

The Stereoscopic Society.
New Zealand Section.
5th. September 1977.

AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF THE STEREOSCOPIC SOCIETY

(With particular reference to the NZ Section.)

The Stereoscopic Society was founded in England in 1893, known as the Stereoscopic Postal Exchange Club. In 1895 two folios per month were circulating, also around this time the name was changed to the present form, the American section was also extant.

In the early days the emphasis was fairly heavy on only enrolling advanced workers in photography and this is not surprising as most members undertook their own processing etc. One of the more outstanding characters was the U.K. Secretary Mr H.J. Mobbs whose hard work and vision did much for the popularity of stereoscopy and won him a eulogy in the British Journal of Photography as far back as 1925.

The Society was affiliated to the Royal Photographic Society of London but apparently this may have been lost in recent times because of tax problems associated with bequests. It is certainly, however, affiliated to the Stéréo Club Français.

The NZ Section was formed by 1924 and probably even a few years earlier. Mr J.D. Richardson, manager of the Auckland Savings Bank in Ponsonby, was the secretary at this time. The only surviving Society record of this period is a memorandum from the Collector of Customs, Auckland, regarding his grudging concession to waive duties on circulating folios. He requested Mr Richardson to record all incoming and outgoing stereograms and this record was to be produced for inspection should the customs desire it. These records represent most of the Society's written past and date back to the 14th. November 1932, and are fairly intact up to the present day 1977.

Mr Fritz Golding, our secretary to April 1977, joined the Society in 1925 when there were about 9 members. One of these was a police constable Mr Olsen; another was a Napier magistrate Mr Barton. By 1932 the membership stood at 11, but after Mr Richardson's death and when Fritz was made secretary on the 9th. April 1942 there were only 5.

There was a silver spoon trophy for the best contributor to the folios and this award was based on a system of voting and the points for each folio indicated the top 3 slides. It apparently was very time consuming for the secretaries of the various sections and after the prizes were dropped the voting faded away, possibly because of the 2nd World War. Only one of these trophies fell to NZ and that was to Fritz Golding in 1940.

Next to Fritz Golding our oldest contributing member is Mr Clarrie Bott, our current President, whose earliest contribution was on the 11th May 1936 with a stereogram titled "The Swing Bridge", Fritz's contribution at this time was called "Elephantine Water Frolics".

In those days a stereogram consisted of left hand and right hand paper prints mounted on a piece of cardboard, black for preference so as not to distract from the picture. The standard mount size was 7" x 3.5" and the picture was viewed through a stereoscope using reflected light. They were often sepia toned or water coloured.

This style of stereogram dates back to at least 1882 and was commercially available in a variety of forms. Some of you will either have or remember the wooden or metal stereoscopes with a slide rail along which the card holder was positioned, two slightly prismatic lenses with about a 2 dioptre magnification mounted on the viewing end with a shapely light deflecting shroud attached. Often known as the 'Holmes' scope it was actually developed by the well known American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes who tried without success to have it commercially developed.

A member who rejoined us recently, Mr Edgar R. Williams, joined the Society in 1938 and his first recorded entry was "Maoris Pulpit (Kawhia)" on the 9th. July 1938. He was a continuous contributor to 1962. His father was a very well known stereographer. In his younger days Edgar was very active in the tramping and mountaineering exercises. This gave him many opportunities for taking some fine photographs and he gave many talks to schools and other groups.

With the onset of the 2nd. World War communications became difficult and a letter Clarrie Bott wrote in 1941 to the then secretary Mr Richardson expressed concern at the problems of remitting Sterling to the U.K. for membership fees and mounts. In May 1942 Clarrie was a Corporal in A Co. 9th Field Ambulance stationed at Kaikohe, and later when promoted to Sergeant he was still contributing to the folios. Somehow the Society survived the war years and in 1947 thirteen folios are recorded with the N.Z. membership standing at seven.

Throughout the years the subject matter of the slides was much the same as it is today, quite a few of NZ places and a surprising number of overseas shots taken by NZ members. Very few were taken of public occasions and the only recorded picture of the 1953 Royal Tour was entered by Fred Carr in 1954 of the Queen and the Duke.

The folios continued on a regular basis averaging ten per year with the membership varying around 4-6 through the 1950's - 60's. In 1975 contributing members reached an all time high of 13 and there were 8 folios for the year. Four of these on the big U.K, USA, Australia and NZ circuit, and four on the Australia and NZ circuit.

1976 was a lean year for folios, two big ones and 3 Australia-NZ ones; however this was made up for by the new NZ only folio started by Mr Carl Watson and averages four circuits a year. The latest overseas folio 0X-8, consists of 14 contributions from the UK, 17 from the USA, 23 from Australia and 11 from NZ (Bear in mind that the UK and the USA split their membership in folio distribution.

Well this is the sketch so far folks and there are many gaps and details to be filled in. Anyone who can add to or correct this material is most welcome to write to me. I will close this page with a list of current members:

Dr John Wattie. Greenlane, Auckland
John Wallers. Mairangi Bay, Auckland
Clarrie Bott. Browns Bay, Auckland
Murray Bott. Browns Bay, Auckland
William McConnachie. Dunedin
Edgar Williams. Christchurch
Mel. Palmer. Newlands, Wellington
Miss. Jane Cronhelm; Wellington
Rex Wellington. Masterton
Paul Ropata. Waiouru
Carl Watson. Edgumbe
Vic. Heston. Katikati.
Miss Christine Golding. Green Bay, Auckland
Bob. Browne. New Lynn, Auckland
Fritz Golding. Pt. Chevalier, Auckland
Athol Jonas. Hillborough, Auckland
Roderick Lambert. Mangere

17 of us in total covering most age groups and vocations. I wonder how our Society will be ten years from now?

The Stereoscopic Society, New Zealand Section.

The following paragraphs are from the writings of Mr Fritz Golding and are some of his recollections from his years of association with the Society. They form an important background to the preceding history and members should preserve these papers as no further free copies will be distributed.

Fritz Golding

My first contact with stereoscopy would be at the age of 10, in 1911. I was at that time on a farm in the Waikato, and one evening the housekeeper asked me if I would care to see some 'living pictures'. I naturally said I would, that evening she handed me a stereoscope (Holmes type.) and a bundle of slides; Underwood & Underwood travel pictures most likely. It was quite an experience for me and I was fascinated, particularly by pictures of woodland scenes and the way a hotchpotch of branches, twigs and leaves really did become 'alive' in the Stereoscope.

My next introduction, several years later, was on seeing a Holmes scope and some slides for sale in a second-hand shop in Ponsonby. It was a lot of money, 25/- if I remember rightly, but I had to have it and so became the proud owner of my own outfit. At that time I possessed a 1/4 plate film pack camera so I set about making my own stereo pictures, mounting two prints side by side and looking at them in the scope. Of course there was no 3D effect and I was quite puzzled, because as far as I could see the pictures on the slides I had bought were both identical. At that time there was a photographic shop in Victoria St. Auckland owned by Mr Holland. I had often purchased film, chemicals etc. there and one day I told him about my failure in making slides for my stereoscope. He then explained that the pictures were not identical but were photographed with a special camera taking two pictures at one time through two separate lenses, and if I was interested he could get me such a camera from someone he knew.

I called in several times and eventually he had the camera for me - the first I had ever seen. It was a German make, Goerts-Dagor, taking standard size photos with three double dark slides. He showed me how to work it; I took some pictures, developed, printed and mounted them side by side. Eureka! I had slides now with some 3D effect but puzzling to look at... Of course they were pseudoscopic.

Back to Mr Holland I went, to complain about the camera as being no good. He said that it couldn't be the camera, and not knowing much about stereoscopy, said that I should see the manager of the Auckland Savings Bank in Ponsonby Rd as he being the Secretary of the Stereoscopic Society should be able to help me.

It happened to be the bank where I kept my small savings in and although I had never met the manager I asked if I might see him when he came in. In explaining why I had come he asked me into his office where he told me of the Society and described the principles of stereo to me. Then and there I was enrolled as a member and paid my first year's subscription of 5/-. I can't remember the exact date, but it was in the spring of 1925, as my first pictures were of trees in Western Park, Ponsonby Rd, and also of the native bush in the Waitakere ranges.

The first slide I entered in the folios was of a large Punga fern which I thought would be of interest to overseas members. I still have the slide and the envelope well covered with comments and criticisms. I had mounted the slide carefully taking as a guide one of the Underwood & Underwood professional slides and had domed the tops of the prints as theirs was. Unwittingly I had joined sides with a minority of the members who also domed their slides, and gained the hostility of the anti-domers. As all of the NZ members were anti-domers I decided to adopt the square shape top, as it was much easier.

The folios then, as new, were started on their circulation in England, then USA, to one member in Malaya, then to Australia, and on to New Zealand. We had one member in Wales, and one in Scotland (Dr Grove, who later became our President) and I think one in Ireland.

The folios made the circuit approximately once a year compared to the time the present OX folios take to circulate. This would be because only 3 days were allowed for viewing and there were regular and frequent mails by sea.

The average folio contained 40 slides. The New Zealand membership was about 11, seven of whom resided in Auckland. I have a photograph of a group of six Auckland members taken at the home of Mr Richardson in 1927. The occasion was for us all to meet each other and also a Tauranga member who had just returned from England. Included in the group was our eldest member at that time, Mr Blackman of Onehunga, then 90 years old. Also an Indian Doctor who practised in Auckland, Dr. Share, he was an interesting character and invited me to his Dominion Rd. home as he wished to see a new camera I had imported from London.

I had brought some of my slides and he showed me some of his. I must confess that I was more than a little embarrassed as many of his were of young ladies not in the nude but 'topless'. Sometime later the Doctor was involved in a charge of improper conduct to a young lady patient, was found guilty and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment. He was struck off the register by the BMA and was asked to resign from the Stereoscopic Society. He returned to India with his family at the expiration of his sentence.

The meeting I have referred to was the only one we had. Members probably met each other at various times but not as a group. I saw Mr Richardson fairly frequently as I banked at his branch, and two other members. Mr Smith of Mt. Albert who delivered the folios to me on his bicycle, and Mr McKillop of Greenlane to whom I passed the folios on also on a bicycle.

One feature of the print folios which I recall was that if a member particularly liked a slide he would write on the envelope that he would like a copy and would offer one of his that you may have fancied, in exchange. I have several slides from members in those days in exchange for some of mine which were popular. We all made our own prints so it was little trouble and they were exchanged in an un-mounted condition.

Mr Richardson's camera was a 1/2 plate Thornton-Pickard with double extension bellows; for stereo work. Twin lenses on another panel replaced the single lens panel and a dividing curtain was fitted into the bellows, ingenious but quite simple to operate. His main hobby at that time was not stereoscopy but photographing in mono historic old buildings and the copying of old prints of early Auckland. This collection on his death was presented by his family to the Old Colonists Museum as a memorial to him and was mounted on one of those revolving frame affairs.

After moving to Pt. Chevalier in 1933 I lost touch with Mr Richardson, apart from the folios, so do not know the cause of his death. I received a letter from Mrs. Richardson asking me if I would take over the secretary-ship. I agreed and with the NZ members confirming the appointment I became Hon. Secretary.

New members joined at various times, some of them came to know of our existence through the "B.J" (the British Journal of Photography) and would write to the English Secretary whose address would be in the Journal and he would refer them to me. Mr T.G. Johnson of Dunedin joined in this way and, through him, two more Dunedin members joined, Mr Sanderson and Mr Cunningham thus Dunedin had the majority of NZ members at the time.

By that time colour transparencies had taken over from paper prints in popularity, although both types were circulating in separate folios. The Dunedin members were all colour workers and did not receive the print folios, and finally only two workers were left in that section, Clarrie Bott and a Papatoetoe member Mr F Jenks. Clarrie was then doing colour slides also but Mr Jenks was not interested at that stage and resigned, and so the print folios ceased to circulate in NZ.

The Australian/New Zealand folios were started by the Australian Secretary, Mr Harold Tregellas, to help maintain interest for our NZ members. Australia had sufficient members to support a folio of their own, similar to the folio Carl Watson has successfully started here. A group of the Australian members agreed, as did our members, and it has been a great success particularly as the OX folios have become slower and more infrequent mostly because of holdups in the USA.

A few brief notes on some of our past members I met or corresponded with which may be of interest.

Dr. Grove of Edinburgh, who was for many years the President of UK section of the Society.

His slides were always sepia toned bromide prints, standard size, of superb quality. He specialised in interiors of Cathedrals and churches, all perfectly exposed and needle sharp. He was asked by some member or other to write in the notebook what equipment he used, exposures etc., and he very courteously did so. His equipment was what he had used for very many years, an ordinary bellows type camera, with simple rectilinear lenses and a wooden tripod. His exposures were very long, up to an hour, using the smallest stop f.32 I think, using slow speed plates. He used caps on his lenses because while people were moving about the Cathedral no impression was made but if they should happen to sit down for a while he would have to cap the lenses until they moved on. Dr. Grove gave me one piece of advice I have never forgotten: 'It is not what equipment you have that counts, it is getting to really know what you have and how to use it'.

Mr Mobbs, U. K. Secretary I met at his home in London in 1928 on my trip to England. He had invited the London members to meet me but unfortunately, after all these years, I cannot remember who they were. But I can remember the prime interest of the gathering..... Mr Mobbs worked in the London G.P.O. and was keen on wireless. He had made his own set, and that evening had rigged up two horn-type loudspeakers from it and placed them at opposite corners of the room, and, if we stood in the centre between them, the sound seemed to come from in front. Stereoscopic Sound claimed Mr Mobbs! As General Secretary of the whole Society he wrote quite sharp letters to me at times for what he called my laxity in enforcing the rules on our NZ members.

Mr Adamson, Christchurch member had joined up through the "B.J." I never met him, of course, but he used to write to me at times and was also a regular contributor to the notebooks of scientific formula etc. He also commented on most, if not all, the slides in the folio. But he never contributed a slide himself and this eventually drew the attention of Mr Mobbs who wrote to tell me I was not enforcing the rules that each member contribute a slide

to every folio and he also wrote to Mr Adamson direct who replied to him direct. I knew nothing of their correspondence until later, but I received a letter from Mr Mobbs saying that if I couldn't (or wouldn't) remove Mr Adamson from the NZ membership he would stop sending me the folios altogether. I wrote to tell Mr Adamson that I should have to remove his name from the route list. His reply was that he knew his 'rights', that he was financial, and that if I removed his name he would take legal action. However, better thoughts prevailed as soon after, I received a letter from him saying that he had written an apology to Mr Mobbs, and hoped to have a slide ready for the next folio. This he did, and until his death a few years later he was a regular contributor and his criticisms on the work of other members were both helpful and kindly. I must mention one of his unique contributions to the folios, stereoscopic postage stamps! When a new series of stamps came out he would go through the sheets until he found a difference in the registering of the two colours in the printing. By mounting two of these, one from each sheet, on a slide mount as you would with photo prints the main subject would stand out from the background when seen through the viewer.

Harold Tregellas. In 1928 on my way to England the ship stopped at Melbourne for one day and I had the opportunity of meeting the Australian Secretary, briefly as he was working. He was a dispensing chemist at the Friendly Societies Dispensary. He was a keen skier and circulated some very fine slides of ice and snow scenes taken during the winter at one of his favourite ski fields on Mt. Kosciusko.

He lived in the USA where the present US General Secretary now lives, Lookout Mountain. I don't know how far that is from Mt. Shasta, but many of his slides were taken of that mountain and upon it. Also some fine 'giant views' from it. This type of stereo photography was uncommon as air travel had not become popular. He used two plate cameras for these slides, set on tripods a fair distance apart. His problem was cloud movement between the two exposures and he overcame this in a unique way. The nearer camera shutter he tripped by hand but on the farther one he attached a line to the shutter with a weight on it resting on a bottle. He had a rifle and fired at this bottle, breaking it, and the weight then dropped and tripped the shutter!
End.

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