

# THE DUKE'S AT 100

THE STORY OF BRIGHTON'S FAVOURITE CINEMA

Compiled and Edited by Cinecity



Photograph by Roger Bamber 2010



*“The Duke’s is one of Britain’s truly great independent cinemas. The jewel in the crown of Brighton. I love it.”*

**Nick Cave**

*“Today to be able to sit back & watch a movie inside the Duke of York’s is virtually a sacred experience... It harks back to the days when cinema was king, when movies were given the scale, the space, and all the majestic quality that would transport audiences into other magical worlds. As the oldest standing cinema in the country it must never be carved up into a multiplex and be protected at all times.”*

**John Hillcoat**

# FOREWORD

**T**HE DUKE OF YORK'S PICTUREHOUSE opened on 22 September 1910 and after one hundred years of continuous operation, it is acknowledged as the oldest purpose-built cinema in the UK. This book commemorates the centenary of this much loved cinema.

THE DUKE'S AT 100 reveals an intriguing history that began twenty years before the advent of synchronised sound. After welcoming millions of audience members, witnessing many changes of ownership and surviving numerous threats to its existence and even possible demolition, it was re-born in the early 1980's as an arthouse cinema. It is now part of the City Screen chain of Picturehouse cinemas and a protected Grade II listed building.

There was a nationwide cinema building boom in the years 1910-14 with fourteen new picture palaces built in Brighton & Hove. The Duke's was the first purpose-built cinema in the city and, today, it is the great survivor. Its location away from the city centre meant that it escaped some of the commercial pressures that led to the destruction of all of its contemporaries.

Most books on cinema history concentrate on films and film-makers. THE DUKE'S AT 100 is different because the Duke's birthday has provided us with an opportunity to explore a century of cinema-going through the history of one building, its audiences and the people who worked there.

By exploring this rich history through historical research, anecdotes, and memories, interviews, photographs, advertisements and film programmes, we have tried to capture a sense of just what this cinema has meant to so many.

It has been a great pleasure gathering together these elements that combine to tell the story of the Duke's. It is Brighton's favourite cinema as well as the country's most enduring picture house.

Cinecity 2010

# 1920's

SUSSEX PICTUREDROMES &  
THE SHOW  
THAT PUTS THE  
BRIGHT  
IN BRIGHTON  
E.V. GLENISTER

**T**he new owners of the Duke's, the Sussex Picturedrome Company, was registered on 17 April 1918 with £5,000 in £1 shares. In 1922, Mr. W.T. Bradshaw became a director of Sussex Picturedromes and he took charge of the Duke of York's by the end of the 1920's, remaining its head until his death in 1955. This provided the longest and most stable period in the history of the cinema.



Mr. W. T. Bradshaw Managing Director from 1922 to 1955. Courtesy of Sue Ringwood

# Talkies

## 1930's



The talkie revolution came to Britain when *The Jazz Singer* opened on 27 September 1928 at the Piccadilly Theatre in London. In Brighton, the Regent and Palladium cinemas tried to be the first to introduce sound to Brighton cinemagoers on Monday 1 July 1929. The Duke's played the last major American non-talking film, *The Four Feathers*, from Monday 12 May 1930 for six days and then closed the following week to be redecorated. It was fitted out with new seats and carpets, and wired up for sound with a speaker behind a new screen which had to be moved forward from being on the rear wall.

Sussex Picturedromes had entered into a hire purchase agreement with Sound Equipment Ltd. for a British Thomson-Houston "reproducer" at a cost of £1,325.

Eleven months after sound first came to Brighton, the Duke of York's launched its talkie installation on Monday 26 May 1930 with a six-day run of Fox's musical hit *Sunny Side Up* (first seen in Brighton at the Regent from Monday 10 March for six days). It is not clear whether the Duke's ticket prices went up at this point but the annual Kinematograph Year Book records an increase in the price range (eight pence to

two shillings and fourpence) after it had been five pence to two shillings.

The interest in seeing and hearing what had been done to the Duke's and the huge appeal of *Sunny Side Up* brought out the crowds. The opening Monday drew huge queues for seats at all prices. The Duke's followed this draw with a three-day run "by special request" of *The Singing Fool*. Its films were now all talkies.

#### Extract from Allen Eyles' history

**PICTURED LEFT** Exponential Horn type of reproducer for use with transoral screen. From G. F. Jones Sound-Film Reproduction, from Blackie's 'Technique' Series



*The interest in seeing and hearing what had been done to the Duke's and the huge appeal of Sunny Side Up brought out the crowds*

TOP RIGHT Opening day at the talkies, 1930

BOTTOM RIGHT The queue for the 'cheap seats' in Stanley Road. Both courtesy of Sue Ringwood



**I** first visited 'THE DUKES' (I remember this wording in red neon, on the front) in the early 1950's. Living quite nearby I was probably taken there many times but my first memory is seeing an Old Mother Riley film (probably on its initial release as they were still being made in the very early fifties). After that it became one of my regular haunts.

I remember the sweet shop on the right hand side, the other side of which also served as the cinema kiosk. The formidable, but polite cashier sitting in her little semi circular box with roll tickets, no ticket machine. The very noticeable smell of channel-blocks (the solid disinfectant bricks placed in men's toilet urinals) which became overpowering when the door to the toilet was opened (just how many did they put down there? I used to gag with the smell).

There was rather a short doorman who always seemed to be on duty and I recall he used to wander up and down the aisle during the interval with a spray pump of air freshener which he sprayed over us, we probably were a smelly bunch of kids! I also have an equally vague recollection of using the second entrance occasionally.

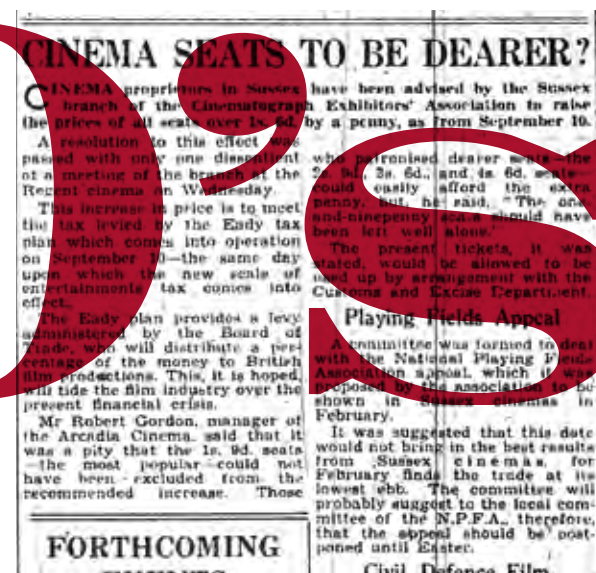
They brought you in at the front stalls area. I think access was from Stanley Road.

My biggest love of this cinema was that, unlike most others, they showed so many trailers. There were trailers for both films showing the following Sunday and Mon-Wed and Thurs-Sat. But that wasn't all, after all this they showed black and white stills of what seemed like masses of up-coming films. It was the best part of the show for me! I recall the screen adverts at the time, were from a firm called Presbury's.

Although I spent most of my time in the Duke's I did of course give my admissions money to the other cinemas too, in the immediate vicinity of my home, particularly the Astoria and the Gaiety on Lewes Road. I eventually found myself, working in the cinema business with (amongst others) the ABC circuit, ending up as the general manager of the Empire Leicester Square up until 1990. I was subsequently general manager of the now defunct Film Network. ”

## MEMORY D Hurrell

# 1950





*The Duke's highlighted an  
"All Technicolor programme"  
colour was a big selling point in the  
days of black-and-white television*

# Technicolor vs TELEVISION



Argus Article, Friday 9 October 1981 declaring the re-opening and new ownership of the Duke of York's

RIGHT Official invitation to the opening of 'Brighton's new repertory cinema' 8 October 1981

# 1980's

## AN ARTHOUSE IS BORN

PAT FOSTER, THEO SIMONS & GERALD HITMAN TAKE OVER THE DUKE'S



Extract from Allen Eyles' history

A partnership of Pat Foster, Theo Simons and Gerald Hitman - took over the Duke's on Sunday 13 September 1981 and closed the cinema for a month of improvements. They reportedly spent £50,000 to buy the cinema and make improvements including a new look to the foyer and new projection and sound equipment. As scheduled, on Friday 9 October, the Duke of York's was re-launched as a full-time arthouse, setting it off on the course it has maintained ever since. It re-opened with a week's run of Eric Rohmer's *The Aviator's Wife* followed by Tarkovsky's *Solaris*.



In the spirit of the old Brighton Film Theatre, the Duke of York's offered a Sunday afternoon double bill of G. W. Pabst's *The Threepenny Opera* and the silent *Pandora's Box*, and a midweek revival of two Hitchcock classics: *Notorious* and *Rebecca*



Pat Foster saw in the Duke of York's an opportunity to create a student-orientated arthouse in the manner of the Ritzy Cinema that he and others had brought back to life at Brixton, south London. Like it, the Duke's operated as a club with a low-cost annual membership.

#### DOUBLE BILLS

In the spirit of the old Brighton Film Theatre, the Duke of York's also offered a Sunday afternoon double bill of G. W. Pabst's *The Threepenny Opera* and the silent *Pandora's Box*, and a midweek revival of two Hitchcock classics: *Notorious* and *Rebecca*. There were around 460

seats, barely half the number in 1910. The cinema could draw on the local student population from Brighton Polytechnic and the University of Sussex, but its location away from the heart of town didn't help - except that it made the place less attractive for redevelopment or other uses.

In mid-March 1983, after only seventeen months, the cinema was put on the market as a going concern by Rosier Films, owned by one of the partners, Gerald Hitman. It was reported to be in need of a secure financial basis.

According to an article by Robert

Shelton, based on an interview with its two managers, Jeremy McAuliffe and Steve Airey:

*"A major problem facing comparable cinemas in London is competition from other arts rep houses. The Duke of York has virtually eclipsed Cinescene, in Brighton, in showing first-run and rep films. [...] We didn't take their audience, we created our own,"* said Mr. McAuliffe proudly. He cited the Duke's special seasons of Japanese, Russian, Hitchcock, "film noir", sci-fi or classical German films as examples of, "seasons where you could not otherwise see films of that kind." The Duke of York sells

coffee, juices and cakes, almost casually, but does not send its ushers around hawking. "We're in the business of selling films, not hot dogs," the co-managers say. The Duke of York, in its present incarnation, has done its best business with such imports as *Fitzcarraldo* and *Diva*. They've also had a smash revival one-day bill of *Brighton Rock* and *The Third Man*."

Despite this it was forced to close on Tuesday 7 June 1983 following the world premiere run of the British film *The Ploughman's Lunch*, the first production for Channel 4 Television to be released to cinemas.

pears in The Final Count-  
E/FALSE.

**DUKE OF YORK'S**  
PRESTON CIRCUS, BRIGHTON BN1 5QJ

Today & Sat LCP 6.45  
Eilan Burstyn Lee J. Cobb  
**THE EXORCIST**  
Tues 8.35 Sat 4.30 & 8.30 (V)  
**EXORCIST II THE HERETIC**  
A 45 (V)

Starting Sun 7 days  
**MONTY PYTHON'S LIFE OF BRIAN**  
Sat & Sun 3.25 6.05 & 8.15  
Mon-Fri 7.15-8.15 (V)  
**SUPPORTING PROGRAMME**  
Sun-Fri 7.25 5.35 7.45  
Mon-Fri 7.45 (V)

**DUKE OF YORK'S**  
PRESTON CIRCUS, BRIGHTON BN1 5QJ

Today & Sat LCP 7.45  
**LAST FEELINGS**  
Sat Comp Perf Fri 7.45  
& Sat 5.10 & 7.45

Sun Dec 12 to 7 days  
JACK NICHOLSON  
in the  
Academy Awards Winner  
**ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST**  
Sat Comp Perf  
Sun & Sat 4.40 & 7.30  
Mon to Fri 7.30

**DUKE OF YORK'S**  
PRESTON CIRCUS, BRIGHTON BN1 5QJ

Today and Sat LCP 7.00  
**ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW** (V)  
Fri 8.40 Sat 5.10 & 8.40

**PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE** (V)  
Fri 7.00 Sat 3.30 7.00

Starting Sun Dec 21  
**THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK** (V)  
Comp perf 7.15 4.55 7.35

Mon-Fri 21, Thurs 28, Fri 26

**BRIGHTON • Tel 602 503**

The Duke of York is now a cinema club.  
Membership is 30p per annum. There is immediate entry.

**MARCH • APRIL**

All seats £1.80  
Matinee Monday-Friday £1.00  
OAP's 50p

Sunday March 21  
**MURIEL (A)**  
at 1.00  
**PROVIDENCE (X)**  
at 3.10  
**DERSU UZALA (A)**  
at 5.25 & 8.00



Sunday March 28  
**CELINE AND JULIE GO BOATING (AA)**  
at 2.15  
**THE STEPFORD WIVES (X)**  
at 7.10  
**ROSIE THE RIVETER (A)**  
at 6.00 & 9.20



Sunday April 4  
**COUSIN COUSINE (AA)**  
at 2.20  
**VIOLETTE NOZIERE (X)**  
at 4.10  
**PADRE PADRONE (X)**  
at 8.25  
**ALLONSANFAN (AA)**  
at 6.30



Monday & Tuesday March 22 & 23  
**ERASERHEAD (X)** at 5.25 & 9.10  
**THE TEMPEST (AA)** at 3.40 & 7.20



Monday & Tuesday March 29 & 30  
**SLOW MOTION (X)** at 5.45 & 9.15  
**TWO OR THREE THINGS (X)** at 4.00 & 7.30



Monday & Tuesday April 5 & 6  
**THE ELEPHANT MAN (AA)**  
at 4.40 & 8.40  
**LORD OF THE FLIES (AA)**  
at 3.00 & 7.00



Wednesday March 24 Only  
**STRIKE (A)** at 5.45 & 9.20  
**SALT OF THE EARTH (A)**  
at 4.00 & 7.30



Wednesday March 31 Only  
**HARLAN COUNTY USA (A)**  
at 5.15 & 9.00  
**THE WOBBLIES (A)**  
3.30 & 7.15



Wednesday April 7 Only  
**KNIFE IN THE HEAD (X)**  
at 5.00 & 9.00  
**THE LOST HONOUR OF KATHARINA BLUM (AA)**  
at 3.00 & 7.00



Thursday-Saturday March 25-27  
**MON ONCLE D'AMERIQUE (A)**  
at 4.30 & 8.40  
**LOVE ON THE RUN (AA)**  
at 2.45 & 6.50



Thursday-Saturday April 1-3  
**MEMOIRS OF A SURVIVOR (X)**  
at 4.40 & 8.50  
**SOUTHERN COMFORT (X)**  
at 2.45 & 6.50



Thursday - Saturday April 8-10  
**CLARENCE AND ANGEL (U)** at 5.45 & 9.30  
**MON ONCLE (U)** at 3.40 & 7.30



Film listings, the Argus, early 1980's

Duke of York's programme March - April 1983

The hands of the clock are changed by John Vernon, 1997.  
Courtesy of Roger Bamber





A 1983 drawing by sculptor John Buckley (designer of the famous legs) depicting the Duke's as a cake with eight candles on the roof

# DUKE OF YORK'S *Picture house* 100 est. 1910 LONG LIVE *The Duke's!*

## DUKE OF YORK'S CENTENARY & COMMUNITY HISTORY PROJECT

In 2010 Screen Archive South East and Cinecity were awarded funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to create an online archive and coordinate the Duke of York's centenary celebrations. Led by Sara Duffy and Christina Reading. The project set out to tell the story of the Duke of York's through an investigation into its social, architectural and cinematic history.

The virtual collection which now exists at [www.dukeofyorkscinema.co.uk](http://www.dukeofyorkscinema.co.uk) brings the story of the Duke of York's alive for the communities of Brighton & Hove. A selection of the memories gathered are published in this book. ▶