

# MINA MOORE'S CAMERAS

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Before examining Mina's cameras, a brief introduction to May & Mina Moore. In the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sisters were the most successful women photographers operating in Australia. Their success stemmed from excellent knowledge and practice of photographic technique and the simplest studio lighting available-daylight filtering in through a large single window-beautiful lighting for dramatic portraiture. Combine this with a passion for the Theatre and some good contacts backstage-and their appointment book was soon filling with the names of rich and famous stars of stage and society.

This photographic adventure had started some years earlier in Wellington, New Zealand where May, the eldest sister, had established herself as a successful portrait artist (the brush and canvas type) working in, of all places, a photographic studio. It was here that May "fell under the spell of the camera" and when the studio was put up for sale, she urged Mina to join her in purchasing the business-a bold step for complete photographic novices! With great enthusiasm, a crash course in photography and an applied passion, the girls used their local theatrical contacts to develop a very successful new enterprise. The stars of the theatre always need good portraits-in costume-to promote their latest roles.

But new horizons beckoned and seeking to use their proven formula on a larger scale, May crossed the Tasman to open a new studio in Sydney, followed by Mina, who then went on to open her Melbourne studio in 1911. Their great flair and natural style of photography should be celebrated. In a previous article we saw some of Mina's photographs, now let me share with you details of her cameras.



*Pic 1. Mina Moore's grand 10 x8 Fallowfield is still impressive.*

The main studio camera was the 10x8 inch (21 x 27 cm) Fallowfield. **Pic 1.** Having a square bellows indicates it's a pre-1880s model-McKeown's Guide suggests circa 1860. There is a flap (single leaf) shutter and a pneumatic bulb tube connection attached to the lens panel inside the bellows. This shutter flap is now fixed in the open position so I imagine the lens cap would have been used to control the usually lengthy exposure times of that era.

The Fallowfield has a whole plate (21.5 x 16.5 cm) reducing back **Pic 2.** and sadly the ground glass is missing from the focusing screen-as are the ground

glass screens of the other two cameras-I'm sure they are carefully wrapped and boxed resting deep in some Melbourne Tip! There is one double dark plate holder with the camera.

The lens is a magnificent Carl Zeiss-Jena F: 4.2 Planar of 300 mm focal length (without a mark on it) circa 1902, serial number 41,727. **Pics 3 and 3A.**

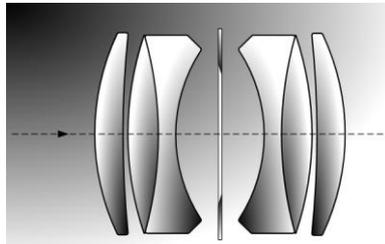
This is an excellent, sharp symmetrical design for crisp, clear portraits when working with the whole plate back. **Pic 4.** The rear element mount has a very interesting inscription- Series 1a, Nr. 14! Is it only the 14<sup>th</sup> lens of this type? **Pic 5.** Is there a Zeiss expert in the house? Mina's original focusing cloth is still with the camera (with a neat little patch sewn onto it). What a story this camera could tell! **Pic 6.**



*Pic 2. Reducing back and focus frame (minus ground glass) - note the rear focus crank which racks the front standard back and forth.*



**Pic 3.** A large piece of fine vintage glass! Zeiss Planar from around 1902.



Zeiss Planar  
**Pic 3A.** Designed by Dr. Paul Rudolph in 1896, the Planar is a classic symmetrical, super sharp but prone to flare until coating was invented.



**Pic 4.** Beautiful script reveals the specification.



**Pic 5.** Very special indeed!



**Pic 6.** Ready for work-Mina's Fallowfield with lens cap and her hand sewn focusing cloth.

For about 10 years I told and illustrated the history of this Mina Moore camera to coach groups visiting my Kenilworth (Queensland) Movie Museum. I had the Fallowfield set up on a swing-out arm that allowed it to focus (through a small window) on the wonderful view of the Kenilworth Bluff across the Mary River. Every person in the theatre could see the inverted

image on my replacement ground glass, and always the comment 'Oh! Fancy a camera that old being able to take colour photos' and if you look closely, you will see it's a moving picture too. 'Why is the picture upside down?' Well, it's like this...

The second camera Mina Moore had was her field, or outdoor portable studio camera. It is a Thornton Pickard "Imperial" half plate size, circa 1905. **Pic 7.**



**Pic 7.** The portable field camera, Mina's Thornton Pickard 'Imperial' half plate.



**Pic 8.** Beck Symmetrical F:8 on the T.P roller blind shutter.

It is very much the standard TP, with the roller blind shutter and a 10-inch (253 MM) F: 8 Beck Symmetrical mounted, as so many were, in a homemade lens panel. **Pic 8.**

The original tripod has survived intact. **Pic 9.**



**Pic 9.** Original tripod (third leg obscured) cleverly fitted into camera base.

The pendulum back tilt indicator seems to be out of whack-or was it me? - Very possible. **Pic 10.**

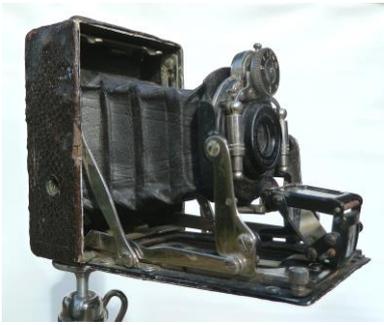


**Pic 10.** Pendulum level, simple and effective-when not frozen with age!

The third of Mina's cameras to survive is a miniature Ernemann Heag XV 4.5 x 6.0 cm plate camera, circa 1911, serial number 226625.

**Pic 11.**

This little 'detektive' camera would 'have been purchased by Mina after she arrived in Melbourne. I'm sure the novelty of using such a small instrument would have appealed to her after working with the mammoth



*Pic 11. Tiny Ernemann  
6.0 x 4.5 cm plate folder.*

beast in her studio. And all this before George Eastman produced his 127 Vest Pocket Kodak. I wonder where he got the idea from?

**Pic 12.**

This little Ernemann has an F: 6.8 Aplanat lens, number 211691, mounted in an Ernemann patent shutter with a main range of a half second to one hundredth of a second. A black dial at the rear of the shutter provides an extended range of very slow speeds, bulb and time settings.

The aluminium body is decomposing and producing a fine dust that escaped my notice when shooting this sequence, an oversight for which I must apologise. The focusing lever is pulled forward to focus the camera to 3 feet (91.5 cm) at full extent.

**Pic 13.** The central viewfinder folds up neatly as the drop bed is closed.



*Pic 13. The unusual focus lever. Ernemann amalgamated with Zeiss-Ikon in 1926.*

Like the others, only one plate holder survives - a single metal type. **Pic 14.**



*Pic 12. A surprisingly small camera-compare with the Australian 50 cent coin!*

The rust and corrosion in the camera due to storage close to the ocean requires attention to preserve this very special camera. I wonder how often Mina used it - I imagine for happy snaps.



*Pic 14. The very small, thin metal single plate holder with numbered dark slide.*

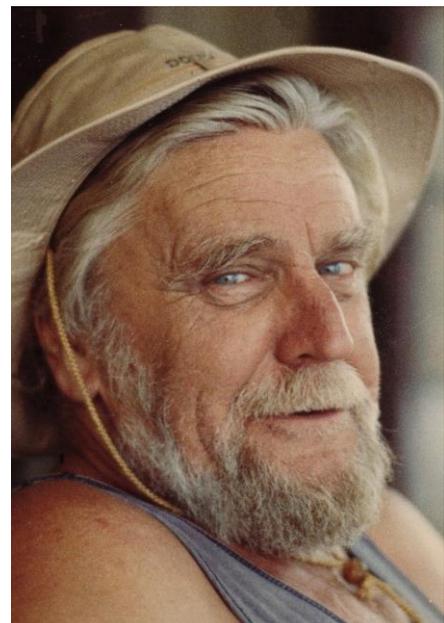


*Pic 15. Mina's studio tripod, a folding Folmer and Schwing product.*

Two other items remain - A Kodak/Folmer and Schwing collapsible tripod-which it tends to do as the glue is giving up-so don't put your Hasselblad on it! **Pic 15.**

Also, Mina's neg retouching easel (Not Illustrated) an essential piece of equipment in the old days.

I wouldn't have been able to show you these wonderful, very historic cameras except for the generosity of my dear friend, the late Doug. Tainsh, **Pic 16.** who entrusted me as the temporary custodian. My sincere thanks also to Doug's son Bill-a chip off the old block-for his help in creating the recent Mina Moore articles. Further reading on the May and Mina Moore story can be found in 'The Story of the Camera in Australia' by Jack Cato (Georgian House, Melbourne, 1955) and 'Australian Women Photographers 1840 to 1960' by Barbara Hall and Jenni Mather. (Greenhouse Publications P/L, Melbourne 1968 ISBN 0864360398).



*Pic 16. Doug Tainsh in his Queensland retirement days. Photo courtesy Joff Manders.*