

F. W. THRING

Frank Thring (aka Frank Thring Snr) started out his career in the entertainment industry as a magician before turning to picture exhibition around 1911. His first venture in this field was in Tasmania with the Biograph Pictures Company. He later moved to Melbourne to work as a projectionist for Kreitmayer's Waxworks and in 1915 became part owner of Electric Theatres (which operated Melbourne's Paramount Theatre). Three years later Thring became managing director of J. C. Williamson's Films and by 1926 was managing director of Hoyts Theatres. He sold his interests in Hoyts to the Fox Film Corporation in 1931 and set up Efftee Films which produced eight feature films, including Pat Hannas' *Diggers* (1931) and three George Wallace films. Thring was also active in live theatre production, his biggest successes being *Collits' Inn* (1933), *The Beloved Vagabond* (1934) and *The Cedar Tree* (1934).

The son of William Francis and Angeline Thring, little is known of Francis William (Frank) Thring's early life other than that he initially started out as a bootmaker, before attempting a career as a magician sometime around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1904, he married Grace Wight in Gawler, South Australia, listing bootmaker as his trade on the marriage certificate. As with many other touring variety showmen of the era, Thring began screening films as part of the evening's entertainment, and eventually moved into film exhibition as a full-time career. His first venture in the field is believed to have been in 1911, when he started the Biograph Pictures Co in Tasmania. He later moved to Melbourne to work as a projectionist for Kreitmayer's Waxworks. In 1915, Thring became part owner of Electric Theatres, a company which operated Melbourne's Paramount Theatre. Three years later, he took up a position as managing director of J. C. Williamson's Films, and by 1926 was managing director of Hoyts Theatres. Under Thring's direction, seven palatial Regent cinemas were built by the organisation.



Source: State Library of NSW,
(Hood Collection, Part 1)

In 1931, Thring sold his interests in Hoyts to the Fox Film Corporation and set about establishing his own company, Efftee Films. Based in Melbourne the company produced, eight feature films, along with nine shorts and a series about the Great Barrier Reef, between 1931 and 1936. The films were *The Haunted Barn* (1931); *Diggers* (1931, starring Pat Hanna); a remake of *The Sentimental Bloke* (1932); *His Royal Highness* (1932), *Harmony Row* (1933), and *A Ticket in Tatts* (1934), all three starring George Wallace; *The Streets of London* (1934); and *Clara Gibbings* (1934).



St Moritz Skating Rink
Courtesy of the City of Port Phillip Heritage
Recognition Program

Two years after founding Efftee, Thring acquired a building in St Kilda which since 1923 had been operating as the Wattle Path Dance Saloon and Café,¹ and converted it into one of the largest film studios in Australia. However, as the full effects of the depression became more apparent, Thring was forced to close the studio down and return the site to its original theme. Renamed Streets of Paris Dance Saloon, it too was eventually closed down due to the economic downturn. Despite facing enormous challenges during his years as a film producer, Thring was determined to help build an Australian film tradition, and throughout this period he campaigned vigorously for the Australian government to apply a quota system to protect the local film industry from being inundated by foreign product.

Thring's entrepreneurial activities were not confined only to film during the 1930s. Not long after setting up his company he established set up his own theatrical operations, known as Efftee Players, at Melbourne's Garrick Theatre. One of his goals at this time was to increase the chances of world-wide distribution by first producing material on the stage. His idea was that if a show succeeded with a live audience, he would then adapt it into a cinematic version. Arguably his greatest theatrical endeavour was the Varney Monk/T. Stuart Gurr musical *Collits' Inn* (1933). Two other successes were his 1934 production of the Dudley Glass/Adrian Ross) romantic musical *The Beloved Vagabond* (first staged in London in 1927) and Varney Monk's *The Cedar Tree* (1934). Although Efftee Films undertook screen tests for the lead roles in a



1935
Source: Chris Keating,
Radio Heritage Foundation

¹ The building which housed Efftee Studios was originally known as the Paradise of Pictures before becoming the Wattle Path Dance Saloon and Cafe. After the was re-opened in March 1939 as the St Moritz ice rink. The building was eventually demolished, with the site now being the home of the Novotel St Kilda.

proposed cinematic version of *Collits' Inn*, and began negotiations with British entrepreneur Charles B. Cochrane, Thring's death saw his plans for the venture shelved.

The year before he died, Thring also founded Melbourne radio station 3XY. Operated by Efftee Broadcasters Pty. Ltd. the station began its operations on September 8th, 1935. A feature of 3XY ever since its inception, and very likely influenced by its founders, has been its concentration on live-artist productions for direct broadcasting and for recording for future use and for distribution.

Thring's death, the result of cancer, occurred on 1 July 1936, barely a month after he returned from a trip to Hollywood in search of scriptwriters and actors. He was survived by a daughter from his first marriage, his second wife Olive (nee Kreitmayer), and their son, the actor Frank Thring Jnr. Olive Thring remained a director of 3XY for a number of years after his death.

FURTHER REFERENCE

Arthur, Bronwyn. "The Pub with no Peer, or *Collits' Inn*: The First Australian Musical Romance" (1995).

Djubal, Clay. "[Thring, F. W.](#)" *AustLit* (2006).

"[Efftee Studio Opening in Melbourne: Speech by Frank Forde \(1931\)](#)" *Australian Screen* [sighted 5/04/2011]

Holroyd, J. P. "[Thring, Francis William \(Frank\) 1882-1936](#)" ADB: 12 (1990): 221-222.



Source: John Reid Vintage Movie Memorabilia

Details in this entry have been in part sourced from J. P. Holroyd's entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

First published: 10/05/2011

NB: The URL for this PDF will change each time it is updated. If you wish to cite or link to this record please use the following:
Australian Variety Theatre Archive • <http://ozvta.com/entrepreneurs-s-z/>