

1 'Let's go to the cinema!'

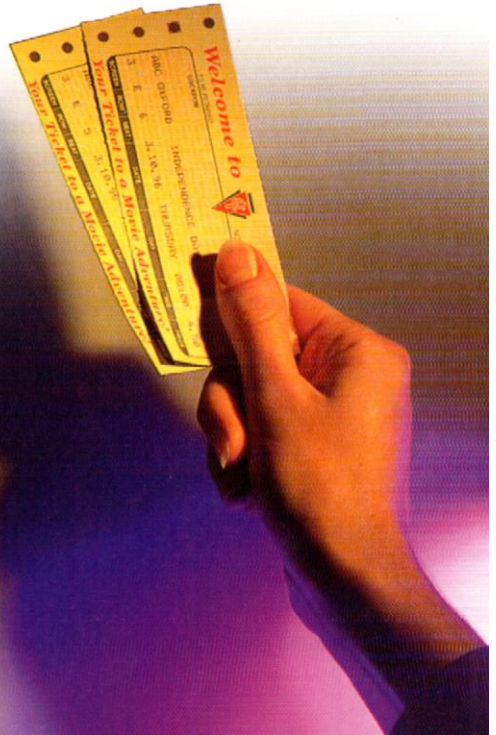
Today it is possible to buy or hire a video and watch a film at home, but millions of people all over the world still prefer to go to their town or city cinema for a 'night out'. And before television arrived in people's homes, a visit to the cinema was something really special to look forward to.

The 'golden age' of film-making – and going to the cinema – was between about 1930 and 1950. Film stars seemed like kings and queens. Cinemas were 'picture palaces' where, for the price of a ticket, you could enter into a magical world where anything and everything was possible.

In 1946, 1,650,000,000 cinema tickets were sold in Great Britain. That's thirty-three tickets for every man, woman and child in the country.

And in the year 1939 – the year when audiences first saw *Gone With The Wind* – 30,000 people were employed by the big film studios in Hollywood. They made 400 films every year. Americans called the moving pictures, 'the movies', and fifty million of them went to the cinema every week. They wanted to see the magic of the movies!

But how did it all begin ...?



The first moving pictures were simple 'shadow shows' or 'shadow plays'.

Then came the magic lanterns which projected painted glass slides on to a screen. These became very popular in Europe in the 18th century, and lantern showmen travelled from village to village.

But in the 1820s, Nicéphore Niépce invented photography, and soon photographs were used instead of the much more expensive glass slides. But these were not movies. The pictures did not move. To make moving pictures it is necessary to take a large number of photographs very quickly, one after the other. Then, when the photographs are projected, the person or animal in the picture appears to move.



In 1878, the British photographer, Eadweard Muybridge, who was living in California, fixed twelve cameras beside a racetrack and took pictures of a racehorse – very quickly, one after the other. The American inventor, Thomas Edison, watched the work of Muybridge with great interest. (Edison had invented the phonograph – an early ‘record player’ – in 1877.) By 1890, William K. L. Dickson, who was working with Edison, had managed to take ‘moving pictures’ with something called the Kinetograph.

In 1893 the world's first film studio was built by Edison in West Orange, New Jersey. Actors from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and Barnum and Bailey's Circus were

filmed there. The films were shown in Kinetoscope machines. These machines did not project the film on to a screen, they had 'peep-holes' that one person at a time could look through.

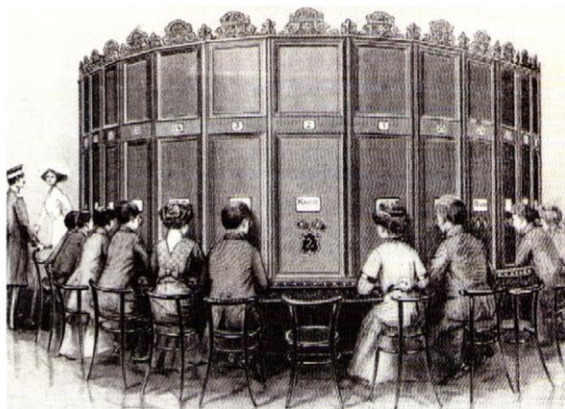
It was the Lumière brothers, in France, who invented a camera and projector in one – the Cinematographe. Now large audiences could watch projected pictures on a screen. And because films were longer, people were happy to pay more to see them.

The Lumière brothers gave the first performance of their Cinematographe in Paris in 1895, in a room under the Grand Café, 14 boulevard des Capucines on 28th December. They borrowed a hundred chairs from the cafe, but only thirty-five seats were sold at one franc each. But it was the world's first 'film show'.

Then Edison introduced the Vitascope projector in New York on April 23, 1896. And by the end of that year, films were flickering on screens all over Europe and America. (Films were often called 'flickers' or 'flicks'.)

At first, people did not mind what

they watched, it was exciting enough just to be able to see real moving photographs of people and animals. But slowly films with stories began to appear, and the Frenchman, Georges Méliès, began to use clever photography to make strange things happen. These were some of the first 'special effects'.



A kinetoscope

Film fact

- There was a bad accident in May 1897. A Cinematographe show was part of the great Charity Bazaar in Paris. But the projectionist was careless and the film caught fire. This started an even bigger fire, and 140 people died. Many of them were very rich and important people.