NEW PALACE BALDWIN STREET 1912-80
INTRODUCTION
This Book, which is in Two Parts, features historic photographs with supplementary notes on Bristol Cinemas. Part One covers from 1909 to 1914. Part Two continues through 1914 to 1940. Some 61 cinemas in Bristol, starting with those showing silent films, have been identified of which 48 are included in this book. Information sources include the specialist websites Cinema Treasures and Arthur Lloyd, the 2005 book "Bristol Cinemas" and the Allen Eyles publications of the Cinema Theatre Association and British Film Institute.

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BRISTOL CINEMAS IN PART ONE 1900-1914

Cinemas are listed in order of the year in which they started. Many date from before World War I, the majority of the others from the 1930s. A few were destroyed in the World War II Blitz on Bristol. Now, many have been through a change of ownership and most have been closed or demolished. Some cinemas have been used as a bingo hall, supermarket, shop and even a garage.

This author was born in Bristol and lived there until 1954, being a regular patron of those cinemas listed in bold type. The names of the cinemas used are those familiar to the author. Alternative names are shown in brackets in the listing below.

1909-54 Town Hall. Cannon Street, Bedminster.
1909-54 Vestry Hall. Pennywell Road.
1910-63 Tatler. Carey's Lane. (Olympia).
1910-33 Queen's Picture House. No. 17 Peter Street.
1911-27 Clare Street Picture House.
1911-26 Fishponds Picture House.
1911-90 His Majestys. No. 424 Stapleton Rd. (Concorde).
1911-76 Kings, Old Market Street. (Kings-ABC).
1911-64 Park Picture House. Church Road, St. George. (Park-ABC).
1911-19 Picturedrome. East Street, Bedminster.
1911-41 Redcliffe Hall Picture Palace. Redcliffe Hill.
1912-24 Coliseum. Park Row.
1912-61 Granada. Church Road. Redfield. (St. George's Hall).
1912-63 Regal. (Staple Hill Picture House).
1912-49 Regent Picture House. Regent Street, Kingswood.
1912-16 Tivoli. Broadmead.
1913-56 Brislington Picture Hall. Sandy Park Road.
1913-59 Hippodrome. No. 309 Stapleton Road, Eastville.
1913-68 Metropole. Ashley Rd.
1914-73 Globe. Church Road, Lawrence Hill.
1914-54 Plaza. No. 275 North Street, Bedminster. (Ashton).
1914-63 Premier. Gloucester Rd.
1914-40 Triangle. Clifton. (Triangle-ABC).
BRISTOL CINEMAS IN PART TWO 1914-1940

Cinemas are listed in order of the year in which they started. Many date from before World War I, the majority of the others from the 1930s. A few were destroyed in the World War II Blitz on Bristol. Now, many have been through a change of ownership and most have been closed or demolished. Some cinemas have been used as a bingo hall, supermarket, shop and even a garage.

This author was born in Bristol and lived there until 1954, being a regular patron of those cinemas listed in bold type. The names of the cinemas used are those familiar to the author. Alternative names are shown in brackets in the listing below.

1915-41 Hippodrome. East Street, Bedminster. (Stoll).
1919-22 Clifton Cinema. Queens Road, Clifton. (Victoria Rooms).
1919-74 Scala. Cromwell Road, St. Andrews. (Pringle's Picture Palace/Zetland).
1921-2002 Whiteladies Picture House. Whiteladies Road, Clifton. (Whiteladies-ABC).
1922-36 Baths Cinema. Gloucester Road, Bishopston. (Bristol North Baths).
1928-59 Kingsway. No. 93 Two Mile Hill.
1928-40 Regent. Castle St. (Granada).
1933-59 Carlton. Canford Lane, Westbury-on-Trym.
1933-63 Embassy, Queens Avenue.
1933-95 Gaiety. Wells Rd.
1933-56 News Theatre. Peter Street, Top of Castle Street.
1933-62 Savoy. Station Road, Shirehampton.
1936-61 Odeon. Winterstoke Road, Bedminster. (Ambassador).
1938-61 Broadway. Filwood Park, Knowle.
1938-61 Odeon. Kingswood. (Ambassador)
1938-present Odeon. Union St.
1938-71 Orpheus. Northumbria Drive, Henleaze. (New Orpheus/Studio Five-to Seven).
1938-68 Ritz. Bristol Hill, Brislington.
1940-80 Rex. North Street, Bedminster. (Rex-ABC).
The Gem was once a Music Hall Theatre (the Vaudeville) and later it became one of the earliest cinemas in Bristol. The Gem was owned by A.F. Moon, who later built both the Whiteladies in Clifton and the Regent in Kingswood.

Although the Gem could seat 1200 people over three floors, it was one of the last Bristol cinemas to go over to the talkies. It seems the problem was accommodating all the sound equipment. This was done eventually when the filmmakers stopped making silent films, but seems to have created other problems.

With the seating being hard benches nailed to the floor, it was considered a fleapit, closed in 1932 and operated as a boxing club. The building became run-down, suffering further damage in the Blitz of 1940.
In 1909, Ralph Pringle took a lease on the old Bedminster Town Hall which dates back to 1892. It was converted into a very basic cinema. At some point it changed hands, first to F.J. Pringle who sold it to Bruce Atkinson, who owned or leased a number of buildings in the area. In later years the building became badly run down. The cinema closed in 1954. It became a supermarket and then a furniture store.
Vestry Hall, once a Quaker Workhouse dating back to 1696, was built in 1880 by the Bristol Corporation Baths Department who operated it as a segregated sports gymnasium. In 1909, it became another Ralph Pringle cinema with 520 seats. It was later taken over and seems to have continued in very poor condition. This lasted until 1954 when much of the surrounding land was bulldozed.
The building changed from a roller-skating rink to the Olympia in 1910, a "penny gaff", showing silent movies. Situated just off Old Market Street, it faced strong competition from the nearby Vestry, and later from the Kings. After the Second World War, it was closed for modernisation, reopening in 1947 as the Tatler. It specialised in showing foreign films, many with subtitles. This proved extremely successful. However, this didn't last and the cinema closed in 1963. Bristol City Council paid £31,000 for the building, then had it demolished to make way for road improvements.
Opening in 1910, the Queen's Picture House was Bristol's first purpose-built cinema distinguished by the Coat-of-Arms of the City of Bristol over the entrance. The cinema seated 380 and an unusual feature, before the days of ventilation and air conditioning systems, was the provision of a mechanically-operated opening roof. In 1933, the Picture House was demolished and replaced by the News Theatre.
Built and owned by the Provincial Cinematograph Theatre Ltd, the Clare Street Picture House opened in July 1911 with 470 seats. Cary Grant said he remembered visiting it as a child. However, it was considered too small and the owners closed it in March 1927 and built the larger Regent in Castle Street which opened in July 1928.
When the Picture House opened in February 1911, Fishponds was still a village. The Picture House was built by a John Blake who, in 1913, sold the cinema to Henry John Davey for £700. The Picture House repeatedly changed ownership. In 1921, Davey sold it to Herbert Wren who already owned the Regal in Staple Hill. In 1922, Wren sold it to Sid Macaire who had been Manager of Old Market's Empire. Believing he would be unable to compete with the new Vandyck Cinema, he sold the Fishponds Picture House to Bristol City Council in August 1926. The Vandyck opened in November of the same year. The Council turned the building into a Library.
The Picture House opened in 1911 as Jesty's Picture Palace. It was soon renamed His Majesty's. It was owned by George Allen, who also owned the nearby Eastville Hippodrome and the Metropole. His Majesty's originally seated 800, virtually three times the size of the Hippodrome. It is said, at this time "Stapleton Road was a very well-to-do area."

Allen carried our major alterations to His Majesty's in the late 1930s, which included increasing the seating capacity to 1150. He had earlier built the Carlton in 1933 and the Ritz in 1938.

Allen died in the late 1950s. His Wife continued to run the business until 1969 when she sold it to the Northern Star Group, who wanted to turn it into a bingo hall. Planning was refused, but reopened it as the Concorde Cinema in 1973. This closed in 1990, the building becoming a furniture store.
The first cinema on this site was owned by British Electric Theatres and called King's Hall. After the First World War, Ralph Bromhead took over the cinema, making significant additions and changes, which cost £15,000. It reopened in 1921 as the King's Cinema and even had its own Symphony Orchestra of twelve musicians (at £68 per week between them). Faced with strong competition from the nearby Regent, they started showing the talkies—the first cinema in Bristol to do so. This began in March 1929 with the screening of Al Jolson in *The Singing Fool*, which broke all attendance records.

In the late 1930s, the King's was taken over by the ABC Group, surviving the bombing of the Second World War, finally closing in December 1976. It was later demolished and an office block built on the site.
The Park Picture House got its name because of its location on the edge of St. George's Park. A balcony was added in the 1920s, increasing seating capacity to 1020. During the Second World War, the building was used as a base for local fire-watching.

After the war, the cinema was bought by Sidney Gamlin, who owned both the Vandyck and the Cabot. In the mid-1950s, he secured the rights to Cinemascope films after the Odeon Group had a disagreement with 20th Century Fox. Gamlin spent £8000 on the necessary equipment "including a screen that was too big for the small cinema and is said to have overlapped its side walls." In 1964, after a disagreement with staff, he closed the cinema. Opposed to gambling, he refused its conversion to a bingo hall. Planning permission to convert the building into a car showroom was refused. In 1967, the cinema was demolished.
PICTUREDROME BEDMINSTER 1911-19
Opened in 1911, the East Street Picturedrome was situated between the Wills cigarette factory and the local police station, being known locally as the "Penny Pops". In 1912, the number of seats was doubled to 450. It was in competition with the nearby Bedminster Town Hall which had opened in 1909. Survival became more difficult when the Bedminster Hippodrome became a cinema in 1915. The Picturedrome closed in 1919 and became the Dockers' Hall.
Situated on Redcliffe Hill, the Picture Palace seated only around 100. There were problems with the building (infested with fleas and rats). In response, the usherettes used a perfume spray gun. In 1941, the Picture Palace was completely destroyed in the Blitz.
Having previously having been a roller-skating rink, an ice rink, an exhibition hall, a dance hall and even a car showroom, this wedge-shape building opened as a cinema in 1912. During the First World War, it was used as an aircraft factory. It had 450 seats on one floor and a succession of owners failed to make it pay. Even the addition of a Ladies' Orchestra made little difference and in 1924 the Coliseum was closed. It was badly damaged during the 1940 Blitz, leaving little but the exterior walls. It was later restored and used by the University.
The cinema located in Church Road opened in 1912 as the St. George's Hall Electric Palace, with seating on benches. In the late 1920s, the Pugsley family took over the hall and purchased several nearby buildings to make a larger cinema. Now called St. George's Hall it opened on 26 December 1927, having a balcony, 750 seats and an orchestra. In 1929, with the arrival of the talkies it was renamed the Granada. The Granada survived the Second World War, but closed in 1961 becoming a bingo hall.
The People's Palace opened in 1892 as a music hall. In 1896, it showed an early film by the Lumiere Brothers, but only opened as a cinema in 1912. It changed ownership in 1920 and again in 1927 when it was sold to the Gaumont British Picture Corporation, who carried out a major refurbishment and renamed it the New Palace. It now had a steep balcony, 1600 seats, a flood-lit front, a cafe, its own orchestra and an organ console that could rise to stage level. It regularly featured on BBC broadcasts.

The New Palace survived the Blitz. In 1952, it was renamed the Gaumont. It finally closed in 1980, becoming a night club, when its frontage Listed Status saved it from demolition.
The Staple Hill Picture House was built in 1912 and extended in 1927 and renamed the Regal, when the original dome as removed and a cafe added. The cinema remained in the Wren family. In 1940, it was recorded that there were two National Gas Engines in the garden, enabling them to generate their own electricity. After closing in 1963, it became a bingo hall. This closed in 1992 and it became a church.
Located in Regent Street in Kingswood, the Kingswood Regent Picture House opened in 1912 showing silent films with piano accompaniment. It is said to have sold winkles rather than ice cream. The cinema closed in 1949 and was replaced by a BeWise Store.
The Tivoli was originally the Star Music Hall, believed to date from 1896 when it may have been one of the first Bristol music halls to show moving pictures, though only for a few weeks. The Tivoli, which became a cinema in 1912, seated only 300. This may be the reason it lasted for only four years, until 1916. The building was demolished in 1952.
Located on Sandy Park Road, the cinema was originally called the Empress, though this was short-lived. The Brislington Picture Hall was owned by the Tomkins Family who also ran Bristol Film Services Ltd. In 1938, a larger and more modern cinema, the Ritz, was built close by. The Brislington Picture Hall was forced to modernise and lasted until 1956. It reopened as a bingo hall in 1962 and sometime later was converted into flats under the name Kinema House.
The Eastville Hippodrome on Stapleton Road seated only 300, but included some double seats for courting couples. In spite of this, the cinema closed in 1959 and the building became part of the Bristol Trading Centre.
The Knowle Picture House, on the Wells Road, was generally considered to be of excellent design though perhaps too ornate for some. It made a loss in its first years of operation and by 1919 it was in receivership. Under new ownership in 1922, a balcony was added and both good and bad years followed until it closed in 1961 and was later demolished.
The Metropole opened in 1913 and seated 600 people. It was refurbished and enlarged in 1938 to seat 1460 people and renamed the Metropole De Lux. It closed in 1968 and was converted into a bingo hall. New flats, known as Ashley Court were built on the site.
A few houses and shops in Jane Street and Church Road were demolished to make way for the Globe cinema which opened in March 2014. It had a nine-piece orchestra which played in the evenings. The Globe could seat 1172 people. It even had lavatories- inside for Ladies, outside for Gentlemen.

The Globe showed its last silent film in 1929 and switched to the talkies. "In 1933, the manager needed a gimmick. He put a fish tank in the foyer, filled it with water, but didn't put any fish in it. He put a sign on it which read *Come and see the invisible fish.*" Staff were amazed when people actually asked where the invisible fish were!

Attracting audiences became difficult during the 1950s and early 1960s. The Globe closed as a cinema in January 1973 and was later demolished to make way for City Motors.
In 1914, William Wendley developed the Magnet Cinema in St. Pauls by buying and combining 51-53 Newfoundland Street with the houses behind them in 23-24 Orange Street. This building with its distinctive arched entrance could seat 520 people. In 1919, it was sold to a Mr. Chamberlain who went on to own three other local cinemas. In the 1930s, slum clearance led to closure of the Magnet. In the years which followed the building was used for food packing, sales of office equipment and then by a building contractor.
The Ashton cinema at 275 North Street opened in 1914 and is recorded as being small, well-kept and family-friendly. In later years, the name changed to the Plaza, but failed to compete with the larger nearby Odeon and Ritz. It closed in 1954, was converted into a supermarket and later into a furniture showroom.
Samuel Jackson, the owner of a bicycle shop in Stokes Croft and an amusement arcade in Weston-super-Mare, built and opened the Premier cinema on Gloucester Road in 1914. When it was renovated in the 1920s it could seat 700 people including 100 in the balcony. The Premier closed in 1963 and was taken over the building firm of A.F. Alders who used it to show and sell paint, wallapers, bathrooms and central heating. Later, it became a supermarket.
Originally a roller-skating rink, the Triangle with its distinctive curved and pillared entrance, opened in 1914 and proved extremely popular. It was owned by Emmanuel Harris and included a cafe with a trio and an orchestra between shows. When threatened with competition in 1921 from the nearby Whiteladies cinema, Harris cleverly made deals with 20th Century Fox, MGM and others to get the choice of their best films. He later took over the Whiteladies, but in the 1930s he sold both the Triangle and Whiteladies to ABC. He later bought the Scala off Zetland Road, the Plaza in Bedminster, leased the North Baths on Gloucester Road and built the Savoy at Shirehampton. Unfortunately, the Triangle was destroyed by enemy bombing in November 1940.
William Greene (later Friese-Greene) has an unusual connection with the history of film and cinemas. He was born in Bristol on 7 September 1855 and went on to be apprenticed to a photographer and established his own business in Bath. He met John Rudge who was experimenting with magic lanterns. In 1880, he met John Rudge who was experimenting with magic lanterns. In 1885, he opened two photographic shops in London with Esme Collins, who would go on to be a pioneer of British filmmaking. In 1889-90, he worked with Mortimer Evans and Frederick Varley on cameras that could take five pictures per second (too slow to be successful). In 1898, he experimented with colour photography. He patented obsessively but true advances were made elsewhere. He died on 5 May 1921.
During his lifetime, William Friese-Greene made extravagant claims to have been the "Inventor of kinematography." Rightly or wrongly, he became known as the inventor of moving pictures, his story being told in the 1951 British film "The Magic Box". He was certainly one of the first to work on the concept of moving pictures and a founding father of British film.
WILLIAM FRIESE-GREENE REMEMBERED

One of the commemorative plaques in Bristol. There are others in Bath, London and Brighton.
A: PLANNING

I: THE SUPER CINEMA

By Robert Cromie

The subject of this analysis is a modern cinema in a provincial town. The site has three frontages; and the clients desired a cinema with the maximum seating accommodation (1,714). The plans comply with all the regulations governing the erection of cinemas, and with present-day requirements as regards the circulation of the public, film projection, acoustics, seating, sight lines, café, and the like. All the salient points of the plans are referred to by Mr. Cromie in his analysis. His observations indicate generally the fundamental principles to be followed in designing a super cinema in any part of the country. Some counties, like Middlesex and Surrey, have their own regulations for the erection of cinemas. In counties and in towns where there are no regulations, the county and municipal authorities usually request that cinemas shall be designed to conform with those of the London County Council. These are published under the title of Places of Public Entertainment, by P. S. King & Co. Price is 6d. net.

ANALYSIS

ENTRANCE HALL.—Front of house planning is difficult on a cramped site. Points to note in the plans are the reduction of staircases to the minimum, and the provision of a separate entrance from the main street to the café. Forthcoming programmes are shown inside the entrance hall, the staircases being decorated only by stills.

It is impossible to use any front staircase without seeing the café. Exits lead to different streets.

Stalls entrances are approached from the auditorium.

CIRCULATION.—Rear stalls are entered on one side, the check-taker directing patrons to gangways inside the auditorium.

Balcony is served entirely by one staircase from the entrance, thus the entrance hall planning is divided into two in the simplest manner.

Issue of tickets for admission is centralized in one pay-office containing two machines operated when necessary by one girl.

Chocolate counter is accessible after the pay-box has been passed and cannot be overlooked.

Small cloak room provided—this is often used only for parcels.

THE STALLS FLOOR.—This is “dished” with a continuous one-in-ten rake—the maximum permitted by authorities, and is found to be sufficient if the screen is correctly positioned. It allows 6 ins. rise over each second row, i.e., allowing 2 ft. 6 ins. for stalls spacing. All floors, taking screened-down seating should be finished in 1/2 in. wood, laid diagonally.

SEATING.—All seating should be concentric. It is not practicable to stagger theatre chairs. The slope of the chair back and the standard are arranged in accordance with the rake, whether designed for balcony or stalls.

Space saving may be effected by side seats next walls, but this is undesirable.

Rows should be of even numbers.

Stalls seating should not be less than 2 ft. 6 ins. rear; 2 ft. 4 ins. front.

FRONT OF HOUSE ACCOMMODATION.—Staff rooms for men and women fitted with lockers are best planned at the front of the house.

Separate lavatories should be provided.
PLANNING THE SUPER CINEMA 1936

FIRST FLOOR ACCOMMODATION.—Separate staff room for kitchen staff.
Common room.
Storage-room desirable near office.
Office for management and local publicity only. (Administration will be from Circuit headquarters.)

PROSCENIUM SPLAY WALLS.—Splay walls on either side of the proscenium are the logical outcome of economical planning and are typical of British and American cinemas. The open spaces so often featured in photographs of continental theatres are often the result of wasteful design. In this instance a space of about 18 ins. is added to the curved splay for decorative effect—a simple treatment of concealed vertical lighting, the lamps being accessible from the rear.

CAFÉ.—Café is planned over the entrance hall in the usual way. It does not interfere with access to the lower balcony.
Kitchen occupies all available space and is sufficient for the business expected.
Kitchen staff access is from the balcony exit stairs.
Kitchen staff accommodation is next the offices at higher level.
A small office is required for the manageress and as much storage space as possible (ventilated).

BALCONY.—The sight line from rear of balcony should strike the foot of the orchestra rail. The sight line under the balcony front from the rear of stalls should at least reach the top of the screen, allowing 5 ft. 4 ins. for eye line at the barrier.
Access to the balcony should be by centre corridor (i.e., tunnel) from foyer level.
Furniture should be "loved" to cut out light and noise.
Balcony stepping are: rear 2 ft. 9 ins.; front 2 ft.

STAGE.—Irresistibly required except in smallest cinemas.
Stage depth is defined by the distance of the screen from the front row. This is dictated by an angle of 35 degrees taken from the end seat of the front row at 3 ft. 6 ins. above stalls floor to the top of the picture. Reasonable, viewing room is required.
Note: Pass doors, exit doors and property doors.
The minimum height of stage should be sufficient to exclude the bastions and trunks from view of front end seats.
The stage should not slope.

ACCOMMODATION ACCESSORY TO THE STAGE: (Minimum).
Two dressing rooms.
Separate lavatories essential.
Musical director or organist’s room.
Music store.
Electrician’s store.
Planning the Super Cinema 1936

Orchestra—Since the advent of the cinema organ, the orchestra is usually dismissed from theatres of this size, but the desirability of placing the console on the centre line of the stage necessitates the usual rail to guide the audience to the front stalls exit. Continental cinemas are usually without this feature—hence their stage fronts can be treated in a less stereotyped manner.

Organ—The console is shown in the best position, visible from every seat. It is placed on an electric drum-and-cable lift switch operated by the organist.

Provision is made for the motor under the stage in a ventilated chamber. The console-well is guarded by a metal surround.

The organist approaches his seat by an under-stage corridor at the stage end.

By means of an electric attachment a piano placed on the stage can be played from the console.

The organ itself is housed in the roof over the proscenium. (This is in some respects a better position than under the stage.)

The sound duct is “reserved” to avoid time-lag between the speaking pipes and the organists. The duct is a horizontal slot in the ceiling fitted with a fume-plaster grille and covered with heavy mesh on light steel (for safety).

The chambers are plastered and ventilated, also electrically heated.

The blower chamber is adjacent—the air intake is from the auditorium, not from the exterior.

Projection Department—Should be accessible from inside the building. Projection chamber must be approachable through the open air.

Alternative means of escape are required to the chamber and raised room and usually to other parts.

The accompanying plans show provision for two projects 3 ft. 6 ins. apart; two spot lanterns; non-synchronous machine (if required); cutter-bank.

All the apertures must be glazed and guarded by automatically closing shutters.

The customary employment of rectifiers and batteries demands accommodation accordingly.

A small automechanical room should be provided for the operators.

Operators’ w.c. should be placed near the projection chamber. Battery rooms should be well ventilated. They should be lighted only by a small window or skylight.

Heating and Ventilation.—Plenum system essential—preferably with a “mist spray” water washer.

The boiler house, necessarily under the stage in this case, includes provision for a fuel store. A mechanical stoker is employed with automatic feed.

The plenum chamber is on the top floor over the boiler room.

Acoustics.—The acoustical demands of a cinema are extreme.

“Wide-range frequency”—from a bluish whisper to full-tone organ playing is best satisfied by a streamline section.

The auditorium ceiling should take closely to the operators’ sight line.

Sound-absorbent material is not necessarily required.
TYPICAL FILM PROJECTOR ROOMS
REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

BRISTOL & BRITISH CINEMAS
CTA Cinema Theatre Association

1989 Epsom Entertained, Trevor White, Privately Published.
1993 ABC The First Name in Entertainment, Allen Eyles, CTA, London.
2001 Old Cinemas, Allen Eyles, Shire, Princes Risborough.
2004 Cinemas & Theatres of Wandsworth & Battersea, Patrick Loobey, Tempus, Stroud.
2005 Bristol Cinemas, David Stephenson & Gill Willmott, Tempus, Stroud.

BRIAN ROBERTS, Budleigh Salterton, 2022