

WATERFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY



PAT POWERS: Co-founder of Universal Pictures

Born in Waterford in 1869, Patrick Anthony Powers emigrated to Buffalo, New York when in his teens. Powers set up the Buffalo Film Exchange, which acted as a distributor to cinemas. By 1910, he was living in New York City, and the Powers Motion Company replaced the name of his original company.

Pat Powers became the first treasurer of Universal Pictures when his company merged with the Independent Moving Picture Company, a film production group run by Carl Laemmle, and several smaller companies in 1912. By 1915, Universal Pictures relocated to California, and was the largest production facility in the world, Universal City Studios.

Powers entrepreneurial skills lead him to invest in the Phonofilm system, devised by Lee DeForest, which created a technique of synchronising sound on to film. However, DeForest's bankruptcy lead to Powers to hiring his chief technician, William Garrity, and created a version of the Phonofilm called the Powers Cinephone. The cinephone was used by Walt Disney on their first sound cartoon in 1928, called *Mickey Mouse's Steamboat Willie*, thus giving Mickey Mouse his voice. Though this was the height of Powers's career, he remained in the cinema industry till his death on 30 July 1948.

Cian Manning