



CINEMA
THEATRE
ASSOCIATION

www.cta-uk.org

BULLETIN

Vol 57 No 4

ISSN 1479-0882

October – December 2023



The restored and enlarged Hyde Park Picture House, Leeds. The new extension is on the right-hand side. See article and Newsreel entry inside.
Photo Ollie Jenkins, taken July 2023

HELP, PLEASE

AN APPEAL

We have virtually exhausted our stock of articles for the *Bulletin*. Could you write something? As a guide, a single column article has about 400-500 words and a full page article about twice that, allowing for a few pictures. If you can provide photos to accompany the article so much the better, although we probably have pictures of most British cinemas. Of course, historical articles need historical pictures. If you would like further guidance, just ask.

Bulletin Editorial Team

BANBURY/LEATHERHEAD

CTA member Gary Donaldson is working on an article about the recently closed **Regal/Odeon**, Banbury, and the **Crescent Cinema**, Leatherhead. He would be grateful to hear from anyone who has photographs of Banbury exterior and/or auditorium pre-1954 (Essoldo takeover), and of the **Crescent** (1939-1966). Please reply to garydsocial@yahoo.co.uk if you can assist. Thank you.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

NEW MEMBERS

Matthew Humphreys, Peter West, Elizabeth Vinson and Bill Chew.

DONATIONS

IE Barrow, IJ Bellion, MJ Biggam, RJ Buckler, RA Buckley, MJ Burke, M Charlesworth, M Cordner, DWT Corn, J Creswell, MP Greenslade, E Griffiths, AM Harris, TA Harris, BD Hopper, M Hutton, PL Kent, AS Kidd, JM Lewis, SD Locking, A Philip, J Ramsden, GJ Richards, JE Roberts JJ Seabrook, BC Sinclair, G Snowden-Davies, PV Stevens, BP Stoveld, M Tapsell, PJ Turner, KS Wheelan, JE Williams, BD Wingrad and LG Woods.

IN MEMORIAM

Peter Breach from Lowestoft a member of the CTA since 2015.

Ray Ritmeester, Membership Secretary

SMALL ADS

The rate for small ads from members is £3 for 25 words with name and address free, plus 15p for each extra word. Non-members rates: £5 & 25p respectively.

Please send cheque or postal order (payable to the Cinema Theatre Association) to the Treasurer, address on p2. Please quote membership number.

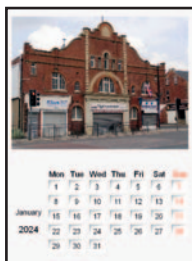
Advertisers are requested to reply to all respondents who supply SAE for that purpose.

Display rates: eighth page – £15; quarter page – £25;
half page (horizontal or vertical) – £45; full page – £80

CINEMA CALENDAR 2024

Available from early November with 12 colour photos of UK cinemas, taken this Century:

Still only £5, including postage. Please make cheque payable to Harry Rigby or simply send £5 note to: Harry Rigby, 65 Tennyson Avenue, Harrogate, HG1 3LE or email harry.rigby@ntlworld.com for details of how to pay by EFT and save yourself a stamp!



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

All membership and subscription enquiries should be sent to

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: Ray Ritmeester subs@cta-uk.org

66 Woodside Road, High Wycombe, HP13 7JB

BULLETIN EDITORS: Richard Hagon, Harry Rigby

Items for possible inclusion in the Bulletin should be sent to

bulletin@cta-uk.org

If necessary, copy for feature articles may be posted to

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

BULLETIN NEWSREEL EDITOR: David Simpson

For contact details see the first page of the Newsreel section

USEFUL CTA CONTACTS

info@cta-uk.org : general enquiries

digital@cta-uk.org : enquires about digital services

visits@cta-uk.org : enquires about talks/events bookings

Visits' registration phone hotline: 020 8800 8393

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN: David Trevor-Jones ‡ chairman@cta-uk.org

VICE-CHAIRMAN: Ian Meyrick ‡

SECRETARY: Adam Unger ‡ honsec@cta-uk.org

TREASURER: Neville C Taylor ‡ accounts@cta-uk.org

CASEWORK COMMITTEE – Chairman: Richard Gray ‡ casework@cta-uk.org

Members: as main committee plus Rob Chesterfield, Peter Lea, Mark Price, Vicky Simon & Peter Wyld

ARCHIVIST: Clive Polden archive@cta-uk.org

ASSISTANT ARCHIVIST: David Simpson

SALES OFFICER: Jeremy Buck ‡ sales@cta-uk.org

WEBMASTER: Gary Painter web@cta-uk.org

VISITS CO-ORDINATOR: Ray Ritmeester visits@cta-uk.org

PICTURE HOUSE EDITOR: Allen Eyles picture.house@cta-uk.org

CTA SCOTLAND: Gordon Barr, Gary Painter scotland@cta-uk.org

CTA CYMRU/WALES: John Skinner, Jon Williams wales@cta-uk.org

CTA NORTH: vacancy north@cta-uk.org

CTA WESSEX: David Eve, Gary Trinder wessex@cta-uk.org

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Kevin Gooding, Tim McCullen, Richard Norman, Harry Rigby, Ken Roe, Marion Kennett (co-opted).

Please use info@cta-uk.org if uncertain as to whom to address an e-mail enquiry; this address will be monitored and e-mails redirected if necessary.

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

BULLETIN: Members are invited to submit items for possible publication to the Bulletin Editors. 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 Editors.

It is assumed that submissions are for publication, unless stated otherwise; items may be shortened or edited at the discretion of the Editors.

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.



www.cta-uk.org



www.facebook.com/cinematheatreorguk



www.twitter.com/Ctheatreassoc



www.instagram.com/cinematheatreorguk

Typeset in Franklin Gothic Book and printed by
The Ludo Press Ltd, 18 Wimbledon Stadium Business Centre,
Riverside Road, London SW17 0BA www.ludo.co.uk

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE WEDNESDAY 22 NOVEMBER

VISITS AND EVENTS

Paris Cinemas – The Disappearance plus CTA pre-Christmas Social Get-together

An illustrated talk by Jean-François Chaput
Saturday 9th December at 5:30pm (doors open 5:00)
ORGANISED BY KEN ROE



Auditorium of Max-Linder, 1982. Courtesy of Jean-François Chaput



Cigale Exterior, October 1986

Everyone knows the French have always had a love of cinema, dating from the 28th December 1895 when Louis & Auguste Lumiere first presented their Cinematographe in the Grand Café, 14 Boulevard des Capucines in the centre of Paris. 60 years later there were 570 cinemas operating in the 20 Arrondissements (districts) of Paris. In 1982 Jean-François was working as a projectionist and was also a keen photographer. He decided he would go around the city photographing the many cinemas which were then operating. Little did he know that by 1992 over 200 single screen cinemas would be closed, and he realised he had recorded them in his photographs. In his presentation to us, he will share his experiences and give some background history on some of the buildings which sadly no longer entertain the Parisian public.



and 188 stunning colour photographs. The text of the book is in French, but the presentation this evening by Jean-François will be in English.

A few copies of Jean-François book *Paris Cinés 1982-1992 des Cinémas Disparaissent* will be available to purchase on the evening (£28-cash only), or from Amazon.co.uk. It is a hardback book, published in June 2023 with 264 pages featuring 51 cinemas



Louxor Exterior, November 1983. Prior to 2013 restoration



Paris Exterior, June 1985

CTA pre-Christmas Social Get-together

Following the presentation, attendees are invited to stay and have a pre-Christmas social get-together where we will add to the festive occasion by showing a vintage Christmas cartoon with a travelogue, and time permitting a short quiz to test your knowledge about our cinema heritage. The evening will conclude with refreshments of wine, soft drinks and seasonal fare.

Venue: The Gallery at Alan Baxter Associates, 75 Cowcross Street, Farringdon, London EC1M 6EL

Getting there: On leaving Farringdon (old) Underground Station (Circle, Hammersmith & City and Metropolitan lines) (not the Turnmill Street exit) turn left. If leaving from the new Elizabeth Line/Thameslink exit (located opposite the Underground station) turn right. Walk east 150 yards along Cowcross Street toward the 'Snappy Snaps' shop. The entrance to the Gallery is opposite: Walk through the large gates, across the courtyard to the far end, turn right down the steps and you are there.

BOOKING YOUR TICKET FOR THE TALK

CTA talks are open to everyone – members and non-members alike. Admission £10 per person, including the pre-Christmas social gathering.

Booking is done on-line using Ticket Source:

www.ticketsource.co.uk. Simply enter 'Cinema Theatre Association' into their search box and book for 'Paris Cinemas – The Disappearance'.

For members who are unable to book online, please call the visits registration line 020 8800 8393 (answerphone) stating your name and membership number and how many tickets are required. You will be registered to attend and able to pay your £10 (cash only) on the door. Please book early to secure your place.



An Afternoon in Finsbury Park The Cinema Theatre Association Visit

August 2023

ORGANISED BY RICHARD GRAY AND RAY RITMEESTER



Astoria Finsbury Park

The CTA trip to North London this year was scheduled in August again and accompanied by un-seasonal weather and train strikes (again) but long looked forward to by me since being trailed by the excellent visit to Kilburn in 2022, also organised by Richard Gray and Ray Ritmeester. It was to feature another of those signature UK cinema buildings, the **Astoria Finsbury Park**, that perhaps you never quite got to in your film-going heydays. At least for me, as there were no **Astoria**'s in my Southern Morris/Shipman & King locales excepting the now lost **Astoria Purley**, which had a rather plain look inside and out.

Finsbury Park was not on my map until the first *Beatles Christmas Show* (1963), this whilst the **Astoria** was in a later period as an **Odeon**, and subsequently as the Rainbow music venue (1971-1982). I well remember the surprise and amazement at being transported into a Spanish village for my Liverpool lad's big London event. However, my memory of the detail of the venue needed a refresh, and this CTA event was to have the same wow factor.

Finsbury Park (now Listed Grade II*) was to be the fourth in the series of famous London suburban **Astoria** theatres built by Arthur Segal. The auditorium, originally seating almost four thousand, is decorated in a Spanish Moorish/Atmospheric style by Marc-Henri and G.Laverdet. It had a Compton organ within the 64 feet wide proscenium, a 35 feet deep stage and 12 dressing rooms.

The building is set on most of a large V shaped plot, with the frontage making a big statement on the Seven Sisters Road facing the station. You couldn't miss it on arriving by bus, train or underground, and the current owners, the Brazilian based United Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) took it in 1995 when its condition had deteriorated for lack of maintenance, since when the church has carried out a significant



Finsbury Park Gaumont



Finsbury Park Picture House

programme of repair and restoration. The result is magnificent, from entry to the main foyer, with its fountain containing goldfish (still there today), through the spacious lobby's now partially repurposed as chapel spaces, into the auditorium complete with a village on three sides in 3D 'Vista Vision'. Okay, so the stars above don't twinkle anymore, and the Brenograph no longer plays clouds across the dark blue sky, but the effect is still impressive.

Our friendly church host, Tison, took us through all the public spaces and up into the balcony, kindly arranging to dim the house lights, and Richard Gray gave a commentary on its theatrical history to add to the nicely illustrated visit notes. I think that we all agreed that its restoration is astonishingly good.

Our group of about 40 members, old and new, then made a dash through a stormy downpour to the far side of the transport interchange and Stroud Green Road, where the Pyke's **Cinematograph/Rink/Gaumont** remains as a bowling alley. Its 1909 façade is essentially all that remains of a tale of two early cinemas with an interesting story of two buildings that joined as one, and then separated again, but with little evidence of its previous use now remaining. But the staff were happy for us to take a look inside. It was then back across to West Place and the seven screen **Picture House**, which opened in 2021. A specially commissioned mural by Dale Lewis enlivens its interior.

An operating cinema was a good place to round off our late summer London event, and our thanks go to Ray Ritmeester and Richard Gray for arranging the visit. And what happened to the bands I saw playing in the seventies at the Rainbow? Well mostly now gone or deteriorating like many old cinemas, but evidently not the **Finsbury Park Astoria** thank goodness.

Mike Wood

References:

Book:

Cinemas In Britain – One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture.
Gray, Richard (1996). Lund Humphries. ISBN 0853316856

Online:

Rainbow Theatre Listing at Cinema Treasures:
cinematreasures.org/theaters/1243

Gaumont Listing on Cinema Treasures:
www.cinematreasures.org/theaters/15136

A history of The Rainbow/Astoria Finsbury Park:
www.rainbowhistory.x10.mx

Flickr Photoset of UCKG Astoria 2008:
www.flickr.com/photos/hjuk/albums/72157608080826218

Mike Hume's Atmospherics online map (include the Astoria):
www.historictheatrephotos.com/Research/Atmospherics

HERITAGE CASEWORK

by Mike Whitcombe

The CTA Casework Committee are continually involved in securing a positive future for many endangered cinemas, both present and former. Here's a summary of their current work load.

England

Grade II* Listed

STATE, GRAYS (Francis Chancellor, 1938)

This case continues to concern following news that Wetherspoons have a potential buyer for the building. In June we met with Mark Bradbury, Thurrock's Strategic Director of Place, to discuss the State's future. The meeting began outside the cinema before continuing in the municipal buildings. We were told that the building might end up in public ownership and that there are two possible outcomes. The first involves the issuing of an Urgent Works Notice which would mean a full-scale repair at a cost of £600,000 to £700,000 for a temporary roof. The other option would be the issuing of a Section 215 Notice to carry out a quick and 'dirty' temporary repair using money from Historic England at a cost of around £100,000. We pressed our belief that the building should be completely refurbished, allowing it to become a fully functioning theatre. We strongly believe this is the best ultimate outcome but should any scheme be proposed which internally carves up the building, we would always argue for the auditorium to remain intact. The sale has now gone through and we have made contact with the new owner.

GRADE II

ROYALTY, HARBORNE, BIRMINGHAM (Horace G Bradley, 1930)

In regard to the new application for a car wash, our view is that if the application is approved there should be a Section 106 Agreement to ensure the security of the building. Although the auditorium has been demolished, the foyer has some remaining original fabric and features and we believe the Conservation Officer in Birmingham should be keeping an eye on the building.

ODEON/EMPIRE, SUTTON COLDFIELD, BIRMINGHAM (John Cecil Clavering & Harry Weedon, 1936)



McCarthy & Stone are meant, under a Section 106 Agreement, to be dedicating £200,000 to refurbish the cinema which, according to a newspaper article, is meant to reopen in Spring 2024. Building work has currently commenced on the car park site but no refurbishment of the cinema has started which, given the fact that Empire went into administration on 6 July, gives us reason to be concerned. We are currently in the process of rechecking planning conditions and writing to local MP Andrew Mitchell who is involved in the case.

ODEON/MAJESTIC, HARTLEPOOL (William & Thomas Riley Milburn, 1936)

We have strongly objected to the proposed demolition of this cinema by the local authority as part of the Hartlepool Masterplan (May 2023) which would see the building knocked down and replaced by a park. We believe this is completely unacceptable and we are urging the



Development Corporation, which has recently taken over planning from the Council, to reconsider their decision. Our objections in a strongly written letter to these proposals are threefold:

1. As an example of 1930s design, the cinema has considerable architectural quality. Its external figurative relief panels are a fine and historic element of Hartlepool's streetscape.
2. The cinema represents an important, sophisticated design by the Milburn practice of William and Thomas Ridley Milburn, one of the leading architects of theatre and cinema buildings in North East England.
2. The cinema is Grade II Listed, and, as for any listed building, restoration and re-use should always be considered before proposals for demolition are suggested.

We have also written in our letter of objection that we believe the cinema should be put to community use and that the park should be situated elsewhere. We are in contact with The Theatres Trust and Historic England North East and are pleased to report that The Twentieth Century Society have also objected.

FORUM, LIVERPOOL (William Riddell Glen & Alfred Ernest Shennan, 1931)

There was fire in the building in early June and we are currently trying to check on the condition of the cinema. Despite approaching Liverpool Council, along with The Theatres Trust, about the future use of this building, we are still awaiting an answer.

SAVOY, BURNT OAK, LONDON (George Coles, 1936)

The applicants are still tweaking their scheme and we believe they are in contact with the local council. EEH Ventures were granted consent to redevelop the building into a 100,000 square foot working and co-living scheme with a gym, library, laundrette, cinema room, lounges and a ground floor cafe. The existing roof to the building would be demolished and replaced with a new three storey structure, with a new seven storey side extension to the northern portion of the site.

EMPIRE, HAYMARKET, LONDON (Francis Thomas Verity & Samuel Beverley, 1927)



We feel this cinema might have a future. We were recently contacted by the Crown Estate to say they have modified their scheme to make it more environmentally friendly. The architect who came up with the scheme will see it through to its conclusion. The Crown Estate added that they want to make a new rear entrance that would lead to a mezzanine and allow for different events.

REGAL, KINGSTON, LONDON (Robert Cromie, 1932)

We recently had a site meeting with a development company, Jericho Estates, who work on behalf of the Irish owners, and who were negative about the building. Apparently, the former lessees spent around £2 million on the basement car park and are trying to recoup that money.

CURZON, MAYFAIR, LONDON (Horace Hammond for Sir John Burnet, Tait and Partners, 1966)

We've had a couple of positive meetings with the landlord's agents about their scheme and have since been contacted by Curzon. A Westminster councillor has set up a petition to save the Curzon. We are currently chasing Curzon to ask if we can see their drawings for the cinema.

PICTURE HOUSE, NOTTINGHAM (1912)

The application to convert this building, which closed as a cinema in 1930, to self contained residential flats has been given permission. The cinema has a very good facade and the interior still has some good plaster features which will be preserved. The design by local firm CBP Architects will subdivide the auditorium.

GRAND CASINO, SOUTHPORT (George E Tonge, 1938)



We feel that unauthorised works have taken place in the auditorium and we will chase Sefton Council to determine if this is the case. On a site visit it was observed that the stained-glass Walt Disney windows, as well as columns, uplighters and balustrades have been retained even though the foyer block has been subdivided into various uses including bars and function room.

ODEON, WESTON-SUPER-MARE (Thomas Cecil Howitt, 1935)

There is good news about this cinema which closed in June when Odeon announced that it was not viable. Merlin Cinemas have been named as the new owners of the site and they intend to reopen it as soon as possible. They will rename the cinema the Plaza. They are enthusiastic about plans to upgrade the cinema and believe it will have a successful future. It is hoped the Compton organ will be heard still on special occasions.

NOT LISTED

CENTRAL, CAMBRIDGE (George P Banyard, 1930)

We have written a letter to support a listing application and have been told by Historic England's listing assessor that our comments are very valuable.

REGENT, DEAL (PV Levett, 1933)

We are currently studying material sent from the architects who have come up with a scheme to incorporate housing and a 49-seat cinema, with a replica facade. We have objected to this last aspect of the scheme.

RITZ, KEIGHLEY (Samuel Beverley, 1938)

We have taken up this case because Buzz Bingo have pulled out.

CLIFTON, LEOMINISTER (Ernest S Roberts, 1936)

We are chasing up various contacts in regard to this site which closed as a bingo hall in late 2022. It has since been put on the market and is currently under offer.

SAVOY, HAYES, LONDON (George Coles, 1939)

We have objected to a planning application that would split the auditorium horizontally. We believe the building is to become a banqueting suite.

REX, STRATFORD, LONDON (Frank Matcham & JM Gladwell/ George Coles 1897/1934)



We are writing to support a listing application along with The Twentieth Century Society and The Theatres Trust.

ODEON, MORECAMBE (William Calder Robson for Harry W Weedon, 1937)

We have had contact with a Conservation Officer who stated the cinema is on the Council's list of non-designated heritage assets.

WALES GRADE II

CASTLE, SWANSEA (CS Thomas, Meager and Jones, 1913)

In principle we support the application to convert the former cinema into commercial units and residential apartments. But in a letter to Swansea Council, we ask for several representations relating to the proposed design of the building to be taken into consideration. We believe the glass extension on the south elevation is totally out of character with the original building and detracts from the adjacent neoclassical facade. CTA Cymru also recommends the application includes the reinstatement of the original 1930s pay box, removed by the former owners and in storage at the rear of the building, to be a feature in the former foyer.

ODEON, LLANELLI (PJ Price for Harry Weedon, 1938)



We are attempting to contact the owner to discover what is happening to the cinema. It's been closed since 2012 when Odeon opened a new five screen cinema in the town centre's East Gate centre.

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

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; 3,000 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	Holophane 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 50 th 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.
No 47	£8.50	Special 96-page issue: The Shipman & King Circuit, Mollo & Egan.

There are also available a few second-hand copies of out-of-print issues of *Picture House* 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 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.

Second-Hand Books

Thanks to generous donations from members, we have a new, larger selection of second-hand books for sale, including many rare titles and some *Kine Year Books* from the 1950s and 60s. To receive a full list with around 120 titles, please send an email to sales@cta-uk.org with 'Second Hand Book List' as the subject. Or write to the Sales Officer at 34, Pelham Road, London N22 6LN. (SAE appreciated)

BULLETINS

We can supply back numbers of most Bulletins from Volume 21 (1987) to date. Prices for issues from 1987 to 2021 are £4.00 per year (6 issues); individual copies are £1.00 each. Prices for issues in 2022 and 2023 are £6.00 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.

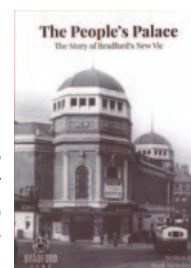
Ordering

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. 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 where you can also place your order using PayPal. A sales list is sent with every order.

New Publication

The People's Palace - the story of Bradford's New Vic

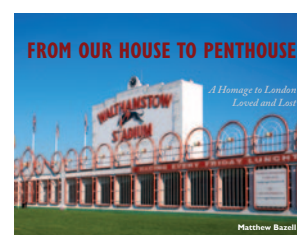
by Mark Nicholson. Paperback, 364 pages, fully illustrated, £20.00 plus postage.



The New Victoria/Gaumont/Odeon at Bradford has seldom been missing from the CTA Newsreel over the last few years. It came perilously close to demolition after closure in 2000, but it is now being renovated as a live performance venue - 'Bradford Live'. In this comprehensive book, the author charts the history of the building from its opening in 1930 until its closure 70 years later. As well as extensive research, the author has interviewed several former employees, projectionists, an organist, a disc jockey and management. There is a wealth of photographs, many previously unpublished. The New Victoria was one of the UK's largest cine-variety theatres, with 3,317 seats and played host to a wide variety of visiting performers, including touring ballet, pantomimes on ice and world famous orchestras and vocalists. Teenagers screamed when the biggest pop stars of the day appeared in the 1950s and 60s, and all are recalled here.

Also Available (but not from the Sales Officer)

From Our House to Penthouse - A Homage to London Loved and Lost by Mathew Bazell. 212 pages, fully illustrated in colour, ISBN 978 1 39843 196 6. RRP £23.99 paperback, also available as a hardback and Kindle. Available through Amazon, etc and bookshops.



The dust-jacket blurb reads "this book will take you on a nostalgic trip down memory lane to a London that disappeared not so long ago. Pubs gutted to make way for coffee chains! Arenas and cinemas bulldozed

to make way for hotels! Dog tracks and football grounds now apartments!" The cinema and theatre content is limited to around eight locations, including the Coronet at Elephant & Castle, the Astoria, the Odeons at West End and Marble Arch, the Rainbow, and Golders Green Hippodrome. For each subject, there is a large 'artistic' photograph of the exterior and a short text. There is probably not enough here for us serious cinema enthusiasts, but some of you may like browsing through pictures of old pubs, cafes, dog tracks, etc. Some inside pages can be viewed by finding the book on Amazon and clicking on 'see inside'. (Thanks to Ian Mitchell for suggesting this title).



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)

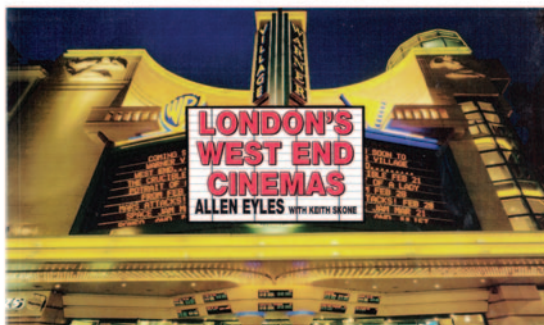
Also available – THE GRANADA THEATRES – £18.99.

Last few copies!

Please add £3.40 to your order for postage.

Available from the Sales Officer – address on p7.

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 show-cases 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 p7.

THE HYDE PARK PICTURE HOUSE

By Harry Rigby

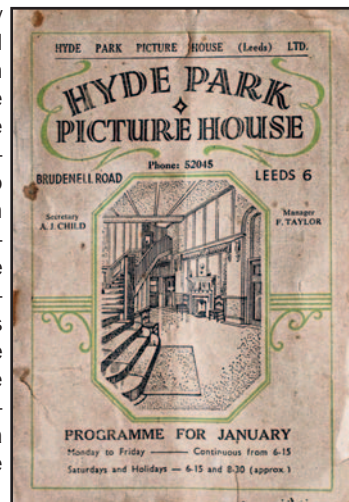
The Hyde Park Picture House in Leeds opened on 2 November 1914. The building had been a private members' club but was largely demolished and the cinema was designed by Thomas Winn. It had 520 seats in the stalls and 150 in the circle. Music was played by a trio: a pianist, violinist and cellist. Daily logbooks exist from its opening until 1958, documenting screenings, weather, audience numbers, takings and other notes, including comments on public health – see p16 Bulletin 56/1.



The cinema has just undergone a two-year restoration, paid for by fundraising and the National Lottery. I arranged a private tour for myself and CTA member Ian Hanson, who was over from Australia and gave a talk to the CTA on 11 August. We were made very welcome by Wendy Cook, head of film. I realised I had met her before when David Simpson organised a visit to the cinema in June 2010 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Cinematograph Act.

The restoration is magnificent, particularly in its attention to detail. Weathered stonework has been cleaned and the mosaic and terrazzo floor outside the original box office has been polished and missing elements recreated. Even more terrazzo was discovered in the foyer after being hidden under carpet for over 70 years. The hand-painted stained-glass window on the staircase has been cleaned and had its wooden surround repaired. Decorative plasterwork has been reinstated.

Accessibility has been improved by the installation of a ramp at the main entrance. The back wall of the foyer has been moved slightly into the rear of the auditorium and an accessible toilet created. This has meant the loss of some seats so that, with re-seating, the capacity is now 232. The nine original gas secondary lights have been repaired and restored and will be lit at every performance. When sound arrived in 1930 a new screen was built in front of the original one on the back wall to give space for the loudspeaker; remnants of the original are still there. The art deco clock in the auditorium came from the former Gaumont Leeds. During the works, various items were found, including the 1950s programme [pictured R] old tickets and cigarette packets, which are now on display in a cabinet in the foyer. The projection room still retains a pair of Cinemeccanica 35mm projectors as well as the digital projector.



The cellar was excavated and a 51-seat second screen constructed; this screen can also show 16mm. The building is Grade II listed, including the cast iron lamppost outside! The cinema's website hph.co.uk contains a wealth of information and pictures. There is also a website lostcinemas.co.uk that lists all 83 cinemas that Leeds once had.

CTA ARCHIVE

The Cinema Theatre Association Archive is open for research visits and for enquiries from members and the general public. Located in a modern building on the outskirts of Southend-on-Sea, the Archive offers all the facilities and resources you would expect from a modern archive. The Archive contains an extensive collection of material that has been steadily growing since its inception in 1967. This includes books, periodicals, articles, newspaper cuttings, photographs, plans and drawings, many donated or acquired from leading architects or industry figures and supplemented by personal collections and research.

The breadth of the collection is such that there are very few topics related to cinema history, architecture, design or operation that are not represented.

VOLUNTEERING AT THE ARCHIVE OR FROM HOME

The Archive is maintained entirely by volunteers. Volunteering can be a very interesting and rewarding experience and you do not have to be a member to be a volunteer. Volunteers might file, organise and sort the collections, deal with enquiries or undertake special projects. You don't need any experience or particular skills. If you cannot easily visit the Archive and have computer skills, a scanner or access to Word or Excel at home, you can still volunteer as we have plenty of work that can be undertaken remotely without visiting the Archive.

VOLUNTEER HELP REQUIRED

The Archive stores tens of thousands of images and documents electronically using a cloud storage system called OneDrive. With the digitisation of photographs in full swing, it is proving increasingly hard to keep up with the 'electronic filing' and we are seeking a home-based volunteer to provide some administrative support. Files are stored in folders by each cinema, within a folder for each place in the UK. The task is to simply move files to their appropriate folders, or if no folder exists, to create one. Anyone familiar with moving documents around on a computer, OneDrive, or similar cloud storage system and has some spare time to help out, we would like to hear from you.

DONATING MATERIAL TO THE ARCHIVE

Please visit the Donating Material page of the website. Almost everything held in the Archive has been donated and is the main way that the collection grows. The Archive will not turn down material which is on subject and adds to the breadth of its holdings so please do not hesitate to contact us if you have something which you think should be preserved. If the material includes books or magazines, please first prepare a list and submit it to us, so we can determine which copies are not already held. We will occasionally accept books that are already held if they are in good condition, on the understanding that they will be sold to raise funds. Please do not post items to the Archive address as there is no facility to receive parcels when it is closed and they may be lost or returned to you as undelivered. Please contact the Archivist, who can provide a safe address. Although we always prefer to receive original material, if you cannot part with the originals we are happy to accept scanned material or copies of your digital photographs.

MAKING AN ENQUIRY OR ARRANGING A VISIT

Please visit the new Archive website for full details or to make an enquiry: cta-uk.org/archive. The Exploring the Archive page of the website includes catalogues and lists for various collections along with indexes for periodicals including the Bulletin and Picture House.

You may find these lists useful in identifying material for research. As the catalogues can only provide a brief snapshot of a small part of the Archive, please use the enquiry form that can be found on the Making an Enquiry page to tell us about a project you are undertaking or subject which you are interested in researching – or maybe it's a photograph that eludes you. Visiting the Archive is not normally necessary and material can simply be sent to you.

ARCHIVE TWITTER

You may be interested to know that the Archive regularly posts messages, often including photographs, on its Twitter account – [@CTA_Archive](https://twitter.com/CTA_Archive). Please feel free to follow us if you use Twitter, alternatively you can view these messages via the link on our website or by visiting twitter.com/CTA_Archive.

VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITY

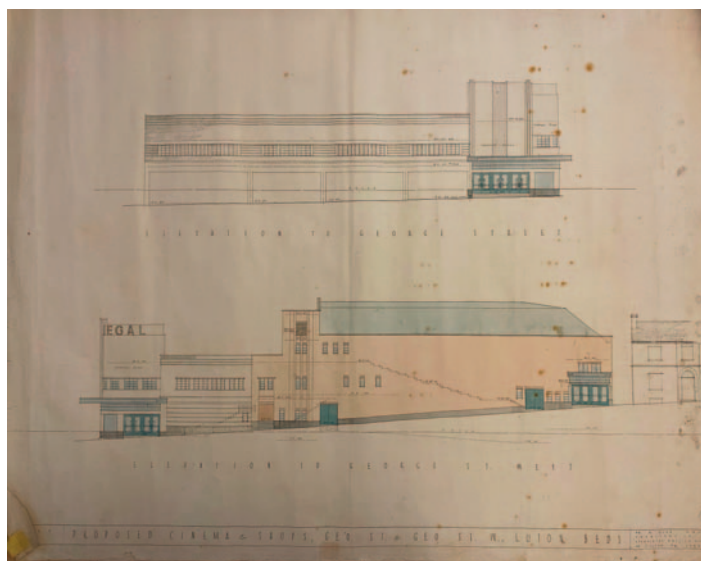
The Archive is seeking a member who has access to the internet and possesses a reasonably large back catalogue of CTA *Bulletin* and *Picture House* for a special one off project that can be carried out at home. The CTA *Bulletin* and *Picture House* have recently been digitised and there is a need for a volunteer willing to go through these scanned copies, held online in pdf format, and compare them with the originals. The volunteer will be looking for missed pages, or perhaps errors in the scanning process. If such issues are identified they simply need to note the copy of the magazine and the page or pages affected so they may be corrected.

If you feel this would be of interest to you and you can spare some time for this over the coming months please do contact me to discuss it further: Clive Polden, archive@cta-uk.org or 07971 752807.

DONATION OF LUTON ABC SAVOY PLANS

In the last few months many members have kindly arranged to donate wonderful items to the Archive, and regrettably it is not possible to mention them all here. I have also had the good fortune to be able to visit some members and to collect these items in person. The Archive is very grateful to you all for the donated material.

One such donation, is shown below, some original plans of the **Luton Savoy** by ABC house architect William Riddell Glen. Although it will not be entirely clear from this image you may see that the design of the curved frontage is very slightly different than the final cinema built. The plan gives the cinema the name **Regal**. Apart from this elevations sheet there is also a plan of the balcony level and a cross section plan of the building.



CONTACTING THE ARCHIVE

To make an enquiry please use the enquiry form on the website. For any other matter, such as donations or volunteering, please email archive@cta-uk.org; if you do not have Internet access call 07971 752807.

Clive Polden, CTA Archivist

LETTERS

JERSEY ODEON



I noticed this picture on a Jersey Facebook page I follow. Lovely tribute to Mr Luke Anthony Money Penny, manager of the Odeon. Tony was manager for many years, his office walls decorated with many awards and box office records. Sadly, Tony died tragically after retiring. We were friends for many years and I also worked there for a while as AUBM. We would sometimes show 8mm sound movies from the balcony, only one screen those days, on the big screen after closing. The cinema has, I believe, been saved from demolition. Sadly, the Forum, New Era, Wests all lost.

Dave Gilks

GRAND RYHOPE AT BEAMISH



Bill laying a brick in the projection room of the rebuilt Grand

I was contacted a couple of weeks back asking me to present myself last Wednesday at noon, when they wanted me to lay a brick on the formation of the projection room. I was most impressed at the speed of the build work and they have got the front structure up and even the steel work of the circle. There is a YouTube video of the event at youtu.be/PZ43XB666vc. Well, as you can see, I haven't laid a brick before but it is like making an ice cream wafer sandwich! You will see the Chief Executive doing the commentary and she told me that they expect it to be ready for around next February/March, opening to the public.

We had a good buffet lunch and they all wanted me to tell them some tales of my time in the business and they were really open-mouthed when I told them the story of when I was at Brighthouse Albert Cinema with Star in my early days (1966/7) when the head cleaner Mrs Ganford was found to be feeding me Rentokil Mouse Poison as sugar when I had my morning tea brought up to the office. All because I wouldn't let the cleaners use mops and insisted on floor cloths/scrub brushes on the floors! I used to get a burning feeling in my tummy going home in the bus at lunch times and Hilda told me to stop having a buttered scone with my tea as it was the salted butter. She used to also use the bunch of keys to clean the gent's urinal and then stir my pot of tea! The other of the three cleaners finally warned me and she was 'certified' and the police told me I need not go to court! Anyway, still here to tell the tale! You will hear the CEO say they were happy with some of those tales etc. Helen, the assistant boss, asked me if I still have my evening suit for the opening. God, it has been in the attic in a case for 20+ years.

Bill Mather

Editor's Note: The former Grand cinema from Ryhope (Sunderland) was dismantled brick by brick and is being rebuilt at Beamish Open-Air Museum as part of their new 1950s town. See p28 Bulletin 57/2.

HULL'S CECILS - AGAIN

You managed to thoroughly mangle my correction about Hull's Cecil cinemas. Please re-read my original message, which I include below. I don't want Bulletin readers thinking that I got it wrong.

Yours, a bit annoyed, Hector J Hill



The 1950s Cecil in Hull was not, as claimed in the last Bulletin, built on the site of the former Cecil destroyed in the Blitz on Hull. The attached image shows the pre-war Cecil under construction in 1925 at the T-junction of Ferensway and Anlaby Road. Note the Mariners' Hospital. The hospital was demolished, post-war and Ferensway extended, turning the junction into crossroads. The 1950s Cecil was erected on part of the grounds of the hospital, diagonally across the new junction from the, then, still-standing but derelict pre-war Cecil.

LIGHT WORK

You might find the attached illustration useful as a filler. It's a picture of a wall light fitting which I recovered during the demolition of the Ritz Hanger Lane, London, W5 (ex-Paradise etc cinema). The building was being demolished at the time and I risked my life by going into the totally unprotected site and unscrewing a few ceiling light fittings from the remaining accessible ceilings, mainly in the balcony area. I also found this wall fitting in the entrance hall. It has been in pride of place in our hall ever since and I donated the rather larger ceiling fittings to the Cinema Museum some years ago.

Robert Gurd

BLACKBURN SALE

I was doing some research in Blackburn library and came across this advertisement for the auction of Blackburn's Majestic cinema in May 1932. It was offered as a going concern with additional property, including a car showroom, which altogether generated over £1,400 of income per annum.

Phillip Crompton

CHESTER

I've noticed that work has restarted on fitting out the new six-screen Picturehouse in Chester's Northgate development (initially reported in Bulletin 56/5). On visits to the City earlier in the year I noticed that there was little, if any, activity on the cinema site, with no likelihood of the spring opening advertised on the Picturehouse web site being met. The site now says the cinema will be opening later this year, with 'Founder Membership' being offered. Walking along the canal path past the boarded-up Gaumont (closed by Mecca in February - Bulletin 57/2) one is reminded how large an area the buildings extend over.

Jeremy Perkins



READOGRAPH



This is not so much a holiday picture but of a cinema near to where I live in London. It is now rare to see any form of readograph and rarer indeed to see one used with imagination. I therefore thought the attached picture could be useful of a filler in the Bulletin. The cinema is the Picturehouse in the Fulham Road. It was born in 1930 as the Forum. Since then, it has had several name changes and internal alterations. It now has six screens, all handsomely fitted out in keeping with the age of the building with very comfortable seats and good sightlines.

Tony Williams

MODERNISM BEYOND METRO-LAND



The Picturehouse (ex Odeon) Bromley and the book cover

As you may have seen from our social media posts in the last week we have begun crowdfunding for *Modernism Beyond Metro-Land*, an exploration of modernism in London's eastern and southern suburbs. It is a follow up to *A Guide to Modernism in Metro-Land*, published in 2020, which you kindly helped to promote the crowdfunding for.

Modernism Beyond Metro-Land travels from Waltham Forest in the north east around to Kingston in the south west, *Modernism Beyond Metro-Land* will record the art deco, modernist, brutalist and high-tech buildings in this stretch of suburbia:

www.modernism-in-metroland.co.uk/modernism-beyond-metroland.html

The guide will include the work of architects such as Charles Holden, George Coles, Owen Luder, Richard Rogers and many others. The guide will feature art deco cinemas, modernist tube stations, brutalist office blocks, stunning post war houses and much more.

As with the first guide, *Modernism Beyond Metro-Land* will feature colour photographs, detailed descriptions and maps of each area, as well as extended sections on each exploring a specific group of buildings such as Redbridge's Central Line stations and Waltham Forest's cinema heritage.

We feel that this is something your members would be really interested in. If you could include our crowdfunding project on your site, newsletters, publications and/or social media, we would be very grateful.

Josh Abbott

GHOST SIGNS

I saw an item on the *Liverpool Echo* website about 'ghost signs' appearing as the former Ritz in Anfield is being converted into flats. The picture on the website shows the blue area in the centre of the photo below had been removed and traces of the original entrance were then visible. You can read the full article at tinyurl.com/anfield-ritz but here is a synopsis:



The former Ritz Anfield as a sports shop in July 2007

The Ritz opened on 6 March 1929 with 1,200 seats. CinemaScope arrived in January 1955 and closure came on 30 June 1957. An advert in the *Liverpool Echo* on 23 January 1958 listed the cinema as 'for sale by auction'. It became a DIY store and later a sports shop. cinematreasures.org/theaters/50785

Terry Rourke

HOLIDAY SNAPS

I have two for you taken in July in Montelimar in Southern France. The two cinemas are opposite each other across a wide tree-lined road. Both were original single-screen buildings, which have been subdivided.

Tony Williams



DEMOLITION DAY

by Mike Whitcombe



The Odeon Portsmouth in May 2006

The Odeon Portsmouth, which closed in January 2008, is currently being partially demolished, with houses and flats being built on the site.

Outline planning permission for the complete demolition of the building and fifty residential and retail units was submitted and refused in 2018. Imperial Homes South eventually amended these plans and they were approved by Portsmouth Council in January 2023. There will now be a total of fifteen homes, comprising of eight three storey terraced houses, six flats and a maisonette. The development will be constructed on the site of the auditorium and the large rear car park. The famous Odeon tower that dominates North End High Street and the long foyer (which is currently in use for retail) will remain untouched.

The major reason for the initial application being turned down was the lack of car parking. Under the resubmitted plans there will be two parking spaces allocated for each house but only one parking space for each flat. All the parking spaces will be what is termed 'undercroft parking'. Undercroft was traditionally used to describe an underground storage room or cellar but in modern usage it describes a parking area, unenclosed on one or three sides, generally on street level, that occupies the area below the footprint of a building.

This explains why the houses on the former Odeon site will be three storey – the ground storey is technically a narrow entrance into the property with the rest of the area reserved for parking. Certain urban developers believe this is the least satisfactory arrangement for car parking in compact urban developments as it prevents a lively street-scene. Others believe it allows additional car parking in a restricted space, allowing for more properties to be fitted in.

The Odeon Portsmouth opened on 14 December 1936 and was designed by Andrew Mather. It boasted 1,824 seats (600 in the circle and 1,224 in the stalls) and cost £36,997 to build. The opening night film was the crime comedy *Chick*, which starred the Leeds-born stage comedian Sydney Howard (hugely popular at the time but largely forgotten now) and Betty Ann Davies. Directed by Michael Hankinson, it was based on a 1923 novel by Edgar Wallace.



Screen 1 (the former circle) a year before closure

The cinema was converted to run 70mm in September 1960 and was the place to go for the big roadshow presentations of the time. It remained a beautiful example of an art deco cinema even after it was tripled in 1973. A fourth screen was added in 1990 at the front of the original stalls. This auditorium used the bottom half of the original proscenium to house the screen. The original narrow stage was also retained. In 1998 the cinema received a £500,000 refurbishment, which did not destroy the art deco flourishes that gave the building its unique character.

It was always a hugely popular cinema and was well maintained by Odeon who invested heavily in the site until their merger with UCI twenty odd years ago. It was making a profit up until the day it closed when Terra Firma, the private equity firm who then owned Odeon, made a quick buck by selling its lease, which ran until 2036.

Like most cinemas from the golden age of cinema building, it was constructed with a fair amount of asbestos, particularly in the side walls and the roof area. When I worked at the cinema from 2001 until closure we were restricted from drilling into certain original walls because they were lined with asbestos. The main roof void also had warning signs throughout informing of the same danger. This, I thought, should have resulted in the building being cloaked with a protective sheet before demolition. But a construction worker I spoke with in late June 2023 as the roof was being peeled away told me that he believed – note the word believed – that asbestos had already been removed.

Cultural vandalism is the term that springs to mind when I look at the destruction of this much loved Odeon, always highly regarded by local residents who lived in the surrounding densely populated streets. But for some faceless developer it's a profitable investment opportunity. Whatever your opinion, it's a sad day for Portsmouth.



The above photographs show demolition and initial construction work being carried out between June and August 2023.



OXFORD'S SUPER CINEMA – A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE

By Giles Woodforde

It's always sad when someone dies just before their 100th birthday, never to receive their Royal Missive. Admittedly there would have been no congratulations from Buckingham Palace but it was still sad when the Odeon Magdalen Street, Oxford, closed on 4 June 2023, aged 99 years and 5 months.

Besides creating some special memories for me, the Odeon held a place in cinema history: it was probably the last mainstream circuit cinema to retain its original large auditorium intact and substantially unaltered. At closure there were 764 seats, including 104 'Super Luxury' and 43 'Luxury' seats (figures from the Odeon website).



Early views of the auditorium. Note the clearly visible organ console photos CTA Archive

The cinema opened as The Oxford on 1 January 1924, having been built for independent operators the Oxford Cinematograph Co Ltd. According to *The Builder* magazine there were 950 seats in the stalls and 350 in the circle on opening day. Architects were Frank Matcham & Co (famed theatre architect Frank Matcham himself had died in 1920) plus local architect JC Leed. The cinema was constructed with a narrow entrance on Magdalen Street and the bulk of the building on a cheaper site behind – as was the case with many American movie palaces. Interestingly, the three floors above the entrance have never been part of the cinema: originally, they provided extra bedrooms for the adjoining Oxenford Hotel and when that was demolished the access passageways were simply bricked up. In recent years attempts to discover who owns this building have (literally) hit a blank wall.

No expense was spared in fitting out The Oxford: "The main entrance is of marble, surrounded by a bronze illuminated fascia," gushed *The Builder*, "The main lounge is treated in rich French Renaissance [sic]." The Renaissance style continued into the auditorium, with perhaps a touch of the Classical added in, as befitted a cinema built in a famous University City. On the auditorium walls were two enormous paintings (30ft long by 17ft high), the work of G Rushton RBA. One depicted 'Modern Sport', the other 'Early Learning'.



Façade. *Come Up Smiling*, the film advertised, dates this shot to 1937. Note signage carrying the cinema's original name higher up: once this was removed, no later signage ever replaced it. Photo: CTA Archive.

point, incidentally, that the organ received its only broadcast: as a producer on *BBC Radio Oxford* at the time, I tapped out a tune on the xylophone.

In 1931 operation of the cinema passed from Oxford Cinematograph to Union, by which time it had become known as the Super. Along with the rest of the circuit, it was absorbed by ABC and then followed the standard procession through Cannon and MGM to end up as the Odeon Magdalen Street. The name 'ABC Oxford' was awarded to bigger sister, the Ritz, round the corner in George Street, which generally got the juiciest release of the week – ABC had a monopoly of first-run halls in Oxford, so could pick and choose what to play where. The Super came into its own, however, when the Ritz installed 70mm in 1959 and became occupied with long runs of *South Pacific* and *The Sound of Music*.

Deemed unsuitable for tripling, the Super was given a 'luxury lounge' makeover in 1971. The by now nicotine-blackened paintings were concealed behind swathes of curtaining, the seating was replaced and much of the plasterwork detail was painted out. However no significant damage was done. The first real threat to the cinema didn't come until 1994, when a plan was hatched to demolish both the Magdalen and George Street cinemas and replace them with a new multiplex further out of the City centre.

With alarm bells ringing, I enlisted the help of the much-missed Elain Harwood of English Heritage. There followed an unforgettable morning when Elain, with her customary fearless enthusiasm and I explored the cinema, with the active assistance of its then manager.

We prized hardboard panels away from walls, we peered behind curtaining and took ourselves through a window in the long-closed first floor café, across a flat roof and into the derelict ex-hotel bedrooms. These turned out to be extraordinarily intact with even the cord switches to the bedside lights remaining. Spot Grade II listing quickly followed. In the end the multiplex plans were turned down by the Council.

A 2 manual 6 rank Spurden Rutt organ (one of only three cinema instruments built by this firm) was added in 1928, installed in a single chamber alongside the stage. The fixed console was buried when the stage was extended over the orchestra pit in 1935 and lay forgotten for many years. One of the cinema's managers once told me, with great glee, a story of how auditors acting on behalf of the building's owners (ABC was only leasing the premises at this point) had turned up one day and demanded to inspect the organ. Unfortunately, the key to the chamber could not be found, whereupon ABC was accused of selling it without permission. In fact, the organ was entirely intact, as the private individual who bought and removed it in the 1980s discovered. It was at this



The first major modernisation of the entrance in 1963. ABC's favourite terrazzo has been applied to the side walls but there is no other sign that this is an ABC cinema. Photo: CTA Archive.



Auditorium in 1963. ABC 'spider' lights have arrived.

One bit of further fun followed in 2011, when Odeon applied to install a Costa Coffee outlet in the foyer. Because of the listed status of the building, a heritage statement had to be produced, which announced that only the auditorium retained its original features. Not true, I knew from my explorations with Elain: four original giant mirrors were still in situ behind hardboard panels in the foyer. A call to the Council conservation officer resulted in the (perhaps unorthodox) suggestion that I should phone Costa's architect. I was truly gobsmacked by his reaction: the call led to a full and extremely expensive restoration of the mirrors (see picture below).

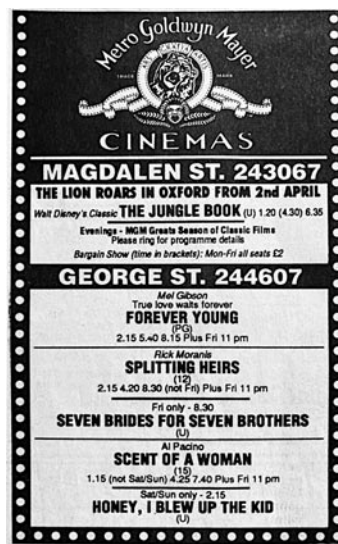


Costa Coffee's restoration of the original foyer mirrors.

It has to be admitted that the Odeon gradually slipped behind the film-going experience offered by the best modern cinemas. The CinemaScope screen was contained behind the original proscenium arch, which meant that the picture was small for the size of auditorium. It was also subject to a keystone effect as the projection box is cantilevered forward over the circle, resulting in a steep throw to the screen. This problem was eventually improved in 2009 by installing a larger screen in front of the arch: ugly but effective. The new screen is cantilevered on girders running through from the back wall of the stage, so no structural alteration to the proscenium was involved. Upstairs, Odeon converted the former café into a 55-seat second screen: this was a seriously unsatisfactory space and its loss will be mourned by nobody.

So, what next for this lovely, atmospheric period cinema? At the time of writing, 13 screens in three different buildings remain open in Oxford City Centre. However, Magdalen Street's sister Odeon in George Street, containing six of those screens, is currently slated for closure when its lease runs out next year. Demolition is proposed, with no cinema screens included in the replacement building. Whether this latest development has any implications for the Odeon Magdalen Street remains to be seen.

Source books: ABC: The First Name in Entertainment by Allen Eyles and Oxfordshire Cinemas by Ian Meyrick. And thanks to Oxford City Council Planning Department for their enthusiastic help in accessing their archive. Photos by the author, unless otherwise stated.



MGM arrives in Oxford, 1992



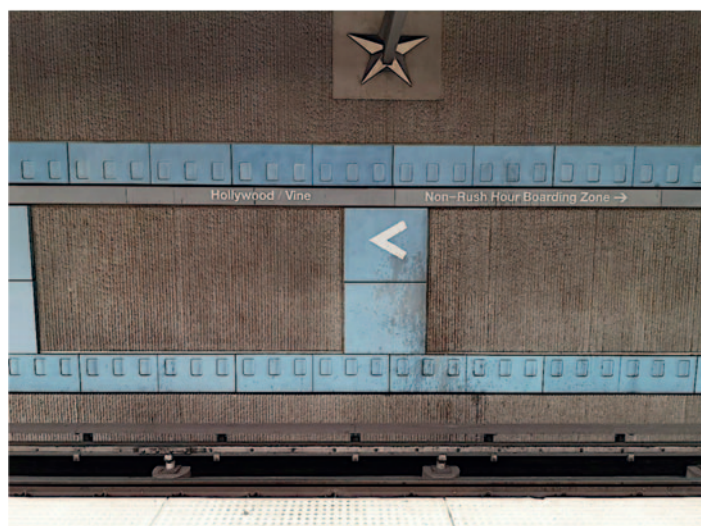
The façade on closing day,
4 June 2023

HOLIDAY SNAPS

Hollywood / Vine Metro Station

The LA metro can hardly be described as glamorous, so I was rather surprised to alight at Hollywood & Vine station to find the ceiling decorated with hundreds of 35mm film spools, a screen and proscenium arch! The whole station is decorated in a 1930s cinema theme, with two 35mm Simplex projectors donated by Paramount Pictures on display at the top of the stairs to the platforms. The Pantages Theatre is opposite the station entrance.

Sent in by Ben Doman



PLAYHOUSE BEXHILL-ON-SEA

By David A Ellis

Bexhill-on-Sea was home to several cinemas, including the Gaiety, the Ritz and the St George's cinema, opposite Bexhill Town Hall. This finally became the Savoy cinema, closing in 1954. Items were auctioned, including the Kalee 12 projectors.

On Friday 8 July 1921 at 3pm, the 800-seat Picture Playhouse on Western Road opened its doors. It was opened by Her Grace the Duchess of Norfolk. She cut the cord of the flag that veiled the screen. A picture of the King was thrown upon it and the audience joined in singing the national anthem. The vestibule and passages were decorated with an art paper and the interior was carried out in a panelled scheme of dove grey and white. Proceeds from the opening performance went to the Bexhill Centre of the British Red Cross Society. Next door to the Playhouse stood the Cinema Deluxe, which opened on 19 March 1913, closing in November 1921. That went on to become a garage.

The architect of the Playhouse was PD Stonham and the proprietors were Playhouses (Bexhill) Ltd, registered 13 October 1919. They had acquired Bexhill Cinema Company Ltd, which had been formed in November 1912. Directors included Mark Martin and RW Robbins.

At this time Randolph E Richards wasn't mentioned, so he seems to have come later, forming Randolph E Richards, Kinema Playhouses Ltd. The first to manager was Ray Allen. Films were usually shown for three days. In its first full week starting 11 July *Aylwin* was screened for three days. From the Thursday *Mrs Erricker's Reputation* was shown. Stage shows were also a feature, usually taking place on a Sunday. Two staircases took patrons to a large balcony. There was also a waiting area by the balcony.

The projection room was equipped with Butchers projectors. When sound arrived the popular Western Electric sound system was installed. Secondary lighting was originally by gas.

In 1966 the small circuit was taken over by the Classic chain and the name was changed to Classic. Classic introduced bingo, which took place two nights a week. In 1969 an idea was put forward to twin the cinema but this didn't come to fruition. In 1974 directors of Classic Eric Rhodes and his son Gerald retired from the chain and were given a handful of cinemas as a gold watch payment. They ran the old Playhouse as the Curzon cinema.

The stalls area became bingo and the circle a cinema. This operation continued until 1988. Manor Estates then took control, retaining the circle cinema and turned the stalls area into a shop and flea market.

Due to poor attendance the Curzon closed its doors on 31 January 1991, the last film being *Home Alone*. Another reason for dwindling audiences was a new multiplex.

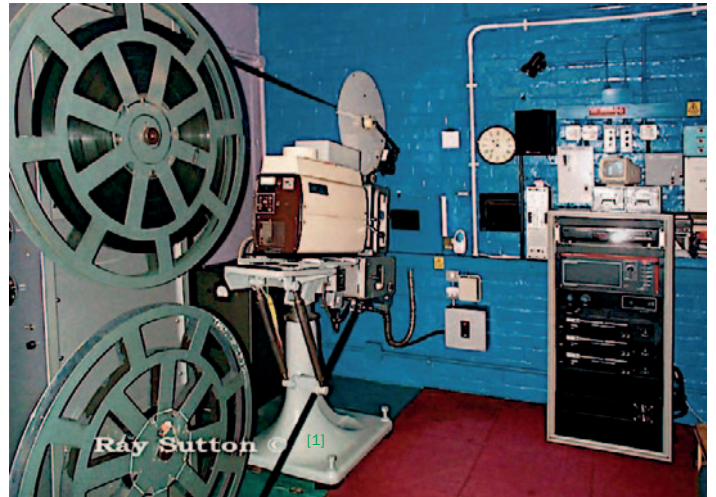
In May 1991 Nick Prince leased the building for cinema shows, believing he could turn business round with a change of programming and marketing. He introduced late screenings, art house material and special one day only presentations. There were also shows on Saturday mornings for the Curzon Minors, which had also been screened under previous management. By 1993 business was once again on the decline and the cinema closed in May 1994.

In February 1995 it was reopened by Ray Sutton with the film *Killing Zoe*. He ran it until the lease expired on 28 October 2004. He talked to me about his time there. He said: "When I took over it was in a dire state. My brother-in-law helped with a complete internal decoration. A false ceiling was placed in the ceiling dome while retaining the plaster coving around the dome."

Regarding projection equipment Ray said: "When I took over there was a Westar projector on a Ross base, so it may be that Ross machines had been in at some point." Ray goes on to say that the stage end was below ground and a pump had to be used to keep water out.



The cinema as the Classic [1]



"One aspect of the cinema that always surprised me," said Ray, "was the arrangement of the exits. The circle had two exits at the rear that had stairs down to the foyer. The stalls had exits at the rear to the foyer and an exit at the stage end that had a corridor to the front of the building, so all exits were at the front." Ray went on to become editor of the Projected Picture Trust (PPT) magazine *Rewind*.



The cinema as the Redstack Playhouse in April 2008 [2]

In 2006 the building reopened as the Redstack Playhouse and occasional films were shown, using video equipment, alongside stage presentations and concerts. Films and live entertainment ceased completely in 2008 and the building remained empty until 2016 when it was converted into a Wetherspoon pub, opening in July 2017. Wetherspoons merged the Playhouse with the old Cinema Deluxe by knocking down dividing walls. They have carefully restored interiors of many old cinemas that may have faced the demolition hammer. Many original features are retained in these conversions.

Many thanks to Ray Sutton for his help.

Photos: [1] Ray Sutton; [2] Harry Rigby

THE (1970) GOOD CINEMA GUIDE

No 41 – Regal Wallingford

By Ben Doman



Regal exterior circa 1972; CTA Archive.
The car park in front of the building was later built on.

The Regal Wallingford (west of Didcot), opened on 17 March 1934 to the designs of Harold Scott. A brick building, set back from the road, it had a central section in stone with tall windows either side. The auditorium was on a single sloping floor, with the side walls gently curving in towards the proscenium. It was taken over by Union Cinemas in 1936, passing to ABC a year later. By the time of the Good Cinema Guide's visit in December 1970 it had been run as an independent since 1957.

"Perhaps the best way to sum up the atmosphere of the Regal is to say that it's the sort of place one feels one used to be taken to as a treat when a child. It's got that 1950's feel about it, coupled with a certain homeliness." The writer was impressed with the amount of forthcoming film posters on display.

The foyer itself is a little bare, with its stone floor. And the ticket office and sweet stall, which are combined together to form one unit, have a somewhat prefabricated look about them."

"The auditorium itself you could hardly call modern. But at least they have tried to make up for this by some bright, if unsophisticated, colours. The ceiling and part of the walls are decorated in various shades of antique red and green, with parts picked out in gold."

"An original feature of the Regal is the fact that the more expensive seats have arm rests that are padded, while the less costly do not. It's one way to get your money's worth, if you pay a bit more, apart from being farther away from the screen. Though clearly most people would expect, these days, padded arm rests as a minimum of comfort."

"There is a carpet running between the seats as well as the aisle, The legroom is adequate and the rake perfectly all right. The seats themselves are moderately comfortable."

The writer remarked that the manager was on hand to take tickets and was most pleasant and the cinema itself was very clean. No catering but a good selection of sweets and ices were available. "... a cinema that lacks the luxury but not the effort to try to please its customers."

The Regal closed in 1973 and was converted to a community centre.

The cinema was given a score of 27 out of 40 in the article in *Today's Cinema*, 1970.



Wall panel detail from the Regal, taken on CTA visit April 2009

SHORT-LIVED BUT GOOD.

By David A Ellis

To attract audiences many ideas came to fruition only to fall by the wayside in a very short time. We have had 3D, which has appeared several times in different forms. In the 1950s two projectors were locked together with 5,000ft spools, giving fifty minutes running time. Because of this, an intermission was required. The audience wore 3D glasses, which in some cases could put a strain on the eyes, so while the system was impressive it went away for a while after its 50s introduction. Now we have digital 3D and digital IMAX, which is not as impressive as 70mm IMAX with its fifteen perforations to the frame and running horizontally. Maybe digital IMAX will have a longer shelf life than film IMAX, because of lower costs and only a few houses being able to screen it. It is easier to screen digital IMAX in many more theatres but in most cases the screen is smaller. We have had three strip Cinerama, which proved costly and only a few could screen it, so because of the costs and limited exhibition it soon fell out of favour. Three strip was replaced by 70mm Cinerama, which is also no more.



A postcard advertising Cinerama

The Odeon Leicester Square was kitted out with horizontal VistaVision for the screening of *Battle of the River Plate* but the equipment was only used there once. Director of Photography on the film Chris Challis told me he was glad to see the back of it as it was a difficult system to work on.

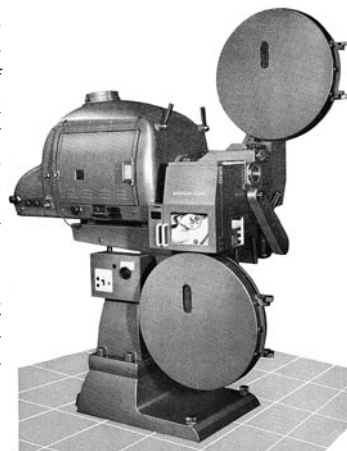
We have had Smell-O-Vision, which put out pleasant and probably not so pleasant aromas into the theatre. Again, this was short-lived, apparently only being used for the film *Scent of Mystery* in 1960.

Sensurround was another short-lived experience where you would

feel vibration in your seat, which was delivered by low frequency sound, giving you the feeling you were experiencing an Earthquake in the film of the same name. Unfortunately, the vibrations had adverse effects on the structure of some of the cinemas it was screened in. This was soon consigned to cinematic history.

Around the World in Eighty Days was screened at the Astoria Charing Cross Road, London in 1957. It was shot in 65mm using Mike Todd's Todd AO process but screened in 34mm with six track magnetic sound played on separate sound carriers, which had to be locked to the projectors by Selsyn lock. The reason for this was because by using a 34mm print, quota rules at the time could be avoided. The projectors employed for this gimmick called Cinestage were the popular Kalee 21 machines accompanied by water-cooled Mole Richardson arcs. The gates were also water cooled. There were five Duosonic speaker assemblies. There were more than forty effects speakers. The screen for the presentation was a Perlux, which gave the impression it was floating.

Today it is harder to impress the cinema-goer because we now have large wide screen TVs and equipment that can give us a full stereo and surround sound experience and there is an endless supply of films to be streamed both old and new. What other gimmicks will make a splash, only to sink into cinematic history very quickly?



A horizontal VistaVision projector

MISCELLANY

BODYGUARD NEEDS BODYGUARD!

Singer Melody Thornton has apologised after rowdy fans halted a live performance of *The Bodyguard* at the **Palace Theatre**, Manchester. Police were called when audience members refused to stop belting out the lyrics. They were led out, amid a 'mini-riot', and the last ten minutes were axed. (See 'Cinema Business' in Bulletin 57/3.)

Sunday Express – 9 April; sent in by Barry Quinton

BINGO STAGES A COMEBACK

Bingo halls have faced some tough years, mainly due to the indoor smoking ban in 2007 (which saw patrons exiting the building during the intervals, rather than playing the lucrative slot machines), the pandemic and the cost of living crisis. According to the Bingo Association, pre-pandemic there were about 330 bingo halls across Britain, compared to 262 these days. But the industry is fighting back, and is being particularly successful at drawing in many more younger customers, with themed nights and other ways to make it a real fun – and affordable – night out.

BBC News – 24 May; sent to the CTA e-group by Rob Chesterfield

THE LAST SHIFT

When care home staff heard 87-year-old Pauline Allen's stories about working as an usherette at the **Central**, Bury St. Edmunds, when she was aged 20, they arranged for her to go back and do one final shift. She said that "Working at the cinema were the best days of my working life". As well as seeing all the latest films for free, she also met stars such as Dame Barbara Windsor, Joan Sims, Leslie Philips, Sid James and Tommy Steele. The **Central** opened in 1924, and still proudly serves its patrons as the **Abbeygate Picturehouse**.

Suffolk News – 31 May; sent in by Terry Hanstock & Metro – 1 June; sent in by Tom Laughlan

MELBOURNE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

According to a new documentary, *The Lost City of Melbourne*, in the 1850s it was the fastest growing city in the world: "They dreamt big, they built big ... it was a city jumping out of its skin". When the movies arrived, it became an epicentre of film culture through its magnificent picture palaces. However, the 'modernisation' of the city in the 1950s destroyed many of those elegant cinemas. Featuring rare archival film and photography, Gus Berger's film looks back at what has been lost – and celebrates what was, eventually, saved. Check out thelostcityofmelbourne.org for the trailer and upcoming screenings.

Screen Hub – 29 June

THE RETURN OF THE EDINBURGH FILM FESTIVAL

Following the collapse into administration of its parent body, the Centre for the Moving Image, last October, the Edinburgh International Film Festival ran this year as a strand within the Edinburgh International Festival. The crisis had thrown the future of the Festival itself into doubt, and forced the closure of the capital's much-loved **Filmhouse** as well as its Aberdeen sister venue, **Belmont Filmhouse**. The 'leaner' Festival opened on 18 August and presented just 24 features – last year there were 90 – over six days. The **Cameo** was not used; instead, the **Everyman** in the St. James Quarter and the nearby **Vue Omni** were the main venues. There were no community engagement programmes and the Festival's competitive elements, such as the £20,000 Michael Powell Award for the best British feature film, were put on hold. Describing the period following CMI's collapse as one of "grimness", the Festival's Executive Producer, Tamara Van Strijthem, said "We really don't want to underplay that grimness, but what we can celebrate as a positive which has arisen out of all of the previous events is the outpouring of love and support which was shown to the festival - and to the **Filmhouse** as well."

TROUBLE AT ELSTREE

Elstree Studios is in urgent need of between £150m and £200m to secure its future, after a report found the roofs of some older stages were "dangerous" and there is further evidence of asbestos. The report is from Hertsmere Borough Council, which purchased the studios in 1996 "in a very dilapidated state". It said the money was needed to replace "life-expired buildings", but also that the council could not "afford to continually invest" in the complex. The council has spent

£22m, to date, on improvements, including asbestos remediation, and building the George Lucas stage in 1999. The site's market value is estimated as ranging from £40m to £100m, depending on future use. Labour and Liberal Democrat council leaders have proposed paying up to £90,000 in consultancy fees to map out a "way forward".

Screen Daily – 7 July

100 YEARS OF DISNEY MAGIC

'Disney 100', the biggest exhibition of Walt Disney memorabilia, costumes, props and artefacts, is due to open in London's ExCel exhibition centre on 16 October. The 10-room space will be home to iconic items such as the prop storybook from the opening scene in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the carousel horse from *Mary Poppins* and the crystal glass slipper from the 2015 version of *Cinderella*, alongside artwork from the 1950 original. Items have been sourced from the Walt Disney Archives, Marvel Studios, Pixar Living Archives and the Walt Disney Animation Research Library.

Evening Standard – 11 July; sent in by Tom Laughlan

YOUR REACTION COUNTS...

A state-of-the-art cinema is set to monitor audience reactions "like never before". The 36-seat Instrumented Auditorium will open at the MyWorld creative hub at The Coal Shed in St Phillips, Bristol, in 2024. It will record audiences' biometric responses, including their heart rate, eye movement and brain activity as they react to what is on the screen. Researchers will also observe the electrical properties of people's skin to "gauge their subconscious emotional and sympathetic responses". This will be the first fully-instrumented facility of its kind in the world, and is intended to "provide insights which will shape the future of film, television and beyond". MyWorld is a creative technology research and innovation hub, led by the University of Bristol in partnership with 12 other organisations, including Bristol Old Vic, Watershed, Aardman Animations, BBC and BT.

BBC News – 28 July

A PLAQUE FOR ROMAINE?

Nigel Smith, who leads walking tours about Islington's cinemas, has said he would welcome a plaque dedicated to Romaine Hart, the legendary proprietor who made the **Screen on the Green** world-famous, as it prepares for its 110th anniversary on 16 October. Describing her as a "rare female figure in a largely male-dominated industry", Smith suggested that the council could consider a tribute as part of their Heritage Plaques programme. Another possibility would be the Everyman group, which took over the cinema in 2008 and honoured its heritage by retaining its iconic name. Ms Hart died in 2021 aged 88; Mr Smith added that "She was a remarkable woman and a true pioneer of cinema programming and film distribution."

Islington Tribune – 11 August (sent in by Tom Laughlan)



**The
Projected Picture Trust**

Dean Clough Mills, HALIFAX, HX3 5AX

The Projected Picture Trust exists to locate and preserve projectors and related film equipment, both professional and domestic. Since 1978 enthusiastic volunteers have been happy to help restore these items and so preserve **THE MAGIC OF CINEMA**.

The Trust provides help and assistance to non-commercial community cinemas and museums exhibiting film related artefacts.

The Museum of Cinema Technology has perhaps the largest collection of all types of film equipment in the UK. The Data Archive holds over 3,000 items including press cuttings, manuals and film related technical documents. We are presently looking to strengthen our management team...

PLEASE CONTACT US IF YOU ARE ABLE TO HELP
or if you would like to become a member only.

contact@theppt.org www.theppt.org

CINEMA BUSINESS

A MILESTONE FOR VUE

Tim Richards has been celebrating a milestone he feared he might not see – the 20th anniversary of his creation of Vue, Europe's largest privately owned cinema circuit. That achievement looked precarious during the pandemic, when the world's biggest cinema operators were pushed to the brink, but the future now looks much brighter, for Vue at least, thanks to a £1bn restructuring in January. The circuit had been founded on 13 May 2003, when Warner Village's 36 UK cinemas were merged with the six cinemas Richards had opened under the SBC branding. (He had been working in a business development role for Warner Bros. and had seen that its UK circuit was being regarded as a 'non-core asset'.) Indeed, the future for theatrical releases looks brighter all around. While this year will see about 20% fewer releases than pre-pandemic, analysts expect next year to be almost back to business as usual. And Richards points to Hollywood studios returning to theatrical releases in the first instance and streamers such as Apple and Amazon committing substantial budgets to films destined for an initial big-screen release. (See also the 'Barbenheimer Effect', below.)

The Guardian – 16 May; sent in by Neville Taylor

TOUGH TIMES FOR THE INDEPENDENTS

The **Tyneside** has launched an urgent fund-raising campaign to prevent it from closing down, as similar cinemas around the country are facing a "cliff edge", according to the UK Cinema Association. The **Tyneside** has struggled over the past few years due to the pandemic, with a 40 per cent reduction in audiences, and has now seen a 300 per cent rise in utility costs; issues being faced by small cinemas right across the country. According to the Association, between 2010-2020 the sector saw consistent growth, and the number of cinemas increased by 15 per cent. However, a reverse in this trend is now being seen. Phil Clapp, chief executive, said that "I think all cinemas, and indeed all businesses, were grateful for the support the government provided when energy costs started to spike in spring of last year, and the continuation of that support through into the beginning of 2023 was hugely welcomed. But businesses like cinemas and others faced a cliff edge at the end of March when that support ended." He added that "The loss of any cinema is not just really the loss of a place where people go to see film, although clearly that's one of their key purposes. It's also a community asset; it's a place where parent and baby screenings and silver screenings for older patrons and accessible screens for disabled customers allow the community to mix, and there are increasingly few of those places where that can happen. While the loss of a smaller operator may not be so great of an economic hit to the industry, I think the loss to the local community is much, much greater." However, on a hopefully brighter note, the summer is packed with plenty of much-anticipated releases, including *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, DC's *The Flash* and *Barbie* [see also further reports below].

Sky News – 28 May

A 'NEW CINEWORLD' EMERGES...

As part of a financial restructuring process, Cineworld Group filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in the USA last September. As forecast, the company emerged from that protection in July this year following a restructuring plan that has resulted in the 'New Cineworld' reducing its debt by \$4.35bn (£3.4bn), securing \$1.71bn (£1.34bn) of new debt financing and raising \$800m (£626m) in new capital. The company is, however, committed to paying former Chief Executive Mooky Greidinger, his brother and deputy chief executive Israel Greidinger, finance head Nisan Cohen and chief commercial officer Renana Teperberg between \$30m and \$35m in cash in the year following their exit. The newly incorporated company has become the sole owner of the group, and a new board of directors has been appointed. This is chaired by Eric Foss, who has served as CEO of Pepsi and also food services and uniform provider Aramark, while the new chief executive is Eduardo Acuna, the former president of Mexican cinema chain Cinépolis Americas. Cineworld, which owns the Regal circuit in the USA, is the second largest cinema operator in the world, after AMC Entertainment.

Evening Standard – 25 May (sent in by Tom Laughlan); *Investing.com* – 13 June; *Variety* – 16 June; *Daily Mail* – 17 June (sent in by Tom Laughlan); *City AM & Daily Record* – 27 June (sent in by Tom Laughlan) *Yahoo Finance* – 29 June; *City AM* – 13 July; *i* – 2 August (sent in by Tom Laughlan); *City AM* – 1 August

...WHILE THE SUN SETS ON THE EMPIRE

On 7 July 2023 the Empire circuit went into administration. In a press release, Chief Executive Officer Justin Ribbons said "As a consequence of [the closures during] COVID-19, [the company] was left with a high fixed cost base and no income. Cinema attendance levels have not yet returned to pre-COVID-19 levels and the operating environment remains extremely challenging...we firmly believe this process can be a platform to restructure the business and preserve as many of our cinemas and the maximum number of jobs as possible". BDO were appointed as administrators. On Friday 9 July, without prior warning, the circuit's cinemas at Bishop's Stortford, Catterick Garrison, Sunderland, Swindon, Walthamstow and Wigan closed. According to local media reports, staff turned up for work to find notes on windows explaining they were closing down. (Presumably this also explains why work had 'slowed down' on **Empire** multiplexes being built in Peterborough and Basildon.) It wasn't long before news came in that UK circuits Light, Parkway and Merlin, along with Ireland-based Omniplex and Arc, were understood to be interested in the closed sites, with John Sullivan, of Light Cinemas, also founding director of cinema consultancy The Big Pictures, remarking that "I believe that, with a little bit of investment, a bit of renegotiation with the landlords over rents and innovative and creative management, they could be turned around." In August the surviving eight cinemas (luxury-brand **Tivoli** picture houses at Bath and Cheltenham, **Empire** multiplexes at Birmingham (Great Park), Clydebank, High Wycombe, Ipswich and Sutton, and the closed former **Odeon** at Sutton Coldfield) were offered for sale by property agents CBRE on behalf of the administrators. Toby Hall, senior director of operational real estate, said there had already been "significant interest", adding "This is a rare opportunity to acquire profitable, operating cinemas in a market with renowned high barriers to entry." Empire Cinemas was founded in 2005 following the mergers of Odeon and UCI, and Cineworld and UGC, when neighbouring cinemas had to be divested.

BBC News – 8 July; sent in by Terry Hanstock and Margaret Burgoine; *Screen Daily* – 28 July; *The Business Desk* – 16 August

INDIANA JONES AND THE BOX OFFICE OF DOOM...

The return of Indiana Jones, after 15 years, in *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, the fifth outing for Harrison Ford's intrepid archaeologist, brought in a lacklustre \$130m worldwide on its first weekend of release – 'lacklustre' when considering the film cost \$295m to make, and the promotional budget is usually reckoned to cost almost the same again.

i – 4 July; sent in by Tom Laughlan

...BUT IT WASN'T ALL BAD NEWS

Veteran composer John Williams surprised the audience at the film's Los Angeles premiere, at the **Dolby Theatre**, with a live performance. The 91-year-old played several pieces from the film's score, accompanied by a full orchestra.

i – 16 June; sent in by Tom Laughlan

WHERE TO MOVE TO IF ON A BUDGET

According to savings website Voucher Codes, the UK city with the cheapest cinema prices is Swansea, with tickets for an adult with one child costing an average of £11.03. The rest of the 'top ten' were York, Cardiff, Bristol, Nottingham, Leeds, Edinburgh, Leicester, Oxford and Manchester, the latter average being £18.65. Not surprisingly, cinemas in London charge the most. Voucher Codes also looked at opening day prices at Cineworld, Odeon and Vue – finding Vue to be the cheapest.

i – 6 July; sent in by Tom Laughlan

THE 'BARBENHEIMER EFFECT' PART 1

Vue International reported its biggest weekend for UK ticket sales in four years after *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* were released simultaneously. The circuit said that a fifth of its customers had

purchased tickets to see both films in a 'double bill' dubbed by social media as 'Barbenheimer', which draws together the otherwise rather diverse storylines about the famous doll and the nuclear physicist. More than 2,000 of Vue's screenings for *Barbie* were sold out, with the best-performing sites being Cambridge, Glasgow St Enoch, Leeds, Cwmbran, Islington, Bolton and Portsmouth.

Meanwhile, Odeon reported on Thursday that more than 200,000 advance tickets had been sold, and over 10,000 patrons were expected to see both films during the opening weekend, when *Barbie* took £17.5m at the UK box office, while *Oppenheimer* took £8.05m in what was most likely the biggest weekend since the pandemic.

Alloa & Hillfoots Advertiser – 23 July; *Metro*, *Evening Standard* & *i* – 24 July (sent in by Tom Laughlin)

THE 'BARBENHEIMER EFFECT' PART 2

Barbie went on to take £67.5m in its first three weeks in the UK and Ireland – enough to push the previous chart-topper, *The Super Mario Bros Movie*, on £54.6m, into second place. Meanwhile, *Oppenheimer* made £39.2m, which put it in third place.

THE 'BARBENHEIMER EFFECT' PART 3

The huge success of *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* has sent supermarket popcorn sales soaring. Aldi said its popcorn sales have risen by over a third, with the discounter offering a 110g bag of sweet & salted for 99p, as opposed to Cineworld's sweet popcorn at £4.60 for 123g. (Of course, cinemas usually do all they can to dissuade patrons from bringing their own food in...)

Daily Express – 29 July (sent in by Tom Laughlin)

ADVERSE 'BARBENHEIMER EFFECTS' PARTS 1 & 2

Warner Bros. Japan has apologised after its US parent company associated itself with a fan-produced image which showed Barbie sitting on the shoulders of *Oppenheimer* – with an atomic blast in the background. And BBC newsreader Jane Hill said she walked out halfway through *Oppenheimer* after finding that the soundtrack drowned out the dialogue. She added that the cinema staff told her this happens all the time with Christopher Nolan's films. (The cinema was not named!)

i – 2 and 4 August and *Daily Express* – 5 August; sent in by Tom Laughlin

ADVERSE 'BARBENHEIMER EFFECTS' PART 3

Cinemagoers were left in shock after two women got into a fight during *Barbie*. The mood was more red than pink at the **Odeon** in Maidstone as tempers flared when an argument broke out due to one of the women's children getting in without a ticket. After exchanging insults the pair swapped pushes before one was hit in the face. The suspect left before the police arrived. The film had been stopped, but then resumed. Patrons still got a refund and a complimentary ticket to another film. The last word goes to an eyewitness, who remarked "Only in Maidstone could this happen during the *Barbie* movie!"

Kent Online – 26 July; sent in by Philip Stevens

AND MORE BAD NEWS...

The strike by members of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists is taking its toll on UK film production, with the sound stages at Elstree and Pinewood largely falling silent. Films such as *Deadpool 3*, starring Ryan Reynolds, *Wicked*, starring Ariana Grande, Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice 2* and Brad Pitt's untitled Formula 1 racing thriller are on hold, although production on *Paddington in Peru* is going ahead, as StudioCanal is not a member of the industry body involved in the dispute. The issues in dispute include a demand for better pay from streamers and the use of artificial intelligence by the studios.

i – 31 July (sent in by Tom Laughlin)

OUTDOOR SCREENINGS GATHER PACE

Al-fresco film viewing was due to reach a peak this summer with screenings as varied as those offered by (amongst others) **Everyman** (at King's Cross' Coal Drops Yard), **The Barbican** (at its Sculpture Court), Pop-Up Screens (across London at places such as Beckenham, Bexley, Fulham, Crystal Palace and Greenwich), while the **Rooftop Film Club** hosted screenings at Peckham and Stratford (East London). **Luna Cinema**, founded in August 2008 by George Wood (an actor, who conceived the idea while laid up in hospital following a traffic accident) hosted around 200 screenings at venues such as Kenwood House (north London), Chiswick House and Kensington Palace. And *Time Out*

teamed up with luxury ice cream brand Häagen-Dazs for the return of London's first and only floating cinema, 'Movies on the River', which set sail, on the River Thames, from Tower Pier. Launched in 2017, guests enjoyed a sunset cruise then, once the sun had gone down, gathered on the top deck, ready to watch an iconic movie on a "huge" open-air screen. Starting on 1 August, the screenings were due to run until 26 August. Tickets cost £24 and included a Häagen-Dazs ice cream sampling.

Evening Standard – 18 & 24 July (sent in by Tom Laughlin); *Time Out* – 12 July

PRE-'BARBENHEIMER': FURTHER LOSSES AT ODEON

Odeon reported a loss of £31m last year, despite turnover soaring almost 50 per cent to £202m after the lifting of the lockdown restrictions. The circuit says one reason is that it is pumping more money into cinema improvements, including recliner ('Luxe') seating.

Daily Record – 10 August (sent in by Tom Laughlin)

CELEBRATING THE MAGIC OF THE MOVIES – IN THE USA

Following the success of last year's inaugural event, the non-profit National Cinema Foundation organised a further National Cinema Day on Sunday 27 August. Some 30,000 screens across 3,000 locations were expected to take part, with all tickets, including premium screens, costing just \$4. Even the popcorn was discounted! (NationalCinemaDay.org)

Sent in by Allen Eyles

CELEBRATING THE MAGIC OF THE MOVIES – IN THE UK

Not to be outdone, industry organisations Cinema First, Film Distributors' Association and UK Cinema Association presented the UK's own National Cinema Day on Saturday 2 September. "Hundreds of cinemas" took part, with tickets priced from just £4.


MAJESTIC DEMISE


One of the largest independent bingo operators, Majestic Bingo, has gone into receivership. Their on-line business is still operating as, for the time being, are some of their venues. Tim Bateson and Chris Poole, from Interpath, the joint receivers appointed in July, hope the business will continue to trade while they explore options for a sale. Majestic operated eight venues in England and Wales, employing 143 people. The failure is blamed on the impact of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis. Many of the venues are former cinemas, with most having been visited by the CTA over the years. These include the **Empire**, Caernarfon; **Kings**, Camborne; **Odeon/Astra/Apollo**, Rhyl; **Hippodrome/Essoldo**, Bishop Auckland and the **Central**, Skegness. The former **Savoy**, Spalding, had closed after a fire in May 2021 and had not reopened.

Sent in by David Eve (CTA Wessex)



THE CINEMA ORGAN SOCIETY

 Live music events at our organ venues featuring world class artists playing a range of music you will know and love.

 An extensive archive has been amassed over many years and is accessible to members to look at in the flesh and online.

Four publications a year keeping you in the loop with information and articles for all aspects of Cinema Organ.



We are a society and many friendships have been made through our common interest.



How to Join?

You can join the Cinema Organ Society at any time on-line by using of PayPal or Credit/Debit card.

It's quick, safe and easy. Just visit our website:

www.cinema-organs.org.uk

NEWSREEL

The 'Newsreel', 'Cinema Business' and 'Miscellany' sections are compiled by Assistant Archivist David Simpson. Contributions from members are welcomed, and should be sent to David at david.simpson399@btinternet.com or by post at 399 Woodgrange Drive, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 3DY.

Although the 'Newsreel' items have been checked by Allen Eyles, errors of reporting can occur. So corrections – and/or updates – are also welcomed.

Photos courtesy of Harry Rigby, unless otherwise credited.

ABERDEEN

The Save the Belmont Cinema campaign group and Faffless café have announced rival bids to re-open the **Belmont Filmhouse**, and have submitted 'notes of interest' to the council, which owns the building. Five other organisations have also registered their interest, but their identities remain a mystery. The **Filmhouse** closed in October after the charity which had been operating it since 2014, the Centre for the Moving Image, went bust. Recent studies have shown that the cinema was waning long before the pandemic and, in a report into the viability of the plans, market analysts Mustard Studio admitted survival could be "genuinely hard", and interested parties have been asked to explain where their funding would come from and what they would do with the building. The Save the Belmont group would run it as a community cinema, focussing on film, education and the community, while Faffless would run it along the lines of their existing café in Netherkirkgate, but with films interspersed with comedy shows, open mic nights and the like. It was subsequently reported that "two prospective operators" have been invited to meet council officers.

Press and Journal – 22 June; Screen Daily – 11 August

ABINGDON (Oxfordshire)

The **Abbey** cinema, in the Abbey Hall, risked closure on 30 June if a new lease could not be agreed with the council. The cinema's lease was first granted in 2018 and has since been extended twice, with the current one expiring in September. Town councillors had been summoned for a 'special meeting' on Wednesday 24 May. The **Abbey** is operated by Sue Wiper and her husband Ian (who also operate the **Regal**, Evesham). They have had difficulties negotiating the lease with the council, and a meeting was held to discuss this last August. Ms Wiper said: "Despite expressing support for the cinema, three successive councils have provided only short lease extensions, which do not enable us to make the necessary financial investment to improve the accessibility, appearance and utility of the building." Layla Moran, MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, has spoken in favour of maintaining the cinema and, in late June, Abingdon Town Council agreed to propose a fixed-term arrangement that would allow the cinema to continue until the Abbey Hall closes for a major refurbishment, which would include repairs to the roof.

Oxford Mail – 24 May & 2 July

ANNAN (Dumfriesshire)



A staggering £31,000 has been spent on electricity so far this year to keep the doors open at the **Lonsdale**. Owner Alan Towers was paying £65 a day in spring last year, and was shocked to see this soar over the winter by almost 170 per cent. And he still has to pay wages, distributor costs and other bills. Alan says it is only the goodwill of his cinema's supporters from across the region, who make an effort to visit the movie theatre, that are keeping it from closing. However, while some films pack out the three screens, there are days when it is soul-destroyingly empty and, overall, audiences are only back to 70 per cent of the pre-lockdown admissions. Alan believes the COVID-19 pandemic and rising prices since the Russian invasion of Ukraine have played their part, along with streaming services keeping people at home to watch films. But he is fighting back, and the cinema now presents, via satellite, events from the Royal Ballet, pop concerts and West End musicals. It has also introduced other special events, such as a Monday morning 'Cinebairns' parents and toddlers show, which are proving popular.

Daily Record – 14 July; photo taken August 2009

ASHBOURNE (Derbyshire)



From 26 May, residents have been able to do something not possible for almost 50 years: take a trip to the **Elite** in the Market Place. Originally opened in 1929, the cinema entertained audiences up to 1976 but, since then, the building has had a shopping arcade in the stalls area, while a false floor enabled a nightclub to open in the extended former circle. However, thanks to Mick Gallimore, who runs the Ashbourne Shoe Company, the building is being restored to its former glory, with a 144-seat luxury cinema in the former circle. The initial plans were approved in 2020, and funding was received from the Rural Grant Scheme. The pandemic inevitably led to delays, and costs have increased, but, for Mick, who was born in the town, restoring the cinema has been deeply personal and an immense source of pride, and he is hoping this will help start a regeneration of the town centre. The **Elite** re-opened with around four screenings a day, and has stage facilities for live shows. And then there is the former stalls area: it is hoped that a restaurant and/or bar could be opened there, possibly with its own screen.

Great British Life – 5 July; Derbyshire Live – 30 July, sent in by Terry Hanstock; photo taken June 2023 by David Simpson

ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE (Greater Manchester)

Tameside Hippodrome, which has been closed for 15 years, has received an award of £5,000 from the Theatres Trust which has rejuvenated the ambitions of those who want to see the Grade II listed theatre bustling once more. The award has been handed to Ashton Empire Hippodrome (Building) Ltd, a campaign group that has been trying to save and restore it, to put it in a better position to take their project forward. Describing it as "a rare theatre survival, illustrating the interwar fashion of adaption to cinema, and retaining a wealth of Art Deco features from its 1930s re-fit", Tameside Council is the current owner of the **Hippodrome**, which has been on the Theatres at Risk

Register since 2009. A threat of demolition that year was halted when the building was listed, but a conditions survey in 2014 showed considerable repair works were required. There are ongoing concerns about its deterioration, particularly the roof, and, in October 2020, the council added the theatre to its list of assets for disposal. Further work is now required to update the 2014 survey before a Community Asset Transfer process can begin, and the Theatres Trust say the council now needs to find funding for this. The **Empire Hippodrome** opened in November 1904 as a music hall. It was completely reconstructed in 1933, re-opening as the **New Empire Cinema**. It closed as the **ABC** in April 1975 but re-opened as a live theatre, finally closing in March 2008.

The Correspondent – 26 May

AUCHTERARDER (Perth & Kinross)

Fresh plans are being submitted to breathe new life into the former **Regal**, after concerns were raised about the demolition of a neighbouring sandstone cottage. Last November, Auchterarder Picturehouse submitted a planning application to bring the cinema back to its former glory. This included the demolition of Basset Cottage, currently used for bed and breakfast, so its site could be used for a community hub, but this drew criticism from residents and Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust. That scheme was withdrawn and now new plans are to be submitted. The **Cinema** (latterly the **Regal**) operated from 1926 to 1963. More recently the 'B' listed building was used as an antiques shop, which closed in 2019. The new application coincides with a series of arts projects from the team behind Auchterarder Picturehouse, including very successful film screenings in the town's Aytoun Hall and nearby Muthill Village Hall.

The Courier – 25 May

AYR



The category 'B' listed former **Playhouse** has been put on the market for sale or lease as a development opportunity. Offers over £400,000, or rent offers over £60,000 per annum, are being invited. It was described as "one of the last and best surviving" creations of architect John Fairweather when it was sold at auction for £432,500 in summer 2021. Built for George Green, the original **Playhouse** (which, in turn, had replaced an earlier cinema) opened in 1923 but was destroyed by fire in 1929. The new 'super cinema', with 3,104 seats, opened in 1931. It closed in the late 1960s and moved over to bingo which, in turn, closed on 26 February 2023.

The Herald – 20 May; photo taken July 2009

Circuit bosses axed the **Odeon** in June, saying it was "no longer viable" – but in stepped the Cornwall-based Merlin circuit (which already had a presence in Scotland through its cinema at Thurso). On 8 August, Siobhian Brown, MSP, announced that she had spoken to executives at Merlin Cinemas. They confirmed the purchase, saying that they intend to "create jobs, show film, support the local economy and preserve cinema heritage within the town." Merlin later announced that the cinema will re-open as soon as possible, after a refresh and a re-brand – it is due to become the **Astoria**. (See also Weston-super-Mare.)

Ayrshire Live – 14 June; social media post (8 August) sent to the cta-uk e-group by Darron Keeling; Ayr Advertiser – 9 August

BASILDON (Essex)



Fears were growing that the long-awaited 10-screen **Empire**, part of the £25m town centre East Square development, would not open this summer as promised, with residents claiming it is "nowhere near ready". Indeed, photographs taken on 6 June showed the main foyer had still not been fitted out. The multiplex was originally set to open in February 2022, but, it was said, the conflict in Ukraine led to delays in the delivery of projection equipment. The opening was put back to later in the year, then to summer this year, now with claims there were issues with the power supply. The local councillor responsible for economic stimulus and tourism thought the project was "still on track" for this summer, saying he has toured the cinema, and the seating has been installed. But then, on 7 July, Empire Cinemas went into administration – and, although "big-name" circuits have apparently made contact, the council is rather ominously talking about repurposing the building as a 'hybrid-use' facility should it transpire that full cinema use is no longer viable. (After all, the town does already have a multiplex, the 16-screen **Cineworld** at the out-of-town Festival Leisure Park.) In the meantime, the **Empire** building provides a unique photo opportunity, as it is a fully-branded, new-build multiplex which is unlikely to open with its current branding.

Basildon Echo – 13 June & 8 July; Essex Live – 24 July; photo taken July 2023 by David Simpson

BATHGATE (West Lothian)

Reconnect SCIO, the charity that runs the **Regal**, is bidding to take over the closure-threatened **Howden Park Centre** from West Lothian Leisure, which had stated that the Centre currently makes a significant monthly financial loss. The council has provided £140,000 of one-off support to ensure the theatre, gallery and art studio can continue until at least 31 March 2024.

Edinburgh Live – 21 June

BERWICK (Northumberland)

Despite residents on nearby Ravensdowne (a historic street) forming a group to oppose the application, planning permission for a temporary cinema, while the **Maltings** is being rebuilt, has been granted by North Northumberland Local Area Council. The 'Mob Store' (Mobilisation Store, for military equipment) at the Grade I listed Berwick Barracks will be converted into a 96-seat cinema. This will be designed in such a way that it can be re-purposed into a facility for Berwick Archives once the 'new' **Maltings** has opened in 2025.

Northumberland County Council News & Northumberland Gazette – 18 May

BLACKPOOL (Lancashire)

Fitting out of the new **Backlot** multiplex was due to start in July, as part of a £6m investment on top of the £21m cost of the extension to the council owned Houndshill Shopping Centre, which the development is part of. The cinema's founder, John Sullivan, had said "We are still on track for a pre-Christmas opening but, like all things, there may still be slips in the contractor/supply lines, and what is being delivered is way beyond a standard cinema. We are aiming to deliver a venue that will wow visitors to Blackpool, and also have some very special ideas and exclusive offers pitched entirely for residents." His words were rather prescient, as it was later reported that the work would not begin until October. There will be nine screens, with a total of 850 luxury seats,

and the Backlot Diner. A deal to include an IMAX screen was announced in July last year. Since the final credits rolled at the Odeon at Festival Park, in June (see next item) the independent **Regent**, which re-opened in 2016 and shows classic films, has been the only venue for 'big screen' entertainment in this busy seaside resort

The Gazette – 9 June & 23 August

Plans have been submitted to redevelop the former **Odeon** multiplex, which closed on 5 June. Austringer Capital, which owns the site, had secured planning permission for alternative leisure uses, but efforts to find an operator have failed, and a self-storage business, Storage King, is being considered, with food and drink outlets at the front. It is also proposed to change the name of the site from Festival Leisure Park to Bloomfield Central. A planning statement says the building would be updated with new glazing and cladding.

The Gazette – 25 July & 23 August



Plans for around half a million pounds worth of repairs to the historic **Grand Theatre**, including renovating its famous dome, have been unveiled. The Grand Theatre Trust, which owns the venue, is proposing to make a bid for funding from Arts Council England in the autumn. If successful, this would enable repairs to be carried out next spring without affecting the programme of events. Plans for the works, submitted to the council, warn that the property "is suffering from widespread water ingress as a result of failed roofing, valley gutters, parapets and lack of pointing." Investment would "rectify the significant and widespread roof leaks which will help to protect this Grade II* listed property, preventing further damage and deterioration." The theatre had been closed for 18 months during the pandemic lockdown, and, when it re-opened, in September 2021, the weather damage was noticed. The **Grand Theatre** originally opened in 1894. A full restoration was carried out in 1994, in time for its centenary.

Manchester Evening News – 9 August; photo taken June 2009

BLYTH (Northumberland)

Further to the report in the last Bulletin, the plans for a £15m cinema and cultural hub in the town's Market Place have been approved. Work was due to start during the summer for a winter 2024 opening. Ahead of the meeting, which saw the proposals backed by 10 votes to 3, councillors argued that the design of the building was both "disgusting" and "beautiful"! The three-screen cinema will be operated by Whitley Bay-based **Jam Jar Cinema**, and there will be a café and space for live music, theatre and comedy. Funding has come from the £70m Energising Blyth programme (which aims to revitalise the town over five years), the government's Future High Street Fund and Town Deal, Northumberland County Council and the North of Tyne Combined Authority. The town has not had a full-time cinema since the **Wallaw** closed in 2004, although films are a significant part of the programme of the **Phoenix Theatre**.

BBC News – 6 July

BRADFORD

The Bradford Science Festival in late May and early June turned out to be the last chance for patrons to visit the **National Science and Media Museum** before it closed from 5 June until summer 2024, as

part of its £6m transformation. The 'Sound and Vision' project will create two new galleries and enhanced foyer space, and add an additional passenger lift. The **Cubby Broccoli** and **IMAX** screens will be closed, but the **Pictureville** cinema will remain open.

Yahoo! News – 23 May

BRIERLEY HILL (West Midlands)



The former **Danilo** has been put up for sale, seeking offers in excess of £320,000. Marketed by Siddall Jones, the listing says: "The property comprises a substantial, three-storey, former cinema and nightclub premises built in Art Deco style in the 1930s", adding that the site "may be suitable for a variety of uses, subject to planning". The first in the circuit founded by Mortimer Dent, the **Danilo** was opened in December 1936 by George Formby. In 1946 it was acquired by S.M. Super Cinemas then, in 1955, by Essoldo, but it retained its original name until closure in February 1969. The building was converted into a Mecca Bingo Club, then later a Walker's Bingo Club and then, in 2000, it became the Eclipse nightclub. It was last occupied by Pulse nightclub.

Express & Star – 3 August; photo taken June 2006

BRIGHTON

Revised plans for the restoration of the **Hippodrome Theatre** still raise "considerable concerns", according to the Theatres Trust. Last October, the Trust warned that redevelopment proposals from developer Matsim Properties were "highly compromised" and would prevent a return to a full-scale theatre. Matsim then submitted revised proposals, which would create a performance area, office space, a hotel, restaurant/café and roof-top bar and terrace. While cautiously welcoming these new proposals, the Trust said it still had "significant concerns regarding the operability and viability of the scheme as a venue for [live events]". With the works halted, awaiting planning permission from the council, two 'Open Days' were held at the end of July so the public could see the progress so far. A conversion of a skating rink (to designs by Frank Matcham) the theatre opened in 1901 and closed in 1964. Bingo took over until the early 2000s, since when it has stood unused. (A 2013 scheme to create an 8-screen multiplex was subsequently scrapped.) It was listed Grade II in 1985.

The Stage – 4 May; sent in by R. David Simpson and Barry Quinton; Brighton and Hove News – 3 August

BRISTOL

Back in February, more than 600 people signed a petition to preserve the 1994 foyer at the **Showcase** at Avonmeads. The circuit had installed new seating in half of the screens, with the rest to follow. It was then to be the turn of the foyer, but the organisers of the petition were imploring the company to maintain and preserve the original fittings, especially the decorative neon, rather than going for a more modern look. Showcase had declined to comment. This news goes back to February. Can anyone provide an update?

Bristol World – 6 February; sent to the cta-uk e-group by Andrew Woodyatt

CHESTER

Council bosses have been in talks with Picturehouse Cinemas about their new venue at the city's flagship Northgate development, and the long-awaited cinema is set to finally open later this year. Located

at the heart of this major new development, it has been the subject of much speculation, especially in view of parent company Cineworld's financial situation – although a spokesperson has said that its British operations are not being affected. The Chester Market, which includes the cinema, opened in November 2022.

Chester Chronicle – 29 June; Chester Live – 27 July

CHIPPING NORTON (Oxfordshire)



The **Living Room Cinema** opened on Friday 14 July with *Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One*, with founder and CEO Claire Beswick, formerly head of programming for Curzon and Odeon, curating a diverse programme for the summer. The cinema has brought a new lease of life to the long-empty shop front of the historic 'Harpers' building. There are two "state-of-the-art" screening rooms, with bespoke seating, including solo loungers and two-seater sofas, and a café/bar. The opening night raised money for Thrive North Ox, a charity which provides support to children of struggling families.

Cotswold Journal – 28 June; photo David Simpson, taken July 2023

COLCHESTER (Essex)

The first businesses at the city's £65m Northern Leisure Park were due to open in July. The development will eventually be home to a Travelodge hotel, Hollywood Bowl, Puttstars indoor golf and a Jump Street climbing centre as well as the usual restaurants and cafes. It is also due to welcome a 12-screen **Cineworld** – for which, according to the council, a contingency plan is in place with other operators, following the circuit's financial difficulties.

Colchester Gazette – 12 July

Firefighters were called to a blaze at the former **Odeon** shortly after 7pm on 19 July, which tore through about a quarter of the abandoned building. Crews from Colchester, Weeley, and West Mersea attended, and took around an hour and a half to extinguish the fire. The cause is not known: an investigation is underway. The **Regal/Odeon** closed in 2002, when the current **Odeon** opened nearby in Head Street. The building has been unoccupied ever since, and suffered a previous fire in October 2017.

Colchester Gazette – 19 July

DARLINGTON

Following rumours that the former **Odeon** building could have a new future, after sparking interest from a potential developer, contractors have been seen moving in. It is thought that "plans to convert the building" are being drawn up, but no formal planning application has been submitted. The cinema closed in June last year, having been given the Odeon Luxe treatment in 2019. It had opened as the **Regal** in 1938, on the site of the 1885-built **Theatre Royal**. It became the **ABC** in 1961 and was tripled in 1977. It was taken over by **Cannon**, then **MGM** and **ABC**, before being acquired by **Odeon**.

Northern Echo – 1 July & 17 August

DEAL (Kent)

At a protest meeting outside the venue on Bank Holiday Monday, 1 May, campaigners called for enforcement action to be taken against the owners of the former **Regent**. James Wallace and Mark Digweed were granted planning permission to re-open the cinema, with two screens and a restaurant, in July 2019, but that has now expired. In February, this year, fresh plans to regenerate the building had been expected "any day", but these have not materialised and no work has

started. In a later development, plans were unveiled to demolish the building and replace it with 12 homes, a 49-seat cinema and a café. The building was said to be beyond repair, although the iconic Art Deco front would be rebuilt. Consultation events were held on 21 and 22 June. The Reopen the Regent campaign group said it was pleased to see some progress at long last, but there was a lot to consider, and concerns were expressed about how a cinema with a "mere" 49 seats could serve a community the size of Deal – plus its many visitors. The building opened in 1928 as the **Pavilion Theatre**. In 1933 it was converted into the **Regent** cinema. That closed in 1963 and bingo took over. In turn, that closed in 2008. There was talk of a two-screen cinema in 2010, then a three-screen cinema in 2013, but the building remained derelict and in very poor condition, its condition worsened by a fire in June 2022.

Kent Online – 3 May; sent in by Martin Tapsell, and Kent Online – 7 June

DEVIZES (Wiltshire)



The **Palace** is set to open its doors to the public for the first time in almost two years. Since being acquired by Picturedrome Cinemas in 2019, the cinema, which first opened in 1912, has been undergoing a comprehensive refurbishment. The public had the opportunity to view the works in progress in November 2021, and they will have another chance on 16 September, on Devizes Heritage Open Day. However, Picturedrome are yet to announce a re-opening date.

Gazette & Herald – 15 August; photo taken August 2003

DUDLEY (West Midlands)



The demolition of the **Hippodrome** has begun. Campaigners had long wanted the historic building to be retained as an entertainment venue with bars and restaurants, but Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council said that the work was underway as all planning requirements had been met. Demolition is expected to take about four months after the building is stripped of its fixtures and fittings. The local authority has been awarded £25m from the government to build a nursing college for the University of Worcester on the site. Building works are set to begin in 2024, with the new campus opening in September 2025. The theatre opened in December 1938, with seating for 1,621. Although equipped for film shows, there is currently no record of any screenings taking place at what was

dubbed the 'Showplace of the West Midlands', a major touring venue for variety shows and pantomimes. After a stellar start, it fell out of favour into the 1960s. The final show, Ivor Novello's *Glamorous Nights*, was presented by the West Bromwich Operatic Society in February 1964. It re-opened as the Dudley Hippodrome Casino Club, a bingo club and nightclub. Taken over by Ladbroke's, it became Caesar's Palace in October 1973, with bingo in the daytime and shows at 10pm. Roy Orbison was the final star to perform on the stage, on 16th August 1974. Gala Bingo took over, until September 2009. The building was then purchased by Dudley Council. The ensuing battle to save the **Hippodrome** featured on regional TV, and the building has been on the Theatres Trust list of 'Theatres at Risk' for 10 years. In March 2022, Dudley Council Cabinet members met to discuss its compulsory purchase powers, and took legal advice about the nature of the covenant on the site, which stated that the building (and/or its site) should be used for public entertainment and leisure use. They overrode this by using the Housing and Planning Act (2013). Despite this, the fight continued and, in June 2023, the **Hippodrome** was placed on SAVE Britain's Heritage 'Buildings at Risk' Register. Sadly, all to no avail.

BBC News – 5 August; photo taken August 2004

DUNFERMLINE (Fife)

Further to the report in the last *Bulletin*, the new **IMAX** screen at the **Odeon** opened on 27 June. According to circuit publicity "guests will be able to enjoy the world's most innovative movie-going experience, showcasing the difference between 'seeing' a film and 'living' it through the combination of immersive 360 degree sound, via dozens of powerful speakers, and an ultra-high-resolution screen that stretches from floor to ceiling and wall to wall." This conversion of the existing Screen 6 has 145 Luxe recliner seats, with "triple the legroom of a standard seat."

Dunfermline Press – 27 June

Also further to the report in the last *Bulletin*, the folks behind the plans to bring an arts performance centre to the city have said they "remain committed" to the proposals, despite ongoing delays. The Alhambra Trust is aiming for the Ironmongers Studio in the former Watt and Dewar building on New Row to be turned into a performing arts centre.

However it is currently involved in a legal dispute over the use of a piece of common good land which the Trust wants to lease or buy on the corner of New Row and Park Avenue. Central Dunfermline Community Council has objected to this, saying that the land was gifted for the wellbeing and benefit of, and is owned, by the people of Dunfermline. While the discussions continue, the Trust has revealed that they are now involved in talks which could see a community cinema included within the complex. This follows plans put forward by the Dunfermline Cinema Project which were shelved due to the pandemic. Although it is understood that the current talks are with a different party, the Trust say they "remain committed" to the return of a city centre cinema. They also said that the Ironmongers venue will provide a permanent base for the Alhambra Stage and Dance School, which would enable the school to expand its range of classes and host full-time Youth arts training courses and qualifications.

Dunfermline Press – 7 July

EDINBURGH

"Treasures and trinkets" have been discovered during the refurbishment of the **Playhouse**. The now-live theatre has been closed for a 12-week maintenance project since 15 May and, while the focus has been on updating the ventilation, installing a new control system for the orchestra pit and cleaning the façade, a few fascinating finds have been made along the way. These include over 40 pipes from the original organ, along with internal parts of the console itself, cigarette packets discarded by workers in the 1980s, and newspapers, tickets and posters. The **Playhouse** cinema opened in 1929 with a huge auditorium that could seat 3,053. It closed in 1973 and was set for demolition but, it was saved and now presents large-scale live shows.

STV News – 9 July

Further to the report in the last *Bulletin*, the "currently uninhabitable" shell of the **George**, Portobello, has been placed on the open market after a series of unsuccessful residential planning applications that

also included partial demolition. The Friends of the George community group has prepared a fresh proposal to "retain and upgrade this important listed building and operate it as a publicly accessible cinema and cultural venue". The group produced an earlier appraisal with its strategic partners Out of the Blue (arts organisation) and Queen Margaret University and, while its separate £3.2m refurbishment costing of seven years ago needs updated, it gives an idea of the money involved. Offers are being invited through the sales agent, which says "The premises offer the potential for a variety of uses such as a theatre, cinema or entertainment venue, hospitality and restaurant, retail space or community resource, all subject to obtaining appropriate consents. Other uses, including residential and/or student accommodation, might also be possible." The building's owner, Buckley Building, said it has not yet received "any official written notes of interest or discussed possible offer terms with any party". The Friends also envisage workspaces, events and a café and bar, adding that the 'C' listed building was "unexpectedly" put up for sale, and "Naturally our efforts are focussed on acquiring ownership, or working in partnership with an owner who is open to repairing and bringing the building back into public use."

The Herald – 15 July

Also further to the report in the last issue, the **Filmhouse** appeared to be close to being saved as a cinema. The new owners are, indeed, pub firm Caledonian Heritable, and a deal was close to being reached that would see cinema staff continuing to operate the movie side of the business while the new owners look after the hospitality. A spokesperson for Caledonian Heritable had said "We are working with the **Filmhouse** towards something that will suit both sides. We are working closely with the staff with the expectation of arriving at a scenario that will suit both parties. It is all looking very optimistic that it will be able to continue to operate in a similar fashion as before." However, further talks stalled after the new owners sought assurances that any shortfall in rent would be covered by public funds, and the council responded by saying that storing up cash to keep the cinema open would be "very challenging". A new charity, Filmhouse Edinburgh Limited (FEL), made up of former staff and campaigners fighting to secure the future of the capital's "unique cultural cinema provision", is understood to be the only organisation being considered as the new operator by Caledonian Heritable, which bought the building for £2.65m. Convener of the council's culture and communities committee Val Walker said she was optimistic the West End building would return as a "hub" for independent and cultural cinema – but added that no funds would be committed "until everything is nailed down". If the latest plans come to fruition then films could be screened in libraries and community centres "after they're screened at the **Filmhouse**" as part of a new ambition by the council to "spread those films across the city," Cllr Walker added. The local authority previously supported the **Filmhouse** and film festival with £100,000 a year, which remains ring-fenced in the budget for the purposes of 'developing cultural cinema in Edinburgh'. A non-domestic rates waiver has been secured for six months and a licence to occupy is currently being negotiated to allow FEL "to enter the building and start to plan refurbishment, operating and fundraising". FEL is being led by Ginnie Atkinson, who until 2010 was the **Filmhouse's** CEO and managing director of the Edinburgh Film Festival. (See also the Glasgow item.)

Edinburgh Live – 12 July, Daily Record – 14 July (sent in by Tom Laughlin), STV News – 3 August, Daily Record – 8 August (sent in by Tom Laughlin)

FARNHAM (Surrey)

Good news for thirsty cinema-goers, as they will be able to enjoy an alcoholic drink until as late as 2.30am, if the application by the new **Reel** multiplex is granted! The six-screen cinema, at the new Brightwells Yard development, is due to open in late 2023. The town has been without a full-time picture house since the closure of the **Regal** (latterly **Odeon/Cinema**) in 1985, although films are part of the programming at the **Maltings Arts Centre**.

Farnham Herald – 8 June

GLASGOW

JD Wetherspoon have secured permission to alter the premises licence at a former nightclub so they can re-open it as one of their pubs. The company will invest £4m and create 60-70 jobs. This will



replace the Sir John Stirling Maxwell, on nearby Kilmarnock Road, which closed earlier this year due to the re-development of the Shawlands Arcade. Although most recently Tusk nightclub, the building was originally the **Waverley Picture House**, which opened in December 1922. It has a red sandstone exterior, with a corner entrance topped by a dome. Taken over by **ABC** in September 1929, it was not renamed until 1964. It closed in March 1973 and went over to bingo, then became a snooker hall. That closed in the late-1990s, and Tusk opened in the early 2000s. That closed in 2017; the building has been empty since then. In 1992 it was 'B' listed; this was upgraded to 'A' the following year. The licensing lawyer for Wetherspoon told the city's Licensing Board that the company "would bring back a very handsome building to the quality it was in days gone by."

Glasgow Times – 15 May; sent to the CTA e-group by Darron Keeling; photo taken July 2009

A fire at the former **White Elephant**, in Shawlands, is being treated as arson. Nine fire engines and over 40 firefighters responded after it was discovered at about 7pm on Tuesday 11 July. Investigations are on-going. The cinema opened in 1927; its rather unusual name being the result of a competition to find a name for the wider complex, which also included a dance hall and restaurant. The eccentric owner, A. E. Pickard (of the city centre **Panopticon Theatre** fame) had a bas-relief sculpture of an elephant mounted over the entrance at the top of the façade! In 1934 the cinema was sold to A. B. King – who promptly removed the double 'love seats' (with Pickard claiming that King's wife "made a fuss about them"!) and renamed it the **Elephant**. It closed in 1960, and the elaborate frontage was, regrettably, removed.

Daily Record (sent in by Tom Laughlan) & STV News – 13 July

In contrast to the troubled **Filmhouse** in Edinburgh (see above), Susan Aitken, leader of Glasgow City Council, said she "couldn't imagine any circumstances" where the local authority would have allowed the **Glasgow Film Theatre** to suffer a similar fate. The leader of Scotland's largest local authority was discussing plans to revitalise Glasgow's city centre 'Golden Z' area, which covers Argyle Street, Buchanan Street and Sauchiehall Street. The **Film Theatre** will form part of a new 'Avenue of the Arts' which will celebrate the cultural attractions on Sauchiehall Street from the Mitchell Library to the Royal Concert Hall. It occupies a 'B' listed building on Rose Street, and first opened as a cinema in 1939.

The Herald – 5 August

HARTLEPOOL (County Durham)



A new masterplan to "supercharge" regeneration will see the derelict **Odeon**, West Hartlepool, razed to the ground and replaced by a community park. The **Majestic** opened in 1936. In 1943 it was taken over by Odeon, and renamed two years later.

It was closed in 1981 and moved over to bingo. From the mid-1990s it went into nightclub and bar use, but closed for good around 2002. The building has remained unused since then. It was granted Grade II listing in 1992.

Teesside Live – 18 May; photo taken March 2021

HARWICH (Essex)

The **Electric Palace** has been awarded £10,000 to continue its 'Memory Matinees' dementia and autism-friendly screenings. During those for patrons living with dementia the house lights are raised slightly and the sound level is a little lower than normal, while the autism-friendly screenings provide a chance to watch a film in a relaxed and inclusive environment, with adjustments to reduce over-stimulation and create a friendly atmosphere. The cinema is continuing to collaborate with Age UK, Harwich Connexions, Autism Anglia, local care homes and Harwich Home Start, to ensure that those who would benefit most are able to attend.

Daily Gazette – 1 June; sent in by Terry Hanstock

HEREFORD

In a heartfelt post on social media on 11 June, owner Fiona Bain announced the sudden closure of the **Loft** cinema.

Expressing her apologies to ticket holders and party bookings, she thanked everyone for their support, adding "It is with a very heavy heart I say this, but I'm afraid the **Loft** is no more. Without any notice we have been very suddenly closed and, while I have fought to continue, even to see out this month, this isn't an option. Thank you for all your support over the last four and a half years. To this small team it really meant the world." The cinema opened in December 2018, with sofa seating, rather than individual seats. The imaginative programming ranged from classic film seasons to family-friendly screenings.

Hereford Times – 11 June

ILKESTON (Derbyshire)

The Grade II listed **Ritz**, which operated as a cinema from 1938 to 1968, then on bingo until 2018, could be transformed into a gym and fitness centre. The plans, submitted to Erewash Borough Council by owners Parliament House Limited, say this scheme would "help secure the long-term future of the building" and "inject additional life and commerce in the immediate area through a much-welcomed increase in local footfall". The owners say an operator has already expressed interest, following a marketing exercise, and wants to move in as soon as possible. As part of the conversion the existing stage and refreshment kiosk would be removed, while the glazed screen between the former café and main auditorium would be partially removed.

Derbyshire Times – 27 July; sent in by Terry Hanstock

IPSWICH (Suffolk)



The **Regent Theatre** is a great entertainment venue – but, at 94 years old, improvements are required to meet the needs of a modern audience. Ipswich Borough Council, which owns and manages the venue, are therefore looking to improve it for both audiences and performers. The first phase is already nearing completion, with a modular building being erected on part of the rear car park. This will provide three additional dressing rooms and a large, versatile space,

with a small kitchen. In the main building, the façade is considered to be unappealing, disabled access is far from ideal, the foyer is cramped, the bar poorly laid out – and there are long queues for the toilets at the intervals! To begin to address these issues, the canopy will be restored, disabled access will be made easier, including a new lift, the foyer will be enlarged with a new bar and merchandising areas and the Crush Hall will be cleared and opened up, with a new, longer bar. Upstairs, the Circle Lounge will be upgraded and a single storey extension will be built on a small piece of land at the side of the building which will more than double the number of female toilets. A project plan is being formulated, which will have to take into account the theatre's Grade II listing. To protect the venue and keep investment at a high level, future bookings where tickets cost more than £10 will attract a restoration levy of £1.50. The **Regent Theatre** opened in 1929, becoming the **Gaumont** in 1955 and **Odeon** in 1987. It closed as a cinema in 1991, when Odeon opened their new multiplex, and re-opened as a live theatre in September 1991.

Ipswich Star – 20 June & BBC News – 24 June; sent in by Terry Hanstock; photo taken July 2007

KENDAL (Cumbria)

An expanding vape store is to move into the front part of the former **St. George's Theatre**, a Grade II listed building on the corner of Stramongate and Blackhall Road. The family-run business, Kendal Vapes, established in 2014, has nine stores across the North of England. The original St. George's Hall was converted into a cinema, rather confusingly called **St. George's Theatre**, in May 1910. This survived into the CinemaScope era, but eventually closed in 1964 and moved over to bingo. That closed in 1989; the auditorium was converted into retail use but has since been demolished for housing.

Cumbria Crack – 16 June; sent in by Terry Hanstock

KESWICK (Cumbria)

Faced with falling attendances and soaring energy bills, the **Alhambra** hopes to entice patrons back with 'Five-Pound Fridays', with tickets reduced from the standard price of £9. Owners Jonathan Moore and Carol Rennie hope this will encourage local residents and tourists to experience their newly refurbished cinema.

News & Star – 5 July

LEEDS



The **Hyde Park Picture House**, thought to be the last gas-lit cinema in the world, re-opened on 30 June with Wes Anderson's *Asteroid City* following an eight-year £4.8m restoration project which saw all nine of its gas lamps lit once more for every screening. Other improvements include a second, 51-seat, screen in the basement (which opened on Saturday 12 August) and updates to the building's accessible facilities. The main auditorium has been re-seated, with the capacity reduced from 587 to 235. Leeds Heritage Theatres chief executive Chris Blythe said that, when developers began the project in 2015, they had not anticipated it taking so long to complete. The Grade II listed cinema first opened in November 1914. When it was threatened with closure in 1989, Leeds City Council stepped in to save it, creating Grand Theatre and Opera House Limited (which also owns the **Grand Theatre and Opera House** together with the iconic **City Varieties**).

Why Now – 9 June; Hyde Park Picture House website (sent in by Terry Hanstock); Daily Express – 1 July (sent in by Tom Laughlan); photo taken July 2023

LITTLEHAMPTON (West Sussex)

The **Windmill** has been forced to close "for the foreseeable future" after damage from a fire in the neighbouring Harvester restaurant. The cinema suffered water damage to the foyer and kiosk during the emergency services' response, and there was also damage to a flat roof which closed off access to the cinema's toilets. At its height, 12 fire engines battled the blaze alongside two aerial platforms and two water carriers. The fire started in the restaurant's kitchen, quickly spread to the roof and gutted the interior.

The Argus – 14 August

LLANDUDNO (Conwy)

The **Palladium** has undergone a £1million project, which involved the full repair, restoration and re-decoration of the historic fibrous decorative ceiling. In March 2022, a full crash deck/scaffold was constructed, following concerns for the safety of a small section of the ceiling. Over the course of 15 months, the ceiling void was "meticulously" cleaned of all dust and debris to enable inspections by a structural engineer and fibrous plaster specialist. The timber ceiling support structure was then strengthened, whilst plaster specialists carried out hand repairs to restore the entire plaster ceiling, along with repairs to the historical proscenium arch and to the decorative elements on the front of original balconies. The pub remained open throughout the works. The theatre was designed by Arthur Hewitt and built in 1920. There were 1,500 seats in the stalls and two balconies. In 1972, it was split, with a bingo hall occupying the stalls area and a 600-seat cinema above. In 2001, the Grade II listed building was converted by Wetherspoon into the pub it is today.

North Wales Pioneer – 18 July

LONDON (Bayswater)

An **Everyman** cinema should be opening in the newly re-developed Grade II listed Whiteleys in 2024. Nostalgic filmgoers who remember the **UCI**, which opened in 1989, or the multiplex as the **Odeon** after 2006, are promised a familiar experience as they head to the new cinema, as the grand centrepiece staircase, clock and glass dome will be restored and will retain pride of place. Whiteleys closed in 2018, pushed out of business by the opening of Westfield in nearby Shepherd's Bush, but it is currently midway through a major redevelopment, which also includes shops, restaurants, a hotel and 139 new homes.

Time Out – 26 May

LONDON (Bexleyheath)

The "dated" and "awkward" **Cineworld** could be replaced by a block of flats, with a leisure centre and/or shops on the ground and first floors. So says the council's local plan, which was approved on 26 April. Cinema bosses have declined to comment, and meanwhile it is 'business as usual' at this 9-screen multiplex, which opened in March 1998.

My London – 5 May; sent in by Sarah Warne

LONDON (Holloway)

The **Coronet**, put on the market by Wetherspoon a year ago, has been purchased by David Nourani, of DN Property London, for an undisclosed sum. He said "The Coronet is steeped in so much history that it would have been scandalous if it had been allowed to close. My intention is that it will continue as a public house, with exciting plans for a delicate and sensitive renovation." Designed by William R. Glen, the **Savoy** opened in 1940; after becoming the **ABC** in 1962 it closed as the **Coronet** in 1983. Following brief use as a snooker hall (in the stalls) and an amusement arcade (in the foyer), Wetherspoon opened it as one of their pubs in 1996.

News report dated 23 August; sent in by Margaret Baber (via Allen Eyles)

LONDON (Kentish Town)

Civic groups and residents' associations have joined forces to demand that developer Vabel honours a commitment it inherited (from previous developer Uplift) to build a cinema on the site of the former North London Polytechnic. This was a key part of the plan, for which permission was granted in 2015, to build 12 homes. Now, the homes are ready and being offered for sale, while the cinema space on the ground floor and in the basement remains a concrete shell. The campaigners are urging Vabel to accept a lower rent to enable a not-for-profit community cinema to be created. Vabel did have a

commercial cinema company interested, but the cost to fit out the cinema was estimated at £750,000 and the company, which has not been named, decided this was unviable and withdrew. Vabel director Jeremy Spencer has said he does want the cinema, and that he would welcome any offer from the community.

Camden New Journal – 20 April

LONDON (Mayfair)

Further to the report in the last *Bulletin*, Mayor Sadiq Khan has added his support as campaigners rally to save the Grade II listed **Curzon** and over 20,000 people have signed a petition protesting against the plans being put forward by the landlords. A spokeswoman for the mayor said: “London’s cinemas are a huge draw for locals and tourists, but the last few years have been incredibly challenging across the industry. The mayor views [this cinema] as one of London’s cultural gems and an important home for cinema in our city. The Government, local councils, landlords and developers need to do all they can to protect our cultural venues – especially ones as celebrated as the **Curzon** in Mayfair.” The campaign received cross-party support at the London Assembly. Green Party assembly member Zack Polanski, whose motion called on the mayor to write to both the landlord and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport “expressing his concern”, said that their support was “a recognition of the need for art and culture in London”. And, to demonstrate how the cinema “has served generations of London audiences over many decades”, a programme of “greatest hits” (the ‘Save The **Curzon** Mayfair Film Series’) is due to begin on 10 September, featuring classics such as *La Ronde*, *Solaris* and *Howards End*.

Evening Standard – 7 July (sent in by Tom Laughlin) & 10 July; Evening Standard – 31 August

LONDON (Sidcup)

The three-screen **Sidcup Storyteller** opened on Thursday 15 June. Built on the site of a former Blockbuster Video store, it is a partnership between the London Borough of Bexley and independent operators Really Local Group, which also run the **Catford Mews** and **Reading Biscuit Factory** cinemas. In keeping with the operator’s community aspirations, the building also includes a café, bar, library and a co-working space. This brings ‘big screen’ entertainment back to Sidcup for the first time since the **King’s Hall Picture Playhouse/Regal/Cannon/ABC** closed in August 2000.

Yahoo Sports – 17 June

LONDON (Sutton)

A double dose of demolition news: The former **Cannon** has been demolished, to make way for a residential development. The **Picture Theatre** had opened in July 1910. In 1946 it was acquired by James Gardner, who re-named it the **Curzon** in 1953. Taken over by Star Cinemas early in 1971, it was tripled, and re-opened as Studios 1, 2, 3 that June. It was later acquired, and renamed, by **Classic**, and closed as the **Cannon** in June 1992. The building then operated under several names as a nightclub, closing as *Wonderland* at the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. It never re-opened. Meanwhile, the office block built on the site of the demolished **Granada** has itself fallen foul of the wreckers’ ball. The cinema had opened as the **Plaza** in 1934, and was acquired by Granada just one month later. It was not, however, renamed until it had re-opened following bomb damage during the war. Its extensive stage facilities were used for pantomimes and other live shows from the late 1940s into the 1960s; it closed in August 1975. Despite a bingo licence being granted (having been refused the previous year) and the town looking to open a live theatre, the building was demolished and replaced by the office block.

Sent in to the cta-uk e-group by Darron Keeling and Ken Roe – 15 May

AE notes: According to my research for *The Granada Theatres* (1998), Granada took over the **Plaza** on the Monday after opening, having made a deal allowing the original promoter Lou Morris to launch it, retain a small interest and become a director of the new subsidiary company owning it.

LONDON (West End)

On 6 May, following the coronation of King Charles III, **Her Majesty’s Theatre**, Haymarket, home to *The Phantom of the Opera*, was renamed **His Majesty’s Theatre**. This follows a precedent that goes

back to the 1700s, when the original playhouse opened as the **Queen’s Theatre**, named after Queen Anne. In its second build it was called the **King’s Theatre**, on the accession of George I, then the current building, in 1897, was named after Queen Victoria. It became **His Majesty’s** after Edward VII, then **Her Majesty’s** at the start of Queen Elizabeth II’s reign.

Sunday Mirror – 16 April & The Stage – 20 April; sent in by Barry Quinton

A planning application by the Aziz Foundation to convert part of the Trocadero into a mosque was approved by Westminster Council’s planning committee in May. Asif Aziz, a property tycoon known as ‘Mr West End’, is constructing a three-storey house of prayer, for 390 worshippers, and an Islamic centre. Previous proposals for a 1,000-capacity mosque were withdrawn in 2020 following a backlash from residents as well as far-right groups. The mosque, to be called ‘Piccadilly Prayer Space’, could open within months. Mr Aziz bought the Trocadero for £220m in 2005. The space being converted includes that occupied by the **Metro**, from 1985 until its closure as the **Other Cinema** in 2002, and, quite possibly, that occupied by the short-lived **Pepsi IMAX Theatre** from 1997 to 2000. The operation of the **Picturehouse Central** will be unaffected.

Mail Online – 17 July

LONG EATON (Derbyshire)



Erewash Borough Council has been trying to buy the former **Galaxy**, and a number of surrounding plots, for more than two years. Now, the council is filing to compulsorily purchase the building. The authority has made at least three formal offers, but the owner has rejected these and put the former cinema on the market, with an asking price of £575,000. The former Stage One nightclub, a shop unit next to it and a garage to the rear would also be demolished, with the council hoping to replace them with four houses, 16 flats and three shops. Although the **St. James’s Theatre** opened as far back as 1907, the present building dates from a 1934 rebuild which followed a serious fire. It re-opened as the *Scala*, but closed in 1964 and moved over to bingo. That closed around 1993, after which the building suffered a further fire. Remarkably, it gained a new lease of life in 2007 when the **Galaxy** opened, with three screens created on the ground floor. (The CTA visited in 2008.) Sadly, that closed in 2012.

BBC News – 21 June; Derbyshire Times – 29 August (sent in by Terry Hanstock); photo taken May 2008

LOWESTOFT (Suffolk)

Work ‘behind the scenes’ at the **Marina Theatre** is gathering pace – with a brand new cinema screen being installed and the 35-year-old flying system also in the process of receiving “a much-needed replacement”. These works are due to be completed in time for *A Tribute to the Carpenters* on 8 September, with the new screen getting its first outing on 13 September with André Rieu’s 2023 Maastricht concert. The work was funded by Lowestoft Town Council.

Lowestoft Journal – 7 August (sent in by Terry Hanstock)

LYME REGIS (Dorset)

The opening of a new cocktail bar inside the ‘iconic’ **Regent** building has been delayed, but the owners have vowed to throw the doors open “as soon as possible”. Beaminstor-based *Black Cow* had hoped

their vodka espresso bar would open this summer, but planning and licensing issues have pushed this back. Following the devastating fire damage in 2016 it had been hoped that the building would re-open as a picture house. But Black Cow stepped in, and manager Guy Chittenden is in the process of submitting a planning application for change the use to a drinking establishment. The company is also seeking permission to build an outdoor decking area.

Bridport & Lyme Regis News – 8 August

MALMESBURY (Wiltshire)

A brand-new projector worth £40,000 and retractable seating worth £50,000 were unveiled at a VIP screening of *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* in the Town Hall's Assembly Room on Monday 3 July. The old dining chairs have been replaced by 100 pocket-sprung retractable seats. This new system is quickly deployed by a touch of a button and takes minutes to set up and put away. The seating and half the cost of the projector was funded by the Town Council, with the rest of the projector funding made up from donations.

Movies@Malmesbury will usually present matinees and evening screenings on Mondays and Fridays, with live-streamed musical concerts mid-week.

Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard – 5 July

MARGATE (Kent)



The discovery of a 'sun burner' in the ceiling of the **Theatre Royal** means a masterplan will need to be drawn up to examine how the historic building will continue to be ventilated, Thanet council's Cabinet member for regeneration and property, Cllr Ruth Duckworth, told members at a full council meeting on 13 July. Sun burners were manufactured in the Victorian era as a means of both gas lighting and ventilating larger public buildings. Ms Duckworth continued "As with all renovations, you do not realise the full extent of what needs doing until proper surveys have been done... the sun burner...has heritage significance. It is an early Victorian gaslight and ventilation system which needs careful investigation. In order to properly ventilate the theatre it is very likely modern plant and extraction will need to be located on the roof and will need to be included in the final designs." The building will be watertight before the autumn/early winter, safeguarding it before the major works begin. £2m has been allocated for repairs from the £22.2m Margate Town Deal. The council will also be applying for National Heritage Lottery funding. Once the works have been completed an operator/commercial partner will be sought. The **Theatre Royal**, which opened in 1787, is Britain's second oldest operating theatre, after the **Theatre Royal**, Bristol. Now owned by Thanet Council, the Grade II* listed theatre closed in April 2022 for this major refurbishment.

Isle of Thanet News – 16 July; photo taken April 2008

MARLOW (Buckinghamshire)

The two-screen **Everyman** is due to open in the former Steamer Trading Cookshop in the Grade II listed Market Hall. The store closed in June 2017, and the premises were acquired by pub company Marston's, which intended opening a bar/restaurant. However, after eight months, they "were offered an attractive price" and sold the building to an investment company. As an incentive to prospective

cinema patrons, founder members will get free popcorn during the first year!

Bucks Free Press – 28 February

MATLOCK (Derbyshire)

The conversion of the former Market Hall into a two-screen cinema has hit a new hurdle, after a second tender exercise concluded without a contractor being appointed. Derbyshire Dales District Council says this reflects "the significant challenge of delivering the proposed scheme within the current volatile construction market, which is impacted by high cost inflation." However, "the positive news is that both the team at the District Council and the proposed cinema operator remain committed to working together to pursue this scheme for Matlock."

Business Link East Midlands – 19 May, Derbyshire Live – 23 July & Derbyshire Times – 7 August; sent in by Terry Hanstock

NEWTON ABBOT (Devon)

The town could be set to get a new, larger cinema as one of the regeneration improvements focussing on the creation of a central Markets Quarter. A new, purpose-built, four-screen cinema would be built in Market Square, but Scott Cinemas, the original redevelopment partner, which runs the existing three-screen **Alexandra**, has withdrawn its interest. Instead, Arc Cinemas have stepped in – but they want six screens, something that could, apparently, be accommodated as the new cinema is such a key element to the Future High Street-funded plans. The **Alexandra** operates in the former Corn Exchange, which was converted into the **Alexandra Theatre** around 1900. It became a full-time cinema in 1927, and was acquired by Charles Scott in 1960. It was twinned in 1996. The building is Grade II listed.

Western Morning News – 26 June

NORWICH

Demolition work at Anglia Square is to begin early next year. The disused multi-storey car park, which closed in 2012, will be the first to go after developers Weston Homes confirmed their plans. Next up, by the end of 2024, will be the former **Hollywood** cinema, then the derelict Sovereign House in 2026. Weston Homes is yet to provide information on when work will begin on the shopping area itself, but the developer has said it would be phased over eight years. Once complete, the site will comprise 1,100 homes and up to 86,111 sq. ft. of business space, including a community hall. The **Hollywood** opened as the **Odeon** in 1971 in what was then the new Anglia Square Shopping Centre. It closed in 2019 when the Hollywood circuit went into administration.

Norwich Evening News – 17 July

NOTTINGHAM



The Grade II listed former city centre **Picture House** is to be given a new lease of life after planning permission was granted for its conversion into nine apartments. The cinema opened in 1912 and was very popular. But its size worked against it (there were only around 600 seats) and, with enlargement being impractical, it closed in 1930 and has since seen a variety of occupants, although the upper floors have been unused for the past decade. The works will include "the sub-division of the old main auditorium, the conversion of

the first, second and third floors of the front section of the building, and the conversion of the original projection room and reel store." According to a local heritage expert who assisted with the application "The challenge was sub-dividing the large internal void to create a series of apartments that all receive natural light from existing openings. The designs show that this is capable while maintaining

respect for the important heritage of the building, which is located in the Old Market Square Conservation Area.”

Nottinghamshire Live – 20 June; sent in by Terry Hanstock; photo taken March 2006

AE comments: I wonder what consideration the “local heritage expert” gave to saving the auditorium and projection room – I had no idea they survived.

OXFORD



The **Odeon**, George Street, is set to be transformed, under council plans given the go ahead on 12 July. The lease on the cinema runs out in September 2024 and, since September 2022, the council has been carrying out a procurement exercise. Under the plans, the building would be demolished and replaced by a community hub on the ground floor and a 145-room aparthotel on the upper five floors. Deputy leader of the city council, Ed Turner, said: “This is a once in a generation redevelopment of one of the city centre’s iconic buildings. We are extremely excited to see the building transformed to provide a new community hub in the heart of Oxford city centre” adding “It is unfortunate that Odeon has announced the closure of their cinema in Magdalen Street, and we hope they may reconsider this decision”. The new contract and lease on the site could be signed as early as August or September this year - the council then aims to secure planning permission for the new building by the summer of 2024. Demolition and construction would take at least three years. However, campaigners are not happy, and they protested outside the Town Hall on 17 July with a ‘wrecking ball’, emblazoned with the council’s logo, mocking, in these days of Airbnb, the council’s claim that the aparthotel is desperately needed to entice visitors. The cinema was opened by Union as the **Ritz** in 1936. Acquired by **ABC** in 1937, it was not renamed until around 1962. Tripled in 1975, it has also operated as **Cannon** and **MGM**.

Oxford Mail – 3 July (sent in by Darron Keeling) & 14 July; The Caterer – 14 July (sent in by Terry Hanstock); Oxford Mail – 23 July; photo taken February 2004

AE asks: If the **Odeon** George Street is “one of the city centre’s iconic buildings” why is it to be demolished?

PAIGNTON (Devon)

New plans submitted to Torbay Council are set to pave the way for a full-scale rebuild of the **Picture House**, with the hope that it will re-open in 2025. The cinema first opened in 1914, and was in continuous use until closure in 1999. In 2013, a group of local people set up a ‘Buildings Preservation’ Trust to look into ways of bringing it back to its former glory. The latest application is for a three-storey extension for a new lift and stairs; new ramps and steps to create an accessible entrance and solar panels on the roof. There will be a café, community meeting spaces and additional toilets. Project manager Josephine Brown said the **Paignton Picture House** Trust is expecting a decision from planners soon, with the cinema forming a key part of Paignton’s Future High Streets project which has attracted millions of pounds in government funding. The funds must be spent by March next year, and so far the plans have come in on time and on budget. Architects AOC say their proposals respect the heritage of the site and meet the needs of the present day. Torbay Council deputy leader Chris Lewis said: “The restoration of

Paignton Picture House is a tangible positive step in helping to regenerate Paignton town centre. This is an incredibly exciting project that really demonstrates how multiple organisations can work together to bring a significantly important building back into use for the community.”

Torbay Weekly – 7 June

PETERBOROUGH

The mystery surrounding the delayed opening of the 10-screen **Empire** was answered, in part at least, by the news that the circuit went into administration on 7 July. The multiplex, built on the roof of the Queensgate Shopping Centre, is understood to have been completed but Empire had not given any indication when it would open. It had been reported that issues with the power supply were causing the delay, but requests for more information were met with silence. The circuit was first announced as the operator in July 2018. The cinema is part of a 77,000 sq. ft. extension that was proposed in 2015. Construction on that began in 2019 and finished in 2022.

Peterborough Telegraph – 10 May & 7 July

PLYMOUTH (Devon)

Further to the report in the last issue, when the delayed **Everyman** was due to open “by the end of the year”, it actually opened rather sooner than that, on Friday 2 June. The cinema was ready for its fit-out in early 2020, but the pandemic led to inevitable delays. The three-screen luxury picture house is in the transformed Melville Building, previously the administration centre for the historic Royal William Yard, a victualling depot named after King William IV which was constructed between 1826 and 1835, and which has been transformed into a major leisure destination.

Plymouth Live – 4 June

PRESCOT (Lancashire)

Plans have been submitted to transform the **Picture Palace** back to its former glory. The proposals, from Knowsley Council, involve the “reinstatement” of [unspecified] “key features” of the Grade II listed building, which was remodelled into a cinema in 1912 from two 19th century townhouses but is in a significant state of disrepair. After the cinema closed, in 1957, the building was used as a carpet warehouse, then a bingo hall and latterly as a church. It was listed in 2021. Plans for its renovation have been several years in the making as part of a £3.1m heritage-led regeneration programme bringing major investment to a number of key projects in the town centre.

St. Helens Star – 11 May

REDHILL (Surrey)

A six-screen **Light** multiplex opened on 16 June. It is the anchor tenant at The Rise, a new leisure destination that also includes ten-pin bowling, mini-golf, a climbing arena, interactive darts, shuffleboard and much more. This major project is supporting the regeneration of the town centre.

Sent in by Michael Mantell

RIPON (North Yorkshire)



The **Curzon** closed on 1 July, with the circuit saying that the venue faced “specific challenges” (which meant it had not recovered, as had been hoped, following the pandemic) and the site “is not suited

to the long-term direction we have taken post-pandemic, driven by increased customer focus on hospitality, for example, the rooftop and pizza kitchen offering at **Curzon Kingston**.” The nine staff had been informed on 14 June. However, in more promising news, Sterne Properties, which owns the premises, later said it has big plans for the building, including retaining one of the screens as a volunteer-led community project, alongside family-friendly facilities – but then a rival ‘Save Ripon Cinema’ campaign was launched with the aim of attracting a new operator so the cinema could fully re-open. The **Curzon** had opened in October 2013, bringing big screen entertainment back to the city for the first time since the **Palladium** closed way back in 1982.

The Stray Ferret – 15 June, 21 June & 7 July; photo taken April 2015 by David Simpson

ROTHERHAM (South Yorkshire)

National urban regenerator Muse Developments says that the new cinema at its town centre Forge Island leisure scheme is slated to open in 2024. Arc Cinemas signed a long-term lease in 2021 to become the leisure anchor on the development, which includes a Travelodge hotel and six food and drink outlets, and is positioned at the south of the former home of the Rotherham Forge & Rolling Mills. The design of the 8-screen **Arc** multiplex is said to reflect the strong industrial heritage of the site. The town has been without ‘big screen’ entertainment since the **Cannon** (former **Empire/Essoldo/Classic**) closed in 1990.

Rotherham Business News – 22 May; sent in by Terry Hanstock

ROYSTON (Hertfordshire)

Further to the report in the last *Bulletin*, the **Royston Picture Palace** has been saved from immediate closure. Saffron Screen, which has managed the cinema for over three years, initially withdrew over declining ticket sales, which had worsened since the pandemic. However, an agreement was reached with Royston Town Council to enable films to be screened after the original deadline of 28 May – but only until 15 October, with the council still looking for a long-term plan for the cinema’s future.

Royston Crow – 20 June

ST. HELIER (Jersey)

The former **Odeon** is to become an events space following a lengthy refurbishment. Freedom Church Jersey, which bought the 70-year-old building for £1m in 2012, has been awarded a licence which will enable alcoholic drinks and canapés to be served to attendees. A spokesperson for the owner told the Licensing Assembly at the Royal Court that the Church had been previously unable to progress plans for the building as a result of “fiscal constraints”, but was now able to do so, with work on a new roof having been completed. The ground floor auditorium will have a proposed capacity of 450, staging events approximately once per month and providing an alternative to existing venues such as the larger Opera House and smaller Arts Centre. The **Odeon** opened in 1952, and closed in October 2004. It re-opened as the **New Forum** in March 2005, but showed its final film in January 2009.

Jersey Evening Post – 23 June

The **Cineworld**, the Channel Islands’ only multiplex, is set to remain open until at least 2027, after the beleaguered circuit agreed to a new lease under which it will rent the site until June 2032 - but with an option to pull out from 2027 if it is not proving to be viable. In 2019, prior to its enforced closure due to the pandemic, the cinema reported 280,000 visits; this dropped to just 180,000 in 2022, leading to it falling behind on its rent payments. The Jersey Development Company (JDC), owner of the Waterfront Centre which includes the cinema, said it needed to be flexible in order to retain an operating cinema on the island, so it agreed to waive some of the arrears in exchange for the circuit making this longer-term commitment. However, the future of the Waterfront Centre itself is uncertain, as the JDC has plans to demolish it as part of an extensive redevelopment of the southwest of St. Helier. The company has announced there won’t be any changes until at least 2027 – but once-popular venues like The Bar and Pizza Hut have already closed their doors, leaving much of the 3.6-acre site empty.

ITV News – 18 July

SALISBURY (Hampshire)

The Hall of John Halle, home to the **Odeon**, was due to be sold at auction on 13 July. The 32,000 sq. ft. property produces annual rental income of £64,422, and had a guide price of £850,000+. This sale should not affect the cinema, which has a long lease, until 2089, but does anyone know the outcome?

Salisbury Journal – 29 June

SELSEY (West Sussex)

Selsey Hall, which opened in 1913 as what would today be called a multi-purpose entertainment centre, and which operated from 1924 to 1964 as the **Pavilion** cinema, is to move into community ownership. Funding of £249,405 has been awarded by the National Lottery to the Selsey Pavilion Trust, which will allow the charity to unlock its Community Ownership Fund grant, awarded in March. The Hall will then become a community arts and heritage centre. (See photograph in *Picture House* 47 p94.)

Museums + Heritage Advisor – 18 August

SLOUGH (Berkshire)

Buzz Bingo in the **Adelphi** closed on Easter Monday, 10 April. The company had previously announced that this was due to financial difficulties; rather ironically, on the final night, so many people attended that they overflowed into the car park! The **Adelphi Theatre** opened in 1930. An independent, it was taken over by Southan Morris, then Union, then ABC and finally Granada, all the while retaining its original name. The cinema closed in 1973, and bingo took over.

Slough Observer – 17 March and 21 April; sent in by R. David Simpson

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA (Essex)

The controversial £70m leisure complex, due to be built on a seafront car park, is in considerable doubt after Empire Cinemas went into administration. The circuit was set to open an 11-screen multiplex, which would have joined a 20-lane Hollywood Bowl and a Travelodge hotel on the re-developed Lucy Road site. However, no work has taken place despite the plans being approved in 2020. In 2021 the council backed the scheme with a £10m investment designed to encourage others to get on board, but the project was put on hold in December last year, after the wider economic turmoil “wreaked havoc” on potential investors. And then Empire Cinemas entered administration. Now, council leader Tony Cox has hinted that the whole scheme might be scrapped.

Evening Echo – 6 July

Plans for a new restaurant as part of the £8m refit for the **Cliffs Pavilion** have had to be ditched to make it more affordable. Councillors had already rubber-stamped the outline plan for a single-storey side and front extension, which will more than double the entrance foyer’s current capacity. However, new plans no longer include a new restaurant in the sunken garden area at the front, but will instead focus on improving the existing facility. The works will also include upgraded ventilation systems, a new outdoor piazza and improvements to the bars, toilets, lifts and other areas, all designed to boost the theatre as a regional centre for the arts and leisure. There will, however, be no changes to the auditorium or back-stage facilities. Roughly £5.5m is being funded through Round 1 of the Levelling Up Fund, announced by the Government in October 2021, with additional investment from the council and Trafalgar Entertainment.

Yahoo News – 14 August

SOUTHPORT (Merseyside)

Numerous historic and iconic fixtures and fittings from the **Southport Theatre** and the **Floral Hall** were due to be salvaged before demolition work began in July. These included glass from the main dome, and wheat motifs, in the **Floral Hall**, film reels and projectors, metal film boxes, signage, old postcards and magazines, theatre seats, and the famous sprung wooden dance floor. Also due to be saved was a memorial plaque to Phil King, who was Sefton Council’s Chief Tourism and Attractions Officer. He died in April 2014, and the plaque was unveiled by Ken Dodd in May 2015. Some of the items will be restored and re-used inside the new £73m Marine Lake Events Centre, which will be built on the site.

In Your Area – 7 June

STEVENAGE (Hertfordshire)

The **Gordon Craig Theatre**, which opened in 1975 and, according to the Theatres Trust, is “probably the best-designed civic entertainment centre of its type in the country” won’t be knocked down just yet, a council leader has confirmed.

The Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, which includes the theatre, was earmarked for demolition in the borough’s Local Plan, adopted in 2019, but councillors have said that a new theatre must be built before the current one closes.

The Comet – 19 July

STOURBRIDGE (West Midlands)

Further to the report in the last *Bulletin*, the plans to bring a cinema back to the town are gathering pace. West Midlands Community Cinema and Art Spaces, a not-for-profit Community Interest Company led by James Anderson Brown, who launched Birmingham’s **Mockingbird** cinema and also runs the **Lume** (former **Warehouse**) in Kidderminster, plans to turn the former Chicago’s bar into a two-screen community cinema by the end of the year. Footballer Ryan Passey was fatally stabbed there in August 2017; this project has been given the thumbs-up from his family, who are keen to see the building used for the good of the community.

Stourbridge News – 26 July

SUTTON COLDFIELD (West Midlands)

Work has begun, on the car park of the **Empire**, on a McCarthy Stone 43-apartment retirement complex. This should be completed in under two years - but there has been no word about the proposed cinema refurbishment, for which the developer has already paid Empire £200,000. The redevelopment proposal had met with some controversy, with cinemagoers expressing concerns that the Grade II listed former **Odeon** may struggle without parking spaces. But Empire said it believed the cinema is viable without parking, and plans had been submitted for a major refurbishment, to include sofa seating. These were approved last September, alongside the apartments’ plans, and Empire had announced that they expected the work to be completed “early in the new year”. But the work never started – and then the circuit went into administration in July, casting a huge doubt over the future of this iconic cinema.

Birmingham Mail – 24 May & 10 July

SWANSEA

Plans have been submitted by Cardiff-based Easy Living to transform the Grade II listed former **Castle** into a mixed scheme of commercial units and 30 residential apartments. The building has been home to Laserzone for decades, but planning documents state that change is needed as it has fallen into a “dilapidated state” and it has been included on a list of “at-risk” listed buildings. It had been put up for sale in June 2021 as a “unique opportunity to redevelop” a historic building. The Castle originally opened in 1913. It was modernised in 1967, then became the **Film Centa** before closing in 1991 and becoming home to Laserzone.

Wales OnLine – 16 June

TODMORDEN (West Yorkshire)

As part of the Todmorden Town Deal, Trustees from Todmorden Amateur Operative and Dramatic Society and local architects Storah Architecture have shared updated plans for the extension and remodelling of the community owned **Hippodrome Theatre**. The building will be extended to create a new, fully accessible performance space and additional spaces for a cinema and to allow for the expansion of the youth theatre section. Additional public spaces, as well as exhibition and gallery spaces, will be created, with the refurbishment of existing spaces enabling more events and increased daytime use. The Town Deal Board’s £17.5m Town Investment Plan received the final go ahead for investment from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in February this year. The **Hippodrome** opened in 1908 as a live theatre, but for most of its life, up to 1956, when it was leased to local amateur dramatic societies, it operated as a cinema.

Halifax Courier – 17 May

ULVERSTON (Cumbria)

The Roxy Collective is planning a series of renovations at the historic **Roxy**, which opened in 1937, the first phase of which will include



fixing the roof and giving the exterior a fresh lick of paint, along with “some other exciting [though unspecified] changes”. The work will not affect the operation of the cinema (in the former circle) or the Laurel & Hardy Museum (in the former stalls).

The Mail – 14 July; sent in by Terry Hanstock; photo taken August 2005

WESTON-SUPER-MARE (Somerset)

There were hopes that the **Odeon**, which closed on 5 June, could be sold as a going concern, with circuit bosses telling North Somerset Council they intended to sell the building as quickly as possible, and they were working to see if there is interest from an alternative operator (despite saying that it was “no longer viable”). Local resident Jim Woods began a campaign for it to become a community cinema, similar to the **Curzon** at nearby Clevedon, but then, on 9 August, Merlin Cinemas, which specialises in operating character-filled and predominantly coastal cinemas, stepped forward and purchased the cinema. Council leader Mike Bell said: “This is great news for the town...I’ve spoken to Merlin Cinemas and assured them of our support for their work to maintain cinema operations at the building. I am confident, with community support, we can embark on a positive and sustainable future for this landmark site.” He added that Merlin has given assurances they will value and promote the cinema’s organ. “They are hoping to reopen the cinema in the near future and will be developing a short and long-term investment plan to improve the building, including the listed features.” (See also Ayr.)

Somerset Live – 10 June; BBC News – 18 July (sent in by Terry Hanstock); ITV News – 9 August (sent to the cta-uk e-group by Darron Keeling); Bristol Live – 9 August

WIGAN (Lancashire)

The former Galleries shopping centre is currently undergoing demolition, and the council has approved a proposal for a ‘Multi Media Centre’. According to the developers, Cityheart and Wigan Council, this would comprise a six screen, 700-seat cinema, multi-lane bowling alley, indoor mini golf, a climbing wall, other indoor leisure activities, a public events space and a games arcade, along with a number of bars and restaurants. These plans have been on the table since an initial planning application was given the green light in 2021, but the £135m proposal has been subject to criticism from councillors and residents, saying that the price is too high during a cost-of-living crisis which culminated in a 4.99 per cent council tax rise this year. However, a Cityheart spokesperson said “The MMC will help boost the local economy by drawing people into the town centre from across the region and will attract people of all ages who want to live in the town centre” as, alongside the Multi Media Centre, the wider Galleries development will comprise 483 mixed tenure homes. There will also be a 144-bedroom hotel and a new market hall and food court.

Manchester Evening News – 9 July; Insider Media – 12 July

WOODBIDGE (Suffolk)

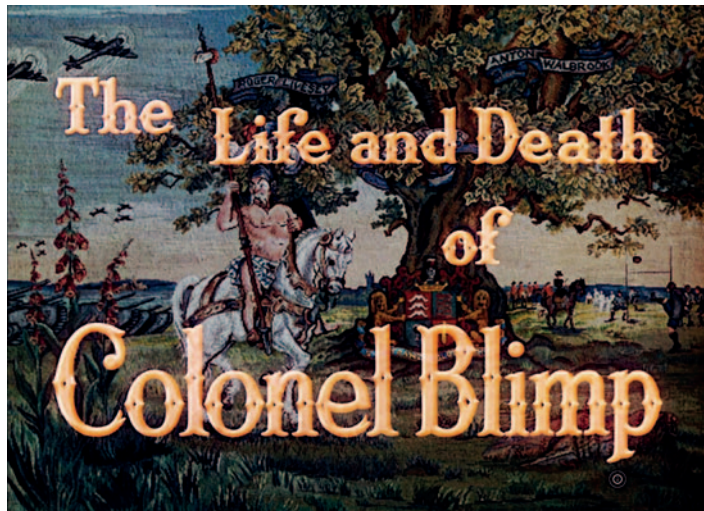
Riverside Theatre has applied to East Suffolk Council to replace a temporary marquee, which houses a dining area and bar outside the cinema, with a permanent, “modern, conservatory-style” structure. The current marquee was erected during the pandemic, before which it would not have been allowed. There is a fear that the council might return to the pre-COVID-19 rules, hence permission for a permanent facility, which should be allowed, is being sought.

East Anglian Daily Times – 30 May

THREE DEBORAH KERRS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

By David C Evans

Yes, that is what filmgoers experienced when Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* arrived at the 2,100-seat Odeon Leicester Square in mid-1943, followed by release on the Odeon circuit a little later, as she played three different characters in the picture, supported by Roger Livesey in the title role and Anton Walbrook in another key part.



The picture had caused some controversy in its inception and production stages and it is reported that Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, tried to prevent its being made as the title, based on David Low's 'Blimp' cartoons in the *London Evening Standard* and some of that characterisation emphasised what Low thought was wrong with out-dated military attitudes in Britain. The inclusion of a sympathetic, 'good' German allegedly disturbed Churchill too. However, although the picture was made, the original choice for the part of the Colonel, Laurence Olivier, was not given leave from duty in the services and so the role went to the less well-known Livesey. As the overriding theme of the film turned out to be an affectionate and witty look at the military career and loves of a British officer, these fears were found to be baseless. However, when it reached the American market in 1945, its distributors there – United Artists – chose to base their advertising campaign on a somewhat titillating romantic angle, which really did not exist in the picture.



The movie was shot in three-colour Technicolor but because of a wartime shortage of Technicolor film stock, the running time of the completed picture had to be reduced so that an adequate number of prints could be made. Although colour was usually a very expensive process at the time, the picture was made for a reasonable £200,000 and this was probably because Denham studio, where the film was made, was already well-stocked with the Edwardian costumes and uniforms required by the script as well as furniture and artifacts of the



period. In charge of the camera was Georges Périnal, who had come to Britain from France, in 1933 and stayed. Music was by Allan Gray who, despite his English-sounding name was a Pole – Josef Zmigrod – who came to London in the same year and like Périnal remained. The credits highlight that the picture is "designed in colour" by Alfred Junge, who came to the UK in the mid-1920s and spent the rest of his career in British film production design. Interestingly, the credits unroll in front of a 'Blimp' tapestry especially made for this purpose by the Royal College of Needlework.



The side wall of the Rialto Coventry Street

By September, 1943, popularity of the film was still evident but, by then, the West End presentation of it had been transferred to the Rialto Coventry Street, which had reopened a year earlier after repairs were made following an air raid in March, 1941. During that attack, the main damage, with many casualties, was done to the Café de Paris nightclub, which was situated under the Rialto. Earlier, in August, 1943, the vast 3,100-seat Granada Tooting had advertised the picture as being "in the best colour you've ever seen", with an additional byline "now see the film you've all read about" emphasising the controversial history behind the production... and really what better way was there to see a good film? A comfortable seat in the luxurious Granada Tooting, Technicolor and, above all, three Deborah Kerrs for the price of one!

Factual Errors (from IMDb)

Clive Candy goes to confront Kaunitz in Berlin, which is in Prussia, but Kaunitz's Stammtisch (regular table for meeting of friends) are drinking from Hofbräuhaus krugs (steins), noted by the 'HB' insignia. The Hofbräuhaus is in Munich, which is the capital of Bavaria, 360 miles away.

No one seems to question the title *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* even though the eponymous character does not die and is very much alive at the story's end.