



# The Australian Museum of Motion Picture Technology (Inc.)

## NEWSLETTER

Edition Fourteen

July - August 2007

### Industry Icon remembered

Local cinema pioneer **John Pye** passed away on July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007 at the age of 94 years. John had a long and varied career which had a major focus on the local cinema industry – a tradition still carried on by his family today.



John began his association with the film industry the day he turned 14. His father, sensing the impending Great Depression, took him out of school to get a job as a spool rewinder at the Majestic Theatre in Perth. This was owned by Hoyts – a company established 18 years earlier by a Melbourne dentist and part time magician Arthur Russell

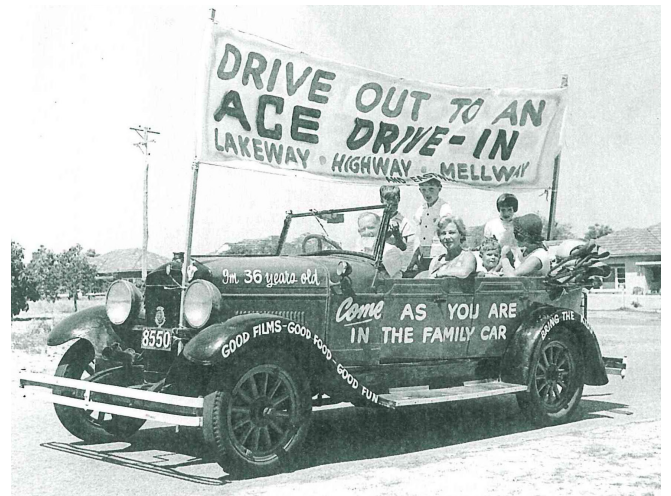
and had rapidly expanded into a chain with cinemas in other capital cities. John was later to work for the United Artists film distributors while he also attended night school to complete his schooling and later gain a qualification in accountancy. When WW2 broke out he entered the Air Force because he always wanted to fly. However John was seconded to the Navy where he served with distinction, commanding his own ship and rising to the rank of Lt. Commander, attaining several medals on the way. Returning from the war, John joined the Grand Theatre Company as an accountant, then later as company secretary looking after its inner city cinemas and other financial interests. Sensing a new direction in cinema entertainment, John left the company in 1954, after which he traveled to America to study a new phenomenon – the Drive-In theatre. In 1956, Australian Cinema Enterprises (ACE) was born with the opening of Perth's first suburban Drive-In theatre, The Highway in Bentley. Later in 1962 he entered the hospitality business with the opening of Perth's first motel, which was to grow eventually into the Hospitality Inns chain.

John decided to retire when the motel chain and cinema operations were taken over by the Greater Union organisation in 1987. This arrangement lasted

only four months when John decided to purchase back Hospitality Inns and re-started Ace Cinemas which were run by his children under his guidance.

With a bit more time on his hands, John decided to fulfill his boyhood ambition to fly. Now well into his eighties, John joined the Royal Aero Club of W.A. at Jandakot and eventually received his Private Pilot's Licence. Both John and Arthur Stiles were recently given recognition by AMMPT for their enormous contribution to the success of the local cinema industry.

John will be remembered as an astute and ruthless business man, but always fair and respected those with whom he dealt. With John's passing the Australian cinema industry has lost another of its icons.



*John and the entire Pye family on the road promoting their new Drive-ins.*

### Arthur Stiles & Peter Thomson

Following a bad stroke, Arthur spent many weeks in Hollywood hospital, being transferred recently to South Perth Community hospital where he is expected to be discharged on August 18<sup>th</sup>.

Peter has been discharged from Fremantle hospital and is now living at his new home in Beach St. Bicton and cared for by his wife Rose. He is still severely incapacitated resulting from his massive stroke.

## Richard Ashton *remembers when..*

the Catholic Church was a big shareholder in TVW 7, and as part of our reason for holding a TV licence we were to telecast certain portion of program material which had to be of a religious nature.

On one occasion we mounted an Outside Broadcast of the Catholic Easter Service. We took over the Altar and other parts of St Mary's Cathedral with the usual scaffolds, lights and cameras with the OB van parked out in the street. The Austin OB van had been built by TVW technicians. The OB was produced by Coralie Condon who was of the faith, with me directing who was of another persuasion. Together we ran the telecast, having the ceremony all worked out beforehand as the service and telecast got under way.

The truck was not very big (see photo below) so we had an audio operator, Coralie and me at the Video switcher on the upper level, and the camera control units in front us but lower down. Half way through the service at one stage I called "ready camera two wide shot please"... then "Take camera two, on you two". I punched the Cam 2 button on the vision switcher, and the camera picture went to air. However as I took my finger off the lighted button, the end, which had a spring loaded return, flew off out over my right shoulder. "Hell" I think I said, or worse, forgetting we were close to God. The Technical Director who was behind me dived to the floor and in the semi dark started to quickly search for the end of the button.

But the savoir was one of the CCU operators; he promptly stood up from in front reached over and stuck a pencil in the empty hole left on the VMU so that we could switch again, pushing the pencil every time we took that camera to air. We carried with it like that for the rest of the live telecast. There was no convenient emergency switcher in the OB truck.

After the end of the telecast the button was found under the floor panels and all the buttons were modified so that excitable directors would not have the same trouble again.



## Geriatrics "graduate"



*AMMPT Members, L-R Graham Lacey, Richard Ashton and Daryl Binning proudly show off the evidence of going to uni.*

In what has been described as a bit of a culture shock, the clock was turned back over 50 years when some of our members returned to the classroom to learn more about how to run a successful museum. ( More on what is a "successful" museum on opposite page.) The Members enrolled in separate modules of the Certificate in Museums studies course being held at weekends at the Churchlands Campus of the Edith Cowan University.

Graham attended the Preventative Conservation module while both Richard and Daryl took part in the Collecting and Documentation course. They were sections of the overall course which consisted of 13 modules, the completion of which would provide the student with credentials which would assist in entering the mainstream museum profession.

It is expected the course will be run again in 2008, with an anticipated module fee of about \$200. Those Members wishing to enroll next year should register their interest now with the Secretary in order that funding arrangements can be pursued beforehand. The knowledge and contacts gained by attending these courses made are invaluable to the future success of our own project.

## Cygnets Success



*Celebrating our first profit at the initial fundraising screening at the Cygnet, most the devoted cinema crew managed to pose resplendent in their white shirts and bow ties (almost incognito). Compare with the photo of the same scruffy lot in previous edition!*

# What is a successful museum?

The following article was part of the material supplied to students at the recent Collecting & Documentation course at the Churchlands campus. It was supplied by the lecturer, Stephen Anstey and reinforces the need to be selective with our collection. The soon to be established Collections Committee will need to seriously take on board his message.

## *Do you recognise this museum?*

How many local museums do you know that fit this picture?

The Museum stands in an old semi-dilapidated building. The first indications that you are visiting a place of antiquity are the many rusty relics of what were once tractors, ploughs or wagons placed outside the museum entrance. Inside, the museum houses a weird and wonderful collection of unsorted artifacts - domestic implements agricultural and mining equipment, war relics, ancient curiosities, natural history specimens, costumes, old photographs, native carvings and sporting trophies.

The public wanders amongst the rows of tightly packed, unlabelled artifacts, sidestepping piles of horse harnesses and brushing against teetering piles of Mrs Potts irons. They occasionally pause to marvel at a two-headed lizard in the stained liquid of a specimen jar or some other grotesque curiosity, leaping continents and eras in giant bounds as they pass from a World War 2 Japanese sword onto a mask reputedly worn by Moondyne Joe.

The visitors finally leave, quite impressed with the scope of the collection but, after all is said and done, emerge confused without having learned anything. Such museums have allowed themselves to become depositories of duplicated material, items in poor condition, unrelated or irrelevant curiosities, relics, rarities and so-called collectors' items, or in short anything and everything old!

This in most cases is the result of a failure on the part of museums to establish a clearly defined purpose or goal and a collections policy that reflects this. This is one of the most crucial decisions a museum must make. If it is clearly defined what your museum is striving to achieve, what story you are trying to tell, everyone from the general public to the museum staff will bend their efforts to realise that goal. All the museum's resources, financial or otherwise, can be devoted towards furthering this purpose and all museum activities including collecting should be guided by that vision.

It is important for all museums to establish their aims but particularly important for local museums to do so. The resources of local museums are severely limited. They are short of staff, lack space for storage and display and are always in need of money and equipment. These precious resources and energies need to be directed solely towards realistic, attainable goals and not squandered or diverted to nebulous or overly broad aims.

Collections policy must therefore be looked upon in the light of the museum's overall aims. It should be guided by and contribute to the overall goal of the museum. It must be recognized that every item that does not contribute to the overall purposes of the museum is an unnecessary drain on limited museum finances, staff time and storage space, and if displayed will detract from the museum's storyline.

*Stephen Anstey is Curator, History at the WA Museum*

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## Collections Committee

In recent months a **Collections Policy** has been formulated in accordance with established mainstream museum procedures. It defines how items can be accessed and included in our collection, and also the de-accession process – the prescribed manner to dispose of unwanted items. How we display the collection and tell the stories of our industries' pioneers requires a lot of (apart from money and volunteer effort) careful planning, not only of the exhibits but how the stories are to be told.

The next phase is to determine which objects are suitable for inclusion in our collection. They must reflect and contribute towards the objectives of our Association – "to create a community awareness of Australia's contribution to the ongoing evolution of the moving image industries by interpreting the technologies used, innovations developed and the people, entities and related services involved". There are three main areas of collection – the cinema, television and the film & TV production industries. Related technologies such as amateur and pre-cinema equipment will also be included.

Members with a substantive knowledge of either or several of these disciplines are needed to become involved in a Collection Committee to determine the significance of donated items. They will be required to meet two or three times a year to consider the latest batch of items for evaluation.

If you think you would have the relevant knowledge, time and desire to be included in this vital aspect of museum operations, please contact the Secretary.



## Cinema City finally to close

After a brief respite from its original closing date in August, and also the postponed AMMPT visit to the complex due to programming requirements, a date has now been selected to bring down the final curtain. At the time of preparing this newsletter, it is hoped to arrange **a significant social event at the complex** to commemorate the occasion. The following account of the history of Hoyts cinemas in the central Perth area has been compiled by Member Jack Honniball.

Hoyts' four screen complex Cinema City is scheduled to close on 17th October after a lifespan of 27 years. Situated in Hay Street opposite the Perth Town Hall, it stands on a prime site which was long occupied earlier by the well-known department stores Bon Marche' and David Jones in turn. With a ground-floor frontage entirely of plain glass, it attracts patrons into a very spacious and brightly carpeted foyer. All its screens are at first-floor level and served by the one commodious projection room. Numbered 1 to 4, the Cinemas have seating respectively for 494, 580, 394 and 790, a total of 2258. The original plans made provision for the addition of a fifth cinema if business warranted it, but such an expansion was never to be.

Built for TVW Enterprises Ltd, the quadruplex opened on 6th November 1980, and turned out to be the last link added to the chain of cinemas operated by City Theatres Pty Ltd. After 55 years in the exhibition field, the Perth based company folded in December 1987 and its cinemas all passed to the control of Hoyts.

The closure of Cinema City means that Hoyts will be without a presence in the central city for the first time in more than 80 years. They entered the local scene in 1927 when they succeeded J.C. Williamson Films as proprietors of the modest Majestic and at the same time they transformed an old concert hall into their prestigious Regent, the first of five such flagships in the mainland capital cities.

Hoyts will continue to operate at six other situations in Fremantle and southern suburbia, with state headquarters at their Garden City complex in Booragoon. *(Eds note: See proposal of event - Page 7)*

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## Storage critical

We have just received advice of having to vacate the storage facility, shared with Member Clive Woodward in Melville, in which our television related objects are housed. Till such time as we find and are able to afford substantial space to store these and other film & TV industry related items, Members are requested to advise the Secretary if they have any space they could spare for temporary placing parts of our collection.

## Donation by Dr. Ina Bertram

This month we received an email from Dr. Bertram in Melbourne offering a large amount of research material she had accumulated in recent decades. A great deal was used in the development of her Cinemaweb project which was transferred to AMMPT's custodianship earlier this year.



The items include dozens of trade journals dating from the 1940's, catalogues of cinema equipment, photographs including the Hoyts convention at the Capitol cinema in 1931. Also several film posters and daybills, negatives and contact prints, glass slides and audiotaped interview with local cinema pioneers, most of which are no longer with us.

This collection will be invaluable for on-going research into one of the sectors of our local moving image industries. The items will be entered in our soon to be established electronic Mosaic cataloguing system which will provide access to the material by other community museums and kindred entities. AMMPT is greatly in debt to Dr. Bertram for her generous donation.

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## Next technical event - August VH Tango Victor Golf

This is call sign of TVW Channel 7 helicopter. It is a French Squirrel and was originally purchased for the Americas Cup coverage. Over the years it has been overhauled and refurbished several times and is due for this process again this coming November. Before the current extensive ENG (electronic news gathering) equipment is replaced we have a chance of seeing it on **Wednesday August 22** at the **TVW hangar** at Tuart Hill at **4:00pm**. News broadcasts from the chopper where a journalist talks live to air with the news presenters at the studio will be explained. We will see how a picture is received from events such as a whale stranding at Augusta, video recorded, then the chopper flown to a suitable height and these pictures are re-transmitted back to the studios for putting to air. Also how ground coverage of a bush fire, sea rescue or police chase pictures are linked up to it and pictures from cameras in the chopper are linked to the studio. We will see how the camera shake is taken out of the picture with the use of a vibrationless camera mount. Also the communication and other electronic equipment. This is a **Members only** event and **limited to 15 members** who **RSVP** to Richard Ashton on 9367 5967 **by August 20th**.

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## Jet-setting George & the PPT

Film screening coordinator George Robinson and his wife Jane were barely through Customs after returning from the Old Dart when he was summonsed to do a stint that evening in the Cygnet bio-box due to the scheduled projectionist Hedley Sims succumbing to the after effects of Chemotherapy. George and Jane had a very interesting, but brief stay in the UK during which they visited a number of industry related museums and re-established our ties with a kindred body, The Projected Picture Trust. George reports as follows;

While in England Jane and I were fortunate enough to have time to visit the Bletchley Park National Codes Centre, home of the "ENIGMA" code breakers of WW2. I found to my surprise this was now the home of the National Museum of Cinema Technology where they have the "Enigma Cinema" and workshop. The cinema was originally the fire station on the complex. My AMMPT membership card assisted in establishing credibility as a kindred soul, upon which I was given a "royal tour" of their facilities and the story of the evolution of the Projected Picture Trust (PPT).

I met three PPT Members, Ken Draper –Curator, Brian Phillips –Deputy Chairman/Treasurer, and Bob Herriott, Archivist/Librarian.

The Trust initially acquired equipment from many sources, not only projectors but items such as admission ticket machines from many famous London and other cinemas which were either closing or being updated. Meanwhile, various pieces of vintage equipment, including a selection of narrow gauge home movie cinema apparatus were being donated by collectors. In the earlier days the PTT accepted almost everything that was offered. In a very short time it ran out of space to store it. (sounds familiar?)

Early storage was in the basement of a cottage and later expanded into a garage without doors, then to an old pig sty (open to the elements), the stable, barn (at least weatherproof) and a heritage listed grain barn which was already in a state of collapse.

In 1994 the PPT was invited to become one of many independent exhibitions at the famous Bletchley Park where they were offered space in Faulkner House. This was the first opportunity they had to exhibit part of their collection, which was open to the public every alternate weekend. Later, due to the need to demolish Faulkner House to make way for land sold for development to support the estate, the Trust was offered space in Block "A" being the old fire station. Although a smaller area, there tenure was more secure as it was in a heritage listed part of the estate.



*"The Enigma" cinema and museum* There was still enough space to display their equipment which they laid out in gauge sequence from very narrow amateur gear to 70mm. These were on display in foyer showcases, through the projection room, and into the auditorium which seated 42 people. The cinema is equipped with full Dolby sound and shows are put on at regular intervals during the Open Days with experienced volunteer member projectionists putting on professional presentations.

Apart from the preservation and restoration part of PPT's activities, a very important role involves education. This is achieved by liaising with the media departments of schools, colleges and universities and is aimed at demonstrating the evolution of the motion picture industry and its interrelationship with the electronic television medium.



*Ken Draper explains the PPT's aims to visiting students*

It also serves to open up the PPT to potential new members who may be inclined to continue its work. This provides an insurance that there will always be new Members to carry on the work.



*Students inspect a Moviola and listen to talk on projection*

It was a pleasure to meet Ken, Brian and Bob and see their enthusiasm for the museum. They would welcome receiving news of AMMPT's activities as they see us following the same path they trod over a decade ago and offered their assistance to help us where ever possible. I was so impressed with their efforts that I decided to also become a Member of the Projected Picture Trust, as I believe so are others amongst our east coast AMMPT members.



## Sign of the Times

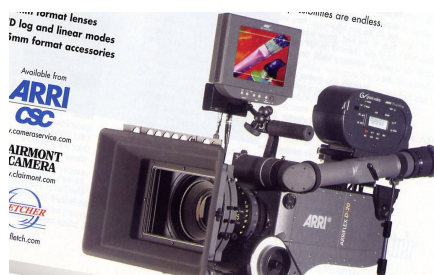
How many times have you heard over the past few decades that motion picture film will become a thing of the past? There have been convincing arguments on both sides – those predicting the demise of that stuff with sprocket holes as the advances in electronics reach the point where it surpass that of film. On the other side of the ledger, there are those convinced the continuing refinement of film manufacture will ensure its image capture and reproduction qualities will always remain greater than electronics will ever be able to achieve.

Both viewpoints have validity, with film taking the moral high ground of proven equipment and format standardization, the subtleties of reproduction due to the chemical process, and its archival qualities. So far the electronic technology has failed to establish it's long term credentials in these areas. However the electronic, or digital image capture and exhibition industry is closing in fast, now with the differences between the end products on the screen only obvious to a discerning eye.

With financial returns coming from a box office which is supported by a public of whom 90% are oblivious to subtle image shortcomings, there is often little desire to invest in the optimum quality systems. At the moment the digital projector development is lagging behind its traditional film counterparts. Units which try to come close to projecting a film quality image onto the larger mega screens in some cinemas are horrendously more expensive than their optical mechanical cousins. For the immediate future, economics suggest the real cinema experience will still be limited to those exhibitors who use film in their bio box. However this is not deterring those in the production and exhibition chain from looking for more cost efficient ways to get their product on to the screen. In recent years many new electronic cameras have appeared on the sets of feature film production. The advances in digital post production facilities have resulted in several titles being transferred to 35mm film for cinema release.

Confirmation of the swing away from the traditional system has recently appeared in two of the industries' "bibles", one being *The American Cinematographer* which reflects international production benchmarks of technical developments and processes. It is now carrying

advertisements from many traditional makers of motion picture cameras such as Arriflex who are for the first time, after 90 years manufacture, offering electronic models. Mr. Kodak and Mr. Fuji may not be impressed!



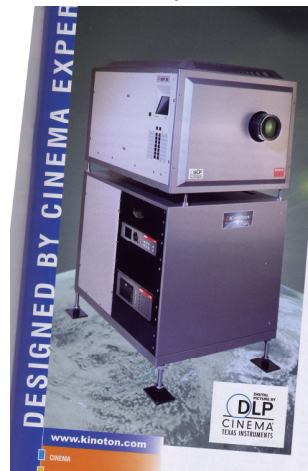
*The Arriflex D-20 model*

Another camera manufacturer, who has been amongst the leaders in Electronic News Gathering (ENG) and similar television industry cameras is Sony. They have recently thrown their hat into the ring with the release of their new CineAlta F23 model aimed at the top end of the feature film market.



*The Sony CineAlta® F23 advert.*

The other internationally respected cinema industry journal *Cinema Technology*, a sister publication to the BKSTS flagship *Image technology* which deals with cutting edge developments in the television industry, is also reflecting the change in emphasis by the products selected for promotion by its traditional advertisers. Whereas we had been accustomed to seeing ads for the latest 70mm or 35mm projectors, we now find these are being replaced with offerings of digital cinema projectors from industry icons such as Cinemeccanica and Kinton.

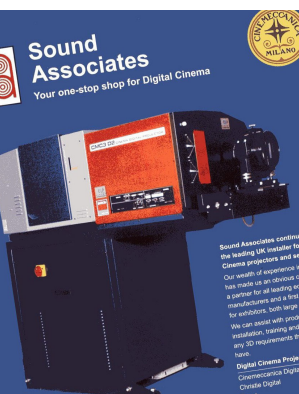


*New beasts of the bio box coming to a theatre near you!*



Obviously the light output and image quality is approaching the point where they are beginning to be seen as serious contenders for space in the bio box.

All this brings us to the reason for AMMPT's existence. We are experiencing rapid change in our industry's technology. It would be a pity if all examples of what we currently consider obsolete suffer the same fate as those old sound on disc projectors, the hand cranked cine cameras and other examples of the evolution of what we today take for granted.



How we wish those people in our industry early last century would have taken the trouble to document and preserve those items which at the time they considered irrelevant.

## Interstate activity

During recent months we have seen a gradual increase in our interstate Members. The Committee are very conscious of having no regional branches established at the moment other than here in the West. It is hoped each region will soon have sufficient local numbers to form a steering committee and recruit interested persons to establish a local regional branch. With a far greater industry population from which to draw upon, it should be easier to make happen than that experienced in Perth. When this occurs, those on the Western Region's list will be transferred to that branch. It is impossible to generate and maintain local enthusiasm for this national project from the other side of the continent, so it will be up to the resolve of local people to make it happen. Much of the national legal ground work has already been done, and a successful local track record has been established upon which other regions could emulate. All assistance will be given to interstate Members wishing to get things moving locally.

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## Committee Meeting

A Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, after the Technical event at TVW but at another venue. Members having any issues they wish to have discussed or suggestions for future activities, please contact a committee member beforehand. Also new applications for Membership will be considered. Members wishing to have their colleagues join are asked to contact the Secretary for Membership Application forms.

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## Magazine subscriptions etc.

AMMPT members wishing to avail themselves of the latest industry technical information contained in *The American Cinematographer*, *Image Technology* and *Cinema Technology*, as well as joining the PPT in the UK are directed to the following web sites;

[www.theasc.com](http://www.theasc.com)

[www.bksts.com](http://www.bksts.com)

[www.ppttrust.org](http://www.ppttrust.org)

Samples of the publications are also available from the Secretary for inspection in case you are considering becoming a regular subscriber to them.

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## Volunteers wanted

Due to the increasing number of requests for Members to give talks about our organisation to local Historical Societies and Community Museum groups, as well as setting up and manning temporary displays in libraries etc. it is becoming obvious we need some volunteer guides/information officers who may have the time available for these tasks. If you are able to assist and be included on a roster, please advise the Secretary.

## September & October events

At the time of compiling this newsletter, these two events are being planned but not yet been confirmed.

The **September** topic is **3D systems** and will be hosted by Treasurer, Keith Coote, possibly at the Curtin uni. TV studio, tentatively on **Wednesday Sept. 5th**. With Keith currently overseas, please check with the Registrar Richard Ashton to confirm event.

With October 17<sup>th</sup> being the date earmarked for the closure of **Cinema City**, a significant event is being planned to mark the occasion. Arrangements are currently under way with Hoyts to determine what options are available. It will most likely take place on a Sunday morning. Stay tuned!

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## New Members

We welcome; **Gordon Leslie, Terry Duke, Graham Kahn, Gordon McColl, Val Cope and Bruce Dargie**. Also Associate Members **Nola Goldman, Evyonne Hale, Heather Mills & Jennifer Rimmer**.

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AMMPT Contact details:

**The Australian Museum of Motion  
Picture Technology ( Inc.)**

ABN 73 111 667 924

and

**AMMPT Western Region ( Inc.)**

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**REMEMBER: "SHOWBOAT" Cygnet, Sun. 19<sup>th</sup> Aug.**

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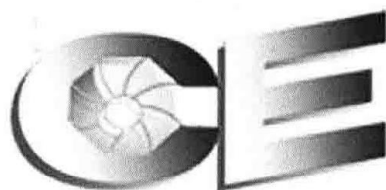
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