ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORY

SOUTH LONDON CINEMAS & THEATRES

1900-1973

BRIAN ROBERTS
INTRODUCTION

This Book, features historic photographs with supplementary notes on South London Cinemas and Theatres well-known to the author. These are listed in alphabetical order within each of the named South London Districts. This author lived in South London for many years and was 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 on page 4. Information sources include the specialist websites Cinema Treasures and Arthur Lloyd, the 2004 book "Cinemas and Theatres of Wandsworth and Battersea" and the Allen Eyles publications of the Cinema Theatre Association and British Film Institute.

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SOUTH LONDON CINEMAS & THEATRES

BALHAM
Balham Assembly Rooms, High Road.
**Odeon Cinema, Balham Hill.**
Pavilion Cinema, High Road.
Pyke's Cinematograph, High Road.
Royal Duchess Theatre, Balham Hill (Hippodrome).

BATTERSEA
Battersea Town Hall, Lavender Hill.
**Century Cinema, Northcote Road (Bio-Pictureland).**
Electro Theatre de Lux, 311 Lavender Hill.
Gem Picture Palace, 109 Lavender Hill.
**Granada Cinema, St. John's Hill.**
New Grand Theatre, St. John's Hill.
Palladium Cinema, 177 High Road.
Pavilion Cinema, 75 High Road.
Pyke's Cinematograph, Clapham Junction, St. John's Hill.

CLAPHAM
Electric Palace, Venn Street.
Majestic, 146 High Street.

ELEPHANT AND CASTLE
Elephant and Castle Theatre (Coronet)
**Trocadero Cinema, Old Kent Road.**

PUTNEY
ABC, 25 High Street (Odeon).
Globe Cinema, Upper Richmond Road.
Hippodrome Theatre, Felsham Road.
Mirror Cinema, Putney Bridge Road.
Palace Pavilion, 23 High Street (Electric Pavilion).
Regal Cinema, High Street.

STREATHAM
**Astoria, High Road.**
Empire Picture Theatre, High Road.
**Gaumont Palace, Streatham Hill.**
**Streatham Hill Theatre, Streatham Hill.**
Streatham Picture Theatre, High Road (Golden Domes).

TOOTING
Broadway Electric Cinema, Mitcham Road.
Classic Cinema, Upper Tooting Road.
**Granada Cinema, Mitcham Road.**
Mayfair, Upper Tooting Road.
The Balham Assembly Rooms on the Balham High Road was erected in the 1890s for civic functions, public meetings and concerts. The Hall was licensed for music and dancing having 468 seats with another 36 seats in the balcony. In 1895, a smaller hall was built with 226 seats including 36 in the balcony. In 1896, the main hall was extended resulting in 513 seats at ground level with 100 in the balcony. A two-week cinemascopic show took place in January 899, approval having been sought from the London County Council because of the inflammable nitrate film then in use. It is thought this was one of the earliest cinema shows in Wandsworth. In 1926, the Hall was taken over by the Salvation Army as their Divisional Headquarters. In 1944, the building was badly damaged by a V1 flying bomb and demolished.
See the Royal Duchess Theatre on page 12.
THE HIPPODROME BALHAM

BALHAM

HIPPODROME

Twice Nightly at 6.30 and 9.0
Saturdays (First House) commences 15 minutes earlier

The special system of heat radiators installed in this Theatre renders it the warmest and most comfortable in the district.

Monday, Jan. 22nd, 1912.

PERCY MONRI

CONCORDIA

And his colossal combine, in a new edition of the great musical scenic phantasy, entitled

On a stage entirely different in all previous efforts, which justly places PERCY MONRI as the leader of spectacular producers. Night Sperber Scenery, buffing description, below and other in a bewildering kaleidoscopic fashion. SCENES: 1. The Dream. 2. Priory Hall. 3. The Street in Boston. 4. The Demon World. 5. The Dressing Room. 6. The Man in the Moon. 7. The Awakening. 8. The Opium Den. 9. The Wishing Well. 10. The Fabulous Cavern. 11. The Condemned. 12. The Great Conductor. 13. The Conjuror's Castle. 14. The Egyptian Tomb. 15. The Hair of the Sphinx. These are but a few of the scenes... Rendered by Mr. PERCY MONRI, the king of from the same Mr. Edwin Grimes, author and composer of CONCORDIA.

AMBER & AMBER Vocalists & Dancers

CHAS. DENMAN Light Comedian and Dancer

AUSTEN TEMPLE

Celebrated Magician, assisted by IRENE VINCENT, presenting wonderful egg trick and great band mystery.

STELLA DELL Vocal Comedienne

HARRY MAXAM THE BIOSCOPE

TED CURTIS & CO.

In vocal and comedy act, introducing their great dancing specialty.

BOXES 5/-, 7/6 and 10/6

Fauteuils 1/6

Orch., Stalls & Gr. Circle 1/-

CIRCLE 9d.

PIT 6d.

GALLERY 3d.

The Odeon Cinema, designed by the architect George Coles, opened in 1938 with 1216 seats in the stalls and 600 in the circle. The opening programme contained an advertisement for J. Jeffreys Ltd. suppliers of the ventilating plant (a spray-washer air cooling system). This also stated that Jeffreys specialised in air raid precaution equipment (gas filtration plant). The cinema was badly damaged by enemy action in October 1940. This destroyed half of the front facade which was rebuilt in 1948. The Rank Organisation gave up the lease in 1973. This was taken over by an Asian film importer, redecorated and the seating changed to 1700, but it finally closed in 1979. The foyer was converted into a Majestic Wine Warehouse. In 2001, part of the building was incorporated into a block of five apartments.
The original plans for a 1520 seat, two-storey cinema were rejected. In 1913, proposals for a single-storey cinema, with 982 seats, were accepted. It opened in October of that year: "The interior was decorated in the French style, the main hall luxuriously decorated throughout, 1100 tip-up seats upholstered in Rose du Barri velvet, having been installed. The rake of the floor was one in ten, giving an uninterrupted view of the pictures projected on to the screen 20 feet by 45 feet...... Two Pathe projectors were installed to stop the annoying wait during the changeover of films." Soon after 1928, the cinema became part of the Gaumont circuit. Badly damaged by bombing, it closed in September 1940 and was demolished around 1946.
Opened in 1890 as a swimming baths and concert hall. It seems that the pool was boarded over around 1898 becoming the New Theatre of Varieties. With a new proprietor in 1902, it was renamed the Empire to show cinematographic pictures. The cinema changed owners in 1907 and again in 1909, when the music hall was fully converted for cinema. The seating arrangements were altered many times. Around 1912, it was noted that the accommodation changed to: main hall 402 seated, 200 standing and circle 262 seated and 84 standing (that's provision for just over 50% of the audience standing !!). It was renamed the Olympia Kinema in 1920, becoming the Pavilion in 1922. It became the Gaumont in 1949 and in 1953 the main hall seating was reduced to 555. The cinema closed in 1960, became a bingo hall in 1962, and was demolished in 1974.
The cinema is thought to have opened in 1911, London County Council having approved the plans for 958 seated plus 246 standing. It was the fifteenth cinema to be opened by the Pyke circuit in the London area. When the Pyke circuit was sold off around 1925, the cinema was renamed the Picture House. It closed for enlargement in 1927 and was taken over by ABC in 1933. In 1953 it was remodelled and renamed the Ritz, finally closing in 1968, becoming a bingo hall, then showing Asian films until about 1978, when it was left derelict and demolished in 1985.
The Royal Duchess opened as a conventional theatre in 1899 with a total of 1268 seats. In 1903, the theatre was renamed the Duchess. In about 1909 it became the Balham Hippodrome. In 1932, it became a cinema and music hall, reverting to the Duchess with 1500 seats. From 1935, it seems not to have been in use. The theatre was badly damaged by bombs in 1940/41 and left derelict until demolished after the war.
The Battersea Town Hall was opened in 1893 for Battersea Parish Council, soon to become a Borough. The building had two large halls for concerts, meetings and social events. Magic lantern shows took place in 1909. In the next fifty years, a wide variety of events took place. Then when Battersea became part of Wandsworth in 1965, the town hall became redundant, but from 1974 until 1979 it was home the Battersea Arts Centre. Films were shown throughout the 1980s and 1890s, but stopped in the early 2000s.
The building opened as Bolingbroke Hall in 1880 and was used for local meetings, small concerts and light entertainment. It became a picture theatre in 1907 and in 1910 was renamed the Bio-Picture Palace with 600 seats. From 1917, and possibly until 1923, it was the Bolingbroke Picture Hall. It was later reconstructed, opening as the Globe Cinema in 1930 with 963 seats plus 160 standing. It was named the Century from 1951 until it closed in 1964 and was converted into a supermarket.
The Electro Theatre de Luxe, a shop conversion, opened in 1909 with 176 seats plus 22 standing. This was increased to 230 seats with 33 standing in 1912. It may have later been known as the Globe, but when and how it ceased to exist is unknown.
The Gem Picture Palace opened in 1910 with 640 seats plus 84 standing. Another report says there were 800 tip-up seats. The cinema had its own Gem Orchestra, but was closed and demolished in about 1924.
The architects were Horner and Norton in association with Cecil Massey. The interior was designed by the Russia Exile Theodore Komisarjevsky in the Italian Renaissance style (see also, The Grade I Granada Tooting). There was seated accommodation for 2475, though 3000 was sometimes claimed. The first floor had a cafe and tea-rooms. The cinema "had full stage and changing facilities with sixteen dressing rooms." Over the years, many shows and stars appeared on stage. In 1968, the world premiere of the film *Up the Junction* was held at the Granada. In 1973, the Granada was converted into a three-screen cinema. The last films were shown in 1980. It was later converted into a bingo club. The building is protected with a Grade II* Listing.
GRANADA ST JOHNS HILL BATTERSEA
GRAND PALACE CLAPHAM JUNCTION

TWICE NIGHTLY at 6.45 & 9.10
SATURDAYS FIRST HOUSE COMMENCES 15 MINUTES EARLIER.

The Special System of Heat Radiators in this Theatre renders it the Warmest in the District

MONDAY, JANUARY 29th, 1912

A Programme of Stars !!!!

BRILLIANT STARS
KING & BENSON
In Vaudeville Variations

MUSICAL STARS:
THE MOTRAMOS
TOM and MARIE
Scholey & Scholey
DECEPTIVE STARS. WINNING A WAGER
Russell Carr
A VENTRiloQUIAL STAR
The Paolias
STRONG STARS

DUSTY STARS
FOREMAN & FANNAN

THE MILLIONAIRES

SPECIAL STARS
ROBBINS & COLLIER
In their Clever Musical Farce, entitled Miss BEACON'S EASTER EGG

Tod LOWEN
A FUNNY STAR


MORNY CASH
A LANCASHIRE STAR. In his Ditties on Shoes

AUSTIN TEMPLE
A MAGICAL STAR
BIOSCOPE
AN INSTRUCTIVE STAR

TED CURTISS
And Co. DANCING STARS. In Topsy-turvy Speciality

A DRAMATIC STAR! THE POPULAR LYCEUM ACTOR

FRANK LISTER
And his Powerful Company present

NAPOLEON'S DRUMMER

FAUTEUILS
1/6
ORCH.
STALLS
1/-
GRAND CIRCLE
9d.
PIT
6d.
GALLERY
3d.

No charge for Booking
Bookable, 3d. extra
The Best in London
Un-interupted View

BOXES, 7/6 and 10/6 (to Seat Four). Single Seats, 2s. and 2/6.
Saturdays (2nd House), Bank Holidays and Special Occasions: SPECIAL PRICES
Seats can be booked by 'phone SS Faversham but same must be paid for by 8.30 & 8.45 respectively:
otherwise they will be sold. The Right of Refusing Admission is Reserved. No Seats Guaranteed.
The Grand Theatre, decorated in Chinese style with "almost 3000 seats set on three tiers" opened in 1900, and was complete with its own electricity generating plant. It was first known as the New Grand Theatre of Varieties to distinguish it from the nearby Grand Theatre of Varieties. The "New" was dropped when its rival was renamed the Imperial. In 1927, the building was converted to show films with 1528 seats, but continued to rely on stage shows until 1931 when it became a "super-talkie" cinema. In 1941, it was again featuring stage entertainment. The last films were shown in 1963 and the building became yet another bingo club. In 1991, it was changed into a night club.
The cinema was built at the bottom of St. John's Hill on part of a site that was previously a horse-tram depot. Another cinema on the Pyke circuit, it opened in 1910 with 800 seats. The building was last used as a furniture store, suffered a fire in 1979 and was demolished around 1981.
Having been built as a replacement for the previous stables, The Electric Palace - The Picture Playhouse opened in 1910 with a permitted capacity of 946 seated and 96 standing. However, it went into receivership in 1915. After a new owner and alterations, giving slightly reduced seating, in 1918 it also went bankrupt. A grandiose scheme in 1919 would have seen a vast cinema, with possibly as many as 3000 seats. It seems that this never happened and the site was sub-divided into a number of commercial enterprises until the three-screen Clapham Picture House opened in 1992. A fourth screen with a restaurant and bar was added in 1998.
The Majestic opened in 1914, just three weeks after the start of the First World War. Although listed as having 1500 seats, it was said to be nearer 2000, making it one of the largest cinemas in Britain at that time. The domed roof could be open for ventilation. The building was closed by the Government during 1940, reopening in 1941. Renamed the Gaumont in 1950 it was closed in 1960, became a bingo hall in the late 1960s and then a nightclub in 1990.
The second Elephant & Castle Theatre opened in 1879 (with 3000 seats?). In 1932, it was renamed the Coronet by ABC, finally becoming a concert venue and night club before closing in 2018.
Opened as a Super-Cinema in 1932 with 3500 seats (exaggerated advertising claimed 6000!). It closed and was demolished in 1963.
In 1975, a three-screen cinema was built on the site of the demolished Regal cinema. Thereafter, it changed ownership and name many times: the Cannon (ABC), the MGM (Virgin), the ABC again in 1996, and then the Odeon in 2000.
The site was purchased from the owner of stables. The Globe cinema, described as having two Indian-style cupolas, opened in 1911 as the Putney Electric Palace with seating for 408 plus 45 standing. It was renamed the Globe in 1913. After alterations, it reopened in 1922 with "a modern ventilation and heating system." It was also reported "The Moorish exterior has been improved." The Globe closed in 1968, reopening as the 300-seat Cinecenta in 1969. It finally closed in 1976 showing the film The Last Picture Show and was demolished around 1978.
Opened as a theatre in 1906. Accommodation: stalls 117, pit 480, circle 403, gallery 403, boxes 16. Films were shown during the First World War. The building was converted into a cinema in 1924; changed ownership a number of times in the 1930s before closing in 1940. It was reopened by Odeon in 1941. They operated it until 1961. The building was demolished in 1973.
Opened in 1911, "The first purpose-built cinema to open in Putney" and “Installed in the building.... are the patent ventilators invented by Mr. W.H. Crosse.” The cinema closed during the First World War. It was used as workshops from 1925 to the 1970s until being demolished in 1972.
Opened by ABC in 1937 with 2540 seats being the largest of their cinemas in London. The Regal was renamed ABC in 1961. It closed in 1971 and was later demolished.
Opened as a cinema 1930 with 2576 seats, having air conditioning designed and installed by the Carrier Engineering Company Ltd, now under UK ownership with the finish of the 50/50 arrangement with Carrier USA (see the CIBSE Heritage Group website). The interior design was in Egyptian style. During the 1930s, the Astoria staged many orchestra and big band shows. The Astoria chain was sold to Odeon in 1939 and they abandoned stage shows. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, pantomimes were staged. In 1979, the cinema was converted to three screens. In 1991, it was provided with five screens having a total of 1955 seats. In 2001, this was increased to eight screens.
The Empire opened in 1910 with 1200 seats. A newspaper reported it had "A reading and smoking room, cloakrooms for ladies and gentlemen with running hot and cold water." It seems that a few alterations were made in 1924, but the cinema was closed in 1932. During the Second World War it was a food storage warehouse, until struck by a V1 flying bomb in 1944. It was partly rebuilt after the war; the auditorium being changed into a Snooker Club.
The Gaumont Palace opened in 1932 with 2431 seats. The marble entrance hall was said to be a part copy of Stockholm Town Hall. During the 1930s it featured stage shows, but although in 1942 it suffered bomb damage it was used as a factory. It closed again in 1944, suffering blast damage when the nearby Streatham Hill Theatre was hit by a flying bomb. Ten years after the war, it was repaired and opened in 1955 with 1873 seats. It finally closed as a cinema in 1961 and was converted into a forty-lane bowling alley (the largest in Europe?) which was operated until 1986. The ownership then changed. It was refurbished and remained a bowling alley.
Opened 1929 with 2600 seats. Home to many major stage productions. Twice damaged by flying bombs. Repaired it reopened in 1950, but from 1962 became a bingo hall. The building was Grade II listed in 1994.
The Broadway Electric Cinema, or Cinematograph Palace, opened in 1912 with 400 seats. Later listed as the Broadway Palace, the cinema was upgraded in 1921, now with 778 seats. It was upgraded again in 1936 and the seating increased to 885 plus 12 standing. The cinema closed at 1939 at the beginning of the Second World War and never reopened.
The cinema opened as the Central Hall Picture Palace in 1910 with seating for 792 plus 168 standing. From 1923, it was operated by Lion Cinematograph. In 1937, it was taken over by the Classic Circuit. It closed due to vandalism in 1983, the circle becoming a night club.
The Granada opened in 1931 with accommodation for 3086 and 360 standing, making it one of the largest cinemas in Britain. The exterior design is generally considered a form of Art Deco, while the interior has a fantastic design in the medieval style by the Russian stage-set designer Theodore Komisarjevsky. (For colour photographs and notes see the author's E-Book on the CIBSE Heritage Group Website). The Granada had a staff of 85 and its own twenty-piece orchestra. From the late 1940 until the 1970s, the Theatre staged many celebrity and big-band shows. The cinema interior was given a Grade II* Listing in 1972, but was closed in 1973. It reopened in 1976 as a giant bingo hall. In 2000, it became Britain's first Grade I Listed cinema.
GRANADA MITCHAM RD TOOTING
The Mayfair opened in 1932 with 1839 seats when its construction is said to have used 2,200,000 bricks. As noted in the photograph, it had its own orchestra and a "Colossal" organ. The ABC Group took it over in 1933. In 1970, the rear of the auditorium was separated off as a western-themed public house called The Painted Wagon. The cinema was taken over in 1976 reverting to its original name, the Mayfair, and specialised in showing Asian films. The stalls were converted to the Bank of Baroda in 1985, the rest of the building having a variety of uses.
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