

The Kinephone

(Gramophone-Cinema)

*An English optical toy of the early 1920s,
retailed in British India by Reid & Co., Secunderabad (Deccan)*



Original box with the red Reid & Co. retailer's label and the printed instruction sheet of The Kinephone.

Collector documentation · Collection S.D.H.

Description

The Kinephone – also marketed as the "Gramophone-Cinema" – is a flat zoetrope designed to be placed on top of a 78 rpm gramophone turntable. As the turntable rotates, three small carriage wheels run on a printed picture disc while the viewer looks through the radial slots of a stationary white disc above. The intermittent obscuration of the slots produces the illusion of moving figures – an ingenious domestic application of the persistence-of-vision principle that animated the pre-cinema toys of the nineteenth century, from the phenakistoscope to the zoetrope and the praxinoscope.

Manufactured in England in the early 1920s and supplied with a printed set of paper picture discs (typically figures, dancers, animals or popular characters such as Felix the Cat), the Kinephone belongs to the late flowering of the Victorian and Edwardian optical-toy tradition that was soon to be eclipsed by the home cinematograph and the small-gauge film projector.

Provenance – Reid & Co., Secunderabad (Deccan)

This example bears the original red dealer's label of **Reid & Co., Piano & Music Saloons, Secunderabad (Deccan)** to the lid of the original cardboard box, and the matching violet rubber stamp of the same firm to the verso of the picture disc(s).

Reid & Co. were a British-Indian retailer of pianos, gramophones and musical novelties based in the British military cantonment of Secunderabad – twin city to Hyderabad, on the Deccan plateau – which was home to a substantial European population during the late Raj. The use of the term "Music Saloons" (i.e. music showrooms) reflects the late-Victorian / Edwardian commercial vocabulary still current in British India through the 1920s.

The Kinephone itself was manufactured in England and exported to India for the colonial market; this piece has since travelled back to Europe, giving it an unusually rich trade and provenance history (England → British India → Continental Europe).

Comparable examples in public collections

The Reid & Co.-marked Secunderabad variant is the same version recorded in two of the most important British public collections of pre-cinema apparatus:

- **Science Museum Group Collection, London** — *Kinephone, or gramophone zoetrope*, with five card discs stamped with the name of the vendor Reid & Co., Secunderabad, Deccan, in original cardboard box.
- **Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, University of Exeter** — *Kinephone by Reid & Co. with 5 discs* (Bill Douglas and Peter Jewell Collection).
- **Auction Team Breker, Köln** — *The Kinephone (Gramophone-Cinema), c. 1920*, estimate EUR 450–600 (Photographica & Film auction).

Mechanism

The Kinephone is set up as follows:

1. The picture disc is placed on the gramophone turntable, centred on the spindle.
2. The central wooden block, fitted with three small wheels on its underside, is positioned over the picture disc.
3. The white slotted viewing disc is placed on top, centred on the pin rising from the wooden carriage block.
4. A curved metal rod is pressed into the side of the wooden block at one end and rests against the gramophone casing at the other, holding the white viewing disc stationary while the picture disc rotates beneath.
5. When the turntable is set in motion and a strong light shines on the picture disc, the viewer looking through the radial slots sees the printed figures appear to move.

Components



Picture disc inside the original box. Reverse shows the violet rubber stamp of Reid & Co., Piano & Music Saloons, Secunderabad (Deccan).



Slotted white viewing disc, seen from above. The radial slits function as the stroboscopic shutter that produces the illusion of movement.



Slotted viewing disc with the central wooden carriage block and its three wheels in place – the rolling element that tracks the printed picture disc on the gramophone turntable.

Colophon

Documentation prepared for collection records. Photographs of the object as found, prior to cleaning or conservation. All attributions and comparable references stated above were verified against publicly accessible museum and auction records.

Object: The Kinephone (Gramophone-Cinema)

Maker: English manufacture, unidentified

Retailer: Reid & Co., Piano & Music Saloons, Secunderabad (Deccan), British India

Date: c. 1920–1925

Materials: Printed card, wood, metal wire, cardboard box

Function: Domestic optical toy / flat zoetrope for use on a gramophone turntable

Contents as documented

- Original cardboard box, lid bearing the red Reid & Co. retailer's label and the printed instruction sheet "Gramophone–Cinema / The Kinephone"
- Slotted white viewing disc
- Central wooden carriage block with three wheels
- Curved metal actuating rod (the gramophone-casing arm)
- 1 picture disc, verso bearing the violet rubber stamp of Reid & Co., Piano & Music Saloons, Secunderabad

Note on completeness: Comparable Reid & Co.-marked sets recorded in the Science Museum, London, and the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, Exeter, are supplied with five picture discs. The present example contains one picture disc; the optical and mechanical apparatus (slotted viewing disc, carriage block with three wheels, and actuating rod) is fully complete and functional.

— S.D.H.