

## **CASEWORK REPORT: January 2010**

Eva Branscombe, Case Officer

### **STATE, George Street, Grays, Essex FGM Chancellor, 1938, Grade II\***

On 15 December 2009 we were finally allowed inside the State, Grays! This has been a two and a half year effort. Whilst our meetings and presentations might have kept the spotlight on the building in terms of not letting the local authority forget this important heritage asset a new, very positive and highly pro-active appointee at the local authority was finally able to draw all the loose ends together. Not only were we given access to one of our longest and most precious derelict cinemas, but a meeting was scheduled afterwards with English Heritage, the Theatres Trust, the Twentieth Century Society, representatives of the redevelopment organisation and the owner.

We are very pleased to announce that not only is the building dry and tidy inside but the discussions are looking fruitful as well. The State is a difficult case because of the size of the auditorium and the location. Only really the Odeon in Leicester Square compares, but that is in central London. Already two years ago we had recommended that the auditorium could be used as a conference venue and this is also something the owner is looking into. We have invited all parties to a tour of Grade II and II\* listed cinemas that are run successfully as alternative venues. Cinema heritage issues are complex and the interiors are so very sensitive. The CTA are the experts in this field and we do see ourselves as proactive. A large part of our work is educational: letting owners, heritage bodies and local authorities understand the issues involved, which bits are important and must be kept and how to adapt the building without losing the special interest. Everyone present was very interested and our tour will be taking place as soon as possible in the New Year.

### **GAUMONT PALACE, 9 The Broadway, Wood Green, North London William Edward Trent and Ernest Tulley, 1934, Grade II\***

Jeremy Buck, active CTA member and local to this former cinema reports that he has managed to get inside this freshly restored building, now being used as a church. He is thrilled about the restoration job. They have installed a rake in the stalls, as per plans. They have put back the seating in the circle to the original layout and removed the bingo stairs. The safety curtain appears to be still there, in the "raised" position. The colour scheme is described as "grey-green with silver" in the 1934 opening brochure, in graduated tones according to the bands on the wall. But the photos in *Gaumont British Cinemas* by Allen Eyles do not seem to show this grading. In bingo days it was graduated browns then graduated blues in a second colour scheme. In the new scheme, it is mainly pale yellow with white in the lunettes/alcoves, and the ceiling is blue. A bit of a shame as we had recommended that paint scrapings be taken and the original colour scheme be identified and reinstated – a lost opportunity although of course reversible. Generally, a great job, the proscenium arch is finally restored after being carved up so many years ago. Just a shame more people don't get to see the interior!

**GRANADA, Hoe Street, Walthamstow, London**  
**Cecil Masey and Theodore Komisarjevsky, 1930, Grade II\***

Another major feat: Again, we have finally been let inside this fantastic building. While it is safe and tidy, we must report that there is some water ingress at the back of the stage area where a window is broken. The poor organ console was underneath.

**PAVILION, 58 Shepherds Bush Green, London**  
**Frank Verity, 1923, Grade II**

We have been consulted on the plans to redevelop this long-empty cinema. If the application is successful this will become a hotel with a bar, restaurant and coffee shop at ground level with leisure and conference facilities etc. To make things a bit complicated this application is based on two previous applications that had received permission in 2002 and 2005/6 respectively, but previously no listed building consent was applied for or given for the external alterations to the listed structure.

Whilst we have never objected to the principle of converting this cinema to hotel use, as the interior is long gone, we are concerned that the new use could possibly also seriously impact the still very much intact street frontage.

The proposal seeks to construct a new attic floor to the entrance block and completely remove the wall of the upper portion of the façade facing Shepherds Bush Green. This wall is to be replaced with a perforated masonry screen to be constructed in front of a new glazed wall. Then the fenestration on the lower part of the façade facing Shepherds Bush Green is to be completely changed. We find all of these changes highly objectionable and have expressed this in our letter to the local authority.

We consider these to be far too radical interventions for this Grade II listed building regarding the conservation of its architectural and historic merit. The façade facing Shepherds Bush Green is the principal elevation of this building and the proposal would change it irreversibly. There is significant scope to adapt and change the former cinema to hotel use on the three elevations that do not face the green. The cinema had been awarded the RIBA London Street Architecture award in 1923 for the building's significant townscape contributions in terms of its street frontage. The reason to list this cinema was not because of the interior, which then had already been lost, but because of the excellent façade. We consider this unacceptable and are gravely concerned about the failure of this application to sensitively and successfully address the heritage issues in its adaptation of this building for reuse as a hotel. This certainly is not a heritage lead approach to adaptive reuse!

## **PRESS COVERAGE**

### **Leicester Square at Risk**

Many of you might have seen the article in the Evening Standard on 26 November 2009? Well, yes we do think that Leicester Square is at risk. None

of the cinemas is actually listed although most people just assume that the flagship Odeon is. But it isn't. We tried a couple of years ago but it was turned down because there had been too many changes. Very disappointing, because the interior is still there to a certain extent: the volume and some of the plasterwork, the organ and the very, very rare painted safety curtain. The leaping ladies are not original. Usually cinema listing relies very heavily on the intact interior, but here we also have an exterior that is unique. True "Nachtarchitektur" where the form being black just disappears into the night and the neon makes out the building. The building becomes its own sign. Very, very cool. The Warner/Vue is completely changed on the inside. But that facade is really five-star Art Deco - still. There is just too much clutter about. That's the real problem.

But what makes Leicester Square is this hub of cinemas - the whole lot in one location. Now there is planning permission in place to knock down the Odeon West End and build a hotel there and have a token cinema in the basement. If this sets a precedent, Leicester Square will be gone. Westminster is desperate to have their own iconic modern building, but they have so much historic building stock. Conservation Areas are everywhere. It seems that they put less value to these buildings than elsewhere. If you look at all the press coverage of the replacement buildings for the wonderfully kitsch Swiss Centre, it's all about replacing this with an iconic building. But what was built is just blandness.

The Odeon West End demolition is on hold because of the economy, so we have a golden opportunity. We really need to draw attention to what might be happening. The facade of this cinema is nice conservation area Beaux Arts. Why is this allowed to go? The replacement building really just lacks any sense of context and is a hotel with a cinema in the basement – a token to planning regulations to keep cinema use in the location. If all these "context" buildings are allowed to be replaced then what will Leicester Square look like, what will it be? Bland hotels with cinema screens in the basements? Is this really what we want?

## **LISTING**

### **ODEON (aka Theatr Elli), Station Road, Llanelli, Carmarthenshire, Wales Harry Weedon with PJ Price, 1938, Grade II**

Very unexpected good news from Wales: This cinema has been listed. The 'Cinema Treasures' website tells us:

"The Llanelli Film Centre was originally the Odeon Theatre, designed by Harry Weedon (assistant in charge was P.J. Price) and opening on Saturday 18th June 1938 with seating for 1450 (900 in stalls and 550 in balcony).

The design was typical of the circuit style, with rounded corners and faience tiling, the main ODEON sign placed above the five tall windows above the front canopy. The opening film was "Paradise for Two".

The cinema was taken over by Classic on 9th December 1967 and renamed Classic. Classic tripled the cinema and reopened on 1st October 1971 (the circle was extended forward to create Screen 1 with 516 seats and the remaining cinemas were created in the rear stalls seating 273 and 122). The opening film in Screen 1 was "The Hunting Party", in Screen 2 it was "The Virgin and the Gypsy", with Screen 3 offering "Danish Blue" (this small screen remained showing sexploitation movies).

As business declined, Classic sold the cinema to the local borough council, which took it over in May 1976 and renamed it the Llanelli Film Centre.

The council modernised the upstairs auditorium, providing full stage facilities. Screens 2 and 3 now seat 310 and 122.

The cinema remains open today as Theatr Elli, retaining its unaltered Harry Weedon exterior design, and continues showing first run films very successfully.

The Theatr Elli was designated a Grade II Listed building in October 2009."

<http://cinematreasures.org/theater/7304/>

## **CINEMAS AT SERIOUS RISK**

### **NEW VICTORIA/ODEON, Prince's Way, Bradford, Yorkshire William Illingworth, 1930, unlisted**

The call-in request has regrettably not been successful. Our only hope now is that the recession will stop any demolition and redevelopment plans.

### **PARAMOUNT/ODEON, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle upon Tyne Verity & Beverly, 1931, Delisted**

We had been unsure about the status of this cinema but now are very sad to report that while it had been listed, a delisting subsequently occurred. The building was gutted by the owners. Very sad indeed!

## **SHORT CAMPAIGNING UPDATES**

### **WHITELADIES PICTURE HOUSE, Whiteladies Road, Bristol Architect unknown, 1921, Grade II**

This building has been the subject of two applications: one for conversion to a church and the other for conversion to retail. Both have been approved. We remain very worried.

### **LONSDALE, Warwick Road, Carlisle, Cumbria Percy L Browne and Son, 1931, Grade II**

There is a local campaign to convert this building to an arts centre. We have been asked to support this.

**ODEON, Northgate Street, Chester**  
**Harry Weedon with Robert Bullivant, 1936, Grade II**

An application has been lodged for conversion to mixed use.

**CAPITOL/ODEON, 166 London Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire**  
**Martin Hatfield and Robert Cromie, 1931, Unlisted**

Good news on this case: It is finally to be returned to cinema use!

**ODEON, Runnymede Avenue/Crescent West, Cleveleys, Blackpool**  
**George Tonge, 1934, Unlisted**

This former cinema that has been on bingo is now closed.

**COLISEUM Cinema, 18-20 Albion Street, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire**  
**Architect unknown, 1913 as theatre, 1931 as cinema, locally listed**

We have sent a letter objecting to plans for demolition.

**BYFIELD HALL, Barnes, South London; Unlisted**

This building is now empty. It functioned as a cinema until 1953 when it became a music studio. There is local interest in returning this to theatrical use. Sadly, the interior has been gutted.

**NEW VICTORIA, Preston; Unlisted**

This building has been closed for some time now. We do not know if anything of interest remains on the interior.