

“AAARRRRHH THERE MATEY!”

- The Strange and Wondrous Tale of Bill Constable & the Cinemascope Pirates of Pagewood...

by Bob Hill, Oct 2018



In early 1954... and a world away from the dense urban spread of today's Sydney... the southern suburb of Pagewood was little more than wind blasted sand hills and scrub encroached upon by rows of hastily thrown up brick bungalows, a couple of isolated factories and a desolate bus depot. In the middle of this literal and figurative wasteland, a strange enterprise was taking place in Australia's only purpose-built film studio complex - the making of "Long John Silver", a Hollywood style blockbuster replete with imported stars, executives and key technicians in all the Heads of Department roles... that is, all except for their Production Designer, a middle aged Australian about to make his first foray into film!

1. Hollywood in the Sand Hills



*Pagewood studios, 1954 - then named "Television City", 2 years before TV arrived in Australia!
(NSW State Library)*

"Television City seems to have borrowed its architectural inspiration from Long Bay Gaol..."

'Pagewood' is the great lost studio of Australian film-making: As Wikipedia explains...

The studio was built in 1935 for National Productions by National Studios Ltd, it was originally known as National Studios. It was constructed for the presumed increase in production that most observers thought would result in Australia following introduction of the NSW Film Quota Act...

They were the first new film studios built in Australia since 1912. Gaumont British helped provide finance and personnel in its construction.¹

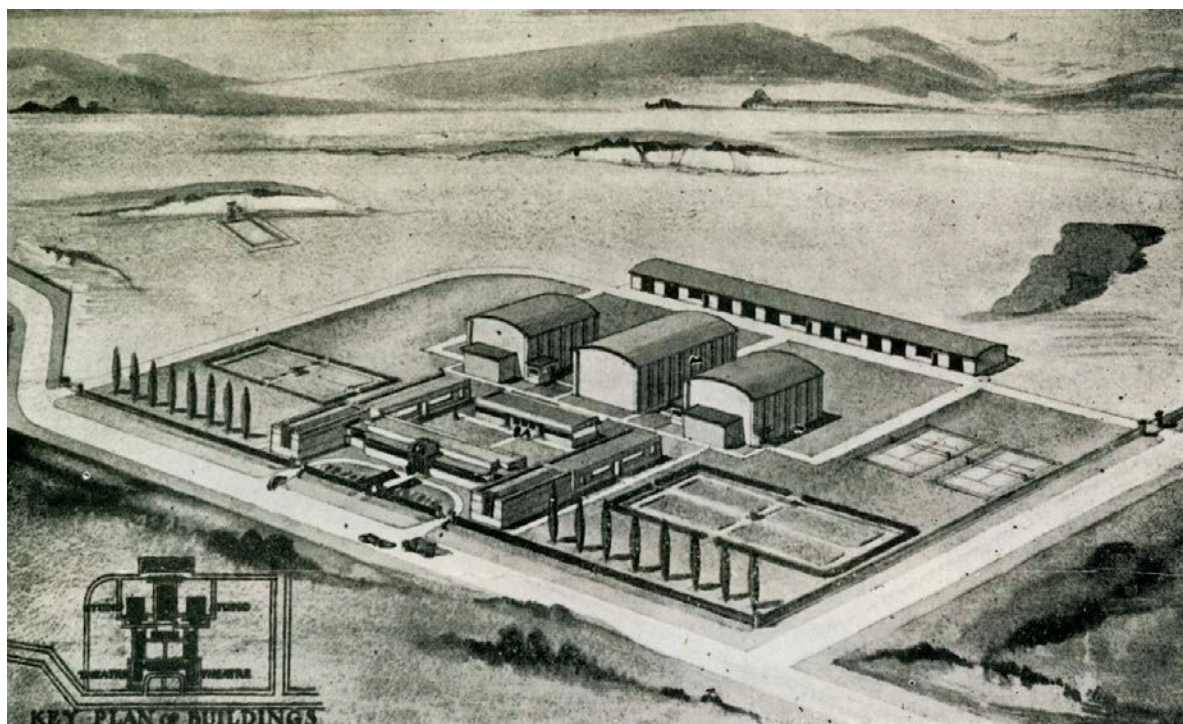
The Quota Act was never enforced and instead of becoming the hub of film production in Sydney, makeshift facilities at Cinesound in Bondi Junction (an old roller skating rink) and Figtree Studios in Lane Cove (a converted picnic ground pavilion) soon eclipsed the better equipped Pagewood studios. Shut down for 3 years, they resumed production briefly for one film before it was acquired as the HQ for the Australia Army Entertainment Unit during WW2.

The UK based Ealing Studios re-opened the studios after the war and did an expensive refurbishment. Following several feature productions, the studio closed down yet again in 1952.

The closure didn't last long: Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, in 1953 a company named Associated Television bought the property and commenced film-making activities once more - leasing out the complex and facilities for independent productions. Positioning themselves for a future television broadcast licence, they renamed the complex "Television City". Like most studio complexes, it wasn't particularly glamorous; In 1954 The Sydney Morning Herald described it accordingly -

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pagewood_Studios

Television City seems to have borrowed its architectural inspiration from Long Bay Gaol. It consists mainly of one enormous brick barn and sets of offices and workrooms, facing a quadrangle like a prison exercise yard.²



The Dream - Plans for National Film Studios, Feb, 1935: 23 acres, 3 sound stages, 2 tennis courts, semi-circular driveway, pencil pines... (Mascot Library)



The Reality - 1937: 1 sound stage, no tennis courts, no impressive driveway, no pencil pines... (NSW State Library)

Glamorous or not, their first major production would be to facilitate a major feature film with the title “Long John Silver - Return to Treasure Island” for a company aptly named “Treasure Island Pictures”.

² <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18459678>

“Mr. Kaufman is frank about his reasons for coming to Australia. He has no noble ambitions. 'I want to make money and I think I can make it more easily in this country'”

Since Robert Louis Stevenson's novel “Treasure Island” was now in the public domain, it would enable Treasure Island Pictures to return to the plot and characters of the book without paying copyright royalties - just as Disney had done! The movie would be followed by a 26 episode television series called “The Adventures of Long John Silver” with the same main cast and story world, broken up into self-contained tales of some 25 minutes each³; It was to be a huge and exciting project that would take 3 years to complete and would reportedly cost over one million pounds overall - possibly the equivalent of Aus. \$20 million in 2018!

FEATURES

By A Staff Correspondent In London

Sydney will become a regular stumping-ground for peg-legged Long John Silver if the actor Robert Newton makes a success of his first venture as film producer.

ON the coast near Sydney about May 1 Newton and his Treasure Island Inc. will begin shooting the new exploits of the pirate.

There will be a full-length feature, “The Return to Treasure Island,” for the world cinema market, and 26 half-hour films for American television.

“If they hit the jackpot, as I’m sure they will,” Newton told me, “then I shall return to Australia every year and repeat the formula—though probably with a greater accent on films for the cinema.”

Each of the television shorts will be a self-contained episode dealing with an adventure by Long John Silver. Made for American consumption only, they will not always bear the hallmark of the great Robert Louis Stevenson.

But Newton is taking no chances, though plenty of artist’s licence, with “The Return to Treasure Island.”

In essence, the setting will be the same. So will the characters—the whole gamut of them from the book. Newton is achieving this by the simple expedient of dragging out of retirement all those who survived to tell the tale, and of resurrecting all the corpses which were not literally blown or hacked to pieces before reliable witnesses.

Advance Guard Has Arrived

And in all these films, of course, Newton will be Long John, whom he played so deliciously in Disney’s “Treasure Island.”

The superstructure of the pirate ship *Hispaniola* will be constructed on a barge, suitable for seagoing. But extensive use will be made of models to keep down costs.

Saving expense has been Newton’s prime consideration in deciding to make his production debut in Australia.

The low costs there, he says, will allow him to get 40,000 dollars’ worth of quality on the screen at a price of 20,000 dollars (£8,930) for each television film—and a comparable reduction for the full-length picture, too.

The biggest economy will be made in the matter of costumes, settings and props, which will be substantially the same for each film.

Moreover, the company will be able to spread overall expenses by shooting their cinema feature simultaneously with the shorts.

An advance guard of Treasure Island Inc., including the producer, Joe Kaufman, the director, Byron Haskin, and key technicians, has already arrived in Sydney, by air from Hollywood to set the stage for Newton.

But before he can join them he has to fulfil two flamboyant assignments in British studios.

The first (nearing completion) sees him as the quality on the screen at a price of 20,000 dollars (£8,930) for each television film—and a comparable reduction for the full-length picture, too.

The second (nearing completion) sees him as the quality on the screen at a price of 20,000 dollars (£8,930) for each television film—and a comparable reduction for the full-length picture, too.

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Newton of old. But he has changed, he says, since he married his fourth wife, Hollywood publicity agent, Vera Budrick, in June, 1952.

At Pinewood, where he has been making his new British pictures, Newton has been the soul of decorum. Watched by Vera, he has left arm-in-arm with her and gone straight home, to help put their baby son, Kim, to bed.

“See what Vera has done to me?” he chuckles. “She’s turned me into a domesticated animal. All I want now is a fireside chair, a pair of slippers—and a garden to work in.”

Newton is likely to be just as well behaved in Australia.

Vera—and the baby—are going with him.

YO HO HO ON THE SYDNEY BEACHES

FILMS, MUSIC, DRAMA



Robert Newton as Blackbeard the bus-coneer in last year's film.

SMH: March 1954

‘Treasure Island Pictures’ was an independent partnership headed up by the experienced Americans, Producer Joseph Kaufman, Screenwriter Martin Rackin and Director Byron Haskins... along with their starring actor, a gifted and colourful Englishman who was also a chronic alcoholic! The project was backed by 20th Century Fox Distribution ... and some dodgy money from a very shady Wall Street Financier⁴. Seeking a landscape that resembled the fictional Caribbean of the 1750s, they were initially reluctant to come to Australia, their first choice being **Egypt** (lots of sand and palm trees?)⁵, but English speaking natives and cheap facilities won out! (Where have we heard this before...?).

And they weren’t even **polite** about it...

*Mr. Kaufman is frank about his reasons for coming to Australia. He has no noble ambitions. 'I want to make money and I think I can make it more easily in this country. Why? Because it's cheaper to make a film requiring outdoor settings like 'Long John Silver' in Australia than it would be, say, in California. Not only are there dozens of natural and picturesque settings almost at our back door, but labor and equipment also come much cheaper here.'*⁶

³ Another film with the title “Return to Treasure Island”, a total stinker, (vaguely connected to the book, but set in a contemporary period & starring a mostly shirtless and oiled up Tab Hunter), was also released in 1954; this possibly prompted the producers of the Robert Newton version to promote their film as “Long John Silver - Return to Treasure Island”... and more often than not, just “Long John Silver”. The TV series became “The Adventures of Long John Silver”.

⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_John_Silver_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_John_Silver_(film))

⁵ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18424923>

⁶ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/16989431>

"PRODUCTION 101" ON LOCATION

Pirate Film In Colour Will Have Sydney Backgrounds

By A STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"Long John Silver," a colour film now being made at Pagewood Studios, in Sydney, will be released throughout the world (all being well) shortly before Christmas. This will be the culmination of a year's work by the producer, and of several months' work by director, writer, technicians and cast.

THE actual shooting of the film at Pagewood, on location at Garie Beach and Waterfall, near Sydney, will have occupied only part — about 10 weeks—of the production time.

"Long John Silver" will conform to all the standard requirements of a major production: it will be photographed for both CinemaScope (wide-screen and direction sound) and conventional screens; it will run for the customary 90 minutes; and its cost, if the producer keeps to his budget,

buses, two trucks, two lorries and a trailer left Pagewood for Garie Beach at 6.30 a.m.

The location unit consisted of 103 people: 43 extras dressed as pirates, including 16 Bondi lifesavers; 20 actors and stand-ins; seven electricians; nine camera and sound crew; seven executives; and 17 production workers, including properties men, wardrobe, make up, drivers, carpenters, labourers, hairdressers, and a nurse.

The electrical truck, carrying 4,900ft of cable, lamps and reflectors, towed a mobile generator.

Artificial lighting is sometimes used outdoors, even in good natural light, to fill in unwanted

Long John, but he'd rather go to sea.

"Silver meets up again with Jim Hawkins, and together they go back to Treasure Island. Silver's great enemy is Mendoza—El Toro, the Spanish pirate—who kidnaps Jim and the little daughter of the Governor of Puerto Bello.

"This scene now shows the landing of three pirates sent ashore at Broken Finger Point, Puerto Bello, from Mendoza's ship. They've come to collect the ransom of 1,000 sovereigns for the Governor's daughter.

"They're landing at sundown, so we filter the light down a bit. All technicolor shots—either day or night—are done in daylight, except for shots showing big fires burning at night. Fires are done at night."

Pirates In Pastels

At a signal from Haskin, the three pirates took their places in the jolly boat. A camera assistant held a board marked "Scene 5, Take 5—Production 101" in front of the camera,

until the ramrod accidentally fell from Bowlegs' pistol as he leapt out of the boat.

"It's costing us an extra half million dollars to shoot this picture for CinemaScope," remarked Kaufman. "The picture would cost about two million dollars normally, but the director, the writer and the star are working for themselves, so they're not being paid yet."

A make-up man repainted the scar on Bowlegs' forehead which had been partly removed by the salt water. Evans motioned the pirates back to the jolly boat and Take 7 began.

Once again a sudden wave moved the boat before the pirates could disembark.

"A scene like this is very difficult," said Kaufman. "The director has to time the ocean. Mr. Haskin is a very competent director; he's directed 'His Majesty O'Keefe,' 'The Naked Jungle,' and 'War of the Worlds.' Usually he can do a scene in two or three takes; but this is very difficult."

Light Too Yellow

SMH June 1954

Their Director of Photography, Production Manager and Editor were also being imported... along with brute arc lights and a set of brand new Cinemascope lenses on loan from 20th Century Fox.

It was to be the first Cinemascope film to be shot in Australia and the negative would need to be flown to London to be processed before being returned as rushes, edited in Australia, then returned to the UK for additional post-production, sound mixing and prints. Every scene would also need to be shot twice - once in Cinemascope, then in standard aspect ratio to accommodate the majority of secondary release cinemas that didn't have anamorphic projection! It was never going to be easy...

Treasure Island Pictures themselves were under no illusions about how difficult their venture would be; In a 1955 interview in "Films and Filming", producer Joe Kaufman explained that it was a tough job making the film in Australia because "few feature films have been made in Australia ... the country lacks trained film technicians and actors trained in cinematography"⁷

But despite this parochial view and their stable of imported HODs, (including the composer who arrived later to conduct the Sydney Symphony Orchestra playing his score), their Production Designer was to be a local stage designer doing his first film!

2. Enter "The Sorcerer"...

William Henry Archibald Constable - "Bill Constable" - was born in Bendigo in 1906, the son of an Anglican rector: He initially apprenticed as an electrical engineer at the Victorian Railways workshops in Jolimont - an experience he later credited for his sense of practical mechanics. After leaving the railways in 1926, he enrolled at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School, (a forerunner of the Victorian College of the Arts), the most respected art school in the city. Bill's studies ultimately led him to work as a commercial illustrator... and a practicing artist who sold many of his paintings, predominantly watercolour landscapes.

⁷ Films & Filming (UK) Feb. 1955

Bill decided “he might as well starve in England as Australia”

When the Depression hit Australia and work and patrons became scarce, Bill decided “he might as well starve in England as Australia” and bought a one-way ticket to England with his savings...



Bill Constable - early 1930s (Constable archives - NGA)

Arriving in the UK, he continued his studies at the prestigious St Martins Art School whilst dabbling in London's experimental theatre scene and taking any odd jobs he could find, including working as a stagehand and appearing as an extra in a touring repertory group. Blessed with a brilliant drawing hand and a thorough art training, Bill eventually found well paid work as a magazine illustrator. However, despite his design experience and drafting skills, there was little opportunity to develop a professional foothold in his now preferred career of stage design due to the near death of English commercial theatre at that time and its closed shop outlook.



Bill's beautiful and technically accurate illustration for an Imperial Airways poster, early 1930s; (That's a Handley Page HP42, in case you are wondering...)

“Bill launched his career via the time-honoured system of working for free and networking...”

Homesick for Australia, Bill returned to Melbourne in the early 1930s... and found fame as a theatre designer almost immediately; The font of all knowledge, Wikipedia, sums up his “overnight” critical success as neatly as any other biographer:

On his return to Australia in the 1930s, Constable worked on several commercial design projects, and was noticed after his very first theatrical commission in 1933: the cubist stage decorations for the Gregan McMahon Players' production of Bridie's Jonah and the Whale at the Garrick in South Melbourne...

The press claimed that the "production will be notable for the unusual settings by William Constable, a young artist who recently reached Melbourne from abroad ... Constable's stage settings are great fun. They are simple and attractive."⁸



Bill @ 1940... Now sporting his trademark dashing moustache, possibly working with the New Theatre: His “Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts” may have been a product of his St Martin’s art school background.⁹

In fact, Bill launched his career via the time-honoured system of **working for free** and networking: As the SMH wrote in an article in 1950...

He came to do dozens of set designs on a non-paying basis for little theatres and look for the opportunity for professional work in his chosen line. He didn't have to wait too long. Marie Ney came out to Australia and commissioned him to design the settings for her three plays — Ladies in Retirement, Private Lives and No Time for Comedy. That was practically the end of the struggle. His sets were acclaimed as outstanding. He accepted Whitehall Productions' offer of the position of scene designer at the Minerva, Sydney, where during his five years with that company he produced sets for such hits as The Man Who Came to Dinner, You Can't Take It With You, and Watch on the Rhine.

⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Constable_\(designer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Constable_(designer))

⁹ http://newtheatrehistory.org.au/wiki/index.php/New_Theatre_Wiki:Home

A digression - the Art Deco Minerva Theatre in Kings Cross was originally built as a theatre; it was converted into the Metro Cinema in 1950, before becoming a live theatre once again for “Hair” in 1969: It has been the HQ for Kennedy Miller for more than a decade... until now. The building has recently been sold and will no doubt be turned into apartments!



*Minerva Theatre - the glittering opening night
May, 1939*



Metro Theatre - sold, 2018

Despite Bill’s prodigious output across multiple productions where he crafted much of the physical staging himself from set design through to construction, costumes and scenic art, he was twice rejected for military service in WW2 on medical grounds... where he possibly would have ended up painting camouflage nets alongside William Dobell, Donald Friend, (Art Director) Eric Thompson and other art luminaries. It was the Army’s loss and the theatre’s gain...

Bill’s design vision was not limited to conventional dramatic theatre: During the war years, a meeting with the self-exiled Czech émigré Edouard Borovansky, a former leading member of the Ballet Russe who toured Australia in 1938, suddenly propelled Bill into becoming the principal designer for his newly formed company - the now legendary Borovansky Ballet. (This company later provided the foundation for the Australian Ballet when it was formed in 1962).

Again, that Oracle of all knowledge - Wikipedia - sums it up succinctly...

Constable and Edouard Borovansky met in the 1940s, beginning a lifelong creative partnership and friendship. As scenic director of the Borovansky Ballet Company for 15 years, Constable was behind most productions as a designer and a painter. Frank Salter described Borovansky and Constable working together "in total harmony over his [Constable] entire Australian career."

For some 15 years Bill Constable designed nearly all of the Borovansky’s ballets, (some 20 in total!), whilst working on other productions, often simultaneously.

“Corroboree” featured an all-white cast costumed as aborigines mimicking aboriginal dance moves, with western ballet flourishes”



Bill designing the aboriginal themed Borovansky ballet "Terra Australis" 1947 (NLA & Olga Sedneva)

In 1950 Bill made headlines as the acclaimed designer of that year's biggest theatrical event - the staging of the National Theatre Ballet's full length work "Corroboree". (Borovansky had declined the commission). It premiered at the Empire Theatre, Sydney in July with a score by John Antill that synthesised aboriginal ceremonial dance rhythms with familiar western orchestration... ("Stravinsky with clapsticks", as a comment on Youtube describes it - accurately).



Bill's 1939 design for an earlier aboriginal themed Borovansky ballet¹⁰

Like similar ballets in this less culturally cognisant period, "Corroboree" featured an all-white cast costumed as aborigines mimicking aboriginal dance moves, with western ballet flourishes. The costumes and stage settings also appropriated totemic aboriginal tribal motifs that were disconnected from any sacred ceremonial context.¹¹

¹⁰ <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/37291>

¹¹ <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/131760/20120120-0944/www.nla.gov.au/pub/nlanews/2004/mar04/story-3.pdf>



White fella ballet ... 1950-1954 (NSW State Library & Olga Sedneva)

The ballet's design was pure theatrical licence on Bill's part; the costumes (jointly executed with Robin Lovejoy) were closer to a Ballet Russe aesthetic than aboriginal anthropology... and the red earth and limitless horizon of his setting owes more to the bare wastelands and spatial themes of Australian artists such as Russell Drysdale and Sidney Nolan than any realistic representation of the western desert.

Nevertheless, in conservative 1950's Australia, this indigenous mash-up was considered extraordinarily sophisticated and radical - and lauded as an artistic coming of age by both the public and critics alike! It was subsequently re-staged several times over the following years and was a feature of the Royal Gala Performance for the Queen's visit in 1954.

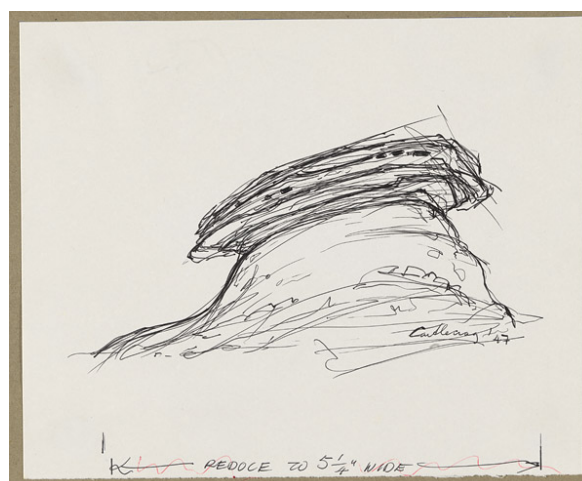
Despite the ballet's dodgy hybridisation, Bill's set design came in for particular praise: Under the unequivocal headline "Australian Ballet of Genius"; The Sydney Morning Herald's reviewer stated -

Constable's decor, a rocky desert outcrop rising to a garish sky, is a masterpiece of theatre design...

The Sunday Telegraph was even more gushing -

A Spellbinding thing of beauty... as the curtain rose on a scene of bewitching quality, wherein the lone and level expanse of the aeons- old Australian land was unfolded with the inverted bowl of mystic sky enveloping it. The whole is dominated by a time-fretted stone, rich in the pastels of Central Australian colouring. It was a triumph of stage' art that all this was accomplished... This decor by Australia's greatest stage painter, William Constable, expressed the spirit of the land!¹²

The central feature of the set - "a time fretted stone" - was actually based upon a small sandstone rock Bill found poking out of the harbour near his home in Castlecrag, Sydney. He scaled it up from 1.5 metres to about 6 metres and built it as a solid object...



Bill's rock sketch, 1947 (AGNSW collection)

¹² The Sydney Sun, July 4, 1950, p 17

A canvas backdrop was hung in a semi-circle around this towering feature and boldly invoked an infinity landscape - a graphic mirroring of the vast spaces of the Australian outback. Cultural mash-ups aside, it still makes a powerful theatrical statement:



An early version (dated 1949) of Bill's design for "Corroboree" (AGNSW collection).

Becoming a design star brought Bill as many commissions as he could possibly handle, and then some...

An article in People Magazine in 1951 describes his workload...

His output acreage is tremendous. At one period last year he was working concurrently on four new ballet settings with 82 costumes for Borovansky; an opera setting for The Meistersingers, played at Sydney Conservatorium, and a couple of assorted plays, one for a Little Theatre and one for JC Williamson. Constable being chief scenic artist for 'The Firm' in Sydney...¹³

In 1953, he was at the height of his powers and reputation when Hollywood came calling...

At the peak of his abilities in 1950, he even found time to take on a commission from Qantas to fly around the world in a Super Constellation and produce a book of sketches from his travels -

¹³ People Magazine, Feb 14, 1951

preliminary concept designs. In 1951 he designed the sets for the National Opera of New South Wales' inaugural season: *Carmen*, *A Masked Ball* and the Australian premiere of *Il Seraglio*. In 1955 he designed for the Peter Scriven puppets and created the settings for the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust's first production, *Medea*.¹⁵



Set Design for Peter Scriven's Puppet Theatre



Bill's rendering of Eugene Goosen's Sydney Opera House concept - featuring an outdoor amphitheatre and art deco elements similar to the Minerva Theatre.



Bill's design for the National Opera's "Carmen" Act #2, 1951 - watercolour & gouache. Similar stucco walls, varying floor levels, archways chunky wood and small pane windows would soon feature prominently in the designs for his first movie...

Bill Constable had become Australia's design superstar - a veritable dynamo who could turn his hand to anything; In the words of one journalist of the time... our 'dean of decor'!

In 1953, he was at the height of his powers and reputation when Hollywood came calling...

¹⁵ <https://liveperformance.com.au/halloffame/williamconstable1.html>

3. ‘AARRRRHH THERE, MATEY’ - LONG JOHN SILVER RISES... AGAIN!

“It’s as if a mad uncle has had one Xmas sherry too many and is wandering the house frightening the kids by doing his pirate schtick...”



“Aarr, fortune rides the shoulders of them what schemes...”

It’s a truth universally acknowledged that there is only ONE definitive pirate - **Robert Newton!**

Now revered as the **patron saint of “Talk Like a Pirate Day”**, the Cornwall raised actor first strapped up his left leg and took on board Long John’s crutch and parrot for the 1950 Disney film “Treasure Island”. Already known as a fine Shakespearian performer and a great character actor in films such as David Lean’s majestic “David Copperfield”, (where he played the evil Bill Sykes like no-one else before or since), “Bobby” Newton ramped up his native West County accent, added heavy doses of corn syrup - and dialled it all up to 11! The affect is closer to performance art than acting...

“...Looking at the performance now it appears entirely over-the-top; he’s limping, sweating, unshaven, bursting out of his clothes, licking his lips and bulging, turning and squinting his eyes as if they’re on opposing, uncontrollable gimbals, each intent on taking sole control of his vision. It’s as if a mad uncle has had one Xmas sherry too many and is wandering the house frightening the kids by doing his pirate schtick...”¹⁶

¹⁶ <https://sabotagetimes.com/tv-film/the-man-who-taught-the-world-how-to-talk-like-a-pirate>



Arrrrrr! "Talk Like a Pirate" Lessons Direct from the Cap'n...

Open this link - it's worth it! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yC_PR7YWQOc

His influence was so profound on kids at the dawn of the TV age, it has now become a living part of our culture...

"... people like Tony Hancock, Peter Cook, Robert Crumb and Keith Moon (all acknowledged fans of the film) started impersonating Newton, along with millions of kids around the English speaking world. Moon, in particular, bore a strong resemblance to Newton and used to dress as Silver and adopt the character whenever possible, right into adult life. The Monty Python team, too, were all fans, creating the Watford Long John Silver Impersonators for one sketch... The Simpson's sea-captain, Spongebob's Mr Krabs, Tom Baker as Captain Rum in Blackadder, Patrick Stewart in The Pagemaster, Graham Chapman in Yellowbeard, Richard Dreyfuss's taunting of Quint in Jaws..."¹⁷



Cartoon homage by the great Robert Crumb

With added eye rolling and liberal sprinklings of **"Aaarrrrhh matey"** (he was apparently the first to use the phrase), across three big movies and a TV series, Bobby Newton created THE pirate template for all time.¹⁸ In the 1950 "Treasure Island", (shot in Cornwall and at Denham Studios in London), he played Long John as a rum soaked, double dealing but extremely colourful rogue with a parrot on his shoulder... who was only semi-murderous; in 1952, in Hollywood, he trotted out exactly the same character for the title role in "Blackbeard The Pirate", without the missing leg or parrot, but with more

¹⁷ <https://theclassicfilmguide.wordpress.com/2014/09/07/robert-newton-the-patron-saint-of-pirate-speech/>

¹⁸ <https://sabotagetimes.com/tv-film/the-man-who-taught-the-world-how-to-talk-like-a-pirate>

rum, added evil and totally murderous... (though he gets his comeuppance at the end of the film - buried in sand up to his neck, with the tide coming in).

Robert Newton's pirate character development arc...



Treasure Island 1950



Blackbeard 1952



Long John Silver 1954

In 1953, struggling with the alcoholism that was affecting his prospects in both Hollywood and the UK, several failed marriages and escalating legal and tax problems, Newton was once again ready to take up the rum and crutch in darkest Australia... but without the parrot (at least on his shoulder - it gets parked on a perch in the tavern) and barely murderous at all!

According to gossip I once heard from an old technician, the reason it was on a permanent perch was because Bobby threw it across the room whenever they attempted to place it on his shoulder!

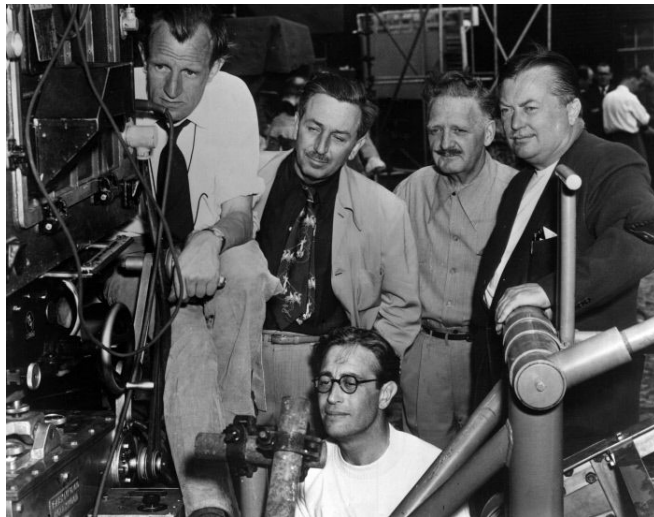


*"Aarrh... Long John's not wearing no f*** parrot this time!"*

Another Digression: For the Designers and Artists reading this - Robert Newton was the son of artist Algernon Newton, R.A. and the grandson of Henry Newton, a co-founder of "Winsor and Newton" fine art supplies - the inventors of paint in a tube!



Director Byron Haskin, a better than average studio stalwart (the good 1953 “War of the Worlds” - not the Tom Cruise one), had already directed Newton as Long John in the successful Disney version.



The substantial figure of Byron Haskin (right) directing Robert Newton in “Treasure Island” in 1950 ... with Walt Disney (bad tie) riding shotgun

Even more intriguingly, Haskin had also worked with several Australian actors on a South Sea adventure film shot in Fiji (“His Majesty O’Keefe”, 1953) and considered they were capable of filling the minor roles in “L.J.S”. In fact, the LJS co-lead Lloyd Berrell (“Mendoza”) and three others from the Fiji cast made the cut.¹⁹

By 1953 Bobby Newton was more or less in professional purgatory after walking out/getting fired (reports differ) from the lead role in a major UK production (“Svengali”, 1952) and so the stage was set for a new Long John to find a safe harbour in a friendly port on the other side of the world - far from the British tax office and the “Svengali” Producers’ lawsuits... (though both eventually caught up with him whilst he was filming in Australia)²⁰.

Robert Newton To Make Film Here

LONDON, Saturday.—British film star Robert Newton will go to Australia early this New Year to play in a Technicolor sequel to the film “Treasure Island.”

The new film, to be called “Return to Treasure Island,” will be made on Sydney beaches and in South Sea Islands.

Newton, who played Long John Silver in “Treasure Island,” will have the same role in the sequel.

Hollywood film technicians will fly to Australia in February.

Newton arrived in Britain this week from the United States.

Newton’s fourth wife, Hollywood publicity agent Vera Budrick, and their baby son Kim, will go to Australia with him.



ROBERT NEWTON

Newton was hailed as a reformed character when he arrived in London this week.

He told reporters, “I am not a wild character now, you know.”

Winking, he added, “Not like the old days, eh?”

In February, 1951, Newton flew out of Britain in a hurry, taking his baby son, Nicholas, with him and leaving his third wife, Natalie, recovering from a nervous breakdown in a London hospital.

She divorced him soon afterwards and Newton married his present wife in June, 1952, after a stormy romance.

“Reformed” Robert Newton SMH Sept 1953

Actor Not Upset By Debt Report

“It’s nothing,” said film star Robert Newton when told in Sydney yesterday of a London report that he owed £46,300 in income-tax in Britain.

“My London agent has it well in hand,” he added.

The report said it was also alleged that Newton owed £700 to various small creditors, including £300 to bookmakers.

The assistant Official Receiver told a creditors’ meeting in London that Newton was a man who “can and does earn quite a lot of money,” and it might be in his power to pay the debts in full.

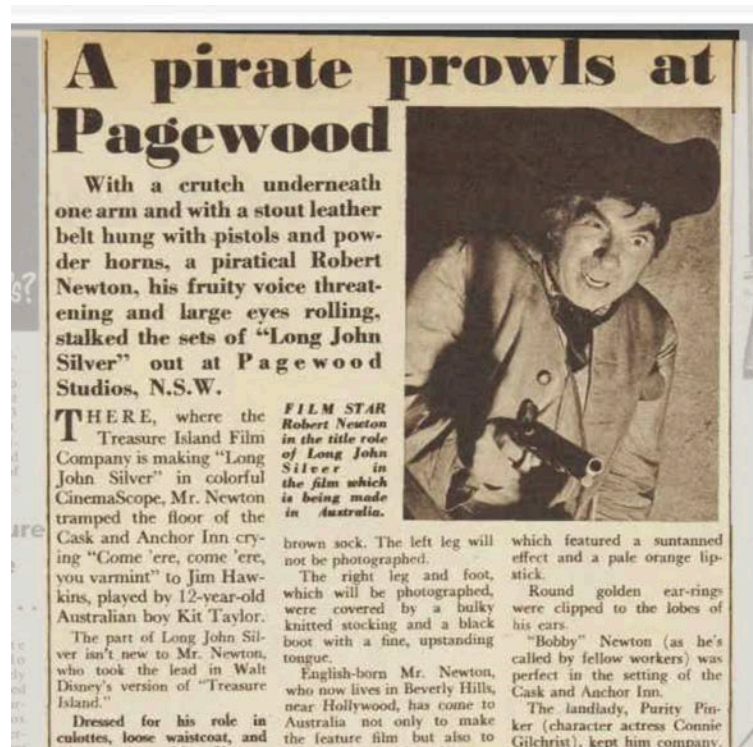
Newton has been making the film, “Long John Silver” in Sydney.

SMH Sept 1954

Regardless of his woes and his hellraiser reputation, Bobby Newton’s arrival was big news in Australia - and the film was a huge event that the local press couldn’t get enough of...

¹⁹ Guy Doleman was later replaced by future Hollywood star Rod Taylor because he wouldn’t wear contact lenses or grow a beard!

²⁰ The “Svengali” producers sued Newton for the full cost of the film - about three quarters of a million dollars. In a separate action, he was declared bankrupt by the British tax office in Sept 1954.



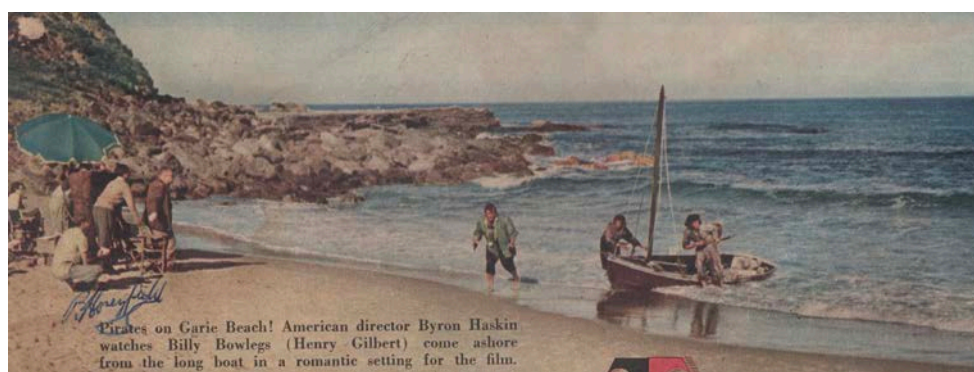
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4. Porto Bello in Pagewood

The art department prepared detailed paintings of 102 costumes and 28 different sets...

It's unknown how Bill Constable came to be recruited for "Long John Silver", but his reputation as the country's leading theatre designer obviously made him a good fit to revisit the stagy settings of the Disney version of "Treasure Island" that the producers were essentially basing their production look upon. (Constable family hearsay suggests that Byron Haskin and Bill's sister in law, a London journalist, knew each other and she may have helped make a connection possible)²².

Despite its self-declared one million pound budget, "LJS" appeared to have less than half the funding of its predecessors with their much larger street sets and ornate interiors; In fact, Byron Haskin later claimed that Joe Kaufman ran out of money during the production "making shooting extremely difficult"²³ ... as it would!



Byron Haskin & crew: Garie Beach, 1st day of shooting (cutting c/o Ken Muggleston)

²¹ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/51775862>

²² Conversation with Dee Constable, August 4, 2018

²³ <https://blog.goo.ne.jp/utaski1930/e/5fb38ac1e9a0cf612e3e126215d48b00>

However, for a lavish pirate adventure set in 1770, there weren't many corners that could be cut from the Art Department. Even if scaled down from earlier versions, everything had to be built - including the main street of the Caribbean town of 'Porto Bello', interiors of the "Cask & Anchor" Tavern... its kitchen and bedrooms... the Governor's residence, ship's cabins, ship decks... model ships... real ships... practical cannons ... a jetty... the rival pirate town... a stockade... and all in accurate period; It was a huge shopping list for any experienced Designer and his team, let alone a first timer!

They built an inn and a cobbled street at Pagewood, a bush stockade... and a galleon on a barge at Botany Bay...The art department prepared detailed paintings of 102 costumes and 28 different sets; the properties department assembled muskets, lanterns, cutlasses, casks, blocks of gold (wood covered with gold leaf), and even rubber belaying pins; the wardrobe department made costumes and hats; and the carpenters made furniture.

By the time shooting began... Treasure Island Pictures was employing 170 people: 84 production workers (electricians, carpenters etc.), 32 artists and cast, 40 extras, and 14 executives.²⁴

Little art department material survives from the film, but it is known that Bill illustrated every set with detailed paintings and sketches... one of which can be glimpsed in this promotional supplement image published in the Sun Herald, 1954...



Director Byron Haskin shows star Robert Newton and art director Bill Constable how they stole a scene in days of the old Hollywood silents!

Bill's concept artwork didn't cut corners either...

²⁴ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18424923>



Concept design for the kitchen of the "Cask and Anchor" Tavern



Long John being introduced to sobriety in the completed set

Able assisted by fellow designer, Desmond Downing, (later to have a stellar career, principally at the ABC)²⁵, Bill leapt into the task. Helen Frizell, a renowned reporter for the Women's Weekly, observed the pre-production...

The setting, designed by Australian artists Bill Constable and Desmond Downing, had been carefully created by technicians. New furniture had been carefully antiqued; spun-rubber cobwebs hung in corners. Old bottle-glass windows in the inn, I learned, were made from glass dessert plates bought in a chain store and stippled over with rubber and coloured paint. Genuine antiques around the set included pewter mugs stacked on shelves and the pistols worn by Mr. Newton have been lent by Major Millett, of Melbourne.

*Draughtsmen and carpenters were working on another set, the main street of the pirate town, Porto Bello, cobbled and overhung by beamed two-storied houses.*²⁶

²⁵ Desmond Downing designed the landmark ABC TV series "Ben Hall" (1975), including a finely detailed period street set built at Smokey Dawson's Ranch, Ingleside. Downing died before the series was released. The street set was left standing as part of the location deal, but was totally destroyed by a bush fire in 1979.

²⁶ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/51775862>



Kit Taylor pretending to be screen tested for the part in which he was already cast - filmed in Bill's 'Cask & Anchor' set for a PR stunt; Cinesound newsreel, 1954²⁷



Interior - 'Cask and Anchor Tavern'... Long John's regular haunt

²⁷ NFSA reference 75746 - Cinesound collection

Sews For Pirates



MISS DESMONDE DOWNING, who is assistant to art director MR. BILL CONSTABLE.

WITH artist Bill Constable—who is art director for the film, "Long John Silver"—Desmond Downing is working as assistant in a tiny studio at Television City, Pagewood, with sketches and designs everywhere but on the ceiling.

Both of them, well known as stage and theatre designers, have also worked in films.

There are more than 100 individual costumes in "Long John Silver"—Australia's first CinemaScope film—including 40 pirates, whose costumes, as soon as completed, then have to be "aged" and tattered.

"It's essential to understand the film personality of a character when designing the costume," says Miss Downing.

Long John Silver's favour-

the inn has been built in the centre of the big studio at Television City. The cobwebs are there, above the huge fireplace, and the benches and tables are scattered by cutlass slashes and rings left by pewter tankards in the 1770-style Jamaican inn—all most realistically reproduced.

From Jamaican alley scenes to a deserted stockade, the 28 sets which Constable and Downing are designing are being approved and the actual building is under way.

Desmond Downing & Bill - May 1954 (SMH)



Co-star Connie Gilchrist as 'Miss Purity Pinker', Landlady of the Cask & Anchor... who spends her time trying to pin Long John down to matrimony

The Pastel Pirates of Pagewood

"We've tried to keep these pirates from becoming too Gilbert and Sullivan... You'll notice that none of them is dressed in bright colours; only pastels".
(Martin Rackin - LJS screenwriter)²⁸



My hat is better than yours!

²⁸ SMH: May 1954: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18424923?>

Despite the screenwriter's protestation, the Pirates of Pagewood certainly exhibit an overall measure of Gilbert & Sullivan-ness: Long John recycles his "Treasure Island" red coat once more and holds up his floppy legged breeches with a 6 inch wide belt. A black tricorne hat sits jauntily on his head. His pirate rival Mendoza is resplendent in an emerald and gold braid three quarter coat with huge turn back sleeves, topped with a purple felt and feather hat creation that matches his mauve breeches and would be considered over the top even for a Spring Racing Carnival. The rank and file pirates exhibit a definitive 70s pop idol look (big hair, lots of puffy sleeved shirts open to the navel) ... with an enhanced proclivity for, yes, pastels!



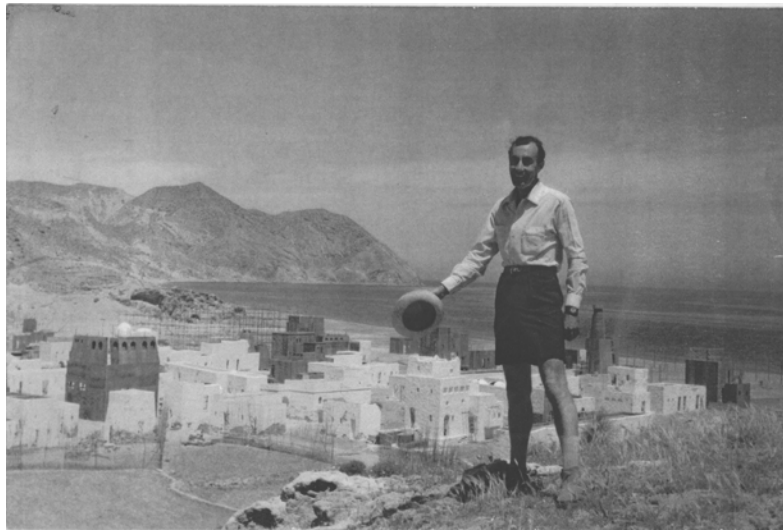
Altogether now - "For I am a Pirate King! And it is, it is a glorious thing to be a Pirate King..."

But in the scheme of the Cinemascope eye feast photographed by American DOP Carl Guthrie and his Australian operator, Ross Wood, the lurid costumes Bill Constable designed match the overall fantasy palette of the film perfectly.

Even the Porto Bello Main Street at night is lit in similar disco colours...



Enter Ken Muggleston: Props Buyer/Set Dresser...



Set Decorator, Spain 1968 - "Lawrence of Arabia"²⁹

23 year old Ken Muggleston joined the Long John Silver art department as soon as he heard there was a film going: He'd met Bill Constable socially, knew they would need people with art backgrounds, (he had some interior design training at East Sydney tech and worked in furniture sales at a department store, though he wasn't an artist) - so he took a chance and wrote Bill a letter offering his services. The letter led to an interview and then to a job.

It was to be the start of a brilliant career: Ken quickly became a skilled buyer and set decorator and went on to do the entire series and several other films at Pagewood before heading overseas in 1958 - where it took him 2 years to break into the English studio system! Once he was in, he never looked back - working on a succession of classic films such as "Dr Zhivago", "The Taming of the Shrew"... and winning an Oscar for set decoration for "Oliver" in 1968!



Long John Silver - Buyer/Dresser 1953³⁰



The same set being filmed (newsreel screen grab)

²⁹ Courtesy of Ken Muggleston

³⁰ Ibid



And as it appears on screen...



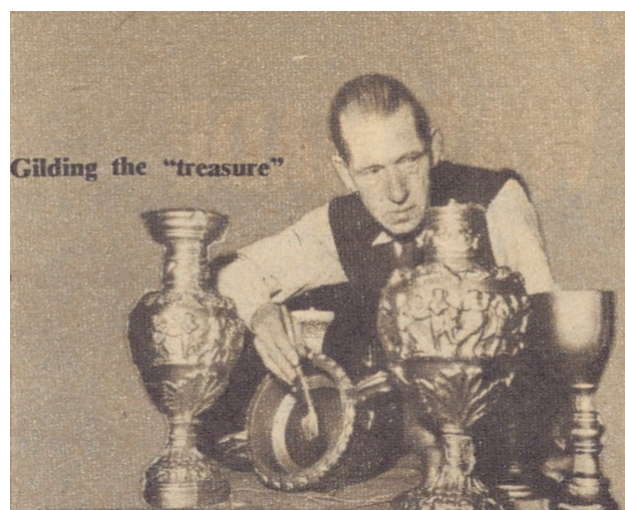
Miss Purity's bedroom set... as dressed by Ken³¹

Apart from locals with limited experience, various seasoned professionals joined the team - mostly English emigres, such as their Construction Manager/Art Director Charles Woolveridge who most likely arrived at Pagewood for Ealing Studios' "Eureka Stockade" in 1949 and stayed on.

Props Master Ted Still began his career in the UK during the silent cinema era...



PROPS MAN Ted Still has had 35 years' experience in the film industry in England. He came to Australia last year to visit his son. Ted describes himself as "the man who has to find everything, from an elephant to a peanut."



Props Master Ted Still

³¹ Courtesy of Ken Muggleston



Ted's treasure on screen



Essential in a "period" film are the wigmakers. The pirate fights are certainly hair-raising!

Blessed are the (Australian) wig makers

Other experienced professionals were recruited from ballet and theatre - including Russian make-up maestro Dimitry Ustrizoff who had started in the Moscow Theatre doing make-up for Pavlova...



Make-up artist Dmitri transforms Rod Taylor for the part of blind Israel Hands. He fits special contact lenses to Rod's eyes.

When Dmitri is finished Rod looks sightless and actually he can't see a thing! Such skilful make-up certainly adds realism.



Hard work and glamor

WARDROBE MASTER Cy Howe fits a cloak on actor Gordon Chater. The wardrobe department is in a converted army hut once used as an officers' mess.

Wardrobe Master Cy Howe - trained in Sydney theatre, working on the series



The Main Street...

"the most expensive set ever built in Australia"

Bill's Porto Bello main street set is the centrepiece of the film's production design - and it certainly gets a workout in both the film and the series; It's an appropriate jumble of angles and textures, all beautifully finished and dressed...

BELOW: Main street of the pirate town of Porto Bello is the most expensive movie set ever built in Australia. The sinister figure under the sign of the Cask and Anchor Inn is Patch (Grant Taylor), Long John Silver's henchman.



Porto Bello street set ... signed by featured actor Grant Taylor (father of co-star Kit Taylor - "Jim Hawkins")³²



Plastering the set...

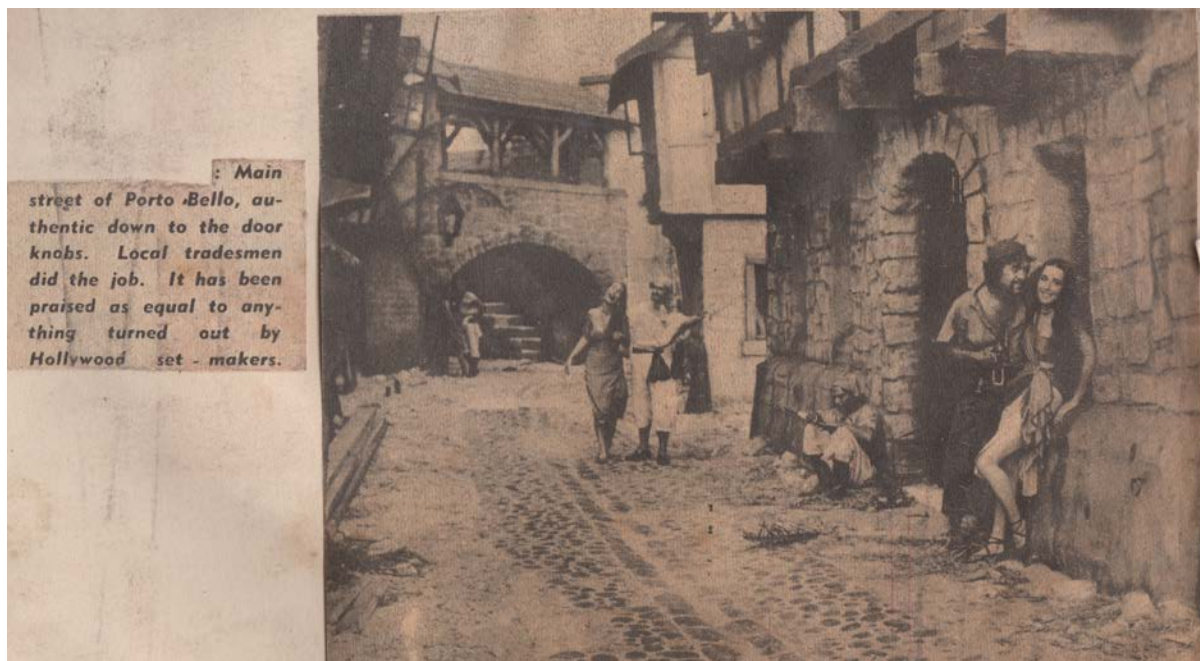
Compared to the Disney Porto Bello of 1950, Bill's set doesn't stack up too badly, though it's obvious Disney had a bigger budget...



Disney's Porto Bello - 1950

Still, the local Press couldn't get enough of "the most expensive set ever built in Australia"...

³² Cutting courtesy of Ken Muggleston



Pagewood's Porto Bello 1954... note the cobbles!



Miss Purity hails a cab outside her Tavern

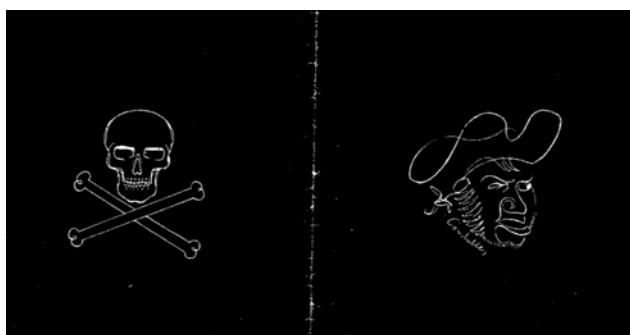


Anyone seen a one-legged pirate in there?

And being Sydney, a high society charity function was held on Bill's set - with Long John pressed into making an appearance as a tour guide...



The greatest movie set
ever erected in Australia
will be the setting for the
"LONG JOHN SILVER BALL"
Saturday, July 24, 1954,
at 8-30 p.m. Double Tickets £4.4.0
Drinks available. Television City,
Wentworth Ave., Pagewood
DRESS:- TREASURE ISLAND COSTUMES.



and a Pirate Ball... for which Bill designed the Invite (Mascot Library)

Plasticine Titles...

Bill also crafted a large and colourful plasticine tableau for the opening titles which was shot in the studio...



Bill tweaking the plasticine



Bill's Pirate Ships...



Bill's Barge - probably in Port Hacking

Unlike the Disney film which had a full size historical replica to film, Bill's pirate ship had to be built from scratch in the studio backlot - and a version of it duplicated on a barge in Port Hacking. The wide shots of the barge at sea are dodgy at best, as are some risible glass shots and mattes, but the practical set pieces are totally convincing...





A pirate's life on the barge wasn't always a happy one...

The "Below deck" studio sets were equally authentic ... and well detailed

'LONG JOHN SILVER'

A JOSEPH KAUFMAN PRODUCTION
in **CinemaScope** EASTMAN COLOUR

starring **ROBERT NEWTON** and introducing **KIT TAYLOR** with **Connie Gilchrist**

Directed by **Byron Haskin**

RELEASED BY 20th CENTURY-FOX

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Cert 'U'



with plenty of booze on hand, naturally...

Two motorized model ships were built for a battle scene; they were reported to have been shot in the swimming pool sized tank in the studio backlot against a cyc, but in this screen grab they appear to have been set loose on a quiet day somewhere offshore...



*A pirate Rave party... and the only actor ever to OUT OVERACT
Robert Newton!*

Amongst the 28 major sets was a **pirate rave party** at Garie Beach in the National Park...



Which doesn't end well for the ravers...



Aarrh mateys - why don't we torch it?

Centennial Park got a practical wharf and jetty...



One set Bill didn't have to build was the Treasure Cave itself - at Jenolan Caves...



A log Stockade was constructed at Waterfall in the National Park... which was also torched, of course...



In the stockade the pirates were visited by the mad, blind and murderous “Israel Hands” - a carryover character from Long John’s previous adventures. He’s played by the only actor ever to OUT OVERACT Robert Newton...



Would you believe - ROD TAYLOR in contact lenses! His second feature film... and the part that got him to Hollywood!³³

And at the end of July 1954, after 63 days of main unit shooting, suddenly it was all over...

³³ <http://www.rod Taylorsite.com>

4. End of the Pirate Dream

“It also turned out that the Commonwealth Bank of Australia actually owned the film”

The feature wrapped and the series production began almost immediately - utilising the same sets, costumes and key cast. Bill Constable soldiered on for half the series though the episode budgets were shrinking fast.

Mark Penrose's recent biography of Robert Newton, "Apologise Later", states that at the outset, each episode was calculated at \$75,000... but had shrunk to \$11,000 - \$12,000 by the last dozen.³⁴ Byron Haskin soon returned home (he later claimed he was broke from lack of tax concessions and undelivered promises)³⁵ and a more prosaic director, another US import, Lee ("Roll-em") Sholem took over took over for the 2nd part of the series³⁶. Bobby also hit the bottle once again and often couldn't reel off complete lines - forcing the director to break them into different shots³⁷, making the shoot doubly difficult...



“Roll-em” Sholem on the series shoot

On the 17th December, 1954, the feature film premiered in Sydney and was followed up by a Christmas Holidays release in the UK...

³⁴ Apologise Later- The Biography of Robert Newton; Penrose, M; Olchon Press, (Revised Edition) 2016. p347

³⁵ <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cp/5/>

³⁶ “If only one Hollywood name is synonymous with speed and efficiency, it has to be Lee "Roll 'Em" Sholem. In a 40-year career, he directed upwards of 1300 shows, both features and TV episodes, without once going over schedule--a feat probably unparalleled in Hollywood history”. (IMDB).

³⁷ Penrose; p347

"Long John" sets record

Sydney, Sunday
FILMING of Australia's first CinemaScope color feature film, "Long John Silver," has been completed in a record shooting time of 63 working days.

Mr. Joseph Kaufman, producer, and Mr. Byron Haskin, director, give full credit to Australian technicians for a world-class job.

Both executives are excited about the film, which will be released simultaneously in London, New York and Sydney, in December.

Work has begun on the first of the 28 television shorts to be made this year at Pagewood on the Long John Silver theme.

The company expects to make more than one a week and more probably will follow the initial 28.

Four full-scale features are scheduled for production next year and at present script writers are working on the book "Come Away Fearless" by Australian Colin Simpson.

U.S. Producer's Plans For 3 Films Here

American film producer Mr. Joseph Kaufman said yesterday that he planned to make three "very big" CinemaScope films in Australia in the next two years.

Mr. Kaufman has just finished the film "Long John Silver" at Pagewood Studios, at a cost of about £500,000.

He leaves for the United States to-morrow to arrange world distribution for the film, which will have its world premiere in Sydney at Christmas.

Mr. Kaufman said he had arranged for an option on the Pagewood Studios for two years.

His company, Treasure Island Productions, planned to spend about £100,000 on new stages and equipment.

Joe Kaufman's promises... July & Dec, 1954

Although hammered by foreign critics for being a 2nd rate version of the Disney original, the feature actually did reasonably good business in Australia and respectable business around the world... but since it was effectively owned by Fox Distributors, little profit flowed back to the producers.



Dodgy Joe and Which Bank...?

It also turned out that the **Commonwealth Bank of Australia** actually owned the film (and presumably the series) ... since they had facilitated a massive overdraft to the producers in return for a 100% collateral guarantee! (Note: I had heard this was the case early in my own career when Pagewood veterans still worked in the industry - but never believed it until I read Graham Shirley's interview with Byron Haskin in the March-April (1975) Cinema Papers) ...



Dodgy Joe looking over his shoulder... "is that the Commonwealth Bank watching us"?

(Haskin)... Ideally, we needed a reduced economy for making motion pictures and wanted a locale with an English- speaking background. Our producer Joseph Kauffman travelled down to Canberra, gave the politicians a load of bullshit and then approached the Commonwealth Bank, who said "yes" with a 100 per cent collateral. We had American finance which we added to the Commonwealth's advance, and also investment from other Australian contacts...Having found the Pagewood studios unoccupied but in fair condition, we refurbished them and started out with the feature.

It only gets crazier...

(our Producer) made deal after deal, and one day one of his financiers reneged — a since- inmate of a US penitentiary called Louis Wolfsen. We could never hang it on our producer, because all of his deals were made at 9,140m over international water, and we ran up a whacking overdraft with the Commonwealth Bank. That was the beginning of their taking the thing over. We figured out later that having started with a budget of \$476,000, we had spent almost a million dollars on the feature and the 26 half-hour television shorts. It was a case of mortgaging the mortgages, or like building a bridge and having to mortgage the first half to build the other. We never did get to shore with it.³⁸

The TV series ran for years throughout the world, but the mythical treasure of Treasure Island eluded the producing partnership ... except maybe for Joe Kaufman who somehow pirated the financial returns.

Joe Kaufman never did return to Australia to make a slate of feature films... and in the end, for all of his promises of a Hollywood in Pagewood, Joe turned out to be just another carpetbagger.

Despite the loss of future Treasure Island Pictures productions, the crew and cast benefited from the opportunity to develop their craft skills on both the film and the series and many continued on to other movies shot at Pagewood before its enforced sell-off to Holden Motors in 1959. It could also be said that the entire Long John Silver adventure trained and developed a core of dedicated film technicians who helped create the foundations for the film renaissance of the 1970s... and even produced a few legends such as actor Rod Taylor, camera operator Ross Wood, (who took over as DOP for the series and later started his own commercial production company that trained an important generation of Cinematographers) ... and of course the production designer Bill Constable.

³⁸ <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=cp>



'Find the Treasure Island treasure' board game... only Joe Kaufman won!



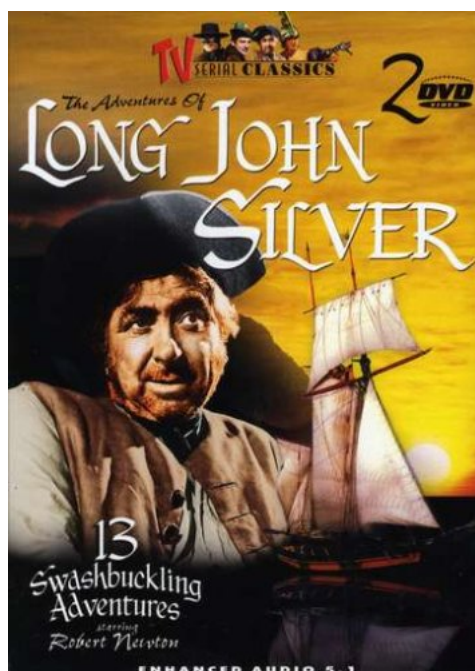
Pagewood Film Studios - Camera department 1952

Top row L-R: Bill Grimmond (1st A/C), Otto Heller (Visiting UK DOP), Tommy Day (Grip), Carl Kayser ACS (DOP/Op),
 Mid row L-R: Unknown, Ross Wood ACS (DOP/Op), Bob Wright 2nd A/C, Keith Loone (2nd Unit DOP),
 Bottom row: L-R: Unknown crew member, Unknown crew member, Warren Means (Gaffer)

The remaining crew also had a great wrap party after episode #26... which they completed with many wearing leftover pirate costumes!



The last pirate tea break; photo - Courtesy of John Maclean



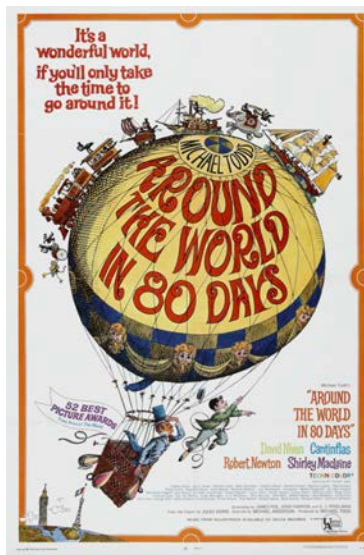
Half of the series is now available on DVD...

5. Gone With The Wind...

Robert Newton, (1905-1956) - “Long John Silver”

“and he did it on one leg, while drunk. Not bad going”

Bobby Newton returned from Australia to his home in Beverly Hills as an exile from British lawsuits and tax demands... which inevitably followed him to California and placed him under intense pressure to work and retrieve his finances. Now deemed “unreliable” due to his alcoholism and therefore pretty close to unemployable, David Niven, an old mate whom Bobby had helped out early in his career, came to his rescue by legging him up into a lead role and a hefty fee in “Around the World in 80 Days” - which later turned into an Oscar winning blockbuster. He also went cold sober for the main shoot, though he turned up staggering drunk for the pick-ups. The film did lead to further prestige work (including an episode of ‘Alfred Hitchcock Presents’), but the physical damage was irreparable...



Bobby Newton's \$100,000 payday, 1956

Battered by decades of alcohol addiction, asthma and now diagnosed with a heart condition, Bobby was prescribed a cocktail of Hollywood wonder drugs - including the 1950's psychotropic drug du jour - “Miltown” - an anti-anxiety compound that “calmed laboratory rodents without actually sedating them...”³⁹! (It's also known as the “Mother's Little Helper” in the Rolling Stones song of the same name.)⁴⁰



Syndromes of the Sixties

The battered parent syndrome

She's the paradox of our age. Compared to her mother, she has more education, more usable income and more labor-saving devices. Yet she is physically and emotionally overworked, overwrought and, by the time you see her—probably overwhelmed.

What went wrong? In parenthood something other than the rose-faded moon of the woman's imagination? Is anxiety and tension fast becoming the occupational disease of the housewife?

Some say it's unrealistic to educate a woman and then expect her to become with the Cub Scouts as an intellectual outfit.

Or to grant that she is socially, politically and culturally equal, while continuing to demand domestic and biological subservience.

Or to expect her to shoulder the guilt-burden of this child-centered age without unraveling around the emotional edges.

Or to compete with her husband's job for his time and involvement.

But whatever the cause, the consequences—anxiety, tension, insomnia, functional disorders, ill-waiting rooms. Sometimes it helps to add 'Miltown' to her treatment—to help her relax both emotionally and muscularly. It's no substitute for a week in Bermuda, or for emotional readjustment. But it will often make the latter easier for her, as well as for the physician.

And 'Miltown' has been doing just that—for a dozen years now—with substantial success.

Indications: Effective in relief of anxiety and tension (acute, adjustment) when anxiety may be causative or the limiting factor. Fosters normal sleep through anti-anxiety and muscle-relaxant properties.

Contraindications: Previous allergic or idiosyncratic reactions to meprobamate. (Brief summary of prescribing information is continued on next page.)

MILTOWN® (MEPROBAMATE)
when reassurance is not enough

© Wallace Pharmaceuticals, Inc., New York, N.Y.

“Mother's Little Helper”

³⁹ “Let Them Eat Prozac”:

https://books.google.com.au/books?id=aK2__vkxiPOC&redir_esc=y

⁴⁰ <https://io9.gizmodo.com/this-is-the-drug-in-the-rolling-stones-song-mothers-li-1693032181?IR=T>

On Sunday March 25th, 1956, barely a year after returning from Australia, he popped a Miltown, took a sip of water and died on his lounge room floor in front of his 4th wife with whom he was attempting a reconciliation. He was 50 years old.

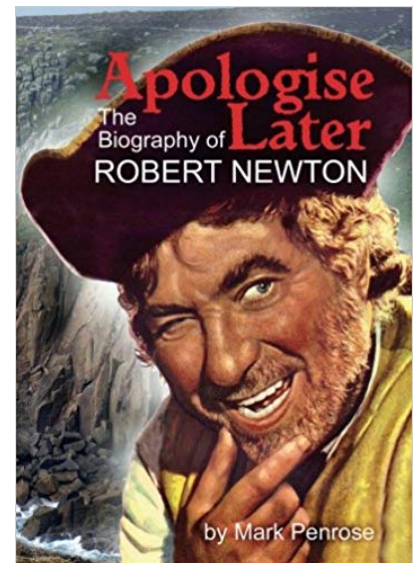
His brilliant appearances on stage, his memorable Shakespeare roles, his decades of subtly nuanced film performances... his years of being a top box office star, his friendships and collaborations with the elite of the acting world... are all now pretty much a footnote to his main creation - the immortal, over the top, eye-rolling pirate who said “AAARRRRHH” - a lot!

“The Sabotage Times” entertainment blog describes his position in our collective cinematic memory as well as any other commentary...

He never lived to see the part he created lodge itself immovably in the popular conscious and become so influential. Some could argue that Brando as Don Corleone gave us our mental image of a mafia don, that Bela Lugosi defined Dracula or Lon Chaney did the same with Frankenstein but only Newton as Long John Silver, has come to completely define in the world's conscience an entire sub-division of the human race. No performance can legitimately claim to have done the same. And he did it on one leg, while drunk. Not bad going.⁴¹



TV series titles - maybe Bobby, or a one-legged stand-in...



Finally - the biography, 2016

Joseph Kaufman, (1911-1961) - Producer

Supposedly let down by his dodgy New York financier for ongoing funding and not seeing blockbuster returns from the movie, Joe Kaufman still managed to get his fingers in the TV series pie; Newton's biographer states...

Ever trusting, Bob had left the paperwork to others and somehow Joe Kaufman had been allowed to steal the thing from under their noses⁴²

⁴¹ <https://sabotagetimes.com/tv-film/the-man-who-taught-the-world-how-to-talk-like-a-pirate>

⁴² Apologise Later- The Biography of Robert Newton; Penrose, M; Olchon Press, (Revised Edition) 2016. p363



Dodgy Joe (seated) on the set of LJS with writer Martin Rackin - who later became Head of Production for Paramount Studios⁴³

Kaufman also managed to pirate the returns from two feature film mash-ups that were cobbled together from the TV episodes. He produced two more movies after “Long John Silver”, but either way, he didn’t have long to enjoy it; he died only 5 years after Robert Newton at the age of 49.

Newton’s son Kim seems to have now regained some of the rights to his Father’s Long John Silver films... and has aggressively pursued his family’s claims through the California legal system.

Lloyd Berrell, (1927 - 1956) - “Mendoza”



As barrel chested as his name implied, New Zealand born, Australian raised Lloyd Berrell co-starred as Long John’s nemesis - the pirate “El Toro” Mendoza... and nearly stole every scene he was in.

A fine actor with a beautiful voice, Lloyd was a fixture in Sydney radio and theatre ... and later played the lead part of “Roo” in the 1956 Sydney Premiere of the landmark play “Summer of the 17th Doll”; He also played major characters in several features including “His Majesty O’Keefe” in Fiji for Long John’s director, Byron Haskin - which got him the big role of staring down Bobby Newton on the high seas of Pagewood.

Heading to England with his wife on a French ship in 1957 to seek international fame and fortune on the back of “Long John”, Berrell died suddenly during an onboard flu epidemic just off the coast of Guadeloupe in the West Indies... the spiritual home of the fictional pirates of Treasure Island. He was just 31.

⁴³ Screengrab from Cinesound newsreel

Kit Taylor, (1942-) - “Jim Hawkins”

Unlike the tragic Bobby Driscoll who played Jim Hawkins to Newton’s Long John in the 1950 “Treasure Island” film, Kit Taylor survived the transition to adulthood acting. Co-Starring in LJS at age 12, Kit continued on through the series... stopped acting... and then returned to the small screen in his early 20’s. He remained in steady work thereafter, mostly on soap operas such as “Number 96” and “A Country Practice”, without ever breaking into lead roles. His memorable performance as Evan, the angry cuckolded husband in Bruce Beresford’s 1976 classic film “Don’s Party” suggests that he should have been given better material. His last screen credit was in 2000.

Twenty years after the series ended, he had only kind words to say about his co-star.

I was a proper little monster. At the age of (12) I realised the power I had... if I didn't get what I wanted I became unco-operative. Robert Newton would get fed up with my behaviour and he'd give me a swipe on the backside to keep me in order. At other times he'd dangle me on his knee and tell me stories, marvellous adventure tales. As I got older I heard people gossip about him, tearing him down because of his faults. But nothing is going to destroy my image of him. I thought he was great.⁴⁴



“Aaarrhh Jim Lad...”

Byron Haskin, (1899 - 1984) - Director

By all accounts a decent and talented man, the portly Byron Haskin continued to have a reasonably productive career though he remained pretty much stranded in B Movies and B Series, most of which had sci fi themes. Some of these were in fact underrated genre efforts, especially “Robinson Crusoe on Mars” (1964) and his episodes for the “Outer Limits” series (1963-64), but Haskin never again rose to the heights of his earlier successes such as War of the Worlds (1953) and his Disney version of “Treasure Island” (1950).

In 1965 he co-produced the pilot episode of the legendary Star Trek TV series. Unlike his fellow Treasure Island Pictures partners, he lived a long life, dying in California in 1984.

⁴⁴ <http://www.classicaustraliantv.com/advljs.htm>



Byron Haskin's "Scientifically Authentic" Robinson Crusoe!

William Henry Archibald Constable, (1906 - 1989) - Production Designer

Bill is credited as the Production Designer for 12 of the Long John TV series episodes. In the next year or so he also designed the set for the puppet show "Little Fella Bindi", operas for the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, ballets for Borovansky and various book illustrations. In May 1957, he gathered up his second wife and their very young daughter and headed back to London. Since there was almost no film activity during this dark age in Australian culture, it was a logical step towards furthering his movie career on the back of his big screen credit... or it may simply have been for the sensible reason, (in the words of Ken Muggleston), "he wanted to be famous"!

Though his journey would take some wonderfully strange twists and turns along the way, Bill Constable - 'the sorcerer', 'the dean of décor' - was about to be born again as a film designer on the world stage...



Bill, back in Australia, 1970s (NLA)

Pagewood Film Studios, (1935 - 1959)

For many years, the only purpose-built film studio in Australia was used for parking cars...



Pagewood Studios, 1983 - shortly before the Forces of Darkness demolished it⁴⁵

Associated Television never got their TV licence; they were blocked by the Prime Minister Robert Menzies in favour of the usual suspects - Frank Packer and the local media barons, who would be more supportive of his political party.

In 1959, following Ealing Studios' two "Smiley" movies and interior scenes for "Summer of the 17th Doll", The Rural Bank of NSW foreclosed on the mortgage of Pagewood film studios which was now held by a consortium of interests - and sold the entire property to General Motors Holden. For many years, the only purpose-built film studio in Australia was used for parking cars...



⁴⁵ Screen grab from footage shot by Steve Arnold and Graham Shirley for a Kennedy Miller documentary - courtesy of Kennedy Miller and the NFSA

1970's: If you look hard enough, in the top left corner you will see the number 15 - the Pagewood Lot being used as a car park! The rest of the vast complex is the Holden plant and the Pagewood bus depot... (NLA)



Pagewood Detail ... (NLA)

In 1986, in a political deal that was crook even for Sydney, the NSW Labor Government of Neville Wran allowed the vast Holden site, plus the nearby Pagewood Bus Depot and the WD & HO Wills cigarette factory to be sold off as a job lot without tender to Westfield - and they even threw in some crown land to sweeten the deal! His government changed the law to block counter offers...



Occupied only by the Ghosts of Pirates Past; the abandoned main studio and its stripped-out interior - Pagewood 1983⁴⁶

Today, even the heritage remnants of the old Holden plant have been trashed for a huge Meriton apartment block development... and the rest of the site is the massive Westfield Eastgardens Shopping Centre.

There's no plaque or any other physical reminder of the great days of Pagewood film studios... of the dedicated artists and craftspeople who created miracles on celluloid... or when a band of pastel pirates roamed the nearby sand hills and one of them, standing on one leg, waved his cutlass in the air, rolled his eyes and growled AAARRRHH MATEY ... a lot!

⁴⁶ Screen grabs from footage shot by Steve Arnold and Graham Shirley for a Kennedy Miller documentary - courtesy of Kennedy Miller and the NFSA



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Olga was my first port of call on the long journey towards discovering the art of Bill Constable and steered me into Bill's archives at the National Gallery of Australia as well as connecting me to Bill's daughter. Without Olga, I couldn't have begun...

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Glen Eley: Cinesound Movietone Productions - for permission to use screen grabs from their newsreel collection held at the NFSA

Sharon Williams & Doug Mitchell: Kennedy Miller - for permission to use screen grabs from their Pagewood Studios (1983) material held at the NFSA

Other major sources & resources consulted include

NSW State Library Special Collections
 National Library of Australia
 Bauer Media archive
 OzMovies website
 Classic Australian TV website
 AFTRS library
 Pagewood veterans John Maclean and Lex Meredith
 David Lewis ACS
 Paul Bentley, The Wolanski Foundation Project
 “Apologise Later - the Biography of Robert Newton” by Mark Penrose

A Note on Open Sources...

Where images and quotes have not been directly referenced, they have been obtained from open sources freely available on the internet. These have been gleaned from hundreds of hours crawling the web through Trove, Wikipedia, IMDB, Revolvvy, Youtube, Pic Hunter, Flickr, EBay etc... and any site that linked to Long John Silver.

It was quite a journey...

Bob Hill.