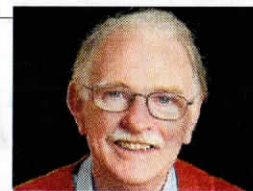


# Horsham Society

with Oliver Farley



## 'An acre of seats in a palace of dreams...'

Once upon a time Horsham had several cinemas, and exotic places they were too. In common with the fashion of the times they all bore romantic titles or impressive ones.

We had the Capitol with a whiff of ancient Rome about it, we had the Odeon with a similar reference to ancient Greece, though strictly speaking an Odeon was a listening place not a viewing one. And there was the Embassy.

Thus we poor Saxons, abandoned in our rainy fastness of Britannia, could employ the diplomatic skills of the cinema to move us to the classical world. Move in every sense as 'cinema' is an approximation of the Greek for movement.

We were by no means alone in these implied transports of delight; a glance at the RIBA's listing of their top cinemas in Britain comes up with a Phoenix (London), the Broadway (Nottingham), the Cornerhouse (Manchester), the Electric (Birmingham) and the Ultimate (Oxford).

Some were purpose built, others are interesting conversions - the Broadway was a church and the Cornerhouse a furniture



The Odeon in Horsham in the 1950s.

store. We've gone the other way with our own original Capitol whose site is now a

shopping mall, with the Odeon which is now shops at the foot of Chart Way, and the re-christened ABC cinema as The Capitol.

The exterior was a fairly plain affair until the modernised frontage was added but its true glory is of course its marvellous Art Deco interior.

All those wonderful swirls and pillars, the gold and gilt, give a real prelude to the colourful imaginings about to appear on screen. Our generation has, perhaps, become too blasé about the wonders of such entertainment, devoted as we are to our TVs, i-Pads and DVDs.

Yet we still flock to the cinema for the shared ritual of sitting in the dark, in the warm companionship of strangers, to share the vicarious voyage ahead.

Not long ago the demise of the cinema in its twentieth century format was confidently predicted yet that has been confounded by the enduring popularity of the ceremonial of going out specially to this gaudy building, an invitation to muse and ponder on the global travels of heart and soul.

This inclination is set, we hope, to continue because two substantial bets are being made on its viability. A multiplex is

to be built at Swan Walk - another shop-to-cinema conversion - and an arts cinema at Piries Place. The buildings won't be as transformative as some recent cinemas elsewhere in the world. Try looking up the Cristal in Aurillac, France or the Sejong Centre for the Performing Arts in South Korea, but they are both innovative in a more limited way.

Will they fit architecturally or not? The plans submitted show progression on what's there rather than total innovation so there's little to shock. And in any case shouldn't a cinema building shock instead of blending in? It's there to prompt dreams, to take us out of the ordinary to awaken wonder and emotion in the safety of an elaborate cocoon, and deliver us back to the re-assuring world of our own when The End appears. We await developments.

*The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website [www.horshamsociety.org](http://www.horshamsociety.org) or phone 01403 261905.*