

CASEWORK REPORT: September 2009

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GAUMONT STATE, Kilburn High Road, London George Coles, 1937, II*

Plans are moving forward to change this wonderful building from its former bingo use to a place of worship. Tim Foster Architects have submitted plans for minor changes that will make the building usable as a church. We have not objected to these plans. The full restoration is going to be phased, as at the Gaumont Palace in Wood Green.

REGAL, Port Street, Evesham, Worcestershire Hurley Robinson, 1932, Grade II

Planning approval has been granted to give this cinema a new lease on life as a cinema/bar, similar to the Rex in Berkhamsted. Apart from the removal of some of the seating and an original barrier (which, in our opinion, should be retained) we have given our full support to these plans. It is precisely these kinds of applications where CTA Casework can provide a beneficial and free service as independent experts, and we had been in contact with the new owners for several months.

NATIONAL PICTURE THEATRE, Beverley Road, Kingston upon Hull Runton and Barry for the De-Luxe Theatre Company, 1914, Grade II

This former cinema was listed as a war ruin two years ago. This was a real surprise to us as it had been completely demolished except for the front façade, with the vestibule and foyer behind it. Luckily the 150 people who were in the cinema at the time of the bombing were evacuated before the auditorium eventually collapsed. The air raids went on in Hull longer than anywhere else in the country and only about 6% of the city's buildings remained unscathed. But time heals most wounds and so Hull rebuilt itself and the cinema was the only bomb damaged site left 66 years later when it was listed. It is important as a reminder of the terrors of war, but also because cinemas played such an important role during the war years. They were a place of information and news and also for the ever important distraction of film entertainment.

After all these years the owners want to redevelop the site, leaving the façade standing but build up behind it with a restaurant on the ground floor and flats above. We have objected to this because we feel this would make a mockery out of English Heritage's decision to list this cinema as a historic ruin. This relic should be stabilized and turned into an 'interpretation' such as a memorial garden where the location could be actively appreciated not only by the people of Hull but by visitors from afar. There are examples for this kind of approach internationally where bomb damaged buildings have been left in place as quiet reminders.

LISTING

PICTUREDROME, 51 Canada Grove, Bognor Regis, West Sussex Arthur Smith as Assembly Rooms in 1886, films from 1897, 1919 conversion to full cinema use by the architect and owner Peter D Stonham and then renamed Picturedrome, Grade II

A major success: This wonderful early cinema has just been listed at Grade II!!!!

This was prompted by an application from the Theatres Trust; we had just recently sent in a letter. The building is exemplary in illustrating the complex history of the evolution of cinema as a building type. The moving image is undeniably one of the great developments of modernity and the world as we experience it today would certainly not be possible without it. Historic cinema buildings are the physical manifestation of this groundbreaking development and early examples are now very rare. They are very important as part of our nation's architectural and social heritage.

While the *Picturedrome* was originally designed and built by the local architect Arthur Smith as Assembly Rooms with a multitude of entertainment offered, its primary interest lies in the fact that it was very soon used as a cinema. The earliest film shows at the turn of the century (1896/97) were held by travelling showmen either as fairground attractions or held in existing shops and other available spaces that were provisionally adapted. But as the films shown became longer and this form of entertainment grew increasingly more popular it was common that the largest halls of an area, such as Corn Exchanges, theatres or other large halls were adapted more permanently than when they had been used as a temporary film show location and hired out for this purpose. Eventually cinema became the most popular form of entertainment.

Of the *New Assembly Rooms* Alan Eyles informs us in his book *Cinema in West Sussex* (1996):

“Films were first presented here in 1897 when David Devant brought his Animatograph to Bognor on the 14-16 of December... Among the regular touring entertainers who used the Assembly Rooms, the Poole brothers were eagerly awaited on their annual visits, and they were among the first to bring films to Bognor as part of their all-round variety programmes... The Assembly Rooms were hired out two or three times a year to the travelling film showmen in the first decade of the century. Poole’s would stay a whole week, giving one evening performance each day and two matinees, usually arriving in the last quarter of the year,”

These film shows enjoyed tremendous popularity and the hall was filled to capacity. Soon safety became an issue for what was still then called the *New Assembly Rooms* and by 1911 adaptations were made by the owners in the form of a separate room for the projector and lowering the ceiling to make the acoustics better. At this time the venue was renamed *Queen’s Hall* in commemoration of the coronation. But although the changes had been made to better accommodate film shows, the hall was still primarily used for live performances.

The building was sold after the war and with the increasing demand for film the building was converted professionally in 1919 by the architect and owner Peter D Stonham. He had also been the architect for the earlier *Picturedrome* in Worthing that had been purpose built in 1913. Many changes were made to the hall making the building more attractive and recognizable as a cinema and also more functional for permanent film. The surviving canopy from this phase is rare and intact. At this point the building was also renamed *Picturedrome* – it had officially become a cinema.

NEW OLYMPIA, Todmorden Unlisted

Several months ago we were approached by the local authority, Calderdale, regarding the listability of the New Olympia. Externally it looked like a fairly typical faïence front of an equally typical small town cinema of the mid-thirties. Richard Gray was invited to have a look around inside but he found too little of the original interior survives, so listing was not a real option in this case. Nevertheless, we have recommended that the façade should be retained if there are plans in the future to redevelop this site.

CINEMAS AT SERIOUS RISK

GAUMONT PALACE/ODEON, Hallgate, Doncaster, South Yorkshire WE Trent with his son W Sydney Trent, 1934, Unlisted

Planning consent has been granted for the demolition of this cinema. For some time we have wondered whether the superb frieze on the street façade survives behind the awful 1960s cladding. Now it appears this feature is still there. If the building is demolished the council has promised that it will be salvaged and reinstated elsewhere. Although the official go-ahead has been given to pull this building down, there is quite an active local campaign and we have not given up hope on this case yet.

MAJESTIC, Old Street and Delamere, Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester Arnold England, 1920, Unlisted

This building is threatened with demolition for a car park, which is completely unacceptable. Richard Gray has been quoted to this effect in the local press. The former cinema, which is on a corner site, has a really good façade.

SHORT CAMPAIGNING UPDATES

**CENTRAL, 21 Hobson Street, Cambridge
1930, GP Banyard, Unlisted**

This building is now closed and its future is uncertain. The façade is in excellent art deco white faience, with an Egyptian motive of the winged globe in the centre and there is quite a bit left of the interior decoration as well.

**CLAPTON CINEMATOGRAPH THEATRE (aka Kenning Hall Cinema) former Assembly Room, 229 Lower Clapton Road, Clapton, London
1896 and converted for cinema use in 1912, George Duckworth, Unlisted**

Richard Gray and other members of the CTA were invited to have a look at the interior. Regrettably not much of the original interior is left after having been used as a nightclub, but this 1950s plush interior is of real interest in its own right.

**RIALTO (later Granada), 25 Church Road, Upper Norwood (Crystal Palace), London
AC Matthews, 1928, Unlisted**

This building has closed as a bingo club but there is a vociferous local campaign for reestablishing it as a cinema.