



NEWSLETTER C-12

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Moviegoing – the future?



It seems agreeably optimistic to begin this month's C-12 Newsletter with the words of Hollywood star Denzel Washington, whose latest movie **The Little Things** is one of the first to be seen when confinement rules allow patrons into cinemas. When asked "What is the future of cinema?" for a recent edition of Radio Times, the actor was quoted as saying:

"The Bible says, "This too shall pass." I have a feeling that we're moving forward – and I have a feeling that cinema will come back stronger than ever because it's in our nature to want to be a

community. It's in our nature to unite and to have shared experiences. I think we're really hungry for that. I can't wait to sneak back into a movie theatre again. When the time is right, cinema will come back stronger than before. It will return."

I'm not too sure the Good Book has any references to the silver screen, but what's not to like about Mr. Washington's optimism?

What's In a Cinema Name?



You may recall from Newsletter C-5 that we featured Stephen's local Provençal picturehouse, the **Cinema Eden Théâtre** in La Ciotat in the south of France. Built in 1889, the Eden was the first public cinema to be established anywhere in the world, and as you may have seen on a recent continental train journey by a certain sartorially colourful ex-M.P.-turned-TV-traveller, it has recently been given a 5.5 million pound refurbishment. A celebrated early presentation at the

Eden was of **L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat (The Arrival of a Train)**; the film, by the Lumière brothers Auguste and Louis, lasted just 1 minute and resulted in some members of the audience fleeing the cinema terrified that the train was about to come crashing through the screen into the auditorium. The Eden was originally a theatre so no name change was made when it was used as a cinema. But cinemas across the world have had a wide range of names, some of which have stood the test of time, some have been changed, whilst others are now film history.

Much of the history of cinema names is bound up in the shenanigans of film distribution, a problem even small film outlets such as the Phoenix has suffered. Names like Rank and MGM will be familiar to all readers from seeing those names in the credits at



the start of many films. Distribution of so many films was decided by contracts between film providers and cinema chains, and this meant that in order to see certain films released by one distributor, you would have to go to a particular chain, whilst another local venue would be showing films from another distributing company. Primarily, that was in the “bad old days” when there were many more cinemas around the country. Such alignments often had bizarre results especially when multiplexes arrived outside of town (e.g. an Odeon cinema might have to show a poorly rated Rank release in its main screen, with a highly rated ABC title in its smallest room). Multiplexes had a huge impact when they were first built, even if they concentrated on mainstream movies at the expense of independent and world cinema, but one thing such monoliths lacked was enticing and imaginative names.



Perhaps the best known chain in the UK over the years, **Odeon**, borrows its cinematic name from French and Italian beginnings. In ancient Greece an odeon (Ὀδεῖον) was an amphitheatre used for musical performances; the name was used in France and Italy for cinemas from the 1920s, and in the UK the Odeon Cinemas brand was created in 1928 by Oscar Deutsch - Odeon publicists suggested that the name was derived from his motto, "Oscar Deutsch Entertains Our Nation". The word "Nickelodeon" was coined in 1888 and was widely used to describe small (and cheap,

hence nickel) cinemas in the United States starting from 1905. The first cinema that opened under the Odeon name was in Birmingham (it is now a conference venue) and it is now one of the three biggest chains in the country. Perhaps the most famous Odeon is the huge palace in Leicester Square, London, originally with over two thousand seats, a royal box and the once common stalls and balcony arrangement. It has been used frequently for film premières, though it now has a mere 950 seats, including 22 full-recliner seats in the Royal Box.

Of course, Southampton boasted an Odeon cinema, located on Above Bar Street. Originally the Regal, it joined the Odeon roster in 1945, with **The Secret Life of Walter Mitty** attracting huge crowds three years later. **Jurassic Park** was the final film screened before long-time manager James Tilmouth announced its closure in 1993; some years after the cinema took part in the first series of Southampton Film Festivals back in the late 1980s.



Another French name that had a presence above many cinema entrances across the UK is **Gaumont** (British). This company, the first and oldest film company in the world, specialises in film production as well as giving its name to cinemas; it was set up in France in 1895 by Léon Gaumont, another pioneer of the motion picture industry. At one time, there were nearly 400 Gaumont sites in the U.K. Curiously, the Odeon in Bournemouth was a Gaumont cinema until 1986, and the last Gaumont picturehouse, in Doncaster, closed in

1987 with Gaumont having gone into liquidation; it seems the famous name has now completely vanished from UK venues. The Southampton Gaumont is still there, now named the Mayflower, its façade still recognisable in the photo.



Other big cinema chain names have been **ABC** and **Rank**, both linked to film distribution. Again, locally, Above Bar also boasted an ABC about two hundred metres along from the Odeon, and it is still recognisably an ex-cinema (it is presently a nightclub, but round the back you can at least find The Stage Door - Southampton's only Fringe Theatre, Live Music Venue & Bar). Associated **British Cinemas** had existed since 1927, and, with a brief hiatus in the 1980s,



continued until its demise in 2017, when the Bournemouth ABC cinema closed down. As we emerge, perhaps, from confinement to the possibility of watching films on the big screen once more, amongst the 843 existing film venues (pre-Covid) in Britain, the big three names are Cineworld (Owner of the Picturehouse chain including Harbour Lights), Odeon and Vue, although we know that the biggest of these, Cineworld, may not return (their



website suggests resumption of screenings in May, but without any details). So now we ask you to think back to the names of any cinemas you frequented when you were younger, especially if that was in the pre-multiplex era. Cinema names were certainly much more varied and enticing (even if sometimes they may still have been run by one of the majors) and just a

few of them scattered across the country are listed here:

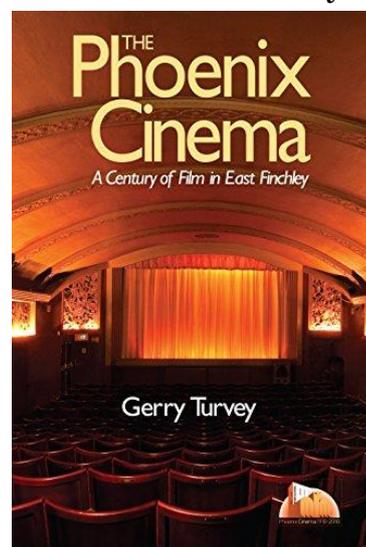
the **Academy**, the **Essoldo**, the **Rialto**, the **Rex**, the **Orpheum**, the **Rivoli**, the **Savoy**, the **Regent**, the **Cameo**, the **Phoenix**, the **Adelphi**, the **Ritz(y)**, the **Carlton**, the **Astoria**, the **Empire**, the **Cosmo**, and yes, even the **Eden!** Aren't those names all a lot more evocative and inviting than ShowCase, Vue or UCI? And even if your early sorties to watch movies

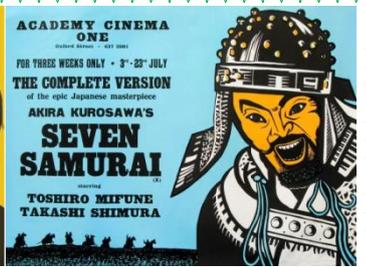
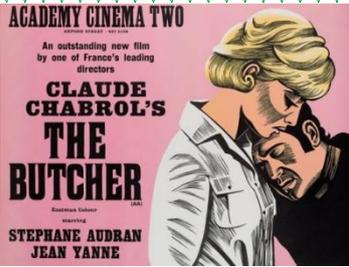


were in an Odeon, nothing wrong with the name originating in Ancient Greece! If you know of others, and in which town they were located, do let us know at our usual address. With that listing of the Phoenix name, we cannot leave the subject of cinema names without particular mention of **The Phoenix** in North London which was built in 1910 and is believed to be the UK's oldest continually-running cinema.

Several re-styles and different incarnations have seen it go from showing silent films in Edwardian times, through the art deco and inter-war period, before emerging as an art house cinema in the 1970s. And, of course, there is one other **Phoenix** cinema with a long and distinguished history (the London Phoenix predates us by just 15 years), of which you, reader, are a part. We ran an article on Phoenix cinemas around the U.K. back in Newsletter 6 in February 2017, and that piece along with a short history of the Phoenix can be read on our website at <https://thephoenix.org.uk/contact.html>

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Our local filmmakers (i.e. The Everly Brothers) are still working hard

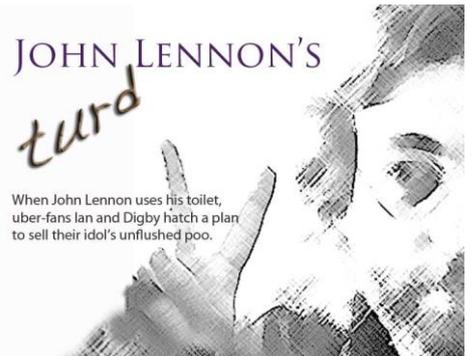
We have mentioned before the film production work of two local people at very different stages of their careers, Dominic Bolton and Phil Peel, and now is as a good a time as any to update their filmwork stories. The former is continuing to establish his work within the industry, and his company, Firework Productions, has developed a number of titles in spite of the difficulties for filming presented by the pandemic. Starting out in 2016, to date, Dominic has been responsible for six short films, the latest being the crowdfunded **Taylor**, directed by Isaac



Tomiczek. That film, one of two to be released this year (the other is **Duette** which is currently embarking on its festival journey), tells the story of a bullied gay teenager who turns his life around when a new friend teaches him to box.

Perhaps in years to come Dom will be in the position of past Phoenix regular Phil Peel who now has 21 films in his productions list and ten as director. Like Dominic, Phil specialises in short films, including titles

such as his 2003 piece **Emily's Dance**, **John Lennon's Turd** (2013), which was screened at **SFW** in 2013 and also the **Toronto ReelHeART Festival**. The **imdb** describes the 15-minute movie thus: "When John Lennon uses their toilet, uber-fans Ian and Digby hatch a plan to sell their idol's unflushed poo. A short film about the crassness of the cult of celebrity".



Phil's latest works, developed over a period of more than thirty years, form a double project, one a 45 min documentary entitled **Gervase**, and the other a fictional feature thriller **Gone to Ground**; of interest is the fact that both are based on or linked to the life of his late father who was a Lancaster pilot in WW2, but who suffered from Alzheimer's in his later life. **Gervase** has been completed and received several awards:

Winner / Best Documentary Feature & Best Editing in a Documentary Feature - Documentary Screen Awards 2020

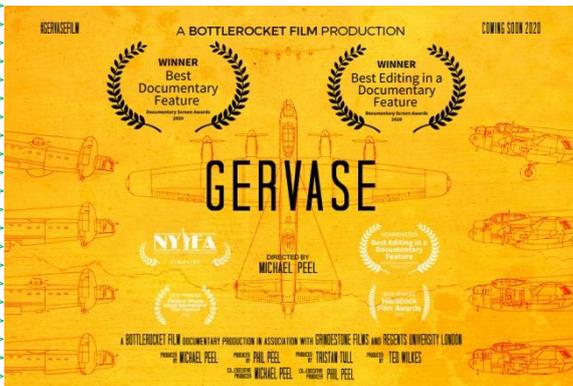
Finalist - New York International Film Awards 2020

Winner / Silver Award - Spotlight Documentary Film Awards 2020

Nominated 'Best Editing in a Documentary' - Southampton International Film Festival 2020

Semi Finalist - Hitchcock Film Awards 2020

Semi Finalist - Flickers' Rhode Island International Film Festival 2020



The feature film **Gone to Ground** is still in production. The script has received good feedback from BBC Films "We really appreciated the unique spin on the message of cross cultural openness and European solidarity". The filming, using a mostly Southampton crew, was located in an isolated farmhouse owned by Phil's father in North Wiltshire and would have been complete by now, but the final scenes were caught out by the first Covid lockdown, so had to be completed with a skeleton crew. Scenes with multiple characters had to be filmed separately and stitched together in editing. It will hopefully be completed by the autumn.

Do you know of other local folks working in film, apart from Dom and Phil? Please do let us know so we can feature them in a future Phoenix Newsletter.