

Obituary—John Bell (JB)

For more than twenty years, this space has been filled with a report from our Patron John Bell, but sadly with his passing an era has come to an end.

Since its inception just over 40 years ago, John, being one of the twelve founding members had lived, breathed and promoted the Film Buffs helping the membership to grow to 150 plus in the earlier years.

He completed a 5 year apprenticeship in printing and soon after he became friendly with the owner of a coffee bar in Oriental Bay. In 1962, this person offered him ownership of a coffee bar in Cuba Street which he took on and ran for a number of years. Across the road was a second hand shop and John became friendly with Mario, the owner and when Mario became aware that John had a truck, he asked if he would like to do deliveries for him. This would lead to a change in occupation so he sold the coffee bar and joined the second hand business. Not long after this, a projector and some film arrived in the shop for sale and John was quick to acquire these items and so his film life began in earnest.

Ten years later when Mario's cousin joined the business, he and John became partners and opened a new second hand business which grew with extra outlets over the next 10 years. During these years, he met some of the most important film people in the business and his film interests continued to grow.

At the same time, the theatre in his backyard at Lyall Bay would be turned into the 40 seater Time Cinema. Eventually John and his wife Margaret started doing regular monthly programs with group bookings during the day as well as in the evenings. It was a very popular venue which attracted a loyal following. Film makers used the cinema for editing and Peter Jackson was able to screen his daily takes, until his own theatre was built at Park Road Post.

As the years rolled by they were beginning to tire a little so when they received a phone call from a real estate agent enquiring if they wanted to sell, they decided maybe it was time to retire. They desperately wanted the cinema to continue and were so happy that a very keen and eager person, who had come to an earlier screening and had always wanted his own cinema bought it. That of course was Cass Shavez who is now a member of the Film Buffs.

John and Margaret moved to Waikanae and he had set up a cinema in one of the garages on the property and was just getting back into showing movies to friends and neighbours when his health deteriorated to the extent that in 2023 it became necessary for him to go into care.

It's so hard to put into words the contribution John made to the Film Buffs. His auctioneering skills along with his wonderful sense of humour were always something to look forward to at our 6 monthly meetings. Often when a member thought the price was too high, his favourite reply was "I will tell you when you're paying too much"!

Thank you John for your friendship to all of us over the last 40 years. Though sorely missed, you will not be forgotten along with the wonderful memories you have left us.

Rest in peace dear friend.