

# HERITAGE CASEWORK

by Mike Whitcombe

*The CTA Casework Committee are continually involved in securing a positive future for many endangered cinemas, both present and former. It's important work – here's a summary of our current work load.*

## England

### Grade I

#### **GRANADA/BUZZ, TOOTING, LONDON (Cecil Masey, 1931)**

The cinema was granted an Asset of Civic Value status last October, following an application by the Tooting Local History group. Zirconia Ltd have owned it for some years and it has now come off the market which correspondence with the Land Registry confirms. We believe the building is safe as long as Buzz bingo continues to trade.

### Grade II\*

#### **STATE, GRAYS (Francis Chancellor, 1938)**

A planning application for a hotel scheme on the roof has been submitted. We are currently chasing further information from the local MP.

#### **REGAL, UXBRIDGE (Eric Bailey, 1931)**

Following approval of the auditorium scheme last April – now fully implemented – an application has now been submitted to build a hotel on the car park at the rear and also taking in the stage house. Fortunately, the hotel would be of fairly modest size, 31 rooms, and would be no taller than the main block of the original cinema. Our main concern now is to restore the important Compton organ to playable condition. The hotel application proposes to tidy up and conserve the organ chambers, but does not include playable restoration. We will contact the Cinema Organ Society and the Conservation Officer to this purpose.

### Grade II

#### **FORUM, LIVERPOOL (William Glen, 1931)**

We are in contact with the Liverpool Councillor Nick Small and would like to meet him to resolve this extremely stubborn case. The Ken Dodd Museum have rejected the Forum for a home.

#### **CARLTON, HAYMARKET, LONDON (Frank Verity, 1927)**

We have met with the Crown Estate. Work on the cinema will not start until next year.

#### **CURZON, MAYFAIR, LONDON (Horace Hammond for Sir John Burnet, Tait & partners, 1966)**

Last April we met Fantasio and saw their latest scheme, designed by architects Studio Pringle. But this has not yet been submitted as a planning application. A new statement by Dan Zaum, owner of Fantasio, implies they are re-thinking the scheme yet again. The current Curzon operation was due to close in January, but a statement says that Curzon will continue for the time being on a 'roll over' basis. We will continue to monitor the situation.

#### **RITZ, NUNEATON (Frank Verity & Samuel Beverley, 1937)**

Improvements to the building are progressing slowly. The Nepalese owners are refurbishing it using their limited resources: their next project is a restaurant in the former foyer space. We know that the cinema has a new roof, and we believe also has new doors, windows, and security system. Prompted by a minor planning application, we have confirmed that Zoe Massey of Haywards Architects remains in charge of these works.

#### **CAPITOL, SCARBOROUGH (Frederick Evans & Edwin Gray, 1929)**

This is a new case. Mecca bingo closed their operations in late November but there is hope that a new operator might take over. The rapidly expanding northern chain 'Club 3000' has been mentioned, although they seem to prefer new buildings. We have written to the MP, Alison Hume, the Town Council, and North Yorkshire Council for information. (Scarborough Borough Council was abolished in 2023). Urban Explorers recently gained entry and took photos, which raises questions about security. We have notified the Theatres Trust about this case.

#### **GRAND, SOUTHPORT (George Tonge, 1938)**

We have checked for any news about re-use or refurbishment of the



auditorium and last November we received a letter from the Conservation Officer, Daniel Longman, who wrote to say he was in discussion with the owner, the Mikhail group, but there was no news yet. It looks that the auditorium is unused, pending some new proposal. We will monitor the situation.

### NOT LISTED

#### **GAUMONT, BIRKENHEAD (Daniel MacKay & William Trent, 1938)**

This cinema was sold last summer. Following our enquiry, we heard from Wirral's Conservation Officer, who told us that they would aim to retain the façade, as it faces the Grade 1 listed park. More than this may not be possible. We are monitoring developments.

#### **RITZ, BRIGHOUSE (JH Freer, 1937)**

An investigation into the recent fire confirms it as arson. The owners/developers could incorporate the frontage in the new scheme as there is strong local support through social media for this.

#### **CENTRAL, CAMBRIDGE (George Banyard, 1930)**

We are happy to report some good news. The Appeal Inspector upheld the Council's refusal of permission to demolish and redevelop. The Inspector's report focused on the quality of the façade and its contribution to the Conservation Area. It is also locally listed. The owner (Mark Richer) has since complained in the press that he is left with an uneconomic building. However, his Design & Access statement did include redevelopment options that would retain the façade. We are closely monitoring developments.

#### **CLIFTON, LEOMINSTER (Ernest Roberts, 1936)**

After long delays, the application for take-away fast food use was approved in early December. Our comments were reproduced in full in the Officer report, but the final decision did not include the condition we wanted: to maintain properly the front part of the cinema, and preserve the pay-box within it even though the owner had previously promised to do this. The owner's project manager is approaching the Black Country Museum near Dudley to ask if they would like to acquire the pay-box.

#### **ODEON, CAMDEN TOWN, LONDON (Daniel MacKay, William and Sydney Trent, 1937)**

There has been a setback here. The application for student housing and other uses was approved in early December, without being modified to retain the historic foyer. Our campaign had good letters of support from the Twentieth Century Society and Historic Buildings & Places, but to no avail. The developers (Camden Town Xchange) had done a skilful job in winning support from local organisations.

#### **ODEON/MECCA ELTHAM HILL, LONDON (Andrew Mather, 1937)**

This cinema is definitely under threat. Lidl bought the freehold in 2022 and their wish is to demolish and redevelop the site which would see housing above a supermarket. This proposal was encouraged in Greenwich Council's previous Local Plan, to which we objected in 2019. The new draft Plan has the same Site Allocation, for 90 homes and

commercial floorspace. We have registered our interest with the Greenwich Local Plan team and will object again. Reports differ as to closure of the Mecca bingo: Lidl could terminate their lease, although Mecca are quoted as saying they will fight to stay.

#### **GENESIS, STEPNEY, LONDON (William Glen, 1939)**

We can report an important success here. The application by owner Tyrone Walker-Hebborn to demolish and replace the cinema with student housing and basement cinema screens was refused in mid November. Our objection was supported by SAVE, the Twentieth Century Society, and the Spitalfields Trust. However, refusal was for two main reasons (not primarily retention of the historic William Glen fabric): officers and councillors felt that Tower Hamlets already had too much student housing, and the proposed block would harm the Conservation Area. Walker-Hebborn has complained in the press about the decision and his options are to whether to appeal or draw up a more acceptable plan. We will monitor closely further developments.

#### **POINT, MILTON KEYNES (Building Design Partnership and Neil Tibbatts, 1985)**

The first purpose built multiplex in the UK remains at serious risk of demolition following the decision to uphold the developers' appeal. We sadly believe that demolition could begin at any moment, despite the huge support for retention expressed by the 'architectural community' in social media. The Twentieth Century Society has been very active on the case, and has built a lot of publicity around the cinema's current 40th anniversary. Two of the cinema's originators have come out publicly in support of retention: Millard Ochs of Warner Brothers, and Charles Wesoky of American Multi-Cinema. The cinema's five-year Certificate of Immunity from listing expires this coming March, and Historic England wrote to us to consult on its renewal. We put in a strong objection, arguing it should be listed for Special Historic Interest as the first UK multiplex, quoting the two USA testimonials.

## **Wales**

### **Grade II**

#### **CASTLE, SWANSEA (Thomas, Meager & Jones, 1913)**

We supported the scheme for change of use as it respected the heritage of the former cinema and made good use of the existing building without any protruding extensions and floors that would be out of character. At the time of writing, the frontage is still covered in tarpaulin, making it difficult to view progress on restoring the façade. The front and rear elevations will be retained and restored, but the side elevations will be altered to accommodate windows (the auditorium has long been lost). The pay-box, which was removed without authority by the previous occupier, Laserzone, is currently in storage on site at the rear of the building. The Enforcement Team at Swansea Council have not pressed for its reinstatement to its original location but we have been told by Steve Ingham, Senior Technical Manager at Easy Living Ltd, that the paybox has been safeguarded and will be reinstated as a feature in the foyer area, where we feel it would enhance the completed refurbishment and possibly may be suitable for use by the restaurant planned on the ground floor. When the scheme is completed we will request permission to take photographs for our archive.

#### **THEATRE ROYAL, MERTHYR TYDFIL (TC Wakeling, 1891)**

The central part of the roof had collapsed into the basement of the building. The planning officer has been informed and the auditorium will have to be partially demolished. We feel this is a lost cause, considering its twenty years of dereliction, and we will not pursue the case further.

### **NOT LISTED**

#### **GAIETY, CITY ROAD, CARDIFF (William Wort, 1912)**

The cinema is in the process of being demolished but we have photographed the property extensively.

*Past and present cinemas around the country are always under threat. The CTA Casework team are always happy to help another cinema from disappearing forever and your help could be vital in doing just that. If any member learns of a threat to a cinema, please let the Casework Committee know. You might just save a cinema for future generations.*