVELLOUS MANDRILL

THE MUSICAL SCHAFFERS
CORDELIA
THE ALEAZOS

CARL FREDRICHSEN
RODOLPH VITA

MAX MILIAN

VENTOCRAPHE

ORCHESTRAL BAND

This reproduction of an old show bill will recall to many of our older readers the type of entertainment in vogue when the present century was entered. Surprising as it may seem, a glance at the bill will show that "talkies" were a feature of this show.

"TALKIES" IN 1902
 AT JERSEY

In the early days every member of the company was pressed into service on the day it was decided to issue the "doquets," as they were called, and it was no uncommon thing for 20,000 to be legitimately distributed, house to house, in one day.

UNREHEARSED INCIDENTS

Occasionally, in some of the rougher types of town, such as the slate quarry district and some of the mining towns, the proletariat adopted quaint means of securing a cheap seat.

The 6d. seats at the back of the hall always filled first, and in many halls the seating consisted of loose chairs.



A favourite trick in some of the lawless districts was to wait until the "house" lights were lowered, then break through the 6d. barrier *en masse* and appropriate the 1/- seats. Sometimes this led to trouble, and on one occasion, at Blaenau Festiniog, amongst the slate quarries of North Wales, C. W. Poole, aided by his trusty lieutenants, cleared the hall, an unprecedented performance in a district where there was only *one* policeman, and one had been *stoned* to death a fortnight before.

John R. (Jack) Poole's initiation into "lecturing" started at Dublin, when the show opened at the Round Room of the "Rotunda" for the season.

At one o'clock in the morning the rehearsal was still in progress, when a violent thunderstorm broke over the city. Such was the deluge, that the water poured through the upper windows of the circular hall and descended in a beautiful cascade over the front of the balcony on to the seats below.

An eerie event! Whilst a profile picture of the S.S. "Egypt" (of the old Guion Line) was being pulled across the stage one night, it caught in some unexplained manner, tore all along the top, and fell in a heap on the stage.



There was no wireless in those days, but three days after, news came that the real "Egypt" had been burnt at sea.

Fire, too, played its part. We had opened with the Myriorama at the Circus, Anlaby Road, Hull, on a Monday in March. Our portable steel cinema house had been inspected and passed by the authorities.

On the Thursday a film caught fire. The operator, Dick Landray, did his best, but it was too rapid for him. John Poole saw the film "go" on the sheet and immediately put the stage lights up. Simultaneously, some of the stage staff raced to the operator's assistance (a considerable distance, it being situated at the back of the gallery), one jumping off the top of the myriorama fit-up, nearly 20 feet, and breaking his ankle.

Providence was with us that night. It would seem almost that we had had a fire drill that day, except that there were no fire drills as known in our cinemas to-day.

The film blazed as only celluloid can. The steel house got red hot. John Poole, on one side of the stage, and "Chef" Parker, in full clown's make-up, on the other side, seemed to hold the audience still by sheer personal magnetism. Tebbitt, the manager, and Crawford, the agent, were in the stalls. The band continued playing and the stage staff acted as if on parade.

The scene from the stage was fascinating. Women fainted, men glanced fearfully at the exits, but our staff seemed to dominate the situation. One young man lifted his girl friend up on to the stage so that she might escape easier in that direction.

In a very short time the film had burnt itself out, and a cheer went up. There were 2500 people in that hall. Of them, *twenty* left the building, and the show went on. But it killed the business. We had three-and-a-half weeks to run, and lost money heavily.



POOLE BROTHERS

[11]

MYRIORAMA HEYDAY

Time passed, and in 1900 the Poole Brothers had seven big shows touring Great Britain, Ireland, and the Channel Islands.

Each tour took forty-two weeks. The map was divided into sections and routes. At the end of the tour all went into their various studios to be renovated, then off again in the autumn.

The programme consisted of about fifty myriorama subjects, six vaudeville turns, and cinema shorts (shown by limelight), and (just after that) the first "talkies"—gramophone and cinema worked by hand. The orchestra played appropriate music for the myriorama pictures, in the same manner as it is brought into "talkies" to-day. The vaudeville artists were of all denominations—musical acts, ventriloquists, gymnasts, marionettes, vocalists, comedians, and animal acts. Among others were performing foxes, cats, bears, monkeys, bulls, pigs, cockatoos, and a miniature circus complete with clowns, *haute école*, trapezists, and ring master.

Later on Poole's purchased many of the halls and theatres they visited (for one week in the year), and, as a matter of course, ran them as theatres with legitimate theatrical companies.

Then came the variety boom and these in turn were altered to vaudeville houses. After that came hard times, the public got saturated with variety. The cinema had not fully established itself.

Poole's took star pictures to municipal halls in big towns, running similar to the road shows in America, and showing the "features" with orchestras and full effects, which they had always done with their myrioramas. Among these were: "The Birth of a Nation," "Les Miserables," "Pollyanna," "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," "Scaramouche," "Everest," "The Covered Wagon."



RUDOLPH VALENTINO

And, as time went on, the theatres were converted into cinemas, new cinemas came along, and Poole's were responsible for large halls; two in Aberdeen, one in Edinburgh, and others in Gloucester, Stourbridge, Oxford, and Ipswich.

Poole's ran the first cinema in Ipswich in 1905 and it is still running successfully.

First in Historic Holyrood

The occasion, 1935. Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Kent were in residence at Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh (the Palace of the Kings and Queens of Scotland for hundreds of years), John R. Poole was entrusted with the presentation of Sound Pictures to Their Royal Highnesses.

By arrangement with R.C.A. (Radio Corporation of America), a sound set was installed in the picture gallery. With the Royal ancestors looking down upon them, "Royal Cavalcade," "The King! God Bless Him," "Mickey Mouse," British Movietone news, "Roberta," "Gold-diggers of 1935," and other subjects were screened for the Royal party.

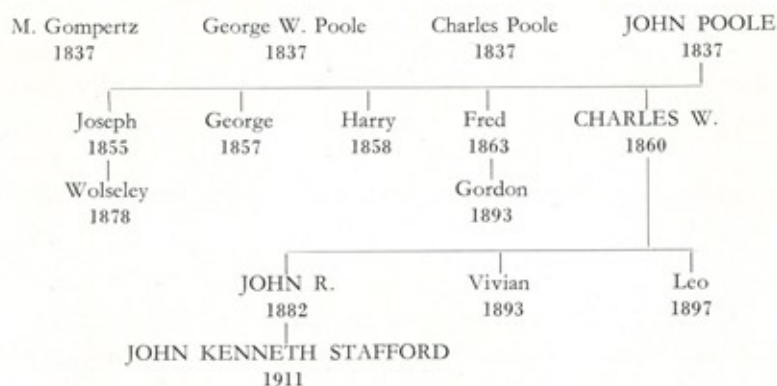
One wonders what the spirits of Mary Queen of Scots, Darnley, Bothwell, and Rizzio thought as they witnessed this unique entertainment.



PALACE OF HOLYROODHOUSE, EDINBURGH

[13]

POOLES, 1837-1937



Vivian and Leo (deceased), Wolseley and Gordon adopted the engineering profession.

Remaining of the third generation is John R. Poole, Head of all the Poole concerns and Chairman and Managing Director of the Poole Companies.

And the last of the line (being the only male in the fourth generation) was educated at Durham and trained in all branches of the cinema: General Manager of Poole's "Regent," Aberdeen (a 2000 seater) at twenty-one; Director of Poole's Theatres, Ltd. and Poole's "Roxy," Edinburgh, is John Kenneth Stafford Poole, aged twenty-six, who will carry forward the great tradition of the family.



JOHN R. POOLE



JOHN KENNETH STAFFORD POOLE

The Finish of this Short History

of a show family would be incomplete without grateful acknowledgment to those who have been so long associated with the firm, and others who contributed so largely to its success.

Of the Scenic Artists :

Arthur C. Rogers, who joined as a boy and has been with Poole's fifty-five years as marine artist, engineer, architect, producer, theatre and cinema manager, with an unique knowledge of all that appertained to the theatre and mechanical production. Edgar Rogers, Robert Tebbitt, Charles Phillips, George Pontin, and a host of the greatest artists of their day who contributed from their own studios.

And the Managers :

Ernest C. Rogers (son of Arthur), with the firm since boyhood, General Manager at present. Reg Rogers, Harry Morris, and (in the past) Harry Stewart, Fred Mayer, Martin Comstock, Elijah Pryce, J. R. Jones, James Scott, J. J. Taylor.

The Advertising Men :

George (Chef) Parker, Alf Faulconbridge, Cliff Crawford, W. Harris, John T. Hurst, W. Cooper.

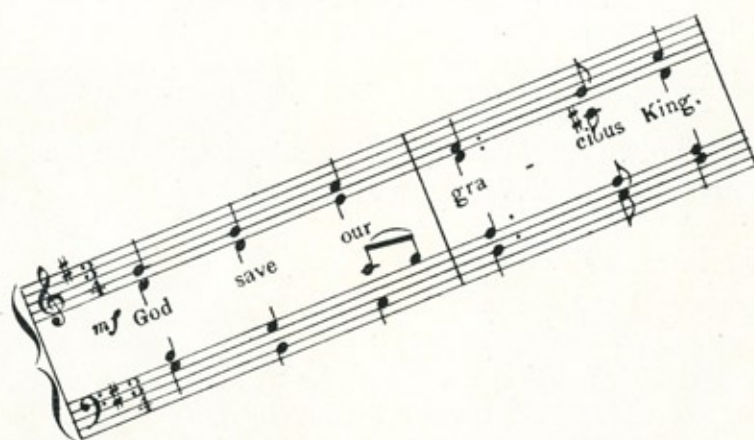
In the Studio :

Edgar Faulconbridge.

And the staffs of the various theatres and enterprises, some of whom have spent a lifetime in the service of the firm.

[15]

And so, to the end of the programme, with “harmony” as their watchword, the firm still carries on. Coronation approaches. From all parts of the civilised (and in some cases uncivilised) world, millions journey to London to witness our great Traditional Ceremony. With sincere loyalty and patriotism, Poole’s unite with the members of the Great Commonwealth of Nations, and heartily welcome our visitors from the four corners of the Earth.



Pillans & Wilson, *Printers*, Edinburgh.

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From Jim POOLE

Feb 85

Dear Bill Douglas

My apologies for being
so long in sending you
a copy of our family booklet
which you kindly requested.
As I may have mentioned with no
reflection on my father who wrote &
assisted in — it is a father

BUSINESS:

Carneo Cinema
34 Home Street
EH3 9LZ

Phone
031-219 2211 (6822)

HOME:

Chaos
41 Woodhall Road
Colinton
EH13 0DT

Phone:
031-441 2012

EDINBURGH

BD033966_02

Postcard accompanying One Hundred Years of Showmanship: Poole's 1837-1937

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their record of a pretty wide span
- but the anniversary year dawned
on my father which I believe he'd
forgotten! but looking not too late
to get a memento out! I've been
under pressure to attempt a book
of record of our family history - I hesitate
as I'm an impatient researcher & very
uncertain about producing something readable.
Sincerely yrs
Jim Peck

EXEBD 33966/2

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Postcard accompanying One Hundred Years of Showmanship: Poole's 1837-1937

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