



CINEMA
THEATRE
ASSOCIATION

www.cta-uk.org

BULLETIN

Vol 52 No 6

ISSN 1479-0882 November / December 2018



Screen ① at the Empire (ex Carlton) in London's Haymarket, which has gained grade II listing ; photo taken July 2013 by Ken Roe



Group photo taken outside the Burgsvik Bio (Gotland, Sweden) by Elain Harwood

FROM YOUR EDITOR



Thanks to all who wished us a good holiday and/or sent 'welcome back' messages on our return. We set off on 4 September and the first three weeks were wall-to-wall sunshine. We kayaked on, swam in and cycled round a couple of Austrian lakes and went up the 1,800m Shafberg [St Wolfgang] on a steam-operated cog railway – expensive [€36 each] but well worth it. The weather went downhill for the last week but we made the best of it. In Salzburg, we came across *Fräulein Maria's Bicycle Tour* [www.mariabicycletours.com] which takes you round 20 *The Sound of Music* locations by bike! It costs €30 per adult for a 3½ hour trip, bike hire included. I'm ashamed to say I only photographed one cinema, the three-screen Biber Kino in Bebra, Germany [above] [web.biber-kino.de]. Bebra is the twin town to Knaresborough, the next town to the editorial office.

Thanks also to all who continue to send material for the Bulletin. Despite a huge 36 pages, I was very tight for space in this edition. There are three visit reports and I've had to hold over a fourth (Mike Wood's *Apollo* Ardwick) until next time. I have also had to retain numerous holiday snaps and several other items, including a very comprehensive article by Hector Hill on the history of Waltham and Wilf Watters' exploration of Margate. I'll try to print as many as possible next time but I still may have to keep some until the following Bulletin.

Whenever I type in the *Cinema Business* section that a certain film has broken box-office records, I always think that it is meaningless, as admission prices are constantly going up. Surely the number of 'bums on seats' would be a more realistic measure of a film's success – what do you think?

Finally, may I wish you all the compliments of the season, using this film frame, courtesy of Kevin Wheelan.

Harry Rigby, CTA Bulletin Editor



**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE
THURSDAY 20 DECEMBER**

CINEMA THEATRE ASSOCIATION

(Founded January 1967)

promoting serious interest in all aspects of cinema buildings

Company limited by guarantee. Reg. No. 04428776.
Registered address: 59 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, TW11 0DJ.
Registered Charity No. 1100702. Directors are marked ‡ in list below.

PATRONS: Allen Eyles; Carol Gibbons; Lucinda Lambton

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Full Membership (UK).....£29
Full Membership (UK under 25s).....£15
Overseas (Europe Standard & World Economy).....£37
Overseas (World Standard).....£49
Associate Membership (UK & Worldwide).....£10
Life Membership (UK only).....£450; aged 65 & over £350
Life Membership for Overseas members will be more than this;
please contact the membership secretary for details.

All membership and subscription enquiries should be sent to
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: Neville C Taylor [subs@cta-uk.org]
Flat One, 128 Gloucester Terrace, London, W2 6HP
Items for possible inclusion in the Bulletin should be sent to
BULLETIN EDITOR: Harry Rigby [bulletin@cta-uk.org]
65 Tennyson Avenue, Harrogate, North Yorks, HG1 3LE

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN: David Trevor-Jones ‡ [chairman@cta-uk.org]
47 The Street, Old Basing, Basingstoke, RG24 7BX
VICE-CHAIRMAN: Ian Meyrick ‡
11 Tarrant Avenue, Witney, OX28 1EE
SECRETARY: Adam Unger ‡ [honsec@cta-uk.org]
59 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, TW11 0DJ
TREASURER: Neville C Taylor ‡ (details as membership secretary above)
CASEWORK COMMITTEE – Chairman: Richard Gray ‡
45 Arnold Road, Bow, London, E3 4NU [casework@cta-uk.org]
Members: as main committee plus Tim Hatcher,
Jane Jephcote, Mark Price, Vicky Simon, James Weir & Peter Wylde
ARCHIVIST: Clive Polden [archive@cta-uk.org]
14 Ivychurch Gardens, Cliftonville, Margate, CT9 3YG
ASSISTANT ARCHIVIST: Rachel Marks
73 Cressy House, Hannibal Road, London, E1 3JF
PUBLIC RELATIONS: Gerald Glover [publicity@cta-uk.org]
228 Malpas Road, Brockley, London, SE4 1DH
PUBLICATIONS & SALES OFFICER: Jeremy Buck ‡
34 Pelham Road, London, N22 6LN [sales@cta-uk.org]
WEBMASTER: Rachel Woodforde
69A Mill Street, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 2EE [web@cta-uk.org]
VISITS CO-ORDINATOR: Ray Ritmeester [visits@cta-uk.org]
66 Woodside Road, High Wycombe, HP13 7JB
PICTURE HOUSE EDITOR: Allen Eyles [picture.house@cta-uk.org]
13 Tennyson Court, Paddockhall Road, Haywards Heath, RH16 1EZ
CTA SCOTLAND: Gordon Barr, Gary Painter [scotland@cta-uk.org]
11 Merker Terrace, Linlithgow, EH49 6DD
CTA CYMRU/WALES: John Skinner, Jon Williams [wales@cta-uk.org]
3 Swan Lane, Ystalyfera, Swansea, SA9 2JB
CTA NORTH: Nick Taylor [north@cta-uk.org]
4 Oxford Way, Stockport, SK4 1JR
COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Emma Beeston, Kevin Gooding, Lynda Hillman,
Tim McCullen, Sally McGrath, Ken Roe, David Simpson
Please use [info@cta-uk.org] if uncertain to whom to address an e-mail
enquiry; this address will be monitored and e-mails redirected if necessary.

© CTA BULLETIN – published six times yearly by the
CINEMA THEATRE ASSOCIATION

BULLETIN: Members are invited to submit items for possible publication to the Bulletin Editor. However, it is stressed that the publication of an item does not necessarily imply that it reflects the views of the Cinema Theatre Association, its Committee or its Bulletin Editor. It is assumed that submissions are for publication, unless stated otherwise; items may be shortened or edited at the discretion of the Editor. Please state if you require items to be returned and enclose SAE, otherwise everything will be passed on to the CTA Archive.
VISITS: Members and non-members are reminded that they attend visits entirely at their own risk and no responsibility can be accepted by the Cinema Theatre Association or the owners of the buildings for any accidents or injury sustained during the course of any visit.
PRODUCTS: The Cinema Theatre Association does not necessarily recommend or endorse any products or services advertised in the Bulletin or in any flyer or document included in any mailings to members.

Typeset in Franklin Gothic Book by Harry Rigby
Printed by The Ludo Press Ltd, 18 Wimbledon Stadium Business Centre,
Riverside Road, London, SW17 0BA [www.ludo.co.uk]

PUBLICATIONS

Back Numbers Available

PICTURE HOUSE MAGAZINE

Listed below are the back numbers of *Picture House* that are still available, along with the main articles the particular issue contains.

No 6	£1.50	Television in the Cinema; Atherley Southampton; Hippodrome , Blackpool.
No 8	£1.50	Sol Levy; Reginald Cooper; ABC in NW London.
No 17	£3.00	Special Issue featuring the Cinemas of George Coles with 26 original photographs reproduced in sepia.
No 18	£3.00	Sydney Colwyn Foulkes; United Picture Theatres; Tivoli Wimborne.
No 19	£3.50	Co-operative Cinemas; Ideal Lambeth; Dursley; Alister Macdonald; Granada Tooting.
No 21	£3.50	100 Years On; Travelling Shows; Reggie Rea; Albert Hall Sheffield; Regal Wells; West End Adverts; Scotland.
all issues below have colour cover and inside pages		
No 25	£4.50	Oldest Cinema (Brighton); FE Bromige; Gaumont Managers; Carlton Swansea; Committee's Choice.
No 26	£4.50	Paramount Newcastle; Edward Stone; Granada Men; E de Wilde Holding; Electric Portobello Road.
No 27	£4.50	New Victoria/ Apollo ; Whiteladies Bristol; Clark & Fenn; Compton Organs; Tim Foster Associates.
No 28	£4.50	James McKissack; WJ King; Torbay Cinema; Tabs.
No 29	£4.50	Cinerama in Britain; Braziers the Builders; John Fernée; Waller Jeffs; John Duffin's paintings.
No 30	£5.00	The Davis Family, Croydon; Apollo Hammersmith Organ; Norwich Roadshows.
No 31	£7.50	Special 84-page edition: Essoldo – A Family Business: Sol Sheckman and the Essoldo Circuit.
No 32	£5.00	Harry Myers Photographs; Cinemas at the Coalface; Shaws of Darwen; Edward A Stone.
No 33	£5.00	Theodore Komisarjevsky; Circuit & other releases of 1956; The case for saving the New Victoria Bradford.
No 34	£5.00	Beaufort Birmingham; Granada Tooting in 1934; Rank in post-war Scotland; J Braddon's Cinema life.
No 35	£5.00	Holophane lighting; Imitations of Odeon; Cradley Records; 1909 Cinematograph Act; Kingston Showmanship.
No 36	£6.00	Leslie Kemp; The Clifton Circuit; Jeremy Perkins on Brighton; Circuit Releases of 1960.
No 37	£8.50	Special 92-page issue; saving the Electric Palace Harwich.
No 38	£6.00	Northern Morris Associated Cinemas; Point Milton Keynes; Going to the Cinema in Birmingham; Palace Conwy; Carlton Haymarket; Military Cinemas; Cinema Murders.
No 39	£6.00	WWI and the Film Trade; Tale of Two Regals ; Odeon North Finchley; Majestic Oxford; Films at the Royal Albert Hall .
No 40	£6.00	Tolmer Euston; Michael Stringer memories; West End in the 1950s; Stafford Entertainments; Will Onda & James Atroy; Stephen Waddingham – a Granada man.
No 41	£6.00	CTA's 50 th Anniversary; Plaza Stockport; Grosvenor Rayners Lane; Majestic Leeds; Pascal J Stienlet.
No 42	£6.00	Odeon Elephant & Castle, Plaza Crosby; Depot Lewes; Cineworld Chelsea; Gaumont Sheffield Figures.

There are also available a few second-hand copies of out-of-print issues 9, 10, 14/15, 16, 20, 22, 23 & 24, priced £5.00 each, plus postage. A list of their contents was printed on p4 of Bulletin 52/2 or can be obtained by SAE or email from the Sales Officer or Bulletin Editor.

BULLETINS

We can supply back numbers of most Bulletins from Volume 21 (1987) to date. Prices for issues from 1987 to 2016 are £4.00 per year (6 issues); individual issues are £1.00 each. Prices for issues in 2017 and 2018 are £4.00 per copy. All prices include postage. There are some issues available from earlier years, 1967 to 1986 – please send enquiries to the Sales Officer.

Recently Published (details in previous Bulletins)

The Cinemas of West Wales

by Alan Phillips. 130 pages, A5 paperback, illustrated. £6.99 plus postage.

North Wales Cinemas Past and Present

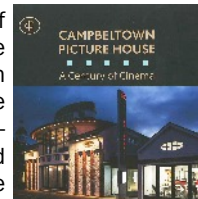
By Alan Phillips. 126 pages, small paperback, fully illustrated in black and white and colour, £6.95 plus postage.

New Publication

Campbeltown Picture House – A Century of Cinema.

Paperback, 66 pages, fully illustrated in black and white and colour. £10.00 plus postage.

Published to coincide with the major renovation of the cinema, this very attractive book looks at the remarkable history of the Picture House, which opened in 1913. There are chapters covering the design and architecture of the building, the characters who have worked there, the revival and restoration of the building and a timeline of the cinema. There are details of the various atmospheric style cinemas that there have been in Scotland, a general look at Scottish cinemas and plenty of good photographs. The book has been produced by Campbeltown Community Business and all proceeds go to the ongoing operation of this rare survivor.

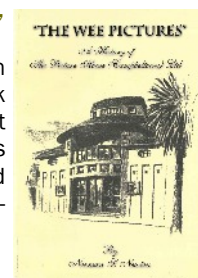


The Wee Pictures

A History of The Picture House (Campbeltown) Ltd

By Norman S Newton, Paperback, 60 pages, illustrated. £4.99 plus postage.

Although not a new publication, this has not been on general sale before. This is an earlier book about the same cinema at Campbeltown, first published in 1989 and revised in 2008. It contains a more detailed history of the Picture House and its operations and contains many interesting illustrations, including advertisements and playbills.



Ordering

For books and other items please add £3.00 for post and packing for orders up to £30.00 in value; £6.00 for orders from £30.01 to £40.00 and £11.00 for orders above £40.01.

Orders to Jeremy Buck, CTA Sales, 34, Pelham Road, London, N22 6LN. Cheques/POs payable to Cinema Theatre Association, or send credit/debit card number with expiry date and security code. A complete sales list is available by sending an SAE or can be seen on the CTA website [www.cta-uk.org] where you can also place your order. using PayPal. A sales list is sent with every order.

Also Available (but not from the Sales Officer)

Scala Cinema 1978- 1993

by Jane Giles, foreword by Stephen Woolley. 424 pages, large size, fully illustrated. ISBN: 978-1-903254-98-1. RRP £75.

Special price to CTA members – £50 + £7.99 UK P&P.

Please make cheques for total £57.99 payable to FAB Press, Flat 2 Farleigh, Ramsden Road, Godalming, GU7 1QE (quote CTA on your order)

One of the most infamous and influential of all repertory cinemas, the London Scala's iconic programmes tell their own unique story about culture and society between 1978-1993, a post-punk / pre-Internet period of significant change. 2018 marks the 40th anniversary of the first Scala programme and the 25th anniversary of the cinema's closure, an ideal time to take stock of a legacy that includes many of today's most exciting filmmakers who've credited the Scala's influence on their work. This book is fully illustrated with all 178 of the Scala's monthly programmes from 1978-1993 and there is a brief history of the building with a small selection of photographs. It explores not only the story of the Scala but its deep roots in 18th Century Fitzrovia and pre-WWI King's Cross.



The author will be presenting a copy to the CTA Archive.

CASEWORK

By Tim Hatcher

Grade II*



The State Grays in April 2004

JD Wetherspoon plc has been granted listed building consent and planning permission for its adaptation of the **State** at Grays into a unit of its chain of hosteleries. Conditions include photographic recording of the building, full restoration of the organ prior to opening and commencement of work within three years. An aspiration has also been expressed by Thurrock Council Regeneration Team that a number of film screenings and organ concerts be held annually.

It is reported that work to the **Electric Palace** in Harwich has been delayed because of the discovery of asbestos in its construction, which perhaps might not have been entirely unexpected in such an aged building. Additional costs involved may impact upon the budget for cosmetic improvements.

Grade II

Now unfortunately a regular occurrence, a further case of a cinema's closure following the cessation of bingo is that of the **Ritz** in Ilkeston. This is a boldly dynamic edifice both within and without, therefore concern for its future is to be expressed forcefully to its local authority. See coverpic & p22 last Bulletin.

The **Odeon** in Holloway is to undergo major refurbishment, including conversion of one of the small auditoria to a bar and the shops along Holloway Road to a restaurant. It is to be hoped that C Howard Crane's distinguished foyer will be refurbished to replicate at least a degree of its former opulence, which the current blanket coating of white paint visited upon every surface, including the elegant wooden balustrade, has endeavoured to enervate. See p10/11 Bulletin 52/4.

Unlisted



The rear of the Westover/ABC Bournemouth in June 2006

Following prolonged prompting by the Association, Bournemouth Council intends to extend a Conservation Area to include the Regent and the **Westover** [ABC]. This could augur well for the futures of these two venues, particularly in light of the recent rejection of Libra Homes' appeal against the refusal of planning permission for its proposals for the properties.

WELSH CASEWORK

By John Skinner

All grade II listed.

CASTLE / FILMCENTA, SWANSEA



The application to the City and County of Swansea in relation to the former **Castle** Cinema was considered and approved on 6 March 2018, at which the CTA was represented. The proposal is for the partial demolition of the roof and internally for conversion into a mixed use development of commercial units on the ground floor at the front and rear with student accommodation in the remainder of the building. The current occupiers, Laserzone, would be required to find alternative premises in the City. CTA Cymru did not object to the proposal as the shell and façade of the building will remain unaltered with a new roof identical to the present one constructed. It was also assured that the planning application includes the re-instatement of the original paybox (currently in storage at the rear of the building) and the wrought iron staircases to the balcony in the former foyer. It was considered that this was the best possible outcome that we could expect in the circumstances, as most of the original interior was lost in the modernisation of the cinema in the 1960s and the roof and ceiling is a replacement of that damaged by wartime bombing. The most impressive feature of the building is the neo-classical façade, which will be retained and restored to its original condition.

PLAZA, PORT TALBOT

There is growing concern about the condition of the **Plaza** as it has been in the ownership of Neath Port Talbot Council since 2009 and there has been no progress on finding an appropriate alternative use for the building. At last, there are grounds for encouragement as the Council has received a 'funding in principle' offer of an EU grant of £5.5m through the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Building for the Future' programme. The building is at present screened off by barriers at the front to prevent access by undesirable visitors and it is believed that there is serious water penetration in the auditorium. The Council's Regeneration Officer, Ian Williams, confirms that a tender is out at present for a design and build contractor to redesign the **Plaza** as a business and community hub. Design development will be undertaken in discussion with CADW and Listed Building Consent will be required before any work can begin. A meeting has been arranged with the Officer to clarify the details of current proposals.

More Casework in the full Bulletin

A WANDER AROUND NORTH WARWICKSHIRE

... and beyond! A report of the CTA tour on 16 June, postponed from 3 March due to severe weather
By Hugh Sykes



The Palace Ibstock, exterior, two views of interior today and [bottom] exterior and interior in the 1980s

We were welcomed onto the coach at Nuneaton station by joint organisers Peter Lea and Richard Norman. At 10:15am promptly we departed northwards and into South Leicestershire for our first visit, to the small town of Ibstock and the **Palace**. Designed by architects Goddard and Wain from Coalville, it was opened on 26 December 1912, built sideways to the High Street with the main entrance a little over halfway along the side wall and a 'pit' entrance (behind the current bus shelter). The auditorium contained raked stalls seating with benches at the front and a small balcony with projection room underneath but no ceiling – just the metal supports for the roof. c1950 KYB; pop 6,000, AWH sound, Props RE & M Ball, 123 High Street, Earl Shilton, 520 seats, one show nightly, twice Saturday, two changes weekly, priced 10d to 1/9. Sadly closing in 1970 with *Jungle Book* it became a bingo club well into the 80s; I visited and photographed the inside whilst in the area, showing the metal beams and brackets in the roof and the former CinemaScope pelmet forward of the pros arch. We were made very welcome by the locals, who on 2nd, 3rd and 4th Saturdays get together for a table top sale, coffee and chat and a gathering of the Ibstock Local History Society Archive.



The 'pit' box office at the Palace

Back on the coach and to Coalville for a visit to the **Century Theatre**, on the Snibston site next to the former NCB colliery. Whilst the Discovery Museum has been closed and demolished, this unusual and very interesting venue is open and run by volunteers. The theatre is different from others in that it is 'portable'. It was designed by John Ridley and built by him with Dick Bull and Rob Robinson in Hinckley between 1948-1952. Donations towards the lightweight aluminium structure cost £22,000 (today about £500,000) from national firms and private



The Century Theatre today

individuals, including Laurence Olivier, John Mills, Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie. The auditorium with 200 seats and stage were built on four 33ft long by 10ft wide ex-military trailers. The floor and ceiling folded up to make the sides of the trailer. Seating was hinged in rows to save space, with floor or roof raised and lowered by hand-operated hydraulic rams, then levelled out with further rams and a rack and pinion under each trailer for uneven ground.

The **Century Theatre** toured from 1952 to 1974 but new road traffic regulations forced it off the road so in 1974 it became the resident theatre in Keswick and stayed there for 22 years until a new theatre was built by Derwent Water. It was acquired by Leicestershire County Council with funding from the Heritage Lottery and other



One of the intact trailers

sources, carefully dismantled and brought home on the back of four low-loaders. It was renovated and reassembled on its present site at Snibston. It was reopened in October 1997 and in 2011 a new front-of-house was built with a mezzanine lounge bar, toilets and full disabled access.

We were welcomed into the lounge area with tea/coffee and biscuits, then an introductory talk, before being invited into the spacious auditorium for an informal history of the project to date, coupled with [digital] film on the screen, which included the movement from Keswick. Afterwards we went backstage, with the dressing room trailers all open for us to inspect. A superb venue for plays, shows, live music and cinema for the locals. It is also the largest item in the County Museum's collection! Plans are afoot to reopen part or all of the colliery site, so we look forward to news on that.

After giving our thanks to the **Century** team, it was a short coach journey into Coalville for three external viewings. The former **Rex** opened on 2 February 1938 with Errol Flynn in *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. It became a twin cinema in May 1973 but closed on 3 May 1984. It was later converted to a retail store for Dunelm, closing only recently.

Just a few doors down is the **Regal**, 2 November 1933 to 14 May 1960. It was converted to Coalville Casino Club from 19 April 1963 and sold in July 1992 to Flutters Bingo Club, which closed suddenly on 1 November 2017. It has recently reopened as the **Palace Bingo Club** and, according to the gentleman on the door, they had "quite a job cleaning the place before reopening".

Lastly, at the other end of Marlborough Square stands the **Emporium**, which originates from the **Coalville Public Hall** of 1876. It later became the **Theatre Royal** and in 1910 was converted to become the **Coalville Electric Theatre** with seating on a single floor. Major alterations in 1920 saw a balcony added and it was re-named the **Grand Cinema** with 900 seats. It was taken over by the Ministry of Food in 1939 for food storage and was used as such until



The former Grand Coalville



The Rex [L] and the Regal [R] Coalville

1953. The Deeming family converted it into a ballroom, which was taken over by Mecca in 1973. It later became a nightclub called Passion, since 2009 renamed the Emporium.

The 1950 KYB lists all three venues:

Grand Cinema, WE sound, props Coalville Theatres Ltd, Man Dir CK Deeming, 919 seats, continuous from 5:30pm, mats Mon & Sat, prices 9d to 2/3.

Regal Theatre, WE sound, props Coalville Theatres Ltd, Man Dir CK Deeming, continuous from 5:30pm, two shows on Sat, prices 9d to 2/3.

Rex, WE sound, props Rex Cinema (Midlands) Ltd, 1,200 seats, prices 9d to 2/3, continuous.

There was also the Olympia cinema, which had opened as a roller skating rink c1908. It became the Olympia Picture House in 1910 but was demolished in 1933 and rebuilt as the Regal, which stands today, retaining the stage with a grid added.

From Coalville, southbound on the coach for Hinckley, passing a little village called Cadeby, a Mecca for narrow-gauge railway fans with its rector, Rev ER (Teddy) Boston. Teddy (a friend of mine until his death in 1986) brought endless pleasure with 2ft gauge *Pixie* steaming around the Rectory gardens on Saturday afternoons – it was lovely; sadly all removed now.



The foyer of the five-screen Cineworld Hinckley

Our first call in Hinckley was the new five-screen **Cineworld**. The kind young manager arranged for us to view screen ② after the matinée had finished. A clear picture (credits) on the screen with no tabs, plain walls with small lighting thereon, modern seating with good sightlines. The manager informed me that business was good and patronage increasing, with lots of people in the foyer. Whilst some members took lunch, a few of us went on a walkabout to see past cinemas:

Regent/Gaumont/Classic 11 March 1929 to June 1986. It ran on bingo to 15 June 2013. In May 2014 the auditorium was demolished in favour of a car park and now the frontage is threatened with demolition, the 'tea room' having closed in May this year.

Danilo/Essoldo/Classic/Cannon 26 July 1937, tripled as **Classic** ①, ② & ③ in 1972 to closure in July 1993. Sadly, since its use as a sports bar has ceased, the building has become very derelict, although not boarded-up. Two vertical glass signs, one above the entrance and the other on the outside left tower (visible in photo, parallel to lamppost) have been removed. Sadly for some, the coach was unable to stop for a photo session – double yellow lines everywhere.



The Regent [top] and the Danilo [bottom] Hinckley



The George Ballroom

Now there is another building in town, behind the Edwards Centre, which looks like an Odeon, foxing me and others some time back but it's the George Ballroom. Derelict for some years, it is now being restored by a local businessman. The previous entrance has been uncovered and a blue plaque returned to daylight. "Arthur Kimbrell (1908-1986) Hinckley's Mr Show Biz" The George Ballroom's Dance Promoter who brought World Famous Artists to Leicestershire



The Grand Chapel End with our coach outside

Back on the coach and west along the A5 before going cross country towards Nuneaton and the suburb of Chapel End (one-time home of Larry Grayson) and the lovely **Grand**. Opening c1920 with 500 seats all on one level, it was modernised in 1936 with Holophane lighting and new plasterwork. An unusual feature here was an underground car park with entrance to the front stalls. Closing to films in 1961, it was bought by the Deeming family of Coalville and they have left a lovely building in superb condition. The underground car park was later rebuilt with a lounge and bar, kitchen and storage, with a new entrance well and stairs from the centre of the stalls. Sold in 2017 to the present owner, who allowed us to view and photograph freely. Our thanks to the manager for the welcome. 1950 KYB: RCA sound, 500 seats, prices 1/3 to 2/3, continuous Mon-Fri, twice Sat, pros width 24ft.



The interior of the Grand Chapel End

Leaving the Grand we had some spare time so another venue was to be viewed, the Palace Stockingford. The coach duly parked, with a little walk up to Short Street, it still stands, somewhat altered in recent years, with a new roof and new brickwork and doors to the frontage. 1950 KYB: RCA sound, props ST Cinema (Stockingford) Ltd, 343 seats, continuous Mon-Fri, two shows Sat, mats Mon, Thu & Sat, prices 9d to 1/9, pros width 16ft. Opened as the New Picture Palace in 1920 it became the Palace c1942 with closure in 1959, having since been used as a warehouse, later offices; present use unknown.



The former Palace Stockingford

So to Nuneaton and a walking tour. We gave our coach driver a hearty thank you for his excellent services. We started outside the Ritz for a group photo. Sadly boarded-up and awaiting its fate, Peter Lea advised us there is considerable water damage inside, although the roof has received attention. We await developments. It was opened by Union in July 1937, designed by Verity and Beverley with seating for 1,652 patrons; it had a 3-6 Compton organ and illuminated surround and Melotone with Alex Taylor as organist. It became the ABC Ritz in October 1937 then ABC until 1977 when it became EMI. It was leased in the same year to Mr Roy Wyatt, an independent operator, who twinned it in 1980; films ceased in 1985. It reopened in 1986 as the Ritz Luxury Bingo Club, who ran it until 1998 when Gala took over, closing in 2007 and empty since.



The Ritz Nuneaton

The Compton organ was removed in 1968 to St John Vianney RC Church, Clayhall, Ilford, where it is in full working order today. Concerts are held on a regular basis with the instrument being looked after by the Cinema Organ Society.

Walking down the street, with the local Co-op store and others empty, we came to the Scala Theatre of 1914 with 850 seats. It closed in 1964 for bingo but reopened in 1972 for films for a few years. It was then empty until 1983, when it was gutted and everything was stripped out for rebuilding into offices on the first floor with an amusement arcade on the ground floor and the façade remaining.

The walking party continued to view the former Vint's Picturedrome, currently in use as a gym, as I went to find the car.

So I give my sincere thanks to Peter Lea and Richard Norman for arrangements and organising a really superb day and to our members for their company.



The Scala Theatre Nuneaton

All above photos by the author



Group photo taken outside the Ritz Nuneaton by Ian Grundy

NEWSREEL

The items in this section are taken mainly from press cuttings from local newspapers. Although their factual accuracy has been checked by Allen Eyles, there may be minor errors in reporting dates or other detail. Allen has also provided additional comments, where indicated. Photos by Harry Rigby within entry, except where stated. A number in curly brackets {nnnnn} is the reference for the Cinema Treasures website. Go to: [cinematreasures.org/theaters/nnnnn]

ADDLESTONE (Surrey)

A new six-screen Light cinema was opened on 5 October in the Addlestone One development in Station Road. It will be the tenth UK cinema for the group. A preview open day was held on 29 September.

Surrey Live – 25 September

ASHFORD (Kent)

A structural survey is being carried out at the former Odeon to see if it contains asbestos. The Council, which bought the building last year, ordered the survey. It has also commissioned “specialist cultural expertise” to look at the business case to turn it into a theatre. {14785}

Kent Online – 19 October; sent in by Philip Stevens

BANBURY (Oxon)

On a visit to Banbury in August, we noted workmen inside the former Grand. I could see that the auditorium is completely wrecked, with very large gaps in the brickwork on the right hand side and steelwork holding up the structure. A great loss. It looks as if it is going to become flats, with the frontage and roof remaining. Does any member have internal photographs?

Sent in by Hugh Sykes

BATH (North Somerset)

A new cinema in the Southgate Centre was granted a licence after “grave concerns” over child safety were expressed; the applicants withdrew their request to allow babies under 24-months into [15] and [18] ‘parent and child’ screenings. Conflicting reports give the capacity as 217 seats over four screens and 450 people over five screens. It is scheduled to open in December and be operated by T4051 Ltd; it will be called the Tivoli. See also entry for Cheltenham below & Business p9.

[somersetlive.co.uk] – 17, 25 September; The Times – 20 September; sent in by Raymond Dolling

BEESTON (Notts)

Planning permission has been granted for a new cinema in the town centre. Work is expected to start next year. No further details or operator have been given.

East Midland Business Link – 13 September; sent in by Terry Hanstock

BIRMINGHAM (Central)



Actor Brian Blessed (OBE) made a solo outing on Thursday 13 September, with a dramatic entrance at the Old Rep Theatre, Brian arrived at the theatre to inspect the seat that is now named after him and told many anecdotes of his time when he trod the boards at the theatre in 1960. Continuing the celebrations of the Old Rep's 105th anniversary, the team have installed a number of seat plaques dedicated to notable actors and theatre makers whose careers were developed in the iconic venue including Sir Brian Cox, Sir Barry Jackson and Toyah Willcox. Blessed, now 81, made the visit after having just returned from Russia where he's completed training to go in to space one day.

Theatre Press Release – 15 September; sent in by Gary Stevens

The Odeon Broadway Plaza (ex AMC) has reopened as an Odeon Luxe. It features 1,264 hand-made seats (cf 2,800 before) across its twelve refurbished screens. There is a 204-seat iSense screen with 4k digital projection and Dolby Atmos sound; all standard screens have Dolby 7.1 surround sound. {24150}

Sent in by Carl Chesworth

BIRMINGHAM (Harborne)

The grade II listed former Royalty suffered a serious fire on 19 September; arson is suspected. The blaze came just days after a public meeting was held to discuss turning it into a community building. The cinema opened in October 1930 and films ceased in November 1963. It was a bingo hall until 2012. An 11 minute video from March 2017 by Urban Explorers is at [youtu.be/Kyrzk55lXa0]; there is no suggestion that they had anything to do with the fire. {33866}

Birmingham Post, Express & Star – 20 September, 4 October; sent in by Chris Ingram via Carl Chesworth & R David Simpson

BLACKPOOL (Lancs)

The company that runs Funny Girls has gone into administration with debts of £4.34m. A licence has been granted to Blackburn-based brewery Thwaites, who will continue to run the venue for the time being. Owner Basil Newby MBE has been suffering from ill health. The venue is housed in the 1939 grade II listed former Odeon. {1833}

Blackpool Gazette – 5 September; sent in by Carl Chesworth

BOURNEMOUTH

A developer's bid to build flats on the sites of the former Odeon and ABC in Westover Road has been thrown out on appeal. Libra Homes had planned to keep the façade of the Odeon but replace most of the rest with a high-rise building. The total price paid for both cinemas was £6.15m. A historic building consultant has been allowed into the Odeon to take photos of what remains of the 1929 building, which opened as the 2,267-seat Regent; these can be seen at: [tinyurl.com/yd2kn8m3]. {24207} {20081}

Daily Echo, Bournemouth – 29 September; sent in by Carl Chesworth, RW Hawkins, John R Forster & John West

BRIGHTON

The Kingswest Odeon closed suddenly without warning in early October. A spokesman said there were “technical issues” with a fire alarm. Patrons were angry, especially those with ‘unlimited card’ membership. The closure lasted two weeks. {20676}

The Argus, Brighton – 15, 18 October; sent in by Geoff Gill

BURNLEY (Lancs)

A fire broke out inside the former Empire in the early hours of 22 October; arson is suspected. It has been described as a “heritage crime” by bosses of the Theatres Trust, who have been working with the Burnley Empire Theatre Trust to protect it and secure its future. The incident comes just seven days before the theatre celebrates its 124 year anniversary after the venue first opened with a variety show on 29 October 1894. {36755}

Lancashire Telegraph – 22 October; sent in by Philip Crompton

BURY ST EDMUNDS (Suffolk)

Pat Church writes: The Abbeygate Cinema is currently undergoing a transformation into a four-screen unit complimented by an enlarged restaurant area. For me it's a lifetime's work come to fruition after being here 52 years as projectionist then general manager, now semi-retired and just ‘casual manager’. Watch this space as the attached bingo hall finally comes back into being a cinema.



Photo by Pat Church

Seven more pages of newsreel
in the full Bulletin

CINEMA BUSINESS

EVERYMAN EXPANDS

The Everyman cinema chain is to spread into Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It started in 2000 with the purchase of the Everyman cinema in Hampstead, north London and has grown to 22 venues with 69 screens and has another 15 committed sites. It reported a 32% jump in first half revenues to £24.9m with underlying earnings up 35% to £4.1m on an adjusted basis. In early September, shares closed at 233p, up 5p or 2.3%.

Daily Telegraph, City AM, The Times – 6 September; sent in by Carl Chesworth, Barry Quinton & Jon Williams

VUE EXPANDS

Vue has struck a deal to acquire the 57 cinemas of Germany's CineStar group for €130m upfront and up to €91.8m more depending on performance, in total €221.8m (£195m). This is Vue's third deal of the year following acquisitions in Ireland and Poland and takes the circuit to 282 cinemas and over 2,400 screens.

Evening Standard – 22 October; sent in by Allen Eyles

TICKET PRICING



As reported on p28 of Bulletin 52/2, Vue has cut regular prices at some [initially 22 but later expanded, including Birkenhead (photo)] of its cinemas to £4.99. However, in a few places this has caused a discrepancy between prices at neighbouring venues. For instance, a standard ticket at Vue Carmarthen costs £10.99, while the same ticket at Vue Swansea, 25 miles away, costs £4.99 (both plus 75p booking fee). People have reported similar inconsistencies at Odeon cinemas; a family ticket in Dunfermline costs £9.25 per person compared to £5.75 in Edinburgh. The reports contained many other examples.

Fife Free Press – 2 August; South Wales Evening Post – 14, 30 August; Carmarthenshire Herald – 10, 15 August; BBC Wales News Website – 18 August; also sent in by Allen Eyles (photo) & Martin Tapsell

UK CINEMA ADMISSIONS

UK cinema admissions are set to rise in 2018 with cinema-going up 3.3% from January to the end of August compared to the same period last year. Based on total admissions of 170.6 million in 2017, if the percentage increase recorded to August 2018 is sustained, the total figure for this year could top 176 million for the first time since 1970. The last decade has seen admissions fluctuate on a largely flat line between the 160 million and 170 million mark. Meerkat Movies, the cinema tickets promotion operated by price comparison website [comparethemarket.com], has proven a significant boost to admissions this year. However, while footfall is up, box office receipts have actually fallen this year. For the first six months of 2018, total takings were down 2%, to £665.8m, on the previous year.

Screen Daily – 9 October

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

Derby Cathedral is embroiled in a row with worshippers over plans to show a series of films that will include graphic sex scenes, full female nudity and a pagan sacrifice. The latter features in the 1973 British horror film *The Wicker Man*. Other films in the season include *Don't Look Now*, *Sister Act* and *Monty Python's Life of Brian*.

Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail – 21 August; sent in by Carl Chesworth & Tom Laughlan

ENTERTAINMENT TAX STRIKES

More than 450 cinema operators in Madhya Pradesh [India] have gone on indefinite strike against the double taxation on cinema tickets. Local entertainment tax is up to 15% in addition to Goods and Services Tax of 28% on cinema tickets. Madhya Pradesh accounts for about 4% of total box-office revenues in the country.

The Economy Times – 6 October; sent in by Carl Chesworth

NETFLIX WAR

The UniCi Consortium [a network of independent Italian cinemas, representing about 15% of the Italian box-office] has announced it won't screen Netflix films day and date in their cinemas until future regulations are in place to protect exhibitors in Italy.

Hollywood Reporter – 10 May; sent in by Carl Chesworth

MURDOCH SELLS SKY SHARES

Universal Studios' owner Comcast has cemented its control of Sky, doing an £11.6bn deal with Rupert Murdoch. This means it has secured more than 75% of Sky's shares, moving a step closer to completing its £30bn takeover of the company.

Daily Mail – 5 October; sent in by Tom Laughlan

BECTU STRIKE

On Saturday 20 October, BECTU members fighting for the living wage at Picturehouse cinema, held a demonstration at the London Film Festival. They aimed to highlight their continued struggle for a wage they can live on and to protest against the British Film Institute's use of Picturehouse cinema to screen their films.

Stage, Screen & Radio – autumn 2018; sent in by Jon Williams

BILLIONAIRE FLOP

Kevin Spacey's latest film *Billionaire Boys Club* took just \$126 [£99] on its first day of release. The film was given a dubbing from critics and opened in just ten cinemas in the US. This means that an average of fewer than two people per cinema bought tickets. This was the last film he made before being accused of sexual assault by more than 30 men.

Daily Telegraph – 20 August; sent in by Carl Chesworth

AMAZON'S BIG SCREEN BID

Amazon is reportedly trying to acquire Landmark Theatres, which owns 56 cinemas in the US; it is up against other bidders. Owning cinemas could boost Amazon Studios, the company's production arm, which was behind Academy Award nominated *Manchester by the Sea*.

Daily Mail – 19 September; sent in by Barry Quinton & Tom Laughlan

BINGO'S NEW TUNE

Mecca Bingo is trying to tempt back gamblers with music-themed events after numbers fell 7.9% last year. Parent Rank Group, which also own Grosvenor Casinos, posted a 41% drop in profits to £46.7m during the year to 30 June. Sales at its gambling venues slumped by 3.9%, causing its total revenues to drop by 2.3% to £738m.

Daily Mail – 17 August; sent in by Barry Quinton

BABES IN ARMS NOT ADMITTED?

A mum has criticised Cineworld staff who refused to let her into a screening of Lady Gaga hit *A Star is Born* [15] with a four-week-old baby. She said she had been to the cinema before with her other child to special 'Babes in Arms' showings where infants can attend screenings in the morning and afternoons with parents. Cineworld said British Board of Film Classification rules meant anyone under-age, including babies, could not be let into age-rated films. "We are sorry this customer was disappointed but this is a mandatory law that staff have to follow," it said. "We allow babies into all films that are classified as [12A] and under."

BBC News website – 11 October; sent in by Philip Stevens

Editor's Note: See Newsreel p8.

SEATS FREE TO GOOD HOME

Seats from the Theatre Royal Drury Lane are being offered "free to good home" when the venue undergoes a refurbishment next year. A spokeswoman said they were keen to receive offers from theatrical or education communities requiring batches of 100 seats or more. They will be available for collection from January 2019.

The Stage – 20 September; sent in by Barry Quinton

MISCELLANY

POSTER MAN

In cinema's heyday, a long-forgotten industry flourished in cinema's shadow – the business of poster writing. Every cinema exhibited outdoor posters, often one each side of the entrance. These were called 'oils' and could range from 5ft to 50ft long. Since most picture houses changed programmes midweek and had a different show on Sunday, poster-making flourished. Manchester's two largest poster-making companies were Gordon's Publicity and ADS (Art Display Services), each employing about 100 staff. Cyril Walker worked for Gordon's:

"Oils was my domain. We worked in groups, almost conveyor belt fashion. One guy pinned sheets of white paper on long wooden benches, followed by a foreman ruling lines by walking backwards with a pencil on the end of his 3ft ruler, the other end following the edge of the bench. Another guy put in Monday, Tuesday and Wednesdays, another the star's name, another the film's title and yet another 'Full supporting programme'. The pins were out, the sheets put under the table to dry (which didn't take long because the special ink was thinned with petrol, which evaporated quickly – most of it into our clothes!) Because so many posters were needed each week, speed was of the essence. The speed of the production line was down to precision-made one-stroke brushes and the aid of a finger stick to guide your brush in a straight line. I served in the navy as a telegraphist. When I returned to Gordon's, one of my regular jobs was the Odeon Derby. I had a mate in Derby and kept in touch by putting a border in Morse code around the Odeon poster."

Sent in by Carl Chesworth

MAGNIFICENT FLYING SCREEN GETS AIRBORNE



Mobile Phone Company EE is staging screenings for rural communities in a 'flying' cinema that dangles 100ft in the air, winched up by a crane. It will tour areas recently added to the company's 4G network. The experience – including popcorn deliveries by drone – was tried out by 20 students from Goodwood Flying School in Chichester.

Metro – 3 October; sent in by Margaret Burgoine, Carl Chesworth & Tom Laughlan

Editor's Note: No, it's not 1 April!

WORLD RECORD CINEMA VISITS

One movie buff has proved just how much he loves the big screen by watching more than 700 films in the cinema in 12 months. Parisian Vincent Krohn, embarked on his quest on 23 March 2017 and, despite his full-time job, has achieved the new record for the most films seen in a cinema in one year with 715, beating the old record of 500 by 215 films. To complete the challenge, the 29-year-old Frenchman watched an average of 14 films a week, cramming 10 into his weekends and four during the rest of the week. His favourite was *Back to the Future* which he described as his "most amazing experience", while at the other end of the scale declared 1980s art-house film *The Last of England* as his least enjoyable.

Guinness World Records – 14 August

INFLATABLE MOVIE SCREEN

Large inflatable movie screens are a US concept that hasn't fully made it into the UK. Amazon has a wide range, some of which self-inflate, from £140 up to several thousands of pounds; search "inflatable movie screen".

Evening Standard – 30 August; sent in by Tom Laughlan

STAMPS CELEBRATE OLD VIC'S BIRTHDAY



Maggie Smith, Richard Burton, Judi Dench and Glenda Jackson are among the famous faces that feature on a new set of stamps released by Royal Mail to mark the Old Vic's 200th birthday. A set of eight, each featuring a memorable Old Vic performance. They are available individually but a presentation pack of all eight (illustrated above) costs £10.35.

The Stage – 23 August; sent in by Barry Quinton

THE THEATRE IN THE VAN

The smallest West End theatre entertained fans with three shows a day in late August. With room for an audience of six, it is housed in a Citroën Space Tourer van. It hosts a 20-minute show by two actors in the front. A parking bay in Drury Lane has been suspended so the van can sit undisturbed. Its seats have been reupholstered in traditional theatre red, with headrests removed to improve the audience's view.

Evening Standard – 22 August; sent in by Barry Quinton

PLAQUE UNVEILED

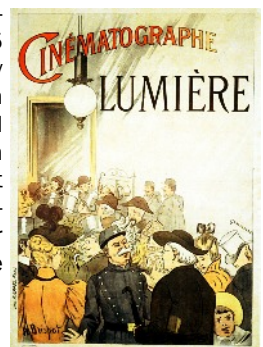
A plaque honouring Alan Jay Lerner has been unveiled at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. His shows include *My Fair Lady*, which had its première at the theatre in 1958.

The Stage – 6 September; sent in by Barry Quinton

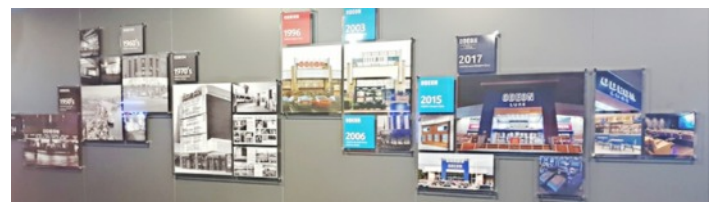
WORD'S FIRST FILM POSTER

The world's first film poster has sold at auction for £160,000. It advertised an 1895 showing in Paris of 20 minutes of shorts by the Lumière Brothers. Sotheby's in London gave the poster an estimate of £40,000 and was stunned at the sum reached. The 58in by 30in design was by artist Henri Brispot but it attracted just 30 people to the screening. Sotheby's previous best for a film poster was £42,000 last year, an advert for the 1933 *King Kong*.

*Daily Mail, Daily Record – 17 August;
Daily Mirror – 14 September;
sent in by Barry Quinton & Tom Laughlan*



ODEON CELEBRATES ITS HERITAGE



Odeon is celebrating its historic cinemas in Exeter, Weston-super-Mare and Salisbury by installing history walls in them. The company has also recognised the history of its presence in Glasgow by the installation of a history wall in the Odeon at Glasgow Quay. Some images for these installations have been provided by David Simpson and the CTA archive. These are permanent installations, so members are encouraged to pop in when visiting those towns. It is lovely to see the circuit celebrating its heritage in this way. Odeon kindly provided this photo of the installation at Glasgow Quay.

Sent in by David Simpson

LETTERS

DOWN MEMORY LANE

It is always nice to read and see Wilf Watters' strolls down Memory Lane in the Bulletin. Some members may not realise that a number of Wilf's own early films showing Memories of Hoxton, the Marlborough Theatre and Last London Trolleybuses etc are shown on the *Talking Pictures* channel (Freeview 81) so look out for them. Thanks, Wilf for letting us have the chance to see them.

Les Bull

POINTS FROM PREVIOUS BULLETIN

Vera Lynn in Chester: Three of Vera Lynn's films are now available on DVD Including *Rhythm Serenade* and *We'll Meet Again*. All are worth obtaining and are good value for money. The Tivoli Wimborne was one of Myles Byrne's cinemas, which included at one time the Theatre Royal Winchester and the Continentale in Brighton. The Tivoli advertised itself as "Cinema at its Best". When it closed an additional notice said "Permanently Closed" On a visit to the building a few years ago, the tour guide said that during closure, the local gunsmith used the screen as a rifle target.

Ian Patterson

SUNDAY OPENING



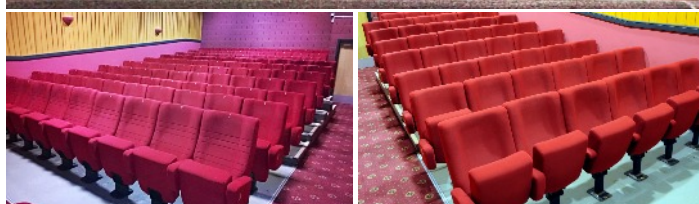
I was interested in the article about Sunday opening of cinemas in Skipton and to see that the staff of the Plaza (I am sure that's what it should have read) voted against it. They did succumb, however and certainly in the early 1970s the cinema opened on Sundays. Later it reverted to six-day opening but when I took over in 1998 I promptly restored Sunday opening. I was glad to see the picture from 2005, which made me realise that we have in fact achieved quite a bit since taking over, as shown in the above picture taken this September.

Charles Morris

Sunday Opening in Skipton (p12 last Bulletin) prompts me to write. When I worked in Derby (at the Odeon/Gaumont (later the Odeon) and the Superama, Derby Council's licensing conditions for cinemas opening on Sundays were fairly rigid: we were only licensed to operate from 2:30pm until 9:30pm. The conditions stipulated that the cinema could open its doors at 2pm but no music was to be played, (the audience were sitting in silence until the 2:30pm start-time when the day's programme started). If, because of a 'technical issue' the film programme were to continue beyond the 9:30pm cut-off time, then the remainder of the film showing was to have the sound turned off! Thankfully this never happened, for the programme was trimmed down for Sunday (usually omitting *Look at Life*) and the programme would finish around 9:10pm to be within the license. Even the luxury Compton Superama (later the Odeon Pennine) had to comply with this strange request for quite a number of years. Another less well-known facet of Sunday opening, was that for each ticket purchased, one [old] penny was to be given as a separate cash item to the Mayor of Derby's Special Purpose Fund: this 'fund' then paid for a Christmas Lunch at Derby Guildhall for a chosen number of Derby's pensioners as a treat for them. The lucky chosen recipients would also receive five shillings (2 x half-crowns): the coins being supplied by a chosen bank and 'new' of that year. My grandmother was 'chosen' one year (1967) and she gave my sister and me one coin each – I still have it!

Carl Chesworth

LONSDALE CINEMAS, ANNAN



I saw that we were mentioned in the last CTA Bulletin. You used a photo from 2009 so just thought I would send you a couple of newer pics: exterior, screen ① and screen ②.

Alan J Towers

BOWNESS-ON-WINDERMERE ORGANIST

In answer to the query on p27 of the last Bulletin, the organist shown on the restored DVD of *The Dam Busters* is Paul Gregson, who is one of the regular organists there and part of the team of volunteers who installed the organ.

Charles Morris

LONDON PALLADIUM WALL OF FAME

I passed by the London Palladium recently and they were having a press call for their new Wall of Fame. In fact it's all on the door that's now fixed to the entrance to the 'walkdown' to the Stage Door. It has 32 square metal 'head and shoulders' portraits of notable artistes who did more than two seasons there. They include Ken Dodd, Arthur Askey, Tom Jones, Vera Lynn, Max Miller, Bruce Forsyth, Nat King Cole, Tommy Trinder, Sammy Davis Jnr, Shirley Bassey, Bing Crosby, The Two Ronnies, Judy Garland, Bob Hope, Des O'Connor, Tommy Steele, Jimmy Tarbuck and Cliff Richard. The last four were there in person. The story made the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Express*.

R David Simpson

WORCESTER

Can I add a bit to Hugh Sykes' notes on Worcester cinemas in the last Bulletin, as the Odeon in Worcester has an unusual early history. It was almost ready for opening in September 1939 but on the outbreak of war was requisitioned by the Government for storage purposes. One reason for this, as can be seen from the railway platform on the bridge above Foregate Street, is that the side wall of the cinema backs right up to the railway tracks, so it was straightforward to arrange movement of materials between trains and auditorium. The cinema finally opened in 1950, so becoming one of the first post-war openings. Also referring to Hugh's article, it is perhaps worth noting that Worcester has a Vue multiplex, almost in sight of the cathedral.

Jeremy Perkins

I thought the Worcester Odeon had seven screens and it was Vue who operated the multiplex?

Tim McCullen

Two more pages of letters
in the full Bulletin

THE METROPOLE VICTORIA

By David A Ellis

The Metropole cinema in Victoria, London, which was originally going to be called the Broadway, was opened on Friday 27 December 1929. It was designed by George Coles and was built for brothers Sydney and Philip Hyams. It is said that it was part of the Hyams and Gale circuit but Gale has no mention in the list of directors. *The ERA*¹ dated 1 January 1930 says: The directors of the Metropole are Mr Philip Hyams (Chairman and joint Managing Director) Mr Sid Hyams (Joint Managing Director) Mr L Benvenuti, Mr HWS Howard and Mr BO Savage, ACA. Mr RS Sowden, whose long experience at the Rivoli and more recently at the Regal Marble Arch, equips him well for the post as General Manager and Mr Mick Hyams, House Manager. Mr Archie Parkhouse is to preside over the magnificent organ. Before teaming up with Gale the Hyams were responsible for several cinemas, which they sold to Gaumont.

Situated opposite Victoria Station, the Metropole was built on what was the bed of a river and the foundations had to be sunk to a depth of thirty five feet. The theatre was designed with a view to combining modern simplicity with the warmth and colour of the Spanish Renaissance period. The prevailing colour scheme throughout was amber, gold and blue. There was a marble floor in the foyer area with pillars of onyx and marble. The auditorium had walnut panelling and there was amber lighting that was concealed. There was a magnificent chandelier, which hung from the central dome. Auditorium carpet was in blue and the proscenium curtain was woven in gold. The proscenium itself measured thirty-seven feet. The theatre boasted six dressing rooms. Features in the foyer, included curved skylight Windows, which had a rich yellow stain with geometric decorations in orange and blue. They were in the high curved ceiling and were nine feet by eight feet.

The first film to hit the screen was *The Co-optimists*. It was stated in the press that the film was the most wonderful for voice reproduction we have heard. In fact by merely closing the eyes you could think the cast were there in the flesh.

At the opening a Mr Archie Parkhouse presented a musical novelty, on what was described as the magnificent Standaard organ, after which one of the directors of the theatre apologised for the unfinished state of the building. He told the audience that the elements had been against them and how sorry he was that those present walked in as the carpet people walked out.

In July 1935 the organ was replaced by a Wurlitzer model. In 1961 it was removed. Musical entertainment was provided by Jack Hylton and his boys. They created a furore when the curtain rose and they started to play *Singing in the Rain*, followed by *Ain't Misbehaving*, *Stepping Out* and others.

¹ *The ERA* was a theatrical newspaper, published 1837-1939

The ERA said: Although it has been stated that a full orchestra had been engaged for the new Metropole Cinema opposite Victoria Underground Station, there was not done at the opening on Friday and I understand that the directors are pursuing a "waiting" policy. That is to say, if the patrons of this magnificent new house desire a real orchestra, the directors are prepared to engage one. In the meantime, music lovers are to have bands and turns on the stage to satisfy their desires as far as possible. Jack Hylton and his boys were the opening attraction and are remaining on. Teddy Brown will be seen there in the near future.

On 1 June 1932, shortly after Baird's television demonstration at Selfridges, plans were made to televise the Epsom Derby. It was transmitted by land line to the Metropole. The Odeon circuit took control in 1943 and played first run Odeon circuit product. The cinema's claim to fame was in 1945 when the interior of the theatre and the organ, were featured in the classic movie *Brief Encounter*.

Road show presentations began in 1959 with the musical *Oklahoma*, opening on 26 December. Because it was now equipped for 70mm screenings, a new wide screen was placed in front of the proscenium and the seating capacity was reduced from the original 1,967 to 1,394. The new projectors were Philips DP70s. The DP70 was the only projector to win an Oscar. If anyone knows what projection equipment was in before 70mm, please let us know.

The cinema's longest run was *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) screened in 70mm with fantastic six track magnetic sound. It had previously had an eight week run at the Odeon Leicester Square. This ran at the Metropole for a staggering ninety-eight weeks. Another long run was the epic *El Cid*. On 5 April 1967 the cinema hosted a Royal Premiere, screening Steve McQueen in *The Sand Pebbles*. Eventually 70mm roadshow product started to dry up, no doubt due to expense and the cinema went back to first-run 35mm shows.

Sadly, film ceased on 11 June 1977 with the film *Burnt Offerings*. It became the Metropole Laser Theatre, staging a show called *Lovelight*, commencing 21 June 1977 until 26 September 1977. After this, the shutters came down and it didn't open for business until Virgin Records took control opening it as a concert hall named The Venue. This operated from 1 November 1978 until August 1984. The demolition hammer moved in after this, destroying the beautiful auditorium. The nearby Cameo/Classic was also victim to the wrecking ball. Fortunately, the foyer of the Metropole was retained and opened as a restaurant. After several occupiers it was opened as Pizza establishment called Ask.

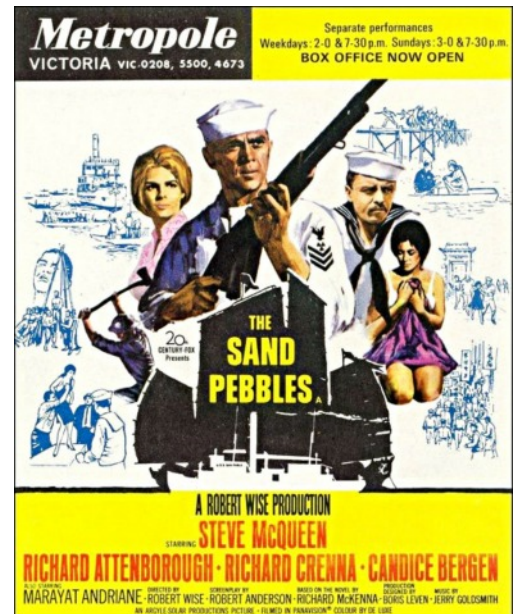
In September 2010 it was announced that the block, which included both the Classic and Metropole were to be demolished to make way for an extension to the Victoria Underground station, providing a new entrance and exit on the north side of Victoria Street. Another fine cinema had joined so many others, as just a memory. Thanks to *Cinema Treasures* for some of the information and images.



The Metropole in 1972



The Upper Foyer in 2010



Poster for *The Sand Pebbles*