

## The Cinemas in Norton and Malton

(Contributed by Lorraine Williams, July 2015)

Randall Williams was well known throughout Britain as the 'King of Showmen' and in the Stage Newspaper, 19 Nov 1891 it reports that 'his famous Cinematograph will visit Malton during the 'hirings'. This was possibly the first ever moving picture show to have taken place in the town. In 1897 Randall was invited to exhibit his show in London at the Victorian Era Exhibition as part of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations and in the November of that year he brought his Cinematograph and Animated Pictures Exhibition show to Malton, again during the Malton hirings. Randall Williams died in 1898 but the Monte family carried on the show in Randall's name for many years afterwards and they continued to visit Malton where both the Randall William's bioscope and the Monte Williams' Razzle Dazzle show were shown.

In 1904 a three month theatrical licence was granted to the Thespian Theatre in Bark Knotts' Field. In February 1909 a fierce gale blew the Waterloo Theatre down in the same field, perhaps this was the same theatre but with a name change! On the 15 Nov 1912, many of the country roads around the twin towns were flooded and crowds gathered on Norton Bridge to watch the swirling waters. Looking towards Welham Road they could see the newly-erected picture palace was surrounded by water. On 21<sup>st</sup> December 1912 Norton Magistrates granted a licence for a 'Cinematograph Hall' on a field, in Welham Road, Norton. The licence was in the name of Mr. Herbert Butler and it became known as the Palace. So it seems that the first cinema in Norton and Malton stood in Bark Knotts Field where the Clothing Factory was later built.

In the meantime opposition was looming at the Old Corn Exchange building in Yorkersgate, Malton. The building was converted about 1910 and attempts had been made to gain a cinematograph licence at least since 1912 and finally three years later this was granted and the cinema was opened as The Exchange Picture Hall on 13 Feb 1915 with the film, "Brewster's Millions". It was one of the early permanent cinemas which became popular at that time especially as they were seen as respectable places for women to go unlike music halls. After war was declared in 1914 films such as "War Maps" and "Pathe's Gazette" were shown and tickets were 3d, 6d and 1/-. The owners of the Corn Exchange were brothers Raymond Dawson Read of Broughton Rise in Malton and Cecil Searle Read and from the 1920s the Corn Exchange Cinema was under the same management as the Majestic.

By 1918 after the war the Palace had been purchased by Walter Ernest Coldman. In the Daily Mail dated 1 April 1927 it was reported that Coldman had been a member of the North Riding Constabulary 1906-7 and after leaving the force he married the widow of a licensee in Malton. The inn in question could have been the Crown and Anchor that was on Castlegate near the workhouse as he was landlord there in 1909.

There was a fire at the picture palace in the early hours of 1 August 1923. The Malton Fire Brigade fought the blaze for six hours but the fire had got such a hold that the building was gutted with the exception of the cinema operator's room. The building was still owned at this time by the above Coldman and was leased to Messrs. Watson and Weatherby. While it was covered by insurance the Vaudeville Company that were currently the entertainment in situ were not. They lost scenery, property and personal belongings leaving the members with only the clothes they stood up in. At this time the building of the new purpose built cinema in Church Street, the Majestic Picture Theatre, must have been well under way. These circumstances could have been seen as suspicious as it was later shown that Coldwell was indeed a dubious character. In 1927

he was given a prison sentence for receiving stolen goods which he sold on the market stall he then ran at Scarborough.

The Majestic Picture Theatre was erected in Church Street, Norton on the site that was previously the show ground of R. Yates & Sons,' used for agricultural implements. This cinema was erected by a small private limited company for £15,000, had seating for 800 people and was one of the best equipped in the north. It was officially opened on the 19 November 1923 by Admiral Sir Guy Gaunt, presented by Mr. W E Puckering. Gaunt apologized to a large audience for the fact that when he was asked to open the ceremony two months previous he had been an MP for Buckrose now he was only 'Gaunt' but hoped to become an MP once again. He said that he expected the Picture Theatre to run entirely British productions as the British could do a better job of it. The afternoon performance rose £31.13s.5d. for the Malton and Norton Cottage Hospital.

In The Yorkshire Post an announcement was made that the Majestic Picture Theatre would be up for auction on Thursday 23 July 1931 at 3pm at the Royal Station Hotel in York. It was described as being modern, built in 1923 and having a seating capacity of 850. Various fixtures and fittings and two lock-up shops were included. The auctioneer was Edward Walker and the receiver R Crampton Esq. On 4 July prior to the auction one of the lock-up shops was advertised in the Yorkshire Post 4 July as to be let by Tender in October and to apply to J R Humphrey, the secretary of the Majestic. It seems it never sold as both cinemas were still in the hands of the family until 1949.

In September 1932 Raymond Read collapsed and died suddenly in Newbiggin, Malton and the cinemas were left in the hands of his brother Cecil. In 1933 Cecil expanded the Malton cinema, the work being carried out by James Brodie of Pudsey and it was renamed, 'The Palace'. The art deco features that can still be seen today can be attributed to that time. As well as films other events were held there such as the first Malton Beauty Queen contest, staged by the Chamber of Commerce in 1934, and various stage productions were performed here.

Cecil Searle Read died in 1948 and in 1949 both cinemas were sold, purchased for £51,250 by Eskay Ltd, who owned 14 other cinemas in Derbyshire and Nottingham. The managing director of this circuit was Herbert Elton. Eskay produced joint programmes for the two cinemas showing films such as 'Springfield Rifle' starring Gary Cooper, 'The Crimson Pirate' with Burt Lancaster, and 'Never Let Me Go' with Clark Gable and Gene Tierney. Cecil very generously left in his will, £5 to each employee for every year that they had worked in either cinema.

In 1955 after widescreen cinemascope films with stereophonic sound had arrived he Palace was fitted with a 30ft screen but this seemed to herald the death knell of the Majestic as in the same year it was finally declared unviable and closed, later demolished and eventually replaced by a petrol station.

In the 1960s Star Cinemas and Associated Companies took over the remnants of the Eskay Circuit and in 1980s the Palace closed as attendances had gradually declined as the new multi-screen cinemas started to appear in the larger towns. For a while The Palace became a bingo hall, then in 1987 the ground floor was converted into 'The Lanes' a small shopping mall and a smaller cinema was constructed in the old upper circle. In 1998 the cinema closed once again but it was refurbished with two screens and opened it's doors once again in 2002 by Jeremy Powell; the Worldwide Shopping Mall was opened by Malcolm Chalk. Today they both still thrive and the cinema enjoys three screens although one is exceedingly small seating about 12 people.

The freehold of the building is owned by Fitzwilliam Estate and the long leasehold 1933-2032 is owned by Tulip Ltd, a property company owned by an Iranian family based in Teheran with managing agents in London.

Notes:

I have found some of the dates in 'A Cinema Miscellany' to be inaccurate as the correct dates are found in the newspapers as events happened so these are the dates I have used where possible.

The Stage Newspaper, 19 Nov 1891

A Cinema Miscellany Part 2, No 1 covering Malton, Brian Hornsey

The Yorkshire Evening Post, 21 March 1904

The Yorkshire evening Post, 5 February 1909

World's Fair, 1 Oct 1910

Baker's Chronology of Local Events 1899-1911

The Yorkshire Evening Post, 15 Nov 1912,

Malton Messenger, 6 Feb 1915

The Yorkshire Evening Post, 1 April 1923

The Yorkshire Post, 2 August 1923

The Yorkshire Post, 20 Nov 1923

The Daily Mail, 1 April 1927

The Yorkshire Post, 27 June 1931

The Yorkshire Post, 4 July 1931

The Hull Daily Mail, 26 September 1932

The Yorkshire Evening Post, 5 February 1949

The Yorkshire Post, 25 March 1949

The British Listed Buildings website

The Malton Estate website

