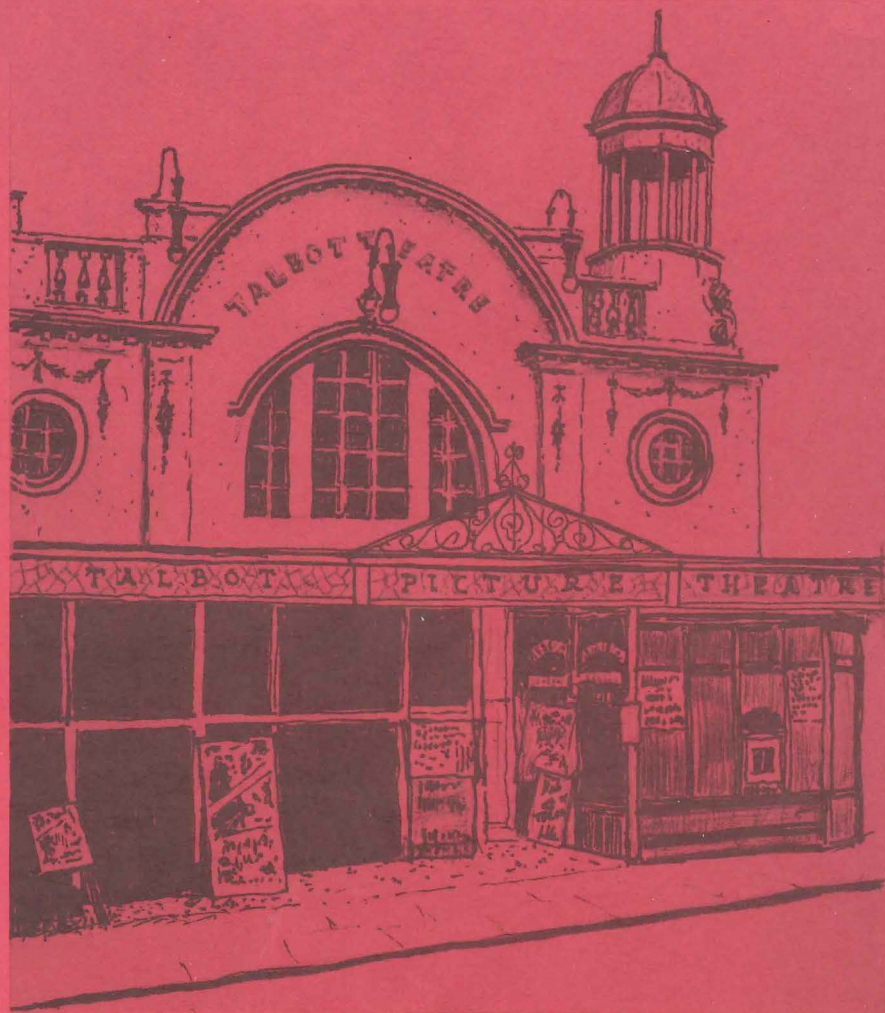


THE DREAM PALACES OF
RICHMOND UPON THAMES

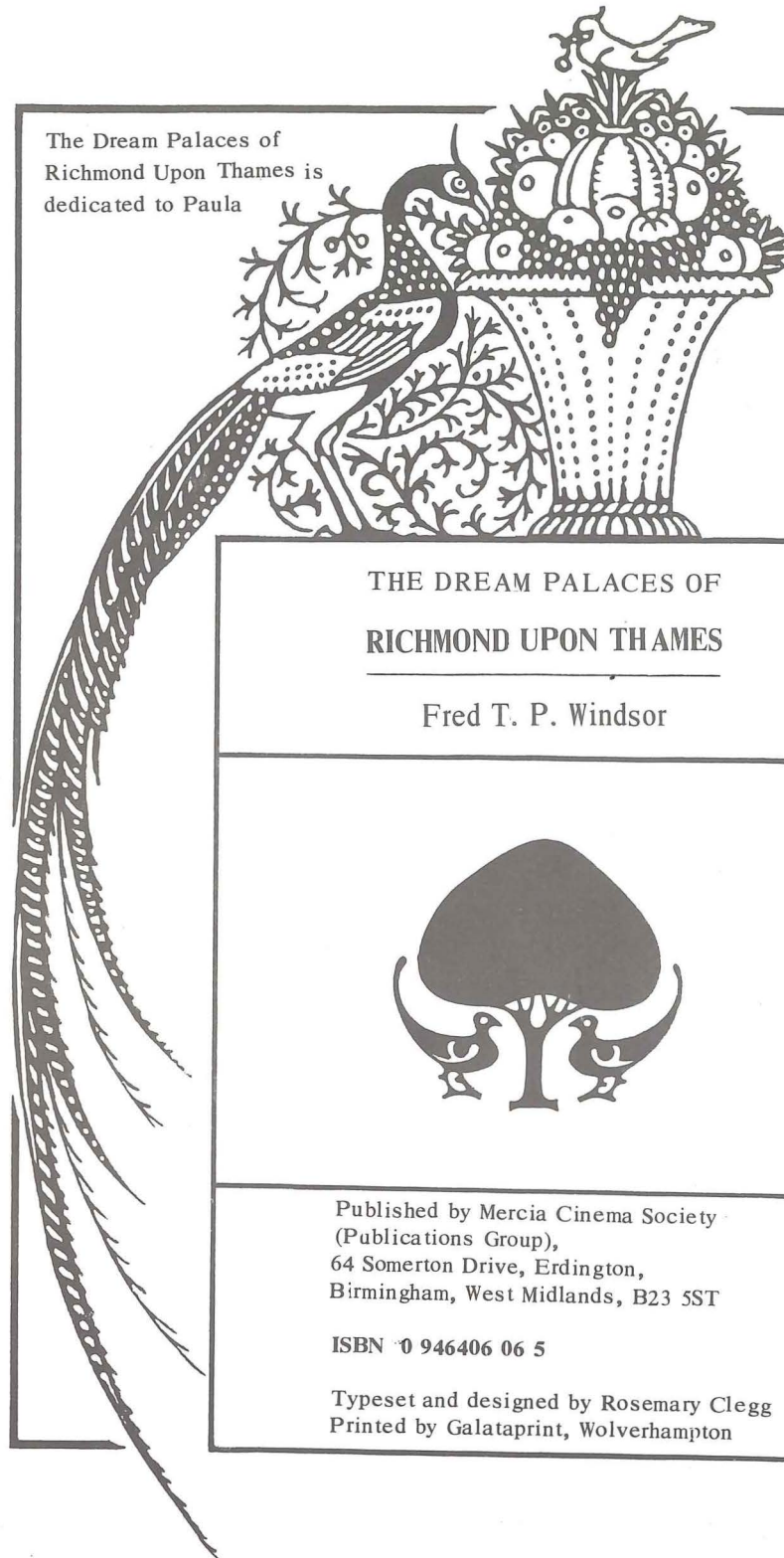
Fred T. P. Windsor





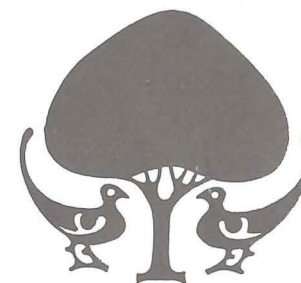
The Talbot, Richmond (see page 3)
Drawing, Fred Windsor

The Dream Palaces of
Richmond Upon Thames is
dedicated to Paula



THE DREAM PALACES OF
RICHMOND UPON THAMES

Fred T. P. Windsor



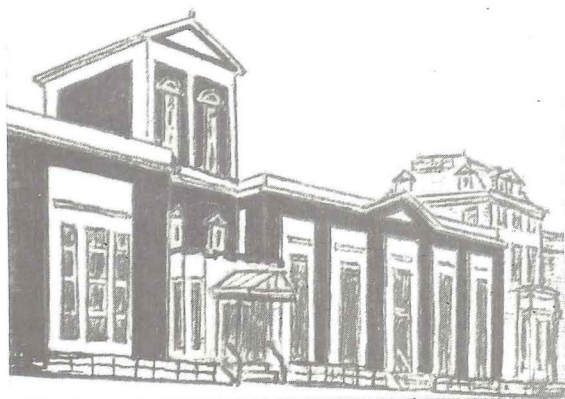
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Richmond

Probably the earliest cinema to be established in the town was at the Castle Hotel Assembly Rooms in Whittaker Avenue, adjacent to the riverside. This was in 1910, and I am told that there was both piano and organ accompaniment to the films. This room later became the Castle Ballroom, and I remember that in the late 1940's there was still a proscenium arch at one end where the band played, and a balcony at the opposite end. The building is still there but boarded up.



Castle Hotel
Drawing: Fred Windsor

In 1910 also, a cinema was operating in the Dome Buildings in The Square, and during the ensuing years it became known by various names such as The Palace, Clock Cinema No 1, The Palais, and finally The Empire. I have not been able to establish an exact date of closure, but I can remember seeing adverts for films outside the building I would say around 1919. My mother and my sister, who was a lot older than I, told me of visits to this cinema where they sat upon forms and were given tea and biscuits all for sixpence (2½p). Originally, this building, erected in 1843 on the site of the village pond, housed the Mechanics Institute and

a Public Library. From 1855 to 1867 it was in use as a Bath House before becoming the Royal Assembly Rooms, and subsequently, shops, furniture store and auction rooms. It was after this period that the dome was added, giving its name to the structure. After its short life as a cinema the ground floor once more became a shop selling high class furnishings by the name of Seymours, and later still a branch of the 50 Shilling Tailors, with some offices on the upper floors.

In 1911 a building in Sheen Road was fitted up by the Wright Brothers as a cinema, and lasted to 1921 under various names such as Pictorial Hall, Queens Hall and New Pavilion. I believe it was also known for a time as Clock Cinema No 2. During the 1930's the building was in use as a Billiards Club, but just after the end of World War II it was refurbished and reopened as Richmond Community Centre, and was often referred to as The Queens Hall. When I knew it in the late 1940's and early 1950's it had a level auditorium floor, used for dances etc, with a stage and proscenium at one end. Also the former projection room was in use as an office, but I think later, at times returned to its original use by the local Film Society for their shows.

At the end of March 1911 the first purpose built cinema in the town was opened in Hill Street. The Talbot Kinema was erected on part of the site of the Talbot Hotel opposite to the approach to Richmond Bridge. The auditorium, entered from the screen end had a raked floor and seats for some 560 patrons. When I frequented the cinema in the 1920's the plan had been slightly modified from the original layout with entry to the auditorium still at the screen end, but with a separate entry to the front stalls (the 'sixpennys') and although there was never a circle, two small 'boxes' were installed, one each side of the projection room and at first floor level, each approached by its own little staircase. Each box contained two short rows of seats and as can be imagined, were pretty popular with courting couples. Prices of admission were 6d, 11d, 1/3d for the rear stalls and 1/10d in the boxes. I believe the 11 old pence admission was charged, rather than one shilling, because of some method of rating for entertainments tax. To digress for a moment there was something similar in operation at the old Crystal Palace. I remember visiting that remarkable place a few weeks before it was tragically burnt down. The price of admission was 11¾d since if it had been one shilling I believe tax would have been levied. I shall never forget the pile of farthings ready for change at the entrance turnstile..... But to return to the Talbot; the interior decor was in a green/blue colour scheme, with large orange coloured electric shades hanging from the curved ceiling. A small orchestra accompanied the silent films, but sound films were being shown before closure of the cinema. In 1917 Mr Smither, the owner



Above: the Talbot
Photo: Kevin Wheelan

Opposite: the New Royalty, later the Gaumont
Photo: Kevin Wheelan

sold out to Joseph Mears Theatres Ltd., whose Chairman was Alderman Joseph T Mears of the Richmond Council. Mr Mears was later to build the Kensington, Richmond, Twickenham, Sheen and Royalty Kinemas, and to acquire the Luxor, Twickenham. The Talbot Kinema closed on April 14th 1930, and the Richmond Kinema, today's Odeon, opened the following week on Easter Monday. Although the frontage of the Talbot was demolished when the Richmond was built, the auditorium remained standing until 1978 having been used over the years as a garage and for industrial purposes. It has now gone. As a matter of interest the last feature film shown at the Talbot was Frederic March and Ann Harding in *Paris Bound*.



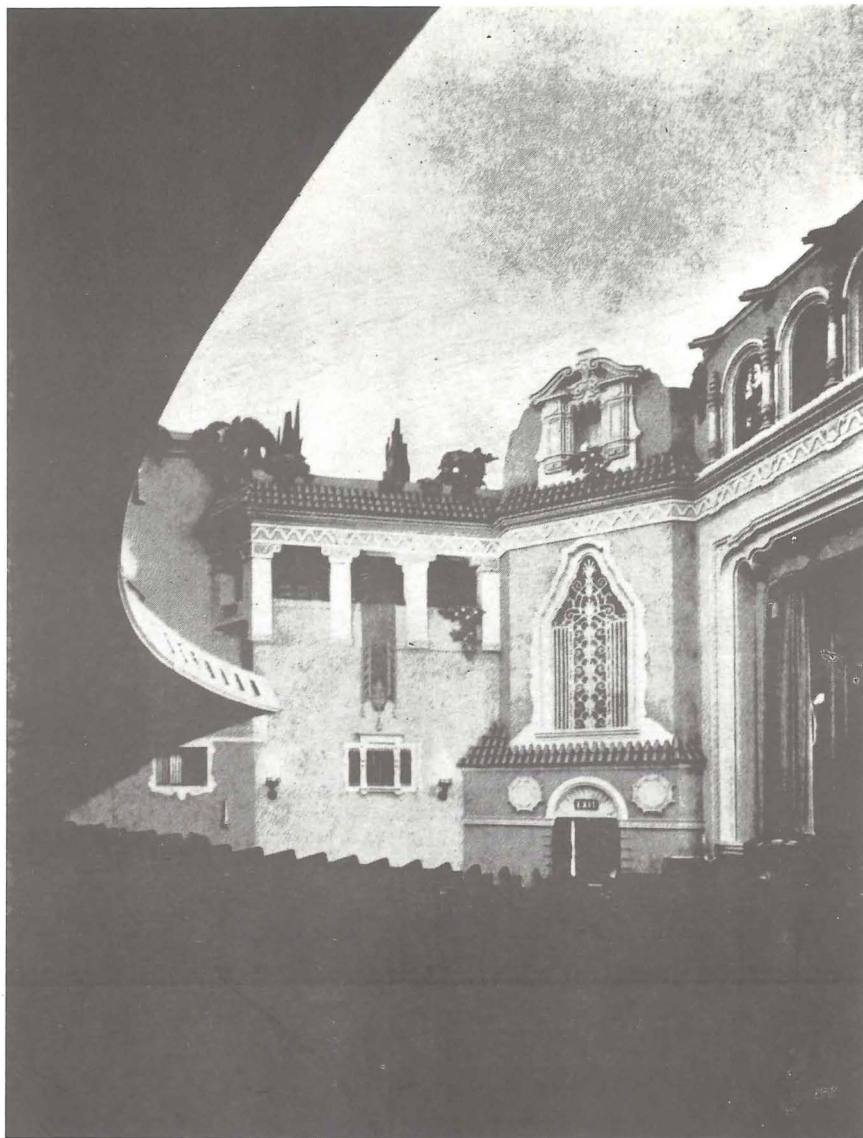
On Christmas Eve 1914 the New Royalty in Hill Street was opened by Joseph Mears. The auditorium with raked floor was built at the rear of an 18th century town house, at present the subject of D.O.E. Preservation Order, which was used as the foyer. Original panelling and a fine staircase were retained, and a feature of cold winters nights was the cheerful fire burning in the old fireplace. At the rear of the foyer a short flight of stairs led down to, on the left a nice tea lounge, and to the right, the auditorium. Seating was for 900 downstairs and 120 in the shallow circle. Decor was in a French Classical style with an illuminated dome in the curved ceiling towards the front of the auditorium, and a sliding roof over

the circle which could be opened on hot (but rainless) summer days during the intervals. No air-conditioning in those days, although it was installed later, but to sweeten the air an attendant patrolled the aisles from time to time operating a spray of perfumed liquid over our heads. If you sat in the end seats of the rows you were subject to a not unpleasant scented rainfall. From the ceiling hung electric light fittings in the form of large bronze bowls, and along the side walls were a series of flambeau electric light fittings in clusters of three, the centre one of which was red and remained 'on' when the outer whites were dimmed for a film performance. For many years a separate entrance and paybox were provided for the sixpenny front stalls. A nice orchestra accompanied the silent films, but in 1922 a Hill Norman and Beard organ was installed at a cost of £3,000. The organ pipes and console were housed in a wood pannelled surround on a platform projecting at about first floor level from the wall to the left of the screen. Some further stops were added later, such as a Glockenspiel. The organ was opened by G T Pattman, and it is interesting to note that at this time Mr Pattman travelled the country with an organ giving recitals and on more than one occasion performed at the Richmond Theatre. His organ was transported in two or three horse drawn pantechnicons similar to those used by furniture removers. Edward Farley became the regular organist at the Royalty, the 'New' part of the title having been dropped, and at times both organ and orchestra together accompanied the films. On occasions the orchestra would play perhaps for the first half of a film, and then the organ take over for the remainder. In these pre 'talkie' days special musical scores were often supplied with the films, as for example during the showing of *Chu Chin Chow* a vocalist stood at the side of the screen and sang the various songs with the orchestra accompanying. Prior to the Sunday opening of cinemas in Richmond, the Royalty was for a time used by a local church for evening services led from the very narrow platform in front of the screen curtains. These services were preceded by slides on the screen of the architectural splendours of ancient Greece and Rome, together with an organ recital. The general decorative colour scheme of the auditorium and seating was dark red and the usherettes had uniforms to match. I remember occasions in the early days when printed programmes were actually issued. The number of the item being performed was shown in an illuminated 'sign' to the left of the screen (as in theatres at that time). This was balanced by an illuminated clock to the right of the screen. The numbers didn't last long, but the clock remained to the end. The Royalty was the first cinema in Richmond to show talkies with Al Jolson in *The Singing Fool* in June 1929. The cinema was sold to Odeon Theatres in 1944 and renamed The Gaumont. The tea lounge closed and the organ

was removed in 1950. Final closure came in 1980 and there has been considerable local debate and a great deal of opposition to various commercial schemes proposed for the use of the building. The auditorium has been demolished.

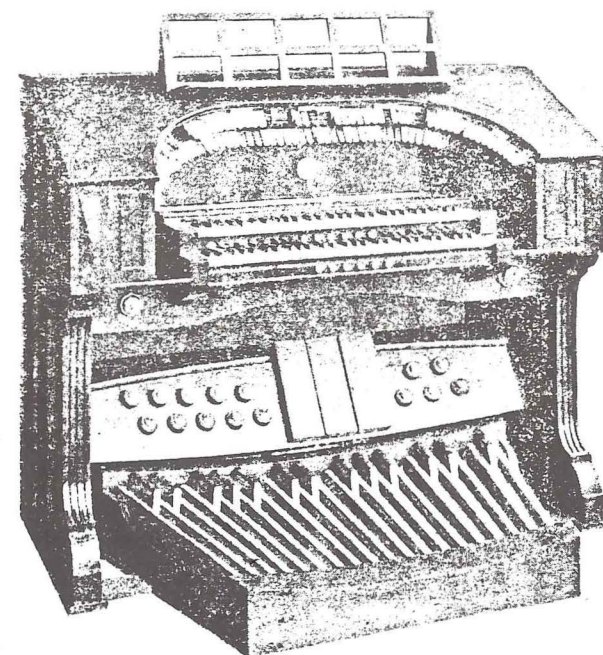
The Richmond Kinema, now the Odeon Film Centre
Photo: Kevin Wheelan





Above and opposite above: the atmospheric auditorium of the Richmond
Photos: Kevin Wheelan

Opposite below: the two manual console of the Richmond's Compton organ
Photo: Dave Jones





The original elevation of the Richmond
Drawing: Dave Jones



Only the name has changed! Compare with the photograph on page 11
Photo: Kevin Wheelan

On April 21st, 1930 Alderman Joseph Mears opened the Richmond Kinema in Hill Street, adjacent to the Talbot which had closed a week earlier. The opening feature film was *The Gold Diggers of Broadway*. Also in the programme was a stage show, the Richmond Symphony Orchestra, and Edward Farley at the 2/8 Compton organ which was on a lift. Later on during the 1930's E S Heming was to take over at the organ

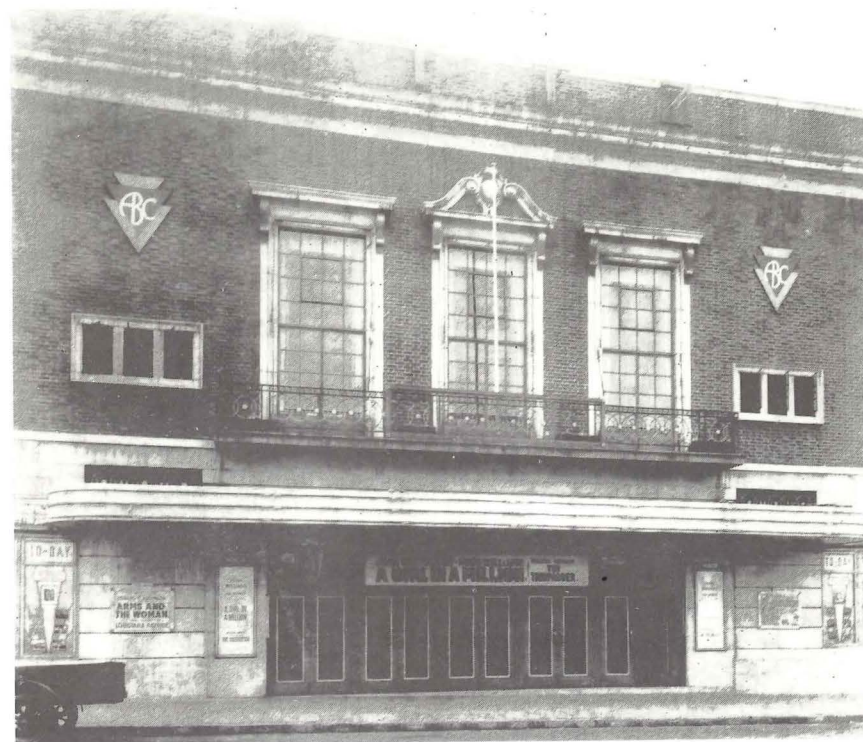
and the resident orchestra was under the direction of Garry Verne. The auditorium was of a beautiful semi-atmospheric design representing a Spanish courtyard setting. There were balconies with (stone) oranges hanging over the edge, Spanish windows and grilles, (stone) doves and foliage. The plain curved ceiling represented the sky and the Holophane lighting system ran through a programme of sunrise to sunset with ever changing coloured lighting behind the balconies, grilles and windows. The architects were Leathart and Grainger F/FRIBA and they designed a truly lovely setting. There were seats for 1533 in the stalls and circle with prices ranging from 1/- in the front stalls to 2/4d in the front circle.

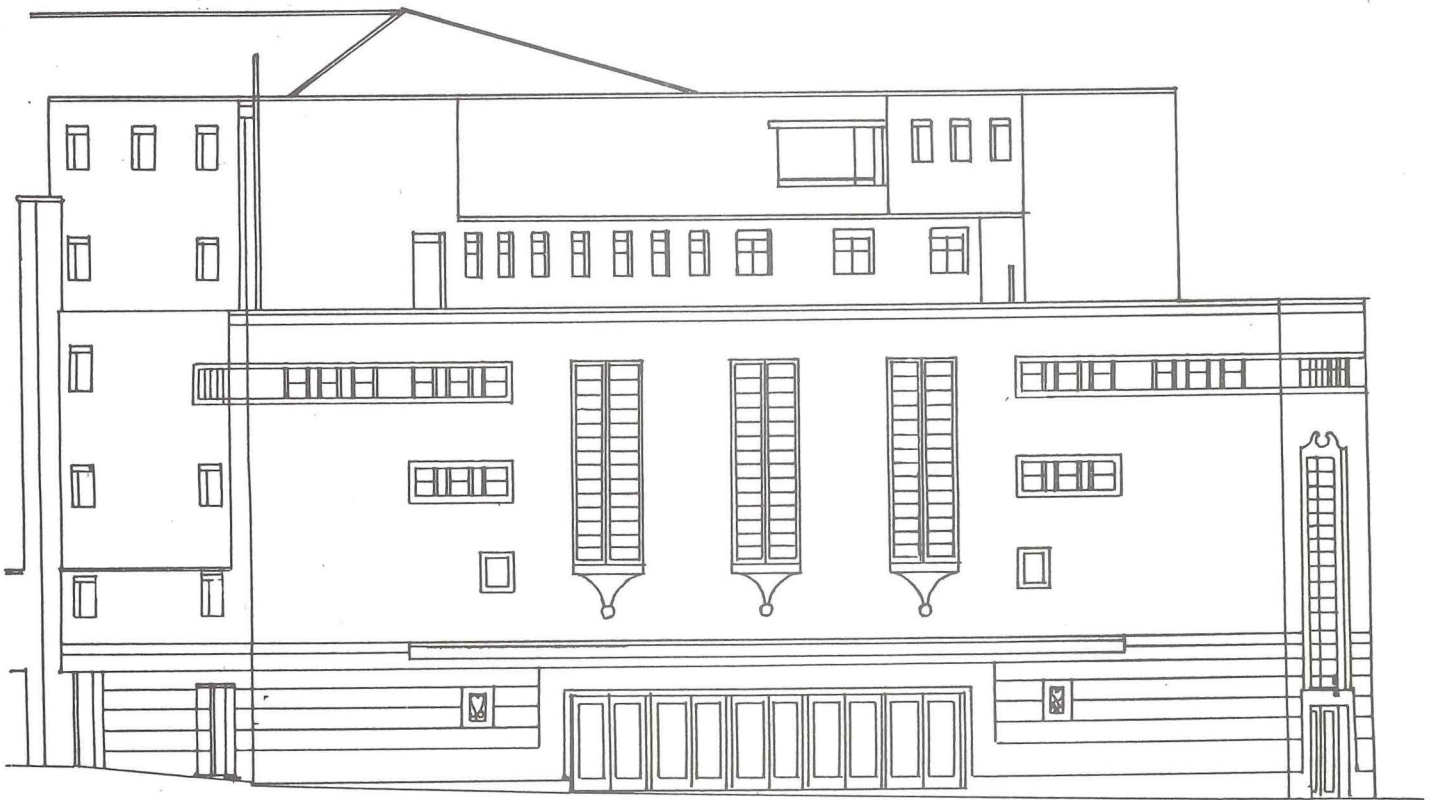
Sadly nowadays some of the decor has gone and the cinema has become a triple with 516 seats in screen 1, the former circle, and 129 each in the former rear stalls.

In 1940 it was renamed the Premier, when the wartime anti-invasion measure of removing place names was in operation, and in 1944 it was sold to Odeon which name it now bears. Incidentally, the frieze in the cinema is interesting since it depicts the other interests of Alderman Mears. Not only did he own the chain of cinemas, but also an important construction company, a large fleet of motor coaches and an extensive fleet of river steamers. Some of these activities can be seen depicted in the plasterwork.

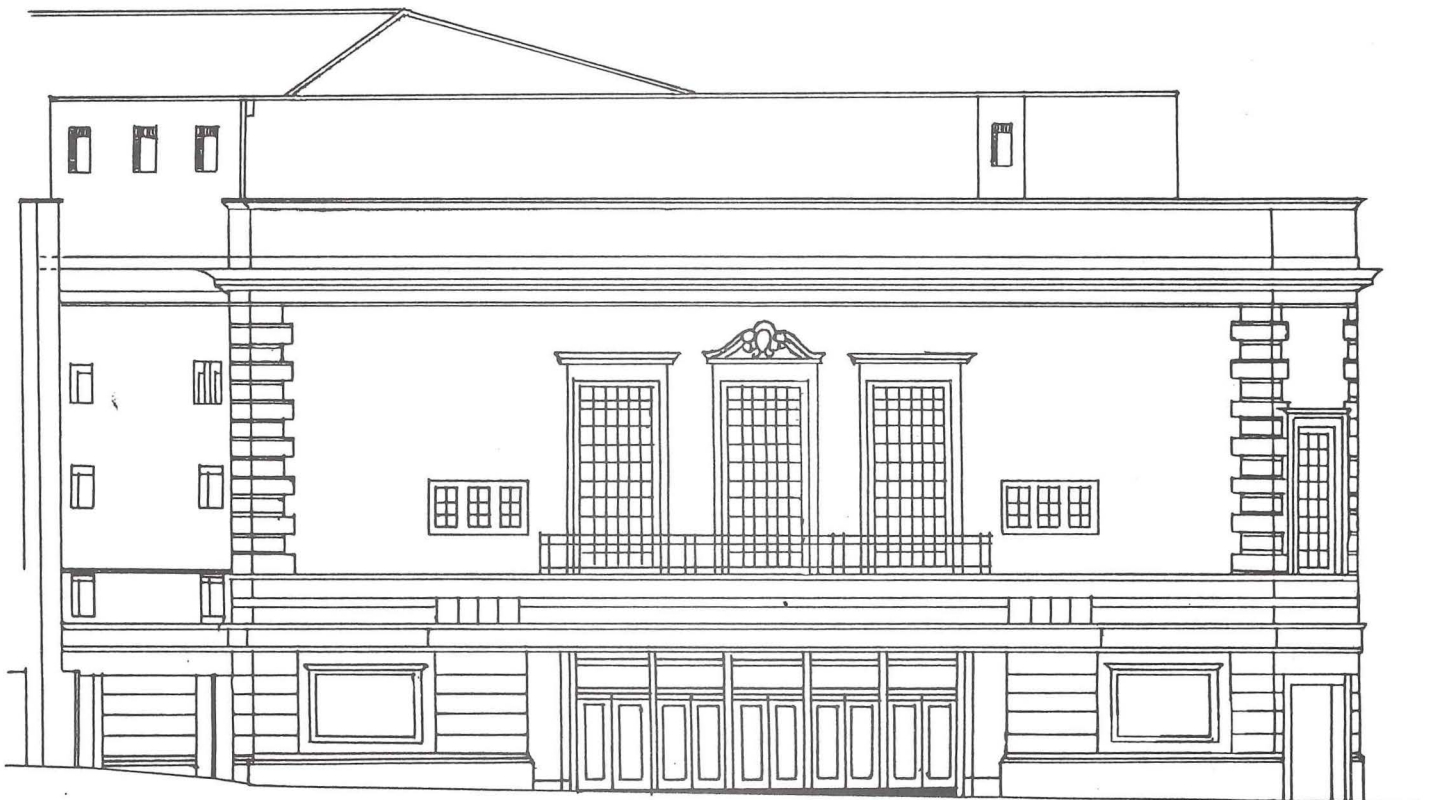
The last cinema to be opened in Richmond was the Ritz in Sheen Road on 19th May 1938. Designed by Sam Beverley of Verity and Beverley F/FRIBA for Union Cinemas, it was actually opened by ABC with a seating capacity of 2,150, 1456 in the stalls and 694 in the circle. It had a very nice auditorium with unusually prominent grilles on each side closer to the front of the circle rather than the proscenium. A fine Wurlitzer 3/8 organ was installed on a lift and with an illuminated glass surround. Originally this was to have been a special 3/16 Wurlitzer for this evidently special cinema, but no doubt due to the takeover of Union by ABC and the subsequent reorganisation, the organ destined for the Ritz at Wigan was installed at Richmond instead and the Wigan house opened without an organ. The Ritz had a relatively short life. It closed on 11th December 1971 when the feature film was *Death in Venice*. The building has since been demolished.

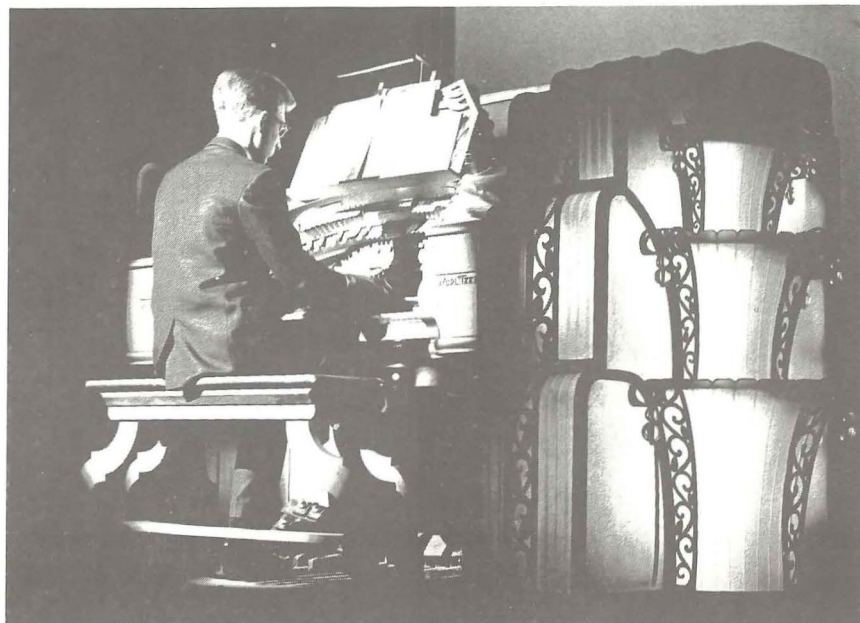
Opposite: the Ritz
Photos: Thorn EMI



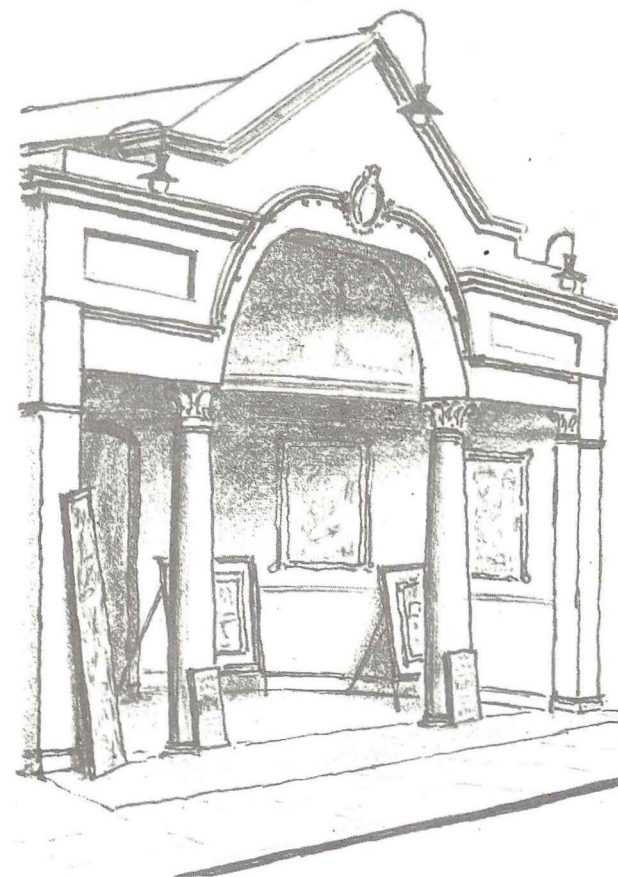


The Ritz as it was originally to have been built (above) and the amended design which was actually constructed.
Elevations: Chris Clegg





Twickenham



Opposite: Len Rawle at the 3/8 Warlitzer. The organ was opened by Wilfred Southworth, removed in 1972 and is now in Australia. Photo: John Sharp. Below is the Ritz after closure. Photo: Kevin Wheelan

Above: the Gaiety, Twickenham. Drawing: Fred Windsor

The earliest film shows would appear to have been held in the old Town Hall in King Street as far back as the 1890's, and on and off during the subsequent years, including 1905 William Jury's Imperial Bioscope Co., advertised as being 'Direct from the Crystal Palace'. Part of the property was demolished for road widening in 1928, but the hall at the rear was retained and although damaged by a bomb during World War II still survives. The famous Lily Langtry made her first stage appearance in this hall.

The Twickenham Picture Palace, converted from a shop in King Street, may be said to have been the first permanent cinema in Twickenham although it only lasted from 1910-1914. Owned by Silverman and Vanas it had a 300 seat auditorium behind an ornate plasterwork frontage. After its closure the premises became in turn a warehouse and then a shop. Its site can be located at 41 King Street.

The Gaiety Picture Playhouse in Richmond Road close to the approach to Richmond Bridge was opened in 1912 by Mr A Worsley JP on 2nd March. It had previously enjoyed a short life as the Grand Cinema in 1910. Sometime after 1912 it was purchased by the company who owned the cinema in the Castle Hotel, Richmond, under the directorship of Mr L Courlander. A new frontage was built with a recessed semi-circular foyer, the pediment and fascia over being supported by Corinthian columns and pilasters. The auditorium was, according to reports, richly decorated with mural panels in Watteau style and illuminated by concealed lights, but I am afraid I cannot vouch for this since during the times I went there in the 1920's I don't remember the main lights ever going up and towards the end of the decade the place was beginning to show signs of wear. For most of its life it was known as the Gaiety although for a very short period at a time of new management it became fleetingly called the Albert. The alterations mentioned above were carried out by Jarvis &

Sons and the raked floor of the auditorium then contained 600 seats. Prices of admission were 3d, 6d and 1/-, but in later years more price stages were added up to, I think, 2/3d. The cinema seems to have been bought and sold several times during its life, and one re-opening in 1916 was carried out by the famous editor of the John Bull magazine, Horatio Bottomley. Childrens Saturday morning film shows were not regular occurrences when I was young and the only one I went to was at the Gaiety for a special showing of Charlie Chaplin in *The Kid*. A special occasion at the Gaiety was the showing of the British World War I (silent of course) film *The Retreat from Mons*. A special piece of music had been written for the accompaniment to this film, and copies of the music were on sale in the foyer. I saw my first sound film there, *The*

Jazz Singer. Unfortunately the synchronisation of disc and film was not all that good which resulted at times in some curious and hilarious effects.

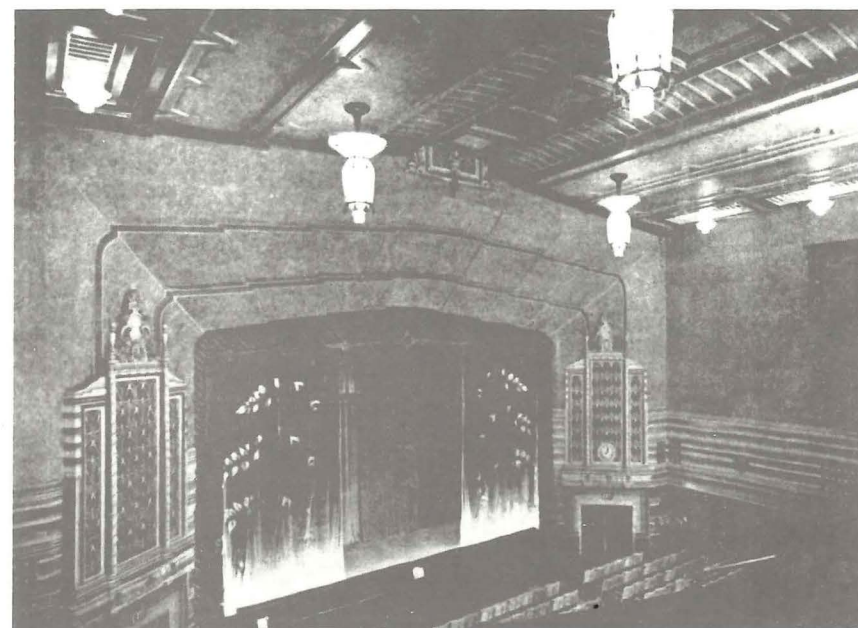
The Gaiety eventually closed its doors on 8th February 1930, the final feature film being *Broadway*. I remember reading a report of the subsequent auction sale in the *Richmond & Twickenham Times* - all the effects and furnishings went at virtually 'give away' prices. I seem to remember that seats averaged out at 3/4d each, and the screen curtains went for 30/-. After closure the premises became firstly a miniature golf course which was a craze at the time, and then a billiards hall. In more recent years it has been put to industrial use.

In 1912 the Lyric cinema in Richmond Road was opened by the Lyric Picture Palace Company. The auditorium, seating around 600 was entered via a rather narrow frontage, the design being by Mr R Rowell ARIBA. I believe it cost around £4,000.

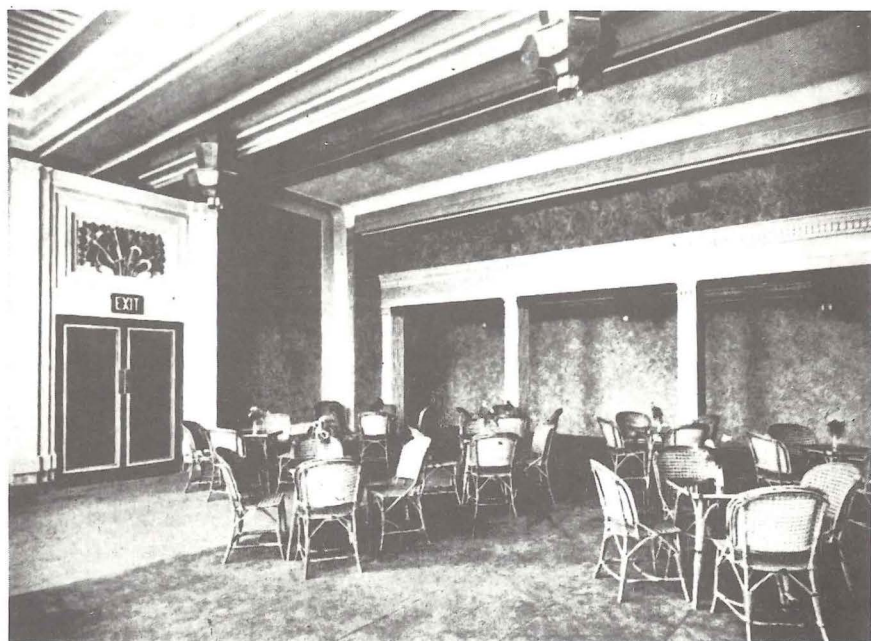
In addition to films, variety turns were frequently included in the programmes right up to closure in February 1930. Equipment for showing sound films had been installed a year or so earlier, but no doubt competition from the new Twickenham Kinema almost next door was too great. The last feature film at the Lyric was *Dark Streets*. Subsequently the premises were used for yet another miniature golf course and in more recent years, the old cinema facade having disappeared behind some modern treatment, it housed a club.

The Twickenham Kinema in Richmond Road, at the corner of Oak Lane was opened on 15th October 1928 by Joseph Mears. Built by his own construction company, the cinema was designed by Leathart and Grainger F/FRIBA. The building cost around £25,000 and was in a very pleasant and colourful modernistic style. P Morton Shand, who didn't seem to like English cinema design, generally, referred to the external facade in his book, *Modern Theatres & Cinemas*, as being 'by far the best facade which any English cinema yet built can boast'.

The frontage was mostly white with some green panels. There were three large semi-circular topped windows with elegant wrought iron grillages, and a semi-circular canopy at the top of a flight of six steps. Originally there were no hand rails to the steps, but after some complaints these were added. The foyer was panelled in marble and there was a tea lounge over. The auditorium which seated 850 in the stalls and 350 in the circle was decorated in a modernistic fashion in a blend of green, orange and brown, the seat backs being painted in varying colours. There was a small stage and some dressing rooms, but I don't remember them being used very often. Seat prices were 6d, 11d, 1/3d, 1/10d and 2/4d. The opening programme included *The Beautiful Fraud* the Twickenham Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Edward Van Praag, and Sebastian



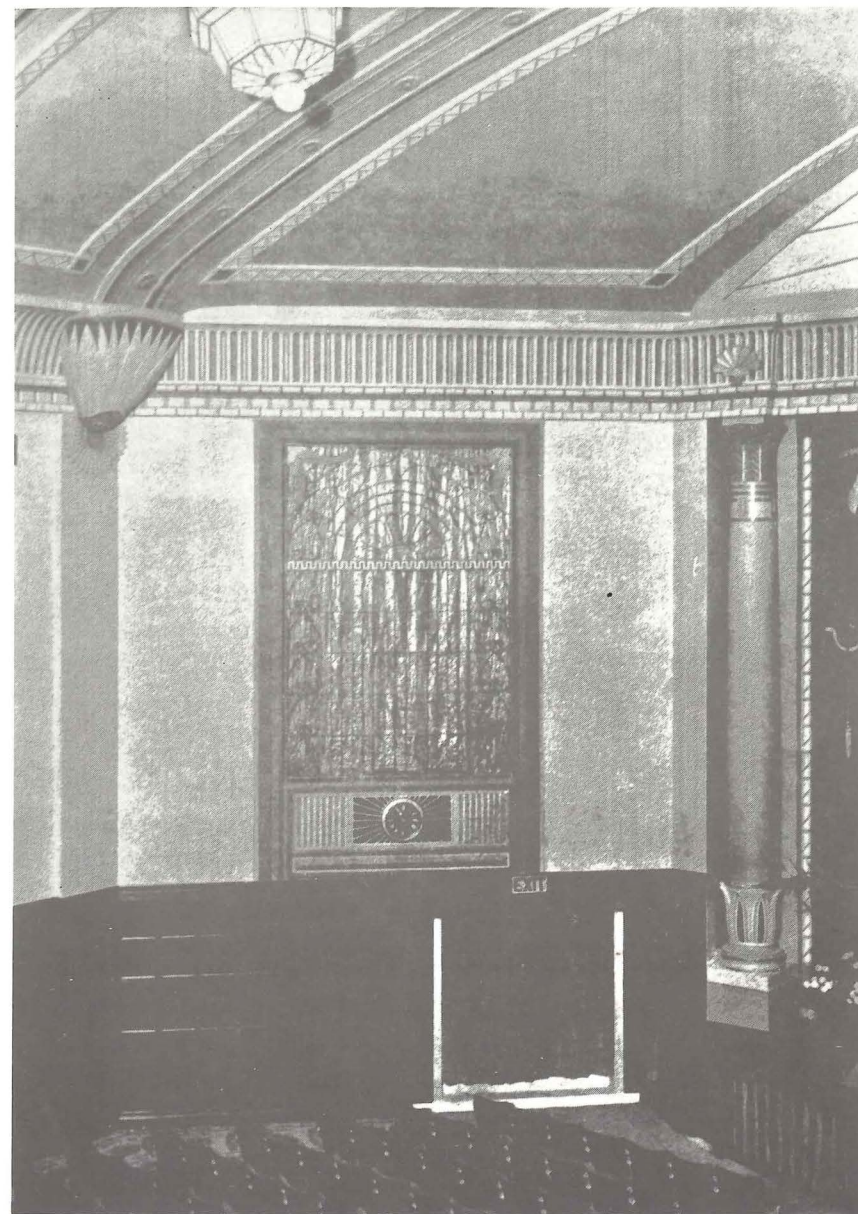
Opposite and above: the elegant modern lines of the Twickenham
Photos: Kevin Wheelan



Fenn at the Compton organ. The organ was not on a lift. The Twickenham was a very pleasant cinema and was the second super cinema to be opened by Joseph Mears, the first being the Kensington Kinema in Kensington High Street (later the Odeon) in 1926. I always thought the organ had a very nice tone. During 1940 the name of the theatre was changed to The Queens but later on that year it closed as a cinema and was leased to the local council for use as a furniture store. In 1914 it was sold with the other Mears' cinemas to Odeon Theatres, and after general refurbishment re-opened in 1945. In 1949 the name was changed to Gaumont at the same time as the Royalty, Richmond was renamed, similarly. The organ was removed in 1941. As the Gaumont it finally closed on 1st December, 1956 with the films *Nightfall* and *Bermuda Affair*. The building has now been demolished and replaced by a garage.



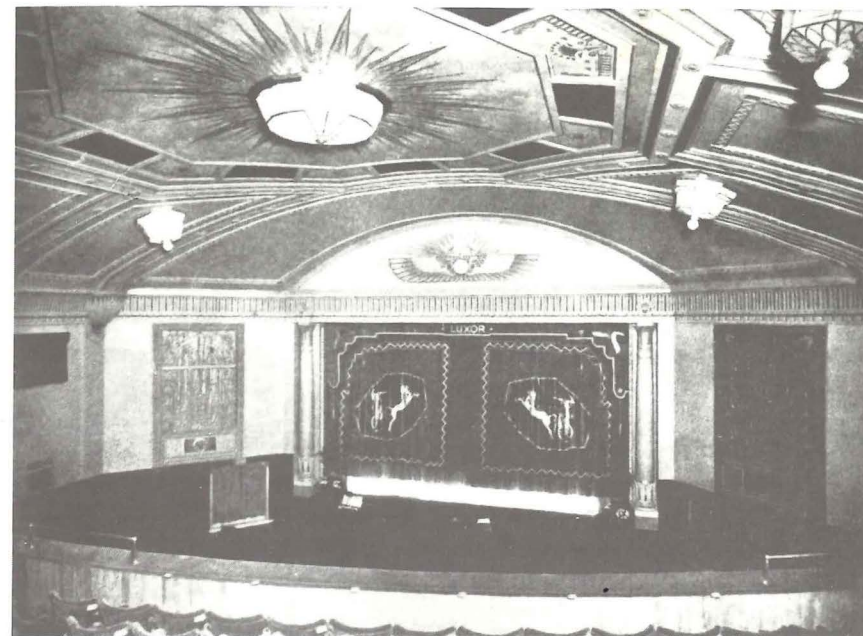
The Luxor at the junction of Heath Road and Cross Deep was opened on 18th November 1929. Built for Rialto (Twickenham) Ltd, by Minter & Co, the architect was J. Stanley Beard, FRIBA. The main elevation is to Cross Deep in an Egyptian style with an attractive colour scheme in its terracotta facing. The foyer was in a modern style and there was a cafe over. The auditorium repeated the Egyptian theme and in the centre of the ceiling, painted to represent sky and clouds, was a large sun design in red and gold. Over the proscenium was a winged creature with the word 'Luxor' below. The general colour scheme was a warm mixture of yellow and light red, with dark wood panelling at low level to the side walls. There was a good stage with nearby dressing rooms, frequently used for variety turns.



Opposite and above: the Egyptian styling of the Luxor, later the Odeon
Photos: Kevin Wheelan



The foyer (above) and the auditorium (opposite) of the Luxor, later the Odeon
Photos: Kevin Wheelan



The opening film was *King of the Khyber Rifles*. Musical items were provided by the Luxor Orchestra under the baton of Edward Van Praag, who had conducted the orchestra at the opening of the Twickenham Kinema. The 2/6 Compton organ was played by John Armitage FRCO. This organ was not on a lift and in the early days was invariably played in conjunction with the orchestra. I remember a very inspiring rendering of Suppes *Light Cavalry* overture by this combination of organ and orchestra in the early weeks the theatre was open.

In recent years the organ has been used for concerts and Don Knights has made at least two recordings of this nice vintage instrument. In the autumn of 1981 it was sadly removed, part being incorporated in the organ at the Odeon, Leicester Square and the remainder returning to the makers.

The cinema as originally built contained 1,700 seats in stalls and circle, with prices ranging from 6d to 2/4d. In 1932 the Luxor was taken over by Joseph Mears Theatres and then in turn sold to Odeon with the rest of the Mears circuit in 1944. Renamed the Odeon, the interior was refurbished and the seating reduced, but the exterior remains almost as it was originally. The cinema finally closed on 10th October 1981.



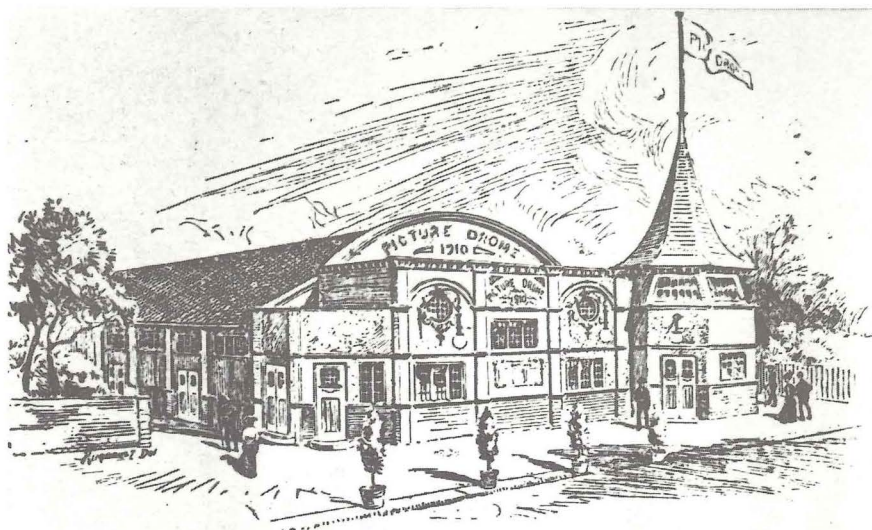


The last cinema to be built in Twickenham, the Regal, opened on 9th October 1939. The 1,740 seat theatre was built for ABC on the site of the former Fortesque House Boys School in London Road. It contained neither a cafe nor an organ. The opening programme included *The Hardys Ride High* and admission prices ranged from 6d in the front stalls to 2/4d in the front circle. The pleasant auditorium was decorated in a modern scheme of predominantly gold and brown. This was another cinema with a short life, closing with the film *Hercules Unchained* on 20th August 1960. It was then demolished and replaced by a block of offices known as Regal House.

Opposite: W J Hemsley at the Luxor's Compton organ
Photo: Tony Moss

Above: the Regal, the last cinema to be built in Twickenham
Photo: Kevin Wheelan

East Sheen

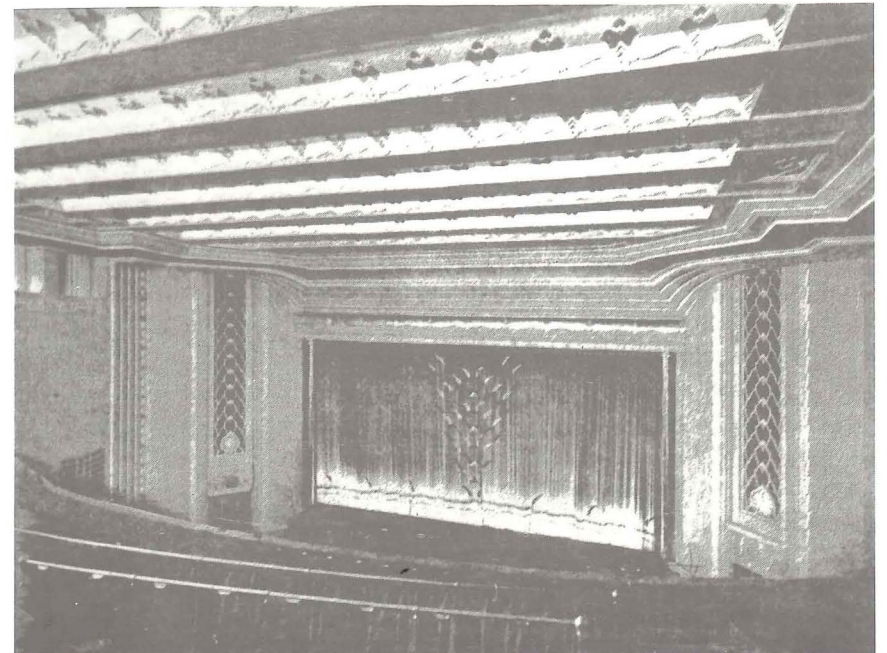
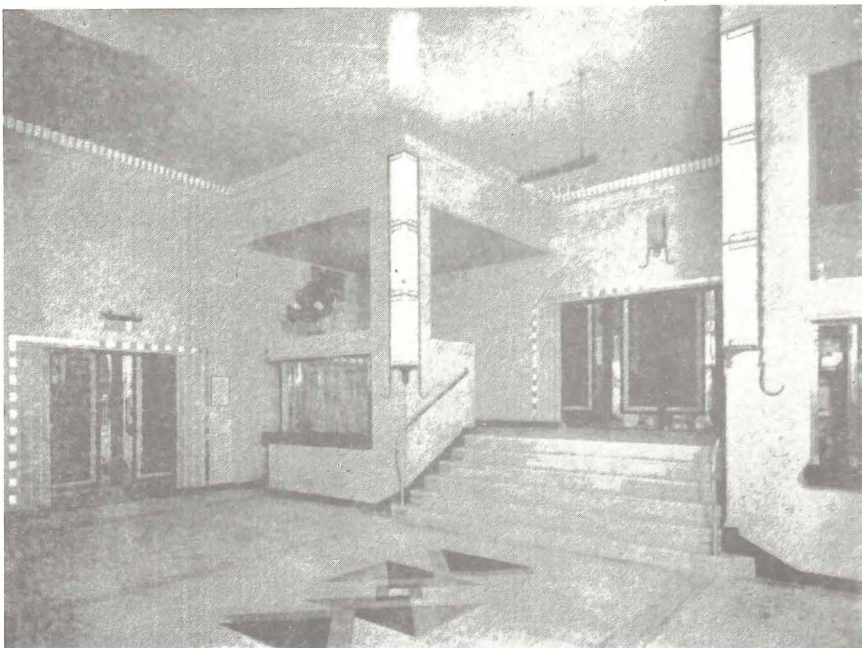
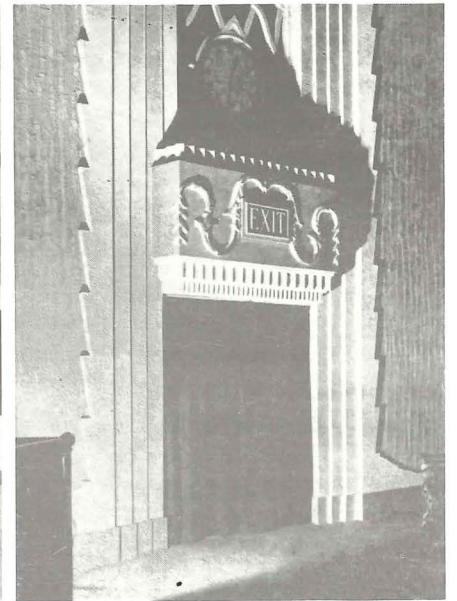
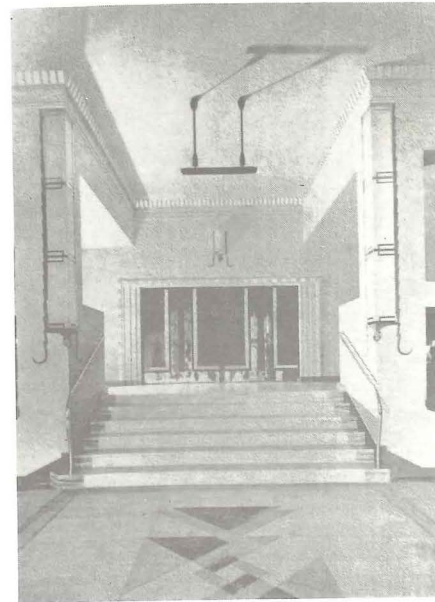
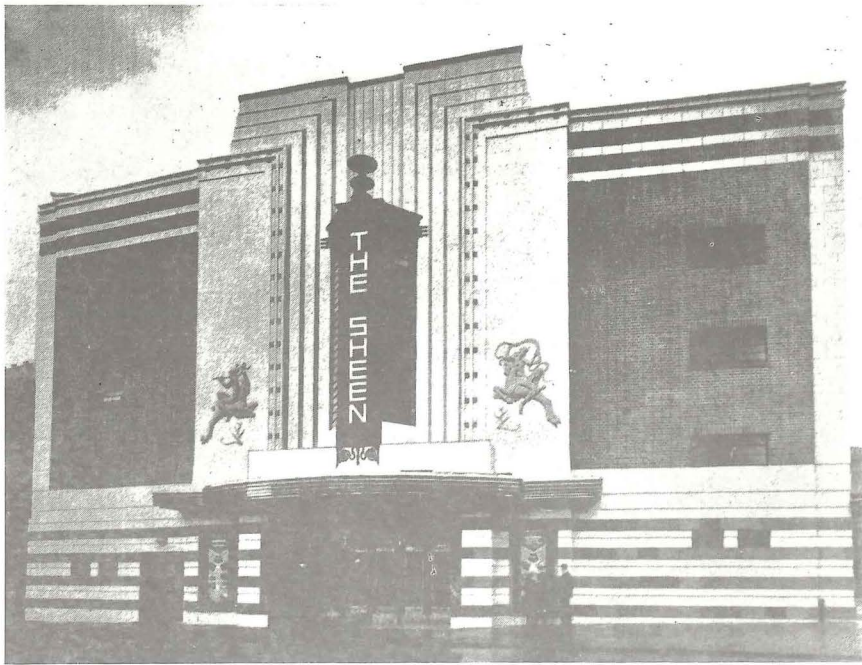


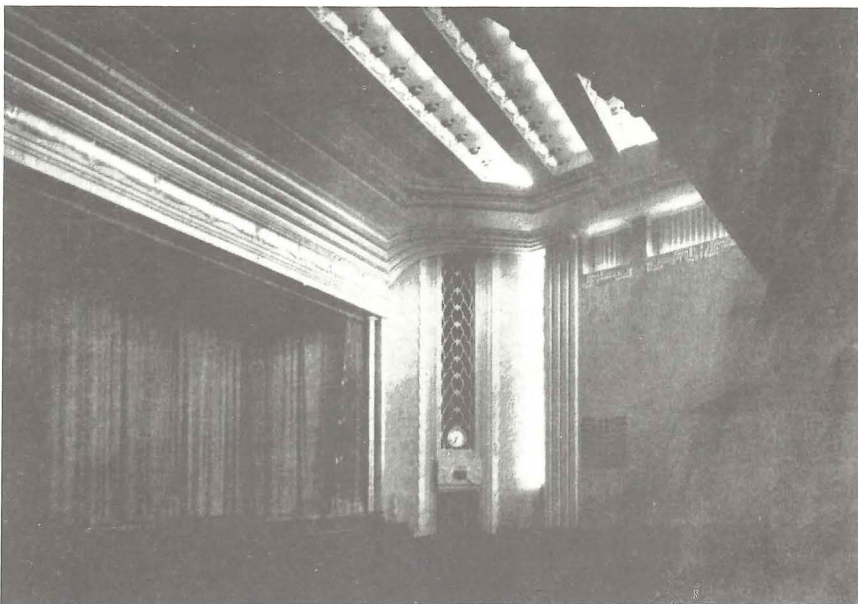
The above illustration represents the facade and elevation of the Picturedrome, which has been completed at the Triangle, East Sheen, and which is to be opened on Boxing Day. Reference to the advertisement on p. 4 shows an excellent programme of unexceptionable type, suitable for the best audiences. Spacious and commanding in appearance, the premises are an ornament to the locality. Doubtless there will be a large audience to mark the opening performance, with liberal patronage subsequently.

The Picturedrome (above) and the Sheen which replaced it (opposite)
Photos: Kevin Wheelan

Built on the site of Parkway House at the junction of Upper Richmond Road and Sheen Lane, known as the Triangle, the Picturedrome opened on Boxing Day 1910. It was a curious little building with a turret and truncated spire on one corner of the external elevation. I remember little of the interior, but am told that in the early days, afternoon tea was provided free for those in the one shilling seats. I don't believe it was ever wired for talkies, being demolished around 1929 to make way for the Sheen Kinema.







Previous pages and above: the sleek lines of the Sheen
Photos: Kevin Wheelan

In December 1930 the Sheen was opened by Joseph Mears on the site of the former Picturedrome. This very nice cinema was designed by Leathart & Grainger F/FRIBA in the modern style and as regards the exterior, was an early example of night architecture, the lighting playing an important part in this.

Basically the colour scheme in the auditorium which contained 1,404 seats in stalls and circle, was shades of green and silver, and there was a Holophane lighting system which could provide over 600 combinations of illumination. A two manual Christie organ was installed to the left of the orchestra pit, but it was not on a lift. During World War II the name was changed to the Empire and then in 1944 it became an Odeon along with the rest of the Mears cinemas.

Final closure came on 3rd July 1961 with the film, *Very Important Person* included in the programme.



Mortlake's little cinema in the High Street, close to the present Charlie Butler pub, and on the site of the former Leach Brothers stores, opened as the Mortlake Cinema just prior to World War I. In 1914 its name was changed to the Electric Pavilion, and then, closing as a cinema, became a factory for the duration of the War. In 1920 it re-opened as the Gaiety, the name it retained until closure.

In 1930 Edibell sound equipment was installed but the little cinema was having a rather thin time, due probably to its location on the edge of the district, and also to the competition from the Sheen which was to open very soon, and which in any case was in a more populated area.

The Gaiety finally closed later in 1930 and was put to industrial use. It caught fire in 1969 and was demolished during the subsequent widening of Mortlake High Street.

Barnes



Opposite and above: the Ranelagh
Drawing: Fred Windsor and photo: Kevin Wheelan

Barnes' only cinema opened at the Byfield Hall (built 1906) in Church Road in June 1910. An important part of the opening programme was a newsreel showing of King Edward VII funeral, during the screening of which Miss Kathleen Mackenzie sang *Nearer My God To Thee*. From 1925 until 1926 it was in use as a theatre during which time John Gielgud and other celebrities appeared. By 1930 it had reverted to use as a cinema named the Ranelagh, with some 500 seats. It was renamed the Plaza in 1943, and the New Vandyke in 1951 for about two years or so. A small fire having occurred, the cinema was closed in March 1952 with the film *Bicycle Thieves*. It was later in use as a recording studio.



Index



The Richmond Theatre - always a place of live entertainment
Photo: Kevin Wheelan

A
Albert, 18

B
Barnes, 35
Byfield Hall, 35

C
Castle Hotel, 2
Clock No. 1, 2
Clock No. 2, 3

D
Dome Buildings, 2

E
East Sheen, 22
Electric Pavilion, 33
Empire, East Sheen, 32
Empire, Richmond, 2

G
Gaiety, Mortlake, 33
Gaiety, Twickenham, 18
Gaumont, Richmond, 5
Gaumont, Twickenham, 21

Grand, 18

L
Luxor, 22
Lyric, 19

M
Mears, Joseph, 4, 12
Mortlake Cinema, 33
Mortlake, 33

N
New Pavilion, 3
New Royalty, 5
New Vandyke, 35

O
Odeon, East Sheen, 32
Odeon, Richmond, 11
Odeon, Twickenham, 22

P
Palais, 2
Pictorial Hall, 3
Picturedrome, 28

Picture Palace, 18
Plaza, 35
Premier, 11

Q
Queens Hall, Richmond, 3
Queens, Twickenham, 21

R
Ranelagh, 35
Regal, 27
Richmond, 2
Richmond Kinema, 11
Richmond Theatre, 36
Ritz, 12
Royalty, 5

S
Sheen, 32

T
Talbot, 3
Talkies, 6, 19
Town Hall, 18
Twickenham, 17
Twickenham Kinema, 19

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MERCIA

Cinema Society

The Mercia Cinema Society was founded in 1980 to keep alive the memory of the heyday of the cinema. The Society publishes books like this one, as well as producing a quarterly magazine, *Mercia Bioscope*. Occasional meetings and events, such as visits to cinemas, are arranged, thereby bringing together those interested in cinema architecture.

The Society is also hoping at some future date to preserve an actual cinema and to run it the way it would have been done during its heyday.

For details of the Society and an up-to-date booklist please send a stamped addressed envelope to Charles Morris, 'West Dene', Manchester Road, Rochdale, Greater Manchester, OL11 3PJ

Various books about cinema architecture are available from the Society. The following books from an ever expanding range are available at the prices indicated. Please add 50p postage to all orders under £6-00 or 95p postage to orders above £6-00. Please order from Mercia Cinema Society (Publications Group), 64 Somerton Drive, Erdington, Birmingham, West Midlands, B23 5ST

The Dream Palaces of Sunderland, £1-90

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