



CINEMA  
THEATRE  
ASSOCIATION

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

# BULLETIN

Vol 56 No 3

ISSN 1479-0882

May / June 2022



The Palace Devises in August 2003



The Phoenix East Finchley in April 2006



## FROM YOUR EDITOR

Thank you for continuing to send in stuff for the Bulletin. I could do with another article or two for next time. I have a few UK holiday snaps in stock – I haven't got any overseas ones but I suppose trips abroad have not been easy during the pandemic. However, with things easing, I look forward to receiving some from foreign parts. Can I also please ask again for you not to cut dates off press cuttings – or at least write the date in the margin. It makes them more relevant.

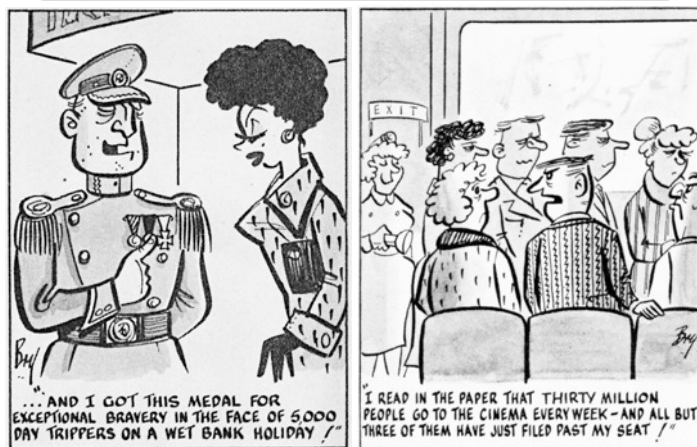
Whilst compiling the Cinema Business section on p(Ref) I noticed that different reports often give different figures for takings, admissions, profit/loss etc. I can only repeat the information I receive so please remember that, like many things, it is soon out of date.

I have had to slightly change the order of some sections in this issue, in order to make consecutive pages available for double-page articles. I don't think you'll have any trouble in finding things. I do hate magazines where you get halfway through a piece, then it says "continued on page ..."

I'm sorry I won't be able to be with you at the AGM on 2 July (see panel on p(Ref)) as I shall be busy compiling your next Bulletin, which has to go to the printers on Monday 4 July. Please note the deadline date below.

I had a chuckle at a Freudian slip I made whilst typing the item about an autograph book going to auction in the Miscellany on p(Ref). One of the stars who signed it was Dusty Springfield but instead of typing a 'D' for her first initial, I typed a 'B' – work it out for yourselves!

## CARTOON CORNER



From ABC Film Review; sent in by Ben Doman

## Quick Guide to CTA Social Media



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



[www.facebook.com/cinematheatreorguk](https://www.facebook.com/cinematheatreorguk)



[www.twitter.com/Ctheatreassoc](https://www.twitter.com/Ctheatreassoc)



[www.instagram.com/cinematheatreorguk](https://www.instagram.com/cinematheatreorguk)



[www.ticketsource.co.uk](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk)



Zoom talks and presentations platform

### Useful CTA Contacts

[digital@cta-uk.org](mailto:digital@cta-uk.org) : enquires about digital services  
[visits@cta-uk.org](mailto:visits@cta-uk.org) : enquires about talks/events bookings  
[info@cta-uk.org](mailto:info@cta-uk.org) : general enquires  
Amazon Smile link : [smile.amazon.co.uk/ch/1100702-0](https://smile.amazon.co.uk/ch/1100702-0)

**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE**  
**MONDAY 20 JUNE**

## 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:** Alan Baxter; Michael Darvell; Allen Eyles; Lucinda Lambton

### ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Full Membership (UK).....	£33; under 25 (with proof of age) £16
Overseas (Europe Standard Air Mail & World Economy).....	£43
Overseas (World Standard Air Mail).....	£56
Overseas (Digital CTA Bulletin).....	£33
Associate Membership (UK & Worldwide).....	£10
Life Membership (UK and overseas digital).....	£500
65 & over (with proof of age).....	£400
Life Membership (Overseas).....	Air Mail £840; Economy Mail £645

All membership and subscription enquiries should be sent to  
**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)

# VISITS AND EVENTS

## An Archival Day at the Seaside

**Saturday 25 June;**

**organised by David Simpson and Clive Polden**



The building that houses the CTA Archive

The CTA Archive moved to its present location in March 2019. With twice as much space as before, it has been possible to get all our lovely memorabilia out of its bags and boxes and put it on display, where it belongs. This has resulted in some very eye-catching displays, which have considerably enhanced the traditional 'information' side of the Archive. As March 2020 approached, with the work well under way, we were gearing up for the 'official' CTA visit – when the pandemic hit! The only good news is that the enforced delay meant that the work has now been completed, so all our wonderful memorabilia is now on view: and what displays they are! So we are delighted to invite you to join us as we open up the Archive for this very first 'official' visit!



The Palace Theatre Westcliff-on-Sea

But this is not all! The day will include a visit to the Grade II-listed **Palace Theatre** in nearby Westcliff and a photo-stop at the former **Plaza** in the Southend suburb of Southchurch. You will also have time for a lunch break and a pleasant stroll along Southend's 'Golden Mile'!

**Getting there:** Those travelling by car should park at the Archive (Unit 1, Millhead Way, Purdey's Industrial Estate, Rochford, SS4 1LB: Just look for the **ODEON** signage!) where our coach will pick up at 10:15am (and where a comfort break may be taken!).

In the current timetable, those travelling by rail are asked to catch the 10:00am 'CTA Special'(!) from London Fenchurch Street (which, amongst other stops, picks up at West Ham, with its Jubilee Line interchange, at 10:09am). This is due to arrive at Westcliff station at 10:52am, where our coach will pick you up. We will then go to the nearby **Palace Theatre** for a full tour and a welcome refreshment break.

We will then head to the sea front for our lunch break (own arrangements: there are one or two eateries!!) Afterwards we will take a look at the former **Plaza Cinema** before heading to the Archive, where the archivist, Clive Polden, will conduct guided tours and you can also have a leisurely browse around our impressive displays. We will also have an extensive range of second-hand books, magazines and other items for sale.

Late afternoon, around 5:00-5:30pm, our coach will return to Westcliff station for those heading straight back to London and, for those who want to stay on a little longer, to Southend sea front. (If you are intending staying on, please purchase a return ticket to Southend Central station when you join the train in the morning. That station is half way up the High Street, directly north of the Pier). Those travelling by car who wish to stay on will need to drive to the sea front.

**Enquiries to:** David Simpson on 01702 464733 or 07754 391163.

### BOOKING YOUR TICKET

Members and their guests £20 (includes coach, driver's gratuity, visit notes and refreshments at the **Palace Theatre** and the Archive). Early booking is advisable, as we are only hiring one coach.



Booking can be done on-line using TicketSource: [www.ticketsource.co.uk](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk). Simply enter 'Cinema Theatre Association' into their Search Box.  
OR by post to David Simpson, 399 Woodgrange Drive, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 3DY.

(Cheque payable to 'The Cinema Theatre Association'. Please include a phone number and either SAE or an e-mail address.)  
All bookings will be acknowledged.

## Save the Cinema screening

**at the Regent Christchurch, Dorset;**

**Friday 15 July at 3:00pm (Doors open at 2:30pm).**

**Organised by CTA Wessex.**

The CTA committee was keen for members to get a chance to see the above-mentioned film, as it has had a limited theatrical release to date. We have arranged for the **Regent Christchurch** to screen this film for the CTA and public and are doing this the day before the Renown Films / Talking Pictures event, which is happening over 16 & 17 July at the **Regent**. There wasn't a huge response from members for a larger Dorset-wide trip at this time but, as we are getting over the Covid situation, perhaps this can be postponed.



The auditorium of the Regent Christchurch

For those who will be in the area, I'm looking to organise a walking tour of the remaining cinema buildings in Bournemouth town centre on the morning of Friday 15 July, between 11:00 and 13:00. It will no doubt be exteriors but interesting, as Bournemouth still retains much of its cinema heritage at the moment.

In order that I have a list of those members attending the **Regent** screening and the morning Bournemouth walking tour, please email me by 15 June for meeting up details at the following address:

David Eve – email: [evecinema@talk21.com](mailto:evecinema@talk21.com) Mobile: 07717793909.

(For those that have already confirmed they are coming, thanks very much.)

**Please note:** Booking for *Save the Cinema* should be done directly with the **Regent Centre** [www.regentcentre.co.uk](http://www.regentcentre.co.uk) Box office 01202 499199; The **Regent**: 51 High Street, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 1AS.

Tickets for the Talking Pictures Event **must** be booked in advance via the Talking Pictures website [www.renownfilms.co.uk](http://www.renownfilms.co.uk).



## CTA VIRTUAL TALKS

### Hotels with Cinemas – From **Le Métropole** to **Le Paradiso**

**Saturday 9 July at 5:30pm (UK time)**  
(Zoom talk No 19)

**BY HAROLD MANNING**

The concept of a cinema either built into or attached to a hotel is not new. Indeed, the earliest scheme can be traced back to the 1920s and today there is a resurgence of these schemes built and promoted in different guises. These would serve the general public, or as an exclusive service for hotel guests, or even have a dual role.

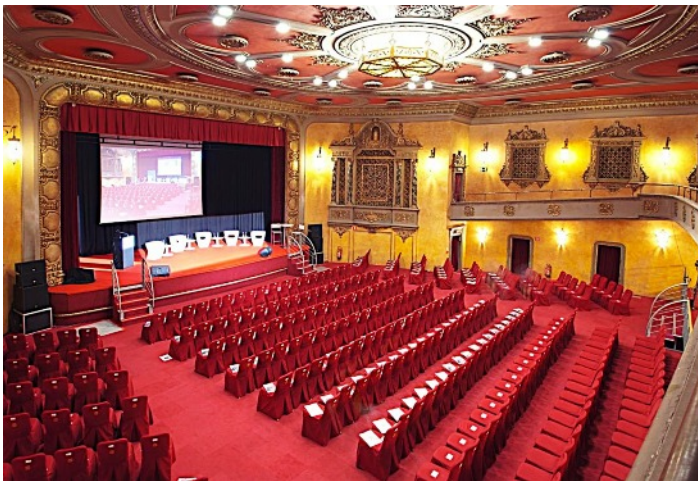
Some stunning architectural designs were created particularly to match the status of the host hotel and this was more prevalent in some European countries with designs for **Le Plaza** in Brussels (the first hotel-cinema in Europe), or **PLM Saint-Jacques** in Paris (once the most modern hotel in the world, featuring a 'Jerry Lewis Cinema').

In the UK, probably the most notable was London's **Mayfair** hotel, where successive conversions turned its lavish ballroom into cabaret space, a theatre and then a cinema – and recently this space has been revived as a conference cinema suite. Several other UK hotel-cinema sites, particularly London's boutique hotel chains, include cinemas.

Our presenter Harold Manning's interest in this novel subject started in 1990 when he discovered **Le Métropole** (built 1932 with 3,000 seats) in Brussels. "It was just magical," he says and it captured his imagination to research the historical background and interpretation of the cinemas' relationship with its mother hotel. This gem closed in 1994 but fortunately with its architecturally ornate exterior remaining.

This fascinatingly-illustrated talk will cover the historical background and cities such as Paris, Berlin or Madrid and more. Harold will bring us up-to-date with the very latest and impressive **Hôtel Paradiso**, Paris, operated in the same building as the new **MK2 Nation** cinema. Harold is planning a publication covering the subject.

English-born Harold currently lives in Paris. He has produced several documentaries and has also been involved with the BFI. He also teaches film criticism, exhibition and distribution at **La Fémis** and is one of the programmers of **L'Alcazar** in Asnières near Paris, one of the oldest art-houses in France.



An example: **Le Plaza Brussels (1929)** converted to a conference venue, retaining its original decorative auditorium

#### 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:  
[www.ticketsource.co.uk](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk)

Simply enter 'Cinema Theatre Association' into their Search Box. (Talk No 19)

## HERITAGE CASEWORK

**By Tim Hatcher**

### Grade II\* Listed

A meeting is to be convened between interested parties in order to deliberate upon the application for alteration to the **Granada** in Walthamstow, within which proposal several components impact adversely upon original features. The Association will be represented thereat.

Concern has been expressed anent the lack of maintenance to the external signage of the **Dreamland Cinema** in Margate: faults are currently apparent in the illuminated lettering, strip lights and up-lighting units.

### Grade II Listed

As an element of the anticipated refurbishment of the **Odeon** in Sutton Coldfield, the CTA is requesting reinstatement of the missing segment which formerly surmounted its characteristic fin.



The rear of the **Tower Hull** in July 2005, showing the horn chamber

The parlous state of repair exhibited by areas of the horn chamber and guttering of the **Tower** in Hull has been reported to the Conservation Officer of the City Council. The cinema is currently under refurbishment preparatory to its operation as a music venue.



The **Pyramid Sale** in January 2006

Water ingress has caused partial collapse of the ceiling and damage to plasterwork within the currently uninsured **Ritz** in Nuneaton. The impecunious religious organisation which occupies the cinema is intending to relinquish ownership and professes to be in negotiation with a prospective purchaser.

**More Casework in the full Bulletin**

# PUBLICATIONS

## Second-Hand Book List

These titles were available when this list was prepared but please note there are only single copies of most titles, so a book may have sold out by the time you order. Please add £3.40 to your order for post and packing. Overseas orders – please email [sales@cta-uk.org](mailto:sales@cta-uk.org) for postal charge, or use credit/debit card.

**To order by post:** Please send orders to Jeremy Buck, CTA Sales, 34 Pelham Road, London N22 6LN. Please enclose a cheque/postal order payable to Cinema Theatre Association, or send your credit/debit card details, including expiry date and security number.

**To order online:** please send your order to [sales@cta-uk.org](mailto:sales@cta-uk.org) Your order will be confirmed and instructions given how to make payment by PayPal.

TITLE	AUTHOR	£
Amber Valley Gazetteer of Greater London Suburban Cinemas 1946-86 (softback, black and white cover)	Malcolm Webb	12
Amber Valley Gazetteer of Greater London Suburban Cinemas 1946-86 (hardback edition, plain red cover)	Malcolm Webb	15
ABC Turnpike Lane 50 years	D Jones K Whelan	1
ABC Mile End the First 100 Years	D Jones K Whelan	1
Ace Rayners Lane 50 Golden Years	Mercia C S	2
A Cinema Near You (Derbyshire)	Ashley Franklin	3
American Picture Palaces (softback)	David Naylor	10
Best Remaining Seats – The Golden Age of the Movie Palace (softback edition)	Ben M Hall	10
Birmingham Cinemas – Films & Stars 1900-60	Victor Price	15
Black Family of Sunderland: Circuits and Cinemas	Frank Manders	2
Boston & Spalding Entertainment	Mervyn Gould	3
British Film Studios An Illustrated History, 2001 edition., signed copy	Patricia Warren	6
Cathedrals of the Movies (hardback)	David Atwell	15
Cathedrals of the Movies (softback)	David Atwell	10
Cinemas of Croydon (1989 edition)	A Eyles K Skone	3
Cinemas of Essex	Bob Grimwood	5
Cinemas of Lincoln	George Clarke	2
Cinemas of the Black Country (1st edition 1982 softback)	Ned Williams	3
Curtains!! New Life for Old Theatres	Various	3
Dream Palaces of Liverpool (1988 edition)	Harold Ackroyd	4
Dream Palaces of Richmond-on-Thames	Fred Windsor	2
Enter the Dream House: South London	ed. M O'Brien	5
Fading Lights Silver Screens (Belfast)	Michael Open	4
Frank Matcham Theatre Architect	Ed. Brian Walker	30
From Grand to Grove: South Bedfordshire	Eddie Grabham	8
Gaumont British Cinemas	Allen Eyles	20
Granada Woolwich: Opening souvenir booklet	Various	5
Harwich Electric Palace	Chris Strachan	10
Kalee Model Eleven Projector – handbook/catalogue 1933	Various	4
Kinema at Kinver	B Parker N Williams	1
London's Suburban Cinemas 1946-80. Mercia Reference Guide	MAF Webb	2
London's West End Cinemas (Hardback 1991)	A Eyles & K Skone	4
London's West End Cinemas (Paperback 1984)	A Eyles & K Skone	3
London's West End Cinemas (Paperback 1991)	A Eyles & K Skone	3
Long-Gone Cinemas of Swale (Kent)	John Clancy	2
Memories of Buckinghamshire Picture Palaces	Martin Tapsell	3
Odeon Muswell Hill: 50th Anniversary programme	Various	7
Picture House in East Anglia	Stephen Peart	3
Picture House Rugeley Golden Jubilee Souvenir	Chris J Ingram	1
Picture Palace & Other Buildings for the Movies	Dennis Sharp	15
Picture Palaces Remembered (Dover, Deal, Folkestone)	J Roy & T Thompson	5
Rotherham's Film Pioneers 1898 to 1911	Stuart Smith	1
Shazam! Regal Cinema, Evesham	Rob Hemming	5
Shepperton Studios – A Personal View	Derek Threadgall	2
Sound Film Projection (1949)	Molloy/Campbell &c	4
Souvenir of Savoy Leyton (Reprint of opening brochure)	n/a	1
Talking Pictures (1932)	Bernard Brown	5
Temples of Dreams: Eastbourne	Peter Hodges	4
Theatres Trust Guide to British Theatres 1750-1950	Various	4
The Projectionist's Handbook (1933)	Pitchford/Coombs	5
West Yorkshire Cinemas & Theatres	Peter Tuffrey	5
York Cinemas	Mervyn Gould	5

## Back Numbers Available

### PICTURE HOUSE MAGAZINE

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

- Nos 6, 8 – £1.50 each
- Nos 16, 17, 18 – £3.00 each
- Nos 19, 21, 22 – £3.50 each
- Nos 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 – £4.50 each
- No 30 – £5.00
- No 31 – £7.50
- Nos 32, 33, 34, 35 – £5.00 each
- No 36 – £6.00
- Nos 37, 45 – £8.50
- Nos 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46 – £6.00 each

For details of contents, see Bulletin 56/2, or online at [www.cta-uk.org/publishing/picture-house](http://www.cta-uk.org/publishing/picture-house)

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

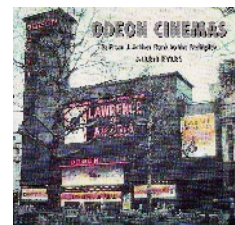
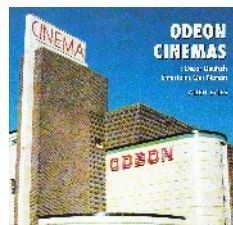
We can supply back numbers of most Bulletins from Volume 21 (1987) to date. Prices for issues from 1987 to 2020 are £4.00 per year (6 issues), individual copies are £1.00 each. Prices for issues in 2021 and 2022 are £5.00 per copy. All prices include postage. There are some issues available from earlier years – 1967 to 1986. Please send enquiries to the Sales Officer.

## 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.

## All you need to know about... ODEON

These two volumes, by Allen Eyles, provide a comprehensive history of the Odeon circuit, from its beginnings in the 1930s up to the multiplex era. Fully illustrated in b/w and colour.



### Now at reduced prices!

ODEON 1 – Oscar Deutsch Entertains Our Nation – £15.00

ODEON 2 – From J Arthur Rank to the Multiplex – £15.00

Buy both Odeon 1 & 2 together for £27 (plus postage)

Also available – THE GRANADA THEATRES – £18.99.

Last few copies!

Please add £3.40 to your order for postage.

Available from the Sales Officer – address on p5.



# A SPRING DAY OUT IN SMART MAYFAIR

A report of the CTA visit to Mayfair and beyond on Tuesday 29 March by Adam Unger



Screen ① at the Curzon Mayfair [4]

This was our second visit to London in recent months, commencing at the Curzon Mayfair, which opened in 1966, designed by Sir John Burnet Tait & Partners, with Horace Hammond as the project architect and is Britain's youngest Grade II listed cinema. This replaced the earlier Curzon of 1934 by the same architectural firm, which featured an elegant auditorium of simplicity and concealed lighting, housed in a restrained brick single-storey structure. Regrettable as the loss of the old Curzon is, its replacement is of high quality and reflective of the period it was built in, as was its 1930s predecessor.

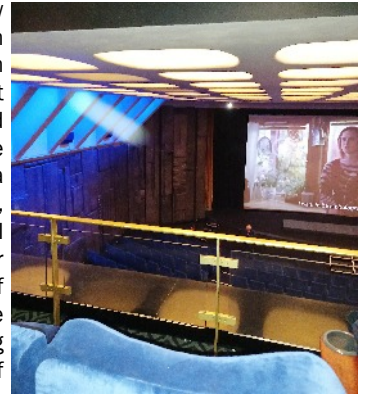
This mixed-use development includes a restaurant, flats and offices. The exterior is faced in Portland stone, with the original signage in Curzon Street and canopy all surviving remarkably intact



The entrance foyer of the Curzon [4]

The entrance foyer is slightly lower than street level, accessed to the side of the building in Hertford Street. This low-ceilinged space has a bar to one side, with a sliding screen that can be drawn across to separate this area. This striking screen of an abstract relief pattern, looking like ceramic, is made of fibreglass, designed by William Mitchell. Much of the 60s signage on the foyer doors have survived, with the sense of luxury extending into the toilets, lavishly lined in Carrara marble. What alterations that have taken place over the years have been executed in a sensitive manner.

The original auditorium, now screen ①, is unusually placed on the first-floor level, rather, than more commonly in the basement of such developments. Accessed by a dividing staircase from the main foyer, the auditorium has a cellular-lit ceiling of concrete, which provides the principal house lighting and acts as a major structural element for the floors of offices and flats above. The smooth light surface of the ceiling contrasts with the side walls of abstract sculptural panels in fibreglass, also by William Mitchell. We speculated that it had probably been painted over in a darker shade in more recent years. The stadium-style auditorium, now seating 307 (originally 530), has a unique feature of two private boxes, each seating six, neatly inserted at the rear, flanking the projection room. A second screen of now 65 seats was discreetly inserted in the recessed seating area at the back of the auditorium in 2003 and has recently been refurbished, with plans afoot to refurbish screen ① with new seating. The projection room is larger than expected, being also equipped to run film, with a dedicated team of projectionists. Sophie, the manager, said that audience attendances hadn't yet recovered to pre-Covid levels, with a lack of product being one of the reasons. However, the Curzon still hosts premières, with the closing of Hertford Street being a great advantage for such events.



Screen ① from a private box [2]



Screen ② at the Curzon [4]

The Curzon is currently under threat from the ground landlord, with plans for conference and possibly theatrical use as well, which would entail compromise and the loss of sole cinema use. We left the Curzon with time for a leisurely lunch.

The Trafalgar Theatre in Whitehall, just a stone's throw away from Nelson's Column, was quickly reached by bus, where we were welcomed by the manager, Christina. Formerly the Whitehall Theatre, which opened in 1930 – one of the great boom years of theatre construction. The architect was Edward A Stone with interior work by Marc-Henri Levy and Gaston Laverdet. The Portland stone frontage bears a strong resemblance to the Astorias at Brighton and Southend, which were also Stone schemes. The theatre became well known for the long-running 'Whitehall farces', that were staged there in the





The façade and auditorium at the Trafalgar Theatre [2]

1950s and 60s, by actor-manager Brian Rix. The Trafalgar is Grade II listed and was subdivided in 2004, with the rear stalls separated from the rest of the auditorium and renamed the Trafalgar Studios. Only last year it was undivided, back to its original form and the subject of a major restoration. The seating capacity is 630 and is currently staging *Jersey Boys*.

The opportunity has been taken to enlarge and refurbish the entrance foyer sympathetically. The high auditorium has a very deep balcony, which extends right down to the proscenium, with the steep stepping giving an unobstructed view of the stage. The art deco scheme has an angular geometric emphasis, dictated by the deeply coved chamfered proscenium and the main ceiling recess. A paint analysis was done in the auditorium, resulting in a redecoration to the original colour scheme, which was predominantly black, with use of tinted silver on the delightful reliefs on the box fronts and walls. A contrasting green deco pattern has been used on the seating.

As is common planning with West End theatres, the stalls are below street level, which unusually has a Royal Box in the rear stalls. Christina related the difficulties of operating during the Covid period, particularly regarding some of the anti-social audience behaviour experienced, with regard to mobile phones and wearing masks.



The CTA group on stage at the Trafalgar Theatre [3]

We had the opportunity of going on stage, which is quite restricted in depth and wing space. This provided a very good vantage point, looking towards the rear of the house. It was indeed heartening to see this important surviving art deco theatre, revived by a sensitive restoration.

Our last call of the day was to the Garden Cinema in Covent Garden, which is situated in Parker Street near the Kingsway. This had only recently opened on 15 March 2022 with the documentary *The Real Charlie Chaplin*. It's an art house cinema, running seasons of classic films, as well as new releases from around the world. You descend from the entrance hall to a lower foyer with a bar area, all in dark red and black and carefully lit, giving a cinematic feel. An art deco theme has been adopted, which adds to this ambience, with a montage of images from films and their stars lining the walls, particularly in an area named



The frontage, the 'tunnel' and a screen at the new Garden Cinema [2]

'The Tunnel', with alcove seating along its length. The cinema has two screens of 70 and 40 seats, with a third screen to be added soon.

It's most encouraging to see a new independent cinema opening, with an art house policy and we were made most welcome by Richard and his team with free refreshments and a brief show in one of the screens. At the time of the visit, lifetime membership was being offered at £20, which represents remarkable value for a central London venue.

This most satisfying day concluded by having visited three quite diverse properties, from the 1960s, 1930s and the latest cinema opening. We wish all these venues well in regaining their audiences.

Our thanks go to the organisers, Richard Gray and Ray Ritmeester with the assistance of Kevin Gooding. Also, thanks to the following for their hospitality; Sophie Wardman (Curzon), Christina Horsepool (Trafalgar) and Richard Vitola-Jones (Garden Cinema).

Photos by: [1] Kevin Gooding; [2] Adam Unger; [3] Ray Duns



# ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

By Dave Harte †

"Pre-eminent among all – is the 'Kenilworth' chair,  
for those who want a real high-class article."

*Kinematograph Weekly* – Thursday 9 March 1922

This is a story of bums on cinema seats. Seats made and upholstered in Birmingham and supplied to cinemas across the United Kingdom and the world during the height of the cinema-building boom between the First and Second World Wars.

There were two main companies in Birmingham involved in the trade of kitting out cinemas with seats, carpets, curtains (both across windows and screens) and associated interior decorations. Both Beck and Windibank (who used the trademark of 'Beckwin') and WW Turner emerged prior to the First World War and both had their roots in the well-established theatre and interior furnishing firm of AR Dean.



## THEATRICAL BEGINNINGS

Albert Reuben Dean had founded his firm in 1874 and within 20 years had a long list of theatre clients. Based in Corporation Street in Birmingham City centre, it would take out advertisements in the theatrical journal *The Era*, boasting that its 'New Automatic Adjustable Back Tip-up Theatre Chairs are the Best in the Trade' (22 June 1895). It was involved in the manufacture of seating as well as just upholstery, filing a patent in 1894 for a tip-up chair with a self-straightening back that allowed for a greater gap between rows of seats ("to make more room for a person passing along the gangway behind the chair, the person seated has only to sit erect, when the back straightens itself" – patent application, 2 March 1894).



Cover of 1925 Beck and Windibank catalogue

Image courtesy of Birmingham Libraries and Birmingham Museums Trust

An advert published in *The Era* in September 1894 listed 54 theatres for which they had "contracts in hand". However, by 1903 the company was wound up, only for Albert Reuben Dean to buy it back from the receiver and continue trading as AR Dean & Sons Ltd. That too was wound up in 1910 but Dean gave it one last go as AR Dean (1910) Limited. This time, he had separated out the theatrical furnishings side of the business from the home furnishings (which had a store on Old Square in Birmingham). He based the furnishing firm in Clement Street, near Birmingham City centre, a street where many metalworking and foundry firms were located at the time. But Dean was becoming something of a serial failure and the *Birmingham Daily Mail* reported on 16 December 1912 that this firm also failed. The Official Receiver partly blamed: "the acceptance of unprofitable contracts and bad debts." AR Dean was no more.

† Dave Harte is an associate professor at Birmingham City University where he researches local and community journalism. [dave.harte@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:dave.harte@bcu.ac.uk). This article was produced as part of the *Wonderland* project – see [p\(Ref\)](#).



The 'Invincible' tip-up chair; from a 1936 Beck and Windibank catalogue  
Image courtesy of Birmingham Libraries and Birmingham Museums Trust

## SUPPLYING THE GOLDEN AGE OF CINEMA

But from AR Dean's legacy came two firms that would build on its contacts and personnel and go on to be significant suppliers of cinema seating and furnishings. Beck and Windibank advertised themselves as the successors to AR Dean. The face of Lewis R Beck appears in an advertisement from 1921 (in *The Kinematograph* 10 February) with the proclamation: "A live progressive firm, conducted by the men whose names appear above and who are known personally to the majority of those interested in the theatre and kinema world." The advert is keen to point out that there is "no connection with any other firm. One address only, Clement Street, Birmingham."

Perhaps the other firm, Beck and Windibank, was keen to not be connected to was WW Turner, based in York Street, Kings Heath (later moving to Station Road in Northfield in the 1930s). Turner had originally worked for AR Dean, boasting about the connection in a 1912 advert in the *The Bioscope*: "Manager: WW Turner (late 14 years with AR Dean)." That advert featured the rather basic looking 'specialty chair' for six shillings and sixpence. It was the "talk of the trade" it claimed. More opulent chair designs were to follow, with both companies doing their best to outdo each other in emphasising the comfort and luxury of their designs as the cinema trade boomed and their markets extended nationally and internationally.

A sample of Beck and Windibank's trade catalogues are available in the Library of Birmingham's archives and they reveal an extensive range of seats and furnishing. Seats are named in a way as to connote opulence and history: 'The Imperial', 'The Regal', 'The Piccadilly', 'The Lancastrian', 'The Embassy', 'The York', 'The Tower'. The cheap seats were more simply named: 'The Chummy' or were simply numbered – No 52 was one its simplest tip-up chairs.

WW Turner's range of seats were similarly named. 'The Stirling' would "last for years," it proclaimed in an advert from 1924. They also had 'The Warwick' and 'The Balmoral', while 970 of the Turner 'Sandringham' chairs were supplied to the Lewes Odeon for its 1934 opening. Their adverts often emphasised comfort as well as luxury:

"How comfortable" says the patron as he sinks into the roominess of a 'Turner' chair. The comfortable man enjoys the picture, enjoys the music and enjoys his smoke. The comfortable man comes again – and tells his friends about it, too.

(Advertisement in *The Cinema* May 1925)

Like Beck and Windibank, Turner also offered a complete set of cinema furnishings services. Both firms would use advertorial-type articles in the trade press throughout the 1920s and 30s to list the many contracts they had in hand and this excerpt from an article in *The Cinema* (January 1925) describes the plans for the kitting out of the soon to be opened Kingsway cinema in Kings Heath:





The Kingsway Birmingham as Gala Bingo in August 2004

*The Kingsway Cinema will be ready at the end of this month to be fitted up with chairs Turner's have ready for them. Super tub chairs will be for the balcony patrons and two grades of very comfortable chairs in the auditorium. The oak polished woodwork is tastefully [sic] inlaid and upholstery is a cheery orange coloured velvet. Carpets of black and orange will harmonise, while the scheme is carried through with curtains in orange, trimmed green and black satin.*

It would seem that there wasn't a cinema in Birmingham whose seats or furnishings hadn't been supplied by either WW Turner or Beck and Windibank but they both also had plenty of national and, in the case of Beck and Windibank, international contracts as well. Mid 1920s pamphlets list contracts secured in: Calcutta, Grahamstown (now Makhanda) and Ladysmith in South Africa, Brussels, Sydney, Melbourne, Singapore and Buenos Aires, where it had a local agent.

While Beck and Windibank had a diverse range of clients ("the Southport Football Club sends repeat orders" – *The Cinema* October 1924), Turner seemed to focus wholly on the cinema trade. Perhaps with good reason, as the

average cinema screen in the UK in 1935 had 900 seats and there were 3.9 million cinema seats overall. By way of comparison, in 1919 there were close to 940,000 cinema seats and an average of 205 seats per screen. While the late 1920s saw cinema screens dominated by Hollywood-produced content and a decline in production of British Films (see Linda Wood; *British Films 1927-39*), the cinemas were still largely independently owned with only 13 cinema chains owning more than 10 cinemas in 1927, compared with 39 by 1937.



Advertisement for WW Turner from Supplement to The Cinema, News and Property Gazette Technical Supplement, 2 October 1924

By the mid-1930s competition for the bottoms of cinema-goers was fierce and as Linda Wood notes, new cinemas built by more aggressive chains were being placed in areas where there was a cinema already: "The newer ones tended to take business from the older, usually independently owned cinemas, with the latter then going out of business."

## COMPETITION AND DEMISE

Cinema admission in the UK peaked at 1.6 billion in 1946 but the post-war market for seats and furnishing was unlikely to have been as vibrant as it was in the boom years of the 1920s and 30s. During those years WW Turner and Beck and Windibank did have competitors such as: J Springer & Co and Tomlyn and Stone, both of High Wycombe, an area with a long history of furniture-making; Hall & Dixon Ltd of London; Lazarus & Son Ltd of Hackney. But those firms either didn't shout quite as loud as the two Birmingham companies, with their long lists of 'contracts in hand', or perhaps they didn't quite do the same volume of business. Another High Wycombe firm, Dawsons Seating, emerged post-war and were sole contractors to ABC cinemas for a time before turning to making office and lecture theatre seating. Essex-based Kirwin and Simpson Seating are still going and still supplying theatres and cinemas worldwide. They started in 1946 by using parachute off-cuts to upholster cinema chairs.

By the 1950s, WW Turner's advertising had lost any emphasis on opulence and were focused largely on longevity, proclaiming in an ad in *The Ideal Kinema* in April 1957 that their seats were "the best seats for the longest runs." Gone was the picture of the seat itself, to be replaced rather oddly, by a picture of a bus. Similarly, a Beck and Windibank's advert from 1958 doesn't feature a chair either, showing instead a woman seated on nothing, with a slogan: "I didn't notice the seating during the performance – it was so comfortable."

On 12 May 1967 Beck and Windibank was wound up. Turner lasted longer but by 1975 its small, simple advert in *The Stage* ("Seating repairs, Re-upholstery, Carpet, etc. Enquiries welcomed") was a pale shadow of its glamorous boastful advertising of the golden age. It too would be wound up on 3 December 1982.

## BIRMINGHAM INNOVATORS

The two Birmingham firms that we have touched upon here drew on their experience and contacts in the theatre industry of the 19th Century in order to make the most of the booming cinema-furnishing market between the wars in the early 20th Century. They were innovators as well as suppliers. As well as the self-straightening seat that AR Dean patented, Beck and Windibank filed a patent for the squeak-free seat in 1931. Its "anti-percussion device [...] for the purpose of conducting to the obtainment of silence." It's not clear if any Birmingham-supplied cinema seats are still being sat on today but if you're in a restored older cinema and its antique seat doesn't squeak, then it might well be an 'Imperial', or a 'Regal', or a 'Piccadilly', or a 'Stirling', or a 'Kenilworth', or a ...

## USEFUL LINKS:

- [tinyurl.com/2p97bzdf](http://tinyurl.com/2p97bzdf) – UK Cinema Association: admissions 1935 onwards
- [tinyurl.com/2p93zbut](http://tinyurl.com/2p93zbut) – UK Cinema Association: sites and screens 2009-2020
- [tinyurl.com/2p935kwk](http://tinyurl.com/2p935kwk) – From the BFI: British Films 1927-1939 [171-page downloadable pdf]
- [tinyurl.com/m7avyadc](http://tinyurl.com/m7avyadc) – A British Newspaper Archive blog: *The Golden Age of Cinema Going*
- [tinyurl.com/3t8ytnmp](http://tinyurl.com/3t8ytnmp) – Kirwin & Simpson website



Rear of playing card advertising WW Turner, late 1930s



# 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)

## ASHFORD (Kent)

Ashford Borough Council is advertising for interested parties "who would like to bring something new to the High Street". This refers to the site of the former Odeon, where the façade will be retained but the auditorium will be demolished and replaced by a new extension that "provides a modern, flexible space, which will open up and enhance views to St Mary's Church". The Council's website has a downloadable 13-page brochure of the plans at [tinyurl.com/ea34f35p](http://tinyurl.com/ea34f35p).

Ashford Council website; sent in by Martin Tapsell

## BELFAST

An £10.5 million plan to transform the former Debenhams store at CastleCourt into a new nine-screen Omniplex cinema and leisure hub has been approved, despite initial concerns from NI Water over wastewater capacity in the area. Wastewater treatment works in the area are due to be upgraded by July 2023. If NI Water withdraws its objections, work could start soon but if they are not completed by November 2022, they would have to be delayed to avoid interfering with Christmas trade, potentially pushing back opening until Easter 2023.

News Letter – 2 March

## BIRMINGHAM (Central)

The Electric was forced to close for ten days over licensing issues, just a week after its grand reopening on 11 March. See p16 last Bulletin. {9559}

Birmingham Live – 1 March

## BRENTWOOD (Essex)

The Council is in talks with a major cinema chain to bring a three-screen cinema to the Baytree Centre. The Council recently bought the centre for an undisclosed but significant sum.

Essex Live – 23 March

## BRIGHTON

A developer has revealed its plans for the Grade II\* listed Hippodrome. The rotting roof was replaced last October and the entire ground floor was shrouded in scaffolding to support the building whilst repairs were taking place. The next step is to replace the plasterwork. The owners have already invested over £1m to slow the building's decline and plan to invest a further £10m at the second stage. It is hope to reopen the building in 2024 as a multi-functional space. However, it is understood that the stage house does not feature in the plans so hopes of a live theatre may have been dashed. {36884}

The Argus, Brighton – 11 February; sent in by Barry Quinton

## BRISTOL

The developer that bought the former St George's Hall / Granada in Redfield, has submitted a planning application to build 44 bedsits in the building. Local residents, who have been campaigning for the building to be put into community use are hoping that the Council will reject the application, saying it is "prison-like". The building was last used as a Wetherspoon's pub in the foyer only – the cinema is still hidden behind and could be restored. {27949}

Bristol Live – 23 March

## BURY ST EDMUNDS (Suffolk)

We reported on p16 of the last Bulletin of plans for a four-screen Everyman in the basement of the former Debenhams store. The Town Council welcomed bringing the building back into use but objected on the grounds of noise and disturbance and the effect on the existing Abbeygate cinema. A local resident said the noise is already unbearable at times.

Suffolk News – 7 March; West Suffolk Mercury – 16 March; sent in by Terry Hanstock

## CANVEY ISLAND (Essex)

We reported on p16 of the last Bulletin of the theft of a model of Star Wars character Yoda from the Movie Starr. It was anonymously returned on 4 March, exactly a month after it disappeared. The staff are delighted to have him back. {14619}

Basildon, Canvey & Southend Echo – 6 March

## COLCHESTER (Essex)

The former Odeon in Crouch Street was due to go to auction on 13 April with a guide price of £2.5m. However, it was withdrawn prior to the sale and is now due to be auctioned in May. There have been numerous plans for the building since the cinema closed in October 2002, having opened in February 1931. {17575}

Essex County Standard – 24 March; East Anglian Daily Times – 15 April; auctioneers' website [www.dedmangray.co.uk](http://www.dedmangray.co.uk); sent in by Terry Hanstock

## CORBY (Northants)



Planning permission has been given to demolish the auditorium of the former Odeon and build apartments and shops; the façade will be retained. It opened in March 1936 with 1,042 seats in stadium-style. It was taken over by an independent operator in January 1969 and renamed Rutland Cinema but closed in December the same year. It was last used as a furniture shop. {16655} photo taken February 2004

Northants Telegraph – 14 April; sent in by Chris Godbold & Trevor Haynes;

## DAVENTRY (Northants)

Batman attended the opening night of the new four-screen Arc Cinema on 3 March after arriving in a life-size Batmobile. The seating capacities are: screen ① 77; screen ② 121; screen ③ 84; screen ④ 79. All auditoria have luxury electric recliner seating and there is the usual café/bar. {66730}

Northants Live – 7 March

## DERBY

A planning application has been submitted to turn what I believe are the dressing rooms of the former Gaumont Palace at the rear of the building on Osmaston Road into a 10 bed HMO [House in Multiple Occupation]. The rooms are currently used by the staff of the restaurant, which occupies the main building. The HMO will be cut off from the restaurant so there will be no access to it. Planning application No 22/00482/FUL. {14897}

Derby Evening Telegraph – date unknown; sent in by Bob Taylor

## DEVIZES (Wilts)

The Palace was taken over by Adam Cunard (of the Picturedrome Bognor Regis) at the beginning of 2019 with a promise of cheaper tickets and a complete makeover of the premises. Now he is applying for planning permission for a second-storey extension at the rear. If approved, it would provide a rehearsal area and changing area for the theatre/live acts. This will incorporate the stage/fly tower to be used as a 534-seat working theatre/cinema. {24666}

Gazette & Herald – 24 March; photo on front cover

**Editor's Note:** Although the Gazette & Herald report doesn't explicitly say so, it sounds as if the 1970s subdivision is being removed and a single space created. Can anyone confirm? I emailed the cinema for clarification but haven't had a reply.

## DONCASTER (South Yorks)

Doncaster Council has launched a feasibility study into the potential reopening of the Grade II listed Grand Theatre following a grant of £11,500 from the Theatres Trust. It opened in March 1899 as a live theatre and had intermittent cinema use until it became a bingo hall in September 1961. The bingo operation closed in 1995 and the building has been empty since and on the Theatres Trust 'at risk' register from the time that started in 2006. {19936}

The Stage – 3 March; sent in by Barry Quinton;



## DUDLEY

Plans for the demolition of the Hippodrome have been approved by the Council. They overturned a restrictive covenant on the site, preventing it from being used except for the purposes of leisure, retail or housing. It will be replaced by a nursing college for Worcester University, which is expected to be up and running by the 2024 academic year. {41631}

*Express & Star* – 25 March

## GAINSBOROUGH (Lincs)



The makeover of the King's Theatre has almost finished. The building dates from 1885 and has been a theatre, cinema and bingo hall. When the bingo closed in 2016 it was bought by a local businessman and he has carried out most of the work himself. It is due to open later this year as a community venue. There are interior pictures on the BBC News website at [tinyurl.com/5f74dfa5](https://www.bbc.com/news/arts-5f74dfa5). {23864}

*BBC News website* – 15 April; photo taken June 2014

## GLASGOW



The Grosvenor Cinema on Ashton Lane is seeking permission from Glasgow City Council to make alterations to its frontage. The cinema has been closed during the pandemic while refurbishment works have been carried out. The proposed changes would see a new revolving door created at the entrance to the cinema. A brass canopy overhead, showing what films are being screened and the timings, would be added, among other smaller changes. Each of the two screens on the ground floor has 104 seats; upstairs, the original ceiling has been restored and the space is now a restaurant. {27083}

*Glasgow World* – 8 April; photo taken November 2006

## HARWICH (Essex)

The Grade II\* listed Electric Palace reopened on 8 April after a two-year £1.5m restoration project. It first opened in November 1911 but closed in 1956. It lay derelict for 16 years but volunteers reopened it in 1981. It closed in 2019 for the restoration to remedy structural defects and a water leak and to remove asbestos. There was also redecoration of the interior, replacement of part of the auditorium floor and refurbishment of the auditorium seating. A more prominent celebration event will take place at a later date. The original restoration was covered in a special issue of *Picture House* No 37 (2012). {2597}

*Essex County Standard*, *BBC News website* - 31 March;  
sent in by Terry Hanstock & Robin Lee

## LLANDUDNO (Conwy)



The Wetherspoons pub in the Grade II listed former Palladium was forced to close for ten days in March for repairs to the ceiling. Scaffolding was erected in the auditorium space. The cinema opened in August 1920 and closed in September 1999. It has been a Wetherspoon pub since August 2001. {22974}

*North Wales Live* – 16 March; photo taken July 2014

## LONDON (Dalston)

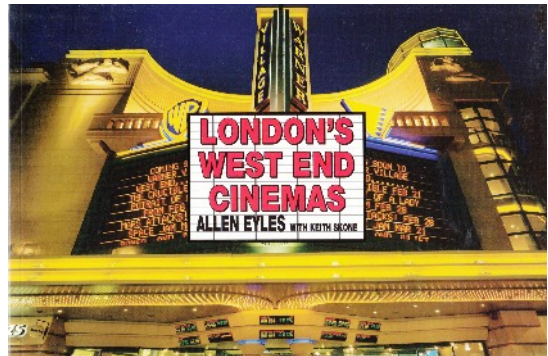
The Rio was transformed into a three-day Gotham City inspired experience for the new *The Batman* film. Guests were presented with a crime scene as part of a role-play experience where every audience member was a suspect. Participants were encouraged to interact with each other and the actors who took on the role of Gotham City's police force. The goal was to unravel a series of clues and challenges and solve a mystery. {10557}

*Digital Cinema Report* – 7 March

## More Newsreel in the full Bulletin

### London's West End Cinemas

by Allen Eyles with Keith Skone.



The history of London's West End cinemas dates back more than one hundred years. This book details all of them, in chronological order, totalling well over one hundred, from 1906 up to 2013. The best of the West End's cinemas were outfitted to a very high standard to match their role as showcases for new films, hosting press shows and premières, as well as being a magnet for film enthusiasts anxious to see films on exclusive première runs. Even now, when films are available everywhere at the same time, the West End's cinemas are a vibrant attraction to visitors from all over the world as well as for Londoners having a night on the town. There are interior views as well as exteriors of most of the cinemas and over 50 illustrations are in full colour, together with appendices of club cinemas and theatres used as temporary cinemas.

Large Format paperback, 210 pages, over 400 illustrations,  
£25.00 plus £3.40 postage, from the Sales Officer.

Published in 2013 in conjunction with English Heritage.

Ordering details on p5



# AN ODEON ODDITY – THE GREAT MR HANDEL

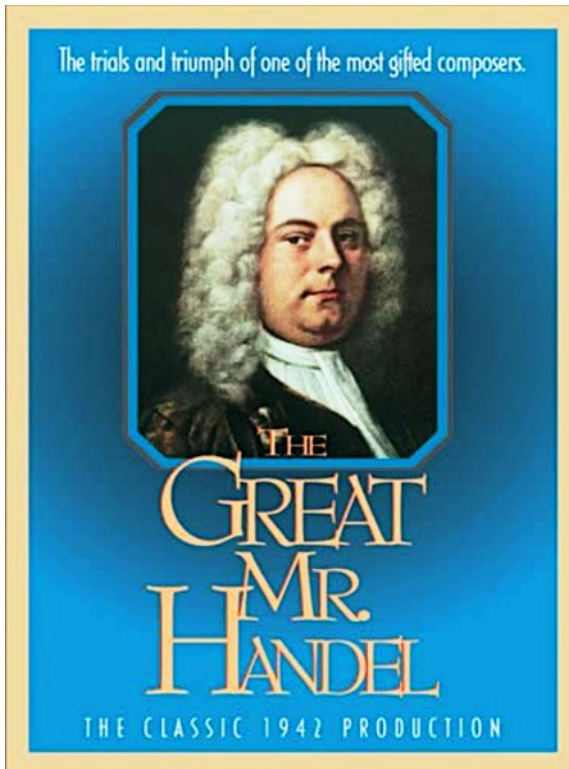
By David Evans

In an era when cinemas would be jammed-packed for practically anything being screened, one British film of 1942 certainly had the opposite effect on audiences – *The Great Mr Handel* made by GHW Ltd, a production company owned by J Arthur Rank and released on to his Odeon circuit towards the end of that year. This was the first Technicolor feature to be made in Britain since the Korda super productions of the late 1930s and looked at three aspects of Handel's life – success in earlier years, failure in later years and then the triumph of his oratorio *Messiah*.

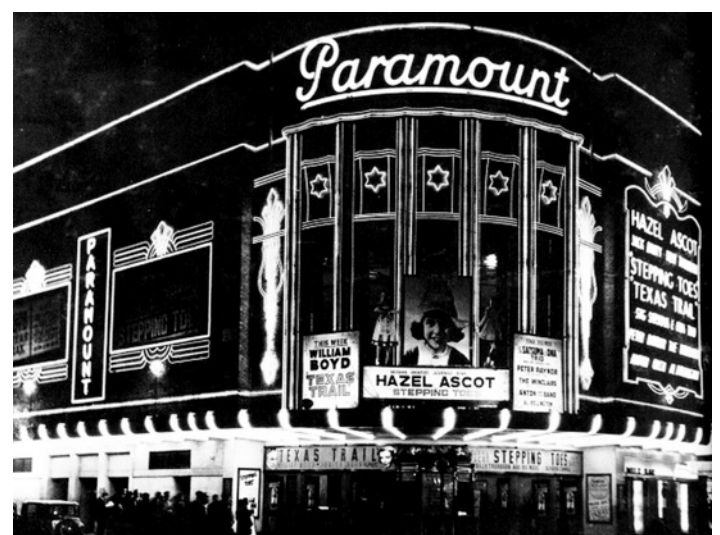
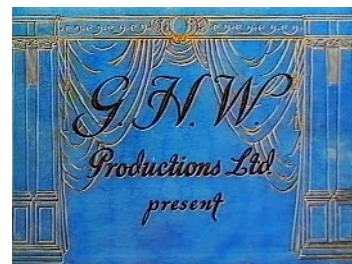
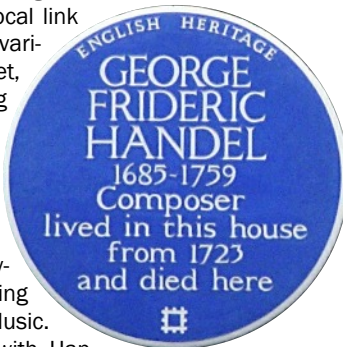
GHW specialised in films with a spiritual message – Rank was a practising Methodist – of somewhat limited appeal to many in the average cinema audience, so expensive Technicolor may have been used to bolster the picture's chances at the box office and, to improve these even more, a concert of Handel's music was performed at the Leicester Square Theatre, where the film premiered and HMV reissued recordings of his works – all to little avail. So, to improve its chances and “spice-up its appeal” *The Great Mr Handel* was coupled with a reissue of *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, a 1938 a French Riviera-set comedy directed by Ernst Lubitsch and starring Claudette Colbert and Gary Cooper for its London-wide release. To demonstrate how unsuccessful this was, when the double bill hit the Rank-owned Paramount Tottenham Court Road in November it was replaced, quickly, by *Are Husbands Necessary?* and *The Fleet's In* the following week; both light-hearted escapist items, more certain to fill the 2,500-plus seat Paramount than a film with little popular appeal, even if it was in Technicolor.

Looking at the film, recently, I asked myself, was it such a bad picture or was it a case of the wrong film at the wrong time? True, it is occasionally slow-moving and the dialogue is somewhat stilted in some scenes but there is a charming vocal link between a number of these when various street sellers on Brook Street, Mayfair, where Handel lived [R], sing about their wares as they go about their business. In fact, the other music in the picture is superb – all Handel, of course and played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Ernest Irving, who was loaned to Rank by Ealing Studios where he was Director of Music.

Musically, everything culminates with Handel's composition of his *Messiah* when Technicolor brings to life the various stages of Christ's ministry as they pass through Handel's imagination while he composes. The camera was in the hands of colour-cinematography pioneer Claude Friese-Greene, son of the earlier cinema pioneer William Friese-Greene and Jack Cardiff, who would go on to win an Oscar for his Technicolor work on *Black Narcissus* in 1947. Their work is especially notable during interior scenes where the somewhat flat, overall lighting used in Technicolor productions up to that date was modified to achieve a more “natural” effect. Sadly, Friese-Greene died in 1943 and in May of the same year *Kiné Weekly* reported that the Association of Cinematograph Technicians had put in a request for higher pay when working on Technicolor pictures, due to “mental strain” and *The Great Mr Handel* was cited as an example of such strain. Doubtless there was some truth in all this for at the time using Technicolor was a complicated process with much extra lighting involved, cumbersome cameras, shortages of Technicolor stock and worries about colour compatibility, the latter under the hawk-eyed supervision of the company's representative assigned to each picture.



Another minus point for average audiences of the time was the lack of any romantic interest in the picture. Wilfred Lawson, who played Handel, was a fine actor who, despite battles with alcoholism throughout his career, delivered well-received performances in most of the films he made but he was no matinée idol in the looks department. The role of Elizabeth Allan, who took the female lead, is simply that of a diva who performed in his operas and oratorios. Those Odeon picture-goers who did see the production must have noted the contrast between the worthy *The Great Mr Handel* and the lively Technicolor musical *My Gal Sal*, with glamorous Rita Hayworth, which played on the circuit just before it. In addition, they only had to wait for a couple of weeks more before Paramount's Technicolor *The Forest Rangers* made it to their local Odeon screens. Not only did this have Paulette Goddard, Susan Hayward and Fred MacMurray but it featured a hit song, *I've Got Spurs That Jingle, Jangle Jingle* and it is a sure bet that 1942 Odeon audiences found that catchy number much more to their taste than eighteenth-century classical music – however worthy – in an oddity like *The Great Mr Handel*.



The Paramount Tottenham Court Road, London in September 1938  
photo courtesy Cinema Treasures, Creative Commons Licence