



CINEMA  
THEATRE  
ASSOCIATION

[www.cta-uk.org](http://www.cta-uk.org)

# BULLETIN

Vol 56 No 2

ISSN 1479-0882

March / April 2022



The Odeon Weston-super-Mare in August 2003



The proscenium of the State Grays c2004; photo by Peter Hammond



## FROM YOUR EDITOR

Please can I remind you of the rubric at the bottom of the next column: "It is assumed that submissions are for publication, unless stated otherwise." If you send me something confidential, please say so – or I might inadvertently get us both into trouble.

At the risk of repeating myself, please can you ensure any photos submitted for publication are of printable quality. I'm afraid I get many that are out of focus, are too dark and/or suffer camera shake. I can make some adjustments with software but focus and camera shake are very difficult to deal with. If you are taking photos in low light or indoors, please steady your camera, preferably by using a tripod. If you scan prints, please send them at the highest resolution possible. Please don't 'doctor' any images – if I have to make further adjustments the two could conflict. I prefer images as jpgs but I can cope with virtually any format.

I have a few holiday snaps held over but I could do with some more. Now that Covid restrictions are easing and spring and summer are approaching, remember to take your camera and get snapping. I would also welcome some more articles, again illustrated with photographs. I have photos of most cinemas in Britain, taken this Century but if you have recent ones, so much the better.

Harry Rigby, CTA Bulletin Editor



The 2021 edition, number 46, was collected by Royal Mail from the printer on Christmas Eve. Most members seem to have received it on New Year's Eve but we have reports of its arrival in mid-January, clearly as a result of staff shortages at some local post offices, as reported in the national press.

Please email any letters regarding the contents of this issue [of *Picture House*] to [picture.house@cta-uk.org](mailto:picture.house@cta-uk.org) or by post to 13 Tennyson Court, Paddockhall Road, Haywards Heath RH16 1EZ.

The 2022 edition of *Picture House* will focus on Shipman and King, using scans of high quality images provided by Jenny King from the photographic albums of her grandfather, Sam King. To help fill out a history of the circuit, if you worked for or had contact with S&K, have any memorabilia or recollections of the individual cinemas, please contact the Editor, Allen Eyles, by email at [picture.house@cta-uk.org](mailto:picture.house@cta-uk.org), by post at the address above, or by phone on 01444 455763.

Allen Eyles

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Zoom talks and presentations platform

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## 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.

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**MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:** Ray Ritmeester [subs@cta-uk.org](mailto:subs@cta-uk.org)

66 Woodside Road, High Wycombe, HP13 7JB

Items for possible inclusion in the Bulletin should be sent to

**BULLETIN EDITOR:** Harry Rigby [bulletin@cta-uk.org](mailto:bulletin@cta-uk.org)

65 Tennyson Avenue, Harrogate, North Yorks, HG1 3LE

### OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

**CHAIRMAN:** David Trevor-Jones + [chairman@cta-uk.org](mailto: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](mailto:honsec@cta-uk.org)

59 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, TW11 0DJ

**TREASURER:** Neville C Taylor + [accounts@cta-uk.org](mailto:accounts@cta-uk.org)

Flat One, 128 Gloucester Terrace, London, W2 6HP

**CASEWORK COMMITTEE** – Chairman: Richard Gray + [casework@cta-uk.org](mailto:casework@cta-uk.org)

45 Arnold Road, Bow, London, E3 4NU

Members: as main committee plus Rob Chesterfield, Tim Hatcher, Jane Jephcote, Peter Lea, Mark Price, Vicky Simon & Peter Wylde

**ARCHIVIST:** Clive Polden [archive@cta-uk.org](mailto:archive@cta-uk.org)

14 Ivychurch Gardens, Cliftonville, Margate, CT9 3YG

**ASSISTANT ARCHIVIST:** David Simpson

**PUBLIC RELATIONS:** vacancy [publicity@cta-uk.org](mailto:publicity@cta-uk.org)

**SALES OFFICER:** Jeremy Buck + [sales@cta-uk.org](mailto:sales@cta-uk.org)

34 Pelham Road, London, N22 6LN

**WEBMASTER:** Gary Painter [web@cta-uk.org](mailto:web@cta-uk.org)

**VISITS CO-ORDINATOR:** Ray Ritmeester [visits@cta-uk.org](mailto:visits@cta-uk.org)

66 Woodside Road, High Wycombe, HP13 7JB

**PICTURE HOUSE EDITOR:** Allen Eyles [picture.house@cta-uk.org](mailto:picture.house@cta-uk.org)

13 Tennyson Court, Paddockhall Road, Haywards Heath, RH16 1EZ

**CTA SCOTLAND:** Gordon Barr, Gary Painter [scotland@cta-uk.org](mailto:scotland@cta-uk.org)

11 Merker Terrace, Linlithgow, EH49 6DD

**CTA CYMRU/WALES:** John Skinner, Jon Williams [wales@cta-uk.org](mailto:wales@cta-uk.org)

3 Swan Lane, Ystalyfera, Swansea, SA9 2JB

**CTA NORTH:** vacancy [north@cta-uk.org](mailto:north@cta-uk.org)

**CTA WESSEX:** David Eve, Gary Trinder [wessex@cta-uk.org](mailto:wessex@cta-uk.org)

Far Ends, 28 Courtenay Road, Lower Parkstone, Poole, BH14 0HD

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS:** Emma Beeston, Kevin Gooding, Lynda Hillman, Rachel Marks, Richard Norman, Tim McCullen, Ken Roe.

Please use [info@cta-uk.org](mailto: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](http://www.ludo.co.uk)

**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE  
WEDNESDAY 20 APRIL**

## VISITS AND EVENTS

### A Spring day out in smart Mayfair

**Tuesday 29 March 10:30am,**  
**organised by Richard Gray and Ray Ritmeester**



The Curzon Mayfair in April 2004

Britain's youngest listed cinema (Grade II), the Curzon Mayfair opened in 1966. It replaced a distinguished cinema of the same name but this single-storey structure became sacrificed to the pressures of greater development on such a high-profile site. The new building not only accommodated a new picture house but also a restaurant, with eight floors of offices and flats overhead. The ingenious planning fitted the foyer into a semi-basement below a stadium-style auditorium. The same architectural practice – Burnet, Tait and Lorne – was again employed (project architect: HG Hammond).

Particularly notable are William Mitchell's distinctive acoustic treatment of the auditorium wall surfaces in a random abstraction, a device also extending to a sliding screen in the foyer, which can seal-off the bar area if desired. The ceiling is in cellular form, above which a raft supports the superstructure. The Curzon is therefore noteworthy not only for these features but also for the extremely clever use of internal levels. In more recent years a second screen has been fitted into the rear part of the auditorium but not to drastically alter its overall appearance.

Both the new and old Curzon cinemas have held a prominent place in London film-going, presenting not only art films but also more general product. Curzon as a company is determined to continue operating on the site but they are now at the behest of a new ground landlord, whose proposals are not entirely clear but may include conferences and even theatrical use.

For this, certain changes are suggested, leading to unwanted compromise and the CTA Casework function recently attended a meeting about this and is in discussion with both the exhibitor and the planning authority, Westminster City Council.

It is possible the CTA has never before visited this important cinema and we felt it an opportune moment to explore its complexities before any alterations are made.

Following this visit we hope to include one or two other entertainment buildings. Full details of these other venues will appear on the TicketSource and CTA websites.

Getting There: The Curzon is at 37-38 Curzon Street, London W1J 7TY and is situated towards its further end going towards Park Lane. The closest Tube station is Green Park, then walk west along Piccadilly, taking Clarges Street on the right, turning left at the top into Curzon Street.

#### BOOKING YOUR TICKET

Members £8 and Non-Members £10 (including notes and tea/coffee)



Booking is done on-line using TicketSource:  
[www.ticketsource.co.uk](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk). Simply enter 'Cinema  
Theatre Association' into their Search Box.  
Members without Internet access may book by  
telephone on 01494 532241 or 07852 761842.

## CASEWORK

By Tim Hatcher

### Grade II\* Listed

A press release has been issued by the Association raising concern over lack of progress in conversion of the State in Grays to a hostelry of the JD Wetherspoon chain of such establishments. Subsequently a representative of the architectural practice KDPA has contacted the CTA in order to seek advice on the technical equipment which survives in the cinema.

Formal objection has been forwarded against proposed removal of certain decorative features from within the Granada in Walthamstow, as detailed in published plans for its renovation.

It is anticipated that the Dreamland cinema in Margate will be utilised as a location for filming of a cinematographic feature. This would involve temporary replacement of external signage and internal doors. A watching brief will be maintained to ensure that any such alterations are reversed following completion of the project.



The Dome Worthing in March 2009

A modicum of progress has been made towards the rectification, currently stalled, of the unapproved alterations to the Dome in Worthing. Historic England has now deemed the basic revised plans to be acceptable; however, it requires that the intended moulding details be re-designed and expertly crafted.

### Grade II Listed



The Rio Dalston in April 2006

A scheme to install solar panels on the roof of the Rio in Dalston will be assessed when detailed plans become available; any resultant comments will then be submitted to the relevant authorities.

More Casework in the full Bulletin



# CTA VIRTUAL TALKS AND PRESENTATIONS

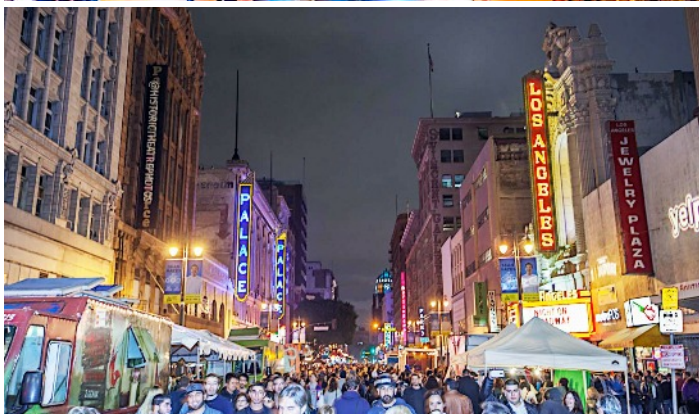
## A Virtual Stroll Down Los Angeles Broadway

**Saturday 2 April at 5:30pm (BST) / 9:30am (US PDT)**  
(Zoom talk No 17)

**BY THE LOS ANGELES HISTORIC THEATRE FOUNDATION**

After the popular success of last year's *Atmospheric Theatres* presentation, the CTA again joins with the Los Angeles Historic Theatre Foundation [LAHTF] to invite you to take a virtual stroll through LA's very own Broadway Theatre District. Explore the theatres that beat the wrecking ball and continue to shine as a beacon in a district over 100 years old. Each theatre as different as the next, they each lend their own unique design and architectural features to the rich character of the largest theatre district listed on the USA's National Register of Historic Places.

New York City's Great White Way has reigned supreme over Broadway productions but in Los Angeles, Broadway was the epicentre of vaudeville and motion picture exhibition in the early 1900s. The development brought out prolific architects and master craftsmen, creating a story woven throughout Broadway of theatres – some lost but many thriving in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Major moves over the last decade have breathed new life into the theatres and district, evidencing how important the district is not only to downtown but a flourishing reminder of the industry's roots in the home of motion pictures and entertainment. Both CTA and LAHTF members enjoy the same admission price for this special presentation. (see below)



The blazing marquee neon of LA's busy Broadway

### BOOKING YOUR TICKET

CTA Zoom talks are open to everyone – members and non-members alike. CTA & LAHTF Members: £3; Non-Members: £5 per device

Zoom talk starts at 5:30pm BST / 9:30am US PDT  
(log-in from 5:15pm / 9:15am)

Booking is done on-line using TicketSource:  
[www.ticketsource.co.uk](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk)

Simply enter 'Cinema Theatre Association' into their Search Box. (Talk No 17)



## The Cinemas of Thomas 'Tommy' Thompson

**Saturday 21 May at 5:30pm (UK time)**  
(Zoom talk No 18)

**BY PETER HALLINAN**

Thomas Thompson was a true pioneer of cinema exhibition in the North-East of England. In 1908, at the age of 40, he gave up his job as a shipping clerk in Hartlepool, rented a hall in Middlesbrough and hired a second-hand projector. Two years later he had bought that hall and also the 3,000-seat Hippodrome in Middlesbrough with its 18-piece orchestra. From then there was no stopping him and during his lifetime he owned 50 cinemas and became a key figure in English cinema exhibition.

Generously illustrated with rare images, this talk will look at how he started, the audience he looked for, his choice of venues and how he made them work as businesses. It will also look at his wider achievements including being a founding member of the Cinema Exhibitors Association, being a frequently outspoken contributor to their deliberations on cinema issues of the day, being a film renter, dabbling in colour films, making films (where his ambition exceeded accomplishment achievement), owning an ice cream factory and being offered a baronetcy (for a price), which he didn't take.

Our presenter, Peter Hallinan, is Thomas Thompson's great-grandson. He'd grown up hearing many family anecdotes and fascinating tales of cinema ownership. After leaving his career as a commercial property lawyer, he began a Master's Degree in Film Studies with Film Archiving at the University of East Anglia. At his interview he shared a few of those family cinema stories. "That's your dissertation", he was told. And so began the search, with fingers crossed, to find out if the reality matched what the family had said. It did, many times over. Peter later worked for a number of years as a film archivist at the Imperial War Museum and has since done a lot more research and created a much-praised website ([www.bugandflea.com](http://www.bugandflea.com)) as a tribute to his great-grandfather. Book your ticket for this exciting tribute to a true cinema pioneer!



The Palladium Middlesbrough in 1960  
(part of the Tommy Thompson circuit)

### BOOKING YOUR TICKET

CTA Zoom talks are open to everyone – members and non-members alike. CTA Members: £3; Non-Members: £5 per device

Zoom talk starts at 5:30pm (UK time, log-in from 5:15pm)

Booking is done on-line using TicketSource:  
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Simply enter 'Cinema Theatre Association' into their Search Box. (Talk No 18)



# PUBLICATIONS

## Back Numbers Available

### PICTURE HOUSE MAGAZINE

Listed below are the back numbers of *Picture House* that are still available:

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 16	£3.00	Dominion London; 3000 plus; John Broadley remembers.
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 22	£3.50	Burrell, Foley, Fischer; Palace Theatre London; David Nye.
No 24	£4.50	Oldest Cinema - Harringay; Cardiff Round-up; Odeon Miscellany.
No 25	£4.50	Oldest Cinema (Brighton); FE Bromige; Committee's Choice; Gaumont Managers; Carlton Swansea;.
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	Holophone lighting; Imitations of Odeon; Cradley Records; 1909 Cinematograph Act; Kingston Showmanship.
No 36	£6.00	Leslie Kemp; Jeremy Perkins on Brighton; The Clifton Circuit; 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; Majestic Oxford; Odeon North Finchley; 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 50th Anniversary; Plaza Stockport; Majestic Leeds; Grosvenor Rayners Lane; Pascal J Stienlet.
No 42	£6.00	Odeon Elephant & Castle, Plaza Crosby; Depot Lewes; Cineworld Chelsea; Gaumont Sheffield Figures.
No 43	£6.00	Virgin Cinemas; Peter Jewett's ABC memories; Scala Kings Cross; Picture House Campbelltown; Beeston/Nottingham memories.
No 44	£6.00	Village Cinemas of NE Scotland; William Keys' career; Bernard Snowball remembers Pt1.
No 45	£8.50	Classic Repertory Cinemas; Blackpool Cinemas; Thomas Jackson; Bernard Snowball remembers Pt2. Special 100-page issue.
No 46	£6.00	Cecil Clavering, Odeon Architect: Pavilion Hailsham; Working For Star: Focus Sevenoaks Figures.

There are also available a few second-hand copies of out-of-print issues of *Picture House* 9, 10, 14/15, 20 & 23, 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 2020 are £4.00 per year (6 issues), individual copies are £1.00 each. Prices for issues in 2021 and 2022 are £5.00 per copy. All prices include postage. There are some issues available from earlier years - 1967 to 1986. Please send enquiries to the Sales Officer.



## BINDERS FOR PICTURE HOUSE MAGAZINE

These binders are to a new, revised design, which should allow easier storage for the more recent thicker copies of the magazine. The 'Wirex' system allows copies to be inserted easily and removed if required. There are twelve wires per binder, although the number of copies that can be inserted may vary depending on the thickness of the issue. The binders can also be used for the thinner, earlier copies of the magazine. Featuring a red leather-look finish and the magazine title on the spine in the current format.

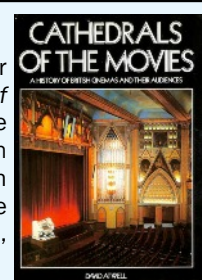


**Price:** £6.00 per binder, supplied in a special postal carton. Please add £3.40 to your total order for post and packing.

Ordering details below.

## Second-Hand Books

We have a selection of second-hand books for sale, including rare titles such as *Cathedrals of the Movies*, *The Picture Palace*, etc. To receive a full list with around 50 titles, please send an email to the Sales Officer [sales@cta-uk.org](mailto:sales@cta-uk.org) with 'Second Hand Book List' as the subject. Or write to the Sales Officer, 34 Pelham Road, London, N22 6LN (SAE appreciated).



## Ordering

For post and packing: total order value up to £20.00 please add £3.40, total order value from £20.01 to £40.00 please add £4.40, total order value from £40.01 to £60.00 please add £6.40. For larger orders and overseas, please contact the Sales Officer, email: [sales@cta-uk.org](mailto:sales@cta-uk.org). 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 and all the books can be seen on the CTA website [www.cta-uk.org](http://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)

*Movie Theaters* by Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, 304 pages, hardback, 200 illustrations, large size, ISBN 978-3791387741. About £35.99 from Amazon.

Following on from their incredibly successful *The Ruins of Detroit*, this major new project by two prolific French photographers poignantly eulogises and celebrates the tattered remains of hundreds of movie theatres across America. They are in every American city and town - grandiose movie palaces, constructed during the heyday of the entertainment industry, that now stand abandoned, empty, decaying, or repurposed. Since 2005, the duo have been travelling across the US to visit these early 20th Century relics. In hundreds of lushly coloured images, they have captured the rich architectural diversity of the exteriors and have also stepped inside to capture the interiors - crumbling plaster, rows of broken crushed-velvet seats, peeling paint, defunct equipment and abandoned concession stands - as well as their transformation into bingo halls, warehouses, fitness centres, flea markets, parking lots and grocery stores. Using a large format camera, the photographers' carefully-composed images range from landscape exteriors to starkly beautiful close-ups. Presented here in an oversized format, this illustrated eulogy for the American movie palace is certain to interest many cinema enthusiasts!



A selection of the images can be viewed at: [tinyurl.com/357nn7vv](http://tinyurl.com/357nn7vv)



# THE CONTINUAL BATTLE FOR THE STATE

by Mike Whitcombe

Even during what we now consider to be an almost mythical era of cinema building, the State Cinema in George Street, Grays, Essex, stood out. And considering that during the latter half of the 1930s, predominately art deco designed cinemas with seating capacities of over two thousand were literally opening every week, that's a remarkable fact.



Even more remarkable is the fact that the State still stands. It might not have shown a film in thirty years but as one of the few remaining 'super cinemas' from the late 1930s to survive almost unaltered, it's culturally important not only to the local area, where it has dominated the town for over eighty years but to the nation itself. Empty and forlorn since the mid-1990s, it's been watched over by the casework committee of the CTA for many years. When pub chain Wetherspoon announced they intended turning this iconic cinema into a pub, the CTA naturally voiced their opinions to ensure any planning application would not destroy, in particular, the unique preserved interior decoration of what is a Grade II\* listed building. In 2018, when Planning and Listed Building Consent was given to Wetherspoon by Grays Council after strong guidance from both Historic England and the CTA, there was much anticipation. But since those heady days, progress has been slow. Deterioration of the interior due to a damaged roof has continued unabated and the CTA has once again been forced to publicly demand that the State Cinema be saved.



The State opened on Monday 5 September 1938. It was originally going to be called the Roxy and was built by the independent circuit Frederick's Electric Theatres Company. After twenty houses in George Street were demolished to make way for the site, the cinema soon became one of the largest cinemas ever built in Essex. It seated 2,200 patrons – 1,400 in the stalls and 800 in the circle – as well as a 50-seat restaurant at circle foyer level and stage facilities for live entertainment with complete stage equipment and three dressing rooms. Equally impressive was the three manual, six rank, Compton organ with a Melotone attachment, a 'rainbow' illuminated console and two chambers containing approximately 500 pipes, which were located under the stage, giving sound through the orchestra pit. Such extravagance didn't come cheap.



The State organ console, some organ pipes & the orchestra pit showing the organ shutters

The cost for the build was £100,000, a huge figure at the time, particularly for a town the size of Grays, which, in the mid-1930s, only had a population of 18,000, most of whom were working class.

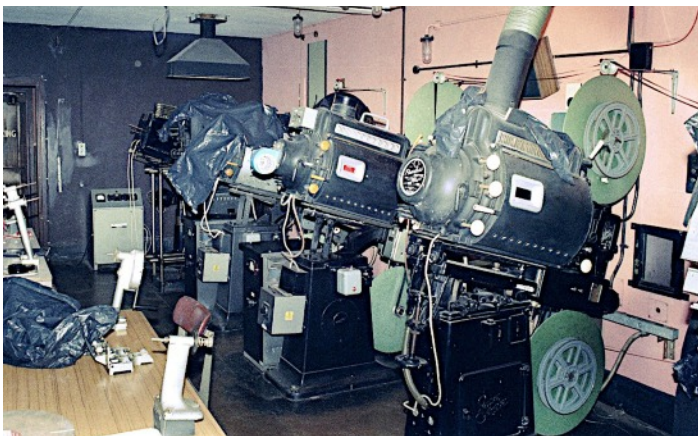
The architect was Francis Graham Moon Chancellor (1869-1940). He was a Tasmanian who had begun training as an architect before arriving in England in May 1894 on board the *RMS Oroya*. In 1900 he was hired by Frank Matcham and when Matcham retired in 1913, Chancellor largely took over the running of Matcham & Co. Chancellor was clearly held in some esteem by Matcham, for when Matcham died in 1921, Chancellor was co-executor of Matcham's will. By the end of the 1920s, Chancellor realised that the hey-day of theatre building was long gone and he modernised Matcham & Co's business model to concentrate on cinemas. In 1938, just a year before he retired, he produced his most notable work – the State Cinema. Interestingly, it was the second 'super cinema' that Chancellor had designed in Grays for Frederick's Electric Theatres. His first was the Regal in New Road, which opened in 1930. Sadly, it was demolished in 1971.





The State's opening film was a South Seas drama called *Hurricane* starring Dorothy Lamour and directed by John Ford. Variety and concert performances supplemented films during the 1940s and cinema staff at this time offered to take telephone messages for patrons "if they will be good enough to inform the cashier at the Box Office that a call is expected". As cinemas began closing during the 1950s and then began to be carved up for additional auditoria a decade later, the State defied the odds by not only remaining open but remaining a single-screen cinema, pretty much unaltered from its opening night.

In 1975 the State was sold to Mecca Leisure. They kept things going until dwindling audiences caused them to close the cinema in 1985 (*Gremlins* was the final film). At the time, the State was the largest single-screen cinema still operating in the country and, to avert a serious threat of demolition, it was awarded Grade II listing in February 1985. Valiant efforts were then made to revive its fortunes. Independent operator Robins Cinema reopened the State in 1986, when the cinema also played a starring role in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. Sadly, Robins could only battle on until 5 September 1988, the State's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, when they closed by showing the film that had opened the cinema half a century earlier. A year later another independent operator tried their luck but that only lasted a few months. On 30 November 1989, *Great Balls of Fire* became the final film to be shown on the famous silver screen.



The projection box – projectors still in situ

During the 1990s the Charleston Nightspot opened in the lower foyer. David Essex and Suzi Quatro both performed on the stage. But it was too little too late and when the cinema was upgraded to Grade II\* listing in 2000, this huge building was already beginning to deteriorate. A year later the supermarket giant Morrisons paid £10 million for the site. They made the usual vague claims that they would ensure the upkeep of the building but their real interest was in the State's large car park. When they had built a store on the car park, the cinema held no interest for them and in 2006 they sold the building to TSP Properties for £550,000.

Various suggestions were made for the future use of the State but it was only when JD Wetherspoon bought the cinema in 2015, claiming they would spend millions of pounds sympathetically redeveloping it, was there a belief the State might be realistically saved. And when Thurrock's Planning Committee approved plans by Wetherspoon in August 2018 to turn the State into one of the largest pubs in the Wetherspoon chain, it was believed desperate remedial work would begin immediately.

By November 2020, there was little or no sight of any vital repair work being done, prompting the CTA Casework Committee to take action. They fired off a press release, declaring they were genuinely concerned for the very fabric of the State.



The north wall, showing the water damage

"Water is leaking into the interior from a roof desperate for repair and this work is the responsibility of Wetherspoon's, who own the site," said Richard Gray, Chair of the CTA Casework Committee, in the press release. "The State is a cultural marker of historical importance and a visual centrepiece of Gray's town centre. Remedial work must be begun immediately if the fabric of what is an extremely rare representative of a 1930s 'super cinema' is to be saved."

The redevelopment of the State was meant to herald a £200 million investment in Grays, which, according to Mark Coxshall, lead councillor for regeneration in Thurrock, speaking in November 2019, would transform Grays "from the river to the very heart of the town." This point was alluded to by Richard Gray, who added: "The importance of the building cannot be stressed enough. It really has remained unaltered with much of its original décor, organ and fittings intact. But unless urgent repair work is carried out to stop further water penetration from the fast-deteriorating roof, we have serious fears for the building. We cannot allow the much-loved State to be exposed to another harsh winter. We urge the Council and JD Wetherspoon to cooperate and live up to their promises."



The staircase & a stalls side exit



The press release was immediately picked up by local media outlets. The *Thurrock Gazette*, in a piece by Matthew Critchell on 1 December 2020, gave it much coverage and printed a response to the CTA's claims from Wetherspoon spokesman Eddie Gershon. "We are still committed to opening a Wetherspoon pub on the site of the former *State* cinema," said Gershon. "Once specific points have been resolved, Wetherspoon will resubmit a revised planning application. We hope to be in a position to develop the site in 2021. It will be a substantial project, costing up to £5 million, restoring the dilapidated Grade II\* Listed building."

The article also contained a quote from Cllr Rob Gledhill, leader of Thurrock Council, who made it perfectly clear whose side he was on. "I am disconcerted that the reasonable requests of Wetherspoon are being denied," he said. "I feel the changes they propose are more than reasonable. Yes, there would be a change to the exterior and some of the interior features would not be original but that is an acceptable price to pay. To get this iconic building back into use would be good for the regeneration of Grays and show Thurrock is open for business."

The CTA's press release had done its job in rattling a few cages but four months later there was still no sign of any repair work being carried out on the roof. It was also difficult to get Wetherspoon or their architects, KD Paine, to reveal what changes would be contained in a resubmitted planning application. The CTA decided it was time for a second press release. Again, Richard Gray made the concerns of the CTA crystal clear: "JD Wetherspoon need to live up to their responsibilities," he stated. "They urgently need to commission immediate repairs on the roof to stop any further water penetration that could irrevocably damage an interior that has been listed Grade II\* for a reason."

He went on to add: "We (the CTA) cannot understand why Wetherspoon's are dragging their heels over this development, which could transform the centre of Grays and prove the impetus needed to regenerate the whole area. But the Council also need to take their fair share of responsibility. It's all very well for the leader of Thurrock Council to claim that turning this iconic building into a Wetherspoon's will boost the economy of the Borough and show Thurrock is open for business, as he did after our last public intervention but unless something happens soon his words are meaningless."



[L] a side grille & [R] a seat end casting

Matt Critchell was one of the journalists who received the press release and he reported in the *Basildon, Canvey and Southend Echo* on 31 March 2021 that Wetherspoon were still keen to push ahead but made no mention if any work would be begun on the roof or why Wetherspoon were resubmitting their planning application. It seemed as if the whole affair was cloaked in secrecy but then on 15 July 2021 the Council approved the new plans. By 19 July 2021 the local media was awash with the story.

Louise Lazell, writing for *Essex Live*, reported a quote from Wetherspoon spokesman Eddie Gershon. "We are delighted with the decision of the Council," said Gershon. "We are committed to developing the site and once again making it an important part of the town's social scene. The Council has a superb plan to regenerate Grays and we are delighted to be part of that." Cllr Mark Coxshall, cabinet member for the grandly named Regeneration, Strategic Planning & External Affairs, chipped in: "I can't wait to see the iconic doors of the *State* finally reopen!"



A side view of the proscenium, showing the house tabs



# 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 added 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: [\[cinematreasures.org/theaters/nnnnn\]](http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/nnnnn)

## ASHBOURNE (Derbys)

Work has started on converting the upper floor of the former Elite into a 120-seat cinema. Builders are constructing new tiers and a stage and a specialist architect has been enlisted to turn it into a cutting-edge cinema and theatre. The project has attracted one of the last EU funding grants. It is hoped work will be finished by September with a view to opening before the end of the year. The ground floor of the building was converted into shops in the late 1970s. {29267}

Derbyshire Live – 9 February; sent in by Terry Hanstock

## BANBURY (Oxon)

The forthcoming eight-screen Light cinema has been granted permission for a retractable roof on its outdoor café area as well as a screen for an open-air cinema. See p18 last Bulletin.

Banbury Guardian – 20 January

## BARNESLEY (South Yorks)

Interior works have begun on the new 13-screen 2,000-seat Cineworld as part of the Glass Works development in the town centre. It is expected to open late summer. The site is virtually opposite the existing two-screen Parkway (ex Odeon).

Yorkshire Post – 15 February; sent in by Terry Hanstock

## BIRMINGHAM (Central)

As reported on p18 of the last Bulletin, the two-screen Electric in Station Street reopened on 21 January. The media interest was extraordinary, covering local news and Sky News and a big segment of *The One Show* on the Wednesday before opening. The old digital projectors had been turned off for so long they could not be saved. They have sourced some almost new 35mm projectors that only have a few hours on the clock, which will be going in soon, so the image on 35mm will improve considerably. They are also waiting for the second laser projector to go in screen 2; the improvement in the picture will be quite remarkable. [electricbirmingham.com](http://electricbirmingham.com) {9559}

NME – 11 January; The Independent – 19 January; BBC News website – 20 January; The Guardian – 22 January; Sky News – 23 January; sent in by Margaret Burgoine, Phillip Crompton, John R Forster, Tom Laughlan, Barry Quinton, Joseph Roberts, R David Simpson & John West

## BLAENAVON (Torfaen)

The 1895 Workmen's Hall has launched an appeal for volunteers to help keep it open as it is "struggling to keep going". It recently had a £280,000 refurbishment, including new sound and lighting equipment for the 350-seat theatre and new seats in the 69-seat cinema. [www.blaenavonworkmenshall.uk](http://www.blaenavonworkmenshall.uk) {26560}

Abergavenny Chronicle – 16 January

## BOURNEMOUTH

The 19-seat Colosseum is set to reopen in March following the easing of Covid restrictions. It opened in September 2013 and is located downstairs in *The Vintage Lounge* coffee shop in Westbourne Arcade. {56057}

Daily Echo, Bournemouth – 13 February; sent in by Terry Hanstock

## BRADFORD (West Yorks)

Plans, reported on p21 of Bulletin 55/2, for the Grade II listed former Scala to become an extension to the adjacent wedding venue have been approved. A link will be created between the two buildings. The 700-seat cinema only lasted nine years between 1913 and 1922 and many of its features are still intact. {3674}

Telegraph & Argus – 17 January

## BRISTOL

Councillors have backed a plan to save the former St George's Hall / Granada from being turned into flats, after a petition with 9,000 signatures was presented to them. The auditorium is said to be largely intact behind the foyer area, which was used as a Wetherspoons pub until last September. See p18 Bulletin 55/6. {27949}

Bristol Post – 10 December

The Grade II listed three-screen Everyman (ex Whetladies) has been granted permission to add a 37-seat fourth screen in an adjacent former restaurant, the Cowshed, which opened in 2009 and closed at the start of the pandemic. {849}

Western Daily Press – 30 December

## BURNLEY (Lancs)

Work started at the end of January on the Pioneer Place development. It will incorporate a seven-screen Reel cinema. It is set to be completed in late summer 2023 and opened in the autumn of that year. Reel will relocate from its existing site and their old building will become a supermarket.

Lancashire Telegraph – 29 January; sent in by Phillip Crompton

## BURY ST EDMUNDS (Suffolk)

Everyman has submitted a proposal to turn part of the former Debenhams store into a four-screen cinema, with a fifth screen available for private hire. In total, the screens would provide 306 seats; the largest screen will accommodate 104 customers with the others comprising a 74-seat screen and two 48-seat screens. The private hire space will cater for 32 viewers. No time scale has been given.

Retail Gazette, BBC News website – 14 February; sent in by Roger Fox & Terry Hanstock

## CANVEY ISLAND (Essex)



A full-size model of *Star Wars* Jedi master Yoda has been stolen from the four-screen Movie Starr. CCTV shows the villain sheepishly looking around before swiping the 2ft high character. Staff gave chase but were unable to catch the thief. Cinema bosses are appealing to the public to help find the missing figurine. Anyone with information can use The Force – Essex Police! {14619}

The Sun – 10 February; sent in by Barry Quinton; photo taken July 2007

## CHELMSFORD (Essex)

The 500-seat Civic Theatre is to get a £1m makeover as it celebrates its 60th birthday. The foyers and ground floor bar will be redesigned to give more space and a second café/bar area created at the front of the building, allowing for tables on the pavement outside. The toilets will also be updated. The work is due to be done this summer. The theatre has some cinema use.

Essex Chronicle – 4 November; sent in by David Johnson

## CHESTERFIELD (Derbys)

The Grade II listed Museum and the adjacent Stephenson Memorial Hall of 1879 are to have a £15m renovation. The Hall houses the 590-seat Pomegranate Theatre and Cinema. The museum was due to close on 1 March to move the collections but the theatre will remain open during this time; no closure date has been announced for the theatre. {64495}

East Midlands Business Link – 18 February; sent in by Terry Hanstock

## COLCHESTER (Essex)

A drive-in cinema has gone into administration after its bid for permission was rejected. Nightflix had been allowed to use a former supermarket site in Stanway as a pop-up cinema and had applied to build on the site.

Daily Gazette, Colchester – 31 January



### DARLASTON (Walsall)

The former Showcase has been demolished and will become a car supermarket. At the time of the report the façade was still standing but it is unclear if this will be reused. {17102}

*Express & Star, Wolverhampton – 1 January; See photo p23 Bulletin 55/4*

### DAVENTRY (Northants)

The delayed opening of the new four-screen Arc cinema was scheduled for 4 March. All screens feature VIP electric recliner seats as standard.

*Northants Live – 4 February*

### DINGLE (Co Kerry, Ireland)



The 150-seat Phoenix closed last November but news has only just reached us. It first opened in 1919 with 600 seats. {24651}

*Sunday Times, Ireland – 28 November; photo taken September 2017*

### DONCASTER (South Yorks)

The six-screen Savoy, which is owned by the Council, has been devalued by more than half of what it cost to build. The latest external audit report says it is worth £3.29m against a build cost of £8.5m. {65131}

*Yorkshire Post – 30 November*

### DORCHESTER (Dorset)



The four-screen Plaza had to shut for a few days in early January due to a power failure. It first opened in July 1933 with 986 seats. {15143}

*Dorset Live – 11 January; photo taken May 2006*

### DUNDEE

Plans for a Light cinema in the Wellgate centre were first mooted in 2013 but fell through after talks collapsed. Now the centre is up for auction and Light says it has “not lost interest” and would be “very enthusiastic” to talk to whoever buys the centre.

*Dundee Courier – 3 December*

### EASTBOURNE (East Sussex)

Plans have been submitted to turn the former six-screen Cineworld at Sovereign Harbour Retail Park into a B&M store with garden centre. Originally a project of Cineplex Odeon, the cinema opened in August 1990 as a Cannon. It had a succession of names before becoming the Cineworld in November 2005. It closed in July 2019 when the circuit relocated to the Beacon Shopping Centre. {24682}

*Eastbourne Herald – 7 January; sent in by Geoff Gill*

### EDINBURGH (Portobello)

As surmised on p19 of the last Bulletin, plans to redevelop the C-listed former George have been rejected for the third time. The assessment said that the applicant had not sufficiently demonstrated that the building was incapable of meaningful repair and had not fully demonstrated that the potential for the building to be reused as a cinema (or similar compatible community use) had been fully explored. {23292}

*The Herald – 12 January*

### GRAVESEND (Kent)

Plans to convert the former Majestic/EMD into flats have been delayed again after the developer announced it would reduce the height of the building. See p20 last Bulletin. {37337}

*Gravesend Messenger – 2 December*

### GREENOCK (Inverclyde)

Work to demolish the former BB Cinema was due to begin in January. The building was purchased by the Council for £280,000 as part of a plan to free up the land for a housing development. Knocking the building down is expected to cost £400,000. The money is coming from funds set aside for town and village centre improvements. The cinema opened in January 1913 and closed in the early 1970s. It became bingo and then a nightclub, which moved out several years ago. Photos of the demolition can be seen at [tinyurl.com/5f2jn46s](https://tinyurl.com/5f2jn46s). {50366}

*Inverclyde Now – 29 December*

### HASTINGS (East Sussex)



The 50-seat Electric Palace Cinema had to close in January. “Due to the understandable concerns that affect us all regarding the ongoing Omicron variant, January film bookings and venue hire were at an all-time low. It has not proved financially viable for us to open our doors for film screenings.” The venue launched a community fundraising appeal with a target of £15,000; more than £17,000 was raised, saving it from permanent closure. {24720}

*Bexhill-on-Sea Observer – 11, 19 January; photo taken April 2008*

### HULL (East Yorks)

The Grade II listed former Tower is due to reopen in March as a live music venue. The new owners [un-named], who also run a venue in London, have taken out a 25-year lease on the building. It opened in June 1914 with 1,200 seats, later reduced to 750. Films ceased in September 1978 and it was last used as a nightclub

[towerballroomhull.com](https://towerballroomhull.com) {3278}

*Hull Daily Mail – 4 February; sent in by David Alexander*

### LIVERPOOL (Wavertree)

Work appears to have started to convert the former Abbey into a Lidl supermarket. The original proposal was to demolish the building but it was awarded a Grade II listing. {44856}

*Liverpool Echo – 26 January*

### LONDON (Kensington)

The façade of the Odeon has been demolished due to corrosion of the original steelwork that supported it. Apparently, the Portland stone blocks from which the façade was made have been numbered and will be reinstated on the new building. We wait and see if that will happen but, sadly, the entire former Odeon Kensington has now been demolished and the site is an empty plot. {13801}

*Sent in by Ken Roe*

**More Newsreel in the full Bulletin**



# LETTERS

## MODEL CINEMA

I have just been reading the latest CTA Bulletin and had quite a surprise when turning to page 30. I am the builder of the model cinema shown in the photograph – but I have no idea why a copy of the photograph has turned up in a file relating to the Electric Palace at Harwich.



The model was built in 1984/85 and was part of a family project in which I built a 1/12<sup>th</sup> scale model of a fictitious Black Country Street. This 1" to the foot scale is the internationally accepted scale used by dolls' house builders and I was challenged to produce this scene by the organiser of the 'Miniatura' Dolls' House Exhibitions because I had complained that dolls' house exhibitions were boring and asserted that people would prefer to see fish & chip shops and cinemas rather than exquisite Georgian houses.

The cinema frontage was 'freelance' – ie not based on a particular cinema but combining elements of several cinemas that were often converted from live theatres. It was given the name **Electric Palace Kinema** to give it a pre-First World War ambience.

The auditorium part of the cinema, which is just about visible in the photograph, was about the size of a very large dog kennel and consisted of four sides that folded up into position from the base. Two hinged roof sections were then dropped onto the side and end walls. However, the side walls could be removed to let people see the cinema's interior. My one-year-old daughter was able to sit in the auditorium until we started installing a balcony and some of the seats. On several occasions a 'standard 8' compact Bolex ciné projector was placed beneath the balcony and this projected films onto the screen on the back wall of the auditorium. The top of the screen can just be seen in the photograph.

In the end, the dimensions of these buildings were determined by practical issues concerning being packed into the family estate car rather than exact scale and most of the buildings were never quite finished. However, the street was exhibited at several West Midlands exhibitions, including a 'Miniatura' where some people dismissed it as a poor joke in bad taste and reaffirmed their view that the Georgian house was the only architecture worth modelling in the dolls' house world. When they noticed that a film was actually being shown in the cinema, they accused me of being a cheap showman and obviously not a 'serious' modeller.

The problem in building models of this size is that we quickly ran out of space and at a family conference it was decided that we should sell the entire street and start again using 1/2 inch to the foot as our scale. The street was advertised in *Exchange and Mart* and a lady came down from Liverpool and bought the lot. She said her intentions were to use it in a school but we never heard anything about its fate. Our problems were not over as we then produced twice as many smaller models but I never built another model cinema, except in popular railway modelling scales. I am still addicted to building model shops in a variety of scales.

I enclose a photograph of the family – as it was then – that shows the models as in 1985.

Ned Williams

## MATTERS ARISING

As Stuart Smith notes in *Cinema Cruising* [letters, p25, last Bulletin], the *Iona* is indeed a vast ship. The four cinema auditoria are very well appointed and the staff take great pride in their cinemas. The huge Headliners Theatre is also equipped for (digital) film, with a full Dolby Atmos sound system. I was lucky enough to go on board the *Iona* before its maiden voyage, to train the crew on how to use and maintain the digital cinema equipment. It really is a floating city!

Regarding Trevor Chapman's Odeon / Empire Sutton Coldfield letter, it may be a case of the listing doing more harm than good. The original screen ④ conversion was especially poor. The seats aren't great and the room acoustics are terrible. Unfortunately, the auditorium, with all its faults, is included in the listing and as such everything in it is subject to the same restrictions as the original 1930s fittings. There was a standing joke that even the chewing gum on the seat backs was listed!

A planned refit several years ago for screen ④ ended up being limited to increasing the picture size. The new screen sheet was fitted on the original screen frame, the tabs are still hanging there, you just can't see them anymore! Having tabs and masking locked in the open position is a common commercial decision these days. With no perceived cost benefit, if they are not used you don't have to pay for maintenance. There are some original features still visible in screen ④ though. The stage with its orchestra pit and the decorative grilles on the side walls are still there.



The main dimmer board at Sutton Coldfield

There are a couple of oddities at Sutton Coldfield. The original dimmer board was still in use (with the addition of a motor to drive the levers) for screen ① until a few years ago. It was found to be an experimental type that was only manufactured for a short time where, instead of taking the live potential down to earth, the earth potential was taken to live, meaning that when the lights were out the fittings were still at full mains voltage! The other unusual feature was that the roof void was accessed from the front stalls, rather than from the projection room level. Stairs at the side of the stage took you up past staff rooms and up to the roof void. See Newsreel p[Ref].

Ben Doman

## CINEMARK

Early this Century, Cinemark of Dallas [Texas] planned to build five multiplexes in the UK: Banbury, Grimsby, Halifax, Northampton and Scunthorpe. The first three were not built; Cinemark pulled out and the last two were opened in 2004 by UCI. That is what we were told when I was working at the Majestic Scunthorpe. My job there finished and I went elsewhere.

A Smith

**Editor's Note:** This may explain my comment about a tourist sign in Banbury on p18 of the last Bulletin.

More letters in the full Bulletin



# WARTIME FRANCE GOES TO THE PICTURES

By David Evans



A recent view of the Rex Paris [A Hellmann, creative commons licence]

As in Britain, going to the cinema in France was a hugely popular pastime during the Second World War. There, for a few hours, audiences found a brief escape from the awfulness around them in a country divided into an occupied northern zone under German control and a southern so-called 'free zone' under the government of Marshal Philippe Pétain, until the whole of the country was occupied from November 1942. In Paris, large capacity cinemas such as the Olympia and the Paramount on the Boulevard des Capucines and the Biarritz, Colisée and Lord Byron on the Champs Élysées played to packed audiences, whereas the huge 5,000-seat Rex on the Boulevard Poissonnière was requisitioned for German service personnel only as a 'Soldatenkino'. Outside Paris, theatres such as the Pathé Palace on the Rue de la République in Lyons and Le Prado on the Avenue du Prado in Marseilles were equally busy. Even a medium-sized departmental capital such as Troyes, in the North-East of France, boasted five cinemas, from the upmarket 1,600-seat Cirque Municipal to the small Jeanne d'Arc with around 400 seats.

With American and British films totally banned throughout France from November 1942 – a few had circulated before this in the Free Zone when this was still officially 'independent' – French film production worked overtime to fill the gap. Some dubbed German productions were distributed and pictures such as the all-Agfacolor *Münchhausen* (1943) attracted fairly large audiences. The Germans even set up a production company – Continental Films – to exploit the profitability of the French market where, for example, a version of *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* (1942) attracted huge audiences during its run at the Olympia in Paris in early 1942 and, earlier, Marcel Pagnol's *La Fille du Puisatier* (1940) took well over 600,000 Francs during a three-week run at the Pathé Palace in Lyons. Continental Films was the brainchild of the Francophile German Alfred Greven, who received full support from Joseph Goebbels back in the Reich but it had plenty of competition from French production companies such as Pathé and Gaumont.

Of the many stars and directors of the French film industry it might be said that "some strayed while some stayed". Those who left France for the USA or the UK included actors such as Michèle Morgan, Jean Gabin, Claude Dauphin and Françoise Rosay, with directors such as Jean Renoir and Julien Duvivier settling in the US. Top female stars such as Danielle Darrieux and Micheline Presle and directors such as Henri-Georges Clouzot and Marcel Carné stayed in France. Here it should be noted that from 1941, as well as other cruel and onerous restrictions placed on them, Jews were forbidden to work in any part of the French film industry. One notable Jewish actor who managed to get to the USA, with his wife Madeleine Lebeau, was Marcel Dalio, both of whom are remembered for small but memorable roles in *Casablanca*.

Of the 220 films made in France during the Occupation – all subject to strict censorship by the Nazi and/or Free Zone authorities – many stand out as superb examples of work undertaken in very difficult circumstances. These include two directed by Henri-Georges Clouzot; *L'Assassin habite au 21*, *Le Corbeau* (1943) and two by Marcel Carné; *Les Visiteurs du Soir* (1943) and *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1944).

*L'Assassin habite au 21*, a Continental Films production, found Pierre Fresnay as a police superintendent going undercover, disguised as a Protestant clergyman, in a Paris boarding house in order to discover the identity of a serial murderer known simply as "Monsieur Durand". In all this he is joined by Suzy Delair in a very funny role as his girlfriend. The novel on which it was based was set in London but this locale was not deemed appropriate in 1942! Again, for the German-controlled Continental, Clouzot directed *Le Corbeau* in 1943, once more starring Pierre Fresnay. Strangely, its theme of poison pen letters seemed not to have bothered the censors, despite the fact that anonymous denunciations to the German and French authorities were very much a part of everyday life in wartime France. *Le Corbeau* opened at the Normandie cinema on the Champs Élysées in Paris in the Autumn of 1943 and was very well received there and on its general release. For example, one of the largest-selling weeklies of the totally collaborationist official press, *Je Suis Partout* gave it an excellent review, as did the equally collaborationist cultural weekly *Comoedia*. However, after the war the film and Clouzot were given the cold shoulder by the French film industry as it was deemed to have presented the wrong image of France and it took some time for the picture and Clouzot, to be rehabilitated.



Carné's *Les Visiteurs du Soir* (1942), a mediaeval fantasy, starring Arletty, Alain Cuny, Marie Déa and, in a key role as the Devil, Jules Berry, was seemed by some as a cleverly concealed protest against the German occupiers but, after the war, Carné denied this. His *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945), set in the Paris of the 1830s / 1840s, is often seen as the most important picture made in France during the war, even though it was not released until 1945, after the Liberation, following many production difficulties going back to 1943.

Only one newsreel was shown in each zone, *Actualités Mondiales* in the Occupied Zone – no more than a dubbed version of the official German newsreel *Deutsche Wochenschau* – and *France Actualités* in the Free Zone. This was produced in France but in August 1942 it became the sole newsreel shown in both zones, well before complete Nazi occupation of France in November that year. The glorious, victorious forces of the Reich featured heavily in this as did the Allied bombings of France. However, as the war progressed in the Allies' favour it was found that cinema audiences started to make loud anti-German comments, especially when Hitler appeared on the screen. Applause for the Allies and boos for the Axis were not uncommon and so to counteract this, newsreels were shown with the auditorium lights fully on and audiences were warned that such conduct would lead to arrest and the immediate closure of the cinema. On other occasions the authorities often interrupted performances in crowded cinemas for identity checks, as they looked for those trying to avoid compulsory conscription for war work in Germany, other opponents of the regime and, of course, Jews. This is really where the similarity between wartime picture-going in Britain and France, mentioned at the beginning of this article, ends.

