

Ilford Historical Society

Newsletter No.140 December 2022



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Our website can be found at: <http://ilfordhistoricalsociety.weebly.com/>

God bless the Queen! Long live the King!

It wasn't so much a shock as a rite of passage, an event that made us review where we had come from and where we are going. With the Queen's passing, we lost another living link with our recent past. When Elizabeth II succeeded the throne, we were an almost entirely white, superficially Christian nation, rationed and getting back on our feet after a devastating world war; on her death, we are multi-cultural, no longer tied to the traditional ceremonies of baptism, weddings or even conventional funerals and heavily invested in computer technology.

Whatever one's views on the monarchy, the unsettling strangeness of the transition seemed to touch us all. The Leader of Redbridge Council, Councillor Jas Athwal, spoke for many when he said "So many of us have lived our whole lives under the quiet comfort of Her Majesty's reign; this immense loss is deeply personal". And this for a woman that we never knew - well, we knew she liked horses and dogs and that she was dutiful, but we didn't know what she was like as a person. She rarely revealed herself in off-the-cuff remarks. She visited Redbridge four times in 1945, 1949 (as Princess Elizabeth), and in her Jubilee years, 2002 and 2012 (as well as a visit to Barnardo's in 2013). The Queen's one quoted remark from these visits in *Royal Redbridge*, a YouTube film made for the Platinum Jubilee by Redbridge Museum, was 'Goodness, how things have changed', when shown exhibits from Redbridge Museum. But that was the essence of her, she just was. She didn't have to perform or say anything of importance to earn the respect of the majority of the nation. Apart from a few jolts, the monarchy has continued along this well-oiled and comfortable groove for 70 years. Can this continue now she has gone?

Changes are certain to come nationally and internationally as long-standing issues come to the fore, such as Commonwealth countries choosing to become republics and the questioning of other traditions and institutions which have been shelved for years out of respect for Her Majesty. The King, in his first address promised to continue as his mother had done to uphold our existing traditions, freedoms and responsibilities as well as serving and respecting all people irrespective of background or belief. We can only wish him luck in this endeavour.



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Queen Elizabeth I also visited Ilford, in 1597

Queen Elizabeth I visited Wanstead several times but in August 1597 she visited Ilford. Her itinerary as prepared by Simon Bowyer was to visit several houses in the area, staying with Michael Hicks at Ruckholt, Leyton, “on Wednesday night [August 17], to stay there all Thursday, on Friday to dine at Mr Knyvett’s, and so to Havering to bed.”

So on Friday 19th August 1597: “dinner, Claybury, Ilford, Essex; Mr Knyvett. Simon Bowyer made ready ‘a dinner house for her Majesty at Mr Knyvett’s house in the Forest called Claybury’.” Then Simon Bowyer made ready ‘Havering House’, and ‘a standing for her Highness’s hunting in Havering Park’.

August 20/30: dinner, Pyrgo, Havering, Essex; Sir Henry Grey.

August 31, Wednesday: Luxborough, Chigwell, Essex; Mr Stoner.

Sources: [1597: 26 Oct 2004 1597 \(folger.edu\)](#)

Sir Thomas Knyvett of Claybury



Sir Thomas and Lady Knyvet, by Daniel Mytens

Thomas Knyvett (or Knyvet) was the son of Sir Henry Knyvett of Charlton, Wiltshire, and was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, before entering the service of the Crown. He became a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Queen Elizabeth, and later the Queen’s Keeper of the Palace. Elizabeth granted Knyvett premises in Westminster, rent free for life, and later James I extended this arrangement so that Knyvett’s heirs could keep the property for sixty years after his death. The house was large and impressive, part brick and part timbered, and it probably had carved panelling inside the principal rooms. It was close to what was later to be called St. James’s Park where Thomas and his wife, Elizabeth, could stroll in the fresh air. When the family eventually left, the site was acquired by a speculative builder called George Downing. The house he built on the site still stands and is currently the home of Rishi Sunak and his family.

Sir Thomas Knyvett entered our history books in his capacity as a Justice of the Peace for Westminster on the night of 4/5 November 1605. Shortly before midnight a group of men hammered on the door of Knyvet House and showed the magistrate a letter. It had been sent to Lord Monteagle and warned him to stay away from Parliament. Simply transcribed extracts say “My lord, out of the love I have for some of your friends, I want to make sure you are safe. Because of this I would advise you to not attend this sitting of parliament because God and man have agreed to punish the wickedness of this time. Do not think this is a joke, go to your estate in the country where you will be safe, because although there is no sign of any problem yet, this parliament will receive a terrible blow, but they will not see who it is that hurts them. . . .” [The estate may have been Eastbury Manor House at Barking]

Knyvett led Lord Monteagle and others down to search the cellars under the House of Lords and discovered Guy Fawkes with his barrels of gunpowder. It was to Knyvett that Fawkes made his confession. Soon after this he was appointed a Privy Councillor, Member of the Council of Queen Anne, and Warden of the Mint. On 4 July 1607 he became Baron Knyvett of Escrick, Yorkshire, and continued to take part in court life.

When Thomas Knyvett was about 52 years old he married Elizabeth on 21 July 1597 as her second husband. She was the widow of Richard Warren of Claybury and she had inherited the Claybury Estate (about 176 acres) at Woodford Bridge. The house at that time was a large gabled building, probably timber-framed rather than made of brick. (The house we can see today was built in 1791.) Queen Elizabeth I visited Claybury on Friday 19 August 1597 soon after their marriage so perhaps the Queen wanted to congratulate her much respected courtier and meet his bride. As mentioned above, the Queen called in for dinner at Claybury but moved on to Havering House to stay the night.

Sir Thomas Knyvett died on 27 July 1622, just after their silver wedding anniversary, and his wife survived him by just a few weeks. His will makes it clear that he owed his success to his “deceased mother and my living and loving wife, by whose estate (though much wasted by me) I have been maintained. . . .”

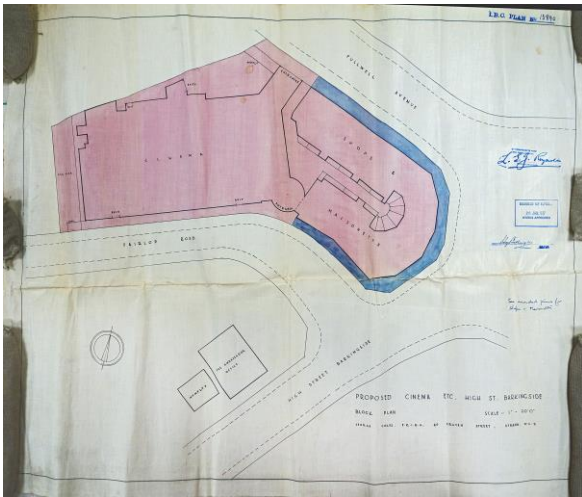
© Georgina Green, 10 November 2022

The State cinema, Barkingside

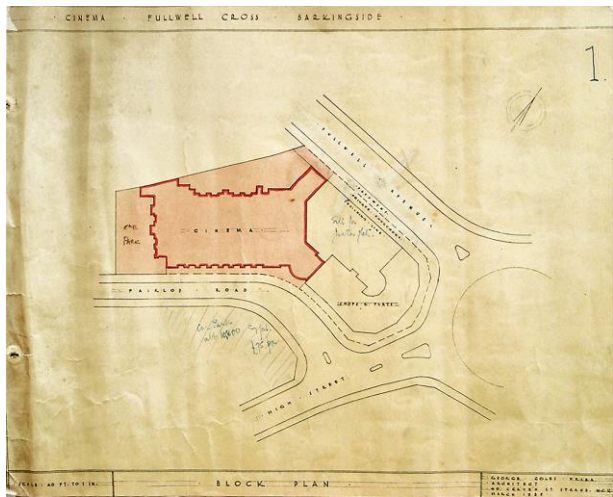
In November 1936, architect and surveyor George Coles¹ submitted a planning application to Ilford Borough Council on behalf of a company named Mirabeau Ltd of 197 Wardour Street, London, W1, to construct a 2,198-seat cinema, 16 shops, and 16 maisonettes at Barkingside. This was to be on a site bounded by Fullwell Avenue, the High Street, and Fairlop Road. The application was quickly withdrawn while formalities were completed in respect of Town Planned

¹ George Coles (1884-1963) was born in Dalston and grew up in Leyton, where his mother ran a sweet shop. He attended Newport Road School and later Leyton Technical Institute. After beginning a career in architecture, Coles formed a partnership with Percy Henry Adams in 1912. The company had an office in Craven Street, London, WC2 and acquired a reputation for its cinema designs. The pair produced many designs for Oscar Deutsch's Odeon chain, as well as numerous other cinemas. Most of their designs were built in the Greater London area, but they also appeared in Brighton, Bournemouth, Halifax and Sheffield, among others. Of the nearly 90 cinemas that Coles designed, the majority are no longer cinemas, and a significant number have been demolished.

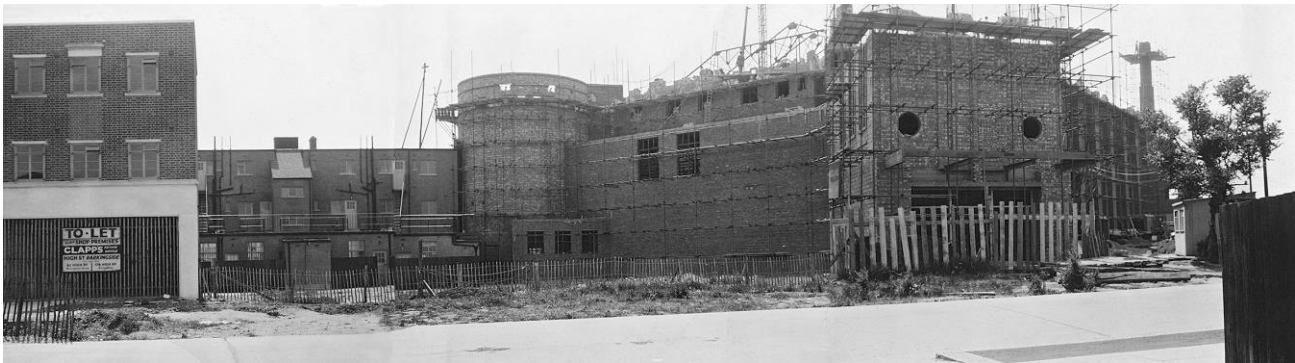
Road No 2² and discussions held regarding the air spaces at the rear of the shops; a new application with amended plans was subsequently made. In January 1937, Ilford Borough Council approved the application for a ‘cinema and 16 lock-up shops and flats adjoining’; in the application the cinema was intended to be named the Era.



The cinema, shops and flats as proposed in the original plan 13890 submitted in 1936. (Courtesy of the Redbridge Heritage Centre)



The cinema, shops and flats in the plans of 1937. Note how shops and flats on the Fullwell Avenue frontage have been omitted, but the space is marked ‘Site for further flats’. (Courtesy of the Cinema Theatre Association Archive)



The cinema, shops and flats under construction in 1938. This shows the Fullwell Avenue side and the gap where more shops and flats had originally been planned.

Construction took place throughout much of 1937 and 1938, the building contractors for the cinema being Higgs & Hill of South Lambeth Road, London, W8 and, on 14 October 1938, George Coles informed the Ilford councillors that the work was complete. Higgs & Hill also wrote to Ilford Borough Council noting ‘Our representative has entered Messrs. Kay Bros.’³ [on

² There were 14 housing and planning Acts passed in 1919-1938. These imposed requirements on local authorities to prepare town planning schemes for any town with a population over 20,000. The earliest draft plans for Ilford’s scheme are dated 1923 and the preliminary statement was submitted to the Ministry of Health in 1926. The final scheme was placed on deposit and a public inquiry held in September 1931. When the scheme emerged in 1933, it envisaged the large-scale residential development of Barkingside, with Fullwell Avenue, Clayhall Avenue, Fremantle Road, Baron Gardens and Fairlop Road to be built as long, straight, single-carriageway ‘town planned’ roads; Fairlop Road was no 2.

³ Kay Brothers was a small independent chain operating as Kessex Cinemas Ltd. Locally, cinemas in its circuit included the Rio, Barking; Regent, Becontree; Grange, Dagenham; Heathway, Dagenham; and Savoy, Gants Hill.

the notice of completion] as the owners, but perhaps we should point out that our contract is signed by Cumberland Cinemas Ltd’.

On 17 October 1938, what had now been named the State cinema was opened by the independent operator Cumberland Cinemas Ltd⁴. Typical of the large suburban cinemas built in the 1930s, the venue had 2,500 seats and was advertised as ‘The District’s Newest Theatre. A Cathedral of Motion Picture Art’. The cinema is described in *The Buildings of England* series of books as:

Slightly curious composition with a tall, streamlined rectangular tower and a lower drum, which contains the entrance, jostling together against the auditorium whose buttressed flank is left exposed to the street. Inside, a characteristically light-hearted decorative scheme, the tall circular foyer has little balconies set halfway up behind frothy ironwork balustrades (large auditorium, richly covered ceiling and closely grouped half columns rippling along the wall).

The cinema had two entrances, the main one on Fairlop Road and another on Fullwell Avenue, both leading to a central rotunda. The auditorium measured 85 feet wide and 92 feet long with seating provided in stalls and in a balcony above. There was also a luxurious café and ballroom. Advertisements also mentioned three car-parks and a ‘special perambulator park’.

Doors opened daily at 1 pm and films were shown from 1.15 pm through to 11 pm. Seats were offered at 6d and 1/- in the afternoons, and 6d, 1/-, 1/6 and 2/- in the evenings. The café and ballroom were open initially from noon until midnight, but soon cut back to 1 pm to 11 pm. Here were tea dances at 9d and supper dances at 1/-; a special supper of mixed grill and light refreshments cost 1/-.

Local newspaper advertisements and contemporary photographs provide evidence that films shown in the first weeks at the new cinema included:

- ‘Alf’s Button Afloat’, starring Alastair Sim and Peter Gawthorne, with Bud Flanagan, Chesney Allen and Jimmy Nervo of ‘The Crazy Gang’.
- ‘Nothing Sacred’ (‘a Technicolor screwball comedy’), with Carole Lombard and Frederic March.
- ‘The Drum’ (‘in glorious Technicolor’), featuring Sabu Dastagir, Raymond Massey and Valerie Hobson.
- ‘Follow Your Star’, a musical with Arthur Tracy, Belle Chrystall and Mark Daly.
- ‘The Hurricane’ (‘the screen’s most romantic thrill’), starring Dorothy Lamour and Jon Hall.
- ‘The Divorce of Lady X’ (‘exceptional, exciting, excellent’), with Merle Oberon and Laurence Olivier.
- ‘Goldwyn Follies’ (‘colour spectacle’, ‘a romantic comedy drama’), a musical with Adolphe Menjou, the Ritz brothers, and Charlie McCarthy.
- ‘Battle of Broadway’ (‘a glittering musical show!’), starring Victor McLaglen, Brian Donlevy, and Gypsy Rose Lee.
- ‘Doctor Rhythm’, a musical featuring Bing Crosby, Mary Carlisle, and Andy Devine.
- ‘The Adventures of Marco Polo’, starring Gary Cooper, Sigrid Gurie, and Basil Rathbone.

Not only did the cinema show films, but it also served as an exhibition space. *The Ilford Recorder* of 24 August 1939 reported that the Ilford & District Model Aircraft Club was holding an exhibition there, featuring petrol models and sailplanes – one with a wingspan of nearly seven feet.

⁴ Cumberland Cinemas Ltd had been formed in February 1935. The company was declared bankrupt in 1942, attributing its failure to the outbreak of war and particularly to the bombing of the area in which its cinemas were located.



The foyer and the auditorium in the new cinema, 10 November 1938

The plans that Ilford Borough Council saw in late 1936/early 1937 included a three-storey U-shaped building adjoining the cinema to its east. This comprised 16 ground-floor shops with 16 two-storey three-bedroom mansion flats above, all on a long frontage to Fairlop Road, the High Street, Fullwell Cross roundabout ⁵, and Fullwell Avenue. The third storey of this building was originally to have been a mansard roof with dormer windows on the flats' upper floor. In the amended plans approved by the council, the flats had a flat roof and a more utilitarian second and third-floor facade. The change in roof structure was probably a cost-cutting exercise, as might have been the subsequent dropping of the Fullwell Avenue-facing section of the shops and flats – about one-third of the planned building – although this could also have been due to unresolved 'air space' issues at the rear. The 16 flats remained, but now reduced to two bedrooms each and squeezed into the space above only 10 shops. The architect's plans held by the Cinema Theatre Association show the revised layout in March 1938, with the empty space marked as 'Site for future flats'. That plot of land remains empty today. It has been a car park at least as far back as the 1960s – and probably ever since the cinema opened in 1938.

The shops and flats were constructed by Kind & Co of Leytonstone ⁶ and are smaller and plainer than most of the shopping parades and flats that make up much of the 1930s High Street at Barkingside. Brick-built with rendered shop fronts at ground-floor level and metal casement windows in the floors above, access to the flats was separate from the shops, either through one of four mildly 'moderne' street-level entrances or by metal staircases to individual balconies at the rear. The properties were let separately – the shops at £150 per year from Clapp's, a Barkingside and Loughton estate agent, and also from Alfred Slinn & Co, estate agents of Ilford Lane; the 'self-contained mansion flats' could each be had for £54 a year from Slinn. (In 2022, one of the same flats was let for £999 per month – that is £11,988 per year, a 222-fold increase from 84 years earlier.) Originally advertised as a single address, 'Tower Parade', by 1939 the shops had become State Parade and the flats State Mansions. According to *Kelly's Directory of Ilford for 1939*, all but one of the flats (no 3) were occupied by 1939, but only one of the shops was in business – Arthur Pope, confectioner, at no 5. The directory shows the cinema in the ownership of Cumberland Cinemas Ltd.

With the outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939, cinemas and theatres were quickly closed. However, within a week, those outside major cities were allowed to re-open. *The*

⁵ Fullwell Cross roundabout was completed in early 1938. Trolleybuses reached Fullwell Cross on 6 February 1938 and the roundabout was the means by which they turned around.

⁶ This company still exists in Leytonstone. Originally formed by local builder and decorator Albert Kind, the business was subsequently taken over and registered by Richard and Geoffrey Giddings in 1944.

Iford Recorder of 14 September reported that, following an interview with the town's mayor (Councillor C A Farman), Ilford's cinema managers had sent a letter to the Home Office requesting permission to re-open, as had already been done elsewhere. The manager of Ilford's Regal cinema was reported as saying 'The psychological effect of cutting off the public's recreation by keeping the cinemas closed is very marked and we feel it may do more harm than good'. From 14 September, all cinemas were permitted to open if they shut at 10 pm. *The Ilford Recorder* carried no cinema listings in its editions of 7 and 14 September, but they reappeared from 21 September. By November, the State was promoting itself as 'Here's a Cure for Black-out Blues! We can now stay open till 11 p.m.'

Fear of being caught in an air raid while at the cinema remained and, in November 1939, *Kinematograph Weekly* reported:

The near proximity of an air raid shelter to a kinema or theatre is a very reassuring fact to patrons who still remain slightly nervous, even after ten weeks of immunity. This is a point emphasised in the publicity of Ewan Shaw, now general manager of the State, Barkingside, who, in some very effective poster publicity, sets out the existence of shelter for 1,000 persons adjoining the kinema.

In fact, from the reappearance of cinema listings in *The Ilford Recorder* on 21 September, the advertisement for the State regularly emphasised 'Air Raid Shelters for Over 1,000 People Adjoining'. Pat Owers remembered visiting the cinema at that time: 'At the State cinema we sat in the cheap seats – 6d – and I loved the Pathé News, our only way of knowing how the war was progressing'.

In late October 1939, Ewan Shaw was appointed manager of the State. *The Ilford Recorder* described him as 'one of the liveliest young men in the business' and 'a real enthusiast for his job, with a record of achievements in cinema management both in this country and in India'.

By 1940, ownership had passed to Kessex Cinemas (run by the Kay Brothers). In the late summer of that year came the Blitz and air-raid attacks on London began in the afternoon of Saturday 7 September. From that date, until 12 May 1941, there were major air raids on Britain almost every night. On 9 September, London theatres were closed, and the London branch of the Kinematograph Exhibitors Association recommended its members to end all cinema shows at 9 pm. This applied to all 500 cinemas operating from Finchley in the north to Lewisham in the south, and from Ilford in the east to Ealing in the west. Consequently, the State adjusted its schedules and its adverts stated: 'For the benefit of our Patrons who desire to get home early, the programme will commence with the Feature Film'.

In late September 1940, the State became a victim of the Blitz ⁷. The last wartime listings for the cinema appeared in *The Ilford Recorder* on 19 September (with Alice Faye and Henry Fonda in 'Lillian Russell', John Mills and René Ray in 'The Green Cockatoo', and a newsreel). I have not been able to ascertain exactly what damage the cinema sustained, but I suspect it was caused by incendiary bombs. The cinema closed and, after minor repairs, the building was requisitioned by the Government. On 16 July 1941, 'the costly and practically new contents of the cinema and cafe' were sold by auction. This included 2,200 tip-up seats, a large quantity of Wilton carpet, two Super Simplex projectors, the Bulman screen, lighting, curtains and draperies, plus the cinema's pay box, and all of the cafe's tables and chairs. Subsequently used as a food store, the War Office took over the ground floor and Ilford Borough Council the balcony. On the BBC's 'WW2 People's War' website, Alison Bush recalled:

⁷ Sixty London cinemas were totally destroyed by bombing over the period of the war.

There were several empty shops in the High Street, which were used to store food during the war. They had big wooden doors on them with padlocks. In the State cinema they stored flour and I can remember seeing men wheeling out big white sacks and loading them onto lorries. The rumour went around that the cinema was alive with rats.

In September 1947, two years after the end of the war, the empty building was acquired and refurbished by the Associated British Cinemas (ABC) chain. On 29 January 1948, *The Ilford Recorder's* cinema correspondent reported:

I now have it that the State Cinema, Barkingside, the youngest of all Ilford's picture houses, is to open some time in late February.

Mr. J. R. Harrison⁸, who used to be manager of the Savoy, Gantshill, is the manager. He is now in office at the State during the daytime. Mr. Harrison tells me there are still odds and ends to be done. "Some equipment has to be installed," he said. "Some things are in the air even yet, but one thing is certain, the inside of the State looks more like a cinema again."

During the last three weeks new carpets and other necessary installations have transformed the once empty and forlorn-looking auditorium.

A fortnight later, the cinema correspondent added:

The State Cinema, Barkingside, opens on Monday at 1.30 p.m. with the film "Mine Own Executioner," which is the film showing at other A.B.C. Cinemas. I am told there are to be no stars or any undue prominence of any kind at the opening ceremony.

This cinema was requisitioned and used as a store by a Government department during the war and only after it was purchased by the A.B.C. was it speedily transformed into a picture house again. It has new R.C.A. sound and completely new furnishings.

The refurbished ABC State cinema opened on 16 February 1948 and films shown over the following three weeks included:

- 'Mine Own Executioner' ('Intolerance! Remorse!') with Kieron Moore, Burgess Meredith and Dulcie Gray
- 'All the King's Men' ('From Beekeepers to the Grenadiers')
- 'The Real Glory'
- 'Apache Trail'
- 'An Ideal Husband' starring Paulette Goddard, Wilding and Hugh Williams
- 'Britain's Sure Shield' ('A Naval Documentary')
- 'Candlelight in Algeria'
- 'Lights of the Old Santa Fe'
- 'The Unfaithful' ('What's HER side of the Story?') with Ann Sheridan, Lew Ayres and Zachary Scott
- 'Little Tough Guys in Society' with the Dead End Kids



The Fairlop Road side of the cinema after its re-opening following the Second World War, March 1949.

⁸ John Harisson had entered the cinema business in 1935 at the Savoy, Gants Hill, where he was the first assistant manager. His career with ABC began at the Rex, Stratford, and he was at the Rivoli, Southend, from 1940 to 1948. In 1948, he went to the State, Barkingside and stayed there for ten years until his appointment as manager of the Savoy, Leicester in 1958. He was Champion Showman for the London District in 1952, and Champion Manager for that district in 1953.

The new seating capacity was 2,200, but the original café and ballroom remained closed and unused. Manager John Harrison was assisted by E E Coxall (from the Rex, Stratford). On 30 March 1950, *Kinematograph Weekly* reported:

“Do you know your ABC?” is the title of a brochure, 4,000 of which were distributed by John A. Harrison, manager of the State, Barkingside, Ilford. This 16-page octavo booklet, the cost of which was covered by local advertisers, contains a mass of interesting information about the theatre and its activities. It answers most of the obvious queries to be expected from patrons, and is a publication that other managers might like to copy.

The cinema thrived during the picture-going boom of the 1950s although the seating capacity was slightly reduced over the following decades – to 2,182 by 1953 and 2,066 by 1969. And on 21 February 1955, *The Daily Herald* reported a ‘screen slasher’ at the cinema: ‘For the second time in a week someone broke into the State cinema, Barkingside, Essex, yesterday and slashed the new 50ft. wide screen’. In Helen Finch’s book *Barkingside Memories*, two contributors mentioned their visits to the cinema in this period: Ray Burton recalled:

Saturday morning pictures were at the ABC cinema at Fairlop roundabout at the bottom of Fullwell Avenue. It was well attended with queues around the block to see the likes of Flash Gordon, Roy Rogers and cartoons. All films were serialised and finished at an exciting part so you came back the following week to see what happened next and if the hero survived. The show always started with the audience of children singing ‘We are the minors of the ABC’⁹.



Linda Barnes recollected travelling from Grange Hill to Saturday morning pictures in Barkingside:

My brothers, sister and I, along with a gang of friends, always went to the State cinema for Saturday morning pictures. We wouldn’t have missed it for anything. We would see Flash Gordon and of course Superman – not to mention Westerns. We had one shilling each. It cost 2d each way on the bus and 6d to get in. The other 2d was to spend on sweets at Enever’s, which was next door to Grange Hill station where we got the bus.

On the BBC ‘WW2 People’s War’ website, Carol Cooper recalled visiting the State:

I don’t remember going to the pictures during the war but after the war we went to Saturday morning pictures. That was 6d a time and as I was an ABC Monitor it didn’t cost me anything to go in. I had to wear my Monitor’s badge to be able to go in free. When we were in there you could get a piece of newspaper made into a cone filled up with broken ice cream wafers and they were a halfpenny a cone which we use to share.

In 1964, the ABC State became the ABC Barkingside and, five years later, EMI bought the ABC cinema circuit. The cinema continued as a single-screen operation until it closed for three months on 19 August 1972 to be converted into a cinema and bingo operation at a cost of £38,000.

On 23 November 1972, a new 626-seat ABC cinema opened upstairs in the former circle. Down below, the area that had previously been the stalls was given over to bingo operated by Star Cinemas (Bingo Division) using the entrance in Fullwell Avenue. Four years later, on 4

⁹ In 1950, ABC set up the first major Saturday cinema club for children, ‘The ABC Minors’. At the beginning of each Saturday morning session, the ‘ABC Minors Song’ would be played to the tune of ‘Blaze Away’ by Abe Holzmann (1874-1939), whilst the lyrics were presented on the screen with a bouncing red ball above the words to help the audience keep the place. The lyrics were: ‘We are the boys and girls well known as Minors of the ABC. And every Saturday all line up to see the films we like and shout with glee. We like to laugh and have our sing-song. Just a happy crowd are we. We’re all pals together. We’re minors of the ABC.’

December 1976, ABC closed the cinema, considering it financially unviable. There were no queues on the final day, except for the Saturday morning cartoons when a few young children gathered in a gaggle to be let in at 10 o'clock; the very last showings were that evening with 'Exposed' and 'Sex Rally'. Of the 12 cinema staff, five were transferred to other cinemas and seven were made redundant (another two had left before closure), including manager George Smith who had been with the company for 35 years. Manageress Vera Marsh had worked at the cinema since 1964; she blamed the closure on the fact that the cinema was the last on the local ABC circuit to receive feature films – after Ilford and Woodford had 'flogged them to death'. Cashier Hilda Carter had worked at the cinema since 1953, when she recalled queues every day of the week. The bingo operation remained open downstairs.

EMI denied that Barkingside was a film 'backwater' and stated that it was not averse to another company taking over the cinema side of the business, considering that a small company without EMI's overheads might be able to make it pay. The cinema was subsequently leased by the small independent Alternative Cinema Entertainments (ACE) chain, run by Peter Dobson and partners, which operated more than a dozen cinemas in south-east England.

On 17 September 1978, the cinema section re-opened as the 635-seat ACE-State cinema; the first film shown was 'Grease', with seats costing £1. *The Ilford & Redbridge Post & Pictorial* of 20 September 1978 reported:

It was just like old times ... Many of the staff who lost their jobs when the ABC closed are back working again for the company called ACE ... The choice of films at the old cinema was criticised as being either too old or appealing only to a limited audience ... ACE plan to bring family films to the Barkingside screen.

Two days later *The West Essex Gazette & Independent* added: 'By eschewing the tawdry X-rated trash, they should endear themselves to both family audiences and cinema fans generally'. A second (video) screen seating 159 opened in the former café/ballroom area on 15 May 1982. However, the revived ACE cinema – with a capacity of nearly 800 seats across the two screens – was not a long-term success and, when the lease expired, it closed on 30 August 1984; the last films shown were 'Star Trek III: The Search for Spock' on the main screen and 'BMX Bandits' on the video screen (this starring a young Nicole Kidman in one of her earliest film roles). These sections of the building have since been mothballed and remain unused. A letter in a Cinema Theatre Association bulletin in 2002 noted that the cinema foyer still contained its two original balconies, one of which was false and the other led to the old ballroom/café in which there were still some original light fittings. Around the back above the central rotunda was a one-bedroom flat with its original glass door; in the 1950s and 1960s, this was used as the ABC chain's area office.

Today, bingo carries on in the former stalls area, now using the entrance in Fairlop Road, run by Gala Bingo and, from June 2018 named Buzz Bingo Club. A false ceiling has been installed forward of the balcony to the proscenium and stage, so the original decoration in the auditorium is no longer visible.

In putting together this article, I must thank the staff at Redbridge Heritage Centre, Clive Polden of the Cinema Theatre Association, Spencer Hobbs and Gordon Brown, all of whom have helpfully provided information and images.

© *Alan Simpson, 24 September 2022*

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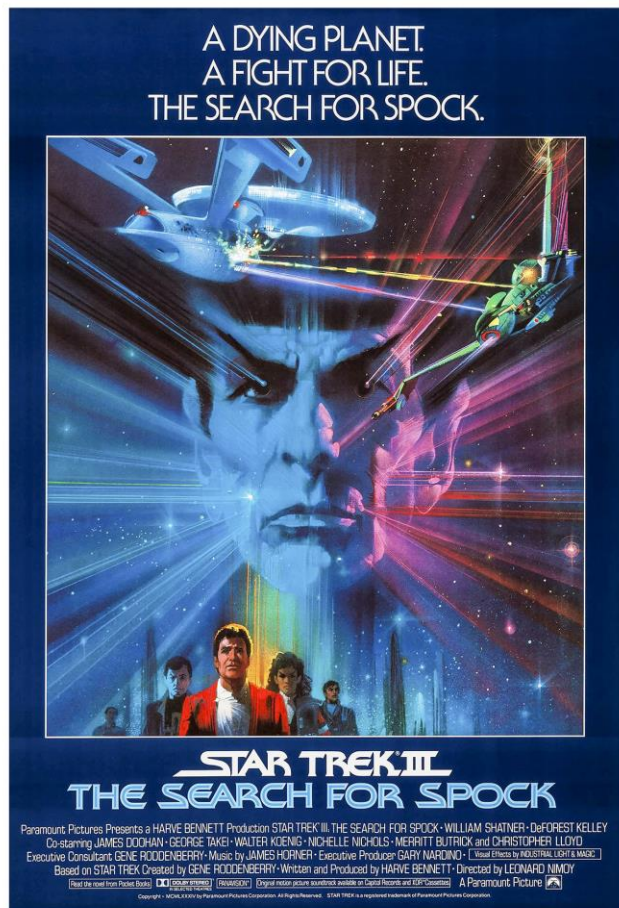
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COMWORLD PRESENTS
A FILM BY BRIAN TRENCHARD-SMITH
BMX BANDITS
STARRING DAVID ARGUE, JOHN LEY, NICOLE KIDMAN, ANGELO D'ANGELO, JAMES LUGTON
DIRECTOR: BRIAN TRENCHARD-SMITH DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN SEALE, A.S.C.
SCREENPLAY: PATRICK EDGEMORTH BASED ON A SCREENPLAY BY: RUSSELL HAGG
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Paramount Pictures Presents a HARVE BENNETT Production STAR TREK III, THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK - WILLIAM SHATNER - DeFOREST KELLEY
Co-starring JAMES DOOHAN - GEORGE TAKEI - WALTER KOENIG - MICHELLE NICHOLS - MERRITT BUTTRICK and CHRISTOPHER LLOYD
Executive Consultants: GENE RODDENBERRY - Music by JAMES HURNER - Executive Producer BARRY MARONDO - Edited by BOB SCHAPIRO
Based on STAR TREK Created by GENE RODDENBERRY - Written and Produced by HARVE BENNETT - Directed by LEONARD NIMOY
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Rita Lebetkin remembers the Gants Hill area c.1920s

I had the pleasure of sitting down for a cup of tea with 99-year-old Rita Lebetkin in June 2022. She is a charming lady and has an astonishing recall of her experiences growing up in Gants Hill in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

She was born Rita Sanders in 1923 and her father, a cabinet maker, moved the family to 14 Ashurst Drive in April 1927 when Rita was only four. The Lebetkins lived there until both parents had passed away in the late 1980s.

She attended Newbury Park School from 1928 which, she reminds me, preceded the opening in 1929 of Gearies School in Waremead Road. She then went to Ilford County High School for Girls in Cranbrook Rod, which later became Valentines High.

Rita recalls the housing in that area was very much in development; Headley Drive and Otley Drive were not built at that time, although Martley Drive had been completed. Rita tells me that the area from Martley Drive leading down to the roundabout, (which now houses the library, car park and the parade of shops on Cranbrook Road), was grassy scrubland and completely undeveloped. This is evident in early aerial photographs of Gants Hill.

Gants Hill was well known for its large Jewish community of families who started arriving after the war, mainly as a result of their East London homes being bombed out. Regarding her neighbours in Ashurst Drive, she remembers there were a few Jewish families - the Kleins, the Freedmans and the Lebetkins who lived in Southview Crescent, just the other side of the newly completed Eastern Avenue.

Rita's father didn't own a car, but the Lebetkins did, as they were one of the wealthier Jewish neighbours at that time, and which she jokes, could have had an influence on her choice of boyfriend! They had a son called Raphael, and Rita recounts the time at a dance in North West London when Raphael plucked up the courage to ask Rita for a dance. She didn't much like him at first, but as he offered her a lift home in his car, and no-one else was going to give her a ride back to Ilford during wartime, she readily agreed. As it turned out his car broke down on the way home, and they had to walk back from Leytonstone to Gants Hill. Before too long Raphael Lebetkin swept young Rita off her feet and they were married in 1946 when she was 19 and the couple set up home in Ilford.

Rita's husband Raphael, who was a furniture manufacturer, also played bridge, which is how he became acquainted with my own maternal grandfather Isadore Rose, a bridge champion and teacher. They met through the furniture trade, as Isadore managed the family furniture business, Summercorn's at 53 Ilford Hill. They became such good friends that Isadore invited Rita and Raphael to my parents' wedding (June Rose to Martin Goodman) in 1952. Their names are on the wedding seating plan which I have in my possession.

I asked Rita what shops she remembered - she mentioned Bartons Bakers and Norman Stanley in Cranbrook Road next to the original Sainsburys. There was a tobacconist next door to Bartons called Gregorys, Henry Haysoms Furnishings, which became Midland Bank, and the Co-op which was a little further down Cranbrook Road.



She also remembered L. Lewis Menswear (now Golds Pharmacy), and Fines Grocers which was on Woodford Avenue near to where Shalom Bakery currently stands. Fines originally traded from a shop in York Road, Ilford.



Rita and her family stayed at home in Ashurst Drive all the way through the war. They had a shelter in the garden and a large solid oak table in the lounge which they used to sit huddled under most evenings. Her family were totally unaware of the Plessey munitions factory operating in the underground between Gants Hill and Wanstead, until well after the war was over.

She remembers bathing at the Valentines Lido where the water was changed once a week. She even described in vivid detail the disgusting state of the water by the end of the week, but I'll not elaborate on it!

The family never ate out in those days, as they were living in austere times, but there were quite a number of smart restaurants in Gants Hill.

A great memory for Rita was when George V and Queen Mary came to Ilford to open the new wing of the King George Hospital at Newbury Park in July 1931. The children had the day off school and everyone lined the streets of Eastern Avenue to watch the Royal procession go past.

Rita is thankfully still in good health and lives in Wanstead. She not only served me tea, but also some delicious homemade cookies. Rita Lebetkin is a truly remarkable woman, and it was a very enjoyable and worthwhile afternoon.

© Vincent Goodman, 28 June 2022

The End of Downshall

When estates fall into the hands of developers and are broken up for the laying out of roads and building of houses, the principal building belonging to the estate tends to be demolished. There are exceptions such as with Valentines and Loxford but for the majority this is the case. But the exact dates of precisely when this takes place are often difficult to ascertain. Although no details appear to exist relating to the sale of Downshall to Mr A. Cameron Corbett in 1897, it appears to be widely accepted that the house and farm buildings were demolished in the early 1900s.

Writing in early 1901, Tasker says that:

*"The last tenant of the old farmhouse was Mr Mead, who for 33 years had cultivated its 107 acres, but shortly after the purchase of the property by Mr Cameron Corbett, M.P., he was obliged to give up his holding. The old building, which had stood for 300 years at least, and would last many more, will soon be pulled down to make room for the completion of the long streets which are being formed etc"*¹⁰

¹⁰ George Tasker *Ilford Past and Present* (1901), p105

So this tells us two things – that Clement Mead vacated Downshall as the tenant soon after 1897 and that the farm was to be demolished later in 1901 or perhaps 1902. But evidence drawn from a range of sources such as Kelly’s Directories and the British Newspaper Archive suggest that neither of these might be correct. Let me begin with the tenant farmer, Clement Mead. An article in the *Chelmsford Chronicle* from November 1900 printed an account of bankruptcy proceedings against a Robert Lewsey of Grove Farm, Chadwell, where it is said that proceedings against him to recover a debt of £119 had been brought by Clement Mead of Down Hall Farm, Ilford.¹¹ Mead then was definitely still at Downshall in late 1900. For his later movements, his obituary in the *Mid Sussex Times* of October 1922 is helpful. It states that “*The deceased gentleman came to Clayton from Ilford (Essex) in 1901*” and that “*He personally farmed...Downs Hall farm for 35 years.*” This seems to be fairly conclusive evidence that not only did Mead not have to give up the tenancy soon after the estate was sold in 1897 but was still at Downshall until some point in 1901. This is also the opinion of Frank Sainsbury in his history of St John’s Church but he thought that “*the old house came down about the same time – allowing Meads Lane subsequently to assume its present straight course.*”¹²

Duns Hall (Downshall) c.1800 by A.B.Bamford. Reproduced by permission of the Essex Records Office



But what of the Farm building itself? It is clear from what we know of the date of Clement Mead’s departure it seems to be still intact, albeit with maybe new houses starting to encroach from all sides, in 1901. But in 1902 it appeared that Downshall had a future after Mead.

Advertisements in the *Essex Guardian* in May 1902 for an auction to be held on the 29th of that month, offer not only plots for sale on St Albans, Pembroke, and Derby (now Chester) Roads, and shop sites in Meads Lane but also “*the substantially Brick Built FREEHOLD FARM HOUSE known as DOWNSHALL FARM HOUSE, MEADS LANE, SEVEN KINGS.*”¹³ The purchaser is unknown but Downshall Farm is listed in Kelly’s Directories continuously up to and including 1906.¹⁴ The 1905 edition lists under Meads Lane, a Mission Room followed by Edward Ballentyne, Downshall farm. The 1906 entry is the same but in 1907 Ballentyne is listed under 148 Westwood Road with a Gospel Mission Room, while Downshall farm has disappeared from

¹¹ Chelmsford Chronicle 9th November 1900

¹² Frank Sainsbury *St John’s Church Seven Kings 1904-1979* (Plaistow Press Magazines Ltd, 2nd ed. 1979), p14. However, it proved possible for Meads Lane to be straightened without the farm house needing to be demolished, with the result that it ended up on the south side of the new road.

¹³ Essex Guardian 24th May 1902

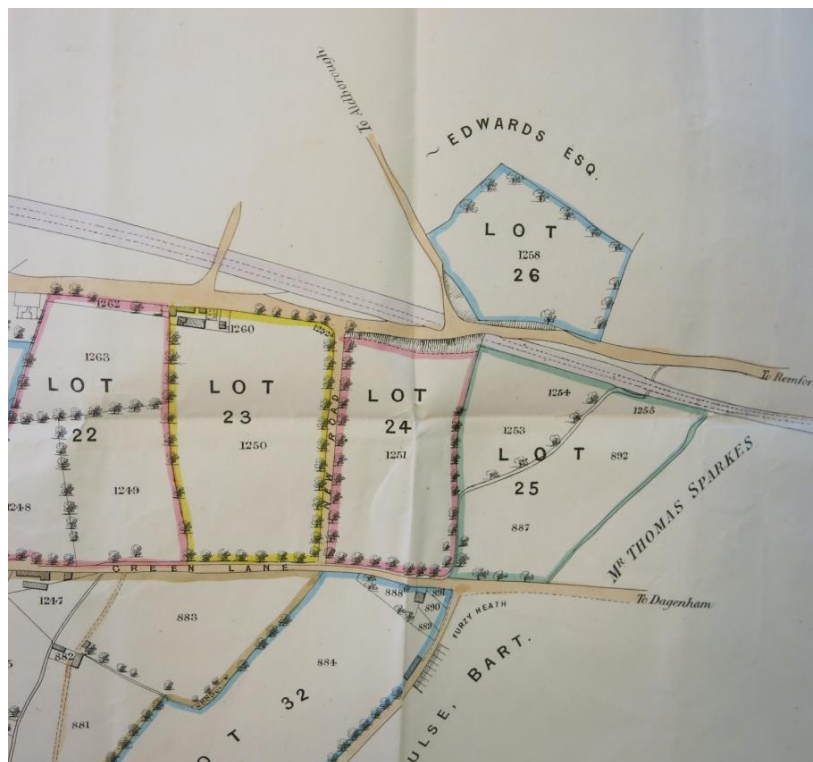
¹⁴ The relevant Kelly’s Directories are held at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Sadly the present author, while noting that Downshall farm was still listed under Meads Lane up to 1906, failed to note the occupant’s name when perusing them a few years ago.

Meads Lane although a Mission Room is still listed. There is, therefore fairly conclusive evidence that the farm building existed until at least 1906 and may not have been demolished until 1907. It is also worth looking at the houses built in the general area of Downshall on the south side of Meads Lane, and the northern sections of Pembroke and Chester Roads where houses were not built until much later – even some in the mid-1920s.

But that reference in the auction notice of May 1902 about the farmhouse being sold freehold does raise an issue – namely, that it suggests that it was not sold to Mr Cameron Corbett along with the rest of the estate in 1897 but retained or sold to Clement Mead for him to use until his retirement to Sussex in 1901.

For a possible reason we need to go back, perhaps surprisingly, to the sale of the Clements Estate in August 1879. For within that sale as Lot 26, was a piece of land called Briton's Pond Field with an area of 10a 1r 1p and situated on the north side of the turnpike road and on the corner of what was then Gosling Lane and is now Cameron Road. The following week's issue of the *Chelmsford Chronicle* gave details of the buyers for the majority of the lots that were sold at the auction.¹⁵ It records that Lot 26 was bought by none other than a Mr C. Mead of Ilford for the sum of £1,000. Any thoughts that he was purchasing on behalf of the then owner of Downshall can be dispelled by the Ilford Burial Board Rate Books which record Mead as the owner of the ten-acre field in 1882, 1889, and 1892.

Auction Map from ERO ref. D/Dsa 1333/28, Reproduced by courtesy of the Essex Record Office.



As you can see from the auction map this would have presented Corbett with a problem if he was to develop all of the area east of Aldborough Road and between Meads Lane and the High Road. I am open to the possibility of information to the contrary turning up in the future but would suggest the following scenario. Given that the location of the farmhouse was at the very north-east point of the Downshall Estate, it was of far less importance to Corbett than

the land then owned by Mead. Corbett, therefore, suggested to Mead that he purchase the ten-acre Britons Pond Field off him, and in return Mead would purchase the farmhouse and live in it until he was due to retire. Mead then sold the farmhouse – possibly at the auction in 1902 after he had moved to Sussex. This may have been to Edward Ballentyne who then used it as a Mission Hall until he then sold it to developers in 1906-7 who built the remaining houses on the incomplete roads.

¹⁵ *Chelmsford Chronicle* 22nd August 1879

Writing local history is sometimes a combination of the recounting of events that have been recorded albeit teasing them out from original but minor sources, updating long-held views of what happened, and making some reasonable assumptions to fill in the gaps. With Downshall, we are now able to say with some confidence when Clement Mead left the farmhouse, what happened to it afterwards, and have a reasonable idea on when it was finally demolished. We may never know the details of the transactions that took place between Cameron Corbett and Clement Mead but it is certainly possible that a deal was struck to enable Corbett to develop where he did, and to allow Mead to stay put until his retirement to Sussex.

© *Dr Colin Runeckles, 24 October 2022*

IHS Programme for Spring 2023

Our regular monthly meetings will be held in the Gloucester Room, Ilford Central Library, Clements Road, Ilford IG1 1EA. on the second Monday of each month, September – May. Free refreshments will be served from 7pm and our talks start at 7.30pm; we finish by 9.30pm. Visitors are welcome, £3 per meeting. There are often walks for members in the summer. Membership of the society for 2022-23 is £10 (payable from September) This includes 3 newsletters available at our meetings, or by email on request.

If there is a return of Covid restrictions our talks will be available via Zoom.

Please check our website: <http://ilfordhistoricalsociety.weebly.com/> for updates.

9 January 2023 *London Through Artists Eyes.*

by Rev John Brown, St Luke's Church Ilford.

13 February 2023 *Valentines Mansion and its Owners.*

by Georgina Green, author & Vice-President, Ilford HS.

13 March 2023 *A Stroll Around Snaresbrook.*

by Lynn Jones, Ilford HS committee member.

17 April 2023 AGM 7.15pm followed by

In Good Health? Ilford's Medical Health Services from 1800 to the NHS.

by Jef Page, President Ilford HS.

NOTE CHANGE OF DATE

15 May 2023 *19th Century Ilford: from Village to Town?*

by Dr Colin Runeckles, Treasurer Ilford HS.

NOTE CHANGE OF DATE



The next newsletter will be available at our December meeting.

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