

## OBITUARY

### BILL BARNES, 1920-2019

With the passing of Bill (William Mervyn Lloyd) Barnes, twin brother of the late John Barnes, an era really has ended. Fascinated by film as young boys, initially in cinema shows of silent movies and the nascent talkies, and from aged 12 with a 9.5mm home cine projector and *Felix the Cat* cartoons, they soon progressed to making their own mini dramas and then documentaries. *Cornish Nets*, about the fishing fleet in St Ives, and *With the Gypsies in Kent* are most accomplished and impressive films – all the more so for having been produced by two boys in their teens. There were many others, now preserved by Screen Archive South East. The brothers declined to comment on which aspects were provided by whom – their contributions were inseparable.

The twins' collecting started in the 1930s, prompted by finding an ancient film projector and phenakistoscope discs. They managed to stay together during their war service in the Royal Navy, afterwards becoming specialist booksellers – of cinema and pre-cinema material. While John curated the collection, in 1963 opening the Barnes Museum of Cinematography in St Ives, Bill became a film production consultant. Living in London he was well placed to comb the bric-a-brac shops, eventually running his own stall in a prestigious Chelsea antiques market selling optical toys, lantern slides and photo-cine items.

The museum closed in 1986 and later the early British cinema equipment transferred to Hove Museum. In 1990 many exquisite lantern slides from the Barnes Collection enhanced the exhibition at the Society's third Convention, expanded at London's Museum of the Moving Image for three months. The important collection of magic lantern slides, and perhaps a hundred lanterns, found a home in a special gallery of Turin's Museo Nazionale del Cinema. Joint honours awarded to Bill and John included the Jean Mitry Prize and a Stirling University honorary doctorate. John died in 2008 and Bill took up the writing – a flood of articles for *The Magic Lantern* about expositions, panoramas, early cinema and other visual delights.

I have a memory of a Saturday morning in the 1980s at the top end of Portobello Road, as a gaggle of the 'usual suspects' (keen collectors) were peeking at each others' finds before leaving, when we spotted Bill arriving. We said something rude like "You're too late old man, you need to get up earlier!" Bill smiled and continued down the market. The joke was on us because, of course, he found treasures that we'd missed – having decades of experience spotting the not-so-obvious, easily overlooked item. For half a century Bill had been discovering marvellous things in the optical fields that we all enjoy, often with John, but later frequently on his own as he tirelessly searched book fairs and his recent favourite haunt, Covent Garden's flea market, sometimes meeting up with the equally persistent collector Peter Jewell.

Bill loved Europe. We once decided to take off on a memorable short trip to Paris, just after the Musée d'Orsay opened. For me it was an education in so many fields in the visual arts. But Bill's real passion was for German culture, which he enjoyed with his devoted partner of more than thirty years, Karin, who looked after him during his last difficult days.

*Stephen Herbert*



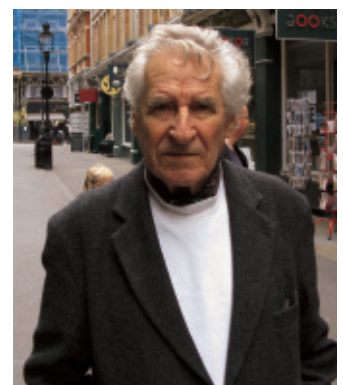
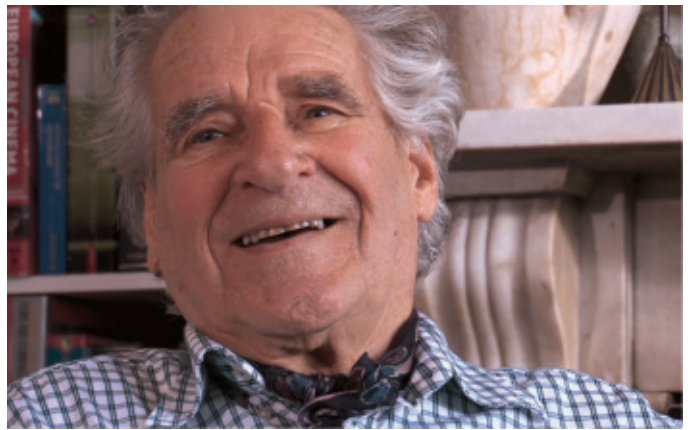
*Bill with his twin brother John*

I was close to Bill during the last 11 years of his life, after John's death. Being a twin Bill felt the loss profoundly, especially as the brothers had always maintained daily contact – John living in Cornwall and Bill in London. John, the writer, had published five books in his *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England 1894-1901* series, while Bill, the collector, searched auction houses and markets for interesting items including early equipment, supplying John with information and illustrations. Fortunately, Bill's passion for looking for antique optical bargains never left him. His hero was Robert W. Paul and Bill acquired nearly 20 items made by this brilliant movie innovator. He also loved Will Day, a pioneer collector of early optical toys and examples of the first cinema machines.

Bill and I would meet up in Portobello Road on a Saturday morning and scour the market. Over the last eight years he would ask me to visit him – every three weeks or so, on a Friday or Saturday evening – and bring items from my own collections. Bill especially loved looking through old catalogues – particularly of early cine equipment – film programmes, and anything related to stereoscopy, optical illusions and magicians. Whenever I arrived he would say "What are you going to stagger my mind with this time?" After an hour or so of excitement Bill would then produce 'supper' – a cold meat pie with a salad and dressing made to his favourite recipe, washed down with a rosé wine and followed by ice cream and wafers. Of course, now and again Karin would pop over from Berlin and be there to look after us, producing a hot meal.

Bill had 'regular' dealers who would look out for him, particularly a postcard lady in Covent Garden who provided cards of 'Bioscope' film stars and Alfred John West of *Our Navy* fame – his favourite lantern slides were those of West's famous photographs of sailing boats. We sometimes met at the monthly book and ephemera fairs around Russell Square on a Sunday morning, culminating in a 'show and tell' session over coffee and biscuits. This went on for five years until June when Bill couldn't make the trip anymore. Bill was a wonderful friend and I shall miss him very much.

*Lester Smith*



*Bill in one of his favourite London haunts – Cecil Court*