

A History of Regent Street Cinema

The Magic Screen



The History of the University of Westminster
Part Four

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Foreword by Professor Geoff Petts, Vice-Chancellor

At the University of Westminster our vision for the future builds on our progressive, inclusive and enterprising history, our roots as an innovative institution with a social conscience, our early model – the original ‘Polytechnic’ blueprint – for collaborating with industry and practice, and our location in the heart of London. Our institution has played a leading role in the development and application of ‘film’ since the introduction of photography here in 1839, the creation of Europe’s first photographic studio in 1841 and the opening of our Photographic School in 1853.¹ The ‘*Home of Animated Photographs*’² – our Regent Street Cinema – was born here in 1896. Today, we are committed to providing ‘a vibrant global learning environment that inspires the next generation of world citizens and helps to shape a better future for all’.³ The restored Cinema will significantly enhance this learning environment and attract a new generation of people to the University from London and across the globe.

The reopening of our historic Regent Street Cinema in Spring 2015 was the exciting culmination of a programme of fundraising and renovation that began in 2009. The University’s Cinema Advisory Board, comprising staff and alumni and friends from the film industry, has worked with Tim Ronalds Architects to create an iconic facility for film screenings in which contemporary activities are unified within an historic space. We reached this landmark with the generous assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund, The Quintin Hogg Trust and many other donors. To all who gave money, time and encouragement I offer a sincere ‘thank you’.

Our newly restored Cinema supports our distinctive ambition to shape the future of professional life through the dynamic interaction of world-leading research, absorbing teaching informed by practice and enterprising education. These values enable our students to become global citizens, professional leaders and lifelong learners, appreciating the need for interdisciplinary approaches in understanding and resolving the constantly evolving intellectual, professional and business challenges of the twenty-first century. Our alumni include many world names in film production and our academic staff include leading documentary film makers and critical media analysts. The Regent Street Cinema and its associated facilities will further enhance our ability to have global impact and to attract international partners to London’s West End.

Widening participation and community engagement remain government priorities today when participation in higher education is approaching fifty per cent and with significantly increased opportunities for non-traditional groups.⁴ Our student numbers have doubled since 1976⁵ and this growth has brought new challenges. Today, the University of Westminster has approximately 20,000 students studying for mainstream awards, with many others taking short courses, and we are a popular destination for students from across the globe who seek summer school placements. The Cinema will provide new

- 1 See Brenda Weeden, *The Education of the Eye: A History of the Royal Polytechnic Institution 1838–1881* (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 2008).
- 2 *The Times*, 23 December 1896, p. 1.
- 3 *Westminster 2020* (London: University of Westminster, December 2014).
- 4 Provisional HE initial participation rates for seventeen-to-thirty year old English domiciled first-time participants in HE at UK Higher Education Institutions and English, Welsh and Scottish Further Education Colleges were 46 per cent for the three consecutive years from 2008–09 to 2010–11, rising to an estimated 49 per cent for 2011–12. This rise is partly explained by students choosing to defer until 2012–13 when fees increased to the new maximum £9,000 p.a. www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-rates-in-higher-education-2006-to-2012 [accessed 4 November 2014].
- 5 In 1976 the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL) had 10,967 students on mainstream programmes, although nearly the same number of students again were registered for short courses at PCL. *PCL Court of Governors’ Minutes*, meeting of 13 December 1976, UWA PCL/BG.

opportunities for student engagement and hands-on learning, and the diverse audiences we hope to attract will enrich their cultural experience.

With 175 years' of pioneering applied research, stemming from our foundation by the celebrated Victorian engineer Sir George Cayley in 1838, the University's research today is at the forefront of making sense of critical contemporary economic, societal and scientific issues. I was very pleased by the positive outcomes of the REF2014, which confirm the internationally excellent quality, reach and significance of our scholarship and impact. This national research assessment exercise takes place every six years and in this review the proportion of research outputs judged as world-leading was double that achieved in the 2008 review. Today we rank in the top half of universities in the UK. REF2014 also re-confirmed our world leading research in Art and Design and in Media and Communications (among others). Through aligning research and practice, our researchers are enabling further understanding of current themes and debates as well as driving discoveries to improve the world we live in. As we look ahead towards REF2020, the University has a distinctive place uniting research and practice at its core. As an independent, commercially-aware institution with impact at the heart of its DNA this will be a key feature as we deliver our strategic plan 'Westminster 2020', which has the further advancement of our research as one of three academic pillars alongside the student experience and developing an enterprise culture.

As I remarked at the launch of the Cinema campaign in 2009:

The Cinema will be a beacon for the film industry, and an incubator for emerging movie talent. The early films shown in the Regent Street Cinema were educational, connecting Londoners with the world in new ways [...]

We want to reopen the doors to new audiences, and continue connecting cultures.⁶

The refurbished Cinema is a unique arts venue in the heart of London's West End and a vibrant social and cultural hub for members of the University and the general public. The state-of-the-art auditorium, screening facilities and adjoining activity spaces are an important focus for the development of our many links with the creative industries and cultural organisations, from London and across the globe. As in its previous incarnations, the Cinema will continue to be a catalyst for innovative education, research and practice, and a showcase for our internationally acclaimed work in film, media and visual culture.

⁶ *University of Westminster News and Events*, 27 October 2009. See www.westminster.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2009/university-launches-campaign-to-revive-birthplace-of-british-cinema [accessed 4 November 2014].

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Acknowledgements and conventions

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A note on archive sources

The research for this book was undertaken while the University of Westminster Archive was being re-catalogued. All material has been recorded under the new cataloguing system, but the old reference, where applicable, has also been included in parenthesis.

A note on money

Pre-1973 sums of money have been left in imperial currency – pounds, shillings and pence. There were twelve pence in a shilling and twenty shillings in a pound. See www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency for examples of equivalent metric amounts.

Abbreviations

AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
BAFTA	British Academy of Film and Television Arts
BBFC	British Board of Film Classification
BFI	British Film Institute
BKS	British Kinematograph Society
CAMRI	Communication and Media Research Institute, University of Westminster
CB(NS)	Common Bench Reports, New Series
CDL	Cinematograph Defence League
CILECT	Centre International de Liaison des Ecoles de Cinéma et de Télévision
CJ	Chief Justice
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
CREAM	Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media, University of Westminster
HC Deb	House of Commons Debates
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
IMDb	Internet Movie Database available online at www.imdb.com
IMCC	Institute for Modern and Contemporary Culture, University of Westminster
KB	Law Reports, King's Bench
KMA	Kinematograph Manufacturers' Association
LCC	London County Council
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
ODNB	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , edited H.G.C. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 60 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The Dictionary is also available online at www.oup.com/oxforddnb/info/online/
OHP	Oral History Programme, University of Westminster Archive
PCL	Polytechnic of Central London
QB	Queen's Bench
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
RPI	Royal Polytechnic Institution
RSP	Regent Street Polytechnic
THE	Times Higher Education
UWA	University of Westminster Archive
YMCI	Young Men's Christian Institute

Institutional name changes

- 1838 Sir George Cayley founds the **Polytechnic Institution**, which later becomes the Royal Polytechnic Institution (RPI) following the patronage of Prince Albert.
- 1864 Quintin Hogg establishes the **York Place Ragged School and Mission**, to provide basic education for some of London's poorest children in the slums of Covent Garden.
- 1873 Hogg develops his vision to provide educational, sporting and social opportunities for young working men by establishing the **Youths' Christian Institute** at 15 Hanover Street.
- 1878 The Institute moves to 48–49 Long Acre and is renamed the **Young Men's Christian Institute**.
- 1882 Hogg's Institute moves into 309 Regent Street, following the closure of the RPI, and gradually becomes known as The Polytechnic.
- 1891 The Charity Commission Scheme of Administration establishes the governing body and begins the transition from private to public institution. **Regent Street Polytechnic** becomes the official name, but the institution continues to describe itself as 'The Polytechnic'.
- 1970 The **Polytechnic of Central London (PCL)** is designated on 1 May 1970 following the White Paper 'A Plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges' (Cmd. 3006) published in 1966. PCL is the result of a merger of Regent Street Polytechnic with Holborn College of Law, Languages and Commerce.
- 1990 Merger with Harrow College of Higher Education.
- 1992 PCL gains university status following the Higher and Further Education Act (1992), which abolished the remaining distinctions between polytechnics and universities. It is renamed the **University of Westminster**, with the right to award its own degrees.

Name changes to the Polytechnic Theatre and Cinema

1848	Royal Polytechnic Institution Theatre
1882	Great Hall (of the Polytechnic Young Men's Christian Institute)
1894	Marlborough Hall; also sometimes known as the Great Hall
1900	Polytechnic Theatre
1916	Large Hall is used within the Polytechnic while the name Polytechnic Hall is used commercially
1920	Polytechnic Cinema
1923	Polytechnic Hall
1924	Polytechnic Cinema Theatre
1924–36	Variously called Polytechnic Cinema, Polytechnic Theatre and Polytechnic Cinema Theatre
1940s	Cameo News Theatre
1949	The Polytechnic (ex Cameo); from December 1949 known as the Cameo-Polytechnic Cinema
1952	Cameo-Poly
1972	Classic Poly
1974	Regent Theatre
1980	Classic Poly Cinema
1980–2014	Lecture Theatre 1/2, informally known as the 'Old Cinema'
2015	Regent Street Cinema

It is not possible to give a listing of the many tenants and lessees due to the lack of existing records.

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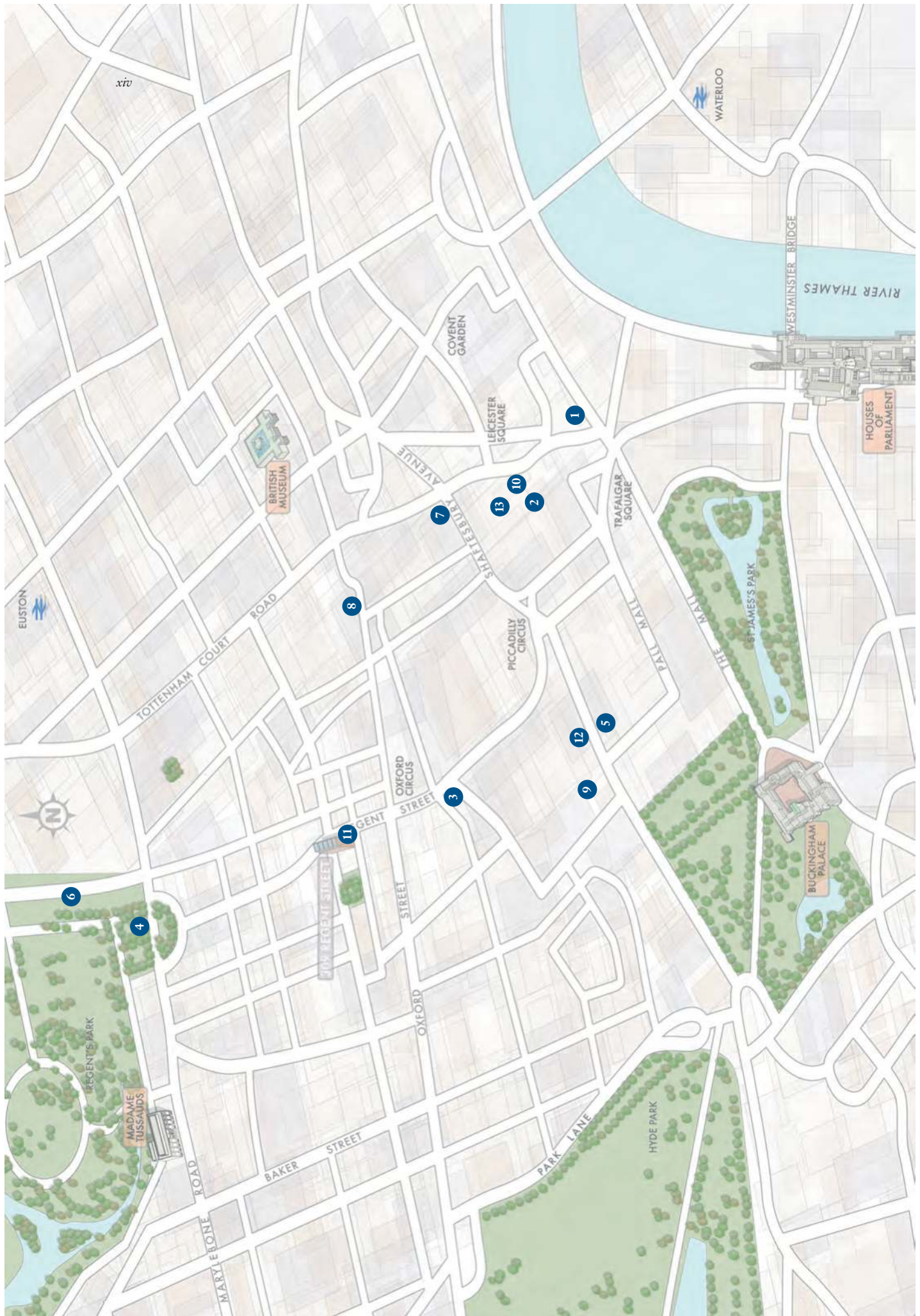
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Horse Shadowgraphy (p. 107) from Félicien Trewéy, *The Art of Shadowgraphy: How It Is Done* (London: Jordison & Co. Ltd, 1920); Harlequin single slipping magic lantern slide giving the illusion of the figure breaking into pieces, c.1850 (p. 112) (Joost Hunningher Private Collection); Eagle Shadowgraphy (p. 139) from Trewéy, *The Art of Shadowgraphy*.



xii

WATERLOO

RIVER THAMES

WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

COVENT GARDEN

LEICESTER SQUARE

TRAFALGAR SQUARE

ST JAMES'S PARK

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

HYDE PARK

EUSTON

TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD

OXFORD CIRCUS

OXFORD STREET

BAKER STREET

PARK LANE

STATE STREET

PALL MALL

THE MALL

REGENT STREET

MARYLEBONE ROAD



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Name	Address	Dates of existence
1 Adelaide Gallery	Lowther Arcade, The Strand	1832 – 1852
2 Burford's Panorama	Leicester Square	1794 – 1863
3 Cosmorama	207–9 Regent Street	1823 – 1861
4 Diaorama	Park Square East, Regent's Park	1823 – 1848
5 Egyptian Hall	170–3 Piccadilly	1812 – (1904)
6 London Colosseum	Cambridge Gate, Regent's Park	1827 – 1855
7 Palace Theatre of Varieties Palace Theatre (Royal English Opera House)	113 Shaftesbury Avenue	1892 – (1897) 1897 – 1957
8 Royal Bazaar Queen's Bazaar	73 Oxford Street	1828 – (1829) 1829 – 1840
9 Royal Institution	21 Abermarle Street	1799 – present
10 Royal Panopticon of Science and Art reopened as the Alhambra Palace	23–7 Leicester Square	1854–1856 1858 – (1936)
11 Royal Polytechnic Institution Theatre	309 Regent Street	1848 – (1881)
12 Royal Society moved to Carlton House Terrace in 1967	Burlington House, Piccadilly	1857 – present
13 Savile House reopened as Royal London Panorama	Nos. 5 & 6 Leicester Square	1846 – (1865) 1881 – (1884)

() indicates continuation as cinema under a different name.

KEY ● Pre 1900 ● Pre WWI ● Pre WWII ● 1970s ● 2015

Map showing similar establishments in the vicinity of the Royal Polytechnic Institution in the nineteenth century



Introduction

Elaine Penn

*'[to] help the younger generations of film workers in acquiring technical knowledge which will stimulate in them a desire to contribute their talent to this field of almost limitless opportunities.'*¹

Thus was the hope of the Regent Street Polytechnic in re-establishing its cinematography course in 1959, as expressed by the Head of the School of Photography, Stanley J. Coleman. Within a year, arguably, such a hope had been realised with the creation of a 'School of Cinematography' accommodated in the newly refurbished Balderton Street annexe with a state-of-the-art studio, cutting room, workshops and technical equipment. Multiple pathways of study were available: all third year students spent one day a week studying Cinematography, and full-time Diploma students could also choose it as their specialist option. There was also a two-year part-time day release course, open to those already professionally engaged in cinematography or photography, and a two-year evening class. In the academic year 1960–1 there were fifty-three students, of whom seven were full-time, twenty-two were attending one day a week, six were part-time day students and eighteen on the evening course.²

A short distance from Balderton Street, adjacent to the Polytechnic's main building at 309 Regent Street, was the Cameo-Poly cinema. Various descriptions of the cinema include 'Internationally speaking – Britain's most distinguished cinema', 'the Old Vic of the cinema', and 'on the art/sex boundary'³, the Cameo-Poly was a prominent fixture on central London's entertainment scene and provided Polytechnic students with a conveniently located opportunity to study film technique. The establishment of courses in cinematography at the Polytechnic and the location of the Cameo-Poly on its doorstep were not coincidental but resulted from the site's unique historical connection with the evolution of photography and film – a connection that spanned over one hundred years. This book tells the story of the connection between the Polytechnic and cinematography and the important role played by the Polytechnic in the history of British cinema.

The development of the connection between cinematography and the Polytechnic is, in the words of Mr Drumm, lecturer-in-charge of the cinematography section at the Poly, 'as old as cinematography itself, for the first public showing of films in this country was held at the old Polytechnic Institute in Regent Street'.⁴ However, although the screening of the Lumières' Cinématographe at the Poly in 1896 is of great historical significance and merits

1 S.J. Coleman, 'Plans of The Polytechnic', *The British Film Academy Journal*, No. 16, Autumn 1958, p. 10.

2 D.V.T. Drumm, 'Looking to the Future in Cinematography', lecture delivered to the Institute of British Photographers Congress, Southport, 1 May 1961. Published in *The Institute of British Photographers Record*, Vol. 40, No. 7, July 1961, p. 206.

3 See pp. 90–1 for details.

4 Drumm, p. 206.

celebration, the connection can be traced back even further, to the earliest days of photography and photography education. In fact, it is the constant interweaving of photography and cinematography associations that remains a sustaining relationship which has led to the present day Regent Street Cinema, and an enduring link to film education and research at the University of Westminster. This Introduction will trace the origins of photography and film education at the Polytechnic, setting the scene for the later chapters of this volume.

The Polytechnic's predecessor, the Royal Polytechnic Institution (RPI), was at the forefront of technological developments in Victorian science, including photography.⁵ As early as 1839, chemist J.T. Cooper experimented with 'photogenic drawing paper' and delivered lectures on the latest photographic processes such as daguerreotypes.⁶ In the same period, geologist L.L. Boscawen Ibbetson conducted a series of experiments at the RPI including the application of oxyhydrogen light to speed up the exposure process. The RPI purchased the rights to demonstrate Fox Talbot's patented calotype photographic process in 1841.⁷ Later that same year, the first photographic studio in Europe opened on the roof of the building at 309 Regent Street, managed by portrait photographer Richard Beard (1801–1885). Photography was becoming increasingly accessible to a wider public and in spring 1853, the first Polytechnic Photographic School opened, with its own glass house, classrooms and separate ladies' apartment. Its first teacher was Thomas A. Malone, who had previously worked with Talbot and had run a successful photographic business in Regent Street.⁸

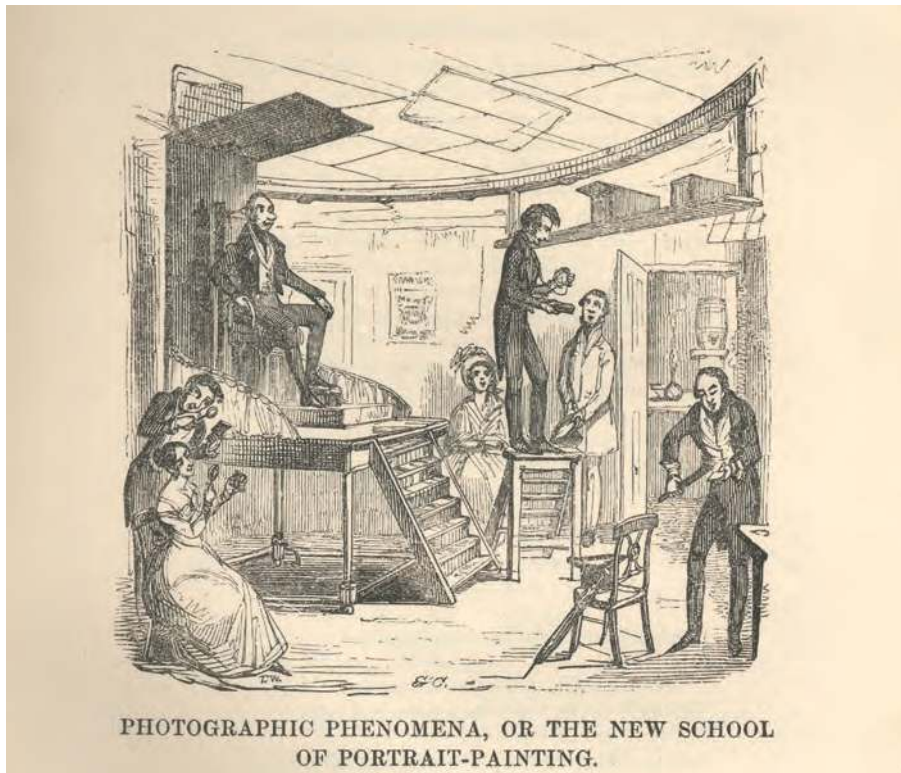


Fig. 1

To prevent blurring the image, sitters in the photographic studio had their head clamped into position. The length of exposure for each photograph could take several minutes.

⁵ See pp. 24–5 for details.

⁶ See Brenda Weeden, *The Education of the Eye: History of the Royal Polytechnic Institution 1838–1881* (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 2008), pp. 37–42 for details.

⁷ *Agreement between William Fox Talbot and William Nurse*, 11 December 1841, UWA RPI/2/60.

⁸ Weeden, p. 62.

Fig. 2

The Polytechnic used unusually large lantern slides, enabling it to project a bigger image than was possible at other venues.

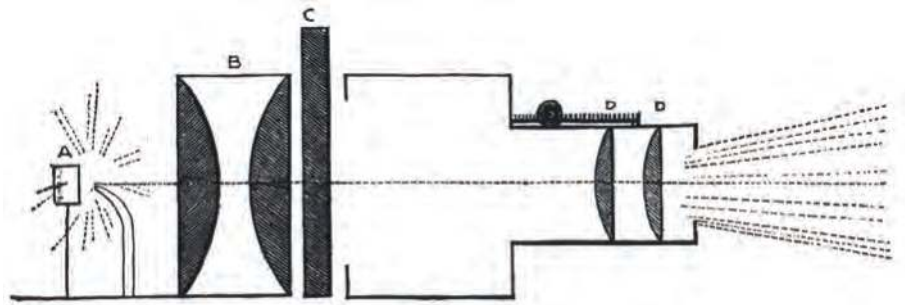
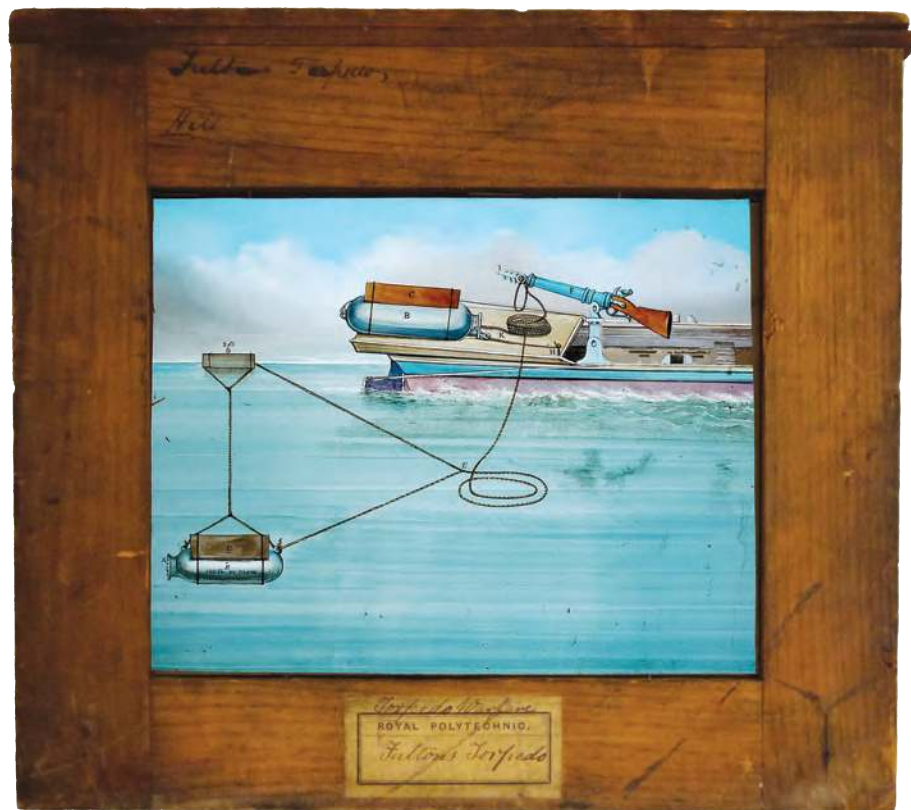


Fig. 296. A. The lime light. B. The condensers. C. The picture. D D. The front lenses for focussing, with rack-work.

Fig. 3

As well as being used for entertainment, lantern slides were used for educational lectures on subjects such as torpedoes and naval warfare.



Simultaneously, new developments were taking place in the field of 'optical' or 'magic' lanterns, with the RPI at the centre of innovation. The lanterns were devices used to project transparent images (in the form of painted glass slides) onto a screen. By 1845, the optical shows at the RPI included 'dissolving views, the dissolving orrery, the apparatus for exhibiting opaque objects, the physioscope (by which the human face is magnified to a giant size), the proteoscope, [and] the chromatrope'.⁹ The addition of a new, purpose-built theatre to the south of the Polytechnic building in 1848 was designed to exploit the latest developments in lantern technology to their best advantage and facilitated the staging of increasingly sophisticated and complex optical projection. Spectacular effects and optical illusions, including the famous Pepper's Ghost illusion or

⁹ *Royal Polytechnic Institution Catalogue, 1845, UWA RPI/3/5, p. 8.*

'Phantasmagoria', were developed at the RPI.¹⁰ John Henry Pepper (1821–1900) was a former pupil of J.T. Cooper and joined the RPI as a lecturer in chemistry in 1847. Encompassing both science and art, the RPI specialised in 'the education of the eye', in every possible sense, providing exhibition and education 'to delight and instruct'.¹¹ As will be shown elsewhere in this volume, the beginnings of cinema were taking shape at the Polytechnic.¹²

Following the closure of the RPI in 1881 and the purchase of the site by Quintin Hogg (1845–1903), the Polytechnic's connections with photography and optical projection continued apace, both in the development of educational courses in these areas, and in the creation of a public cinema at 307 Regent Street. Hogg immediately engaged Ernest Howard Farmer (1856–1944), another successful photographer based in Regent Street and inventor of 'Farmer's Reducer',¹³ to teach evening classes in photography. Within fifteen years, the number of students taking photography at the Polytechnic was greater than any other class (in 1895 there were 472 photography students compared with 250 in tailors' cutting and 33 in mechanical engineering).¹⁴ The classes were to become 'The First and uniformly most successful School of Photography in the World'.¹⁵

In 1896 Hogg rented out the theatre for a screening of the Lumières' newly invented Cinématographe, thus ensuring the Regent Street Polytechnic's place in the history of British cinema. The events of the night of 21 February 1896 are described in detail in Chapter 2 of this volume.¹⁶ Famously believing there to be little future in their invention, the Lumières instead focused on photography and it was in this capacity that subsequent links with the Polytechnic were maintained. In 1906/7 Farmer visited the Lumière Laboratories in Lyons, France, to learn about the autochrome process that had been perfected there. After Farmer's visit, it was reported that: 'Messrs Lumière have requested their London agents in important cases of instruction (such as medical research and educational work) to work in conjunction with Mr Farmer'.¹⁷ The Polytechnic School of Photography took the lead in the training of 'natural colour professional portraiture', culminating in a Royal commission in 1911 to create an autochrome of Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught (1850–1942). Inserted into the panelling of the then newly built Fyvie Hall in 309 Regent Street, the autochrome remains in place today (see Fig. 4).

Unlike the Lumières, however, Farmer did see a future in cinematography and was soon to make the subject an integral part of the Polytechnic School of Photography's syllabus. In 1909 he organised a series of lectures on 'Kinetography',¹⁸ which were delivered by R. Bruce Foster of the Patent Office. Within two years the Polytechnic was offering a mixed course of lectures and practical classes in the subject in the evenings.¹⁹ From September 1913, the Poly offered a 24-week evening course in 'Cinematography (Technical and Practical)'.²⁰ Later that year, the *Polytechnic Magazine* reported that 'one of our old technical boys, W. Engelke' had offered to loan apparatus to the new Cinematography course.²¹ William Engelke (d.1936) became Managing Director of Cinema Traders Ltd and held several cinema equipment patents.²² His offer to

10 See pp. 66–7 and 110–112 for details.

11 *The Times*, 3 August 1838, p. 6. See also Weeden, p. 7.

12 See especially Chapter 4.

13 A solution of ferricyanide and hypo, used in the reduction of density and to increase contrast in a negative.

14 *History of the School of Photography* written by J.A. Carter, School of Communication n.d.; Added to by Margaret Harker, 21 February 1980, UWA PCL [ST82].

15 *Polytechnic School of Photography Prospectus 1909/10*, UWA RSP/5/4/17.

16 See p. 16. See also Chapter 4.

17 *Report for the School of Photography 1907*, Polytechnic Education Department – Departmental Reports 1906–11, UWA RSP/2/5/2.

18 The alternative spellings of 'kinematography' and 'cinematography' both originate from the Greek verb for 'motion' and are used interchangeably by the Polytechnic. This reflected the lack of an established rule as to the spelling in the early twentieth century as is noted in Chapter 3 (see p. 70). Arguably, the use of alternative spellings and pronunciations began immediately with the invention of the Kinetograph and Kinetoscope in the US in 1892 and the Cinématographe in France in 1895. Since the mid-twentieth century 'cinema' has become the standard English term for the medium, although variants are still in use.

19 *Polytechnic Magazine*, April 1944, p. 35.

20 *Winter Programme of Instruction in Photography and Process*, The Polytechnic, 1913, UWA RSP/5/4/20.

21 *Polytechnic Magazine*, November 1913.

22 *A Different Kind of Talkie*, reprinted from *The Cinematograph Times*, Technical Section, June 1929. Available online: www.cineressources.net/images/ouuv_num/196.pdf [accessed 5 June 2014].

Fig. 4

In 1912 King George V and Queen Mary visited the Polytechnic and the new Fyvie Hall 'and were especially interested when the secret panel was disclosed and the autochrome of the Duke of Connaught revealed'. Polytechnic Magazine, April 1912.



his *alma mater* also included a month's practical work experience for Poly students. The Polytechnic's links with the cinema industry were reflective of its general ethos towards its educational provision which was designed to complement and supplement London's workforce. Farmer retired in 1918 after 26 years at the Polytechnic where his contribution to cinematography education cannot be overstated. His legacy expanded and developed under Head of School, Lawrence J. Hibbert (1886–1969), who oversaw the inauguration of a full-time course in the subject in 1933, approved by the British Kinematograph Society.²³

Hibbert's leadership of the Polytechnic School of Photography saw a shift in emphasis towards more scientifically and technically oriented classes.²⁴ His predecessor as Head, Albert James Lyddon (d.1945), in comparison, had been an accomplished artist before moving into photography.²⁵ The new course was designed for:

men who desire to become proficient workers in Kinematograph studios or laboratories. [...] The syllabus provides for a complete general training in all the fundamental subjects needed by the modern workers in the highly technical and complex business of applied science known as the Kinematograph Industry.²⁶

23 Kenneth W. Fensom, 'A New School of Cinematography', *British Kinematography*, Vol. 38, No. 3, March 1961, p. 76. See also Chapter 4.

24 'Photography at PCL, AIFS College Summer School Programme, 20 July 1972, UWA PCL ST82.

25 Lyddon painted portraits of several individuals connected with the Polytechnic, including Quintin Hogg, Alice Hogg (1846–1918) and Major Vincent Hoare (1873–1915), which remain on display in the University.

26 *Prospectus for the Polytechnic School of Photography: Day Session 1933–34*, UWA RSP/5/4/44.

The course, unlike many of the Polytechnic's classes, was not open to female students. It is likely that this was to protect trade union membership and was a necessary condition of British Kinematograph Society (BKS) sponsorship.²⁷ Prospective students had to sit an entrance examination.

The students organised a Polytechnic Society of Kinematographers with visiting speakers, and also regularly attended lectures at the BKS. During the summer between the first and second years of the course, students were required to make a film and these were shown in the Polytechnic's Portland Hall in Little Titchfield Street, in two screenings: one for friends and family, and the other for an invited trade audience. The *Polytechnic Magazine* in June 1934, cited from 'a well-known photographic journal' in describing the second year's films as follows:

Most of the photography was on a very high level, and some examples of marked ability in editing were found. In general, the pictures were travel and documentary in character. Among many excellent pictures one might remark on the greater use of the camera stand, for some pictures would be greatly improved thereby. The projection arrangements for the show were in the hands of the students and were well carried out. Particular mention must be made of the accompaniment of gramophone records, reproduced on an amplifier of the students' own construction, to which a microphone commentary was at times added.²⁸

Talkies, of course, had only just been invented, and the students were yet to study sound editing as part of their film training.

During the Second World War the Kinematography classes at the Polytechnic remained in London and continued to run despite having very small numbers of students (there were just thirteen day students in 1945, compared with fifty, attending both day and evening classes, in 1946).²⁹ During this period, however, the Polytechnic additionally provided training for the armed services, including a total of 1470 cinematograph projectionists (1422 for the army and 48 for the Ministry of Supply).³⁰ However, despite its acknowledged success, the course ran for the last time in 1947–8. It closed as a result of an anticipated alternative training scheme being established under the British Film Production Joint Apprenticeship and Training Council; a scheme that unfortunately was never to materialise.³¹ Occasional evening classes were offered in the subject after this point, but it was not until 1959 that cinematography re-emerged as a subject taught at the Polytechnic. Its re-establishment as a specialist option within the three-year Polytechnic Diploma in Photography was reinforced by the conversion of a former gymnasium in the Poly's Balderton Street premises, just off Oxford Street, into 'an excellent studio and attached laboratories for instruction in cinematography'.³²

Throughout the 1960s the Polytechnic School of Photography continued to evolve and develop its courses, always linked to the needs of the industry. An early emphasis on scientific and applied photographic skills was reflected in the

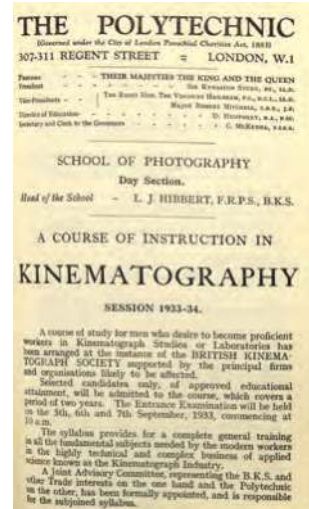


Fig. 5
The Joint Advisory Committee for the Kinematography course included Simon Rowson (1877–1950) of Ideal Films Ltd and engineer William Vinten (1880–1937).

27 The course remained men-only until it ceased in 1948. When cinematography teaching restarted in 1959 as an option on the Polytechnic photography course it was open to both genders. Even in 2014, it is estimated that less than two per cent of cinematographers are women and no female cinematographer has ever been nominated for an Academy Award. See research undertaken at the Centre for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University, <http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/research.html> [accessed 5 June 2014].

28 *Polytechnic Magazine*, June 1934, p. 110.

29 *Polytechnic Magazine*, October 1946, p. 116.

30 'Record of War Service Training in the Polytechnic', *Polytechnic Magazine*, March 1946, p. 33. See also Chapter 3, p. 74 and Fig. 70, p. 77.

31 Fensom, p. 76.

32 *Polytechnic Magazine*, August 1960, p. 256.

Fig. 6
The Polytechnic's Balderton Street premises had many different functions over the decades, from women's gymnasium to motor body building workshop before becoming film and TV studios in the 1960s.



33 'Report on Progress During the Academic Year 1962/63', *School of Photography Annual Exhibition file*, 5–11 July 1963, UWA RSP/4/6/10. Figures compiled in 1963 suggest that from the total number of graduates in the School of Photography, the majority went into commercial photography, cinematography, industrial photography or teaching. *Survey by Head of School of Photography, 1963*, UWA RSP [ST91].

34 Margaret Harker was a former student in photography at the Polytechnic, returning to teach at the institution in 1943. She argued that photographers and their professional bodies needed to be forward-looking to survive and proved to be a perfect example of this herself when she became the first female President of The Royal Photographic Society in 1958.

35 Ainslie Ellis, 'The Polytechnic School of Photography Annual Exhibition', *The British Journal of Photography*, 19 July 1968, p. 601.

36 There was a joint Polytechnic/BBC film society from 1946. See also Chapter 3, Fig. 88, p. 94.

37 *Polytechnic Magazine*, 23 October 1901, p. 163.

students' job prospects, with the BBC Film Unit being the largest single employer of cinematography graduates throughout this period.³³ Margaret Harker (1920–2013),³⁴ appointed Head of the School of Photography in 1959, supported the development of cinematography as one of several allied subjects taught in the School. In 1967, Harker pioneered the creation of the first BSc (Hons) degree in Photographic Technology in the UK at the Polytechnic that saw a broadening of the curriculum. A year later, one critic praised the Polytechnic for pioneering a new emphasis 'on imagination and interpretation as equal partners with sound technique'.³⁵ By 1972, the Polytechnic offered the only degree courses of their kind in the UK and Europe: a BA in Photographic Arts and a BSc in Photographic Sciences.

Although a Polytechnic Student Film Society was not formally established until 1960,³⁶ many of the Poly's sports and social clubs embraced cinematography much earlier as a means of entertainment and fundraising. In 1900 the Polytechnic Rowing Club's annual dinner included a cinematographic entertainment, and the Poly Cycling Club was soon showing films of its own sporting activities as a regular feature of its social events; for example, in October 1901, the Cycling Club's annual Bohemian Smoking Concert included a 'grand display by the Polytechnic Cinematograph, including Poly. C.C. match v. All England at Manchester, by kind permission of Mr. Thos. Edison'.³⁷ The Polytechnic also made good use of cinematography to aid its teaching provision in



Fig. 7
Both the Regent Street Polytechnic and Harrow College had close links with Kodak, with scholarships provided to the best students.

a range of different subjects, including clay-working (1921), telephony (1922), athletics training (1923), and pneumatic tyres (1939).³⁸

Increasing popularity for film-making at the Polytechnic saw films being produced by different groups of students, including Poly-Monoplac Films and the Polytechnic Student Players. The Students' Union newspaper, *West One*, reported in September 1967 that due to 'the wider interest in making films in the Poly, the Film Club [which had previously been limited to showing films made by the professional industry] is undertaking to show publicly inside the Polytechnic films made by students'.³⁹ There were also plans to hold an 8 mm Film Festival. There was growing external recognition of the quality of the Polytechnic's graduates. In 1968/9, for example, the short film *Maybe*, directed by students Murray Martin⁴⁰ and Graham Denman, was selected by the National Panel for Film Festivals to represent Great Britain at the Melbourne and San Francisco Film Festivals; *Mummy, Mummy*, directed by John Beech (a second year student), was selected for inclusion at the Festival of Independent British Cinema and won the Festival Grand Shield at the National Student Film Festival, Motion'70; and graduate David Smith was the first British student to be awarded a Student Fellowship at the American Film Institute's Centre for Television Studies in Hollywood, specialising in motion picture photography.⁴¹

It was not only students at the Polytechnic who made their own films – the Polytechnic Touring Association (PTA)⁴² regularly filmed its holiday tours for marketing and promotional purposes. Its annual reunion events, attended by hundreds of tourists, evolved from the inclusion of magic lantern slide projections to the showing of 'animated photographs' as early as 1899.⁴³ In the 1930s, Arthur Leslie, who managed the Polytechnic Theatre, directed several films that were produced by the PTA, including *Paris Holiday*⁴⁴ and *Lakes and Mountains*

38 See the *Polytechnic Magazine* for details.

39 *West One*, September 1967, p. 7, UWA RSP/8/1/11/12.

40 Murray Martin (1943–2007) later founded the Amber photography and film collective.

41 'Report on Progress During Academic Year 1969/70' by Margaret F. Harker, Head of School, UWA PCL/4/6 [ST88]; School of Photography Advisory Committee Minutes, 29 October 1969, UWA RSP [ST82].

42 See Neil Matthews, 'From philanthropy to commerce: the Polytechnic Touring Association', in Elaine Penn, (ed.), *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit: The legacy of Quintin Hogg and the Polytechnic, 1864–1992* (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 2013), pp. 203–238.

43 'The Rhine Tour Reunion', *The Polytechnic Magazine*, 29 November 1899, p. 275.

44 A Poly-Tours production, commentary by K.W. Robinson; directed, photographed and commentary spoken by Arthur Leslie. Running time: 17 min 30 secs. UWA PTA/5/3/2.

of *Austria*,⁴⁵ copies of both of which have survived in the University Archive collection.

Throughout the 1970s, the curriculum at the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL), as it was now named, broadened yet further with initiatives to set up inter-disciplinary courses with architecture, law and management. By 1974 the School of Photography had become the School of Communication, bringing together the former departments of Photography, Communication Studies and the Centre for Extra Mural Studies into a single school based in the Riding House Street building (today known as 4–12 Little Titchfield Street). Courses included a three-year BA (Hons) in Photographic Arts, with a Film Production specialist option in the second and final years; or a two-year Diploma in Film Studies, covering montage, realism, expressionism, auteur theory and structure and signification: ‘not so much a film show, more a study of what films show’.⁴⁶ Chapters 4 and 5 detail many of the student and graduate successes of the School.

PCL’s School of Communication explicitly linked film theory and practice, placing particular emphasis on ‘the relationship between theories of knowledge, systems of belief and valuation, the meaning of the idea of community and the development of relationships between aesthetic theory and social analysis’.⁴⁷ Former student Donald Lush, who studied for a BA in Film and Photographic Arts at PCL in the early 1980s, recalled: ‘We were told time and time again, “This is not a vocational course, it’s not about training, it’s about ideas really; expressing ideas through photography” [...] It was quite life changing.’⁴⁸ Another student on the same course, Stephen Moulds, remembered the broad range of lectures taught on the course: ‘Everything from semiotics to post-feminist structural politics [...] stuff I would certainly never have considered approaching from a photographic sense [...] if I’d never gone and done that course at PCL.’⁴⁹

At the Harrow Technical College and School of Art (later Harrow College of Higher Education) similar developments in film and photography education had been forged and evening courses in Cinematography had started in the 1940s. The institution can trace its origins back to 1887, coincidentally the same date that the Eastman Photographic Company opened nearby in Headstone Drive, Harrow. The courses encouraged links with the film industry and regular research projects were undertaken at the Eastman Kodak research laboratories. Students could choose between an evening course in Sub-Standard Cinematography,⁵⁰ which was aimed at both amateurs and professionals and covered a range of subjects including the history of cinematography, film processing and editing, and applications of sub-standard film; or a course in Cinematography (Laboratory and Production Technique), which taught the Society of Motion Picture Engineers’ and the British Kinematograph Society’s standards in apparatus, reduction printing and equipment.⁵¹ By 1959 Harrow College offered a three-year full-time Diploma course that included a specialism in Industrial Cinematography from the first year.⁵² Practical work experience was a core element, with one day a week of the third year spent on day-release in industry.

45 A Poly Travel production, commentary spoken by Franklin Engelmann; produced and directed by Arthur Leslie. Running time: 20 min 30 secs. UWA PTA/5/3/1.

46 *School Mag* produced by second-year Media Studies students, School of Communications, 1977. UWA ST82.

47 *PCL Guide for Applicants 1980/81*, p. 8, UWA PCL.

48 Interview with Donald Lush, 9 February 2011, UWA OHP/8.

49 Interview with Stephen Moulds, 8 March 2011, UWA OHP/9.

50 Eastman Kodak introduced 16 mm film in 1923 and it was referred to as sub-standard film by the professional industry for whom the theatrical standard was 35 mm. Today, the term Sub-Standard is used to describe all gauges or widths of film that are smaller than 35 mm film. Raymond Spottiswoode, *Film and Its Techniques* (US: University of California, 1964), p. 473.

51 *Harrow Technical School and School of Arts and Crafts: Prospectus 1946–47*, UWA HAR/5/4/2.

52 *Harrow Technical College and School of Art Prospectus Session 1965–66 Department of Photography*, UWA HAR/5/4/34.



Fig. 8

The School of Photography held annual exhibitions of student work from at least the 1920s; these became the summer Degree Shows.

In 1972, Harrow lecturer Rex Stapleton was released from teaching to work on *Superman* (Donner, 1978). The opportunity for students to be involved in structured creative film work was central to the course.⁵³ Nigel Breadman, a 1970s Harrow film student, recalled the thrill of hiring professional actors to star in his films: ‘We were very encouraged to get a copy of *Spotlight* [...] and, as part of our budget, we could then go out and hire actors. We would put out a call for actors, through agents, who would work for a minimum Equity rate’.⁵⁴ Breadman also experimented with video during his course: ‘[My] final production was a loosely based situation comedy filmed in a seaside town. That was written by myself and using video rather than film, because film was quite expensive. [...] We had our final show at the National Film Theatre, of which I was the only one who did video. [...] Film was [...] the pinnacle but video was considered to be a bit of an upstart’.⁵⁵

A quarter of a century later, under the umbrella of the University of Westminster, these parallel developments were united following the merger in 1990 of the film and photography schools of both Harrow College and the Polytechnic of Central London on what is now the University’s Harrow campus. The cross-fertilisation of allied subjects with strong links to industry continues to remain at the heart of the University’s teaching and research strengths in this area and is explored in detail in Chapter 5. The University today continues to move forward harnessing its rich history of over 175 years of innovation in photography and optical projection.

53 *Harrow College of Technology and Art: Photography: Prospectus 1975–76*, UWA HAR/5/4/9.

54 Interview with Nigel Breadman, 19 December 2013, UWA OHP/58.

55 *Ibid.*

This book tells the story of the connection between the University and cinematography and film and the important role played by the University in the history of British cinema, with each chapter focusing on a different element of that role.

In Chapter 2, Ro Spankie explores the architectural space in which the RPI's visual illusions of the mid-nineteenth century took place, through its adaptation as a public cinema and significant alterations made in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to its continuing evolution as a multi-purpose space by the institution.

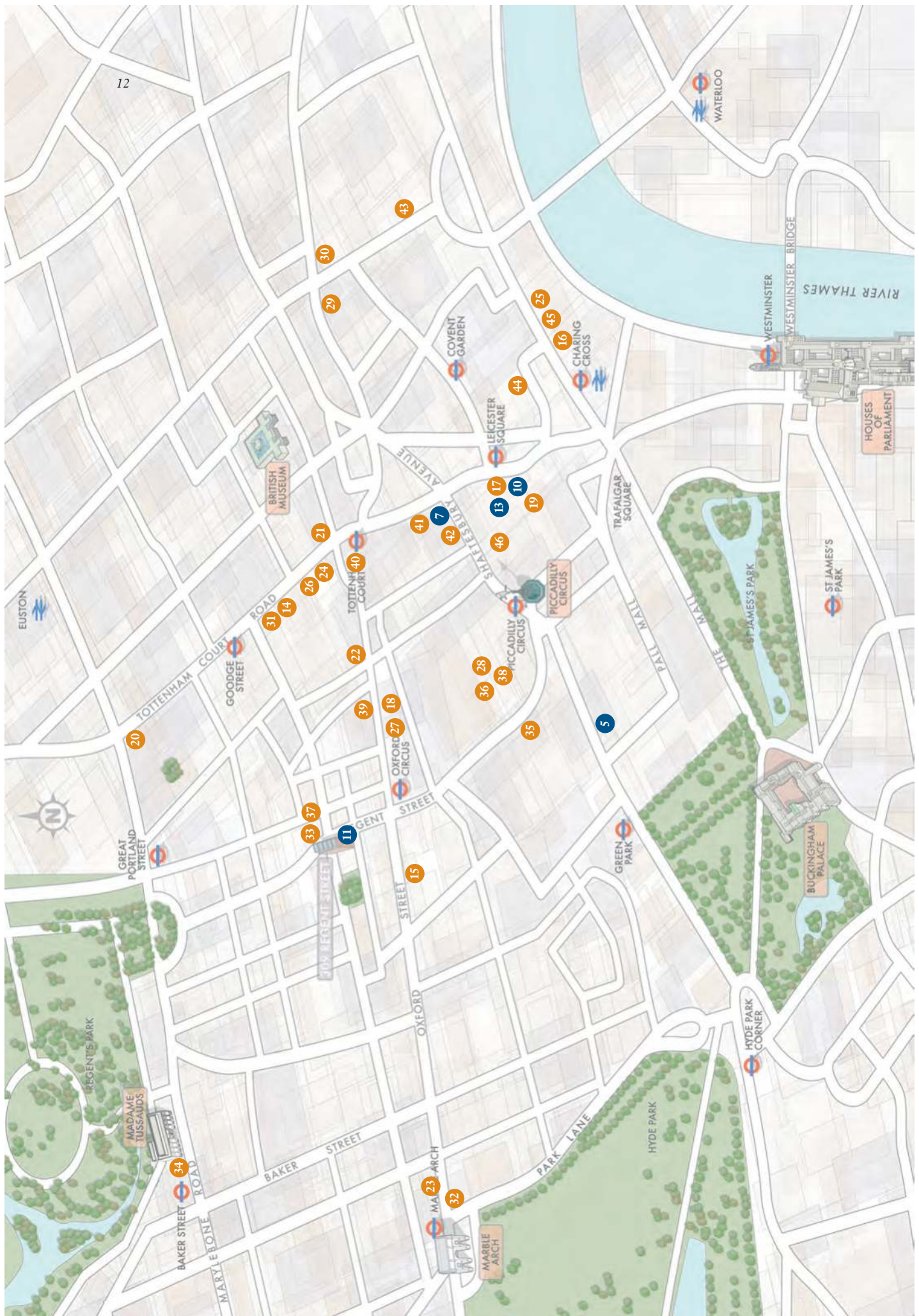
Chapter 3, written by Professor Guy Osborn, traces the development of cinema licensing in the UK, focusing on the Regent Street Cinema, which has been witness to several UK firsts: from the first Cinématographe performance in 1896, to the showing of the first X-rated film in 1951.

In Chapter 4, Joost Hunningher details the capturing of motion and the development of film at the Polytechnic from the nineteenth-century magic lantern to the successes of recent graduates.

Chapter 5, written by Professor Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas, focuses on the recent refurbishment project 'Reviving the Birthplace of British Cinema'⁵⁶ together with an outline of teaching, learning and research in film, media and visual culture at the University of Westminster today.

This volume is the fourth in a series of publications detailing the history of the University of Westminster for the first time. All the essays in this volume draw on an extensive range of primary and secondary sources held in the University of Westminster Archive and elsewhere, including an astonishing variety of drawings and photographs that richly illustrate the text.

56 *Regent Street Cinema: Reviving the Birthplace of British Cinema* campaign booklet, 1st edn. (London: University of Westminster, March 2012).



Name	Address	Dates of existence	Name	Address	Dates of existence
10 Alhambra Palace Theatre	23-7 Leicester Square	1858-(1936)	30 Holborn Empire	242-5 High Holborn	1906-1941
14 Carlton Picture House	30 Tottenham Court Road	1913-(1948)	31 Majestic Picturedrome	36 Tottenham Court Road	1912-(1948)
15 Casino de Paris	291 Oxford Street	1909-1913	32 Marble Arch Pavilion	531 Oxford Street	1914-1956
16 Charing Cross Fonomatograph	53 The Strand	1909-1922	33 Maskeylne's Theatre of Mystery	Langham Place, Regent Street	1905-1933
17 Cinema de Paris Cameo Cinema	35 Charing Cross Road	1910-(1926) 1926-(1936)	34 Mme. Tussaud's Cinema	Marylebone Road	1909-(1928)
18 The Cinema House	225 Oxford Street	1910-(1935)	5 New Egyptian Hall	170 Piccadilly	1905-1912
19 Circle in the Square renamed Cupid's Theatre renamed Palm Court Cinema	28a Leicester Square	1909-(1914) 1914-(1926) 1926-1928	35 New Gallery Cinema	121-5 Regent Street	1913-1953
20 Corner Theatre renamed Grafton Cinema	134 Tottenham Court Road	1910-(1911) 1911-1929	7 Palace Theatre	113 Shaftesbury Avenue	1897-1957
21 Court Cinema	268 Tottenham Court Road	1911-1928	36 Palais de Luxe	17-19 Great Windmill Street	1909-1930
22 Edison's Kinetoscope Parlour	70 Oxford Street	1894-1896	37 Philharmonic Hall	97 Great Portland Street	1907-1928
23 Electric Palace	532 Oxford Street	1908-1933	38 Piccadilly Circus Cinematograph Theatre	43-4 Great Windmill Street	1910-(1930)
13 Empire Palace of Varieties renamed Empire Theatre	5-6 Leicester Square	1884-(1898) 1898-(1927)	39 Picture House	161-7 Oxford Street	1913-(1928)
24 Gaiety Picture Palace	28 Tottenham Court Road	1909-(1933)	11 Polytechnic Theatre	307 Regent Street	1882-(1936)
25 Grand Casino Cinema	105-6 The Strand	1910-1923	40 Pyke House Cinematograph Theatre reopened as Phoenix	19-23 Oxford Street	1910-(1914) 1914-1925
26 Grand Central Picture House renamed Bijou Cinema	24 Tottenham Court Road	1909-(1928) 1928-1931	41 Pyke's Cambridge Circus Cinematograph Theatre reopened as Super Cinema	105-7 Charing Cross Road	1911-(1916) 1916-(1931)
27 Hale's Tours of the World	165 Oxford Street	1906-1908	42 Shaftesbury Pavilion	101 Shaftesbury Avenue	1912-(1927)
28 Haté Electric Cinema (Jardin de Paris)	6 Ingestre Place, Soho	1908-1916	43 Stoll Picture Theatre	22 Kingsway	1917-1941
29 Holborn Cinema	210-1 High Holborn	1910-1925	44 Strand Cinema Theatre	3-5 Agar Street	1910-(1951)
			45 Theatre de Luxe	65 The Strand	1909-1914
			46 West End Cinema Theatre	3-4 Coventry Street	1913-(1924)

KEY ● Pre 1900 ● Pre WWI ● Pre WWII ● 1970s ● 2015

() indicates continuation as cinema under a different name

Map showing cinemas in the West End of London prior to the First World War



The ‘Old Cinema’: a dissolving view

Ro Spankie

A technique by which one slide fades gradually into the next avoiding an abrupt break in the sequence.¹

INTRODUCTION

This chapter concerns a remarkable interior, the Regent Street Cinema, until recently familiarly known as the ‘Old Cinema’, that lies hidden behind the University of Westminster’s stern Portland Stone façade at 307 Regent Street. Why is it remarkable? Not because of its architectural merit, despite achieving Grade II listing in 1973.² Most people would be hard-pressed to name the architect who originally designed it, or any of the later architects and designers who added to and altered it over the years. The fascination with the Cinema comes, as with so many performance spaces, from the events that occurred within it – relating it not just to the origins of cinema in the UK, but also arguably to its pre-history. And, like the magic lantern shows it hosted so many years ago, its history is not clear-cut, but offers a dissolving view, projecting tantalising images from the past.

The significance of the space is based on the fact that M Félicien Trewey (1848–1920), a former music hall performer, shadowgraphist and juggler, demonstrated the Lumière brothers’ Cinématographe to fifty-four people on Friday 21 February 1896. This was the first public showing of moving pictures to a paying audience in Britain. Around the same time, the word ‘cinema’ came into being, derived from the Greek *κίνημα* ‘kinema’ or *κίνηματος* ‘kinematos’ meaning ‘movement’ or ‘motion’. The word was used to describe the art form, the industry and the space used for viewing moving images or films. The defining features of the space were: darkness, a reel of film, a projector and a surface on which to project. A cinema also required an audience.

Over a hundred years later there can be very few people in the UK who have never been to the cinema. The modern experience, however, is very different from that evening in February 1896. Today, a cinema auditorium will be purpose-designed, with raked, upholstered seating and a full-size screen, the film in colour, with surround sound and possibly computer-generated special effects and 3-D vision. Differing from the theatrical or musical performances, cinema has developed its own associated culture and traditions: pre-performance advertising, popcorn, the significance of the ‘back row’; all sit uneasily with the idea of attending a play or a concert. Then the lights go down and the audience

1 Brenda Weeden, *The Education of the Eye: History of the Royal Polytechnic Institution 1838–1881* (Cambridge: Granta Editions 2008), p. 46.

2 See p. 53 later in this chapter for details.



Fig. 9

Félicien Trewéy was a popular entertainer with an international reputation. The Lumières filmed him several times, including his famous 'chapeaugraphy' but transformation trick and, here, spinning plates.

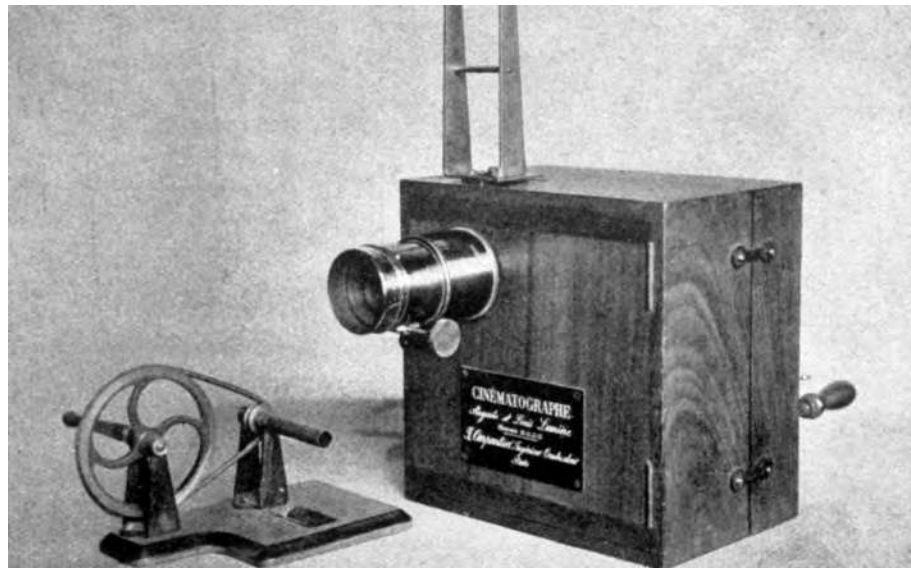
is lost for the next hour and a half, staring at an animated square of light projected onto the screen, a 'private experience in a social space'.³ Unlike so many forms of leisure that define who we are, the cinema is a universal experience.

Thursday 20 February 1896 was the press night, by invitation only. The event was billed as 'living photographs reproduced in movement', demonstrated in the large hall at the Regent Street Polytechnic.⁴ Due to technical difficulties, the guests were kept 'cooling their heels' while Trewéy and a Polytechnic electrician named Matt Raymond struggled with the electric current.⁵ Finally, the doors were flung open, revealing a long hall approximately 40 ft x 100 ft (12 m x 30 m) with an elliptical-coved ceiling. An impressive 50 ft (15 m) skylight running the length of the ceiling was closed and the space dimly lit. At the far end of the hall was a stage with a screen constructed in front. Encircling the entire space was a gallery-style balcony, allowing someone, if they had so wished, to walk behind the screen. Loose wooden seating was arranged facing the stage and, behind this, mounted on a stand about 60 ft (18 m) from the screen, stood the Cinématographe, a remarkable device that comprised a camera, a printer and a projector. The flickering 'living photographs' it projected onto the screen were black and white, silent films lasting less than a minute each, showing images of family life, people bathing in the Mediterranean and a steam train arriving. Theatrical sound effects, such as the splash of breaking waves, were created behind the screen to heighten the realism. According to contemporary reports the whole show took only seventeen minutes, several of which were taken up by Trewéy who acted 'as a chorus to the play'.⁶ At the end of the preview evening Trewéy, ever the showman, drew up the screen to reveal a magnificent banquet laid out on the stage behind.

- 3 Sylvia Harvey, 'What Is Cinema? The Sensuous, the Abstract and the Political' in Christopher Williams (ed.), *Cinema: The Beginnings and the Future: Essays Marking the Centenary of the First Film Show Projected to a Paying Audience in Britain* (London: University of Westminster Press, 1996), p. 241.
- 4 *Photography*, 27 February 1896, p. 143.
- 5 Joost Hunningher, 'Première on Regent Street', in Williams, p. 47–8.
- 6 *Entr'acte*, 7 March 1896, p. 6.

Fig. 10

The Cinématographe machine was operated by a hand crank, which meant it was highly transportable. See also Fig. 103.



- 7 In fact, many of the reviews are far from effusive in their appreciation of the Lumières' Cinématographe. *The Times* simply noted that it was 'a contrivance belonging to the same family as Edison's kinoscope [...] but in a rather higher stage of development.' *The Times*, 22 February 1896.
- 8 Trewey interviewed in *The Bioscope*, 17 October 1912, p. 187.
- 9 In contrast, Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope could only be viewed by one person at a time through an eye piece. In 1894 ten 'peep-hole machines', as the Kinetoscope was popularly known, had been installed at 70 Oxford Street, operated by inserting a coin.
- 10 Intriguingly, after premiering their projected motion pictures first in Paris in 1895, and then all over the world, including in 1896 London (20 February), Vienna (26 March), Moscow (26 May), New York (29 June), Bombay (7 July), Quebec (30 September), the Lumière brothers apparently frustrated with the competition moved on to colour photography declaring the Cinématographe 'can be exploited for a certain time as a scientific curiosity but, apart from that, it has no commercial future whatsoever'. Quoted in Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, *History of the Film* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1945), p. 10.

The evening could be described as a heady mix of innovation, showmanship and good marketing.

Today, the events of that evening are described as the beginning of cinema in Britain; however, it is unlikely that those in the room that evening were aware of the significance.⁷ The audience was not made up of scientists, celebrities or the chattering classes of nearby Portland Place and Cavendish Square, but rather 'the whole of the London Press, as well as every circus, music-hall and theatre manager in London'.⁸ Today the Cinématographe is remembered as innovative because of its ability to project moving pictures onto a screen, meaning, unlike contemporary single-viewer peepshows, it allowed for an audience.⁹ For the Lumière brothers the Cinématographe was a commercial machine for hire, with the money coming through ticket sales.¹⁰ The fact that the apparatus weighed only 16 lbs (7 kg) meant it was portable and by 9 March it was also showing at the Empire Theatre of Varieties in Leicester Square as a novelty feature among the music-hall acts.

So why is the space that the Lumières hired of such interest today? And what remains of the large hall and the Regent Street Polytechnic? These seemingly simple questions are surprisingly complex to answer. Indeed, by the turn of the twenty-first century if Trewey had entered the space he would not have recognised it: a 1920s cinema auditorium with Art Deco plasterwork, a raked balcony and a proscenium arch, the carpeting, the seating and the signage giving the space an institutional air. But on closer inspection tell-tale details remained. If Trewey had chosen to look up, he would have seen the original elliptical-coved ceiling and the great skylight; although now built over it is merely an artificial lighting feature. And if he had looked behind the modern projection screen obscuring the stage, he would have seen a fragment of the original gallery-style balcony at the back of the stage (see Fig. 42), still offering views of the back of the screen. On the wall there is a plaque commemorating the centenary of his presentation (see Fig. 54).



Fig. 11

The Lumière brothers famously claimed that 'The cinema is an invention without any future', and instead preferred to concentrate on developing their autochrome colour photography process.

In discussing the origins of the Regent Street Cinema the idea of the *original* or the *first* is problematic because design, like nature, is evolutionary. In a publication to celebrate the centenary of Trewey's visit, academic Christopher Williams suggests cinema was not invented, but rather:

It was the result of a complicated process which had begun about three centuries earlier; a process which mixed science, entertainment, popular culture and other media, story-telling, business and education in varying proportions. It follows from this that it could not have been the product of one showman or inventor, nor even of two French businessmen with strong interests in science and photography.¹¹

The same idea of an evolutionary process applies to the Cinema itself. When the Lumière brothers brought their Cinématographe to London they did not design the first cinema, but hired a venue. That venue by virtue of the projections shown on 21 February 1896 became the first cinema in Britain.

Listing the changes is not the concern here, because it is not the fabric of the space that is important, but rather what the Cinema represented in 1896 and represents today that gives it significance. Like all good detectives, one must look for both clues and also for motive. It was not by chance that the Lumière brothers held their première at the Polytechnic, and a closer look at the space they chose sheds light on the development of cinema in general. The story can be told in three evolutionary stages defined by how the space was named and, more importantly, by how the space was used: as theatre, hall and cinema.

¹¹ Williams, Introduction, in *Cinema: The Beginnings and the Future*, p. 5.

STAGE 1: 1848–81 THEATRE**URBAN THEATRE, PROJECTION THEATRE, LECTURE THEATRE**

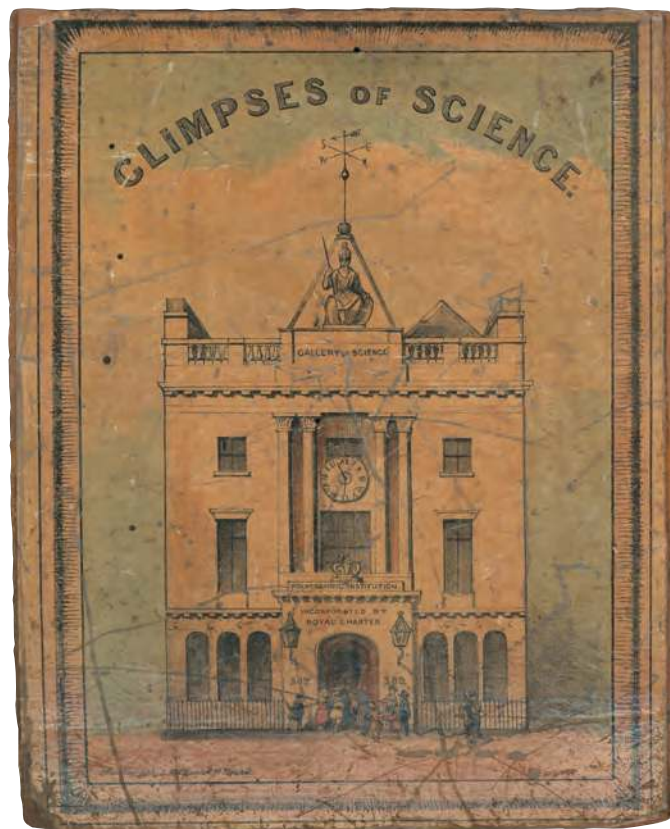
Theatre: late Middle English: from Old French, or from Latin theatrum, from Greek theatron, from theasthai 'to behold'.

The name 'Polytechnic' is the first clue. As guests drew up at 309 Regent Street for the première, the three-storey stucco façade bore the name 'Polytechnic Institution' inscribed over the entrance doors. This name refers not to the technical institute founded by the philanthropist Quintin Hogg (1845–1903), but to the building's previous life as the Royal Polytechnic Institution, first established in 1838 by Sir George Cayley (1773–1857) as 'a more scientific form of the exhibition hall so beloved of the inquiring Victorian visitor'.¹² This admirable intent was achieved through a mixture of exhibits, demonstrations and lectures. The 1837 Prospectus for the Polytechnic Institution declared that it was designed 'for the advancement of the Arts and Practical Science; especially in conjunction with Agriculture, Mining and Manufacturers and other Branches of Industry'.¹³ The large hall was purpose built as a lecture theatre for 'optical exhibitions and other similar purposes'¹⁴ by the architect James Thomson (1800–1883) in 1848.

The Royal Polytechnic Institution should not be understood as an isolated initiative, but part of the wider story of the emergence of London's West End

Fig. 12

The Polytechnic Institution opened its doors to the public on Monday 6 August 1838 and was described by the Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction as 'an intellectual treat'.



12 Hermione Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street: A Mile of Style* (West Sussex, UK: Phillimore & Co. Ltd, 2008), p. 79. See also Weeden.

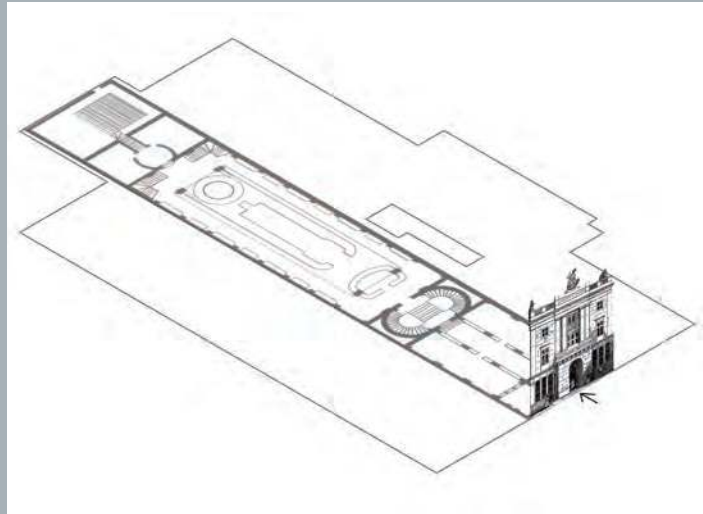
13 *Prospectus of an institution for the advancement of the arts and practical science, 5 Cavendish Square, and Regent Street, London*, 14 December 1837, UWA/RPI/2/8. See also pp. 24–5.

14 *The Lady's Newspaper*, 22 April 1848. This theatre had been commissioned as a major addition to the south side of the Polytechnic Institution.

SET OF DIAGRAMS SHOWING THE EVOLUTION OF THE BUILDING

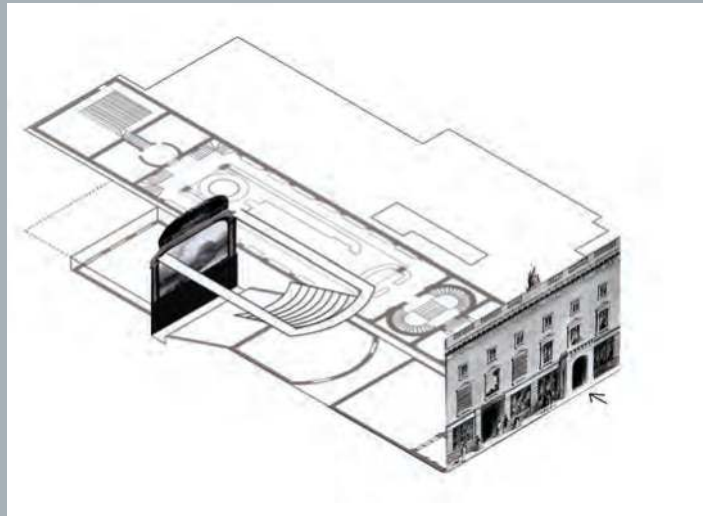
1838

The Polytechnic Institution, first established in 1834, purchases a site running west/east from 5 Cavendish Square to 309 Regent Street and commissions the architect James Thomson. The completed building consists of exhibition halls, workshops and lecture theatres and stretches the length of the plot, utilising the mansion house at one end and providing a new three-storey stucco façade facing onto Regent Street at the other.



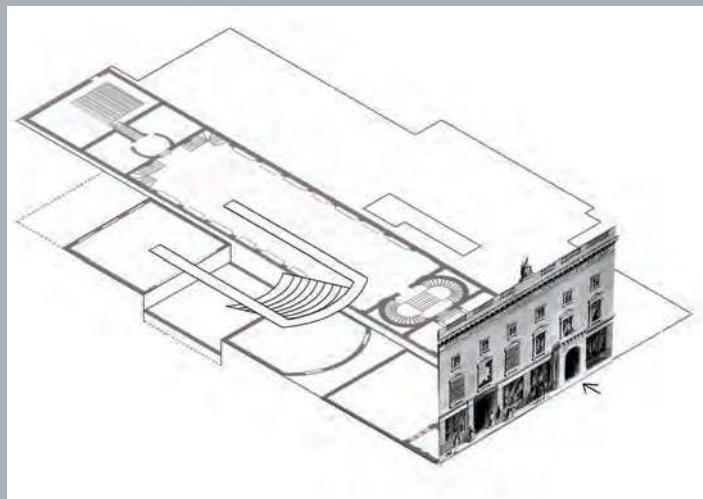
1848 Theatre

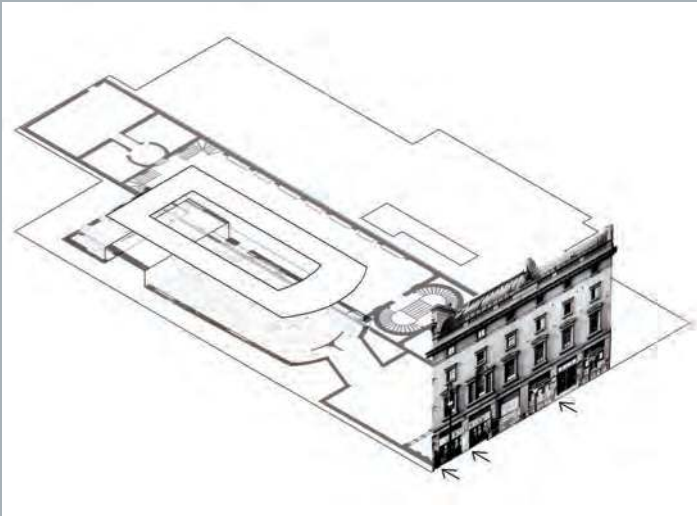
In 1848 James Thomson is commissioned to design a 1,500 seat purpose-built theatre for 'optical exhibitions and other similar purposes' at 307 Regent Street on the south side of the Royal Polytechnic Institution. The theatre has a full stage, tiered seating and a large projection room situated under the upper tier of seating. Although building a new double façade extending across the two sites, the front portion of the site is leased separately and the entrance to the theatre remains from 309 Regent Street.



1882 Theatre/Hall

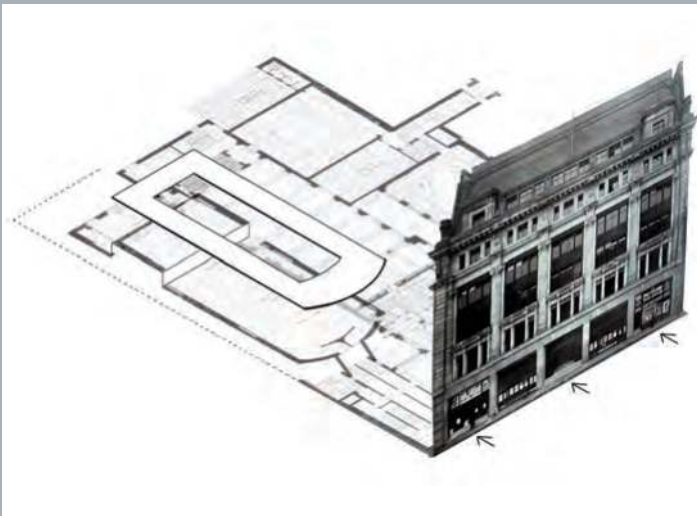
In 1881 the Royal Polytechnic Institution is sold by private treaty to Mr Quintin Hogg, a wealthy philanthropist for his Young Men's Christian Institute. Considerable alterations are made by the architect Spencer Chadwick before the building reopens in 1882; the Great Exhibition Hall is transformed into a gymnasium, and the theatre, its lower tier of seating levelled and proscenium removed, is turned into a 'handsomely decorated hall' capable of seating over 1,100 people.





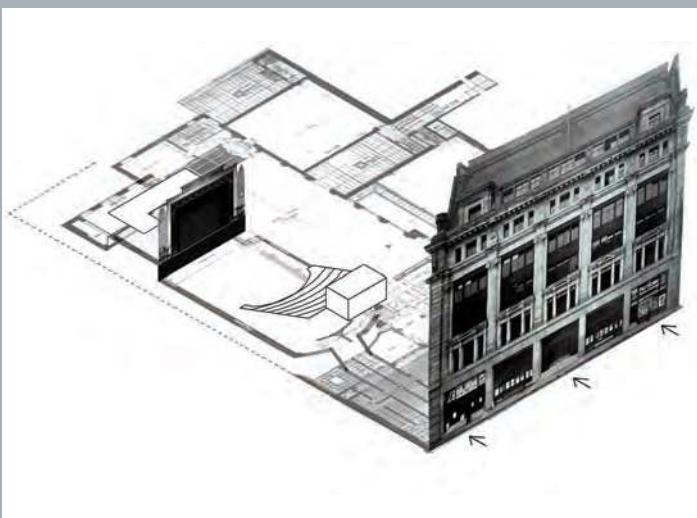
1893 Hall

In 1891 Hogg purchases the front portion of the 307 Regent Street site. Spencer Chadwick refurbishes the Great Hall for a second time, removing the upper-tier of seating and projection room to create an assembly hall with a gallery style balcony encircling the space. In response to new LCC regulations, the Great Hall has access directly to the street and is hired out as a venue.



1911 Hall

Regent Street Polytechnic's lease comes up for renewal prompting large-scale redevelopment, most visibly the seven-storey façade designed by the architect Frank T. Verity. Behind the façade the architect George Mitchell oversees major refurbishment and increased provision of classrooms. The Great Hall, although redecorated, remains structurally unchanged.



1927 Cinema

The Great Hall is refurbished by the architect Frederick J. Wills as a cinema auditorium to be let commercially. The gallery is removed and replaced with a single curved balcony of tiered seating continuing up to the back wall (bizarrely a section of the gallery at the back of the stage is left). The main floor is level and the space decorated in an Art Deco style with a simple proscenium at the front of the stage. It remains like this until 2014.

Diagrams drawn by Zuzana Hozakova.



Fig. 13

The ornamental screen, seen in the centre of this engraving, was designed by John Nash to hide the stable blocks belonging to the grand houses on Cavendish Square.

and Regent Street in particular. The first half of the nineteenth century was a time when London transformed itself into a modern metropolis. It was a time of unprecedented growth: in 1800 the population of London was close to a million; by 1900 it was over six million. The wealthy moved out of the tight medieval street patterns of the old city into large houses and terraces in the new West End, centred around elegant public spaces such as Hanover Square and Cavendish Square. It was more than just the built fabric that was changing; it was also the fabric of people's lives. The 1851 census recorded that, for the first time, over half the population of Britain lived in towns rather than the countryside. This rapid urbanisation changed not just how people lived and worked but also their leisure activities.

In 1811 the lease of 500 acres of farmland north of New Road (Marylebone Road) was returned to the Crown by the Duke of Portland, who had hunted on the land since 1789.¹⁵ The architect John Nash (1752–1835), tapping into the new mood, proposed that the land be used to create Marylebone Park, now Regent's Park; 'a daring and highly picturesque conception of a garden city for an aristocracy, supported by charming panoramas showing a composition of alluring groves and elegant architecture'.¹⁶ Nash, the favourite architect of the Prince Regent,¹⁷ was a great opportunist and made the radical proposal to connect the new Marylebone Park to the Prince's residence, Carlton House (now demolished), in St James's by a ceremonial route. The aim was to create a grand boulevard so that the wealthy and well-to-do could promenade. It was a huge undertaking, never attempted on such a scale before, one of London's great urban gestures and at the heart of this development was the site of the Polytechnic Institution.

Although Nash originally envisaged a direct route, the complexities of London land ownership meant the final route of what would become Regent Street was determined by ownership of the land; 'it was cheaper to plant the road on Crown property than to go as the crow flies'.¹⁸ The upper section of Regent Street was particularly tricky, the land owned by the Duke of Portland:

15 John Summerson, *Georgian London* (New Haven, US: Yale University Press, 1946), p. 196.

16 Summerson, p. 198.

17 George Augustus Frederick (1762–1830), King George IV (1820–30). As Prince Regent his interest in architecture gave his name to the Regency Style. Christopher Hibbert, 'George IV', *ODNB*.

18 Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), p. 127.

Fig. 14
 Charles Booth's *Maps Descriptive of London Poverty* are an early example of social cartography, with each street coloured to indicate the income and social class of its inhabitants. Blue and black indicate poverty, red is middle-class and yellow is upper class.



the direct route would have crossed the yards and gardens belonging to the houses on the east side of Cavendish Square. Realising that a Parisian-style boulevard would be too expensive, 'Nash had to extemporize and contrive an architectural grouping which had a sort of picturesque unity without being strictly balanced'.¹⁹ He disguised the awkward twist where Upper Regent Street met the already existing Portland Place (designed by the Adam brothers in 1774) with the church of All Souls.

Although constructed and funded by individual developers, resulting in a variety of built form, the entire street was designed as a single entity in a Greek Revival style, the façades finished in cream rendered stucco, the stone traced out in relief. This original Regent Street looked very different from today's, with picturesque, three-storey buildings with generous pavements giving a sense of width and elegance; the epitome of the new Regency style.

The route chosen had social as well as formal implications. Intentionally or not Nash's route hugged the frontier between crowded, confused Soho on the east and elegant Hanover Square and Cavendish Square on the west:

By restricting eastern access to Regent Street, Nash's route succeeded, in Sir John Summerson's phrase, in 'damming up Soho', and London's grandest thoroughfare thereby became its social barrier, with Portland Place and Regent Street screening the fashionable West End from *déclassé* quarters.²⁰

The top end of Regent Street was, according to a contemporary commentator, James Elmes, 'the isthmus between wealth and commerce'.²¹

This clash of old and new, rich and poor, well-to-do and trade became the centre of the new urban culture, a dynamic mix of shopping, promenade and entertainment.²² Nash instinctively understood this new London as a public space, a social theatre, and Regent Street as a 'stage set for the drama of mass

19 Summerson, p. 209.

20 Porter, p. 127.

21 James Elmes, *Metropolitan Improvements, or London in the Nineteenth Century* (1827) cited in Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street*, p. 48.

22 Sophie von la Roche wrote 'behind the great glass windows absolutely everything one can think of is neatly, attractively displayed, and in such abundance of choice it almost makes one greedy'. In Leo Hollis, *The Stones of London: A History in Twelve Buildings* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2011), p. 220.

ROYAL POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTION

The Polytechnic Institution opened on 6 August 1838 under the chairmanship of the scientist Sir George Cayley (1773–1857). Cayley was widely known for his inventions; he designed and built the first man-carrying glider in 1853 and is regarded as the father of modern aeronautics.

Committed to the promotion of science, Cayley created an institution where private experimentalists could hire out laboratory space and give lectures on scientific subjects. For the price of one shilling (5p), the Victorian public could enter and see experiments in action and view the latest inventions and technologies on display in the Great Exhibition Hall. These included industrial machines in motion, a man in a diving suit, the 30 ft (9 m) spark from an induction coil, and magnified Thames water. If the visitor was brave enough, and parted with another shilling, they could descend underwater in the diving bell.

309 Regent Street has always been at the forefront of photography, and in 1841 the first photographic studio

in Europe opened on the roof of the building, run by Richard Beard. Patrons, including Charles Dickens, visited to have their portrait taken. The institution was also the first to demonstrate the new photographic process of patented calotypes by Fox Talbot.

The Royal Polytechnic – the name changed when Prince Albert, the first royal visitor, became patron in December 1840 – rapidly became a well-known London landmark. The Polytechnic combined education with entertainment with visual effects as an integral part of lectures and demonstrations. The theatre was added to the building in 1848 to accommodate the growing audiences for the Polytechnic's optical shows. In the new theatre the public could attend a séance, hear lectures on science, view magic lantern shows and see the famous Pepper's Ghost illusion where audiences saw a ghost moving about on the stage. The technology behind the illusion is still employed today. The displays were increasingly sophisticated, spreading the fame of what was arguably the world's first permanent projection theatre. In 1838 Henry Langdon Childe joined the staff of the RPI and transformed the magic lantern, a



Fig. 15
Books published by the Royal Polytechnic Institution's lecturers helped to spread its fame.

Fig. 16
Charles Dickens's stories were always popular as Christmas entertainments. This slide, painted especially for the RPI, was used to illustrate his *The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton*.

forerunner of early cinematography, into a valuable means of recreation and scientific research. Among his major technological advances, Childe pioneered the illuminations of lanterns by limelight rather than oil, enabling the projectionist to come out from behind the screen and project images from the back of the hall.

Behind the scenes, the Polytechnic established evening classes for young working Londoners. The classes were a mix of technical and practical subjects and, from 1853, included photography. Although the institution closed in 1881, many of its activities were to continue under the building's new owner Quintin Hogg. He established an expanded programme of evening classes and rented out the theatre for a variety of visual performances.



Fig. 18
The Ceramic Petalocaust Process enabled the image of plants to be indelibly burnt onto china, and was exhibited at the RPI by Mr G.J. Cox in the 1860s.

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PROGRAMME OF
Lectures and Entertainments
FOR THE WEEK COMMENCING AUGUST 22, 1881.

GENERAL INSPECTION
OXY-HYDROGEN MICROSCOPE
PHOTOGRAPHER'S SUNBEAM
A TRIP TO THE LAKE DISTRICT.
PORTUGAL
ELECTRIC RAILWAY
BLONDIN AND LEOTARD
DIVER AND DIVING BELL
ROBINSON CRUSOE
THE ALICE BARTH OPERA COMPANY
THE KNIGHT WATCHING HIS ARMOUR
ETC., ETC.

BOYLE'S
PATENT
Self-Acting Air-Pump Ventilators.

"Since these excellent Ventilators have been introduced, we have now got perfect methods of ventilation."—Dr. D. W. RICHARDSON, F.R.S.

ROBERT BOYLE & SON, Ventilating & Sanitary Engineers,
64, HOLBORN VIADUCT.

THE GOLDEN CANISTER WESTERN TEA MART.
PRINTERS: WARREN HALL & LOVITT, 88, Cannon Road, N.W.

THE BEST IN THE TRADE. 2, HOLLES STREET, OXFORD STREET, W. GOOD BLACK TEA, 2s. PER POUND, ABSOLUTELY.

Fig. 17
This programme should have been for the final week of the Polytechnic. However, after bearing it was to close, so many people wanted to visit one last time that it actually ran until 10 September 1881.

Fig. 19
The Great Exhibition Hall was 120 feet long, 40 feet wide and 40 feet high (37 x 12 x 12 m), top lit by glass panels in the curved roof.



consumption'.²³ Like all scenery, it was less than it appeared; the buildings were stucco and not stone, so to keep up appearances, the leases required owners to keep their façades in good order – washed all over at least once a year and painted every fourth year.

It was this mix of innovation, opportunism and showmanship that led to the founding of the Polytechnic Institution by three men, Sir George Cayley (1773–1857), a gentleman reformer and man of science, Charles Payne, manager of the Adelaide Gallery²⁴ and William Mountford Nurse (d.1855), a developer and speculative builder. The site was a mansion house at 5 Cavendish Square owned by William Henry Cavendish-Scott-Bentinck, 4th Duke of Portland (1768–1854), with a stable block at the back providing frontage onto the newly-created Regent Street. The location was ideal; it was not chance that the creation of Nash's urban theatre coincided with the period of London's great panoramas and dioramas such as the Colosseum²⁵ and the Diorama,²⁶ both of which were popular visitor attractions in nearby Regent's Park.²⁷ A less visible advantage of the site was its position on 'the isthmus between wealth and commerce' that combined with a programme of exhibitions that were universally appealing to ensure large audiences. A Royal Polytechnic Institution advertisement read:

Notice to everybody: If you want science, you can have it. If you want instruction you can have it. If you prefer amusement, you can have it. You can have either or all three by paying the admission fee of one shilling.²⁸

Members of the Polytechnic could enter via 5 Cavendish Square while the general public entered via the newly-formed Regent Street entrance. Once in its crowded halls, however, all ages and classes rubbed together.

Nurse purchased the property in 1837 and commissioned the architect James Thomson (1800–1883), and builder Mortimer Timpson (1801–1863), both of whom he had worked with before on developments in Regent's Park. The completed building stretched the length of the plot, utilising the mansion house at one end and providing a new three-storey stucco façade onto Regent Street at the other. The building cost was around £15,000. Much has been written about the Great Exhibition Hall in the Polytechnic Institution, the diving bell and sea battles,²⁹ but it was the success of its lectures and optical exhibitions, such as the hydro-electrical microscope, the physioscope and dissolving views that led to the Polytechnic embarking on a major extension in 1847, the third in ten years and evidence of its success. The extension consisted of a 1,500 seat purpose-built theatre for 'optical exhibitions and other similar purposes'.³⁰ Nurse purchased the neighbouring plot on the south side and also paid for the building works, between £10,000 and £12,000, again commissioning the architect James Thomson.

The result was impressive: the theatre's footprint was 40 ft (12 m) wide (the width of the plot) by 120 ft (36.5 m) long and 50 ft (15 m) high. Thomson's design was innovative, incorporating an elliptical-coved ceiling created with

23 Hollis, p. 219.

24 The Adelaide Gallery or the National Gallery of Practical Science: Blending Instruction with Amusement, opened in 1832 on the north side of Lowther Arcade and was a model for the Polytechnic. It closed in 1848.

25 The London Colosseum was built by Decimus Burton in 1827 to exhibit Thomas Hornor's 'Panoramic view of London', the largest painting ever created: a panorama of London as seen from the dome of St Paul's'. The building was demolished in 1874.

26 The Diorama built by Charles Augustus Pugin in 1823 housed a theatrical experience designed by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, inventor of the daguerreotype. It closed at the end of 1851.

27 Other nearby exhibits include the Zoological Gardens (1824) and the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly (1812) that later also showed animated photographs. See also map, p. xiv–xv.

28 *The Times*, 1874, *Polytechnic Scrapbook*, UWA RPI/4/1.

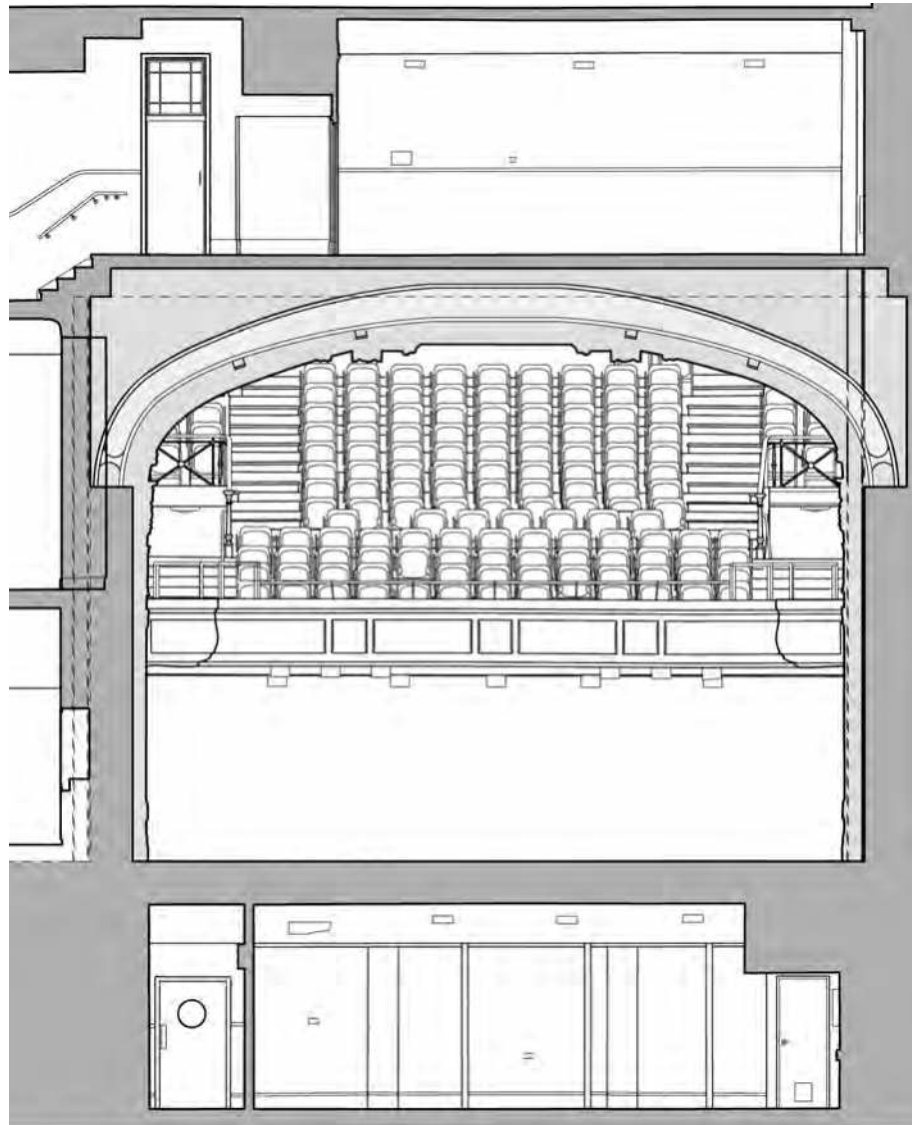
29 See Weeden, especially Chapters 2 and 3.

30 *The Lady's Newspaper*, 22 April 1848.

Fig. 20
*The original 1848 Bramah and
 Robinson cast iron girders still
 exist today, bidden behind the
 plaster ceiling.*



Fig. 21
*The plaster ceiling of the 2014
 renovations follows the line of
 elliptical arch of Thomson's
 theatre.*



huge arched iron girders sitting on massive piers and arches. These girders, *The Builder* reported, were of:

One casting, from the house of Messrs. Bramah and Robinson, of Pimlico, and are amongst the largest, in point of span, that have been executed: they were all previously proved as to their soundness by the hydraulic press, and are good specimens of the ability of the firm in question.³¹

The ceiling was lined with patent marine metal to match the exhibition hall. Running lengthways along the ridge of the ceiling was a 50 ft by 12 ft (15 m x 3.5 m) skylight with opening and closing mechanical shutters, ‘for the purpose of exhibiting the optical illusions in broad day, and in an instant to restore the light again for the general promenade of the public’.³²

Nurse, ever the speculator, kept the front portion of the site onto Regent Street for a separate development known as the Polyorama (1850–54), showing scenic, diorama-style paintings and, from 1854, the home to a literary club called the Cavendish Club, later the Marlborough Rooms, thereby receiving two ground rents from the site rather than one.³³ Thomson articulated Nurse’s ownership by constructing a new façade spanning the two sites, although theatre audiences continued to enter the Royal Polytechnic Institution at 309 Regent Street and the theatre itself from an inner door in the south side of the Great Hall. This lack of street access would cause congestion problems as audiences of up to 1,500 had to exit via the Great Hall.³⁴

The auditorium seating consisted of two tiered planes: one descending from the entrance level to the floor of the theatre, and the other ascending gradually to the back wall. Along the side walls above ran a narrow gallery. Wedged between the two levels of seating was the ‘manipulating room’ or projection

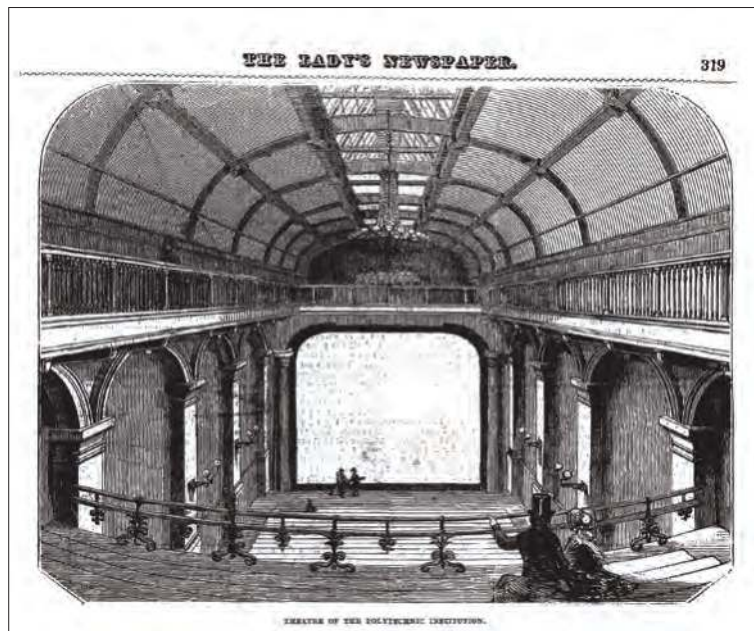


Fig. 23

The Royal Polytechnic Institution used oxyhydrogen – or limelight, as it was commonly known – as the illuminant for its slides, enabling images to be projected from the manipulating room onto the screen. Space behind the stage was used for various purposes, including sound effects to accompany the performance.

Fig. 22

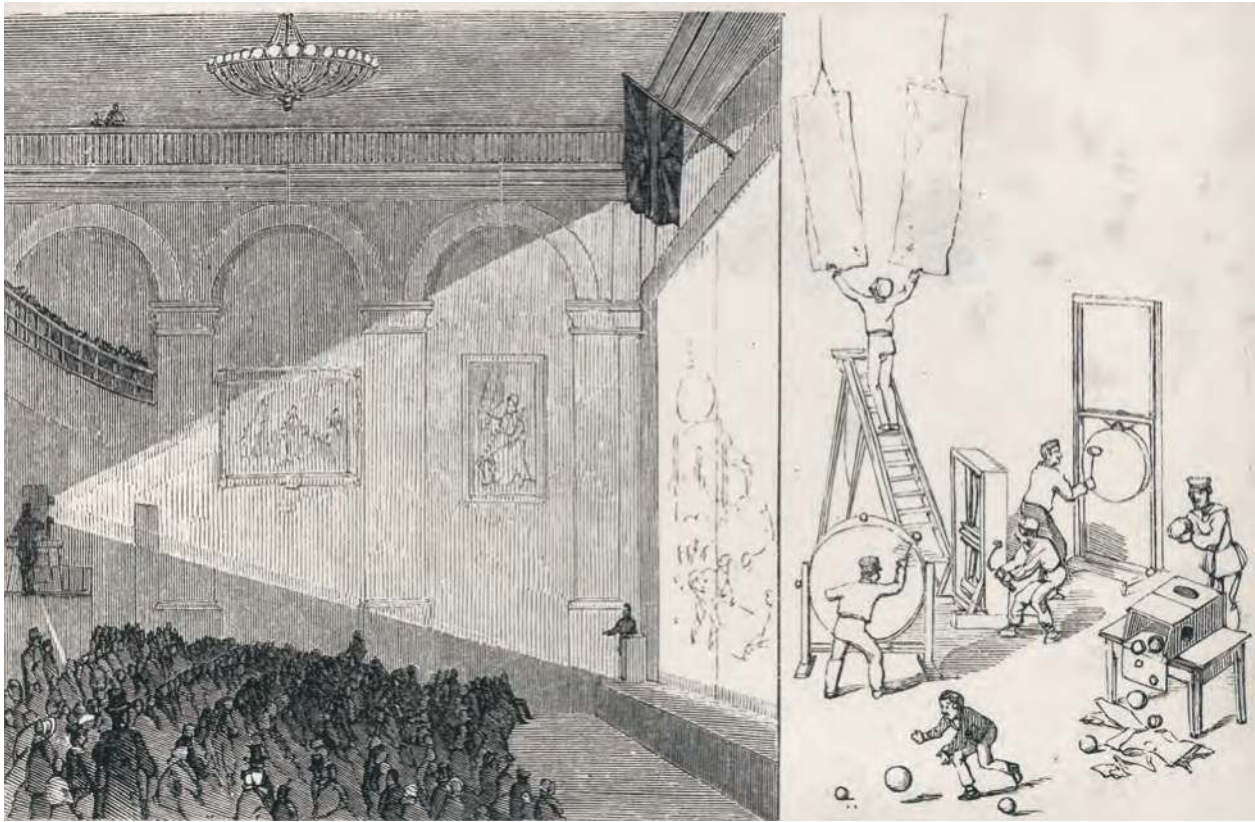
The Lady’s Newspaper described the new theatre as ‘offering increased facilities for prosecuting microscopic research on a broader scale than ever’.

31 *The Builder*, Vol. VI, No. 270, 8 April 1848, p. 173.

32 *Ibid.*

33 The extent of Nurse’s property portfolio was revealed after his death in 1856 – see *The Times*, 24 April 1856.

34 Because of this situation the RPI was unable to hold a theatrical licence. The lack of a street entrance to the theatre continued until 1891.



room. This was huge: 40 ft by 30 ft (12 m × 9 m), and due to the tiered seating above it had a ceiling height varying from 10 ft to 30 ft (3 m × 9 m) and a curved rear wall opening onto a light well providing natural ventilation at the back. The manipulating room contained the lanterns and stored the 'apparatus of the optical and mathematical instruments' used to project onto the screen.³⁵ *The Builder* of April 1848 also described the huge disc-shaped screen:

The disc alone is an object of considerable interest: it is the largest plane constructed of wood, and rendered moveable, that we have ever seen, being 33 feet by 27 feet in area, nearly 900 feet super. It consists of a crane-like construction, upon which is framed a series of horizontal and vertical braces, and the whole is covered with boarding and oil canvass [sic].³⁶

James Thomson was a pupil of John Buonarotti Papworth (1775–1847), part of a dynasty of stucco workers, architects and sculptors.³⁷ It was Papworth's nephew Edward Papworth (1809–1866) who created the terracotta sculpture of Minerva³⁸ that sat on top of the façade of the Royal Polytechnic Institution until 1911. Thomson had previously worked for Nurse with John Nash on Cumberland Terrace and Cumberland Place (1826/7) and was well versed in the Regency tradition.³⁹ In 1827 Thomson published a small book *Retreats: A Series of Designs, Consisting of Plans and Elevations for Cottages, Villas, and Ornamental Buildings* that contained all the tenets of the Nash's speculative

35 *The Builder*, Vol. VI, No. 270, 8 April 1848, p. 173.

36 *Ibid.*

37 J.B. Papworth designed the interiors of the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly 1819. Described as a 'monumental self-advertisement, rich with stage-set historicism', it became a model for later more expressionist cinemas. Edwin Heathcote, *Cinema Builders* (New York: Academic Editions/John Wiley & Sons, 2001), p. 11.

38 Minerva: the Roman goddess of wisdom, sponsor of the arts, trade and strategy. The statue crowned the façade of the RPI from 1838 until it mysteriously disappeared during the 1911 rebuilding works.

39 Thomson also designed the Polygraphic Hall 1855 in King William Street, for Nurse. The Polygraphic Hall was later reconstructed as the Folly Theatre 1876 by Thomas Verity, father of Frank Verity.

Picturesque: a knowledge of Greek Revival architecture, an idealised view of the 'rural' and an ability to combine these styles into suitable typologies 'adapted more particularly to the environs of the metropolis'.⁴⁰ The Royal Polytechnic Institution would have been a challenging brief, representing as it did the world of science and manufacturing that the Picturesque tradition had looked away from. With no existing typologies Thomson referred to the theatre rather than the lecture hall for reference. The resulting auditorium, however, was unlike existing theatres because it had a manipulating room, while it is unlike modern cinemas as it has a stage deep enough to hold full scenery. Although the Royal Polytechnic Institution never held a theatrical licence, this stage area was to prove useful for the special effects created for dissolving views and later illusions such as 'Pepper's Ghost'.⁴¹

Thomson's theatre was arguably the first permanent projection theatre in London. But like everything in this evolutionary tale it referred to what had come before. The Royal Polytechnic Institution already owned the gas lanterns used to project images. These lanterns were hugely expensive and set on heavy iron stands designed specifically for them. Once installed in the manipulating room, they did not leave until the building was sold in 1881. Jeremy Brooker has argued that:

The projectors pre-dated the construction of the new theatre. Since their lenses were designed for the proportions of the small lecture theatre screen their focal lengths now determined the distance from the projection room to the screen. The width of the new plot was limited to 40 feet, so the screen width of 33 feet was about the maximum the building could accommodate. This left a clearance of just 3 feet on each side, with no space for the wings found in conventional theatres. This width also determined the position of the projection box, which of necessity had to be 50 feet from the screen.⁴²

In other words, the new theatre was designed around the existing equipment.

The theatre was an unqualified success, described in contemporary reports as 'excellent' and 'admirably adapted for its purpose'; it was the images on the screen, rather than the technology that everyone was focused on.⁴³ Just like the shop windows on Regent Street, the projected views displayed the world as never seen before, transforming the ordinary into the extra-ordinary. The Physioscope was able to project photographs and other objects including the operator's head, an effect described as not unlike 'Gulliver in the land of Brobdignag, with all the cannibalistic possibilities such an encounter implied'.⁴⁴ The projection microscope projected 'a flea as big as an elephant, with distinctness and semblance of reality'.⁴⁵ A contemporary critic wrote:

Upon this immense screen the microscopic objects are displayed of the most astonishing sizes; and the disclosure of the wonderful structure of natural objects is calculated to fill the mind with holy reverence and devout gratitude to the Great Creator.⁴⁶

- 40 James Thomson, Preface, *Retreats: A Series of Designs, Consisting of Plans and Elevations for Cottages, Villas, and Ornamental Buildings* (London: Printed for J. Taylor, Architectural Library, 59 High Holborn, 1827).
- 41 For a description of Pepper's Ghost, see Weeden, pp. 71–86. See also p. 24 and pp. 110–112 in this volume.
- 42 Jeremy Brooker, *Temple of Minerva, Magic and the Magic Lantern at the Royal Polytechnic Institution* (London: The Magic Lantern Society, 2013), p. 63.
- 43 *The Builder*, Vol. VI, No. 270, 8 April 1848, p. 173.
- 44 Brooker, p. 60.
- 45 C. Gould, *The Companion to the Compound, Oxy-Hydrogen and Solar Microscopes, made by W. Cary, 181 Strand*, 13th edn. (London: W. Cary, 1839), quoted in Brooker, p. 26.
- 46 *The Lady's Newspaper*, 20 April 1848.

Less devout satirical cartoonists of the period show visitors recoiling in horror at the creatures to be found in a glass of London tap water, while an opportunistic business named Lipscombe & Co. at nearby 93 Regent Street made good money selling water filters.⁴⁷

Most popular of all were the Magic Lantern shows or dissolving views, where large-format slides unique to the Polytechnic projected bigger and better images of topographical subjects and picturesque views than could be seen elsewhere.⁴⁸ Dissolving views are 'a technique by where one slide fades gradually into the next avoiding an abrupt break in the sequence'.⁴⁹ The slide operators, known as 'lanternists', were able to simulate movement using a range of dioramic effects such as rainbows, moonlight and lightning, projecting the slides from alternate lanterns with music and sound effects. The dissolving views should be understood as somewhere between a lecture, a demonstration and a theatrical performance. Like the Claude glass⁵⁰ used by the Picturesque artists, they offered the public an image of topical or idealised exotic locations and picturesque views of the countryside; in other words, a respite from the stress and banality of urban life.

The Royal Polytechnic Institution represents something of cinema's pre-history. If cinema was not a single invention, but an evolution, the optical exhibitions such as the hydro-electrical microscope, the physioscope and dissolving views represent a key period leading up to the Lumières' Cinématographe both in terms of innovations in photography but equally significantly, one could argue, in its performative aspect. The Royal Polytechnic Institution was a commercial enterprise, with Thomson's theatre, the manipulating room

Fig. 24
This image of Alice was hand-painted onto a glass slide by W.R. Hill in 1876, specifically for the Royal Polytechnic Institution.



47 John Tallis's *Street Views of London* (London: J. Tallis, 1838–40).

48 Originally hand-painted; later, photographic plates were used.

49 Weeden, p. 46.

50 A Claude glass is a slightly convex tinted mirror, which was supposed to help artists produce works of art similar to those of the French landscape artist Claude Lorrain (1604/5–82); 'they give the object of nature a soft, mellow tinge like the colouring of that Master', Revd William Gilpin: www.vam.ac.uk [accessed 2 October 2014].

and projectors allowing for large audiences. This was entertainment for the masses, relating back to older performances of magic and illusion and to the great shows of London. It was for these reasons that the Lumières chose to première their Cinématographe there.⁵¹

STAGE 2: 1881–1923 THE HALL

GREAT HALL, MARLBOROUGH HALL, CONCERT HALL

Hall: A building or large room used for meetings, concerts, or other events: From old English hall, heall (originally denoting a roofed space, located centrally, for the communal use of a tribal chief and his people); of Germanic origin and related to German Halle, Dutch hall, also to Norwegian and Swedish hall.

The end of the Royal Polytechnic Institution was precipitated by two accidents, the first occurring in the theatre on the evening of 3 January 1859. The audience was making its way out of the auditorium after a Christmas performance, when the spiral staircase leading down from the balcony on the south side collapsed, killing a young girl and injuring many others. Although initially the building reopened, the threat of ensuing lawsuits resulted in the collapse of the original company.⁵² After a period of uncertainty, the Royal Polytechnic Institution re-formed as a Limited Company and in November 1860 reopened to the public, with a greater emphasis on education, offering evening classes and afternoon lectures.

However, it never regained its initial success despite the valiant efforts of John Henry Pepper (1821–1900) and his famous ghosts. In March 1879, a fire damaged the roof of the small lecture theatre, the company was unable to afford the rebuilding costs and went bankrupt.⁵³ The property was put up for auction on 7 December 1881, and was bought by liquidators for £15,000. It was then sold by private treaty to Quintin Hogg (1845–1903), a wealthy philanthropist, to house his Young Men's Christian Institute.

The sales particulars describe:

An Elegant Theatre, 110 ft, by 40 ft, lighted from the roof and capable of seating between 800 and 900 persons, with spacious Stage, Green Room over and Dressing Rooms; and with Galleries approached by wide Stone Staircases and several doors leading from the Grand Hall. Under a portion of the Auditorium are Store and other Rooms for Optical Apparatus, by means of which in connection with the stage, Lectures have been brilliantly Illustrated by the display of the Marvels of the Microscope, the attractive exhibition of Dissolving Views and other Optical Phenomena upon a scale truly magnificent.⁵⁴

Included with the sales particulars were a set of plans and two watercolour perspectives of the interior of the theatre, dated December 1881, one facing the stage (see Fig. 26), the other facing the raked seating (see Fig. 56). When compared with earlier illustrations, they show that the interior had remained

Fig. 25

The sales particulars of 1881 included a floor plan of the property, which comprised both 309 Regent Street and 5 Cavendish Square.

51 Antoine Lumière, father to Auguste and Louis, was a respected freemason. The Regent Street Polytechnic had its own lodge at this time, which may also have influenced his choice of venue.

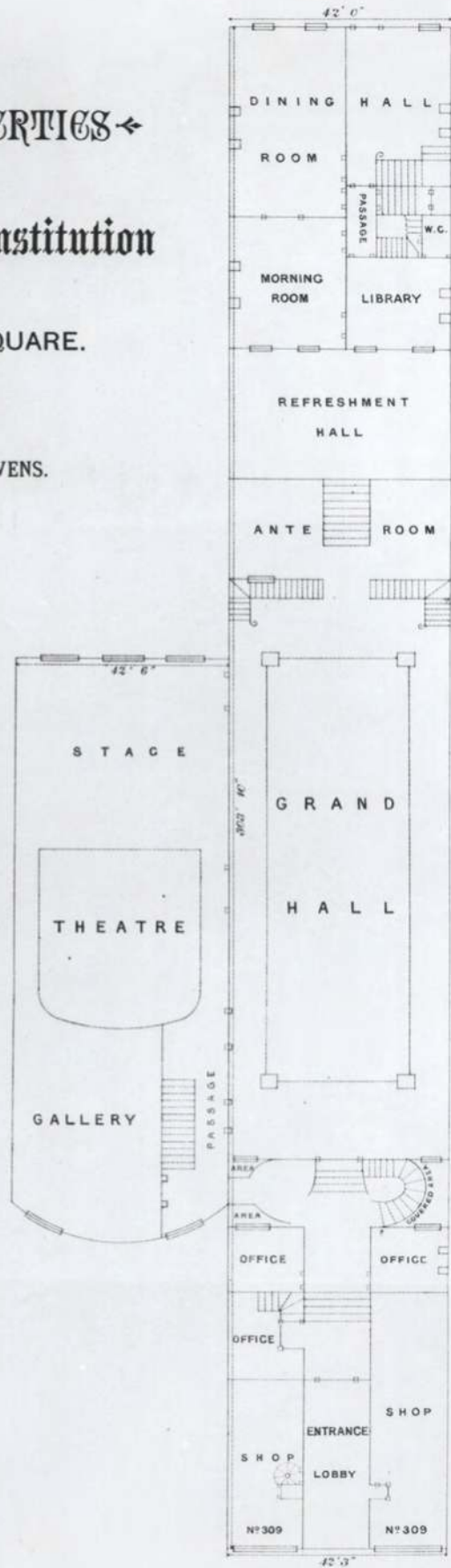
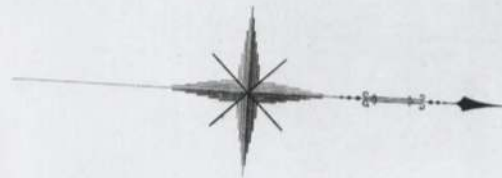
52 See Weeden for details.

53 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 March 1879.

54 *Particulars and conditions of sale of the premises of the Royal Polytechnic Institution*, 7 December 1881, UWA RPI/2/79.

PLAN OF
 ↔ LEASEHOLD + PROPERTIES ↔
 DISTINGUISHED AS THE
Royal Polytechnic Institution
 AND
 No. 5, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

For Sale by Messrs.
 RUSHWORTH, ABBOTT & STEVENS.
 1881.



NOTE.—This Plan is prepared from the Plans on the Leases under which the Property is held, and from which the Dimensions are taken, but the Vendors do not guarantee its accuracy.



virtually unchanged since 1848, apart from the addition of a more decorative proscenium to the stage. For the first time, even allowing for artistic licence, one can see the rich colours of the Victorian interior. The main features: the proscenium and the arched piers along the sidewalls, are shown painted a deep red with mouldings and capitals highlighted in gold, the piers decorated with a faux marbling effect. In contrast to the red, the walls and recesses are painted in shades of green. The neutral tone of the ceiling suggests that it remained patent marine metal. The top tier of seating is wooden benching while the lower levels appear to be individual chairs upholstered in a green fabric. There is one box to the south side of the lower tier, its importance emphasised by its red and gold drapery and paintwork.

Quintin Hogg had begun his mission with a 'Ragged School' in the Covent Garden area in 1864. In pre-welfare state Britain, these private initiatives fulfilled a desperate social and educational need, but following the Education Act (1870), free elementary education was provided by the London School Board. Hogg had already begun to develop evening classes for older students and therefore turned his focus to the Young Men's Christian Institute (YMCI). The YMCI offered evening classes teaching useful skills and trades with the aim of getting boys into work and gave spiritual guidance that took the form

Fig. 26

This watercolour, included in the sales particulars, suggests the rich colours of the Victorian interior and an ornate proscenium arch. See also Fig. 56 for the opposite view towards the seating from the stage.



Fig. 27
On purchasing the Polytechnic building, Hogg wrote that 'the premises are so extensive that they afford scope for almost any possible development of the Institute, and give us abundant elbow room for fresh classes'.

Fig. 28
In February 1888 Hogg re-named his Institute's journal from *Home Tidings* to *The Polytechnic Magazine*, cementing their identification with the famous building.

55 The phrase 'educating mind, body and spirit' was used by Douglas McGarel Hogg (1872–1950), to describe the educational work of his father in a speech at The Polytechnic's Jubilee celebrations in October 1932. See also Elaine Penn, (ed.), *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit: The legacy of Quintin Hogg and The Polytechnic, 1864–1992* (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 2013).

56 *Home Tidings*, March 1882, p. 3.

57 *Polytechnic Magazine*, October 1882, pp. 196–7.

not only of Sunday services but also sporting and social clubs. Hogg's son summarised his father's philosophy as 'educating mind, body and spirit'.⁵⁵

The Royal Polytechnic Institution had been a place of education and entertainment; it had also been driven by profit and the demands of shareholders. Hogg had a reformer's zeal, but this did not mean he was not also something of a showman. Initially considering purpose-built premises, Hogg realised that the Polytechnic's central position in Regent Street 'would be sure to challenge attention' and would help him further his ambitious plans, declaring 'The premises are surpassed by those of no other Young Men's Institute or Association in the world'.⁵⁶ Hogg and his family moved into the mansion house at 5 Cavendish Square.

Considerable alterations were made before the building reopened officially on Sunday 25 September 1882. The RPI's Great Hall had been emptied of its exhibits and transformed into a gymnasium. Hogg also rather confusingly re-named the projection theatre as the Great Hall of his new Institute. *Home Tidings* reported that:

In the large theatre adjoining, Pepper's Ghost has been finally laid, and the floor has been raised so as to bring it on a level with that of the Gymnasium, and has been turned into a handsomely decorated hall capable of easily seating over 1100 people in addition to 150 on the platform. Underneath the platform is the Band room, where our musical members can practise without annoying their neighbours.⁵⁷



A drawing (see Fig. 28) shows the Great Hall as remaining essentially Thomson's theatre with the proscenium removed. The lower tier of seating, including the pit used to create the illusion of *Pepper's Ghost*, has been levelled.⁵⁸ The image was used to announce the new title of the magazine published by Hogg for members of the Institute. A magic lantern manned by a dashing figure (possibly Hogg) mounted on a platform projects the magazine's new title *Polytechnic Magazine* superimposed over the old title *Home Tidings*. Whoever the projectionist is, the metaphor of the gradual change of the dissolving view and the connection between the projected light and the projected voice or message is clear.

The new home of the YMCI certainly challenged attention, as Hogg had hoped. It was reported that 1,000 men applied for membership on the first day of opening.⁵⁹ Despite the internal alterations, Thomson's Regent Street frontage remained as originally designed and the three-storey stucco façade still bore the name 'Polytechnic Institution' inscribed over one of the doors. The identity of the building merged with the identity of the YMCI, and the Institute soon became known as the Polytechnic Young Men's Christian Institute, or more informally the Polytechnic or 'Poly' for short. In 1891 Hogg handed over directorship to a governing body and it was officially renamed the Regent Street Polytechnic.⁶⁰

Between 1877 and 1896 there were 88 fires in theatres in Britain.⁶¹ The worst of these was a fire in the Theatre Royal, Exeter, in 1887 in which 186 people died. The resulting Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1890 required 'Every building...used as a place of public resort...to be substantially constructed and supplied with ample, safe, and convenient means of ingress and egress'. In 1889 the London County Council (LCC) was formed, part of its duties being to implement regulation and licensing and protective services, including fire regulations. At this time the Great Hall was still entered via the gymnasium, but in 1891 Hogg was able to purchase the Marlborough Rooms at the front of 307 Regent Street.⁶² This meant access to the Hall could finally be provided directly to the street from an entrance at 307 Regent Street rather than internally via the 309 entrance. This purchase, combined with requirements of the new legislation, resulted in the Polytechnic embarking on more rebuilding.

Hogg employed the architect Spencer Chadwick (1841–1893) to redesign the Great Hall and to comply with the new regulations. Chadwick was known on the London theatre scene, having already worked on the Adelphi on the Strand (1882–7) and Daly's Theatre in Leicester Square (1893).⁶³ The refurbishment appears to have been a complicated job, with the LCC Theatres and Music Halls Committee minutes recording the 'scheme has not met with the approval of the freeholder, the Duke of Portland'⁶⁴ and Hogg complaining that:

The changes involve practically rebuilding our existing hall, and a very large outlay which we can ill afford, but which we are compelled to undertake under penalty of losing our licenses and having our Saturday evening concerts stopped.⁶⁵

58 *Polytechnic Magazine*, 16 February 1888, p. 1.

59 *Home Tidings*, October 1882.

60 Regent Street Polytechnic was formally designated on 23 June 1891 under the Charity Commission Scheme of Administration. It was the model for several other polytechnics created in London in the 1890s. See Michael Heller, 'The Institute and the Polytechnic', in *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit*, pp. 45–77 for details.

61 Edwin O. Sachs and Ernest Woodrow, *Modern Opera Houses and Theatres*, Vol. 3. (London: B.T. Batsford, 1896–98).

62 Weeden, p. 102.

63 *The Sketch*, 14 June 1893, described Chadwick as: 'This genial man of business with whom architecture is as much a passion as a profession, and with whose work in reconstruction at the Adelphi, the vaudeville, and the Tivoli, so much general satisfaction would have been expressed'.

64 *Theatres and Music Halls Committee. Presented Papers: Polytechnic Institute, etc., 1889–1909*, 20 June 1893, p. 639, LMA LCC/MIN/10/878.

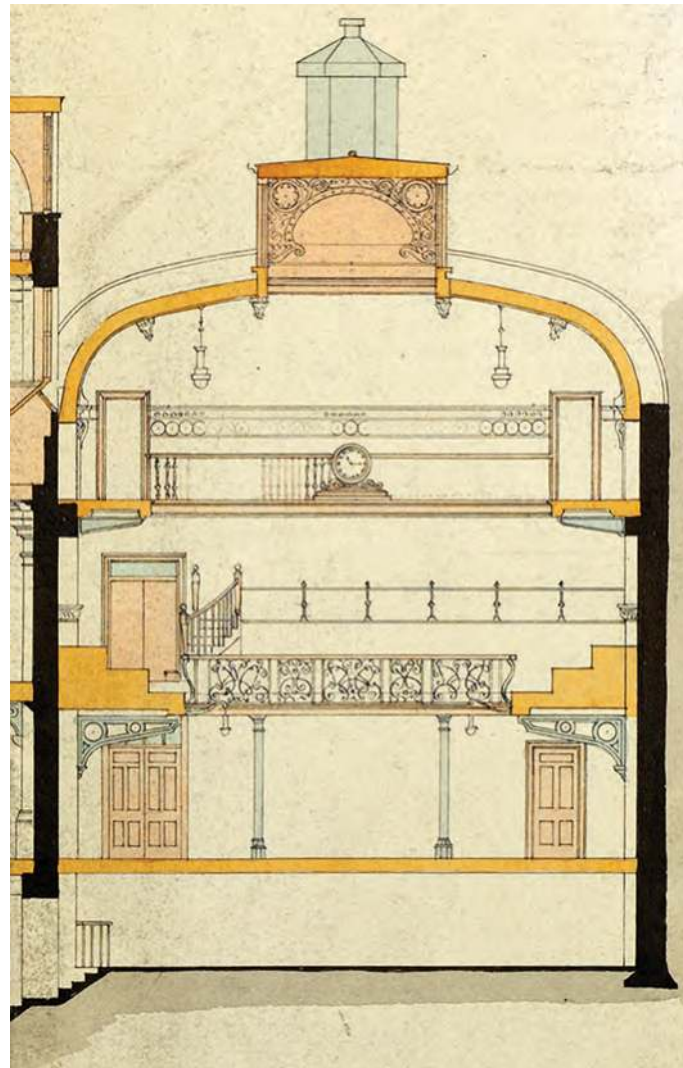
65 *The Quintinian Monthly*, 7 June 1893.

However, this does not appear to be entirely true, as the single biggest change was to raise the floor level again and reduce the overall floor to ceiling height from the original lofty 50 ft (15 m) to a more modest 30 ft (9 m). The reason for this was because the Polytechnic needed extra teaching space more than it needed a grand theatre.

The main reference for the rebuilding of the Great Hall is a series of drawings submitted to the LCC Theatres and Musical Halls Committee between 1890–4. Those by Chadwick were recently discovered at the London Metropolitan Archives and include a beautifully drafted section in coloured ink showing the Great Hall in some detail (see Fig. 29). Unfortunately Chadwick died in November 1893 before the work was complete. He was replaced by William Barnard Pinhey who was also connected to the London theatre scene, both he and Chadwick having worked for the Gattis⁶⁶ on the Adelphi Theatre.⁶⁷ The University of Westminster Archive holds a set of plans drawn by Pinhey in 1894 showing 'alterations to the Polytechnic Theatre'.⁶⁸ The plans of the

Fig. 29

Although this proposal showing two galleries was not built, one can clearly make out the skylight, the iron girders and the detail on the gallery railing.



66 Brothers Agostino Gatti (1842–1897) and Stefano Gatti (1845–1906) had made their fortune in restaurants and ice cream before moving into the theatre business.

67 Both Chadwick and Pinhey also gave named prizes of £5 5s to the Polytechnic Building Construction Classes, indicating their wider involvement with the Polytechnic. Pinhey was also in charge of alterations at 16 Balderton Street (known as the Polytechnic Annex) in 1900. In 1904 he donated £500 to Hogg's memorial fund, a huge sum for the time.

68 *The Polytechnic Board of Governors' Minutes* record that these plans were drawn up for retrospective planning permission. See also Fig. 30 and Fig. 62.

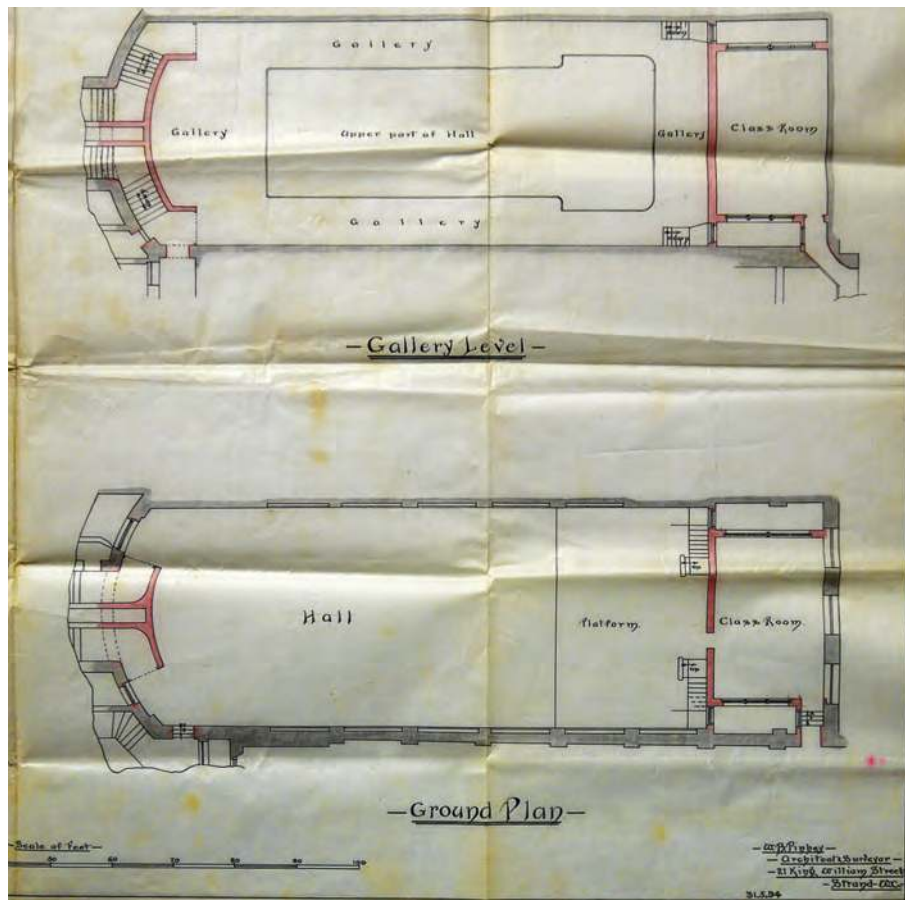


Fig. 30

On this plan of alterations, Pinbey uses the convention of drawing the existing structure in grey and alterations in red.

Great Hall use a convention of grey line to demarcate the existing structure and red for new, and are primarily concerned with showing ventilation shafts and air chambers required by the new regulations. Hogg wrote of the rebuilding: 'the electric lights are hung, the radiators are fixed, the caves of Aeolus duly provided'.⁶⁹

What the plans and a photograph of the Hall being used for a tailors' cutting class from 1899 (see Fig. 31) reveal is that Thomson's projection theatre has been transformed beyond recognition. The lower tier of seating has been levelled at its highest point, creating two basement levels beneath; the tiered seating on the upper level has been replaced by a gallery-style balcony that encircles the entire space. The proscenium has been removed and the arches and piers that articulated the structure on the side walls have been filled in. The manipulating room has gone, as has the high-level gallery. The stage remains, however, with a much-diminished depth, the back section being given over to classrooms one on top of the other. The strong colours so beloved by the Victorians have gone; only the ceiling remains as it was, now finished in white plasterwork, the mouldings still marking the lines of Bramah and Robinson's girders, with the skylight above. The theatre had been converted into a hall: to be used for Sunday services and gatherings, as a lecture hall, debating chamber, teaching space and boxing ring. It was available for hire.

⁶⁹ *Polytechnic Magazine*, 15 November 1893, p. 743.



Fig. 31
The Great Hall was used as a multi-purpose space by the Polytechnic, including the teaching of tailors' cutting classes.

In November 1893, Hogg reported on the alterations to the newly refurbished 'Great Hall' as follows:

Our members will find the hall itself very considerably changed. Although, as a matter of fact, it is some feet longer than the old hall, the effect of raising the floor and doing away with the top gallery has been to make it look considerably smaller, though incidentally, the alterations will make it a great deal lighter than it was before. I fancy when we come to apportion the seats we shall find that we are able to accommodate at least as many, probably a few more, than we were able to do in the old hall, with the additional advantage of having no uncomfortable top gallery for the last 160 late comers.⁷⁰

And it was in this space, Spencer Chadwick's Great Hall, that Trewey demonstrated the Lumière brothers' Cinématographe to the press on 20 February 1896 and premièred it to the public the following evening. Ostensibly, it was a hall for hire in a technical institute with a central London location, but more importantly it was a space that evoked the ghosts of the Royal Polytechnic Institution. The *Polytechnic Magazine* wrote enthusiastically: 'It is briefly living photography, if this term may be used, thrown on a screen in the same way as

⁷⁰ *The Quintinian Monthly*, 1 November 1893. The LCC *Theatres and Music Halls Committee Papers* of 7 March 1893 record that the hall sat 838 persons. LMA LCC/MIN/10,878, p. 252.

THE LUMIÈRE CINÉMATOGRAPHE

Auguste Lumière (1862–1954) and Louis Lumière (1864–1948), born into a family of photographers, are widely regarded as the founding fathers of cinema. Although Thomas Edison had already invented his Kinetoscope in 1893, allowing a single person to view moving images, it was the Lumières who developed a means of allowing multiple viewers to see the same image projected on a big screen. They called their device the Cinématographe.

The Cinématographe was a portable device that weighed only 16 lbs (7 kg) and was powered by a crank handle. The brothers premiered this piece of equipment with a public screening on 28 December 1895 at the Salon Indien du Grand Café in Paris. The screening featured 10 films of about 50 seconds each in length. The films included *La Sortie de L'Usine Lumière de Lyons* (the first film the brothers ever recorded); *Le Jardinier*;

La Pêche aux Poissons Rouges; and *La Place des Cordeliers à Lyons*.¹ Each film reel was approximately 55 ft (17 m) long.

With the invention of such a lightweight, portable device, the Lumières were able to take their show on a world tour in 1896 stopping first at the Regent Street Polytechnic, London, on 21 February 1896 where the first ever public showing of moving pictures in Great Britain was presented. The tour continued on to New York, Bombay and Buenos Aires. Audiences were shocked by what they saw. The *Polytechnic Magazine* gave a review of the screening, describing it as 'living photography' and suggesting that 'the whole thing is realistic, and is, as a matter of fact, an actual photograph'.² The films were initially shown every hour between 2 pm and 10 pm, and then once daily until 14 July 1896.³

The Lumière brothers are renowned for claiming that 'cinema is an invention without any future' and they chose to focus on photography where they subsequently developed one of the first colour photographic films.

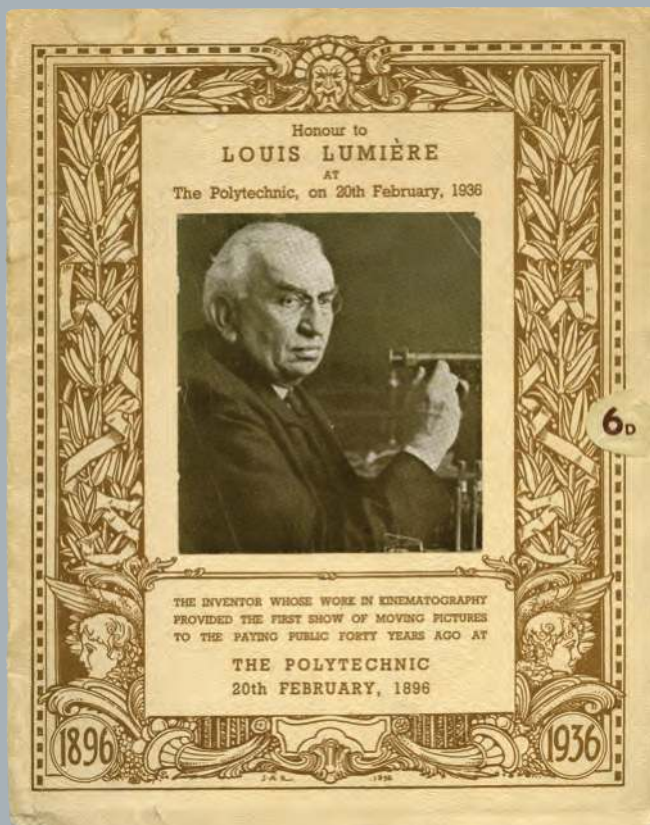
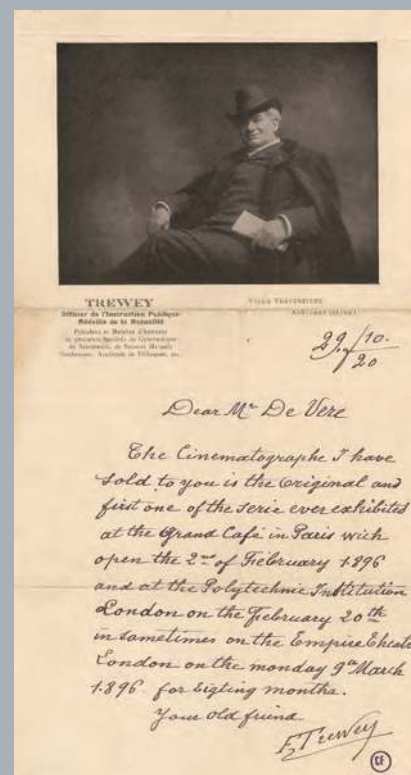


Fig. 32
Louis Lumière visited the Polytechnic for the first time in 1936, to join in the 40th anniversary celebrations of the very first cinema screening in Britain.

Fig. 33

The original Cinématographe projector used at the 1896 screening was included in the 1930 auction of Will Day's collection of cinema equipment and memorabilia. It is now on permanent display in the Cinémathèque Française Museum in Paris.



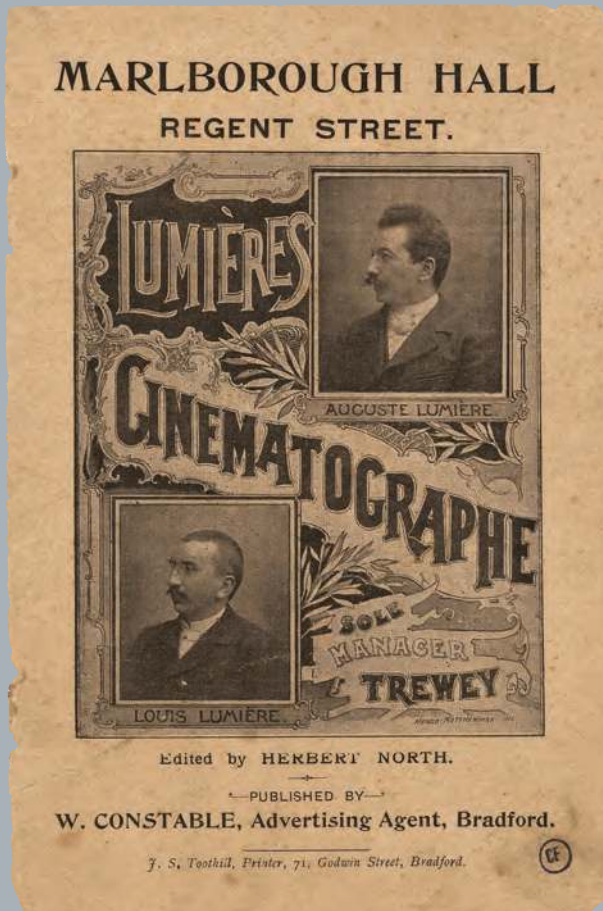


Fig. 34

After the initial Polytechnic screenings, Trewey started Cinématographe shows at the Empire Theatre in Leicester Square, London, on 7 March 1896.

Fig. 35

The 1996 celebrations included talks on Japanese cinema and a visit by the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

Fig. 36

The refurbishment of the cinema in 1926 was the occasions for a 30th anniversary showing of the original 1896 programme.



However, their Cinématographe was a huge success and in 1936, Louis Lumière returned to the Polytechnic to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the first British screening. The event was a three-day exhibition about the development of cinema, which included a reconstruction of the original screening by Will Day (1873–1936) and his son, and featured cinema great Cecil Hepworth (1874–1953) as compère, together with an exhibition of Day's 'cinema relics'.⁴

A second celebration event, The Lumière Festival, was held on the 100th anniversary in 1996. Film students, enthusiasts and members of the industry came together in a festival of film. The programme included an exhibition, film screenings, presentations by critics, actors, historians and film makers, and magic lantern shows as well as a showing of the original Lumière films. The event was supported by organisations including the British Council and the Science Museum.

- 1 *Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyons; The Gardener; Fishing for Goldfish; Cordeliers Square in Lyons.*
- 2 *Polytechnic Magazine*, 26 February 1896, p. 107.
- 3 John Barnes, *Pioneers of British Film: The Beginnings of the Cinema in England 1894–1901, Vol. 3: 1898: The Rise of the Photoplay* (London: Bishopsgate Press 1983), p. 217.
- 4 After his death, Day's film collection was acquired by the Cinémathèque Française, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

are dissolving views by the oxyhydrogen lantern. The effect is really most wonderful'.⁷¹ An early photograph from 1896 (see Fig. 37) shows us Thomson's façade, albeit with an extra two storeys, with Minerva still sitting proudly on top. A discreet billboard advertising the Cinématographe is clearly legible over the entrance to the Great Hall at 307 Regent Street as are the words 'Polytechnic Institution' over the entrance at 309.

In 1863 Portland Road Underground Station (now Great Portland Street) on the Metropolitan Railway opened, allowing far greater numbers of people to travel to the West End. This was followed by Oxford Circus Underground Station (1900) and Piccadilly Circus Underground Station (1906). The West End had become more commercial: 'In the course of the century the character of the houses changed. Gradually the storeys in which people lived over the shops became business premises and offices'.⁷² Many of the buildings had not worn well and 'the words stucco front could, at the time, almost be described as an



Fig. 37

By the time of the Cinématographe exhibition in 1896, two additional storeys had been added to Thomson's 1848 façade, providing extra classrooms at the Polytechnic.

71 *Polytechnic Magazine*, 26 February 1896, p. 107.

72 Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *London The Unique City* (London: Macmillan, 1937), p. 284.

abusive term'.⁷³ The Crown Estate Commissions, who managed the estate, thought in terms of replacement once a century, so as the original eighty-one year leases expired, Nash's buildings were torn down and rebuilt.⁷⁴ The period between 1895 and 1927 was therefore one of huge change, and today all that is left from the original Regent Street development is All Souls Church and the line of the street.

Nash had overseen all aspects of the original development, thus giving it a sense of unity. The redevelopment lacked such a charismatic figure. In 1905–8 the architect Norman Shaw rebuilt the Piccadilly Hotel, part of the Quadrant. Critics described the five-storey building as 'huge and heavy and overwhelming to the surroundings'.⁷⁵ The Regency style horizontal lines that had accentuated the curve of the street disappeared behind enormous vertical columns in a sort of monumental classicism with Beaux Arts motifs. The cream oil-painted stucco façade was replaced with Portland Stone, a material that needed little maintenance but which London's smoggy atmosphere blackened over time. When it was completed, the new Piccadilly Hotel became 'the standard type for the whole street'.⁷⁶

What had not changed was the social division; writing in 1900, Francis Webster, the Rector of All Souls described how, socially, the parish was treated as two distinct districts, bisected by Portland Place. When visiting westwards (between Portland Place and Marylebone High Street), the clergy wore frock coats and silk hats, but in the eastern part of the parish (between Portland Place and Tottenham Court Road) they appeared in lounge suits. This often meant a change of outfits two or three times a day.⁷⁷ For many of the poorer classes, however, the drive for self-improvement was strong and how better to achieve this than to enrol at the Regent Street Polytechnic? By 1910 there was a programme of 600 evening classes a week with up to 3,000 students attending nightly.

As numbers increased, the Polytechnic struggled for space. George Arthur Mitchell (1868–1952),⁷⁸ the official architect of the Polytechnic, remembered that a favourite saying of Hogg's when surveying the crowded classrooms rooms was that 'the walls were not elastic'.⁷⁹ The Institute looked to expansion:

Excavations were made below the Gymnasium, the premises above Messrs. Clayton and Bell, 311 Regent Street were acquired and converted into classrooms; the swimming bath was added; Messrs. Salvatis Galleries were next absorbed, and then the adjoining premises containing the Marlborough Rooms. The next development was upwards adding another storey over the front block in Regent Street.⁸⁰

The real opportunity came as the old lease expired, and as a condition in the new contract the front block was required to be pulled down and rebuilt. The Howard de Walden Estate (originally the Portland Estate) suggested Frank T. Verity (1864–1937) as the architect for the new façade, a choice no doubt made after conferring with the Crown authorities, for whom Verity was

73 Rasmussen, p. 287.

74 Hermione Hobhouse, *Lost London: A century of demolition and decay* (London: Macmillan London Ltd, 1971), p. 88.

75 Rasmussen, p. 288.

76 Ibid.

77 Francis Webster, Rector of All Souls, 1900, quoted in Luker Raymond, *All Souls: a History* (London: All Souls Church, 1979), p. 43.

78 George A. Mitchell was part of the Mitchell family who had a long association with first the YMCI and then the Regent Street Polytechnic. He became Head of Architecture (1916–33) and his elder brother Robert Mitchell (1855–1933) was Director of Education 1891–1922.

79 *Polytechnic Magazine*, April 1912, p. 37.

80 Ibid.

also designing similar elevations at 169–201 Regent Street. George Mitchell designed and managed the rest of the construction.

The original plan was for four storeys, a ground floor and a basement, but the eventual front block designed by Verity was nine storeys, comprising: two basements, a ground floor and six storeys above. It was a steel frame structure, clad in Portland Stone – the first building to be submitted and passed by the LCC following the 1909 Steel Frame Act, an act of innovation recalling Bramah and Robinson’s engineering prowess in 1848. The construction of the sub-basement entailed the underpinning of all the surrounding properties, about 20 ft (6 m) having to be built under all the walls abutting the Poly premises. The cost of the new buildings was estimated at over £250,000.⁸¹

The Royal Polytechnic Institution was gone, the Regent Street Polytechnic’s street presence transformed beyond recognition. However, a photograph in *The Builder*⁸² shows what was now called the ‘Marlborough Hall’, although redecorated and ‘reseated’, as remaining structurally unchanged since Chadwick’s renovation (see Fig. 40). Thomson’s skylight is open and the girders encased in plaster are clearly visible. The semi-basement and basements created in 1893 from the original theatre space were cleared out and the old boilers removed to make room for a library, a new refreshment room and a kitchen. Below this, in the basement, there were dressing rooms for the gymnasium and a new rifle range. More intriguingly, if one looks carefully at the section of the Marlborough Hall (see Fig. 43) at this time one can clearly make out the outline of Thomson’s Great Hall and the theatre buried within the building.



Fig. 39

Despite substantial rebuilding of the Polytechnic in 1911, the Great Hall remains much as it was in 1894.

Fig. 38

During the initial phases of the 1910 demolition work the Minerva statue was still in place. It is not known what happened to the statue after the demolition.

81 Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street*, p. 82.

82 *The Builder*, Vol. 101, No. 3592, 8 December 1911, p. 675.

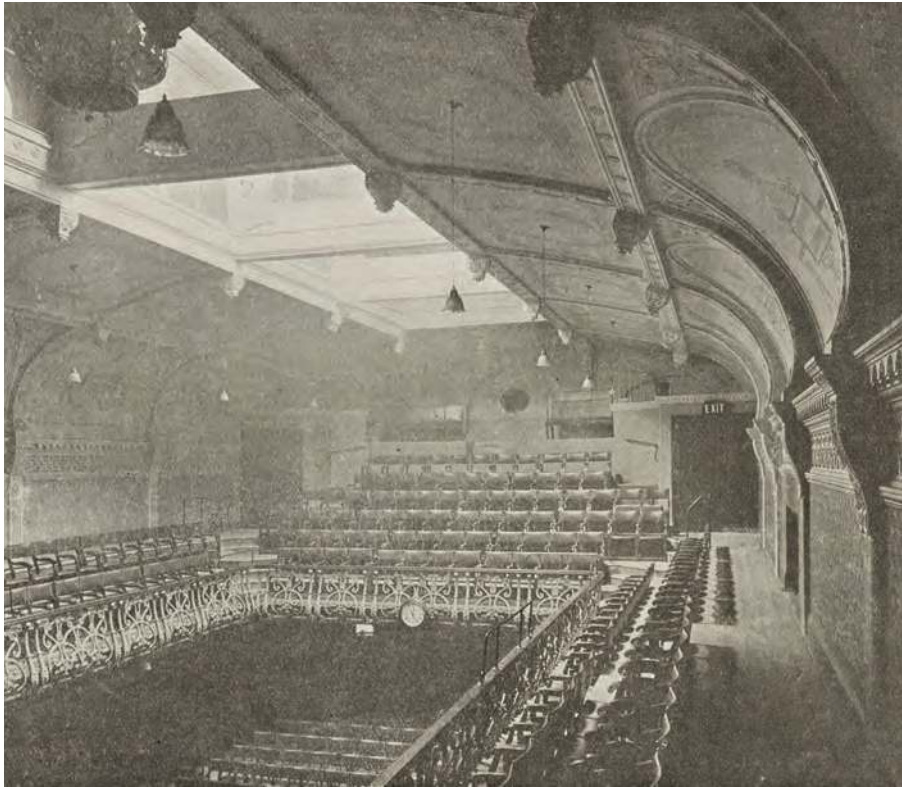


Fig. 40
The ornate Victorian wall decorations are still visible in this photograph of 1911.

Verity's impressive new façade was divided into five symmetrical bays and responded to the classical order of its Regent Street context but gave no clue to the presence of the spaces behind, including the Great Hall. There is a certain irony here, as today Verity is remembered as a cinema architect; his practice designed over twenty-five cinemas including the Plaza on Lower Regent Street⁸³ and he achieved a Royal Institute of British Architects bronze medal for the Shepherd's Bush Pavilion cinema⁸⁴ in 1930. In a further coincidence, his father Thomas Verity had built the Empire Theatre of Varieties in Leicester Square⁸⁵ (1884), the other venue for Cinématographe, with Frank contributing the façade and foyer.

The nitrate-based celluloid film used at this time was highly volatile and posed a very real fire risk. The Cinematograph Act 1909 passed in response to this problem required the source of film projection to be situated outside the body of the auditorium and separated by a solid wall. Mitchell's plans of 1911 show that the Great Hall had no such provision. By this time purpose-built cinemas were being developed⁸⁶ and one of the defining features, apart from a separate projection room, was a noticeable street presence, with the façade acting as a billboard both for the cinema and the films it was showing. Clauses in the lease restricted advertising onto Regent Street and would mean the Cinema would never be typical of the buildings it inspired.⁸⁷ It is a further irony, perhaps, that of the three iterations of the space – theatre, hall and cinema – the Lumières showed the cinematograph in the hall, with no projection room or proper screen, the version least close to a definition of cinema.

- 83 The Plaza (1926), 17–25 Regent Street, seating 1,896, was one of the first huge elaborate American-style cinemas in London with full stage. Furnished with genuine Italian antiques and plasterwork by Marc Henri, the construction alone cost £400,000.
- 84 Shepherd's Bush Pavilion (1923) was designed in Imperial Roman style referring to brick arches and monumental forms of Diocletian's Baths in Rome.
- 85 Later known as the Empire Theatre from 1928, it became the London premier home to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer feature films, seating 3,300 patrons and reflecting the popularity of cinema in relation to the decline of the music hall. Still a cinema today, it has now been divided up into eight screens.
- 86 David Atwell suggests the first purpose-built cinema in London was the Bioscope (Biograph) in Wilton Grove, Victoria (1905). The Electric Cinema in Portobello Road (1910) opened shortly after and remains largely as originally designed. See David Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies: A History of British Cinemas and their Audiences* (London: The Architectural Press, 1980), pp. 5–7.
- 87 'That no advertisements, bills, boards or placards whatever shall be placed on the outside of the street front of the Polytechnic premises [...] except such as may be placed in glazed cases fixed against the external wall of the said premises.' *Licence authorising certain alterations to the premises, No. 307 Regent Street*, 30 December 1893, UWA RSP/2/2.

STAGE 3: 1923–2014 CINEMA

POLYTECHNIC CINEMA THEATRE (1924) POLYTECHNIC THEATRE (1925) CAMEO NEWS THEATRE (1940s) CAMEO-POLYTECHNIC CINEMA (1949) CAMEO-POLY (1952) CLASSIC POLY (1972) REGENT THEATRE (1974) CLASSIC POLY CINEMA (1980) REGENT STREET CINEMA

Cinema: early twentieth century: from French cinéma, abbreviation of Cinématographe

Despite its major refurbishment in 1910–12 the Polytechnic was always in need of more space. In 1923 George Mitchell was responsible for the appointment of the architect Frederick John Wills (1885–1938) who was employed to transform the Marlborough Hall, as it was now known, into a permanent cinema space in order that it could be hired out commercially. Like Thomson before

Fig. 41

In 1922, the 'Poly' Cinema was showing The Mark of Zorro and advertising 'popular prices'.





Fig. 42

A portion of the 1894 balcony was left at the back of the stage following the renovations in 1927 and in the 1990s.

him, Wills was involved in other developments in Regent Street, most notably the Regent Palace Hotel (1912–15), the largest hotel in Europe at the time with 1,028 bedrooms, and the Strand Palace Hotel (1925–30). These developments were for the rapidly expanding J. Lyons & Co. for whom Wills was architect and employee.⁸⁸ The Lyons' mission and the reason for the huge success of their tearooms, 'corner houses' and hotels was to make luxuries available to the less well-off and to offer ordinary women and children a respectable, but affordable, retreat from shopping. Like the Regent Street Polytechnic, Lyons could be seen as part of the wider provision to and democratisation of society.

Wills worked on the cinema between 1923 and 1927, carrying out the job in stages as the building remained open and was in constant use. Drawings dated April 1927 reveal the transformation of the hall into a cinema. The gallery has been removed and replaced by a single curved balcony facing the stage, with tiered seating continuing up to the back wall. (Oddly, a section of the gallery was left at the back of the stage but it is unclear why as it seems to serve no functional or decorative purpose.) The main floor is level and the space has a simple proscenium arch at the front of the stage. A long sectional drawing shows a new 'cinema room' or projection room against the back wall (see Fig. 43). The architect has drawn dashed lines from the projection window to the stage to check that nothing obstructs the line of sight. In order to achieve clear projection lines Wills had removed one of Bramah's arched iron girders and created a new section of roof at the back of the auditorium with its own sliding mechanism. Chadwick's Victorian plasterwork was replaced by a white neo-classical Art Deco style with mouldings highlighted in gold leaf. Seating was provided for 610 patrons and the cost of the works was £11,977.⁸⁹

- 88 Sir Isidore Salmon (1876–1941), Managing Director of J. Lyons & Co., was a former Poly Day School boy and a member of The Poly Governing Body from 1914. In 1923 Wills was working on one of Lyons' famous Corner Houses on Coventry Street.
- 89 *Polytechnic Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 25 March 1926, UWA RSP/1/FP/1/7.
- 90 Empire Leicester Square (1928) designed by Thomas Lamb.
- 91 The opening publicity described it as 'An Acre of Seats in a Garden of Dreams'. The auditorium seated 3,000 in a gigantic Italian courtyard complete with poplar trees and a great curved plaster sky. Today, the venue is known as the O2 Brixton Academy and retains its historic interior.
- 92 Oliver Percy Bernard was technical director of the British Pavilion at the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, and was one of the key figures in the creation of the Art Deco style.
- 93 *Building*, May 1935, cited in English Heritage, Regent Palace Hotel List Entry, Ref. 1900/0/10346 Glasshouse Street 10-May-04. Available online: www.english-heritage.org.uk [accessed 20 October 2014]. When the Strand Palace Hotel was demolished in 1968, Bernard's neon-lit jazz-age foyer was carefully dismantled and was acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum as a significant piece of period design.

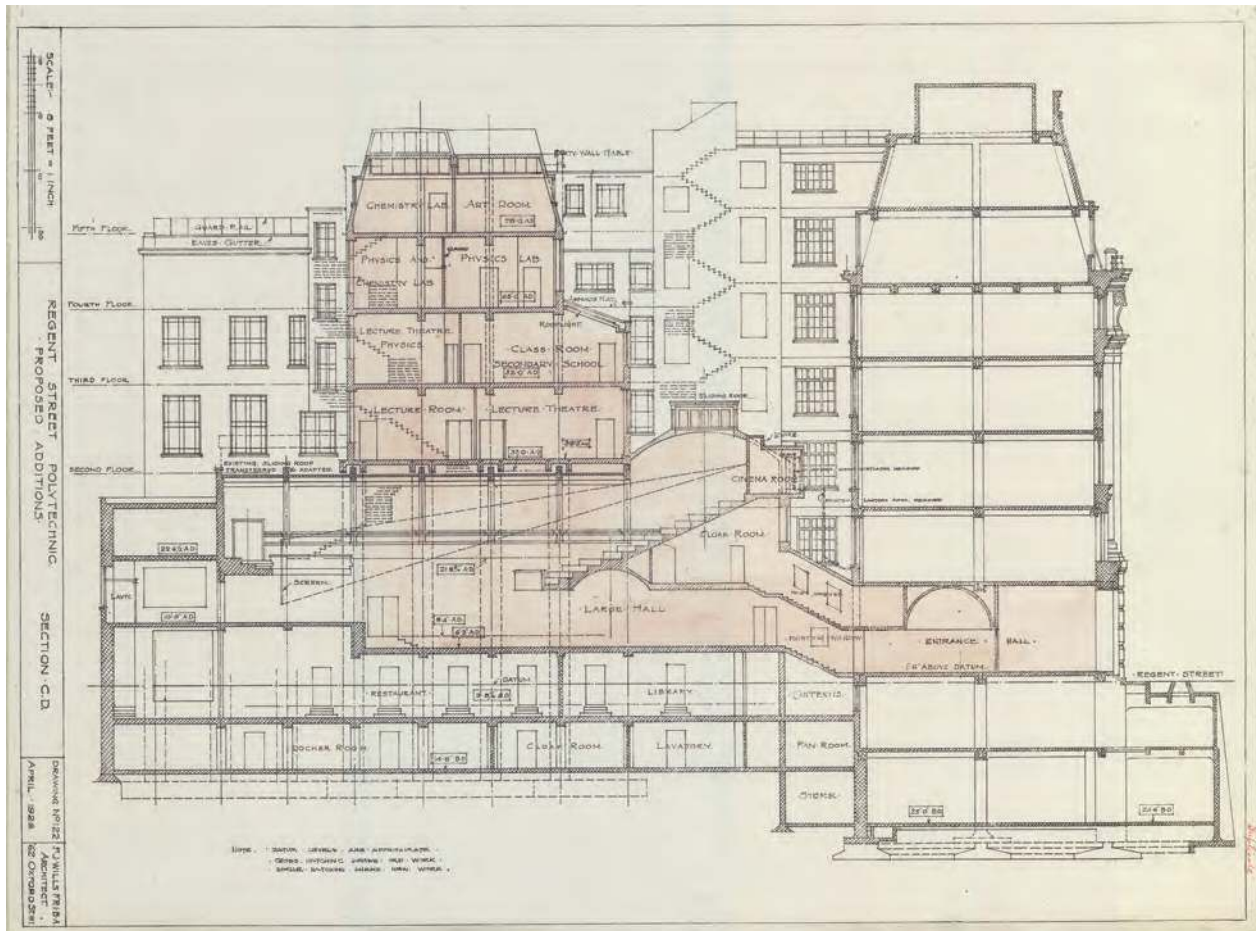


Fig. 43
*On this section Wills has tested
 sight lines from the 'cinema room'
 (projection room) to the screen
 using dashed lines.*

This was the golden age of cinema with purpose-built cinema auditoria being erected all over the country. They represented a new building type, and the architects and designers referred to the music hall and popular theatre rather than the halls and fairground booths of cinema's origin. Interestingly, they also looked to the medium itself and, inspired by the glamour of Hollywood, the early auditoria offered audiences the stagy exotic fantasies found in films. Despised by the architectural establishment, yet adored by the general public, the movie palaces of the 1920s and 30s accommodated huge numbers (the Empire Leicester Square seated 3,226),⁹⁰ and displayed fantasy themes such as Egyptian temples (Carlton Islington, 1930) or 'atmosphere' interiors (Astoria Brixton, 1929).⁹¹

Wills took a more restrained approach. He is remembered now largely for his collaborations with the interior designer Oliver Bernard (1881–1939)⁹² whose Art Deco-style interiors were described by a contemporary as 'just a trifle dissipated and naughty, but not sufficiently so to be vulgar', and today are highly regarded.⁹³ Art Deco was a decorative rather than an architectural style and its appeal was its simplicity, providing a series of familiar surface motifs that could be applied to a building and its interior. Its role in cinema design was confirmed with the introduction of the 'talkies' in 1927, as its simple shapes



Fig. 44
The 1926 refurbishment of the cinema saw the introduction of the Art Deco styling.

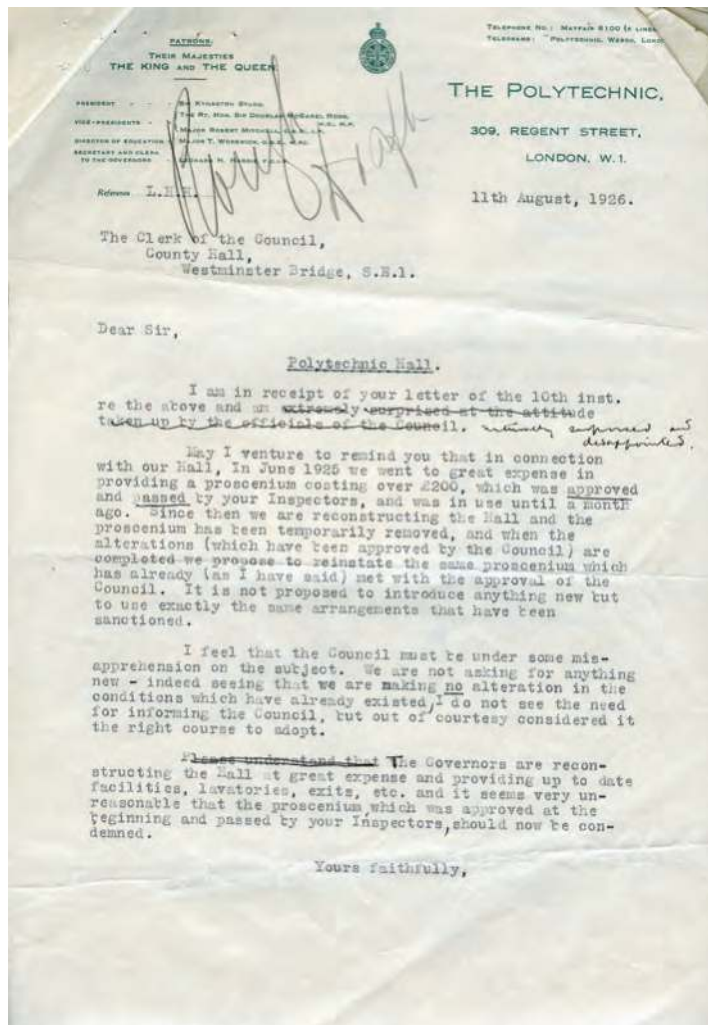


Fig. 45
Correspondence with the London County Council shows that the proscenium arch was installed in 1925, ahead of the overall re-styling of the space.

proved acoustically preferable to all the drapes, boxes and sculptural reliefs of the dream palaces. By the 1930s Art Deco had become synonymous with cinema design and was the house style of the big cinema chains such as Odeon.⁹⁴

The refurbishment of the cinema was only part of Wills's brief. The *Polytechnic Magazine* reported in April 1927 that forty-five years after Hogg moved to Regent Street the membership had increased to more than 18,000 members. Unable to expand horizontally, it was decided that the solution was to build 'over the theatre and over the back part of the premises', adding four storeys of classrooms.⁹⁵ This required building over the great skylight and from this point onwards the cinema no longer had natural light. Perhaps Wills regretted this as he created an artificial light feature that followed the line of the original skylight. When the cinema reopened in March 1927 the space had been transformed for the third time. On 27 June 1927 the completion of Regent Street was celebrated, with King George V and Queen Mary driving in state along its length.

From this point on the theatre/hall was truly a cinema and was leased out to commercial cinema companies by the governors of the Polytechnic. However, the tenancy agreement made clear that the emphasis was firmly on edifying entertainment and 'in the words of the trade, it was "intellectually select"'.⁹⁶ It was the only West End cinema not to open on Sundays.⁹⁷ In this respect, Wills's Art Deco design for the Polytechnic Theatre was successful, contrasting with the excesses of the great dream palaces and expressing the Polytechnic's educational mission (see Fig. 74).

In the years that followed, the Cinema was known variously as the Polytechnic Cinema Theatre (1924), Polytechnic Theatre (1925), Cameo News Theatre (1940s), Cameo-Polytechnic Cinema (1949), Cameo-Poly (1952), Classic Poly (1972), Regent Theatre (1974) and Classic Poly Cinema (1980) – the name changes reflecting the different companies that ran it rather than changes in the interior. Significant changes that did take place had more to do with technological advances than architectural intervention. In February 1930 the first experiments with a 'talking machine' were tested in an empty hall and in March the Polytechnic applied for a licence from the LCC to use the 'talking machine' at public performances. In February 1936, the tenant Ralph Specterman (d.1967) installed a Compton organ.⁹⁸ The organ console was positioned to the left-hand side of the auditorium, with the pipes at the back of the stage, completing the transformation into a classic cinema.

On Friday 21 February 1936, Alexander Korda's film (based on H.G. Wells' novel) *Things to Come* premièred at the Polytechnic. Made in black and white, 117 minutes long, with monophonic sound and special effects by the artist László Moholy-Nagy, the film claimed to have employed 20,000 extras and cost £300,000 to make. Fittingly, the premièred was held on the fortieth anniversary of the Cinématographe's first performance and the guest of honour was Louis Lumière.⁹⁹

The day before, the Polytechnic School of Photography had re-enacted the 1896 programme, presenting the original films on an original Cinématographe

94 The most remarkable being the Odeon Leicester Square (1937) designed by Harry Weedon, Andrew Mather and Thomas Braddock.

95 *Polytechnic Magazine*, April 1927, pp. 62–71.

96 Allan Eyles and Keith Stone, *London's West End Cinemas* (Surrey, UK: Keystone Publications, 1991), p. 31.

97 See pp. 79–84.

98 The organ cost £1,600 and was to be left *in situ* when Specterman's tenancy expired. *Lease of the Polytechnic Theatre*, 25 March 1935, UWA RSP/2/2. See also pp. 54–5 and Fig. 72.

99 At the event, Louis Lumière rather than reflecting on his prediction of the lack of future for cinema gave an account of his latest invention, the Stereoscopic Movie.

projector. A report of the event in *The Polytechnic Magazine* aptly entitled ‘*The Shape of Things Gone By*’ sounded less than impressed, commenting that: ‘The writer makes no comment on these films, but leaves it to those that have seen them to form their own judgment’; however, the piece ends: ‘Once more the Polytechnic is justified in its claim to the title “Where to-morrow is made”’.¹⁰⁰ Like its precursor, this anniversary event could be described as a mix of scientific innovation, showmanship and good marketing, with the Polytechnic using its past to position its future as a forward-thinking and innovative institution. The 1936 event also fulfilled what the 1896 performance had predicted; where the Lumière films were projected in a hired and unadapted hall at 307 Regent Street, *Things to Come* was screened in the purpose-built cinema that space had become.

The film itself also proved eerily predictive, with the opening scene of *Things to Come* showing war breaking out in 1940 and a cinema as the first building to be destroyed by aerial bombardment by an unspecified enemy. In reality the war broke out in September 1939, and although many of London’s cinemas remained open throughout the bombing raids and blackouts,¹⁰¹ after the war things would never be the same; the golden era of cinema was over, and the Hollywood glamour and escapism was replaced by a more sober European realism. The arrival of television in the 1950s followed by video (1970/80s) and DVD (1990s), and the Internet at the end of the twentieth century, increasingly allowed films to be viewed anywhere, and meant that cinema would never again attract the huge audiences of its early decades. In 1946 there was an average of thirty-four visits per person per year to cinemas in the UK, but by 1993 this had dropped to two visits per person per year.¹⁰² With supply reflecting demand, in 1940 there were 5,500 cinemas in Britain; by 1980 only 1,100 remained.¹⁰³



Fig. 46

The organ was installed in February 1936, at a cost of £1,600, with an additional £450 of building work.

Fig. 47

The conversion of the gymnasium at Balderton Street into studios in 1960 enabled the Polytechnic to remain at the forefront of cinematography education.

¹⁰⁰ *Polytechnic Magazine*, March 1936, p. 44.

¹⁰¹ The Polytechnic’s cinema closed in September 1940 but reopened in November and remained open showing newsreels throughout the war.

¹⁰² Harvey, *What is Cinema?*, p. 241.

¹⁰³ Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies*, p. ix. However, due to the increase in multi-screen venues, there were 3,897 screens in 2013. See www.terramedia.co.uk for statistics [accessed 23 November 2014].

Fig. 48

The Compton organ was refurbished in 2006 with generous donations from the Mayor of Westminster and friends and alumni of the University of Westminster.



However, it was during this period of audience decline that the discipline of cinema emerged as an intellectual and avant-garde art form. The Polytechnic Cinema, with no street presence and seating fewer than 600, was never going to compete with the movie palaces of the 1920s and 30s; but situated in the Regent Street Polytechnic with its School of Photography and Film it was perfectly placed to become what was eventually called an art-house cinema. Although commercially let, it still remained part of the Polytechnic identity; in a recording in the University of Westminster Archive oral history collection, a 1960s student describes sneaking out of an art history lecture via a convenient fire escape to spend the afternoon in the cinema.¹⁰⁴

As commercial cinema moved to multiplexes often based in shopping centres, many of the great West End cinemas were either subdivided,¹⁰⁵ converted to other uses¹⁰⁶ or even knocked down.¹⁰⁷ The Cinema sat out this inglorious period of cinema history, cocooned and protected in the Polytechnic, its significance largely forgotten. When, on 20 June 1973, the Regent Street building received Grade II listing, the grading related to Verity's façade and the building as a whole rather than to the cinema and was part of a wider strategy to protect Regent Street from developers.

The cinema also remained largely undisturbed by the amalgamations and restructurings of higher education. In 1970, the Regent Street Polytechnic became the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL).¹⁰⁸ During the 1970s the minutes of the Polytechnic's governing body record repeated discussions on

104 Interview with Vernon Dewhurst, 21 March 2013, UWA OHP/48.

105 The Empire (1928) Leicester Square has been divided into eight screens.

106 Frank T. Verity's Plaza (1926) on Lower Regent Street is now a Tesco's on ground level with a five-screen multiplex above.

107 Plans to demolish the Odeon West End, Leicester Square, and to rebuild a hotel with a two-screen cinema, were approved by Westminster City Council in January 2014.

108 See Heller.

SOUND AT THE CINEMA

A contemporary account of the Cinématographe presentation at the Polytechnic describes the films as being presented ‘in all nakedness, not so much as a pianoforte accompanied their parade’.¹ However once the initial novelty of film wore off, promoters were always keen to include sound as an integral part of the entertainment. In 1898 Walker & Co.’s Highland pictures were shown at the Polytechnic with the accompaniment of the Scots Guards’ pipe and drum band.²

Alfred West, whose army and navy films ran for fourteen years at the Polytechnic, was always concerned to arrange appropriate sound effects: ‘Three men were kept hard at work beating drums to represent gun fire, knocking chains and other metal objects about, and generally making a terrible din’.³ The film *Civilization* (Barker/Ince/West, 1916), the ‘million-dollar kinema spectacle’ shown in 1917, was sound-tracked by the Polytechnic Theatre Orchestra, led by Mr M.B. Friedman.

The travelogues shown at the Polytechnic during the 1920s had a narrator but music was also important to the overall impression. Frank Hurley’s *Pearls and Savages* (1921) included forty-six musical pieces, possibly including his own recordings.⁴ In 1927, the Cinema

presented an experimental performance of *The Marriage of Figaro*, using both live singers and film footage. *The Times*’ review describes the opera as being accompanied by a small orchestra ‘with pianoforte, such as we are accustomed to hear in picture-houses’, but was unconvinced by this method of presentation.⁵ Later that year, the performances of the film *Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness* (Cooper/ Schoedsack, 1927) were accompanied by synchronised sounds recorded at London Zoo. The *Polytechnic Magazine* describes it as ‘the first occasion in which wireless technology has been utilised as the handmaid of the cinema’.⁶ However, for the 1928 showings of *South* (Hurley, 1920)⁷ the Polytechnic reverted to an orchestra.

In 1929, the Cinema was leased to Walter Peace, the European representative of Wurlitzer Cinema Organs. The lease gave the tenants the right to erect a Wurlitzer organ, but they never did so. However the programme for the film *Tembi* (Kearton, 1930) notes that ‘[the] organ music played in this theatre during the interlude is Wurlitzer music reproduced by the Bel-Canto Super Cinema Reproducer’.⁸

‘All-talkie’ feature films arrived in 1929 with the release of *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927). In Britain, Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980) started filming *Blackmail* (1929) as a silent film but during the production decided to make and release a sound version as well.

In 1930 the Polytechnic Cinema organised its first experiments with a talking machine and screened its first ‘talkie’ in July: Frank Borzage’s *Song O’ My Heart*. The lead role was played by renowned tenor John McCormack and the *Polytechnic Magazine* described his voice as being ‘reproduced with wonderful effect and with life-like realism’.⁹ Thereafter the Cinema showed a mixture of silent and talking films, including *Thunder Over Mexico* (Eisenstein, 1933) – essentially a silent production with musical accompaniment, but with agonising cries recorded on the sound track to heighten the dramatic climax of the film.

Despite the introduction of talkies in 1930, the organ at the Cinema was not installed until 1936. Organs were in common use in cinemas throughout the 1920s and

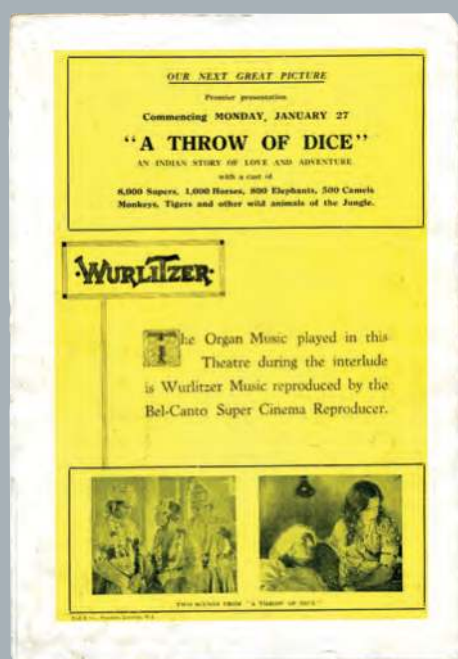


Fig. 49

Prior to the installation of the Compton organ, recorded organ music was used in the Cinema.

1930s, not only to accompany films but also as part of the overall entertainment experience. Although speech became of paramount importance, the versatility of the cinema organ meant that it could also be used to enhance the dramatic performance on the screen by providing supplementary sound effects such as train whistles, gunshots or sleigh bells. The University of Westminster's Compton organ was installed by the tenant Ralph Specterman as a condition of the lease renewal, at a cost of £1,600. Unlike at the Plaza on Lower Regent Street where the Wurlitzer organ was on an elevator and could be raised and lowered into the auditorium, the Compton organ was fixed to the ground at the Polytechnic.

As well as accompanying cinematic events, the organ was also used by the Polytechnic for the Secondary School's morning assemblies and religious gatherings, such as the Founder's Day celebrations.¹⁰ A 1950 Harvest Festival report suggested that 'perhaps for future occasions a piano would be a better instrument for the accompaniment of the solos than the somewhat overwhelming tone of the cinema organ'.¹¹

The organ fell into disuse but was restored in 2006 with generous donations from the Mayor of Westminster and friends and alumni of the University of Westminster. It continues to be played and the University offers an organ scholarship to a student each year.

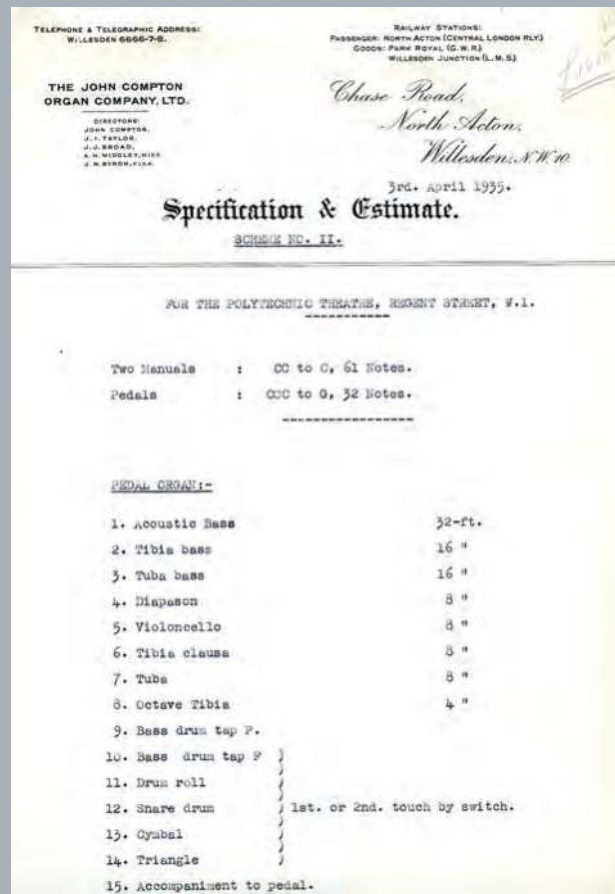
- 1 *Entr'acte*, 7 March 1896, p. 6.
- 2 John Barnes, *Pioneers of British Film Vol 3: 1898: The Rise of the Photoplay* (London: Bishopsgate Press 1983), p. 83.
- 3 Alfred West, *Sea Salts and Celluloid*, unpublished autobiography, 1936, p. 40.
- 4 These included classical pieces such as Rimsky-Korsakov's *Hymn To The Sun* and Hurley's own ethnographic recordings, which were released as sheet music. Robert Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity* (London: Anthem Press, 2013), p. 203.
- 5 *The Times*, 18 January 1927.
- 6 *Polytechnic Magazine* September 1927, p. 192.
- 7 Also known as *Endurance*.
- 8 UWA RSP/6/6/23.
- 9 *Polytechnic Magazine*, July 1930, p. 142.
- 10 See Penn, (ed.), *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit*, especially pp. 159–99.
- 11 *Polytechnic Magazine*, October 1950, p. 298.

Fig. 50

As well as the pipes, the organ includes real instruments such as drums, bells and whistles.

Fig. 51

Although previously static, the organ console can now be raised or lowered via a lift in the stage. See also Fig. 72.



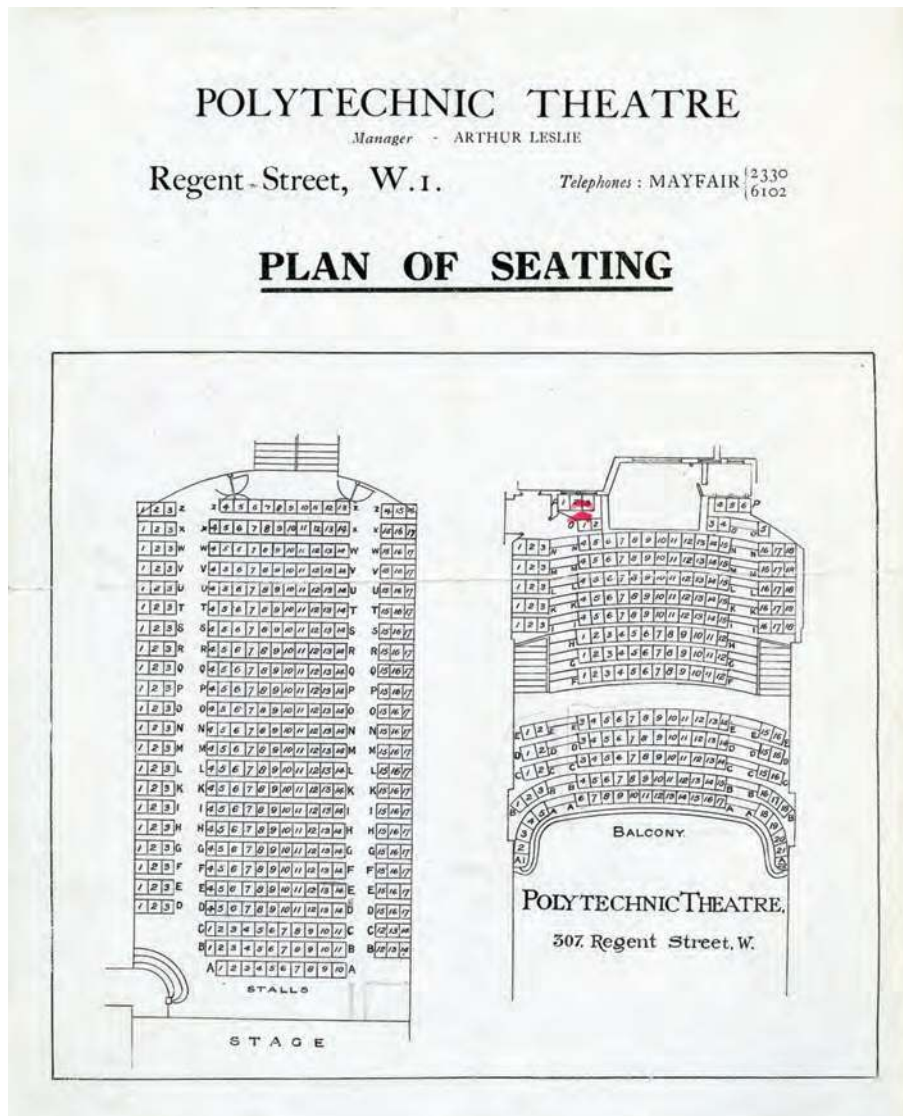


Fig. 52

A 1931 lease stipulated that seats A18–22 were to be reserved for the free use of the Governors of the Polytechnic.

Fig. 53

By the time of the 1994–5 refurbishment the theatre seated only 320, as opposed to the 610 it accommodated in 1927.



ways to regain full use of the cinema as a lecture theatre and on 14 April 1980 Classic Cinemas Ltd, the last cinema company to lease the space, vacated the 'Regent Theatre', as the cinema was then known, leaving behind all projection and sound equipment in lieu of a dilapidation claim.¹⁰⁹ From this point on the cinema was no longer used as a commercial cinema and, although able to show film, was used mainly as a lecture theatre by the PCL. Of course a cinema and a lecture hall have rather different requirements in terms of acoustics and sight-lines, and in 1984 plans were drawn up showing 'proposed alterations to provide three lecture theatres for PCL in the cinema at 307 Regent Street W1'.¹¹⁰ Fortunately the destructive division that had befallen so many other cinema auditoria was never carried out.

In 1992 the Polytechnic of Central London became the University of Westminster. The new University embarked on a programme of modernisation of its campuses, commissioning the architects Sheppard Robson to refurbish

¹⁰⁹ Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes, meeting of 14 July 1980, UWA PCL/4/BG/1/17.

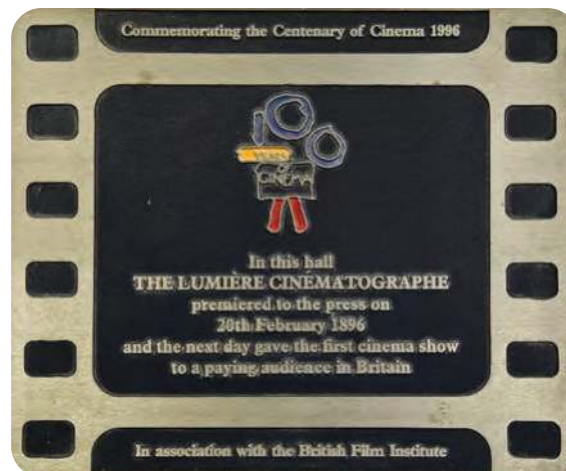
¹¹⁰ Proposed alterations to provide three lecture theatres for the Polytechnic of Central London in the cinema at 307 Regent Street London, W1, P.W. Dowe, 1984. University of Westminster Estates and Facilities Department.

307–311 Regent Street. The architects took a different approach from their predecessors, preserving the building's historic character by adapting existing features rather than simply modernising. The refurbishment (1994–5) included the conversion of the swimming pool installed by Hogg in 1884 (closed in 1981) into a student café called the Deep End and transformed a redundant light well into an internal galleria and circulation route. The refurbishment included 'the conversion of one of the oldest electric cinemas in Britain into a flexible lecture hall'.¹¹¹ The Cinema was already being used as a lecture hall seating 320 but the refurbishment added removable raked seating and a sliding screen providing for the space under the balcony to be partitioned off, creating a smaller 100-seat lecture hall. Other alterations included replacing the existing solid wood floor with a false floor with integrated ventilation system and removing the redundant box office to make the entrance at 307 accessible by wheelchair.

In 1996, following this renovation, and one hundred years after the Cinématographe première in the Great Hall of the Regent Street Polytechnic, the University of Westminster celebrated the centenary with a Lumière Festival held in the Cinema. Although it may have looked somewhat different on the surface, it was essentially the same space. One hundred years on, the greatest change was the fact that the 'living photographs reproduced in movement' were now an established cultural discipline, a universal form of entertainment and a multi-million pound industry. The audience was no longer made up of musical hall owners and theatre managers, but of figures from academia and industry including (among many) Cinema 100, the British Film Institute, Lord Richard Attenborough and Lord Puttnam. As desirous of publicity as their predecessors, the organisers also invited the London press.

As part of the festival, a plaque was unveiled on the evening of 20 February:

Fig. 54
The BFI's Cinema 100 Cinema Heritage Plaque scheme commemorated 126 individuals, places, buildings and a railway engine nominated by the public for their contributions to a century of British cinema.



As detailed on the plaque, it is worth noting that the space is remembered as this 'hall', the space that it was on that first evening, rather than the projection theatre that inspired it, or the cinema it had become.

¹¹¹ John Edward Linden, 'A Monumental Interior', *Architects Journal*, 27 July 1995, pp. 46–7.

CONCLUSION

Cinemas were one of the new building types of the twentieth century. Their origins were in the magic lantern shows and early projection displays that could be found in exhibition halls and fairground booths, offering education, amusement and delight. The arrival of 'living photographs reproduced in movement' in the 1890s resulted in pioneers hiring existing halls and theatres, anywhere where the lights could be dimmed and an audience could be gathered to face a screen. As the new medium caught on, purpose-built cinemas began to be designed, slowly evolving a typology, with the projection room, (or manipulating room or cinema room as it has variously been called) being the most important feature distinguishing a cinema from a theatre or hall.

As more cinemas were built, the search for a style began, from the 'atmospheric' dream palaces of the 1920s that were as stagy as the films they showed, to the glamour and glitz of the huge auditoria of the 1920s and '30s, to the emergence of Art Deco as the defining cinema style. After the Second World War, cinema audiences declined. This, combined with new technologies that allowed film to be watched anywhere, resulted in many cinemas being knocked down or converted to other uses. Those cinemas that survived, often in a run-down state, seemed imbued with the nostalgia for the dreams and romance their faded velour and peeling paintwork suggested. These were the art-house cinemas that, in the second half of the twentieth century, existed alongside and in contrast to the super-cinema multiplexes.

The Regent Street Cinema belongs to the beginning of this story. By virtue of being the first it would never be typical, and its particular evolution – theatre, hall and cinema – owes as much to its West End context as to the wider development of cinema and cinemas. Its location among the showy façades of John Nash's Regent Street was integral to its origins, while at the same time restrictions in its lease would mean it never had the billboard or street presence of more classic cinemas, nor would it show the commercial blockbusters.

Remarkably, throughout its history, the space has only ever had two owners. The first was Sir George Cayley's Royal Polytechnic Institution that built the original theatre, and the second was Quintin Hogg's Young Men's Christian Institute. The continuous occupation by one institution of 307/309/311 Regent Street since 1881 has been a significant factor in the preservation of the Cinema. Changes prompted by government policies and the structure of education mean the institution, in its various incarnations as the Regent Street Polytechnic (from 1891), the Polytechnic of Central London (from 1970) and the University of Westminster (from 1992) has developed and grown beyond recognition but is essentially the same institution. Reflecting on this, a two-way relationship emerges: the story of the Cinema is bound up with the evolution of the University of Westminster as much as the identity of the University is rooted in the history of the Regent Street Cinema.

As for the cinema itself, while originally designed as a projection theatre by James Thomson in 1848, every architect who followed – including Spencer

Fig. 55

The 1996 anniversary celebrations saw the cinema re-opened to the public for the first time in 16 years.



Chadwick (1882, 1893) Frank T. Verity & George A. Mitchell (1910–12), Frederick J. Wills (1923–7), and more recently Sheppard Robson (1994–5) and Tim Ronalds Architects (2014) – has worked within Thomson's original shell. The overall volume has reduced with each insertion, as floor levels were raised, balconies and galleries were removed and added and the skylight was built over. Used variously as a demonstration hall, projection theatre, meeting hall, venue, cinema and lecture hall, its capacity to accommodate numerous activities has provided another reason for its longevity. What is remarkable, though, is that although the building has undergone such extensive alterations, the original shell of Thomson's theatre, including the ceiling and layout of the space, remains remarkably consistent.

In addition to the architectural interventions, the interior, which can be described as a lining to the architectural shell, has been subject to wear and tear, the vagaries of style and changes in legislation to a far greater extent than the walls that contained it. The furniture and fittings, such as seating, curtains, paint surfaces and decorative plasterwork, have been through many refurbishments. Like a game of Chinese whispers played over the decades, each architect and designer referred to the existing interior as they found it, while at the same time changing the space, according to their own design. By the early twenty-first century any sense of an original is deeply buried, although tell-tale



Figs. 56 & 57
The cinema's skylight is one of the many visible continuities between the Cinema and the Royal Polytechnic Institution's theatre. See also Fig. 26 for the opposite view towards the stage.



details such as the curved wall of the manipulating room and a section of the 1893 gallery on the stage today, are there for those who recognise them.

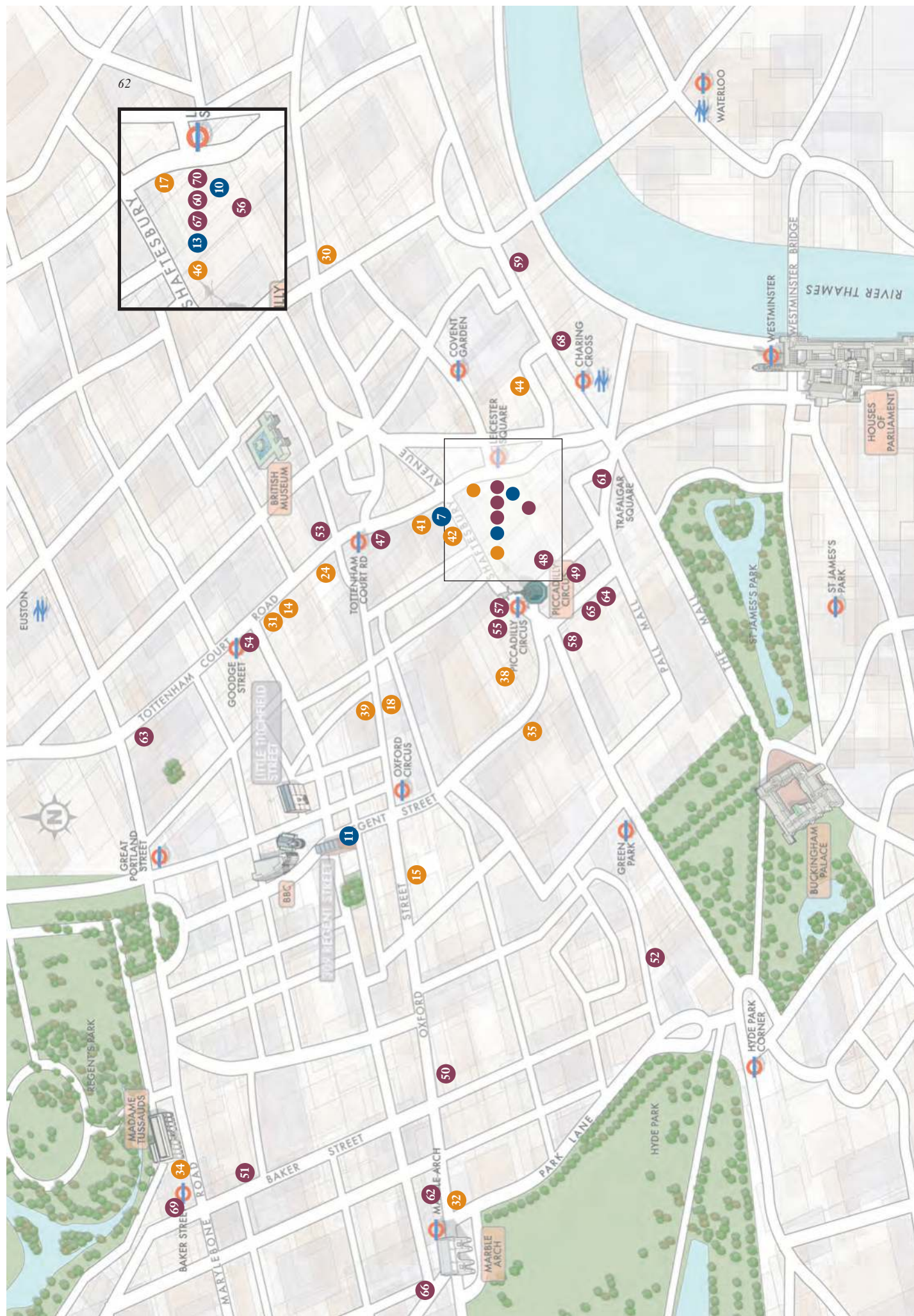
Looking back over a century and a half one could tell a story of constant change, yet there is also a remarkable continuity of a space for projected light, entertainment, education and wonder. The relationship between science, magic and the masses is an ancient one and the history of the Polytechnic and its theatre/hall/cinema situated in the centre of London's West End reflects



Fig. 58
*The newly refurbished auditorium
 of the Regent Street Cinema. See
 also Fig. 155 for the opposite view
 towards the screen.*

its populist inclusive roots rather than a medieval monastic model of a university. It also explains why this rather ordinary interior has several times been at the forefront of technical innovation, most notably with the Lumière brothers' Cinématographe demonstration on 21 February 1896.

So what is the Regent Street Cinema? A darkened room illuminated by projected light? If one thinks back to the Cinématographe one could suggest that perhaps it is not the space at all, but the audience, people stepping off Regent Street to be educated and entertained over nearly 200 years.



Name	Address	Dates of existence	Name	Address	Dates of existence
39 Academy Cinema	161–7 Oxford Street	1928–(1965)	58 Monseigneur News Theatre renamed Jacey Piccadilly Cinema	215 Piccadilly	1934–(1960) 1960–(1972)
40 The Alhambra Palace Theatre reopened as Odeon Leicester Square	23–7 Leicester Square	1860–(1936) 1937–present	59 Monseigneur News Theatre renamed Jacey in the Strand	284 The Strand	1935–(1961) 1961–1966
41 Astoria Theatre	157 Charing Cross Road	1927–1976	60 Monseigneur News Theatre	Queens House, Leicester Square	1936–(1970)
42 Avenue Pavilion reopened as G.B. Movietone and News Theatre reopened as Gaumont News Theatre	101 Shaftesbury Avenue	1927–(1930) 1930–(1939) 1939–1941	61 Monseigneur News Theatre renamed Jacey Cartoon Cinema	4 Grand Buildings, Trafalgar Square	1936–(1962) 1962–(1970)
43 Berkeley Cinema	30 Tottenham Court Road	1948–(1976)	62 Monseigneur News Theatre renamed Jacey Marble Arch	523 Oxford Street	1939–(1960) 1960–1967
44 Cameo Revudenews renamed Cameo Royal Cinema	35 Charing Cross Road	1936–(1956) 1956–(1972)	63 New Gallery Cinema	121–5 Regent Street	1913–1953
45 Cameo-Polytechnic Cinema	307 Regent Street	1949–(1962)	64 Palace Theatre	113 Shaftesbury Avenue	1897–1957
46 Capitol Cinema renamed Gaumont Haymarket	50 Haymarket	1925–(1936) 1937–(1959)	65 Paramount Theatre renamed Odeon Tottenham Court Road	156 Tottenham Court Road	1936–(1946) 1946–1960
47 Carlton Theatre	63–5 Haymarket	1928–(1979)	66 Paris Cinema	4–12 Lower Regent Street	1939–1940
48 Cinephone Cinema reopened as London Film Theatre renamed Cinephone Cinema	421 Oxford Street	1940–(1941) 1953–(1954) 1954–1973	67 Piccadilly News Theatre renamed Cameo Moulín	43–4 Great Windmill Street	1930–(1961) 1961–(1972)
49 Classic	96–100 Baker Street	1937–(1973)	68 Plaza Theatre	19 Lower Regent Street	1926–(2001)
50 Classic Cinema Theatre	3–5 Agar Street	1951–1953	69 Regal	2 Edgware Road	1928–(1945)
51 Curzon Mayfair	38 Curzon Street	1934–(1963)	70 Rialto Cinema	3–4 Coventry Street	1924–(1954)
52 Dominion Theatre	268–9 Tottenham Court Road	1930–1981	71 Ritz	1–4 Leicester Square	1937–(1972)
53 Embassy Cinema	194 Tottenham Court Road	1939–1940	72 Sphere News Theatre	28 Tottenham Court Road	1933–1940
54 Empire	5–6 Leicester Square	1928–(1961)	73 Studio One	225 Oxford Street	1936–(1977)
55 Eros News Theatre renamed Classic Cartoon Cinema	7 Shaftesbury Avenue	1934–(1950s) 1950s–(1976)	74 Tadler renamed Jacey Tadler Cinema	105–7 Charing Cross Road	1931–(1966) 1966–(1977)
56 Holborn Empire	242–5 High Holborn	1906–1941	75 Tivoli Theatre	65–70 The Strand	1923–1956
57 La Continentale Cinema	36 Tottenham Court Road	1948–(1976)	76 Topical News Theatre renamed Times News Theatre	Approach Road, Baker Street Station	1938–(1942) 1942–(1960)
58 Leicester Square Theatre	39–41 Leicester Square	1930–(1968)	77 Tissaud's Cinema	Marylebone Road	1928–1940
59 London Pavilion	1 Piccadilly Circus	1934–1981	78 Warner Theatre	3 Cranbourn Street, Leicester Square	1938–(1981)
60 Marble Arch Pavilion	531 Oxford Street	1914–1956			

KEY ● Pre 1900 ● Pre WWI ● Pre WWII ● 1970s ● 2015

() indicates continuation as cinema under a different name

Map showing cinemas in the West End of London prior to the Second World War



The legal history of the Old Cinema: from 'disorderly house' to high-class cinematograph

Guy Osborn

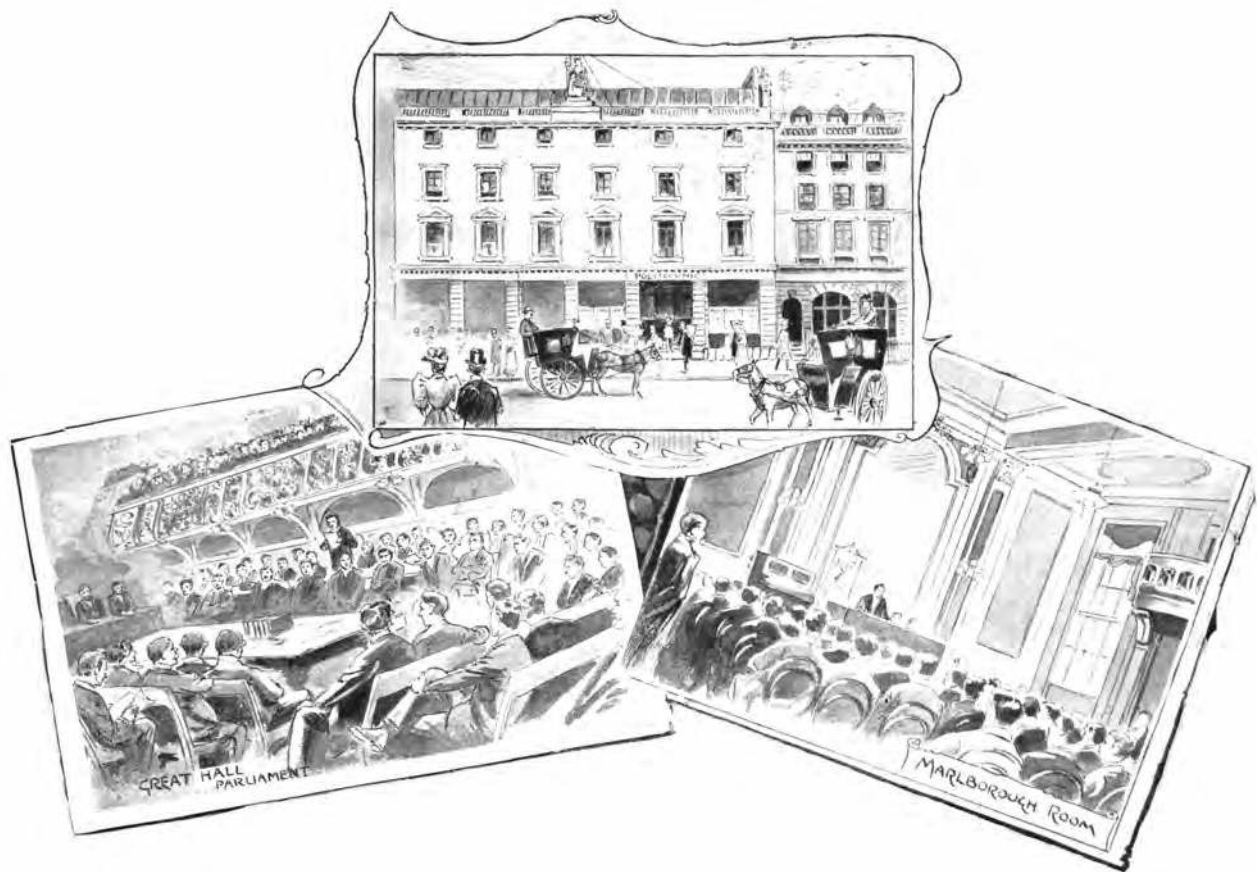
INTRODUCTION

Discussing the film *Hugo* (Scorsese, 2011), the critic Philip French beautifully encapsulated the allure of cinema and the medium of film when he said that 'cinema was a place to congregate, a magical place to let your imagination run free'.¹ The spatial and architectural aspect of this in terms of our own cinematic space has been neatly detailed in the previous chapter, and the magic to which French alludes forms the basis of the book as a whole. That the Regent Street Cinema is an important symbolic space is unquestionable and its illustrious history is detailed elsewhere in this volume. This chapter, however, celebrates the history of the Cinema from a different perspective, that of how the law has framed it. Its point of departure is the interaction of law with the medium of film,² focusing upon the restrictions and guidelines that concerned the exhibition of film, and it tells this story via the vehicle of one cinema. As such it is part local history, part social history and part legal history, with these three narratives crossing, intersecting and told simultaneously.

This chapter looks more specifically at how the law has shaped our Cinema, from the point at which it was first used to show the moving image. The story begins during the reign of Queen Victoria and pauses at the beginning of the 1980s, when a whole host of new technological and legal problems were beginning to come to the fore. The narrative revolves around the 'Old Cinema', (as it became known to staff and students in the late twentieth century) but is located within the context of the whole institution, and the history and ethos, of the University of Westminster. In fact, the history becomes even more interesting when we explore the tension between educational underpinnings and aspiration against broader commercial imperatives, something that remains an issue for the higher education sector as a whole in the twenty-first century. It will be shown how, in many ways, the Cinema is a useful litmus paper of this ongoing tension.

1 Philip French, 'Hugo – Review', *The Observer*, 4 December 2011.

2 The interaction between law and film more generally has been of interest in recent years. Westminster Law School pioneered the first Law and Film module in the UK in 1993, and has fostered links with the British Board of Film Classification, including the jointly curated *Classified* exhibition held in 2012.



OF AMBULANT SHOWMEN: THE EDUCATIONAL MISSION AND THE EMERGENCE OF CINEMA

In *The Education of the Eye*, Brenda Weeden recounts the early history and development of the Royal Polytechnic Institution.³ The Institution had a very particular ethos and approach, and its aim was ‘to help its visitors to understand the inventions and discoveries which were changing their lives, their city and their society; it planned to achieve that aim through display and demonstration’.⁴ This is something that is still visible in the University’s mission statement and corporate strategy today, and informs the work and principles of the modern-day University of Westminster.⁵ Indeed, it should be noted that when the Lumière brothers first presented their Cinématographe to a British audience on 21 February 1896, the space had been rented to them by the Polytechnic’s Board of Governors and a fee paid. While we tend to think of the move towards a more commercially oriented higher education landscape as a modern phenomenon,⁶ commercial possibilities have in fact always been there, and often exploited.

From a legal perspective, even before we consider the medium of film itself, legal issues arose around various events at the Polytechnic. Early arguments

Fig. 59

The first screening of the Cinématographe took place in the Great Hall (bottom, left) but later showings were held in the Marlborough Room (bottom, right).

3 Brenda Weeden, *The Education of the Eye: History of the Royal Polytechnic Institution 1838–1881* (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 2008).

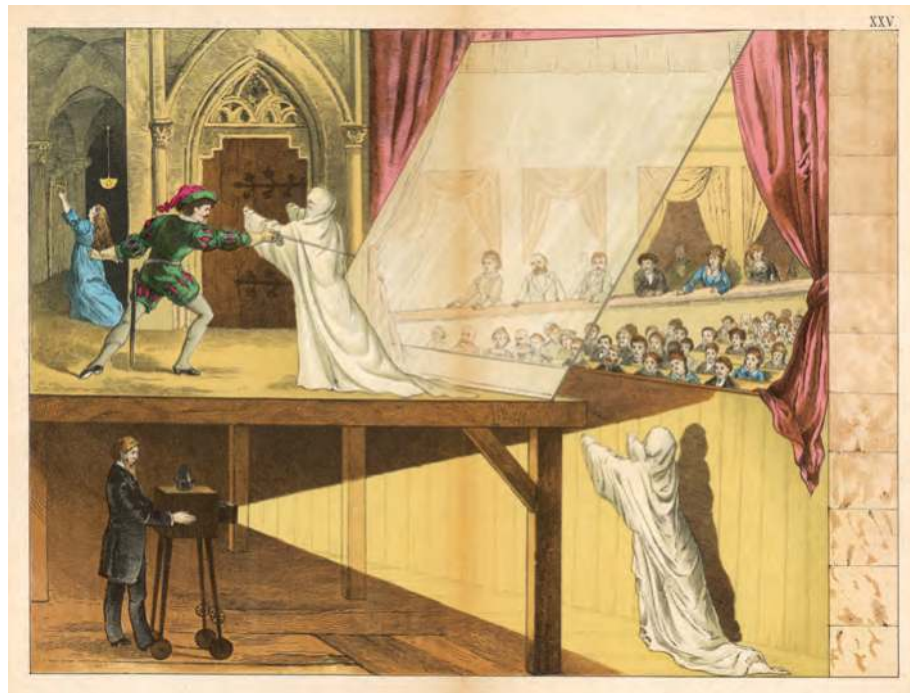
4 Weeden, p. 7.

5 *Westminster 2020* (London: University of Westminster, December 2014).

6 Derek Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace: the Commercialization of Higher Education* (US: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Fig. 60

The principles behind the Pepper's Ghost illusion are still in use today, most notably for teleprompters and concerts featuring absent or deceased performers.



regarding the status of Pepper's Ghost, for example, were in fact precursors to the licensing debates that would occur later in terms of cinema. Famously, the staging of Pepper's Ghost took place at the Royal Polytechnic Institution on a number of occasions, following its first performance as part of Charles Dickens's *The Haunted Man* on Christmas Eve 1862. As manager and star performer at the Polytechnic, 'Pepper and Polytechnic became synonymous in the public mind'.⁷ In 1865, in the case of *Day v Simpson*,⁸ Pepper's Ghost was held to be a stage play for purposes of the Theatres Act 1843 and thus a performance of it was in need of a licence.⁹ In fact various licences, such as for music and dancing, were needed in the late nineteenth century depending on the type of entertainment. For example, theatres were regulated either by the Playhouse Act 1737¹⁰ if a 'legitimate theatre', which essentially referred to the two patent theatres of Drury Lane and Covent Garden; or otherwise they were dealt with under the Disorderly Houses Act 1751. This latter Act would have been the key one for the purposes of the Polytechnic, and it was indeed used initially to regulate film showings.¹¹ Sarah J. Smith noted that 'the 1751 Act was expressly designed to control the leisure activities of "the lower sort of people"',¹² and she also commented how as cinema became more popular and moved away from fairgrounds and into theatres, the pressure to regulate became more overt.

The powers of magistrates to grant licences under the 1751 Act were transferred to county councils after the passing of the Local Government Act 1888. Initially the Act only applied within 20 miles (32 km) of London, although this was extended in 1890. There were numerous debates about the meaning and interpretation of the statute, and even at this stage there were various conditions

- 7 Weeden, p. 51.
- 8 *Day v Simpson* (1865) 18 CB(NS) 681, at 691.
- 9 C.J. Erle found that 'the law requires that every person who keeps a house or other place of public resort for the exhibition of stage-plays or other entertainments on the stage, shall be licensed'; and this exhibition was held to fall within that definition. *Day v Simpson* (1865) 18 CB(NS) 681, at 691.
- 10 Repealed by the Theatres Act 1843.
- 11 Neville March Hunnings, *Film Censors and the Law* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967).
- 12 Sarah J. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship. From Dracula to the Dead End Kids* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 20. This shows that the low culture/high culture debate is not a purely modern construct.



Fig. 61

The first purpose-built cinemas in the UK opened in 1909 (i.e. The Electric in Birmingham and The Palace in Letchworth). Prior to that, cinematograph entertainments were exhibited in fairgrounds, or rented halls like the Polytechnic Theatre.

attached to the licences, even if their efficacy was sometimes questionable. As Rachel Low observed: ‘Ventilation, exits, fireproof operating boxes, electricity installation, staffing – requirements made by people with little or no technical knowledge of film projection – varied from eminently wise to hopelessly ignorant’.¹³

The question of whether local councils actually had the authority to attach conditions to licences was discussed in the case of *R v County Council of West Riding of Yorkshire*.¹⁴ This case established that a council, while exercising its discretion, could take into account a number of factors including, for example, the close proximity of the venue to another establishment that sold liquor, and thus impose a condition to prevent the applicant from applying for a liquor licence in such circumstances.¹⁵

A serious issue in the late nineteenth century was the flammability of buildings lit by gaslight, and a number of disasters occurred, including at the Exeter Theatre Royal 1887 where one hundred and eighty-six people died, and where it was said that ‘the entire responsibility lay with the licensing magistrates’.¹⁶ Safety was a key concern and began to be more and more seriously considered. In 1889, the London County Council (LCC) was formed and one of its duties was to implement the 1890 Public Health Amendments Act that had resulted from concerns about theatre fires. The Act impacted almost immediately on the Cinema as the Polytechnic was forced to purchase property adjacent to 309 Regent Street. The result was to create a new direct entrance to the Cinema from Regent Street and thus greatly improve ingress and egress to the space.¹⁷ At this time the cinema was developing rapidly, with a shift away from the ‘ambulant showmen’ hiring halls, towards established and purpose-built theatres.¹⁸ Interestingly, the Cinema was a true hybrid, as it was not purpose-built as a cinema and it continued to provide for a number of different uses such as lectures and other shows as well as its film screenings. More

13 Rachel Low, *The History of the British Film 1906–1914* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948), p. 59.

14 [1896] 2QB 386.

15 In addition the case began the debate as to whether the cinema could be framed within the 1751 Act. See Hunnings, p. 32.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

17 See Chapter 2, p. 36 for details.

18 See also David R. Williams, ‘The Cinematograph Act of 1909: An introduction to the impetus behind the legislation and some early effects’, *Film History* (1997), Vol. 9, pp. 341–50.

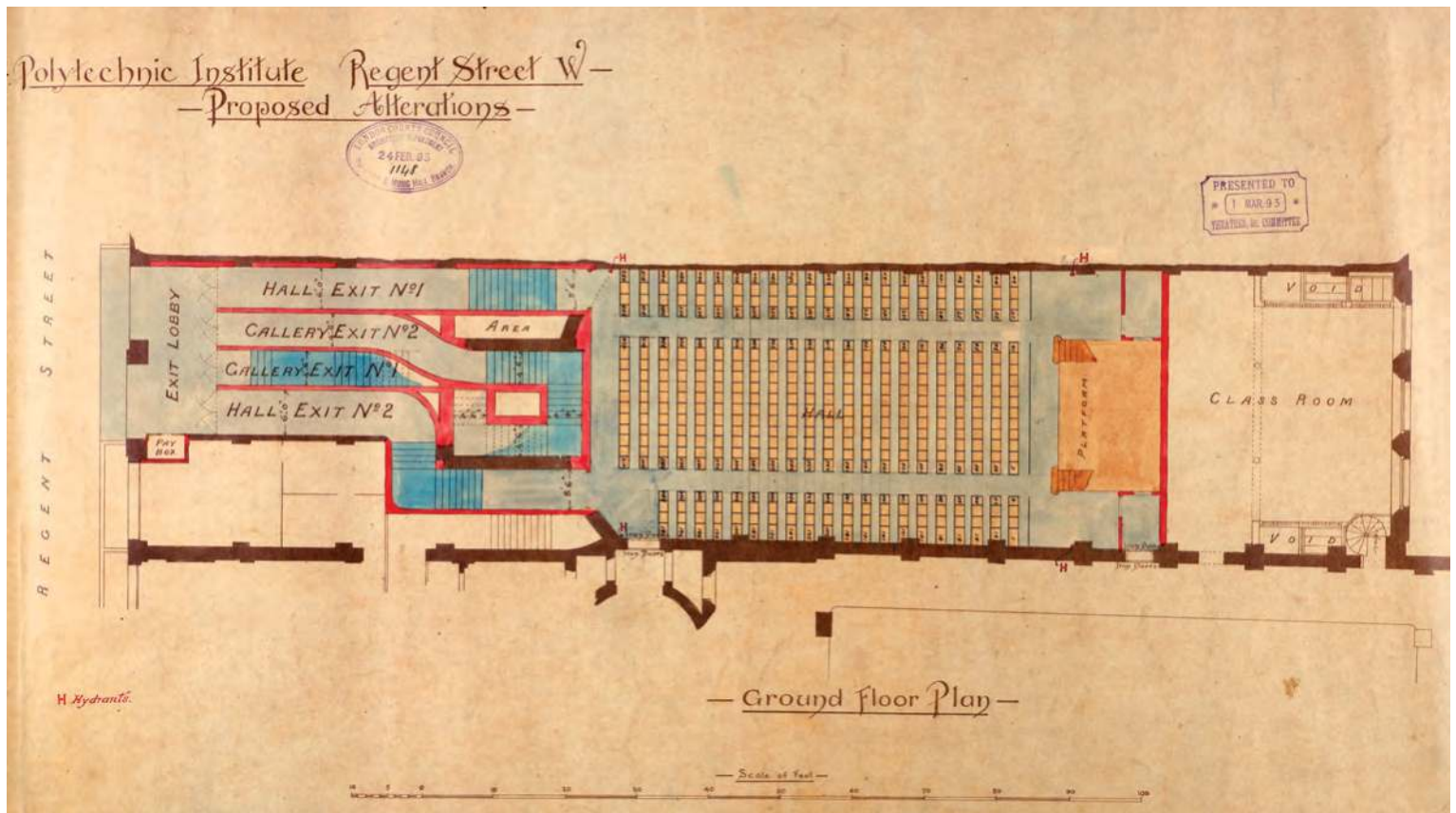


Fig. 62
Before the entrance was created onto Regent Street in 1894, the audience entered the Great Hall through an internal door in the main Polytechnic building.

broadly, however, 'from 1907 the cinematograph was becoming big business and permanent picture palaces were replacing the "penny gaffs" and fairground booths. Cinemas were booming and their number was practically doubling year by year'.¹⁹ Safety issues were to be key, particularly with the combustibility of film; and, in conjunction with awareness of the increasing social and economic importance of film, safety was the basis for statutory intervention in the form of the Cinematograph Act 1909.

INFLAMMABLE MATERIAL: THE CINEMATOGRAPH ACT 1909

In 1908 the LCC began to put pressure on Parliament to give it more powers to deal with the emerging cinematograph industry. This was largely based around the problems of dealing with fire, as nitrate film was highly flammable,²⁰ although the impact on children attending this new medium was also raised as a potential issue of concern. The cinema industry eventually supported the push for specific legislation for cinemas when they realised that they could promote the cinema as a safe and clean leisure environment for that hitherto elusive middle-class audience.²¹ This was in contrast with the original audience base for the cinema, which was predominantly from the 'lower orders':

¹⁹ Hunnings, p. 35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45. An interesting further aspect was the call for projectionists to be officially registered, to try and ensure those in charge of the film were properly trained and responsible. This suggestion was not adopted.

²¹ See Hunnings, p. 46 and Smith, p. 25.



Fig. 63

Although the licence from the Howard de Walden estate required that no advertisements were placed on the street, this rule seems to have been regularly flouted.

As the vast majority of early film audiences were from the working classes, it is hardly surprising that denigration of film viewing came mainly from the well-to-do. Criticism generally related to issues of class, taste and respectability, with major targets being film images of vulgarity, crime, drunkenness and licentiousness.²²

Against this background, a Parliamentary Bill was introduced, described as a 'small Departmental Bill',²³ and characterised as being urgent in nature:

there is a great number of places both in and outside London which are unlicensed, and altogether without control; many of them are dangerous in structure, and no adequate precautions are taken against fire, and unless they are brought under control disaster is sooner or later almost inevitable.²⁴

Not everyone was in agreement that legislation was needed. Some queried whether the flammability of films themselves was the main issue. Mr Watson Rutherford, MP, argued that legislation was unnecessary, describing 'the effect of increasing those grandmotherly, and in many cases, entirely unnecessary, precautions which are supposed to be in the interests of the public, but which really inflict very considerable hardship upon individuals'.²⁵ Others took exception to the very word 'cinematograph', describing it as absurd to use such a word in a Bill, and were scathing about the Bill's premise and scope and the necessity for these 'wretched pictures'.²⁶

However, the idea of a nationwide registration system, and one that would give an official badge of safety to premises, was welcomed in most quarters. Nonetheless, the reality of the bureaucratic nature of the system was not as welcome as the idea underlying it. On 13 December 1909 a circular was sent

22 Smith, p. 22.

23 HC Deb 21 April 1909, Vol. 3, cc1595-9.

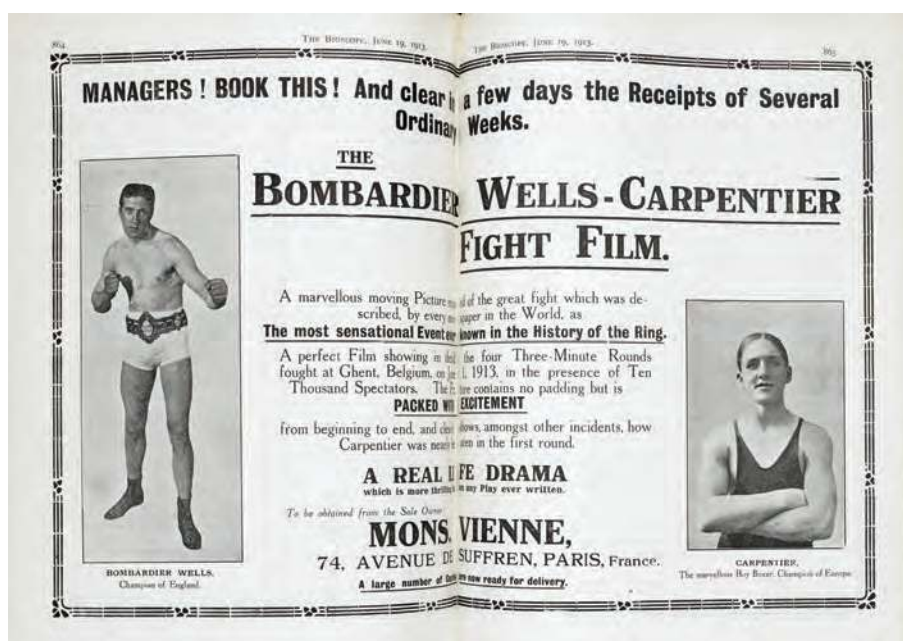
24 HC Deb 21 April 1909, Vol. 3, cc1595-9 (Mr Herbert Samuel, Under Secretary for the Home Office).

25 HC Deb 21 April 1909, Vol. 3, cc1595-9 (Mr Watson Rutherford, Liverpool West Derby).

26 'Call it by some name that people will understand. Nobody ever heard of this thing ten years ago; now it is to have statutory recognition. Some word ten years ago was taken out of the Greek, and that name is given to this instrument, and now it is to be legalised by Statute. It is perfectly absurd, and I must confess I am surprised that the Home Office should give countenance to such absurd action'. Mr T.M. Healy, (Louth North) Hansard (HC) 2 August 1909, Vol. 9, cc2260-5. It was also noted that a search for the word 'cinematograph' in the English Historical Dictionary proved fruitless, although the first use of the word was accredited to the Regent Street Polytechnic in February 1896. *The Mercury*, 20 January 1910.

Fig. 64

Boxing was a popular subject for earlier filmmakers. Billy 'Bombardier' Wells would go on to be the 'gongman' for the J. Arthur Rank films.



27 Circular from the Clerk, LCC to Polytechnic, 13 December 1909, UWA RSP [P103c].

28 Letter from the Polytechnic to the LCC, 16 December 1909, UWA RSP [P103c]. The Cinema was called the 'Marlborough Hall' from 1894, although it was also variously referred to as the Large Hall, Polytechnic Hall and Polytechnic Theatre in the early twentieth century. See p. ix for details.

29 Letter from the Clerk, LCC to the Polytechnic, 30 December 1909, UWA RSP [P103c]. The following year there was some correspondence as to whether the licence would be renewed for 1911 (Letter from the Clerk, LCC to the Polytechnic, 13 July 1910, UWA RSP [P103d]). This was primarily because rebuilding works were due to take place, but it was decided to continue notwithstanding this. (Letter from the Secretary of the Polytechnic to the Clerk, LCC, 7 July 1910, UWA RSP [P103d]).

30 Low, p. 62.

31 The development of censorial practice under the Cinematograph Act 1909 is detailed later in this chapter; on a broader conception of censorship see, for example, the definition provided in the context of music by Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo, eds., *Policing Pop* (USA: Temple University Press, 2003).

32 Williams, 'The Cinematograph Act,' p. 341.

to the Polytechnic from the LCC, noting that the Cinematograph Act 1909 was to come into force on 1 January 1910, and that as a consequence a licence would be needed to show film. The circular stated that licences of a year in length (or shorter) could be granted for a fee not exceeding £1, and that persons acting in contravention of the provisions would be liable to a fine not exceeding £20 on summary conviction.²⁷ The Clerk to the Governors replied three days later, stating that as cinematograph entertainment was given in the Hall for around eight months of the year, his view was that a licence would be needed and therefore requested a formal application.²⁸ Soon after, just before the Act came into force, the LCC approved the Polytechnic's application for a licence, conditional upon the fee of £1 being paid.²⁹

Initially, safety was the key aspect of these new provisions, although from an early stage we start to see a more nuanced view of safety developing, as local authorities saw the Act as their opportunity to consider public well-being in a far more holistic way than simply enforcing health and safety. Indeed, the exhibitors feared that strict licensing conditions would be, in effect, a form of censorship.³⁰ This was prescient: the industry recognised censorship in broad terms, outside of a narrow approach predicated solely on criminal or public order grounds as was the norm; such fears were later proven to be well founded.³¹ An unintentional result of the Act was 'the controlling powers it gave to local authorities to determine programming as well'.³²

The extent of the powers granted by the Cinematograph Act 1909 was tested shortly after it came into force. Local authorities had taken the view that the same sort of approach as was allowed with music hall licences could be adopted, and on this basis imposed a condition that film shows would not be allowed on Sundays. This decision was swiftly challenged by the cinema industry in the case of *London County Council v The Bermondsey Bioscope Company Ltd.*³³

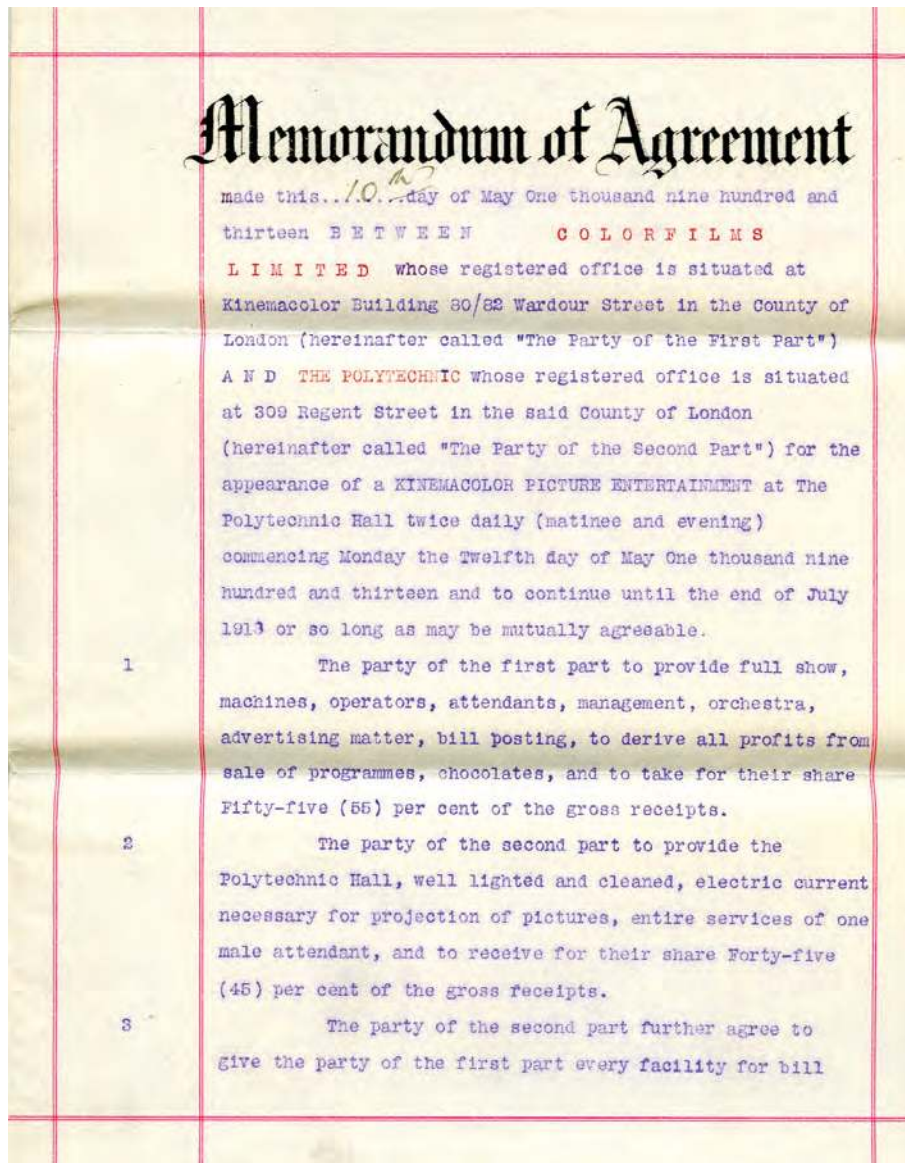


Fig. 65

Kinemacolour was a process of projecting black and white films behind alternating red and green filters to make them appear as if they were colour. It was used commercially between 1908 and 1914 but it is not known how many performances were given at the Polytechnic under this licence.

The case concerned the alleged unlawful use of the London Bridge Picture Palace and Cinematograph Theatre for a cinematograph exhibition in breach of their licence. The licence, granted under the regulations on 19 January 1910, and pursuant to the Cinematograph Act 1909, precluded the use of the premises on 'Sundays, Good Friday or Christmas Day'. The Bermondsey Bioscope Company made their contention on the grounds that the explicit purpose of the Act was to secure and preserve the safety of the public; as such, the Council had no legal power to impose the condition relating to the use of the cinematograph on a Sunday as it was beyond the Act's remit and the Council were therefore acting *ultra vires*.³⁴ The court, however, found differently.

Lord Alverstone CJ, while agreeing that s1 of the Act dealt with safety, noted that s2 was broader and allowed something else outside of the purview of s1 to be included. Adopting a plain meaning approach to statutory interpretation,

³³ *London County Council v The Bermondsey Bioscope Company Ltd* [1910] 1 KB 445 (*Bioscope*).

³⁴ Literally this means 'beyond the powers', and describes an action taken beyond the legitimate powers granted to a body.

and bemoaning the lack of a preamble to the Act, he noted that ‘In my opinion that section s2(1) is intended to confer on the county council a discretion as to the conditions which they will impose, so long as those conditions are not unreasonable’.³⁵ The Court of Appeal thus allowed the assumption of censorial powers by local authorities, prompting the cinema industry to come to the opinion that it would be far preferable if the industry itself were to control its products rather than leaving them to the whim of the local authorities.

The wider consequence of this case was the emergence of a body that was to have an important impact on British cinema, and also later a strong relationship with the University of Westminster; the British Board of Film Censors. This body, today tellingly renamed, or perhaps even reclassified, as the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), emerged as a by-product of the Cinematograph Act 1909 after the filmmakers’ industry body, the Kinematograph Manufacturers’ Association (KMA), approached the Home Office to suggest a self-regulatory body be set up to deal with censorship.³⁶

It is within this context, that is the passing of the Cinematograph Act 1909 and the creation of the BBFC, that the rest of this chapter is set as these two events frame much of the history and development of the Regent Street Cinema.

SAFETY AND WAR

Safety was the key component of the 1909 Act, and the Polytechnic, while occasionally falling foul of the regulations, was quick to try to rectify any problems identified by the regular inspections of the LCC. This is detailed in correspondence surviving in the University Archive collections.³⁷ This correspondence is extensive and continues over many years, and there are various instances documented that are of technical interest. For example, the state of the electrics and similar issues are often raised, and schedules of works survive indicating the matters to be completed. To give a flavour of this, the list of ‘Matters in Need of Attention’, following an inspection of 5 August 1931, noted that the emergency exit and other exit boxes should be illuminated by two systems, a stop should be fitted on the operating box dimmer, the dimmer cupboard needed cleaning and various wiring was in need of attention.³⁸

While safety was of course paramount, other issues also began to emerge and started to form part of the licensing conditions. The LCC was not beyond commenting on potential impropriety, as is illustrated by a note tucked away in a general safety letter after an inspection noting that care should be taken when dealing with the issue of male and female staff at the Polytechnic:

It was found that a room at first floor level, from which the manager’s office is approached, was used as a staff room for male and female attendants. I am directed to inform you that separate accommodation should be allocated for the staff of both sexes.³⁹

35 Alverstone CJ also rejected a double penalty argument based on the fact that Sunday opening was already covered by the Sunday Observance Act 1780. *London County Council v The Bermondsey Bioscope Company Ltd* [1910] 1 KB 445, 451.

36 For more on the BBFC see John Trevelyan, *What the Censor Saw* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973).

37 UWA RSP [P98a and P99a].

38 Chief Officer London Fire Brigade for LCC to The Secretary, 8 August 1931, UWA RSP [P98a].

39 Letter from the Clerk, LCC, to the Polytechnic, 1 May 1923, UWA RSP [P1031].

The passing of the Cinematograph Act was followed some four years later by the onset of the First World War. During the war, safety was still a concern, but some interesting aspects of how concerns changed in the wartime context can also be seen. In 1916 a letter from the LCC to the Polytechnic pointed out that during an inspection, in addition to the two persons lawfully allowed to be in the operating enclosure, two disabled soldiers were also present, contrary to No. 5 of the Home Secretary's Regulations.⁴⁰ Replying to this, apologising for the breach and thanking the Council for not raising a specific objection due to the 'exceptional circumstances', the following aside was added by the Polytechnic Secretary: 'We are, as perhaps you know, training disabled soldiers in various trades and occupations and a good many are going in for cinematograph operating and the practical instruction we are able to give them is of exceptional value'.⁴¹ The role of the Polytechnic with regard to training and re-education was further embedded later during the war when the Ministry of Pensions wrote in 1917 asking whether the Director of the Polytechnic, Major Robert Mitchell (1855–1933), could be placed at their disposal to this end, and to which the Board of Governors graciously acceded.⁴²

THE EMERGENCE OF TALKIES AND THE ISSUE OF CONTROL

Important technological developments were taking place in cinematography in the late 1920s; in particular the emergence of the talkies, where sound was synchronised with film. The contracts of the film stars had to be altered to deal with this technological development, altering their terms to include adding sound, or the voice, to studio entitlements.⁴³ The film *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927) is regarded as the first example of a talkie, and by the early 1930s the synchronisation of sound with film had become a global phenomenon. The Secretary of the Polytechnic wrote to the Clerk of the LCC in February 1930 to discover its position in terms of licensing this new phenomenon:

In connection with the Cinematograph Licence granted to the Polytechnic with respect to the Marlborough Hall, it is desired to conduct experimental work in the use of a talking machine. [...] I will be glad to hear whether permission can be given for this arrangement. [...] In the event of it being decided to introduce the talking machine at public performances, the necessary application for the licence of the Council will be submitted.⁴⁴

Showing notable flexibility, given their sometimes rather regimented approach to licensing provisions, the Council responded that it would raise no objection to the proposed arrangement. The LCC did, however, specify that certain conditions would need to be complied with, including 'making the door between the rewinding room and cinematograph swing both ways and be self-closing and the slide lantern to be removed from the cinematograph enclosure'.⁴⁵ The Head of the Department of Electrical Engineering wrote to

40 Letter from Clerk, LCC, to the Polytechnic, 2 November 1916, UWA RSP [P103i].

41 Letter from Secretary, the Polytechnic, to the Clerk, LCC, 6 November 1916, UWA RSP [P103i].

42 Letter from Secretary, Ministry of Pensions, to the Polytechnic, 6 March 1917; Letter from the Polytechnic to Sir Matthew Nathan, Ministry of Pensions, 10 March 1917; Letter from Secretary, Ministry of Pensions, to the Polytechnic, 14 March 1917, UWA RSP [ST59]. For further details of the role of the Cinema within the context of education, and the use of the Cinema during the wars, see Chapters 1 and 4. See also Anthony Horst, '“Those who did fall in”: war, military service and the Polytechnic', in *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit*, pp. 159–99.

43 Jane M. Gaines, *Contested Culture. The Image, The Voice, and the Law* (London: BFI Publishing, 1992).

44 Letter from Secretary, the Polytechnic, to the Clerk, LCC, 19 February 1930, UWA RSP/2/2.

45 Letter from Clerk, LCC, to the Polytechnic, 28 April 1930, UWA RSP/2/2/1/1.

JAMES FERMAN, THE BBFC AND PCL

James Ferman (1930–2002) was the sixth and longest-serving Secretary¹ of the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC). He held the post from 1975 to 1999, a period of radical change for the industry, which saw the introduction of home video and the subsequent furore over ‘video nasties’.

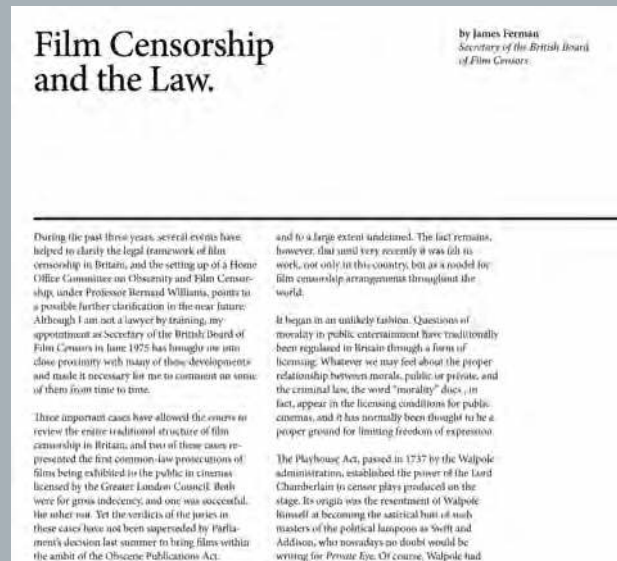
Ferman was born in America but came to England during his national service and remained in the country, working as an actor as well as becoming an acclaimed film producer and director. His documentary work, particularly *Drugs and Schoolchildren* (1973), resulted in his being invited to teach a course on the subject by the Polytechnic of Central London (now the University of Westminster). While at the Polytechnic Ferman lectured part-time in Community Studies (1973–6) and ran a thirteen-week course as part of a Community Mental Health programme.

Ferman seems to have maintained his links with PCL after he took up his new role as Secretary of the BBFC,

as he contributed an article to the *Poly Law Review* in spring 1978.² The article, ‘Film censorship and the law’, was published shortly after Ferman had lobbied successfully for film to be brought within the bounds of the Obscene Publications Act 1959. This Act provided the medium of film with the defence of artistic merit for the first time. In the article Ferman stated that he had always believed ‘that the British X certificate is a protection not only for children, who are denied admission, but for adult filmmakers and adult audiences who wish to concern themselves with material, either serious or frivolous, which is the legitimate concern of adults’.

Ferman’s previous experience as a director and educator was never far from the surface. He noted in one of his private papers, ‘I never stopped thinking as a filmmaker, I’ve tried to see the Board’s role less as a policeman of the industry than as its conscience’.³

- 1 This role was changed to Director during Ferman’s tenure.
- 2 *Polytechnic Law Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 1978, pp. 5–13.
- 3 BFI Archive, James Ferman Collection, ‘Poacher Turned Gamekeeper’, undated, JF/64.



Figs. 66 & 67

James Ferman (Fig. 66) lectured part-time at PCL before taking up his role as Secretary of the BBFC, and continued to maintain links with the Poly (Fig. 67).



the LCC confirming assent to these conditions,⁴⁶ and in July 1930 the first talkie was shown at the Poly: *Song O' My Heart* (Borzage, 1930).⁴⁷

The LCC was concerned with a different notion of 'control' at this time too, specifically in terms of who was in charge of the cinema for licensing purposes. This became particularly pronounced when a change of tenant for the Cinema was anticipated in May 1931. The question of the letting was referred to a Sub-Committee of the Polytechnic's Finance and General Purposes Committee, comprising the Polytechnic's Vice-President Lord Hailsham (1872–1950)⁴⁸, the Director of Education and the Clerk of Governors.⁴⁹ It subsequently reported to the Polytechnic's Finance and General Purposes Committee on 21 September 1931 that the tenancy of the Cinema had changed hands and that Mr Ralph Specterman had been accepted as a tenant.⁵⁰

Once Ralph Specterman took over the lease an interesting issue arose: the complications of a three-way relationship between the control of the premises, the cinematographic licence and the tenancy. In response to notification of the change, the LCC replied on 4 November 1931 that if responsibility for the control of the premises were to be divided between the Governors and Mr Specterman, then this would necessitate the granting of a separate licence



Fig. 68

Thirty-five years since it was last used as a commercial cinema, the projection box is once more coming back to life.

Fig. 69

The First World War was the first conflict to be widely filmed and there was a huge appetite for footage from the Front.

46 Letter from Philip Kemp, to the Director of Education at the Polytechnic, 14 May 1930, UWA RSP/2/2/1/1.

47 See also pp. 54–5.

48 Douglas McGarel Hogg, First Viscount Hailsham was the eldest son of Quintin Hogg. He continued his father's legacy as Vice-President of the Polytechnic c.1920–49. He also had a distinguished political career as a Conservative Member of Parliament. See *ODNB* for details.

49 *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 18 May 1931, UWA RSP/1/FP.

50 *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 21 September 1931, UWA RSP/1/FP.

Fig. 70

The Polytechnic's Robert Mitchell (1855–1933) was appointed Director of Training for the Ministry of Pensions. Courses at the Polytechnic for disabled soldiers included electrical engineering and cinematograph operation.



13. Kinematograph operators at Polytechnic, Regent Street.

to each party. The LCC made it clear that ‘the Council is not, however, prepared to depart from its settled policy of licensing one person or company only in respect of a place of public entertainment’. It continued:

I am accordingly to state that, if it is desired to continue to use the premises for public entertainment, steps must be taken at once by the Governors to modify the tenancy with Mr Specterman so that they are themselves solely responsible for the management and conduct of the premises during the whole of the time that they are in use under the Council’s licence.⁵¹

The Governors responded robustly, arguing that ultimate responsibility was solely in their hands,⁵² and continued that the agreement between the Polytechnic and Specterman provided that the tenants would not exhibit any film that had not been submitted to, and approved by, the Governors. Further to this, the tenant would act in accordance with the regulations of the LCC and the tenancy could be terminated for non-compliance. The Board continued to try to settle the matter by clarifying that:

In drawing up this agreement there was no intention on the part of the Governors to delegate the responsibility of the conduct of the Hall, and actually the maintenance staff of the Hall, including the electrical and heating staff, belong to the staff of the Polytechnic.⁵³

51 Letter from Clerk, LCC, to the Polytechnic, 4 November 1931, UWA RSP/2/2.

52 Letter from Secretary, the Polytechnic, to Clerk, LCC, 4 December 1931, UWA RSP/2/2.

53 Ibid.

However, the LCC were not satisfied with this response as they felt that Ralph Specterman, as the tenant, was still responsible under the tenancy agreement.⁵⁴ The eventual consequence was that the LCC required the tenancy agreement to be modified to ensure that the Governors were solely responsible for management of the premises. It was therefore reported on 23 May 1932 that:

Arrangements had now been made to provide in the agreement that the Governors should at all times have access to all parts of the premises and control the general arrangements, and while the licensee should be the Secretary of the Polytechnic he should be represented by the tenant or his manager.⁵⁵

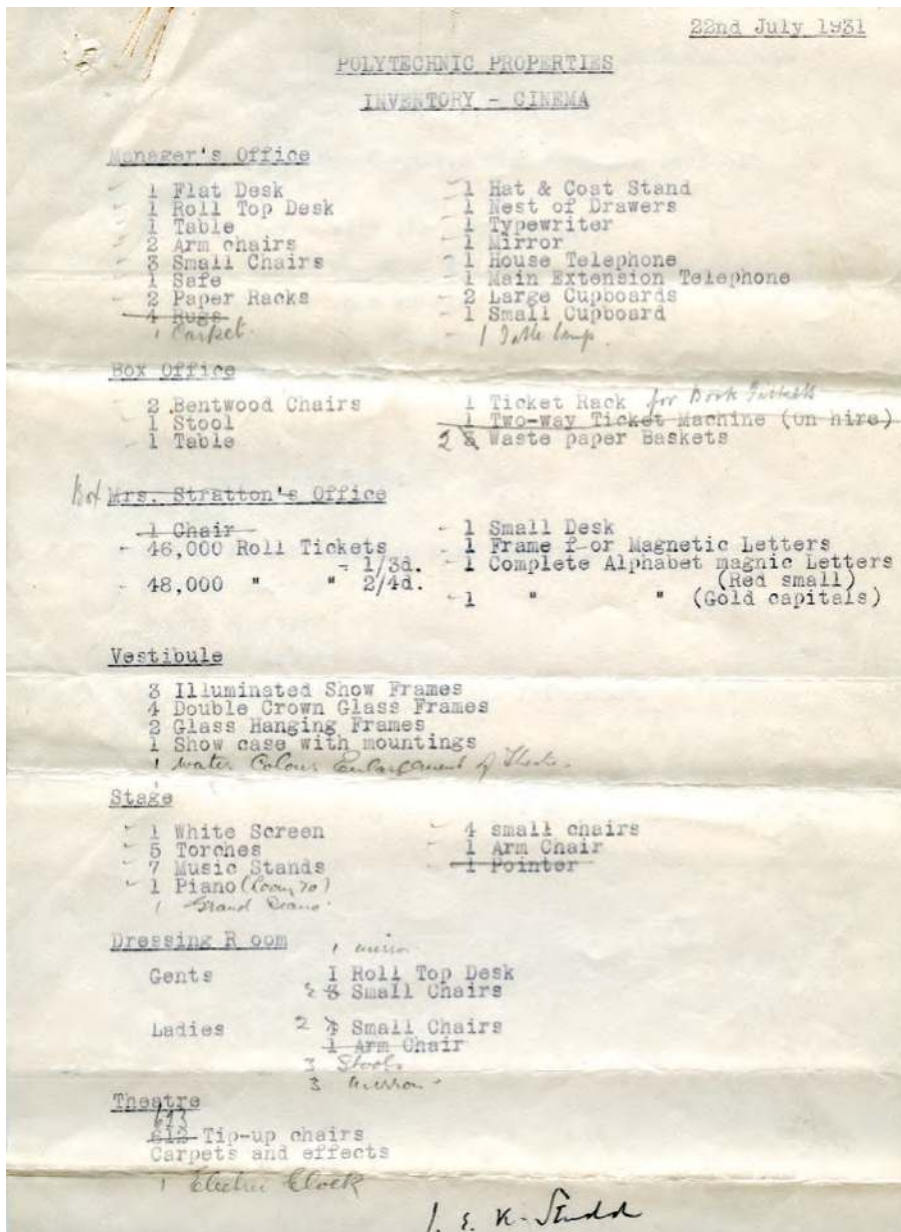


Fig. 71

This 1931 inventory mentions a piano installed on the stage – this would be replaced by a Compton organ five years later.

54 Letter from Clerk, LCC, to the Polytechnic, 2 February 1932, UWA RSP2/2.

55 Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes, meeting of 23 May 1932, UWA RSP1/FP/1/9.

Fig. 72
The Compton organ was installed by Ralph Specterman, as a condition to the extension of his tenancy.



The Polytechnic agreed to insert a clause to the effect that the Governors exercised ‘full control’, and emphasised that the power the governors exercised in fact had other broader benefits and that this meant that ‘the entertainment provided is generally admitted to be of a much higher standard than the entertainment at the usual cinema’.⁵⁶ The variation was sent to the LCC for approval and on 19 July the LCC replied stating that this endorsement to the agreement was acceptable to them.⁵⁷ In some ways this may have seemed something of a storm in a teacup, but the Council were acutely aware of legal ramifications and were keen to ensure that the procedural requirements were followed and that the issue of control was clarified.

THE FEAR OF THE CONTINENTAL SUNDAY

As noted above, when discussing the *Bioscope* case, Sundays were potentially a popular day for cinema but there were other issues to contend with regarding the showing of films on this specific day of the week. Historically, under the Sunday Observance Act (1780), described as ‘An Act for preventing certain Abuses and Profanations on the Lord’s Day called Sunday’, the use of any room for public entertainment or debate on a Sunday was prohibited. Over the years this statutory intervention had been bolstered by the formation of supportive groups such as the Lord’s Day Observance Society, although in 1894 a counter group, the National Federation of Sunday Societies, was established with the aim of removing such restrictions.⁵⁸ In 1910, partly as a response to the *Bioscope* case, and specifically to deal with the issue of use of the Cinema on a Sunday, the Cinematograph Defence League (CDL) formed to fight for the ability to

56 Letter from Secretary, the Polytechnic, to Clerk, LCC, 18 April 1932, UWA RSP/2/2.

57 Letter from Clerk, LCC, to the Polytechnic, 19 July 1932, UWA RSP/2/2.

58 Christopher Lane, ‘On the Victorian Afterlife of the 1781 Sunday Observance Act’, *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History* in Dino Franco Felluga (ed.). Available online: www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=christopher-lane-on-the-victorian-afterlife-of-the-1781-sunday-observance-act [accessed 11 June 2014]. The Act was passed in 1780 but was enacted in 1781.

show films on a Sunday.⁵⁹ The question of film screenings on a Sunday had been a problem since at least 1908, and was what Low characterised as the fear of the ‘Continental Sunday’; that although ‘middle-class virtue might survive golf and bridge, [...] the Sabbatarianism had sufficient life in it still to stigmatise the vulgar new working-class entertainment as too flagrant a flaunting of the Devil’s house’.⁶⁰ The key legal question became, however, whether the LCC was actually able to impose Sunday closing:

Did granting licences ‘to such persons as they think fit, on such terms and conditions and under such restrictions as subject to regulations of the Secretary of State, the Council may by the respective licences determine’ cover the prohibition of Sunday shows?⁶¹

As noted above, the *Bioscope* case had established that Councils were at liberty to insert conditions relating to the issue of licences, including the use of cinemas on Sundays. Following robust debate in the press, and various committee meetings, the LCC Theatres and Music Halls Committee decided that



Fig. 73

Advertisements for Chang emphasised the Governors’ control over the Polytechnic Theatre’s programming.

59 The League was formed on 13 January 1910. Directors included Montagu A. Pyke, a prominent figure in British cinematography at the time. At its peak in 1910–11, Pyke’s circuit managed fourteen cinemas in central London. However, by 1915 his business had collapsed and he was bankrupt.

60 Low, p. 63.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 64.



Fig. 74
 This rare colour picture from 1932 shows the Cinema's Art Deco colour scheme. It was drawn by Reginald Fagg, a former student and Clerk of the Works at the Polytechnic who later designed the Ladies' Extension Pavilion at Chiswick.

such Sunday entertainment *could* fulfil a legitimate and useful purpose and should be allowed, as long as stringent conditions were applied. These stringent conditions included the donation of all profits gleaned on a Sunday to charity. Although this condition was observed to a degree, it seems that it was fairly easy to evade and difficult to enforce. In fact just before the outbreak of the First World War, a number of councils, including Middlesex, announced that exhibitors opening on Sundays was not to be allowed and the LCC itself only allowed Sunday opening during this period if the charity clause was strictly observed.⁶²

The issue of cinemas opening on a Sunday was eventually formally addressed by the Sunday Entertainments Act 1932, which provided that showing films on Sundays would *not* create an offence under the 1870 Act:

no person shall be guilty of an offence or subject to any penalty under the Sunday Observance Acts [...]1780, by reason of his having managed, conducted, assisted at, or otherwise taken part in or attended or [...] by reason of his being the keeper of any place opened and used on Sundays for the purpose of any cinematograph entertainment.⁶³

62 Ibid., p. 105.

63 The Sunday Entertainment Act 1932, Section 4.

One concession contained within the Act was that five per cent of takings from these Sunday shows was to be paid to a 'Cinematograph Fund' and, under s2 of the Act,⁶⁴ this was designed for 'encouraging the use and development of the cinematograph as a means of entertainment and instruction'. This was in fact very much in accordance with the approach of the Polytechnic and the Board of Governors to the Cinema (namely, that the use of the Cinema should be for high-class and educational matters), although there was some debate about what the monies in this fund could be used for and how they would be distributed. A letter to *The Spectator* under the heading 'The Cinematograph Fund' in August 1932 attempted to clarify whether the Privy Council, which was to monitor the fund, would be able to distribute funds to bodies such as schools who might wish to utilise aspects of the cinema in their teaching, but who could not otherwise afford the equipment. The letter detailed a reply from a 'legal authority' to the effect that although such distribution of funds was technically possible, it was questionable whether the Privy Council would be minded to actually make such a grant.⁶⁵ In a reply to a question raised in the House of Commons it was reported that one hundred and twenty-six licensing

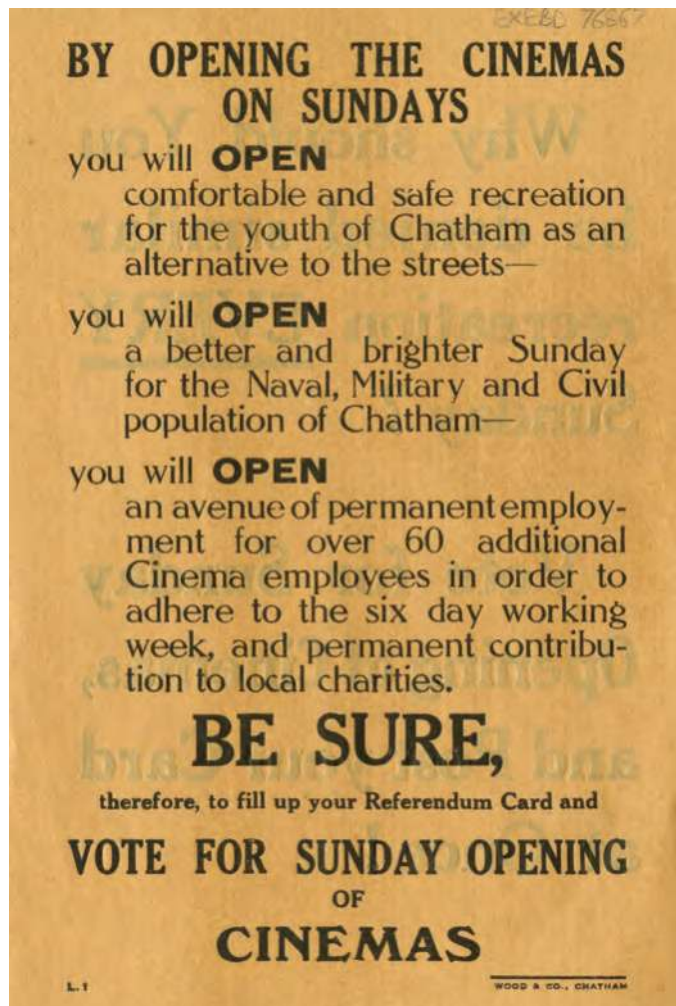


Fig. 75

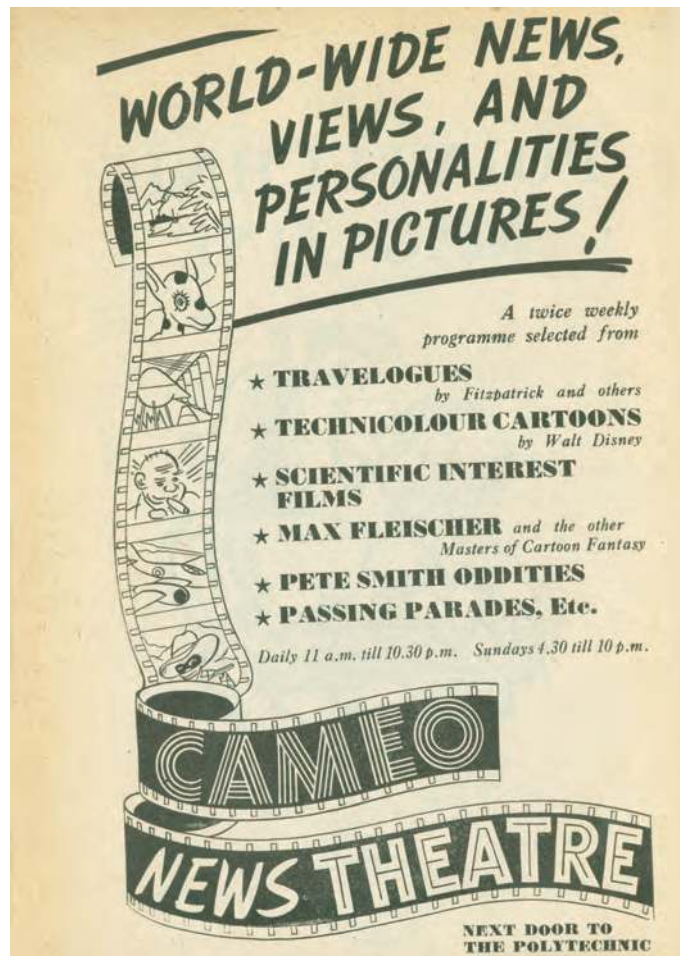
Many areas of the country held referendums to decide whether cinemas should open on a Sunday. At the Polytechnic, the decision was taken by the Governors.

64 Later amended by the Sunday Cinema Act 1972, and repealed by Statute Law (Repeals) Act 1978, Schedule 1, Part. IX.

65 James Marchant, 'Letter to the Editor', *The Spectator*, 13 August 1932, p. 14.

Fig. 76

The Polytechnic Cinema struggled during the Second World War, with diminishing audience numbers and a lack of available staff.



66 HC Deb 16 November 1936, Vol. 317, cc1328–9 (Mr James Duncan, Kensington North).

67 See the BFI website: www.bfi.org.uk/about-bfi [accessed 11 June 2014].

68 See Elaine Penn, (ed.), *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit: The Legacy of Quintin Hogg and The Polytechnic, 1864–1992* (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 2013). The institution held important religious services (such as Founders Day or the Harvest Festival) in the Cinema several times a year.

69 *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 31 March 1941, UWA RSP/1/FP.

70 Ronald G. Studd was the son of the former President of the Polytechnic, Sir Kynaston Studd (1858–1944). In addition to his role as Governor, he was also Director of the Polytechnic Touring Association from 1922.

71 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 28 April 1941, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/4.

authorities were paying into the fund, and that the total amounts paid in for 1933, 1934 and 1935 were £3,367, £7,620 and £9,117 respectively.⁶⁶ This money was to form the original source of funding for the British Film Institute established in 1933, shortly after the Act was passed.⁶⁷

In line with the Christian ethos of the Polytechnic,⁶⁸ its cinema did not open on Sundays, but during the Second World War the Polytechnic received an application to reopen the Cinema and to allow Sunday entertainments with the assurance that the ‘usual standards’ were to be maintained. It was resolved that this proposal be approved as a war measure, subject to one month’s notice for termination and that an application should be made to LCC for Sunday use.⁶⁹ The decision was not met with uniform support at the Poly. Commander Ronald G. Studd (1889–1956)⁷⁰ voiced his displeasure to the Board of Governors:

A letter was read [from Studd] stating that he was deeply grieved that such a decision (opening of cinema on a Sunday) had been taken. He felt so deeply about the proposed arrangement that if confirmed by the Governors it would leave him no option but to tender his resignation as a Governor, with deep regrets.⁷¹

RIALTO CINEMAS LTD.

Cameo News Theatre at The Polytechnic:
Receipts Year Ended 31st December 1945.

	<u>£</u>	<u>s.</u>	<u>d.</u>
* Net Takings after deduction of Entertainment Duty	30814.	7.	7.
Less 12½% of Net Sunday Charity takings	481.	18.	11.
1/9th L.C.C. Charity Administration Charge.	24.	6.	5.
	486.	5.	4.
	30328.	2.	3.
<u>Polytechnic Share:</u> First £150 per week free.	-	-	-
10% of Takings between £150 & £300 per week.	780.	-	-
15% of Balance	2209.	2.	5.
Initial Rent payable in advance	1500.	-	-
Adjustment in calculation (1941-1945)	5.	3.	4.
	4494.	5.	9.
<u>Rialto Cinemas Ltd Share of Receipts</u>	<u>£25833.</u>	<u>16.</u>	<u>6.</u>
* (Net Takings ^{by Poly} W/E 3rd August 1945 to 21st January 1946 - £1643. 6. 9.) * " " " 4th August 1944 to 19th January 1945 - £ 848. 15. 7.) *			

** Total of weekly charges received by Poly for Rent equalled.*

Fig. 77

A balance sheet from 1945 showing the Sunday takings paid into the Cinematograph Fund – the original source of funding for the BFI.

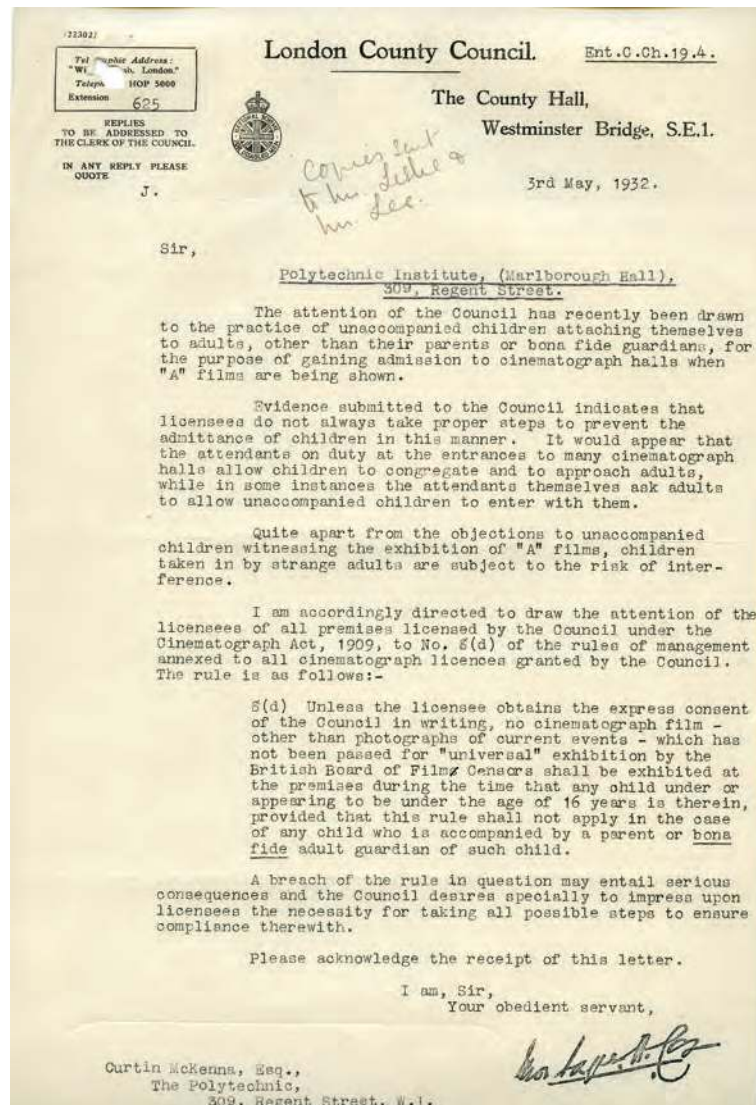
In 1945, the Polytechnic Men's Council wrote to the Board of Governors about the Sunday opening, and also the related practice of children queuing outside the Cinema on Sundays, arguing that 'such counter-attraction was contrary to the high ideals of the Founder of the Polytechnic and also to the high traditions of the Institute'.⁷² In addition to complaining that children should be properly supervised when waiting outside, the Council stated its belief that when the time came to renew the lease, Sunday screenings should not be allowed. Unfortunately for the Council the precedent had been set during the war. Despite the complaint, the Polytechnic agreed to Sunday opening, provided that the tenants controlled the queues on Sunday afternoons and considered ending the arrangement under which children only paid half price. The tenants (Rialto) also agreed to release the Cinema to the Polytechnic on six Sundays during the year for its own use.⁷³

⁷² *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 16 April 1945, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/4.

⁷³ *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 12 December 1945, UWA RSP/1/FP.

Fig. 78

Although considered a modern worry, this 1932 letter shows that 'stranger danger' was as much a concern for the authorities as was the content of adult films.



- 74 Perceval Gibbon, *Souls in Bondage* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood, 1904); see also Graham Stewart, "She felt the future in her bones" - Gibbon's *Souls in Bondage*, *Alternation*, Vol. 5, Issue 2, 1998, pp. 104-13.
- 75 Letter from the LCC to the Polytechnic, 11 March 1915, UWA RSP [P103h]. Curiously the Internet Movie database lists the release of the film as January 1916; it may have been the case that an earlier version of the film existed that was later superseded.
- 76 Letter from the Secretary, Polytechnic to the Clerk, LCC, 15 March 1915, UWA RSP [P103h].
- 77 Letter from the Clerk, LCC, to the Polytechnic, 12 June 1919, UWA RSP [P103j].

X MARKS THE SPOT: MORALITY AND THE CENSORIAL AGE

Censorship had arisen for the cinema as early as 1915, when the LCC wrote to all licence holders regarding the film *Souls in Bondage* (Lewis, 1916), a film based on a short story and concerning the white slave trade.⁷⁴ The film had apparently been shown in various halls in London but the LCC stated that in its opinion 'the film is not suitable for exhibition in a place of public entertainment'.⁷⁵ The Polytechnic Governors evidently agreed with the Secretary writing to the LCC that 'I do not think I need assure you that this film is not likely to make its appearance at the Polytechnic'.⁷⁶ Four years later, the LCC wrote again with regard to the film *Attila* (Mari, 1918), noting that 'I have been directed to inform you that the Council considers the film to be unsuitable for exhibition in a place of public entertainment'.⁷⁷ In October 1925 the Polytechnic had proposed to

show the film *Red Russia Revealed* (1923) but this was withdrawn following consultation with the censor.⁷⁸ In a short piece in the *Aberdeen Press Journal* it was noted that Captain Noel (of Mount Everest fame) had arranged to present the film at the Polytechnic but that the BBFC had banned it as ‘in the present state of public and political opinion [such as the burning of Lord Curzon’s effigy in Moscow] it would be inadvisable to exhibit certain portions of the film’.⁷⁹ Interestingly, the Polytechnic did not always unquestioningly follow the censor’s edicts. In 1919 it proposed to show *The End of the Road* (Griffith, 1919), a film that concerned the perils of venereal disease. While the BBFC had refused to sanction the film and grant it a certificate, the manager of the Polytechnic Cinema, possibly after a conversation with the Governors, decided that he did not agree with the BBFC decision. He noted that the Ministry of Health had approved the film, and medical opinion was solidly behind his decision to screen it, with the internally imposed stipulation that no one under 18 years old would be admitted.⁸⁰ This was reported in the press as ‘Censors to be Disregarded’ and it is a good illustration of the Polytechnic seeing the educational value of the film as trumping the view of a quasi-regulatory body, as well as a reiteration of the fact that the BBFC had no real legal powers, but was in essence an industry association.

Of course, as has already been noted, the problem with the ‘character’ of films in terms of broader LCC regulation had been raised previously under the guise of other licensing requirements. However, censorship became very explicit after the Second World War. Following the war, the Governors were keen to see a return to the approach that characterised their idea of how the Cinema should be used as it had been at its inception, with the focus on education and culture. The issue became pressing, as the lease with Rialto, entered into in 1941, was due to expire in August 1946, and the Chairman of the Company, Sir Albert Clavering (1887–1972), was keen to ascertain the Governors’ intentions. The Governors seemed quite clear as to their vision that the cinema showed films of an educational character.⁸¹

In November 1945, Lord Hailsham, Mr Harry Salmon (1881–1950) and the Director of Education, J.C. Jones, with the Clerk to the Governors Curtin McKenna in attendance, met Sir Albert Clavering to discuss arrangements for the Cinema. Given that the lease was to finish shortly, the Polytechnic was keen to stress the need to ‘revert to an educational basis more in keeping with the scheme and traditions of the Polytechnic’. It appeared that this was not going to be as easy as the Board of Governors hoped, Mr Salmon reported:

Sir Albert Clavering stressed the great difficulty in getting a sufficient supply at the present time of travel and nature films. He was, however, willing to work on building up a programme on the lines indicated and would eliminate any films of which the Polytechnic disapproves.⁸²

An important development was noted in the Polytechnic Governors’ Meeting Minutes on 9 May 1947, when the tenants suggested a further change

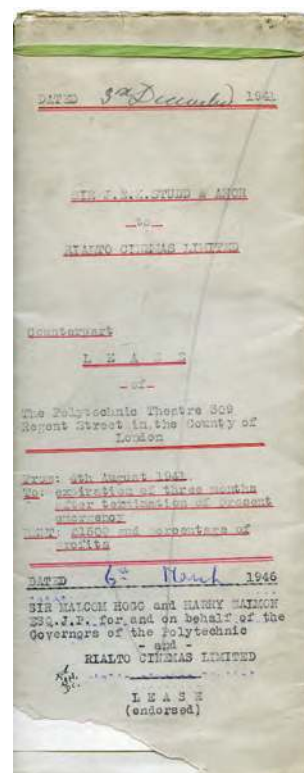


Fig. 79 Although the name over the door and the name of the company was to change many times, the actual tenant of the Cinema stayed the same from 1941 until its closure in 1980.

78 *The Times*, 6 October 1925.

79 *Aberdeen Press Journal*, 20 October 1925.

80 *Evening Telegraph*, 20 December 1919. Interestingly, there is no reference to the film screening in the Polytechnic Governing Body minutes of the period.

81 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 22 October 1945, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/4.

82 *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 19 November 1945, UWA RSP/1/FP. See also Fig. 122 and Chapter 4, p. 127.

Figs. 80 & 81

The *Times* of 12 September 1949 described the chosen inaugural showing as 'a film of quality and imagination, entrancing the eye and beguiling, if sometimes confusing, the mind'.



- 83 *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 21 March 1949, UWA RSP/1/FP.
- 84 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 25 April 1949, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/5.
- 85 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 18 July 1949, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/5.
- 86 *The Times*, 29 August 1949.
- 87 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 17 October 1949, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/5. A side issue of the shift in programming concerned the tax position occasioned by this proposed move. Rialto had queried whether breach of the 'educational and cultural' clause in their agreement would lead to the Governors becoming liable for the payment of income tax, and whether they would then be liable for additional rent on this basis. It was, however, suggested at the Finance & General Purposes Committee that any covenant by a tenant to repay landlords' property tax was in fact void. *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 20 February 1950, UWA RSP/1/FP.
- 88 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 17 July 1950, UWA RSP 1/BG/1/5.

to their programming. They were keen to introduce the exhibition of foreign films in place of the existing diet of news and cartoons. This was a proposal that was received favourably by the Governors, perhaps believing that 'foreign' or 'continental' denoted a raising of the bar of quality, and was more in line with the educational mission and ethos of the Polytechnic. On that basis the tenants were asked to submit a more detailed proposition for consideration.⁸³ The Governors meeting of 25 April 1949 noted that a more detailed proposal had been submitted but that due to the increased expense of showing such films it would be necessary to amend the existing terms of the agreement to reflect this:

The Governors decided to approve the proposal of the tenants and to agree to the variation in the existing terms of rental subject to a minimum payment of £4,000 a year and to a review of the position at the end of each twelve months during the next three years.⁸⁴

The Governors agreed that this change of programming would take place on 6 September 1949, and would be inaugurated with the première of a French film, *Le Secret de Mayerling* (Delannoy, 1949). It was to be a rather grand event, with a reception to which Embassy officials and other VIPs were invited.⁸⁵ The change in policy was reflected in an announcement in *The Times* that the 'poly is to be used [...] as a shop window for continental films of recognised merit'.⁸⁶ The event was later reported to the Governors as a success and the tenants were accordingly congratulated.⁸⁷ However, Rialto wrote on 4 July 1950 stating that they had made a large trading loss since the commencement of screening continental films, and were therefore disinclined to continue this policy.⁸⁸ Although they were under contract to continue with the continental film policy

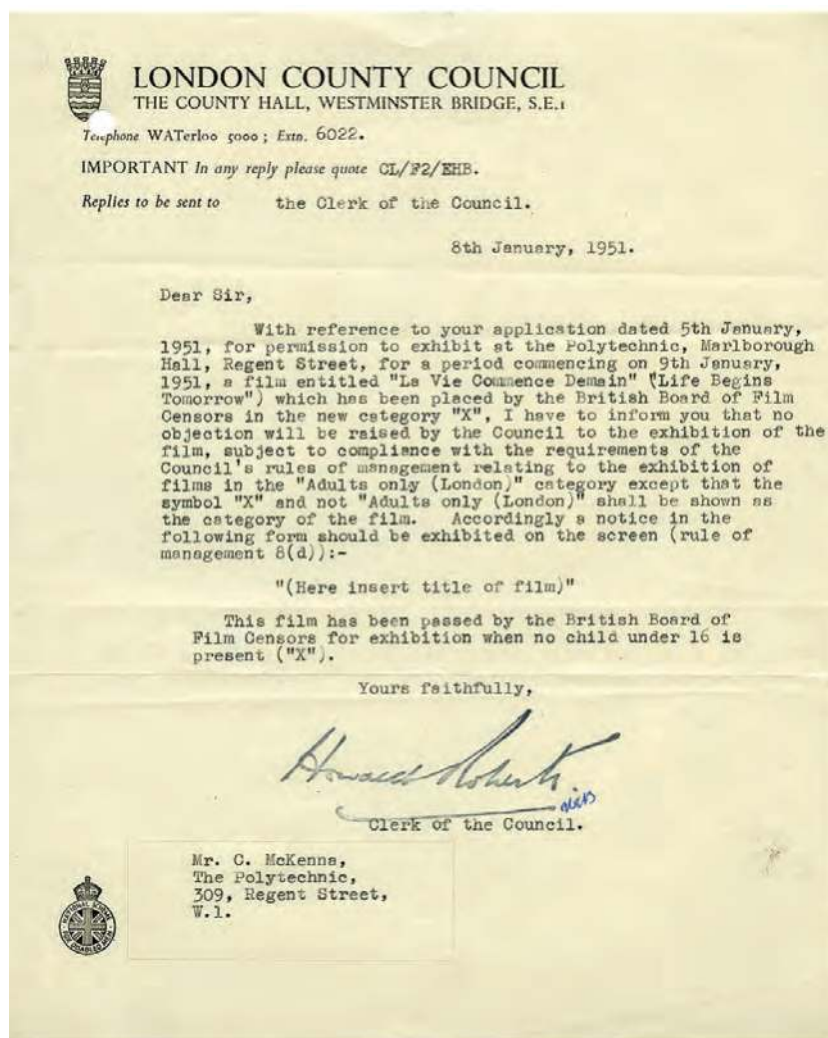


Fig. 82

The X certificate was introduced to allow censors a 'third way' between requiring severe cuts to a film or issuing an outright ban. With the new X certificate in place, La Vie Commence Demain was able to be screened without cuts.

until the end of the following year, they asked whether the Governors would be amenable to bringing this forward twelve months. The Governors agreed, but asked the tenants to inform them of the nature of future programmes as soon as possible and also drew their attention to clause 4(viii) of the principal deed, which laid down that the tenants should, as far as possible, 'exhibit films mainly of an educational and cultural type, including subjects dealing with travel, science, nature study and drama'.⁸⁹ In particular, the Governors expressed the wish that the showing of short cartoons would not be repeated.

While the continental film 'experiment' appeared to be floundering, an important and notable event occurred at the Polytechnic. In 1950 the BBFC had, following the recommendations of the Wheare Committee, decided to introduce a new category of films, denoted by an 'X' certificate, from screenings of which children would be excluded.⁹⁰ The intention of the BBFC was not to suggest that this category was solely for the purpose of denoting 'smut', as Arthur Watkins (1907–1965)⁹¹ noted: 'It is not our desire that X films should be merely sordid films dealing with unpleasant subjects but films which, while

89 Ibid.

90 Prof. K.C. Wheare chaired a committee established by the Home Office, the Ministry of Education and the Scottish Office to examine film censorship in Britain with a view to recommending changes. The 'X' certificate effectively replaced the H advisory designation introduced in January 1932, which later became a specific category, but had been suspended during the Second World War and little used since. The idea behind the 'H', for 'Horrific', was to try and curb the exhibition of 'frightening' films. See Robert James, "The People's Amusement": Cinemagoing and the BBFC 1928–48', in Edward Lamberti (ed.), *Behind the Scenes at the BBFC. Film Classification from the Silver Screen to the Digital Age* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 16–26.

91 Arthur Watkins became Secretary of the BBFC in 1948. Watkins was thought to be a more modern appointment, fresh from the Home Office and previously a PR officer and a part-time playwright, and noted as the first Secretary to begin to take a sympathetic approach towards artistic merit and a more liberal approach than previous Secretaries.

Fig. 83

Less than ten years after its release, *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* was adapted for stage by Noël Coward as 'Look After Lulu'.



not being suitable for children, are good adult entertainment and films which appeal to an intelligent public'.⁹²

When *Keep an Eye on Amélie/Occupe-toi d'Amélie* (Autant-Lara, 1949) had been proposed for exhibition at the Poly in 1950 there were some misgivings as it was felt by the Board of Governors to be not altogether appropriate. They did, however, agree that it could be shown on the basis of the tenant's policy of showing continental films, as long as some judicious cuts were made. The film was described by *The Times* as being very much a French farce, and the review also alluded to some of the scenes that Mrs Wood⁹³ and the Chairman of the Board of Governors, had identified as problematic:

There is a bedroom scene and a scene in a bed, there is a great deal of running about and hiding behind curtains; there is a prince, cut to the pattern of Groucho Marx, without his trousers and Amélie without her dress.⁹⁴

Certainly this does not appear immediately to accord with the notion of educational films demanded by the Polytechnic. Eventually, the Board of Governors noted that:

⁹² Cited in Steve Chibnall 'From the Snake Pit to the Garden of Eden: A Time of Temptation for the Board', in Lamberti, p. 35.

⁹³ Ethel Mary Wood (1878–1970), daughter of Quintin Hogg, governor of the Polytechnic and President of the Women's Institute 1945–70.

⁹⁴ *The Times*, 6 November 1950.

CAMEO-POLY

By 1952 the cinema at 307 Regent Street was known as the 'Cameo-Poly', the name many people still remember it by today. As part of the Cameo cinema chain run by Sir Albert Clavering, it became a destination for continental films in the West End. The chain was described by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith as being 'on the art/sex boundary' showing continental films 'which the British censor had allowed in with an X certificate but [that] had more sex content than was allowed in British or American films'.¹

Clavering also oversaw the Cameo-Poly Distributors circuit, which also provided films to the Continentale and Berkeley cinemas in the West End, and the new Classic cinema in Hendon. In 1954 they announced a collaboration with Gala Film Distributors, which gave them a prominent position in terms of foreign film exhibition both in London and major cities across the UK.² Advertisements for the Cameo-Poly regularly boasted of sold-out performances and showed large queues snaking down Regent Street. These presumably had a dual function, both enticing in cinemagoers and persuading regional cinema managers to book the films.

Between 1946 and 1954 the number of cinemas in Britain regularly showing continental films rose from 20 to 100.³ In central London the Cameo-Poly's main competitors were the Academy in Oxford Street, the Paris Pullman in Chelsea and the Curzon in Mayfair. These were cinemas that specialised in art-house fare and had a reputation as more 'prestige' venues – however, the films shown still largely carried an X certificate.⁴

Some of the Cameo's other cinemas were less salubrious. The Cameo Moulin in Great Windmill Street⁵ showed films such as *Naked as Nature Intended* (Harrison Marks, 1961). This was produced by Compton-Cameo Films, a partnership between Clavering, Tony Tenser (1920–2007) and Michael Klinger (1921–1989). Tenser and Klinger also ran the private members Compton Cinema Club in Soho.⁶ They would later

back the production of Roman Polanski's *Cul-de-Sac* (1966), which received its première at the Cameo-Poly.

Other premières held at the Cameo-Poly, as the flagship of the chain, included *Kwaidan* (Kobayashi, 1964) and *The Committee* (Sykes, 1968). *The Committee* featured a soundtrack by Pink Floyd, two of whom had met while students at the Regent Street Polytechnic. By the mid-sixties the Cameo-Poly had become a by-word for urban sophistication. Sylvia Plath and Paul McCartney both visited,⁷ and the venue is name-checked twice in Margaret Drabble's 1965 novel *The Millstone*.

In 1970 Barney Platts-Mills' *Bronco Bullfrog* opened at the Cameo-Poly to positive reviews. Shot on a budget of £18,000 and using untrained actors from the East End, the film captured the lives of young Londoners in the 1960s. However, eighteen days after opening it was pulled to accommodate a gala première of Lawrence Olivier's *Three Sisters*. The screening was attended by Princess Anne, who also regularly visited the Cameo-Poly cinema in an informal capacity. The cast of *Bronco Bullfrog* organised a voluble protest outside the cinema –



Fig. 84

The Cameo-Poly traded as much on the artistic merits of its films as on their X certificates.

or 'a chanting, howling crowd of 200 East End skinheads and other young people', as the *Daily Telegraph* reported it.⁸ Princess Anne was later invited to a screening of *Bronco Bullfrog* at the Mile End ABC, which she gamely attended.

The Cameo chain was acquired by Classic Cinemas in 1967, and the cinema was renamed Classic Poly in 1972. The programming remained consistent with its Cameo-Poly days, showing X-rated films such as *The Sidelong Glances of a Pigeon Kicker* (Dexter, 1970). However, in November 1973 the Classic Poly was advertising a rare opportunity to hear the twelve-year-old pianist Jeremy Atkins in performance, and in February the following year it was one of three cinemas in the Classic chain to be converted into a theatre.⁹

- 1 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'The Reception of the *Nouvelle Vague* in Britain', in Lucy Mazdon and Catherine Wheatley, eds, *Je t'aime... moi non plus. Franco-British cinematic relations* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 117–26, (p. 121).
- 2 Lucy Mazdon and Catherine Wheatley, *French Film in Britain: Sex, Art and Cinephilia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013) p. 92.
- 3 *Ibid.* p. 91.
- 4 Nowell-Smith, p. 121.
- 5 Previously known as the Cameo Piccadilly, the cinema was renamed in 1961 with its reorientation towards explicit films.
- 6 See also Chapter 4, p. 132.
- 7 Plath to see *Through a Glass Darkly* (Bergman, 1961) in 1962, and McCartney a year later to see *The Trial* (Welles, 1962).
- 8 *Daily Telegraph*, 3 November 1970.
- 9 See Chapter 3, pp. 98–9 for details.

Top of the pops at the Cameo-Poly

IN the foyer of the Cameo-Poly Cinema, Regent Street, there is a large chart which shows the audience figured for all the films shown from March, 1956, to October, 1963. It has been made by Mr. Basil Clabering, director of the cinema.

"The Cameo-Poly is the Old Vic of the cinema," he says. "We have a specialised audience who are selective in their choice of entertainment. They want to see only the best; therefore the films which are the most popular with our audiences may also be called the best films."

Mr. Clabering chooses the films (*Pick of the Best*) mainly British premières—from the finest of those which he sees at film festivals and in cinemas abroad.

The most popular in the seven years covered by the chart was Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle*, which was seen by a 99% capacity audience when it was first shown in 1959. (Yet when it was shown again in 1961 the audience was only 5%).

"The audience at the Cameo-Poly is an intellectual one," said Mrs. Elridge, who is in charge of the box-office. "They come because they want to see the film, not just to have an

evening out.

"We have regulars," she went on, "But we never get exactly the same audiences for each film. For instance, the people who came to see *Mon Oncle* would not be the same ones who saw Fellini's *8½*." (This was the most popular film of 1963; it was an abstract autobiographical essay.)

Mrs. Elridge said that Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon were regular patrons of the cinema. They always come informally, and the last film they saw was *8½*, last September.

The 10 most popular films, as shown on Mr. Clabering's chart, are:-

- | | | |
|--|-----|------|
| (1) <i>Mon Oncle</i> ... | 99% | 1959 |
| (2) <i>The Light Across the Street</i> ... | 78% | 1956 |
| (3) <i>Gervaise</i> ... | 75% | 1956 |
| (4) <i>Jazz on a Summer's Day</i> ... | 69% | 1960 |
| (5) <i>The Lovers</i> ... | 68% | 1959 |
| (6) <i>Jules et Jim</i> ... | 59% | 1962 |
| (7) <i>8½</i> ... | 52% | 1963 |
| (8) <i>Last Year in Marienbad</i> ... | 52% | 1962 |
| (9) <i>Cabica</i> ... | 51% | 1959 |
| (10) <i>The Trials of Oscar Wilde</i> ... | 48% | 1960 |

Fig. 85

The Polytechnic's student magazine reported that the Cameo-Poly was 'the Old Vic of the cinema'.

Fig. 86

Much of the Cameo-Poly's advertising focused on the queue of cinema-goers that stretched down Regent Street.



consent was given to the exhibition in the Polytechnic Cinema of [the film] subject to the deletion of certain somewhat objectionable features, and on the understanding that the greatest care be shewn [sic] in the future in the selection of French films.⁹⁵

Arthur Watkins also kept an eye on the film by arranging BBFC attendance at screenings of the film at the Polytechnic. The BBFC documents report that he was pleasantly surprised by the gender composition of the audience and that ‘on this reception we need not worry about an “X” for this type of film. I did not notice any cuts’.⁹⁶ The Examiner’s Report details a visit taking place on a Saturday afternoon, to see how the film was being received.⁹⁷ The details of the visit are illuminating; the examiner noted that the house was busy when he arrived, with the cheap seats already filled by 2 pm, and that as these seats had all gone he had to pay out the not inconsiderable sum of 4s 7d to see the film.⁹⁸ He noted ‘the long queues of ordinary, clean-looking, middle-class middle-brow cinema-goers. My next-door neighbour was not English but the people behind me were’.⁹⁹ This is interesting when we consider how cinema was seen around the time of the Cinematograph Act 1909 as something for the ‘lower orders’ and suggests that the Polytechnic was attracting more urbane cinema-goers. Watkins further commented on the lavatory humour alluded to in *The Times* review, and reported that the crowd found their trip to the Polytechnic entertaining.

There were some later queries about which version of the film was being shown, partly because of the specific cuts requested by the Polytechnic Governors. Replying to the Chief Officer at Surrey County Council concerning the various versions of the film, Arthur Watkins noted that:

When the film was shown at the Cameo Polytechnic Cinema one or two further cuts had to be made at the request of the Polytechnic directors, and when these cuts were restored for subsequent showings at other theatres, the footage depicting ‘the prince making the sign of the cross’ was inadvertently restored as well.¹⁰⁰

This latter image was supposed to have been removed when it was later awarded the X-rated certificate, and had somehow crept back in when restoring the extra cuts requested by the Polytechnic for use elsewhere.¹⁰¹

Other films shown at the Polytechnic’s Cinema during this period included *Au-delà des Grilles* (René Clément, 1948) and *Jour de Fête* (Tati, 1949), both of which were critically acclaimed. It was against this background that *Life Begins Tomorrow/La Vie Commence Demain* (Védres, 1950) was submitted to the BBFC in December 1950.¹⁰² Following an initial examiners’ viewing, it was suggested that the whole Board review the file.¹⁰³ It was seen again by the President and four other examiners on 22 December, and deemed ‘quite unsuitable for children’.¹⁰⁴ It was decided that it would be better to offer an ‘X’ certificate, which was accepted by M. Cravenne on behalf of the distributor although he noted

95 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 16 October 1950, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/5.

96 BBFC file, *Examiner’s Files: Amelia*, Examiner’s Note, 20 November 1950, p. 2. Signed off by AW, 21 November 1950.

97 *Ibid.*

98 It is difficult to evaluate accurately what this equates to today. The tool *Measuring Worth* notes that for a commodity of 4s 7d, in 2013 its real price would be £6.85, its labour value £18.71 and its income value £21.51. If we take the average of these, we see a price of £15.69.

99 BBFC File, *Examiner’s Files: Amelia*, p. 3.

100 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

101 *Ibid.*, Letter from LCC to Archway Films, 16 June 1950, p. 31.

102 BBFC File, *Examiner’s Files: La Vie*, 18 December 1950, p. 1. See also p. 129.

103 *Ibid.*, 19 December 1950, p. 2.

104 *Ibid.*, 22 December 1950, p. 5.

Fig. 87

Made in conjunction with UNESCO, *La Vie Commence Demain* looks at the wonders of the modern world and the nuclear age and features appearances from Le Corbusier, Picasso, Jean-Paul Sartre and André Gide. See also Fig. 123.



that an 'A' certificate might be considered in the future given its reception in educational circles.¹⁰⁵ The film, a semi-fictional documentary looking at developments in art and science in the nuclear age, was awarded an 'X' certificate on 15 January 1951 and, while fairly anodyne by today's standards, is important in our cinematic history as the Polytechnic became the scene of the showing of the first X-rated film in the UK. The Polytechnic Governors were evidently concerned whether it was permissible to show the film and wrote to the LCC to check; the LCC replied that it was perfectly permissible, as it had been 'placed by the British Board of Film Censors in the new category X'.¹⁰⁶

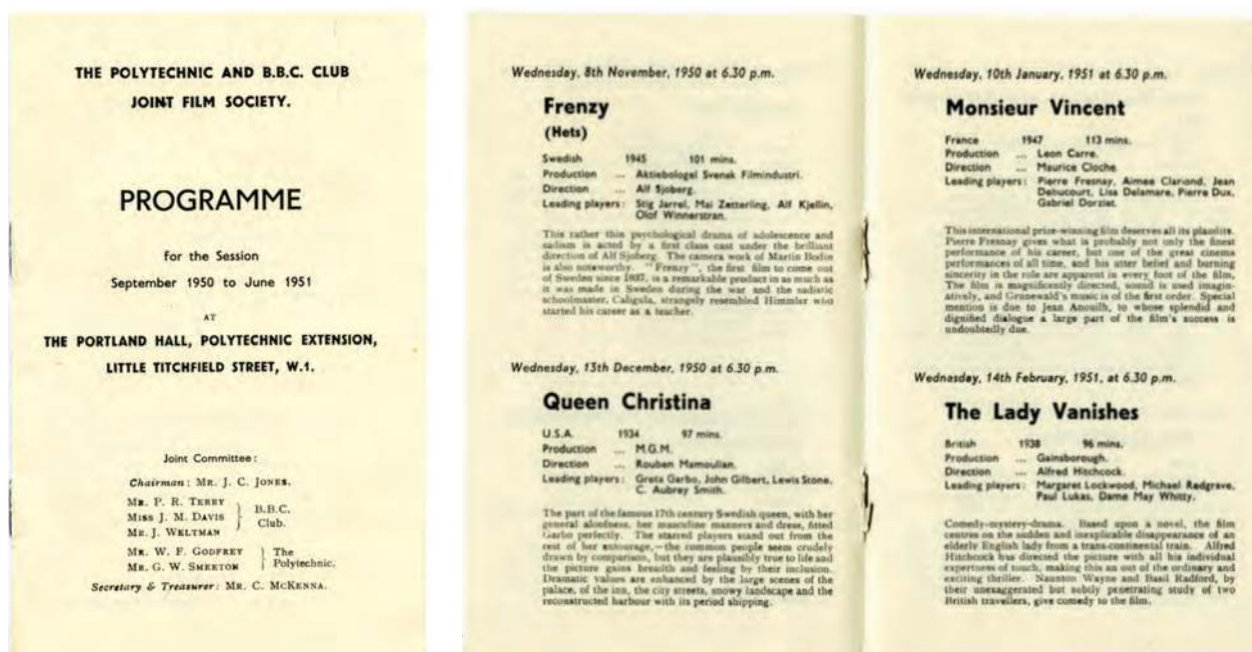
Subsequently, the Polytechnic's Finance and General Purposes Committee reported that:

since the summer of last year the tenants have had a series of successful films and on 15th February 1951, they stated that they had three or four further films booked and hoped that these features would remain at The Polytechnic for some months to come, and that results would justify their continuing the existing policy.¹⁰⁷

105 Ibid. Granting an 'A' certificate meant that a child could see the film if accompanied by an adult. If a film was granted an 'X' the viewer had to be over the age of 16.

106 Letter from Clerk, LCC, to the Polytechnic, 8 January 1951, UWA RSP [P99a].

107 *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 19 February 1951, UWA RSP/1/FP.



During this period, continental films were still being shown, notwithstanding the plans by the tenants to change the programming. These continental films had not proved to be an entirely successful financial proposition and the tenants proposed also to show old American and English films.¹⁰⁸ Rather confusingly, the Polytechnic Governors reported later that year that the tenants had abandoned their policy of showing continental films,¹⁰⁹ but nine months later noted that Rialto had resumed the policy as of 9 May 1952. The deed dated 25 August 1949 would be resumed as of 9 August 1952, with the tenants paying quarterly rent of £100 in advance.¹¹⁰ Later in 1952 the Governors also agreed, in an overt acknowledgement of a broader form of regulation, 'that the censorship exercised over the films to be shown in the Cameo-Polytechnic be continued as hitherto'.¹¹¹

Around the same time the Cinematograph Act 1952 was passed. This Act extended the scope of the 1909 Act, in particular by strengthening the protection afforded to children from 'unsuitable films' and stressing the role of the councils within this process.¹¹²

In fact, from this point onwards the cinema is barely discussed in the minutes of the Polytechnic's governing body. Throughout the late 1950s and into the 1960s there were, of course, many other important things occurring, most notably perhaps the discussions around the future role of polytechnics within the UK education system, with those debates gathering real pace towards the end of the 1960s.¹¹³ The Cinema continued to show a mix of films, notably including *Les Diaboliques* (Clouzot, 1955), which merited a specific mention in the BBFC files:

I have known the manager of the Cameo Poly for some while. He told me that the actress who fainted after seeing the premiere did so (in his opinion)

Fig. 88

The Polytechnic and BBC Joint Film Society began in 1946, when cinema viewing equipment was installed at the Little Titchfield Street building. Continental films were shown right from the start, several years before the change in the programming at the Polytechnic Cinema.

108 *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 19 February 1951, UWA RSP/1/5P.

109 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 15 October 1951, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/5.

110 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 21 July 1952, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/5.

111 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 20 October 1952, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/5.

112 The Act also widened exceptions afforded to private cinema clubs, something that was later used enthusiastically by various clubs such as the Compton Cinema Club.

113 See Michael Heller, 'The Institute and the Polytechnic', in *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit*, pp. 45-77.

partly because she **did** feel faint and then made the most of it. He also told me that several women have walked out of the film after the ‘murder’. They made no complaints to him, but obviously disliked the film.¹¹⁴

Other films including *Macbeth* (Welles, 1948), *Les Casse-Pieds* (Dréville, 1948), *Viva Zapata!* (Kazan, 1952) and *Waiting Women* (Bergman, 1952)¹¹⁵ were also shown during this period. The Governors mention the future of the Cinema again in March 1966, when it was noted that while a paper had been prepared on the matter, they wished discussion of it to be adjourned to the next meeting to give them more time to consider its contents and implications, and the matter was then considered two months later.¹¹⁶ The paper itself noted that the arrangement with Rialto was due to expire on 9 August 1968, that the

Fig. 89

In 1951 the Polytechnic joined in the celebrations for the Festival of Britain with these decorations on the building's façade.



114 BBFC file, *Examiner's Files: Les Diaboliques*, Examiner's Notes, 4 December 1955, pp. 11–12. Signed off by AW, 6 December 1955. Emphasis in original.

115 Originally released as *Kvinnors Våntan*.

116 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 21 March 1966, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/8.

deed granted Rialto sole and exclusive licence to use the Cinema and that ‘the effect of this licence is to prevent The Polytechnic making use of the theatre at times when no performance is in progress, i.e. before 11 o’clock in the forenoon’.¹¹⁷ While the deed allowed for the theatre to be used by the Polytechnic on a limited number of other occasions, largely concentrated around religious or culturally significant events such as Harvest Festival or Remembrance Sunday, it was noted that these had generally been increasingly poorly attended. The issue of ‘sole and exclusive use’, and the impact of this on a modern institution of higher education, were alluded to.¹¹⁸ In addition, the financial position was a cause for concern.

Under the existing licence, Rialto paid an annual sum of £4,000, and some other income was generated from other lettings, but under an agreement with Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), £3,500 was taken as income when assessing the block grant, with any excess transferred into the building fund. Losing the rent for the cinema would eliminate the amount paid into the building fund and reduce the amount taken into consideration when assessing the block grant, and it would therefore prove advantageous to the Polytechnic to *not* renew the lease. Furthermore, given the changes in the higher education sector at large and the specific likelihood of expansion for the Polytechnic,¹¹⁹ the need for all available spaces was made clear:

It is envisaged that the Polytechnic theatre will be valuable to The Polytechnic as a hall for all three colleges, available for many purposes and will serve to some extent as a focal point of the Federation. It should, therefore, certainly be included in the reconstruction programme of the Main Building scheduled to begin in 1970.¹²⁰

Having considered the contents of the Paper, the Governors agreed that Rialto should be informed that the Polytechnic did not propose to renew the licence and that ILEA should be informed. Following a meeting between the Chairman of Rialto and representatives of the Poly, a ‘friendly understanding of the situation’ was reached. Rialto requested that, should the position change, it might have first refusal of any future licence. Mr Bondy, one of the Governors, was evidently a fan of the Cinema and sad to see this important space lost to film, as the minutes note his comments that ‘London would be poorer without the Cameo-Poly Cinema’.¹²¹

As noted above, all of this was taking place at a time of exciting new prospects for the Polytechnic, and in terms of the Cinema it was obvious that this space was required to aid with the plans for the proposed expansion of the institution. Simultaneously, Roman Polanski’s film *Cul-de-Sac* (Polanski, 1966) received its world première at the Polytechnic. This showing neatly encapsulates the pressures on the identity, scope and role of the Cinema as, on the one hand, the Governors were trying to decide on the future of the Cinema and a possible return to explicitly educational use as a lecture hall, while on the other the Cinema was able to attract world premières and be financially attractive.



Figs. 90, 91
The Harvest Festival services continued until the 1960s, celebrated in much the same way they had been in Hogg’s day.

117 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 16 May 1966, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/8.

118 Such issues were exacerbated by the fact that at the time the Polytechnic was a unique mix of higher education institute and members’ club.

119 See Heller, especially pp. 63–66.

120 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 16 May 1966, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/8.

121 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 21 November 1966, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/8.



Fig. 92
The Polytechnic's School of Photography was expanded in the 1960s, with new facilities for the teaching of Film.

122 James Ferman, 'Film Censorship and the Law', *Polytechnic Law Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 1978, p. 3. See also Guy Osborn and Alex Sinclair, 'The Poacher turned Gamekeeper. James Ferman and the Increasing Intervention of the Law' in Lamberti, pp. 93–104. See p. 75 of this volume.

123 The artistic merit defence, provided under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 s4, essentially provided that if a work was *technically* obscene, a defence was available on the basis that the work was 'of public good'. For more on Ferman's campaign to bring film within the purview of the Act, see Osborn and Sinclair.

The Cameo chain was acquired by Classic Cinemas in 1967 and the Polytechnic seems not to have carried out its intention to give notice. Films continued to be shown and notable events in this period included the protest at the première of *Three Sisters* (Olivier, 1970) (see pp. 90–1 for details). Around the same time James Ferman (1930–2002), soon to be Secretary of the BBFC, and in fact to become its longest serving Secretary and Director, was teaching at the Polytechnic and later contributed to the *Polytechnic Law Review*.¹²² Within the wider realm of film censorship the 1970s were busy times. A number of highly contentious films were released, including *Straw Dogs* (Peckinpah, 1971) and *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971), although neither of these appears to have been shown at the Polytechnic during this period. More broadly, the law was developing apace. Ferman himself had agitated for cinema to be brought within the ambit of the Obscene Publications Act 1959, and therefore to be able to utilise the artistic merit defence.¹²³ When the Act was originally passed, film was excluded; partly as a result of Ferman's efforts, film was brought within its ambit via the Criminal Law Act 1977. Children continued to be of particular concern. This was not primarily in terms of the audience, however, (an area that we have seen was of concern earlier in the century), but in terms of participation. Films such as *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973), *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese, 1976) and *Pretty Baby* (Malle, 1978) all feature children in prominent and controversial roles.

THE REGENT THEATRE

In February 1974, the Cinema at the Polytechnic was converted by its tenant, Laurie Marsh, and the 'beat svengali' Larry Parnes (1929–1989), into the Regent Theatre. It was one of three of the Classic Cinema chain to be operated by the new Laurence Theatres Group.

The first production at the Regent Theatre was *Flowers*, a show by the dancer and mime artist Lindsay Kemp (b.1938) in honour of Jean Genet, which had previously been performed at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts. The theatre also experimented with lunchtime productions, with two alternating J.M. Barrie plays performed in front of the stage set for *Flowers*. *The Times* review of this 'bread and circuses'

approach described the 'unappetising packed lunch for 50p (sandwiches, boiled egg, biscuits and apple)' as being 'best avoided'.¹

The musical *Let My People Come* opened at the Regent Theatre in August 1974. Audition advertisements for the production requested 'strong rock/soul voices' and advised that 'every part requires individual talent and personality. Most roles involve nudity'.² The play ran for three years and was described as appealing to 'a certain type of public – largely downmarket tourists'.³ The show's explicit music and lyrics were by Earl Wilson Jr. and were nominated for a Grammy Award in 1974.

In July 1976, PCL's Court of Governors resolved to regain the full use of the Regent Theatre for academic activities at the earliest opportunity. Laurence Theatres

Take Note

Classic Departure



The interior of the vacant Regent Theatre.

Anyone who works in, or has recently made a visit to, the Regent Street site, will have noticed that the Regent Theatre, previously run as a cinema by Classic, is now bereft of its signboards and closed up. In fact, on 14 April Classic Cinemas Ltd vacated the Regent Theatre – owned by PCL as part of the 309 Regent Street building – at their own request.

For some time there have been negotiations between Classic and the polytechnic, as PCL wanted to make use of the Regent

Theatre itself and terminate Classic's lease. Now the matter has been settled by Classic's voluntary vacation of the premises. In lieu of a dilapidation claim, Classic have left behind all projection and sound equipment.

The polytechnic is presently waiting for estimates for improvements, especially to the lighting, before making any decision on use of the Theatre. These improvements are necessary before the Theatre can be utilised for any purpose.

The Regent Theatre

"PURE 40's HOLLYWOOD"

**GREAT
AMERICAN
BACKSTAGE
MUSICAL**

AN EPIC FOR SIX PERFORMERS

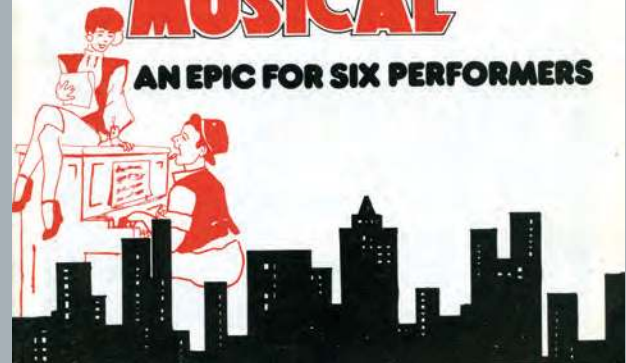


Fig. 93

From 1980 the Cinema once again became a multi-functional space for the Polytechnic, much as it had in the 1880s.

Fig. 94

The Great American Backstage Musical was rather more clean-cut than earlier productions at the Regent Theatre.

Group and Classic Cinemas resisted by claiming the right of automatic renewal of their business tenancy. Laurence Theatres' claim was dismissed in November 1976, leading to a legal case between Classic Cinemas and PCL. At the same time, Larry Parnes' interest in the Regent Theatre was bought out by Ray Cooney (b.1932), who formed the Cooney-Marsh Theatre Group with Laurie Marsh.

After the closure of *Let My People Come* in 1977, the Regent Theatre showed a double bill of plays by David Mamet. *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *Duck Variations* had transferred from a successful season off-Broadway in New York, as did *The Club*, which opened in May 1978. Set in a gentleman's club in the early twentieth century, this feminist revue by poet Eve Meriam

included an all-female cast impersonating men. This was followed by the 1940s parody *Great American Backstage Musical* (music and lyrics: Bill Solly).

In January 1979 the theatre reverted back to a cinema, still in the hands of Classic. The reasons for the reversion given in *The Stage* included the lack of a licence, a cramped backstage area, ticket prices as high as £5 for some productions, and the comparatively small size at only 517 seats.⁴ Behind the scenes, the legal battle for the lease was also ongoing – and would eventually be decided in favour of PCL in April 1980.⁵

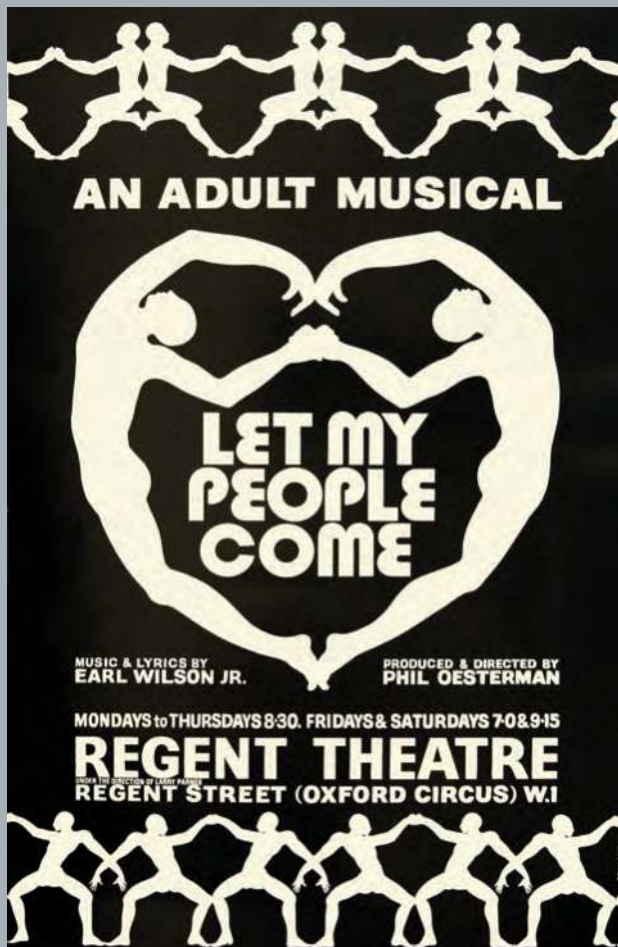
1 *The Times*, 4 May 1974.

2 *The Stage*, 4 November 1976, and 11 July 1974.

3 *The Stage*, 17 February 1977.

4 *The Stage*, 18 January 1979.

5 See *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, UWA PCL/1/BG.



Figs. 95, 96

Let My People Come was nominated for a Grammy in 1974 and enjoyed long runs in Philadelphia and Toronto.



Fig. 97

After its closure to the general public, the Cinema was still used to show films for PCL's classes – this 1978 management training film starred John Cleese.

Their portrayal was ultimately regulated by the Protection of Children Act 1978, which was primarily concerned with the prevention of child pornography.¹²⁴

By March 1974, the Cinema had once more been transformed with a new focus as a traditional theatre. Renamed the Regent Theatre, it saw the staging of several avant-garde stage productions.¹²⁵ The role of this much-loved space as a cinema was slowly but surely eroding. In July 1976 the Governors again refer to the 'urgent necessity of reclaiming the theatre' and slowly this occurs. There was a brief last gasp with a return to the name Classic Poly Cinema at the beginning of 1980 for screenings of *A Different Story* (Aaron, 1978) and *Black Jack* (Loach, 1979) before *Central Issue*, the Polytechnic's staff magazine, reported its closure in May 1980.¹²⁶

CONCLUSION

When the Polytechnic's Cinema closed in 1980, the cinema and film industry was in a state of flux. Technological advances, particularly at that time the emergence of video technologies, had created a whole host of issues for the industry to deal with.¹²⁷ It is likely that it was within this context, together with the general downturn in cinema-going, that the decision to close the Cinema was taken. Many historic and traditional cinemas were closing or had closed, and it was therefore unsurprising that a hybrid cinema, which also served a number of other functions operating within a wider higher education context, was similarly vulnerable. From this point onwards the 'Old Cinema' was retained in name only as it continued to be an integral part of the educational life of the Polytechnic, and later the University of Westminster, increasingly used for the delivery of lectures and other large-scale events.

124 See Osborn and Sinclair for the details of this and how the BBFC utilised this in terms of their approach to classification.

125 See pp. 98–9.

126 'Closure of the Cinema', *Central Issue*, No. 22, May 1980, UWA PCL [(P156a)].

127 Video fell under the legal gaze after the moral panic concerning so-called 'video nasties' via the Video Recordings Act 1984. See Lamberti.

Fig. 98

This photograph shows the exterior of the building after the departure of *Classic*, and before the canopy was removed.



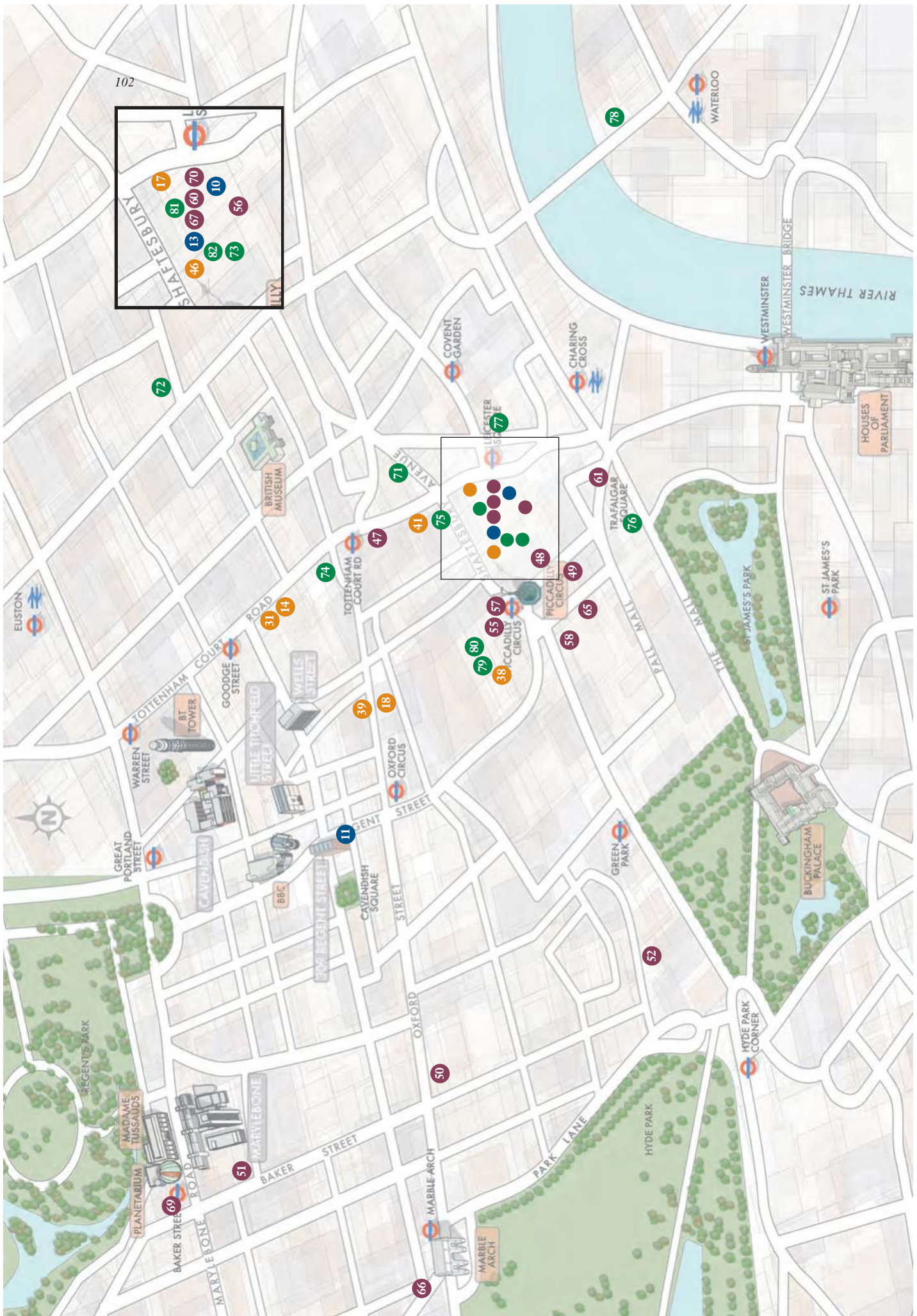
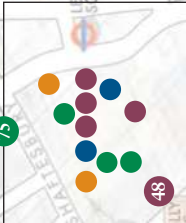
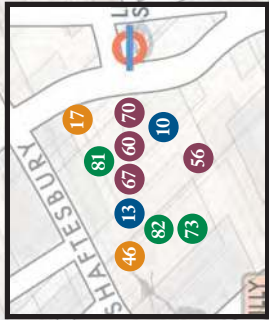
The reopening of the Regent Street Cinema in 2015 necessitates compliance with the current legal terrain. The area is regulated by the Licensing Act 2003, with the responsibility for administering licences vested in the relevant local authority, in our case Westminster Council. In addition, there is a requirement that any film shown to the public is either authorised by the relevant licensing authority or classified for exhibition by the BBFC. The BBFC itself has considerably broadened its approach since the 1980s. For example, its reach was extended to cover video recordings by the Video Recordings Act 1984 and also now takes into account a whole raft of other legal considerations.¹²⁸ In addition, the BBFC develops detailed Guidelines, often based on public consultations, external research and legal advice, that aim to reflect current public opinion on classificatory issues.¹²⁹ These guidelines are of course elastic, and the BBFC is also more cognisant of the role of parents, creating a new category, 12A, that allows parents to decide whether a film is suitable for children under the age of 12, with help from, and informed by, the detailed *BBFCInsight* facility.¹³⁰

It is undeniable that the Regent Street Cinema is of great historical significance. From a legal perspective the Cinema is significant too, specifically with it being the first UK cinema to screen an X-rated film in 1951. More broadly, the Cinema also provides an illuminating snapshot of how the law has interacted with cinematic space. As a case study it illustrates some of the difficulties occasioned by it being not purely a cinema, but a space that fulfilled many different roles at the Polytechnic; a space in which education and commerce were juxtaposed against the magical backdrop of film.

128 These include the Human Rights Act 1998, Public Order Act 1986, Sexual Offences Act 2003, Animal Welfare Act 2006 and Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2002.

129 See Guy Osborn 'Film classification', *Insight Encyclopedia Westlaw UK*, published online 3 July 2014. Available online: www.westlaw.co.uk [accessed 20 October 2014].

130 *BBFCInsight* is a short description of the issues found in a film, video or DVD work that can be found on the BBFC website, app, film posters, listings and on DVD packaging. See www.bbfc.co.uk/what-classification/what-bbfc-insight [accessed 8 October 2014].



Name	Address	Dates of existence	Name	Address	Dates of existence
71 ABC 1 & 2	135 Shaftesbury Avenue	1970–(2000)	76 Institute of Contemporary Arts Cinema	The Mall	1968–present
39 Academy 1-2-3	161–7 Oxford Street	1965–1986	60 Jacey Leicester Square	Queens House, Leicester Square	1970–1978
47 Astoria	157 Charing Cross Road	1927–1976	61 Jacey Trafalgar Square	4 Grand Buildings, Trafalgar Square	1970–1981
14 Berkeley Cinema	30 Tottenham Court Road	1948–(1976)	31 La Continentale Cinema	36 Tottenham Court Road	1948–1976
72 Bloomsbury Cinema renamed ABC Bloomsbury, then EMI International Film Theatre reopened as Gate Two	Brunswick Square	1972–(1974) 1974–(1978) 1978–(1985)	56 Leicester Square Theatre	39–41 Leicester Square	1968–(1988)
11 Cameo-Poly, then Classic Poly	307 Regent Street	1962–(1980)	57 London Pavilion	1 Piccadilly Circus	1934–1981
58 Cinecenta	215 Piccadilly	1972–2001	77 Lumiere Cinema	42–9 St Martin's Lane	1967–1997
73 Cinecenta 1.2.3.4.	11–18 Pantom Street	1969–(1990s)	78 National Film Theatre	Southbank	1951–(2007)
50 Cinephone Cinema	421 Oxford Street	1954–1973	48 Odeon Haymarket	50 Haymarket	1962–1999
74 Classic 1.2.3.4.	16 Oxford Street	1977–(1982)	10 Odeon Leicester Square	23–7 Leicester Square	1937–present
49 Classic Haymarket	63–5 Haymarket	1979–(2006)	66 Odeon Marble Arch	10 Edgware Road	1967–present
38 Classic Moulin	43–4 Great Windmill Street	1972–1990	79 Oscar 1 Cinema renamed Focus 1 Cinema, then Soho Cinema	6–10 Brewer Street	1972–(1974) 1974–1983
17 Classic Royal Cinema renamed Classic Leicester Square	35 Charing Cross Road	1972–(1979) 1979–(1983)	80 Oscar 2 & 3 renamed Focus 2 & 3, then Astral 1 & 2	5–7 Brewer Street	1973–(1974) 1974–2000
75 Columbia	93–107 Shaftesbury Avenue	1959–(1982)	65 Plaza	19 Lower Regent Street	1926–(2001)
52 Curzon Mayfair	38 Curzon Street	1966–present	81 Prince Charles	7 Leicester Place	1965–present
13 Empire	5–6 Leicester Square	1962–present	46 Rialto Theatre	3–4 Coventry Street	1954–1982
67 Empire 2	1–4 Leicester Square	1972–present	82 Scene 1.2.3.4.	Swiss Centre, 10 Wardour Street	1973–(1985)
55 Eros Cinema	7 Shaftesbury Avenue	1976–1985	51 Sherlock Holmes Centa 1 & 2	96–100 Baker Street	1978–(1983)
41 FilmCenta	105–7 Charing Cross Road	1977–1987	18 Studio 1.2.3.4.	225 Oxford Street	1977–1984
			69 Times Centa 1–2	Approach Road, Baker Street Station	1973–1999
			70 Warner Theatre	3 Cranbourn Street, Leicester Square	1938–(1981)

KEY ● Pre 1900 ● Pre WWI ● Pre WWII ● 1970s ● 2015

() indicates continuation as cinema under a different name

Map showing cinemas in the West End of London in the 1970s



*Now showing at 309 Regent Street
– Ghosts on ‘Our Magic Screen’
A screen play*

Joost Hunningher,
with contributions from Ronald Gow

1 INTERIOR. BOARD ROOM. 1

Typing. Close-up. Woman’s voice dictates:

WOMAN (Off Screen O.S.)

‘July 1981. The Minutes of the Governors of the Polytechnic... It is reported that Classic Cinemas Ltd have vacated the premises.’¹

Cut to PICTURE OF THE POLY CINEMA

DURING SLOW FADE TO BLACK

MAN (O.S.)

Pity, after 142 years, the theatre that has been ‘the home of dissolving views’ and ‘the birthplace of British Cinema’ now becomes - wait for it - a flexible teaching space. Make way for the lectern, the lecture chairs and an overhead projector!

(pause)

What’s on television tonight?

WOMAN (O.S.)

I never miss *Doctor Who*!
The traveller who can take you anywhere in time and space.

LAUGHTER

CUT.

¹ *Polytechnic of Central London Court of Governors*, meeting of 14 July 1980, UWA PCL/1/BG/1/17.

ORIGINS OF THE POLYTECHNIC CINEMA

From 1838–81, 309 Regent Street was home to the (Royal) Polytechnic Institution and then (1882–present) to the fusion of the Young Men’s Christian Institute, the Regent Street Polytechnic and the University of Westminster. The first institution was a Gallery of Sciences, aiming ‘to instruct and amuse the public’.² The second was an educational establishment, promoting knowledge, research and academic achievement. Although seemingly connected only by their having occupied the same building at different times, both institutions could claim to have made major contributions to the inspiration and development of British cinema. Staff in both had a passion for ‘the education of the eye’³ and promoted the use of ‘an optical theatre’⁴ to communicate scientific and human discoveries, ideas, drama and emotions. They encouraged research into the art of optics, projections, photography, lighting and visual presentations. It would prove fertile ground for the birthplace of British cinema and film education.

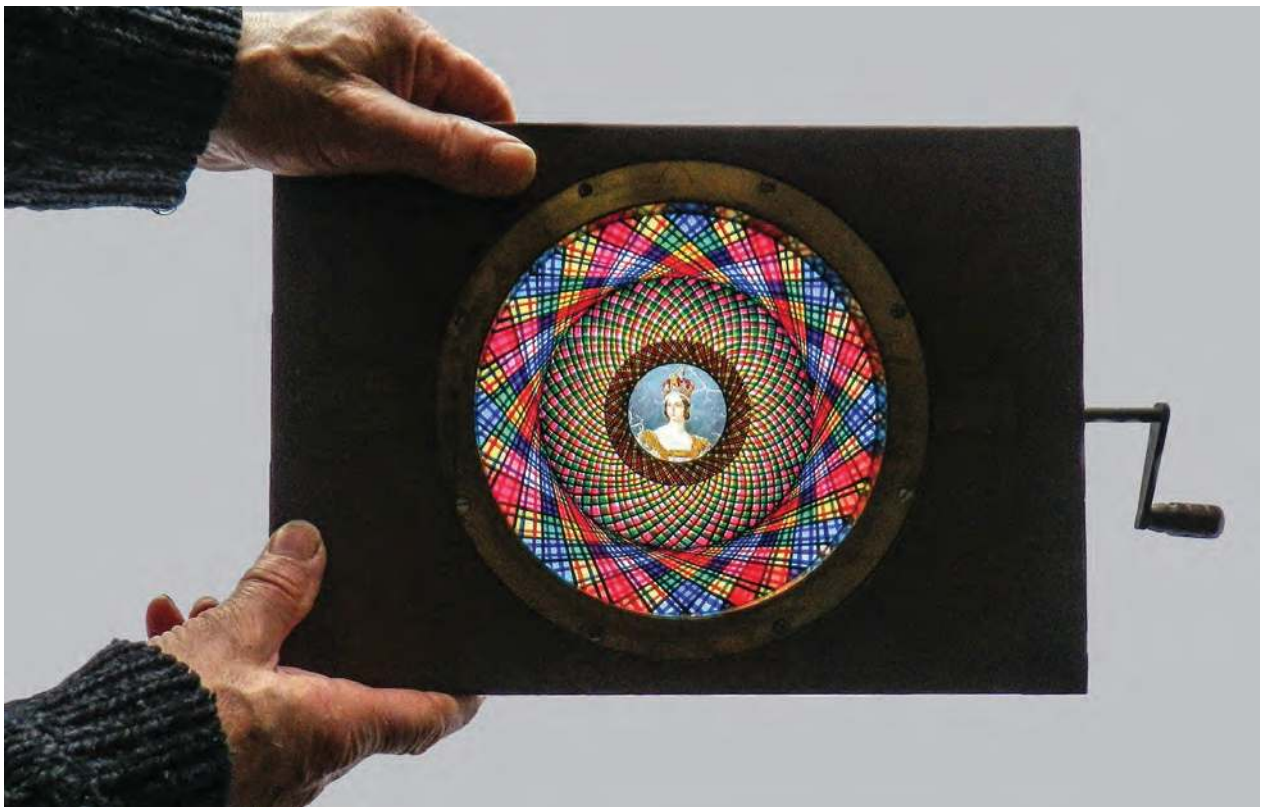
CAPTURING MOTION

The race to capture motion was on.

Enormous amounts of energy and innovation went into developing moving pictures. There were improvements to optics, magic lanterns, dissolving views, illumination sources, devices that gave the illusion of movement and the

Fig. 99

The handle on this Chromatropes turns glass discs in opposite directions to produce a vivid swirl of motion and colour around a stationary Queen Victoria.



discovery of photography.⁵ Examples include Joseph Plateau’s Phenakistoscope (1833), T.W. Naylor’s Phenakistoscope lantern (1843), W. E. Lincoln’s Zoetrope (1867), Eadweard Muybridge’s Zoöpraxiscope (1879) and Thomas Edison’s Kinetoscope (1894). As the British film pioneer Cecil Hepworth (1874–1953) later stated, there was no ‘father of film’ but rather:

[T]he spirit of the thing was in the air and had been for many years. [...] In stable parlance the cinematograph might be described as ‘by Magic Lantern out of Camera’, and the old Poly would certainly have been its birthplace. [...] [C]amera was certainly young but the Poly was the very home of the magic lanterns. [...] Some say that even now the air of the spot is filled with ghosts.⁶

CUT TO:

2 INT. GHOSTS’ DEN UNDER BOARD ROOM 309 Regent Street 2

Interior. Night. It is very dark.
A small closet door opens.
We float down some stairs.
We hear laughter but see no one.
A dim finger-shadow image of a
horse galloping on the dirty
wall.



HILL (O.S.)

Amazing! Did you learn this from Mr Muybridge?

TREWEY (O.S.)

No. This was long before Monsieur Muybridge.

HILL (O.S.)

But the image is too small for an audience?

TREWEY (O.S.)

Alors... Monsieur Hill... Bring us your audience.

GHOSTS

Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

!

CUT TO:

DISSOLVES AND MIRRORS

When the Polytechnic Institution opened in 1838, it had one small theatre and several lecture rooms. The visual effects that accompanied the lectures, like magic lantern presentations, were very popular. The Polytechnic encouraged improvements to the optical system and the artistic quality of the presentations and within ten years a new larger theatre that could hold 1,500 people had been built.

One of the advances was the introduction of the Polytechnic Projector, designed for large-format slides (8 × 5 in / 203 × 127 mm).⁷ The screen measured

- 2 *Royal Polytechnic Institution Programmes*, 1860s. British Library.
- 3 Brenda Weeden, *The Education of the Eye: History of the Royal Polytechnic Institution 1838–1881*, (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 2008).
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 43–50.
- 5 David Robinson, ‘Realising The Vision: 300 Years of Cinematography’ in Christopher Williams, (ed.), *Cinema: the Beginnings and the Future: Essays Marking the Centenary of the First Film Show Projected to a Paying Audience in Britain*, (London: University of Westminster, 1996), pp. 33–40.
- 6 Cecil Hepworth, *The Early Days of Film-making*, BBC, Third Programme, 3 August 1948, 22:40hrs. Published in *The Listener*, 19 August 1948, pp. 267–8. Edited version printed in the Lumière Festival Programme, 19–22 February 1996. UWA.
- 7 Mr Collins, an instrument maker who had a stall in the institution, was commissioned by the RPI directors to ‘build six large lanterns, with condensers of 10 inches diameter, four of which were fixed in a frame’. The results were exhibited at the RPI in 1846. Edmund Wilkie, letter in *The Magic Lantern Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 47, April 1893.

33 × 27 ft (10 × 8.2 m) and the throw to the screen from the projector was 50 ft (15.24 m). The projection box was spacious and could hold six Polytechnic Projectors. The light source came from brilliant hydro-oxygen limelight and could create an image over 30 ft (9.1 m). This allowed an image from one projector to be superimposed upon another, creating spectacular dissolving views. The images were skilfully hand-painted by master slide artists such as Henry Langdon Childe (1781–1874), William Robert Hill (1832–1901) and Edmund Wilkie (1857–1935). Each had his own secret techniques and preparation of a slide could take weeks. These artists also designed clever mechanical chroma-tropes (slides with dizzying kaleidoscopic mixtures of colour), moveable single panoramic slides (anticipating the pan shot in cinema) or single slipping slides (a kind of jump cut that takes dogs through hoops or turns acrobats upside down).

Wilkie described the work at the Polytechnic:

Dissolving views were first exhibited [...] by Messrs Childe and Hill, and under their direction four large lanterns having ten-inch condensers were constructed by Collins for the Polytechnic and exhibited with great success up to the closing of the Institution in 1881. [...] Mr W.R. Hill was the pupil of Mr Childe, but he excelled his master in every way; the very artistic pictures and remarkable mechanical precision which he produced for the Institution was greatly enjoyed by the public for about 30 years.

[...] Some effects were so elaborate that for their perfect exhibition six of these great lanterns were in use at one and the same time.⁸

Hill and Childe reputedly painted at least 1,000 large-format slides together.⁹ They also claimed to have discovered dissolving views. After 1866, Hill set up his own business. Judging from his brilliant dissolving views in *Alice's Adventures or More Wonders in Wonderland*, Hill had a rich, poetic and fanciful sensibility. Hill presented his slides in dissolving sequences, which allowed for a fluid narrative development and exciting disorientations and contrasts. This is illustrated, for example, in the slide that shows Alice caught in a hurricane of flying playing cards and the White Rabbit and other creatures all scurrying away to safety. Hill worked in miniature on glass slides measuring about 8 × 5 in (20 × 13 cm). As the *Daily Telegraph* reported, '*More Wonders in Wonderland*' are shown by ingeniously contrived pictorial effects and singularly deceptive optical illusions'.¹⁰

Alice's Adventures was produced and narrated by George Buckland. The *Morning Advertiser* reported: 'Mr. Buckland whose elocutionary powers are marvellous gave great satisfaction'.¹¹

The author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, 1832–1898), was 'a regular visitor to the Polytechnic' and had allowed Buckland to adapt the book as a dissolving view entertainment. He described it in his diary in 1876:

8 Ibid.

9 Weeden, p. 46.

10 'Opinions of the Press', *Programme for the Royal Polytechnic Institution*, No. 161, 14 February 1876, UWA RPI/3/14.

11 Ibid.

Fig. 100
Hill's brushwork on the Alice's flying cards lantern slide captures a strong sense of sudden motion and panic.



[The production] lasted about one and a quarter hours. A good deal of it was dissolving views, extracts from the story being read, or sung to Mr Boyd's music [...] but the latter part had a real scene and five performers (Alice, Queen, Knave, Hatter, Rabbit) who acted in dumb show, the speeches being read by Mr Buckland.¹²

The five performers mimed to Buckland's narrations and Mr W. Boyd's music and poems. This may sound cumbersome to us today but was necessary due to legal restrictions on theatrical licences, and was consistent with the convention of a narrator in magic lantern presentations. The *Daily News* wrote:

Mr G. Buckland's entertainment was thoroughly enjoyed by the crowds who filled the theatre. [...] It was a treat to hear the hearty laughter and applause with which it was received [...] Alice looks as if she had stepped out of the book, and is played by a pretty little girl, with exactly that demureness, politeness and grace, which are the chief charms of Mr Carroll's heroine. [...] Wonderland was of course the chief attraction, and met with much favour.¹³

Alice's Adventures was perfect material for the lanternist to interpret as entertainment and Hill's slides captured its world of magic and illusion: 'Mr Buckland's efforts being profusely supplemented with dissolving views and optical effects such as can hardly be seen with the like perfection elsewhere'.¹⁴

12 Charles Dodgson, *The Diaries of Lewis Carroll*, Roger Lancelyn Green, (ed.), Vol. 1 (London: Cassell & Co., 1953), 18 April 1876, p. 352.

13 'Opinions of the Press', UWA RPI/3/14.

14 *The Morning Post*, April 1876.

The *Alice* entertainment opened at the Polytechnic on 8 April 1876 and ran until 12 August that year. It was so popular that even the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII) and his family attended.¹⁵

3 INT. GHOSTS' DEN UNDER BOARD ROOM 3

Night. Dark.
We see an uncanny reflection on a piece of glass.

PROFESSOR PEPPER (O. S.)
Smoke and mirrors! I had the honour of
creating ghosts before being one!

LAUGHTER.

FADE OUT.

POLYTECHNIC GHOSTS

In 1847 John Henry Pepper (1821–1900) became a lecturer at the Royal Polytechnic Institution:

[His lectures] delighted both juvenile and adult audiences with his popular expositions of science, optical illusions and magic-lantern entertainments, which he delivered in a fluent, conversational manner.¹⁶

It is said that when Pepper was accorded the privilege of a royal performance, he prefaced his experiment with the announcement, 'The oxygen and the hydrogen will now have the honour of combining before Your Majesty'.¹⁷ In 1858, inventor Henry Dircks (1806–1873) developed the Dircksian Phantasmagoria. When Pepper saw the plans for Dircks's 'spectral Optical Illusion', he quickly perceived the potential of the apparatus and made some modifications that enabled it to be used at the Polytechnic. Pepper and Dircks made a joint application to patent the adapted apparatus, which was granted the following year.¹⁸ At first, Pepper was careful to acknowledge Dircks as inventor, but as the illusion grew in popularity, Dircks's name disappeared. Dircks complained about what he saw as unfair treatment for the rest of his life.¹⁹

What was to become known as 'Pepper's Ghost' was first exhibited as a Christmas attraction on 24 December 1862. Pepper had obtained permission to use Charles Dickens's tale *The Haunted Man* and added optics and reflected visual illusions to explore the psychological demons of Dickens's chemistry teacher. Pepper was able to show the demon ghost as a physical reality that apparently interacted with the live actor. As the narrator told the eerie story, the audience shivered with amazement. This clever illusion was achieved by angling a sheet of glass towards the audience and lighting the actor playing the ghost (who was hidden in a large space constructed below the stage (see also

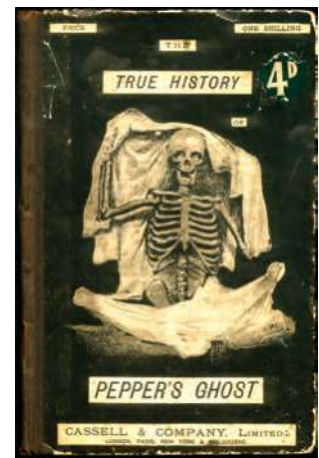


Fig. 101
The genesis of the Ghost illusion was the cause of much controversy between Henry Dircks and John Henry Pepper.

15 Weeden, p. 92.

16 Edwin A. Dawes, *The Great Illusionists* (Newton Abbot, UK: David & Charles, 1979), p. 88.

17 Ibid.

18 Weeden, pp. 73–4.

19 Henry Dircks, *The Ghost!* (London: Spon, 1863).



Fig. 102
A modern restaging of The Haunted Man showed the fluid cinematic quality of ghosts appearing on stage. The Pepper's Ghost technology is a precursor to many modern special effects in film and television.

Fig. 60, p. 67) when the ghost was required to appear. Unlike the audience, the actor playing the chemist on stage could not see the ghost, so stage positioning and movement had to be carefully rehearsed for the effect to work. With careful control of the lighting, the ghostly apparition could appear and vanish into thin air. On 7 December 2013, Richard Hand and Geraint D'Arcy recreated *The Haunted Man* in the Cinema at the University of Westminster complete with the creepy, elusive quality of the original show.

The Haunted Man anticipated the cinematic possibilities of Dickens's writing, which later inspired classic films such as *David Copperfield* (Cukor, 1935), *Great Expectations* (Lean, 1946) and *Oliver Twist* (Lean, 1948; Polanski, 2005). Pepper's Ghost remained a great attraction at the Royal Polytechnic Institution. Cecil Hepworth's father was a lecturer at the Polytechnic and wrote in *The Book of the Lantern* (1890): 'at the time of the "ghost" illusion, they came at the rate of two thousand per diem. There is no doubt whatever that the Polytechnic caused this form of amusement to become popular'.²⁰ Wilkie commented: 'It is ironic that a scientist should be remembered as an illusionist. [...] Others say it exactly suited the popular taste of the time'.²¹

Pepper went on to adapt his ghost in other lectures and dramas. For example, in 1863 he presented a 'Ghost Lecture' during which 'Professor Pepper will retire and appear on the stage as a GHOST 7 INCHES HIGH'.²² The

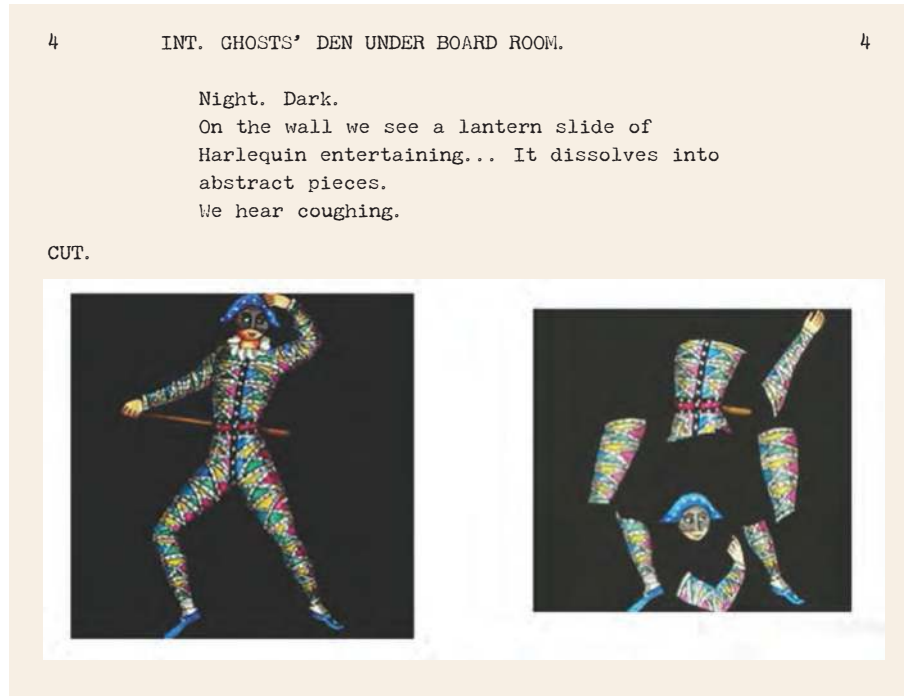
20 Thomas Cradock Hepworth, Preface, *The Book of the Lantern, Being a practical guide to the working of the optical (or magic) lantern* (London: Wyman & Sons, 1888), p. viii.

21 Edmund H. Wilkie, 'Professor Pepper A Memoir', *Optical Magic Lantern Journal and Photography*, No. 11, 1900, p. 72.

22 *Polytechnic Institution Programme*, January 1863 (Lester Smith Private Collection).

Christmas show of 1866 included a novel optical illusion of a 'DECAPITATED HEAD SPEAKING'. *The Times* reported:

To the right is the alchemist [sic], gorgeously attired, who performs certain incantations, at the end of which the head becomes brilliantly illuminated from a light from above, slowly opens its eyes and lips, and in a state of semi-animation, confesses it was alone in its guilt.²³



DISSOLVING VIEWS UNDER THE HAMMER

Much had changed at the Royal Polytechnic Institution by the late 1870s. The Institution was running at a loss: 'with capital reducing some £2,700 per annum, the auditors recommended closure at the earliest opportunity to avoid further liabilities'.²⁴ In July 1881, the directors came to the bleak conclusion that they should put the building up for auction. On 7 December it was bought by liquidators for £15,000 and subsequently purchased by the wealthy philanthropist Quintin Hogg (1845–1903) to house his Young Men's Christian Institute. The contents of the Institution began to be auctioned off on 28 February 1882. Hogg reported that the slide collection 'fetched enormous prices, something like £900 in all, so nobody got much of a bargain out of them, except the sellers'.²⁵ The famous diving bell from the Polytechnic's Great Hall of Manufactures fetched only £60.

In a fitting tribute to its former incarnation, Quintin Hogg's Polytechnic staged a revival performance of *Pepper's Ghost* in 1889 as part of its annual Industrial exhibition, which was held in the two weeks following Christmas.²⁶

Although it is not known if Hogg originally intended to retain the name

- 23 *The Times*, list in Opinions of the Press, On the Great Scientific Novelty Called 'The Decapitated Head Speaking', issued by the Royal Polytechnic Institution, 10 December 1866 (Lester Smith Private Collection).
- 24 Jeremy Brooker, *The Temple of Minerva, Magic and the Magic Lantern at the Royal Polytechnic Institution* (London: The Magic Lantern Society, 2013), p. 138.
- 25 *Home Tidings*, March 1882, p. 37; see also Weeden p. 190.
- 26 See Weeden, p. 104.

Polytechnic, the word remained carved on the façade of the building until 1910 and was so well established that the Young Men’s Christian Institute gradually became known as Polytechnic Young Men’s Christian Institute.²⁷ The theatre, now called ‘the Great Hall’,²⁸ became a multi-functional space for large gatherings and events. It was regularly used as a debating chamber for the Polytechnic Parliament.²⁹

‘WE PRAYED FOR LIGHT [...] AND GOD SENT US [...] LUMIÈRE’³⁰

Henry Hopwood described the advent of the Lumière brothers’ Cinématographe as ‘the turning point in the History of Living Pictures’:

This desirable consummation was attained, and to them must be attributed the credit of stimulating public interest to such a pitch as to lay a firm foundation for the commercial future of the cinematographic projection apparatus...The beauty of the Cinématographe resides as much in the simplicity as in the results obtained.³¹

The Société Anonyme des Plaques et Papiers Photographiques Antoine Lumière et ses Fils was a large photographic firm, established in Lyons, France by Antoine Lumière, and run by his sons Auguste (1862–1954) and Louis (1864–1948).³² The brothers had seen Edison’s Kinetoscope in 1894 and realised that without projection the experience was limited to one viewer. They set out to find a solution to enable auditorium viewing. Louis invented an intermittent mechanism that, for exposure and projecting purposes, was able to hold film stationary before advancing it to the next frame. It was cranked at fifteen frames per second. By early 1895 the Lumière brothers were producing a combined camera, printer and projector that used a special ‘Lumière Gauge’ strip of celluloid nitrate film.

PREMIÈRE ON REGENT STREET

Early in February 1896, Antoine Lumière came to London and signed an agreement to rent the Great Hall at the Polytechnic for three months, no doubt aware that this was the world-famous theatre that had shown W.R. Hill’s dissolving views and Professor Pepper’s Ghost.³³ The choice of a theatre in an educational institution, hired for a reasonable rent, was consistent with the Lumières’ cautious marketing approach (their first screening had been in a café in Paris, hired for thirty francs). The Polytechnic noted that:

For the next few months we have been obliged to ask our Parliamentarians to meet in the Marlborough Room. [...] [W]e have taken advantage of an opportunity to let our Great Hall for the next three months for the exhibition of a new invention, called the ‘Cinématographe’. This is practically an adaptation of the kinetoscope, but instead of looking through a pair of

27 See Elaine Penn, (ed.), *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit: The Legacy of Quintin Hogg and The Polytechnic, 1864–1992* (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 2013).

28 See p. ix for details of name changes. See also *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit*, pp. 78–9.

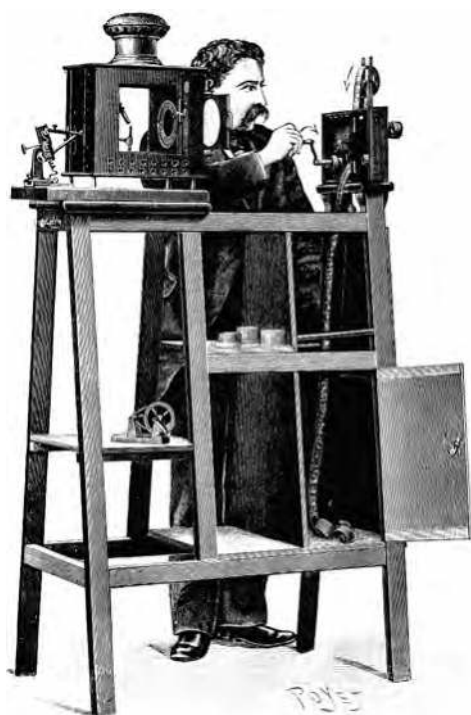
29 *Home Tidings*, October 1883.

30 Hepworth, *The Early Days of Film-making*.

31 Henry V. Hopwood, *Living Pictures: their history, photo-production and practical working* (London: The Optician & Photographic Trades Review, 1899), p. 94.

32 Only Eastman Kodak, founded in 1888 in Rochester, New York, was a bigger supplier of similar photographic products. In 1928 Antoine’s company was renamed Société Lumière and in 1962 the company was acquired by Ciba-Geigy, eventually relinquishing its corporate name in 1982 and becoming known as ILFORD France. (ILFORD 125, 1879–2004, www.ilfordphoto.com [accessed 4 June 2014].

33 Joost Hunnigher, ‘Première on Regent Street’, in Williams, *Cinema: the Beginnings and the Future*, pp. 41–54.



Figs. 103, 104

The Cinématographe machine could be used as both a camera and a projector. The film L'Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat/Arrival of a train at a country station (Lumière, 1897) generated many jokes about audiences dashing out of the theatre to avoid being run over. See also Fig. 10.

binoculars at the pictures, they are, by means of a powerful lantern, thrown on to a large screen, so that all may see at once.³⁴

Lumière invited his friend, the shadowgraphist and juggler, Félicien Trewéy (1848–1920), to manage the screenings of the films. Trewéy had experience with the Cinématographe, having appeared in three early films: *Assiettes tournantes* (see Fig. 9), *Chapeaux à Transformations* and *Une Partie d'écarté*. He was known in London for his act, 'Mons. Trewéy, The Fantaisiste, Humoristique in this Shadowgraphe Entertainment', which he had performed for two months in a variety show at the Alhambra, Leicester Square in 1888. His appearance 'on stage was prepossessing in the highest degree, being a man of splendid physique with a jovial smiling countenance'.³⁵

On 21 February 1896, fifty-four people paid one shilling, or, if they were 'Poly' members, six pence, to see the new Cinématographe in the Great Hall at the Polytechnic.³⁶ This was the first commercial cinema exhibition in Britain and arguably the start of the country's film craze.

The throw from the Cinématographe to the screen was 60 ft (18.28 m) and the image 6 x 4 ft 6 ins (1.8 x 1.4 m). The films varied in length from forty to fifty-nine seconds. The longest possible roll was 892 frames or 55 ft 9 ins (17 m). While the Polytechnic's electrician, Matt Raymond, changed the rolls of film, Francis Pochet, a lecturer at the Polytechnic, 'gave a descriptive commentary, and announced the titles: "The arrival of the train in a country station", "Baby's lunch", "The demolition of a wall", "Teasing the gardener", "A game of cards", "Surf boat leaving a harbour".³⁷ The programme of ten films lasted seventeen to twenty minutes.

34 *The Quintinian Monthly*, 4 March 1896.

35 Félicien Trewéy, *The Art of Shadowgraphy – How it is Done*, (London: Jordison & Co. Ltd, 1920). Available online: www.digital.slv.vic.gov.au/dtl_publish/pdf/marc/40/2394290.html [accessed 4 June 2014].

36 There has been some confusion about the location of the screening in the Polytechnic building as a result of the changing names of many of its spaces. Following the première on 21 February in the Great Hall, the Cinématographe moved upstairs to the Marlborough Hall. See also Fig. 59, p. 66.

37 Ernest Lindgren, 'Cinema Birthday', *The Times*, 20 February 1946.

Reviews of the event were generally positive. Anna de Bremont, writing in *St Paul’s Magazine*, claimed:

A distinctively representative Press and artistic gathering assembled to pass judgment on the new sensation, a judgment which was not only favourable, but enthusiastic. Mr Van de Weyde of the London photographic artists present declared it is so wonderful that it left him ‘breathless’ whilst Mr Downey pronounced it the most marvellous degree of perfection in the way of photography that art had heretofore attained. [...] Pictures are thrown on a screen through the medium of the ‘Cinematographe’ with a realism that baffles description. People move about, enter and disappear, gesticulate, laugh, smoke, eat, drink and perform the most ordinary actions with a fidelity to life that leads one to doubt the evidence of one’s senses.³⁸

The *Polytechnic Magazine* of 26 February 1896 reported the event as:

a special exhibition of a new invention by MM. Auguste and Louis Lumière – the Cinématographe. [...] For instance, a photograph of a railway station is shown, two or three seconds elapse and a train steams into the station and stops, the carriage opens, the people get out and there is the usual hurrying for a second or two, and then again the train moves off. The whole thing is realistic, and is, as a matter of fact, an actual photograph.³⁹

Fig. 105

The Cinématographe ran at the Polytechnic until 14 July 1896 and was regularly upgraded with new footage, such as the coronation of Nicholas II of Russia.



38 *St Paul’s Magazine*, 7 March 1896, p. 462. Cited in John Barnes, *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England 1894–1901*, Vol. 1, new edn. (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter, 1998), pp. 84–6.

39 *Polytechnic Magazine*, 26 February 1896, p. 107.



Fig. 106

Barque Sortant du Port/Boat Leaving the Port, (Lumière, 1897) is a 52-second shot of a boat with two men rowing out of the sheltered harbour of La Ciotat. Beyond the jetty the boat is suddenly caught broadside by a large swelling wave that lifts it high into the air. Fin. The fate of the boat is never made clear.

Jeremy Brooker wrote that the Cinématographe ‘could not have found a more appropriate home’ than the Polytechnic. He points to Trewey’s witty *coup de théâtre*:

There were [...] informal echoes of the ‘old Polytechnic’; Trewey, who operated the Cinématographe, was a stage magician and must surely have relished his appearance on the stage as the ghost. [...] In a theatrical gesture reminiscent of the dissolving view entertainments once given in the same hall, he even concludes his first presentation by raising the projection screen to reveal a banquet set up on the stage.⁴⁰

There were plenty of good reviews but some teething problems on press night led the *Photographer* to report that Trewey kept the press ‘cooling their heels’ for half an hour before the screening and when he did project, the movement was far too quick and the illumination dim. This ‘was doubtless due to the apparatus not being quite perfect’.⁴¹ Subsequently, Raymond was able to improve the image by increasing the power supply from ten amps to fifteen or even thirty. He also introduced a water condenser to concentrate the light from the scissor-pattern arc lamp. After that experience, ‘the only gentleman M. Trewey would trust with the equipment as well as the electrical arrangements was Mr Matt Raymond’.⁴²

The screenings on Regent Street were a great success.⁴³ However, the demand to see the films was so great that from 7 March 1896 Lumière also took a twenty-minute slot in a show at the 2,000-seat Empire Theatre of Varieties in Leicester Square. The compact and portable Cinématographe design made it possible to transfer the equipment between theatres. The matinées at the Polytechnic ran until July 1896 and the Lumière screenings continued at the Empire for a further eighteen months, until autumn 1897. The standard agreement for Cinématographe screenings was that box-office takings would be shared

⁴⁰ Brooker, p. 152.

⁴¹ *Photography*, 27 February 1896, p. 143.

⁴² Will Day, ‘The First Public Exhibitions of Kinematography’, *The Photographic Journal*, Vol. LXIV, October 1924, p. 492. Raymond moved to Crystal Palace with the Cinématographe screenings in July 1896 and then toured Europe. See also Hunningher, in Williams (ed.), p. 52.

⁴³ See Chapter 2, pp. 40–41.

fifty-fifty between the lessor and the Lumières. Accounts have not survived but given that in November 1896 people had to book ten weeks in advance for a seat at the Empire, we can be confident that the screenings were a financial success.⁴⁴

After Trewey stopped his Polytechnic matinées other filmmakers and producers took over the spot to showcase their films and machines.⁴⁵ These included Robert W. Paul (1869–1943), an agent for Thomas Edison, and William Walker (1858–1937), a Scottish filmmaker. Publicity for R.W. Paul films in the Great Hall claimed ‘the machine and pictures are the same as exhibited at Marlborough House before HRH the Prince of Wales and members of the Royal family’.⁴⁶ Paul was a leading British film pioneer and in 1895–6 made at least fourteen films, including *The Derby*, *Hyde Park Bicycling Scene* and *Royal Train*, most of which would have been included in his Polytechnic programme. Distributors also showed American films, including those from the Thomas Edison catalogue. In the 1898–9 season, William Walker showed his *Gathering of the Clans at Balmoral*, a film he had shown to Queen Victoria in October 1897, an occasion that was the making of his career:

[Walker] was well known for ensuring not only the quality but also the respectability of his performances with themed programmes of lantern slides and films dedicated to Dickens, Burns and the polar explorer Nansen.⁴⁷

5 INT. GHOSTS’ DEN UNDER BOARD ROOM 5

Night. It is very dark.

HILL (O.S.)

They are beautiful images but a bit hard on the eyes.

TREWEY (O.S.)

Is 1.8 x 1.4 m hard on the eyes?

HILL (O.S.)

It looked like 6 x 4 ft 6 in. Not like my 30 ft images.

TREWEY (O.S.)

Zut alors!
Next you English will sell 35 mm celluloid in 100 ft rolls!

HILL (O.S.)

Did you make a pretty penny with your screenings in London?

TREWEY (O.S.)

Monsieur Hill, ‘I am not a commercial man, but an artist and philosopher.’⁴⁸

GHOSTS

Ha ha ha ha.

CUT.

44 John Cher, ‘Who was the father of the Trade?’, *The Bioscope*, 17 October 1912, p. 187.

45 Brooker, p. 153.

46 *Polytechnic Magazine*, 7 October 1896, p. 146.

47 Brooker, p. 154.

48 Cher, p. 187.

RAISING THE UNION JACK

Among the films shown at the Cinema, two of the most successful were *Our Navy* and *Our Army* by Alfred West (1857–1937). First shown in 1899 as part of the recruitment drive for the Second Boer War, which began that year, the films ran continuously for fourteen years at the Cinema and arguably made the building one of the first examples of a permanent cinema. West advertised that ‘over two million people’ visited the Polytechnic to see his pictures.¹

Born in Gosport into a family of photographers, West joined the family business and with his brother George later established G. West and Son Photographers. Living all his life near Portsmouth, West developed an interest in photographing racing yachts in action and subsequently invented an instantaneous shutter on his camera to capture the boats at high speed. In 1897 he decided to move away from still photography and take up the new medium of cinematography. His lucky break came when he received a request to film the three-month royal cruise of HMS *Crescent* under the command of the Duke of York (later King George V).² The resulting film was shown to officers and crew, and then to Queen Victoria on 27 August 1898 at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight: ‘Her Majesty was most impressed and West’s future in cinematography was assured’.³

In 1902 West set up his own film company, Our Navy. His films depicted life in the Royal Navy and the British Army, filmed on location by West and his crew. For example, *Our Future Nelsons* showed men training and *Our Navy Today* showed naval warships. Between

1899 and 1913 West produced more than 500 films, a selection of which were scheduled for regular matinée performances in the Great Hall at the Polytechnic. Unlike other cinematographers, including the Lumière brothers three years earlier, West turned his short film clips into a narrative. The proscenium was draped with Union Jacks and the films were shown on a big screen with West himself acting as compere and lecturer. West used narration, music, film, magic lanterns, and a slide of the reigning monarch closed each performance. When Queen Victoria died in 1901:

[West] assembled a complete record of Queen Victoria’s funeral cortège as it passed from Osborne to Windsor, shown on the purple-draped screen of the Polytechnic while full effects were given by firing of minute guns, tolling of bells and soft playing by the orchestra and organ of funeral marches interspersed with suitable hymns.⁴

To give the films more gusto, sound effects were made backstage, with sheets of sandpaper rubbed together to create the illusion of waves and drums banged for gunfire. The films were initially shown twice a day at 3 pm and

MESSRS. WEST & SON, the well-known naval photographers, of Southsea, have taken our Great Hall from October 14th for a daily display of animated photographs,

entitled, “Our Navy,” illustrating a bluejacket’s career in the service, commencing from his entry on board a training ship, and other subjects of considerable interest. Messrs. West have shown this set of photographs throughout the provinces during the past year, and everywhere they have been received with the utmost enthusiasm. The displays will be given every afternoon at three, commencing next Saturday, and on Saturday and Wednesday evenings at eight, the prices of seats being, reserved and numbered, 4s.; unreserved, 3s., 2s., and 1s.

Figs. 107, 108, 109
The Polytechnic Magazine,
18 October 1899, encouraged its
readers to attend the *Our Navy*
films, describing them as
‘distinctly inspiring’. At one
time as many as 50 people
worked for Alfred West, but this
rare photograph (Fig. 108) shows
him behind the camera himself.





5 pm but were soon so popular that evening screenings were introduced as well.

Ever the showman, West's marketing campaigns were just as innovative as his films. One such example was his use of a sachet of seltzer powder labelled 'A splendid stimulant to be taken twice daily at 3 and 5'. When the sachet was opened it was actually a flyer for the films. West also sent sandwich board men out around London and built a 13 ft (4 m) model ship on a float that was driven round London advertising the films.

- 1 Catalogue of Life in Our Navy and Our Army, 1913, p. 1. Available online: www.ournavy.org.uk [accessed 20 October 2014].
- 2 Alfred J. West, *Sea Salts and Celluloid*, unpublished autobiography, 1936. Available online: www.ournavy.org.uk [accessed 20 October 2014].
- 3 Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan, *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema*, (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 149.
- 4 West.

Fig. 110

The Admiralty believed that the screenings at the Polytechnic acted 'as an incentive to the right class of recruit'.

Fig. 111

The Our Navy screenings were advertised with the tagline 'Pictures & Patriotism' – the Union flags being an echo of those hung at the RPI (see Fig. 23, page 29).



6 INT. GHOSTS' DEN UNDER BOARD ROOM. 6

Interior. Night. We see old files, a glimmer of light and a 35 mm can of nitrate film on a dusty table. Voices in a loud whisper.

WEST (O.S.)

Yes, two million people in fourteen years and then they say it is not safe. They ruined my business.

TREWEY (O.S.)

Well, mon ami, once at the Poly I saw flames on the screen! My lantern had caught fire and I had to put a blanket over it. You were lucky you still had the theatre!

WEST (O.S.)

Rescued by Trewey... It would have made a good film.

Ghosts laugh.

TREWEY (O.S.)

Sacré bleu! Entertaining... but we are not amused. Nitrate film - poof! It is no joking matter.

CUT.

A CINEMA WONDERLAND

As part of the Polytechnic's New Year festivities in 1914, the Cinema showed *A Cinema Wonderland*: 'in association with Pathé Frères [...] It comprises cinematograph performances of the latest and best films of a purely educational nature'.⁴⁹ Such programmes, showing 'the wonders and beauties of nature in all its phases and branches'⁵⁰ accompanied by a narrator, sound effects and live entertainment, were to continue throughout the 1920s and 30s. The lease insisted that tenants show films of 'a high class character and nothing objectionable'.⁵¹ Three seats were permanently reserved for representatives of the Governors, so that the quality of the films could be monitored. Quality varied during this period but any of Hepworth's ghosts lingering in the building would have been familiar with the mission to 'instruct and amuse the public'. For much of the First World War the cinema was let to Mr E. Ratisbone for the display of official French and British war films at a cost of £75 for the first month and £150 thereafter.⁵² Examples of these wartime documentary films included *The British Army Film* (1914), *The Battle of Ancre and the Advance of the Tanks* (Malins, 1917).⁵³ The Polytechnic Cinema also began to show Public Health Films, including *The End of The Road* (1920) which 'deals with the venereal disease problem, and shows the dangers that accrue from loose living'.⁵⁴ In June 1920, the Cinema hosted the first of several visual lectures by the Clean Milk Society on the subject of the government bill to amend the Milk and Dairies Act.⁵⁵



- 49 Programme for *A Cinema Wonderland*, 5–10 January 1914, UWA RSP/6/6/5.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Agreement for letting of the large hall for entertainment purposes, 14 July 1915, UWA RSP/2/2/7/14.
- 52 *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 28 September 1916, UWA RSP/FP.
- 53 The exhibition of wartime tank films was a great financial success, as the Polytechnic's share of the box-office receipts for the first week in January 1917 amounted to £110. *Polytechnic Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes*, meeting of 25 January 1917, UWA RSP/FP.
- 54 *Marlborough Express*, 21 December 1920, p. 4. See also *The Times*, 19 January 1920.
- 55 'A Better Milk Supply', *The Times*, 8 June 1920.
- 56 Adrian Brunel, *Nice Work: The Story of Thirty Years in British Film Production* (London: Forbes Robertston, 1948), p. 48.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Cecil M. Hepworth, *Came the Dawn: Memories of a Film Pioneer* (London: Phoenix House, 1951), p. 174.
- 60 Hepworth, *Came the Dawn*, p. 175.

Fig. 112

Thousands attended the Polytechnic's annual New Year celebrations on 2 January 1914, which included continuous screenings of 'humorous films illustrating current topics' in the Polytechnic Theatre.

STUDENTS OF THE SCREEN

In 1922 the Cinema's tenants, the Gar Plum Syndicate, appointed the director, actor and writer Adrian Brunel (1892–1958) to take charge of selecting programmes for the Polytechnic Cinema.⁵⁶ Writing later about his experiences, Brunel commented: 'I had mysteriously become a director of a subsidiary company that was responsible for booking a programme of revivals'.⁵⁷ The films he chose, such as Mary Pickford's *Daddy-Long-Legs* (Neilan, 1919), Lon Chaney's *The Miracle Man* (Loane Tucker, 1919) and Douglas Fairbanks's *The Mark of Zorro* (Niblo, 1920), provided 'an opportunity seldom afforded the general public of witnessing films of intrinsic merit whether new or old'.⁵⁸ Brunel also revived Charlie Chaplin's 1921 film *The Kid* and included some of his own film work in the programmes, such as *The Bump* (1920) and *Bookworms: A Comedy in Two Volumes* (1920), written by A.A. Milne. Brunel later wrote: 'In this way standards of taste and of executive ability may be raised and a critical tradition established'.⁵⁹

Figs. 113, 114

In the 1920s, the Polytechnic Cinema showed very few feature films such as *Civilization* (Fig. 113), preferring to concentrate instead on nature and travel films (Fig. 114).

Cecil Hepworth also had a kind of spiritual homecoming when *Alf's Button* (1930), his most 'completely successful picture',⁶⁰ was shown at the Cinema. Hepworth may well have heard his father, T.C. Hepworth, describe the Royal Polytechnic Institution's 1868 production of the Aladdin story, *The Wonderful Lamp*. *Alf's Button* starts with the revelation that Aladdin's lamp has been



lost in a rubbish heap since the days of the Arabian Nights. Now the British government is collecting waste brass to make buttons for soldiers' tunics. Magic things happen when Alf's button is rubbed.⁶¹

In terms of audience numbers, Brunel's programming was only partially successful. When he left the Polytechnic to make his own film, *The Man Without Desire* (1923), with Ivor Novello, he wrote:

Nothing could've made the old Polytechnic Cinema a real success in those days, for it was uncomfortable and unsuitable for showing films – it was an oblong lecture hall with bad acoustics and a gallery running all along, except on the platform. We recommended a reconstruction, which the proprietors said they could not afford, but which they adopted later.⁶²

Brunel was quite right to be concerned about the shabby state of the cinema. On 6 March 1924 the writer Arnold Bennett and his friend Duff Tayler came to the Polytechnic Cinema to see Fritz Lang's *Destiny* (1921).⁶³ Bennett wasn't impressed. He wrote in his diary:

German film last night at Polytechnic Cinema. One has the idea that all films are crowded. The balcony was not 15% full. Front row, where Duff Tayler and I were, 8s. 6d. for 1½ hours' entertainment. A gloomy place, with gloomy audience. No style or grace in them. All lower middle-class or nearly so. The hall tricked out with silly sort of an ikon, illuminated, of Death, to advertise or recall or illustrate the film. The orchestra most mediocre. Played all the time, and three audiences a day! Hell for the players I should think. Also the horrid habit of illustrating certain points musically or noisily. The clock must strike, etc. And a special *noise* as a sort of *leit motif* for death. Lastly three small common Oriental mats (probably made in England) laid in front of the screen on the stage to indicate that much of the story was Oriental. The captions, etc., were appalling, and ever misspelt.⁶⁴

After Brunel's period as programmer ended, the Cinema started to show work through the late 1920s and 30s that was innovative and even avant-garde. For example, the film *Thunder Over Mexico* (1933) opened at the Polytechnic on 26 February 1934. It ran for three weeks in a double bill with *The Affairs of Voltaire* (Adolfi, 1933). *Thunder Over Mexico* was the notorious version of *¡Que Viva México!*, a film started by the great Soviet director and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948), but taken over by the writer Upton Sinclair and edited by Sol Lesser. Eisenstein's groundbreaking *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) had been shown at the Film Society⁶⁵ in November 1929 at the Tivoli cinema in the Strand.

The fact that Brunel was on the Council of the Film Society shows that the professional world of cinema was still rather small in London in the 1920s and 30s and that the Polytechnic Cinema was closely integrated into it, as well as being part of the developing interest in film education.

61 Brunel, p. 87.

62 Ibid., p. 112.

63 Originally released as *Der Müde Tod*.

64 Arnold Bennett, *The Journals*, Frank Swinnerton, (ed.), 6 March 1924, (London: Penguin, 1971), pp. 475–6.

65 The London Film Society was Britain's first film society founded in 1925 at the New Gallery Kinema, 121–5 Regent Street. Its primary objective was to screen film with artistic merit that would not normally gain a commercial release. The Society closed in April 1939.

Fig. 115

The Polytechnic made many amateur films of its clubs, including the Harriers, but unfortunately no footage is known to have survived.



STARTING FILM EDUCATION

Although the Polytechnic could not necessarily take the credit for the quality of the film programming in its Cinema, it could claim success for the cinematic achievements of the staff and students delivering and taking courses in photography and, later, film.

This success was launched in spectacular manner by Charles Rosher (1885–1974). Rosher had studied photography at the Polytechnic in 1903 and proved to be so good that he was soon assisting Ernest Howard Farmer (1856–1944), Head of the Polytechnic School of Photography and a professional portrait photographer.

In 1908, Rosher headed for Hollywood and by 1919 was working for United Artists and had become Mary Pickford’s favourite cinematographer.⁶⁶ In 1926, Rosher and Karl Struss photographed F.W. Murnau’s *Sunrise* for which they were co-recipients of the first-ever Oscar for cinematography. Struss described their work:

Murnau left the whole visual side of the picture to us. [...] To achieve the effect of interior light coming out and the twilight, the soft light around it, we had to work without exposure meters; there weren’t any then! Today it’s all mechanized, then we were artists.⁶⁷

Rosher won a second cinematography Oscar for *The Yearling* (Brown, 1946).

An occasional lecturer who did much to promote film at the Polytechnic was Will Day (1873–1936). He knew most of the film pioneers and was an important collector of early cinema equipment. On 22 November 1926 he presented a lecture entitled *The Romance of the Kinema* in the Cinema in which he showed sixty-five items from his collection. These included slides using the large-format Polytechnic lantern. He also projected films on an original Lumière Cinématographe and showed original films from T.A. Edison, R.W. Paul and a film of *The Polytechnic Harriers* running in 1901.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Robert S. Birchard, ‘The Founding Fathers’, *American Cinematographer*, 85th Anniversary Edition, August 2004, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Charles Higham, *Hollywood Cameramen: Sources of Light*, (US: Indiana University Press, 1970), pp. 126–7.

⁶⁸ Programme for *The Romance of the Kinema*, Polytechnic Theatre, 22 November 1926, UWA RSP/6/6/2. Day was also involved in the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the Lumière Cinématographe held at the Polytechnic in 1936. See pp. 40–41 for details.

THE HOME OF FILMS OF REALITY

In April 1923 *The Times* announced that the Polytechnic Cinema would be a 'permanent home for travel films', starting with *The Wonderland of Big Game* (Dugmore-Harris, 1923). This silent film recorded Major Dugmore-Harris' East African expedition to film wild animals in their natural surroundings, with his own commentary, described by *The Times* as 'not too formal to be interesting'.¹ After a successful run of 280 showings in three months, it was followed by *Climbing Mount Everest* (1922), 'personally described' by its film-maker Captain Noel and accompanied by Tibetan music. The film ran until September 1923, when Captain Noel departed on the next Everest expedition.

These films set the tone for the rest of the 1920s at the Polytechnic. The 'travelogue'² feature and expedition film allowed the Polytechnic to claim it was meeting its educational commitments, while being popular enough to be commercially successful. Typical of this period was *Pearls and Savages* (Hurley, 1921) shown at the Polytechnic for 300 performances from November 1924 to January 1925. Coloured lantern slides, dissolving views and music were included alongside the film segments, with the filmmaker, Frank Hurley, providing a commentary.³ After its three month London run, the show toured Great Britain.

This approach very much followed in the footsteps of the illustrated lectures that were given at the Royal Polytechnic Institution. One of its successful exponents,

Arthur B. Malden, was formerly a Mathematics tutor at the Polytechnic Day School. His father Benjamin John Malden had been a lecturer, initially at the RPI and then as part of their 'New Travelling Branch' from 1872.⁴ Father and son often lectured together, before Arthur developed his own travelogue features, often based on trips he had taken with the Polytechnic Touring Association.⁵

Another successful filmmaker was Captain C.W.R. Knight, who presented his bird documentaries regularly at the Polytechnic in the 1920s and 30s. These films were accompanied not only by Captain Knight's 'enthusiastic, excitable commentaries',⁶ but also with appearances by his pet golden eagle, Mr Ramshaw. Films by the pioneering wildlife photographer Cherry Kearton were also popular attractions. When his *Dassan* feature on penguins was shown in 1930, the Polytechnic Theatre was proudly proclaiming itself 'The Home of Films of Reality'.

The 'reality' shown by some of these films was a mix of actuality and staged performance. For example, Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), shown at the Polytechnic in 1923, presented a romanticised version of the lives of an Inuit family in Canada. Although the main character Nanook (real name: Allakariallak) usually used a gun while hunting, Flaherty encouraged him to use a spear in the film. A similar ruse was used in his *The Man of Aran* (1934). Flaherty's filmmaking techniques were ground-breaking and these films earned the Polytechnic a reputation for 'creating a

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OUR MAGIC SCREEN
EXCLUSIVE PRESENTATION

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A FILM OF ACTUALITY

"RIA RAGO"

A True Story of the South Seas Re-enacted by a Native Cast on the same Spot where Seven years ago the Story really happened.

AND SUPPORTING PROGRAMME
DAILY AT (Not Continuous) 2.30, 5.30 & 8.30



POLYTECHNIC THEATRE REGENT STREET LONDON
"The Home of Films of Reality" STEPHEN LINDSAY

THE EXCLUSIVE PRESENTATION OF
"TEMBI"

A Story of the Jungle. Produced by CHERRY KEARTON

SOUVENIR PROGRAMME PRICE 6d.




Photo: Capt. C. W. R. Knight

At the Polytechnic Theatre,
REGENT STREET, W.1

DAILY AT 2.30, 6.0 and 8.30
CAPT. KNIGHT presents and describes
"The Filming of the Golden Eagle"

métier entirely of its own...[showing] the life of the humanities that dwell on the outer edges of modern imperialisms'.⁷

The 'real life drama' became a popular genre: films such as *Cape to Cairo* (Court Treatt, 1926) and *Ria Rago* (Buis, 1930) usually showing three times a day during their runs. On the strength of Flaherty's success the filmmakers Merian C. Cooper (1893–1973) and Ernest Schoedsack (1893–1979) obtained funding to make *Chang* (1927). Shot in Thailand, it shows the daily struggle of a poor farmer's family against the jungle and its wild animals. It boasted in its publicity of its 'stupendous' climax, an elephant stampede scene, and proved a hit in London with a run of nineteen consecutive weeks at the Polytechnic.

The first full-length 'talkie' was released in 1927 and, perhaps to compensate, productions at the Polytechnic became more elaborate. That year the Theatre sought permission for a ballet to accompany *Chang* while the 1928 screenings of *South*⁸ (Hurley, 1920) included a prologue performance by 'The 6 Poly girls'.⁹ The Polytechnic finally began using a 'talking machine' in 1930 but, up to the outbreak of the Second World War, continued to show films accompanied by lectures. Alongside these, the Polytechnic Cinema Theatre screened a mix of feature films and ethnographic presentations. Many of these were produced by missionary societies, such as Father Bernard Hubbard's *Aniakcbak*¹⁰ (1933). These reflected the programming decisions of manager Arthur Leslie, a member of the

Catholic Film Society and a proponent of the 'Clean Film Movement'.¹¹

Unlike other West End cinemas, the films at the Polytechnic were screened at fixed times, rather than on a loop. Souvenir programmes were also available, which mention accompanying books on sale in the auditorium. Throughout this period, the theatre was also used for talks by public figures such as the scout leader Lord Baden-Powell (1857–1941) and conservationist Grey Owl, Archibald Belaney (1888–1938) as well as for occasional theatrical productions.

1 *The Times*, 11 April 1923.

2 Kevin Brownlow suggests the word 'travelogue' was a necessary adaptation of the word 'monologue'. The term 'documentary' had not been coined. *The War, the West & the Wilderness* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979), p. 418.

3 Robert Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity* (London: Anthem Press, 2013), p. 203.

4 Lester Smith, 'Benjamin John Malden (1838–1933): A prominent lecturer of the Royal Polytechnic', *The Magic Lantern Society Newsletter*, No. 116, June 2014.

5 See Neil Matthews, 'From Philanthropy to Commerce: the Polytechnic Touring Association', in *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit*, pp. 203–37.

6 www.esmondknight.org.uk/captainknight.htm [accessed 20 October 2014].

7 Hay Chow, 'London and The Negro Film', *Close Up*, Vol. 5, No. 2, August 1929.

8 Also known as *Endurance*.

9 See pp. 54–5 for more details on Sound at the Cinema.

10 Also known as *Aniakcbak die Hölle auf Erden* or *The Story of Hell on Earth*.

11 *Catholic Herald*, 15 November 1935, p. 16.

PROGRAMME		Approximate Times of showing.		
1. Polytechnic News	...	2.30	5.30	8.30
2. Mickey Mouse	...	2.35	5.35	8.35
3. Interest	...	2.45	5.45	8.45
4. Silly Symphony	...	3.15	6.15	9.15
5. CLIMBING MOUNT EVEREST	...	3.25	6.25	9.25
6. Samarang	...	4.5	7.5	10.5

The Management reserve the right to make any alteration in the Programme that may be necessary.

Figs. 116, 117, 118

The Polytechnic cinema showed a range of travel, nature and documentary films. Souvenir programmes and books by the director were often available to purchase in the foyer.

Figs. 119, 120

Unlike other cinemas in the 1920s, the Polytechnic showed films at set-times. The Programme also included news, cartoons and shorter features.



In 1933 the British Kinematograph Society approached ‘the Director of Education [Douglas Humphrey] at the London Polytechnic to explore the possibilities of arranging a course of instruction to suit the requirements of the industry’.⁶⁹ They felt that:

In the past, and to a certain extent in the present, the technical side of the film industry has suffered from too great a specialisation of its workers. ... Strict departmentalisation is very good for the department but may be, and often is, very bad for the production of the artistic unity of a film.⁷⁰

The Polytechnic School of Kinematography was established. Three years later it helped organise the Lumière festival celebrations.

BOMBS OVER LONDON

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the government temporarily closed all cinemas but by 1940 the Polytechnic Theatre had re-opened, showing contemporary and second-run releases of mainstream fiction films, including Powell and Pressburger’s *Contraband* (1940). The script had all the appropriate ingredients for the time: goods prohibited by law, illegal, illicit and foreign:

The anti-climax to the story was a shoot-out in [the Patriotic Bust Company’s] warehouse stacked with ghostly white plaster busts of Neville Chamberlain, bullets shattering his sad, drooping moustaches.⁷¹

The war brought out the best in Powell and Pressburger. *Contraband* was just an appetiser for later films such as *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946).



Fig. 121
In 1939 kinematography courses were advertised prominently in the Regent Street windows of the Polytechnic.

69 Instruction in Cinematography, *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 2, No. 7, Autumn 1933, p. 94.

70 Ibid.

71 Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 339.



Fig. 122
As well as overseeing the Classic chain, Sir Albert Clavering was a member of the London County Council in the 1930s.

72 Although their lease did not expire until 25 March 1942, Specterman and Monument Films gave notice in July 1941 and the same month Rialto applied to the Polytechnic's Board of Governors to take over the tenancy. *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 14 July 1941, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/4; *Lease of the Polytechnic Theatre*, 309 Regent Street from Sir J.E.K. Studd and Sir Malcolm Hogg to Rialto Cinemas Ltd, 3 December 1941, UWA RSP/2/2/7/9.

73 Clavering was very patriotic and anti-revolutionary and proved to be a pivotal go-between for the British Government and the film distribution trade. In the 1930s he became Director of Propaganda at the Conservative Party's central office and was rewarded with a knighthood in 1935. William D. Rubinstein, Michael Jolles and Hilary Rubinstein, *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp. 155–6.

74 John Richards, *Dunkirk Revisited*, (UK: John Richards, 2008), p. 6.

75 Mrs Barrs Davies, quoted in the *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 21 July 1947, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/4.

76 *Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes*, meeting of 17 January 1944, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/4.

77 *The Times*, 29 August 1949.

7 EXT. 309 REGENT STREET. 10 MAY 1941. 7

Night.

Barrage balloons are tethered overhead, protecting Broadcasting House, All Souls Church, the Polytechnic. Wail of air raid sirens.

Opposite - the Queen's Hall is lit up by a direct hit from an incendiary bomb. The building goes up in flames. It could easily have been the Polytechnic.

CUT.

In August 1941 Rialto Cinemas Ltd took over the tenancy of the Polytechnic Cinema, renaming it the Cameo News Theatre, the seventh in their chain of newsreel cinemas.⁷² The company director of Rialto Cinemas Ltd was Sir Albert Clavering (1887–1972). He had been a pioneer in the early cinema exhibition business; for example, in 1922 he bought the British rights to Charlie Chaplin's *The Idle Class* for £15,000.⁷³ To meet public demand for information about the war, the Cameo News Theatre showed an endless run of news and cartoons that was to continue throughout the conflict:

The News programme started with the previous Sunday's National Day of Prayer (from just down the road at Westminster Abbey). Then there were views of Rheims and other bombed French cities. Armament production was shown next, then the embarkation of wounded troops from a French port. The final item showed German prisoners of war looking suitably disconsolate and embarrassed. There was nothing about the evacuation of the BEF from France.⁷⁴

THE GOVERNORS EXPRESS CONCERN

After 1945, Clavering continued the mix of news, cartoons, travel and sport at the Cameo-Poly but began to introduce more exotic pieces, such as Margherita Stanley, dressed in a skimpy bra top and tiered skirt dancing in a Spanish courtyard. He also applied to the Polytechnic's Governors for permission to continue the wartime practice of opening on Sundays. Despite concerns expressed by certain of its members about 'the type of performance given by the present Licensee', the governing body agreed.⁷⁵ The Governors did, however, ask Clavering to change the programming and return to what:

prior to the war was the practice of the tenants to show travel, nature and other films of an educational character. [...] The Committee considered that steps should be taken to revert to this type of programme and the Clerk was instructed to place their wishes before Sir Albert Clavering.⁷⁶

Clavering responded positively and proposed programming foreign films. An announcement in *The Times* stated that the Cameo-Poly theatre would be 'a shop window for continental films of recognised merit'.⁷⁷

THE FIRST FOREIGN ART FILMS

The showing of foreign films in the Polytechnic Cinema was inaugurated on 8 September 1949 with a première of a new French film, *Le Secret de Mayerling* (Delannoy, 1949), in the presence of the French Ambassador, René Massigli. Its success was noted by the Polytechnic Governors⁷⁸ and set the tone for the programming for the next twenty years. Other Cameo-Poly premières included *Un Ami Viendra Ce Soir* (Bernard, 1946), *Les Amants de Verone* (Cayatte, 1949), *Une Si Jolie Petite Plage* (Allégret, 1949) and Jacques Tati's *Jour de Fête* (1949). *Jour de Fête*'s British opening at the Cameo-Poly was particularly successful: 'not until after its London première, when it got good reviews and went on general release, did the French industry sit up and take notice'.⁷⁹ Tati would remain a favourite with British audiences. His 1958 film *Mon Oncle* also premièred at the Cameo-Poly and was 'the biggest foreign-language film' of that year.⁸⁰

Another French success came with the film of Colette's novella *Gigi*, the story of a girl groomed and brought up by two elderly sisters to become a prostitute. Made in 1949, with Danièle Delorme playing the title role, it had a female director, Jacqueline Audry, which was highly unusual for the time. Audry's next film, also from a Colette story, was *l'Ingénue Libertine*⁸¹ (1950).

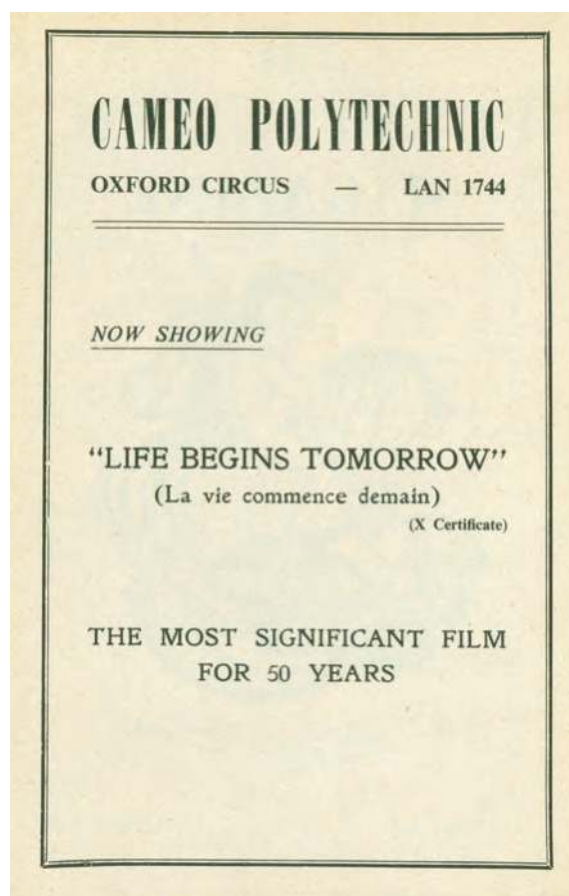


Fig. 123
Polytechnic student magazines from the 1950s regularly carried advertisements for the Cameo-Polytechnic's more avant-garde screenings. See also Fig. 87.

- 78 Polytechnic Governing Body Minutes, meeting of 17 October 1949, UWA RSP/1/BG/1/5.
- 79 Jill Reading, *Dual Format Edition press release for Jour de Fête, a film by Jacques Tati* (UK: BFI Press Office, September 2012). Available online: www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-dvd-press-release-jour-de-fete-2012-09-19.pdf [accessed 16 June 2014].
- 80 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'The Reception of the Nouvelle Vague in Britain' in Lucy Mazdon and Catherine Wheatley, (eds.), *Je t'aime... moi non plus: Franco-British cinematic relations* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 117–26.
- 81 Originally released as *Minne L'Ingénue*.

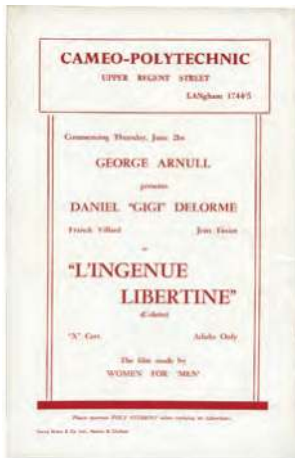


Fig. 124
In 1951 *The Spectator* reviewed this film with some frustration, describing how ‘at all crucial moments the censor intervenes, breaking the sequence of events at the first sign of a bedpost’.



Fig. 125
Hildegard Neff's nude scene in The Sinner was the first such scene in German film history and caused an international sensation.

This also opened at the Cameo-Poly with the provocative tagline ‘The film made by women for men’.⁸² On the handbill, ‘Daniel [sic] “Gigi” Delorme’ has top billing. The audience’s expectations of her role were clearly used to promote the film, as were two new text features: ‘X Cert.’ and ‘Adults Only’. The X certificate (‘suitable for those aged 16 and older’) was introduced by the BBFC in 1951.⁸³ The Cameo-Poly took immediate advantage of the new certification and screened the first ever X-rated film in the UK in January 1951, *Life Begins Tomorrow/La Vie Commence Demain* (Védres, 1950). French films and the new X rating were to be irrevocably linked in the public’s mind.

In 1952, the film critic Dilys Powell wrote in her column in *The Times*:

The X certificate does [...] deny you the privilege of taking your little girl to see a young man in *Quo Vadis* being crucified and then set alight. On the other hand, without the X certificate you would not be able to see *La Ronde*; you can’t make this witty and elegant film suitable for infants by hacking bits out of it.⁸⁴

If the X certificate recognised adult subjects and adult comment, so did film distributors and exhibitors. The Cameo-Poly also exploited the perceived notoriety of the X rating, as the front-of-house publicity for the German film *Die Sünderin* (Forst, 1951) demonstrated. The billboard was surrounded by neon tubes and featured a head-and-shoulders cut out of the leading actress, with her surname – Neff – heading the display. Both the actress and the film were deemed ‘The Sensation of the Year!’ Below, on the steps of the entrance to the cinema foyer, was a life-size cut out of Hildegard Neff.⁸⁵

82 Advertisement for *L’Ingénue Libertine* in *The Poly Student*, Festival Edition, 1951, UWA RSP/8/1/5/9.

83 See Chapter 3, pp. 85–100 for details.

84 Christopher Cook, (ed.), *The Dilys Powell Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 400.

85 *Picture House: Magazine of the Cinema Theatre Association*, Summer 1996, p. 3.



The film was directed by Willi Forst and starred Gustav Frölich. Both had been leading names in German cinema since the 1930s but the sales pitch concentrated on Neff and the X-rated British certificate. The ‘assets’ of female actresses were regularly used to promote continental films at the Cameo-Poly, as can be seen on contemporary covers of the *Continental Film Review*.

In the July 1956 edition of *Continental Film Review*, the Cameo-Poly promoted its recent success:

Only three films in the past 38 weeks [...] one third of a million people have seen *French Can-Can*, *The Fiends* and *The Light Across the Street* at the Cameo Poly which has only 600 seats [...] The Cameo Poly is confident of maintaining its pre-eminence in offering a choice of entertainment that is Adult, Intelligent, Sophisticated – and in good taste.⁸⁶

What were these ‘Adult, Intelligent, Sophisticated’ films? *French Can-Can* (Renoir, 1954) is the story of the Moulin Rouge in Paris ‘during the *belle époque* by a man whose background is a double guarantee of good taste’.⁸⁷ The man of good taste was the French filmmaker Jean Renoir. André Bazin (1918–1958) praises the film for ‘the internal density of [its] visual universe and [being] a pictorial masterpiece’.⁸⁸ *The Fiends* was the English title of Henri-Georges Clouzot’s *Les Diaboliques* (1955), which had been a huge success in France. A British reviewer at the time described it as ‘a suspenseful but sordid slice of French life’.⁸⁹ All this was good material to suggest it would draw crowds, which it did. Tony Tenser’s advertising campaign for Miracle Films’ *The Light Across the Street*⁹⁰ (Lacombe, 1955) proved highly successful. The film starred Brigitte Bardot and guaranteed Tenser immortality as the man who ‘launched a million tabloid headlines’. Tenser thought up her famous tag-line: ‘sex kitten’.⁹¹

Figs. 126, 127, 128

The Continental Film Review ran from 1952 to 1984 (later titled *Continental Film and Video Review*). It portrayed itself as a serious film journal but devoted a number of pages in each issue to semi-nude starlets.

86 *Continental Film Review*, July 1956.

87 André Bazin and François Truffaut, (eds.), *Jean Renoir*, (London: W.H. Allen, 1974), p. 129.

88 Bazin, p. 129. Bazin founded *Cahiers du Cinéma* and was a highly influential film critic and theorist.

89 Lucy Mazdon and Catherine Wheatley, *French Film in Britain: Sex, Art and Cinephilia*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), p. 97.

90 Originally released as *La Lumière d'en face*.

91 John Hamilton, *Beasts in the Cellar: The Exploitation Film Career of Tony Tenser*, (Godalming, UK: Fab Press, 2005), p. 9.

8 INT. GHOSTS’ DEN UNDER BOARD ROOM. 8

Interior. Night. We can just hear a sound track from a French film.

TENSER (O.S.)

You know, I came up with the tagline ‘sex kitten’ for BB.

GHOSTS (O.S.) (In astonishment)

No! Tell us more!

TENSER (O.S.)

I saw the film, went through the stills and blurbs and came up with the phrase ‘sex kitten’. That really took off...⁹² and ‘launched a million tabloid headlines’.⁹³

Laughter.

FADE.

THE OLD VIC OF THE CINEMA

The Cameo-Poly attracted its intelligent, sophisticated audience with an article claiming:

The Cameo-Poly is the Old Vic of the cinema. We have a specialised audience who are selective [...] they want to see only the best [...] The audience [...] is an intellectual one [...] they come because they want to see the film, not just to have an evening out.⁹⁴

In 1954 Clavering set up Gala-Cameo-Poly Film Distributors Ltd with Kenneth Rive (1919–2003), head of Gala Film Distributors, who was a ‘leading influence in the development of post-war art house cinema’.⁹⁵ The collaboration helped both companies to establish a more powerful distribution network. The UK premières of masterpieces such as Fellini’s *8½* (1963), Bergman’s *Through a Glass Darkly*⁹⁶ (1961), Resnais’ *L’Année Dernière à Marienbad* (1961), Antonioni’s *The Eclipse*⁹⁷ (1962) and Welles’s *The Trial* (1962) were shown at the Cameo-Poly and distributed by Gala-Cameo-Poly Film. These films did not exploit audiences with sexually titillating scenes and were recognised for being ‘Adult, Intelligent, Sophisticated and in good taste’.⁹⁸ Audiences saw them as serious and challenging films and an artistic probing of the modern human condition.

While the distributors generally appeared to select a high standard of films, the advertising began to suggest a change of direction. Although the Cameo-Poly advertised itself comparatively soberly as ‘INTERNATIONALLY speaking – Britain’s Most Distinguished Cinema’,⁹⁹ the advertisement it ran for the 1962 UK première of *The Eclipse* on the cover of *Continental Film Review* showed the leading actress, Monica Vitti, lying with a breast exposed and Alain Delon leaning over to kiss her (see Fig. 129).

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 ‘Top of the Pops at the Cameo-Poly’, *The Polygen*, 28 February 1964, UWA RSP/8/1/10/3. See p. 91.

95 Obituary for Kenneth Rive, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 January 2003.

96 Originally released as *Såsom i en Spegel*.

97 Originally released as *L’Eclisse*.

98 *Continental Film Review*, July 1956.

99 Advertisement from *Films and Filming* magazine, May 1963, UWA RSP/6/6/20.



Fig. 129

The *Eclipse* was distributed by Gala films, with whom Cameo entered a distribution agreement in 1954.

Fig. 130

Polanski's *Cul-de-Sac* was produced by Tony Tenser and Michael Klinger. The two men had set up the private members only Compton Cinema Club in 1960 and from there had expanded into distribution and production.

In 1960 Clavering formed a partnership with Tony Tenser (1920–2007) and Michael Klinger (1921–1989) to set up Compton-Cameo Films. Tenser had been associated with British sex and horror films in the 1950s. He was an excellent publicist and notorious for proclaiming, ‘I would rather be ashamed of a film that was making money than proud of a film that was losing it’.¹⁰⁰ The company did well but Clavering soon left the partnership, selling his shares to Tenser.

The 19 November 1964 issue of *Kine Weekly* proclaimed: ‘The fourth (only the “fourth”) anniversary of Compton-Cameo films and it is an astonishing story of progress and expansion in the film industry of the sixties’.¹⁰¹ To gain some prestige and respectability within the film industry, Tenser and Klinger agreed to executive-produce Roman Polanski’s first two English language films, *Repulsion* (1965) and *Cul-de-Sac* (1966).

Cul-de-Sac, featuring Donald Pleasence and Françoise Dorléac, had its London première at the Cameo-Poly on 2 June 1966. The film’s claustrophobia is reminiscent of the absurdist character relationships of Sartre’s *No Exit* or Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. The film won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival but contrary to the impression given on the poster – which claimed ‘6th Great Week’ and showed queues outside the Cameo-Poly: ‘the box-office returns started off slowly and continued in the same manner’.¹⁰² The film marked the end of the ‘astonishing story of progress and expansion’ for Compton-Cameo films. After *Cul-de-Sac*, Klinger and Tenser separated. The assets of Compton-Cameo Films were divided and sold off. In 1967, the lease to the Cameo-Poly was sold to Classic Cinemas Ltd.¹⁰³

100 Obituary for Tony Tenser, *The Independent*, 20 December 2007.

101 Hamilton, p. 49.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

103 The cinema chain was not renamed, however, until 1972. See p. ix for details.

104 Vincent Porter, ‘Film Education During the 1970s’, in Sue Harper and Justin Smith (eds.), *British Film Culture in the 1970s: the Boundaries of Pleasure* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), Chapter 5, p. 62.

FURTHER FILM EDUCATION BY DEGREES

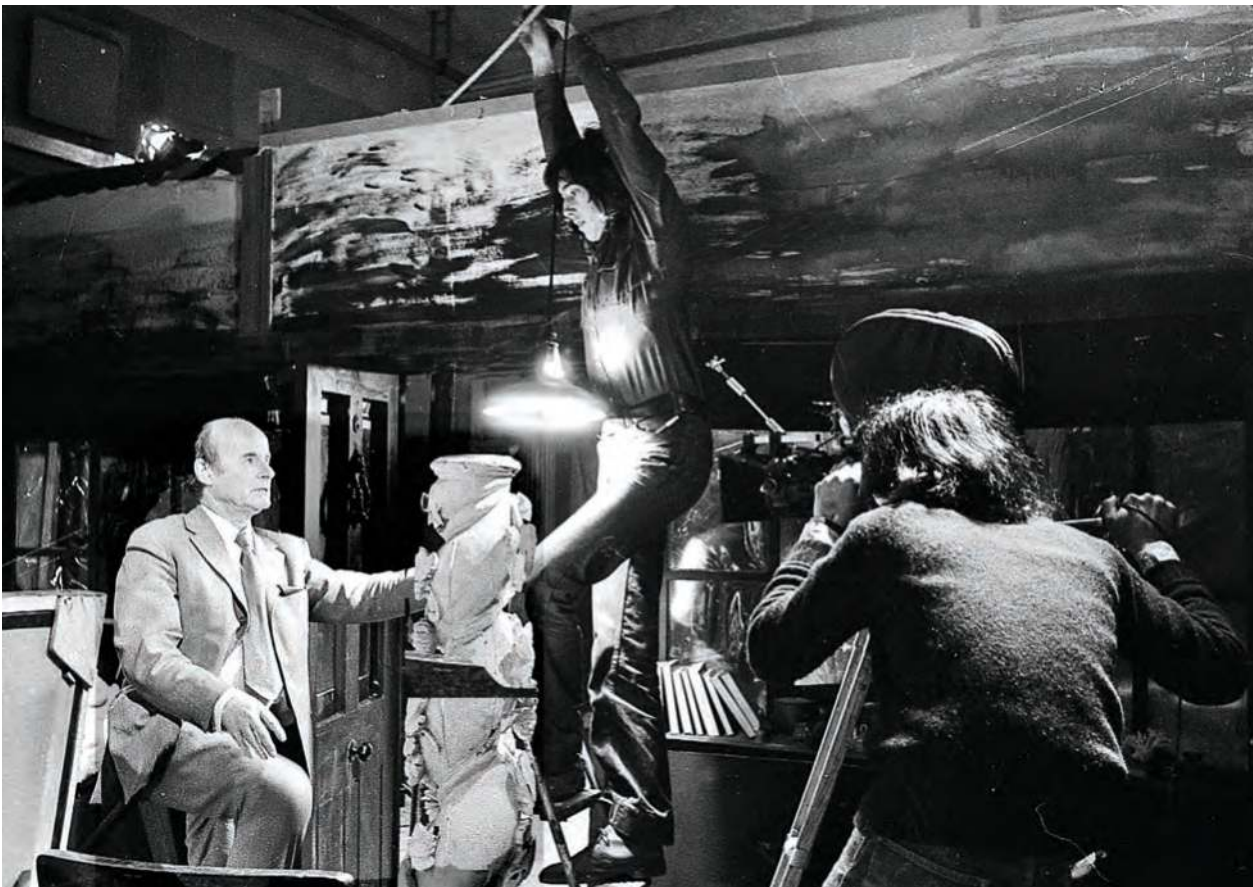
In 1970 the Regent Street Polytechnic was redesignated the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL). The film course on the Polytechnic Diploma in Photography had already moved from Regent Street to premises in Balderton Street. Following in the footsteps of the 1933 School of Kinematography, the course developed students’ understanding of the practice and theory of film, explored the creative filmmaking process and promoted awareness of industry requirements for skilled professionals. Vincent Porter led the film teaching at the time and wrote later:

The 1970s was a seminal decade for film education. Initially, it appeared to be struggling to survive, but by its end, film education was flourishing in both schools and in higher education. It developed along three paths: filmmaking as a profession, film as a medium of personal expression and the study of film as a medium of communication.¹⁰⁴

Fig. 131

Erwin Hillier teaching students lighting in the Balderton Street studio. He called it ‘painting with light’.

Erwin Hillier (1911–2005) was a member of the film staff in the 1970s. He was a cinematographer who had worked with Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock and had shot Powell and Pressburger’s *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) and *I Know*



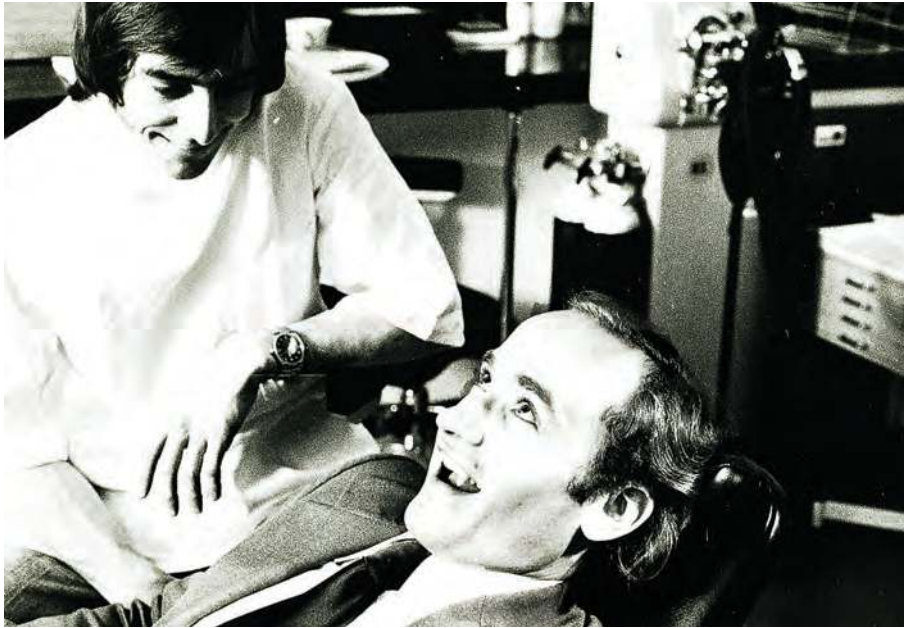


Fig. 132

Dracula is Not Dead – directed by Robert Smith produced by Iain Cassie – was one of the many PCL student films produced during the 1970s.

Where I'm Going (1945). Hillier contributed a wealth of experience and encouraged a rich visual style, incorporating many small practical lamps as light sources. He organised frequent visits to film studios and laboratories and students were often flattered by the VIP treatment they received on those occasions. Hillier also stimulated great interest and support from the film industry, which lent or gave equipment or sets from studio design departments.

Not all the Polytechnic staff came from industry. Some had university backgrounds. Head of School, Margaret Harker (1920–2013) soon gave them the task of drafting submissions to the new Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). Led by David Faddy, PCL offered the first practical and theoretical film and photography arts course in the UK to be validated by the CNAA in 1970. By 1974, Porter had set up a two-year part-time evening course that led to a CNAA Postgraduate Diploma in Film Studies. This diploma was subsequently revalidated as a Master's degree in 1981.

One spring day in 1971, former Poly student, Charles Rosher, arrived without warning at Balderton Street. Porter recalled:

A sprightly old man in his eighties arriving unannounced, and expressing a lively interest in the filmmaking equipment which we were using in Balderton Street at that time, which was, of course, 16 mm Arriflexes, blimped when shooting sound, and Nagra 1/4 inch tape recorders.

I remember sitting with Rosher in the dubbing theatre and showing him a recent student film shot on 16 mm Ektachrome, *Light* by David Smith.¹⁰⁵

Rosher gave the film a generous critique and also described working with Mary Pickford. There was talk of Rosher leading a seminar on cinematography but, sadly, this was never realised.

105 Vincent Porter, e-mail sent to Joost Hunnigher, 11 May 2014.

In 1978, the PCL film course strengthened its international contacts by joining the Centre International de Liaison des Ecoles de Cinéma et de Télévision (CILECT), which was founded in Cannes in 1955 and provided a training forum for film students around the world.

PCL film students also had the opportunity to make a short film for BBC2. Titled *Release*, it starred a new young actress called Joanna Lumley. The Royal College of Art and the London Film School also produced a version of the same script. The final programme, produced by Gavin Millar, revealed interesting variations in interpretation and style.¹⁰⁶

THE CLASSIC POLY CINEMA: GROPING IN THE DARK

In 1967 Classic Cinemas Ltd had eighty-six screens across the UK.¹⁰⁷ The programming at the Classic Poly over the next few years was a mix of repertory titles, ranging from the X-rated *La Fiancée du Pirate* (Kaplan, 1969), ‘a smart and sassy feminist-themed sex comedy’,¹⁰⁸ to the U-rated *Every Little Crook and Nanny* (Howard, 1972), starring Victor Mature and Lynn Redgrave.

In 1973, Classic Cinemas sublet the Classic Poly to the theatrical impresario Larry Parnes (1929–1989). Parnes reopened the cinema as a live theatre venue called the Regent Theatre. Its first production was Lindsay Kemp’s *Flowers: A Pantomime for Jean Genet*. A risqué production followed in August 1974: *Let My People Come*, subtitled ‘A Sexual Musical’ and including songs

Fig. 133
Lindsay Kemp’s *Flowers had transferred to the West End from the Institute of Contemporary Arts.*



106 *Artists of Tomorrow, part 2: Filmmakers*, BBC2. Broadcast 22.00 hrs, 7 June 1969.

107 *UK cinema circuits 1947–69*, Terra Media Cinema Statistics Index, updated 21 July 2004. Available at www.terramedia.co.uk/reference/statistics/cinema/cinema_circuits_2.htm [accessed 16 June 2014].

108 *La Fiancée du Pirate All Movie Guide Review*, Artist Direct, Relativity Media Company. Available at www.artistdirect.com/nad/store/movies/reviews/0,,1877090,00.html [accessed 16 June 2014].

like 'Whatever turns you on', 'Give it to me' and 'First-year fellatio'. The Governors must have been far from happy.

In 1977 there were productions of David Mamet's *Duck Variations* and *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, both of which had had successful off-Broadway seasons. These were followed by two modest musical offerings, *The Great American Backstage Musical: An Epic for Six Performers* and *The Club*.¹⁰⁹

In 1980 Classic Cinemas Ltd took back the lease and reinstated the Classic Poly cinema, a short-lived revival as the Polytechnic's Governors terminated Classic's lease in April 1980. The last films screened were a double-bill of Walerian Borowczyk's *La Bête* (1975) and *Contes Immoraux* (1974). *Contes Immoraux* had been a box-office smash in France when first released but had subsequently been the subject of difficult censorship issues elsewhere.¹¹⁰ The Classic Poly ended as controversially as it had begun.

9 INT. DAY. PCL OFFICE. 9

TYPING.
The paper racks up. Woman's voice dictates:

WOMAN (O.S.)

July 1980. The Court of Governors report that Classic Cinemas Ltd had vacated... as from 14 April 1980... The governors [also] reported that PCL was now considering ways of making best use of the theatre for its own purposes.¹¹¹

CUT.

THE OLD CINEMA AND A NEW CAMPUS

In 1990 PCL and Harrow College of Higher Education merged and in 1992 the combined institution became the University of Westminster.¹¹² Three years later, all the film and media production activities moved to the newly refurbished Harrow campus, where there were professional-standard studio facilities that offered excellent opportunities for practical and theoretical education in film and television. However, at 309 Regent Street additional teaching space was still needed. The Governors had regained control of the cinema so that it could be used as a multi-functional space, for teaching, lectures and larger-scale events, including graduation screenings.¹¹³ Although formally renamed Lecture Theatres 1 and 2 (LT1/2), following refurbishment, many in the institution continued to identify the space as simply the 'Old Cinema'. To celebrate the centenary of the first Lumière screening in 1996, the old cinema, the foyer and the Fyvie Hall in Regent Street were given over for a one-week Lumière Festival. As it had been in 1936, the first Lumière programme of films was projected on a Cinématographe. There were also magic

109 See pp. 98–9 for details.

110 Daniel Bird, *Cinema of Desire: The Films of Walerian Borowczyk*, (London: BFI Southbank Guide, May 2014), p. 24.

111 *Polytechnic of Central London Court of Governors Minutes*, meeting of 14 July 1980, UWA PCL/1/BG/1/17.

112 See Michael Heller, 'The Institute and the Polytechnic', in *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit*, pp. 45–77.

113 *Ibid.*

Fig. 134

One hundred years after the first Cinématographe demonstration, the original programme of films was shown again in the theatre at Regent Street. Actor and Director Richard Attenborough wrote in the festival programme, ‘There is nothing, in my opinion, that can ever match the compulsive magic of the big screen in a darkened auditorium’.

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lantern shows, screenings of important historical films, lectures and an exhibition to celebrate the ‘capturing of motion’ and the birth and development of film. To mark the occasion, the University published *Cinema: the Beginnings and the Future*, a collection of essays by distinguished filmmakers, critics, historians and academics.¹¹⁴

The high reputation of the film courses at the University of Westminster lies in its enviable record of graduate and staff employment in the film and television industries, as well as in teaching and publications. It is exciting to see the productivity in all these areas. In recent years, these have included: The *Red Riding* Trilogy (2009) linking the script writer, Tony Grisoni (a graduate from the film course) with the director of the final film, Anand Tucker (a graduate from the Contemporary Media Practice course); *Meeting Spencer* (2010), directed by Malcolm Mowbray who took leave from his post as course leader of the MA in Film Direction to work in Hollywood; graduate Asif Kapadia’s direction of *Senna* (2010); *For Eklie* by David Winstone, a graduate of the film and television

114 Christopher Williams (ed.), *Cinema: the Beginnings and the Future. Essays Marking the Centenary of the First Film Show Projected to a Paying Audience in Britain* (London: University of Westminster Press, 1996).



course, which won the Student Best Foreign Film Oscar in 2012; graduate Neal Purvis's script for *Skyfall* (Mendes, 2012); graduate Seamus McGarvey's cinematography in *Godzilla* (Edwards, 2014); and *The Act of Killing* by Joshua Oppenheimer, a Reader at the University, which won the BAFTA for the best documentary in 2014.

It seems Cecil Hepworth was right:

The spirit of the thing (the moving image) was in the air and even now the spot is filled with ghosts. You can almost hear them singing the chorus from *The Biograph*:

It's an invention that can't die away.
 What will it mean to the next generation?
 They'll see the world as we see it today,
 For in a hundred years' time,
 Just by the aid of a lime.¹¹⁵

Fig. 135

The 2014 student graduation film Splitting Hairs was shot at the Harrow film studio and made the official selection at the International Student Film and Video Festival of Beijing Academy.

115 From the song *The Biograph*, written by Frank Leo, 1896, The David Robinson Collection. The complete lyrics are printed in the Lumière Festival Programme 19–22 February 1996, UWA.

10

INT. GHOSTS' DEN UNDER BOARD ROOM.

10

We hear singing...

HILL (O.S. finishing the chorus)
Just by the aid of a lime;

PEPPER
No, No, they'll be going digital!

We see a finger shadow image of an eagle fly-
ing.



CAPTAIN KNIGHT
It's my eagle Mr Ramshaw.

TREWEY (O.S.)
Mai oui, Captain Knight.

We see a finger shadow of a cat.

HILL (O.S.)
It's Alice's Cheshire Cat!

TREWEY (O.S.)
Oui, Monsieur Hill.

HILL (O.S.)
I like my images bigger!

TREWEY (O.S.)
Mai oui... but at least it is not one of those...
comment pouvez-vous dire... little tablets.

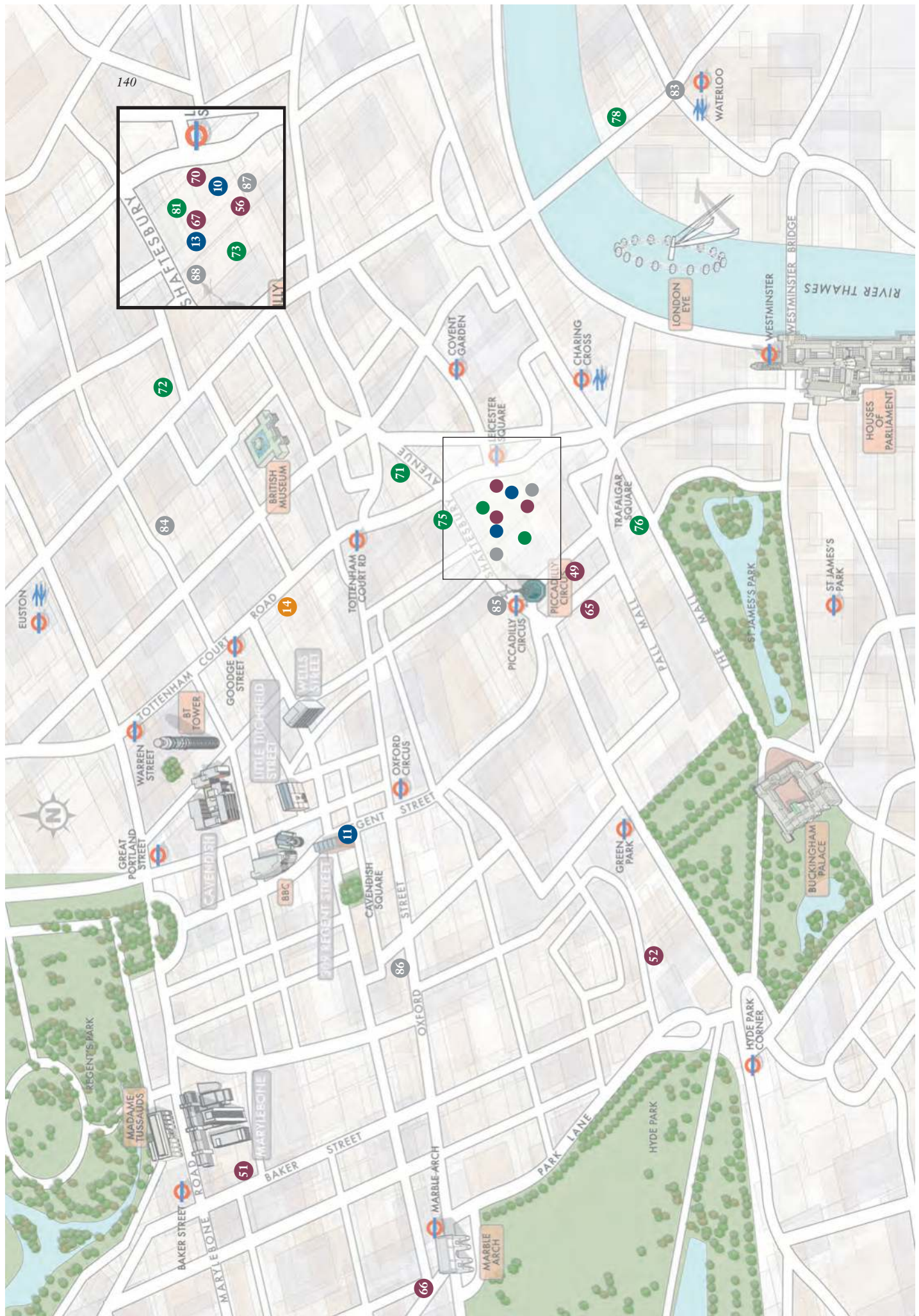
Laughter.

TREWEY (O.S.)
Patience mes amis, we will get nôtre cinema!

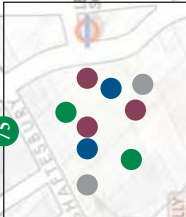
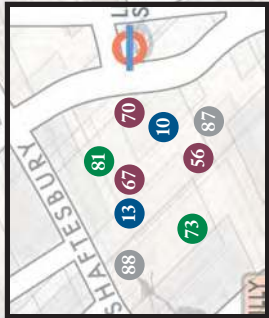
Clapping.

FADE TO BLACK.

FIN.



140



Name	Address	Dates of existence	Name	Address	Dates of existence
83 BFI London IMAX	Waterloo Road	1999 –	71 Odeon Covent Garden	13 5 Shaftesbury Avenue	2001 –
78 BFI Southbank	Southbank	2007 –	10 Odeon Leicester Square	26 Leicester Square	1937 –
84 Birkbeck Cinema	43 Gordon Square	2007 –	66 Odeon Marble Arch	10 Edgware Road	1967 –
49 Cineworld Haymarket	63 – 5 Haymarket	2006 –	73 Odeon Panton Street	11 – 18 Panton Street	1990s –
85 Curzon Ham Yard	1 Ham Yard	2015 –	87 Odeon Studios	22 – 4 Leicester Square	2012 –
52 Curzon Mayfair	38 Curzon Street	1966 –	14 Odeon Tottenham Court Road	30 Tottenham Court Road	1990s –
72 Curzon Renoir	Brunswick Square	2008 –	56 Odeon West End	40 Leicester Square	1988 –
75 Curzon Soho	93 – 107 Shaftesbury Avenue	1998 –	88 PictureHouse Central	13 Coventry Street	2015 –
13 Empire	5 – 6 Leicester Square	1962 –	81 Prince Charles	7 Leicester Place	1964 –
67 Empire 2 (access via Empire)	1 – 4 Leicester Square	1972 –	11 Regent Street Cinema	307 Regent Street	2015 –
51 Everyman Baker Street	96 – 8 Baker Street	2009 –	65 Vue Piccadilly	19 Lower Regent Street	2013 –
86 Everyman at Selfridges	400 Oxford Street	2014 –	70 Vue West End	3 Cranbourn Street, Leicester Square	2003 –
76 ICA Cinema	The Mall	1968 –			

KEY ● Pre 1900 ● Pre WWI ● Pre WWII ● 1970s ● 2015

This map indicates venues whose primary operation is a cinema. It does not include venues that operate screening rooms or film clubs, although it should be noted that the boundaries between different types of media and spaces are increasingly breaking down with a trend for film-showing opportunities at a variety of venues.

Map showing cinemas in the West End of London in 2015



Afterword: reviving the birthplace of British cinema

Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas

*The Cinema is part of the history of film.
Our students are part of the future of film.¹*

INTRODUCTION

In 2009 the University conceived the idea of restoring to its former glory what is one of the most important historic cinemas in Britain.² Since the end of the lease to Classic in July 1980, the imposing scale and significance of what we still refer to familiarly in the University as our ‘Old Cinema’ had lent a unique sense of drama and occasion to University lectures and teaching, public events and ceremonies. The excitement of this enchanting space was palpable even amid the dust and debris as work commenced on the restoration of the theatre itself in the summer of 2014. When the restored Regent Street Cinema reopened in Spring 2015 the old magic was revived for the new century and for the next chapter of the University’s history.

THE CINEMA REIMAGINED, 2009–

The first phase of the project saw the refurbishment of the foyer of our historic headquarters at 307–311 Regent Street. Outside, the grand Portland Stone façade was cleaned and relit. Inside, the generous support of the MBI Al Jaber Foundation³ enabled the refurbishment of the elegant marble foyer. Gallery areas were created, providing a prominent space for displays and exhibitions supporting cultural dialogue and exchange. The memorials to the service and sacrifice of students and staff of the Polytechnic in the 1914–18 and 1939–45 wars were also cleaned and restored in time for the commemorative events marking the centenary of the start of the First World War. Naming the new space the ‘MBI Al Jaber Grand Hall’, Patron and Chairman of the Foundation, H.E. Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber said:

Our support [...] acknowledges the important role of film and documentaries in raising awareness and building bridges between cultures. We are particularly excited by the prospect of a Middle East Film Series, and the social and educational opportunities of the new entrance hall.⁴

- 1 Paul Trijbits, *Regent Street Cinema: Reviving the Birthplace of British Cinema* campaign booklet, 1st edn., (London: University of Westminster, March 2012), p. 9.
- 2 This began with plans for the refurbishment of the foyer at our Regent Street headquarters. *University of Westminster Court of Governors Minutes*, meeting of 6 July 2009.
- 3 See www.mbifoundation.com for details [accessed 26 November 2014].
- 4 *University of Westminster News and Events*, 27 October 2009 www.westminster.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2009/university-launches-campaign-to-revive-birthplace-of-british-cinema [accessed 4 November 2014].



Now, the exterior at 307 Regent Street welcomes cinema-goers with a new canopy entrance, echoing the heyday of its operation in the mid-twentieth century. A separate foyer leads visitors through a box office area to the new café and bar, which also serves for displays, and a permanent exhibition about the Cinema's history, as well as a social space for audiences and students. From here, audience members access the single-raked, 200-seat auditorium.

The renovation evokes the Cinema's nineteenth century origins and its 1920s heyday and has transformed what had been used mainly as a large-scale lecture theatre for more than thirty years into a wonderful multi-functional space that is once again also a working cinema.

The University has engaged Tim Ronalds Architects on the restoration of the Cinema.⁵ The project has taken place in consultation with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), who also provided significant funding, and Westminster City Council planning officers.

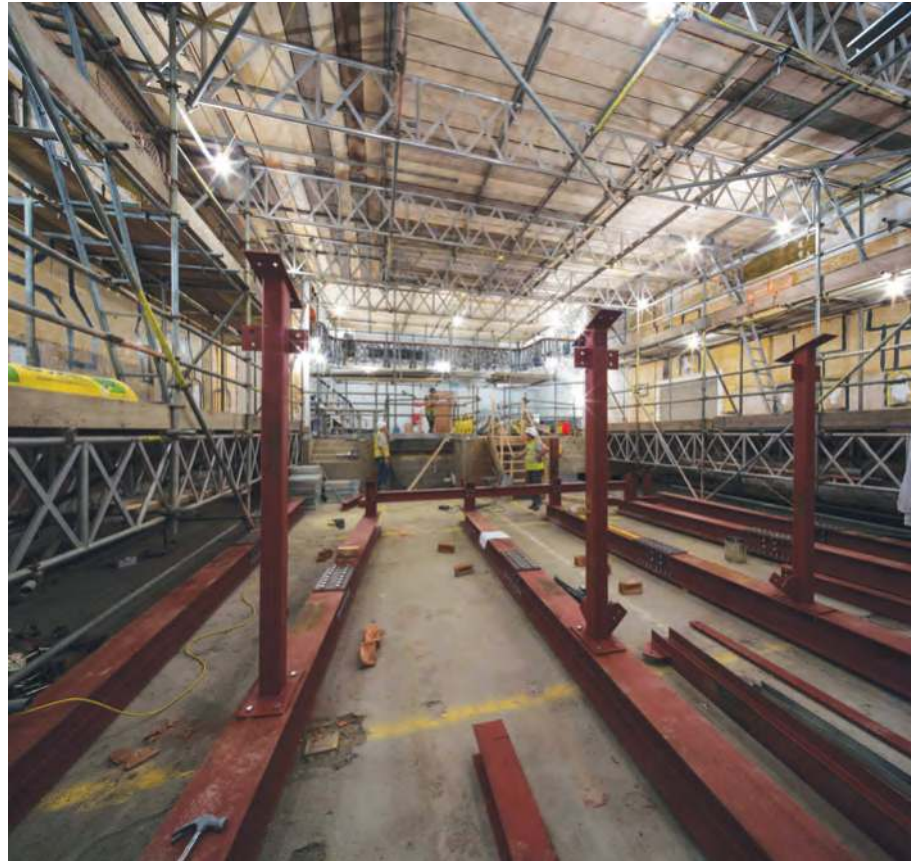
The aim of the project is to transform the Cinema into a lively public space and deliver rich benefits for heritage and for public learning, through the University of Westminster's activity programme. The physical conservation will restore the historic fabric of the 'Birthplace of British Cinema' and turn it into a multi-functional auditorium, with the history of the Cinema, its use and its architectural heritage as a central theme. It will be a working

Fig. 136

The entrance foyer of the Regent Street Cinema with new box office, leading to the upper foyer and bar.

5 Tim Ronalds Architects is a practice specialising in arts, education and public projects, and has won multiple awards for their restoration of the Hackney Empire (London). See www.timronalds.co.uk for more details.

Fig. 137
*The main auditorium of the
 Regent Street Cinema during
 building work, October 2014.*



cinema, a lecture theatre for stimulating talks, meetings and debates, a workshop and activities space.⁶

Research undertaken by Tom Ronalds Architects uncovered the layers of architecture that Ro Spankie describes in Chapter two of this volume and revealed that no single period or scheme dominated the space as it stood; it was truly a record of all of its past adaptations. There was thus no logical single design to be ‘restored’ and a design was proposed that attempted to respect all the remaining Victorian and twentieth-century elements. However, without some adaptation, the opportunity to revive this historic space would have been lost.

In particular, the Cinema needed to be made independent of the adjacent University building with respect to fire escape routes, disabled access, toilets, foyers and staff facilities, all of which had relied on the main University building for the past thirty-five years. Changes to the seating were also required, to suit the various purposes proposed for the reopened cinema. Sightlines needed to suit a wide range of films, from the earliest Lumière Cinématographes to the latest digital projections. The auditorium and seating also needed to accommodate other events – staged discussions, lectures, presentations – and have a flexible capacity for audiences from fifty up to two hundred.

The new single rake of seating creates space underneath to accommodate the foyer, facilities and circulation spaces that are necessary for the Cinema to be

⁶ Tom Ronalds Architects, *University of Westminster: Regent Street Cinema: Design & Access Statement: Planning & Listed Building Consent*, (September 2012). Report available online at www.westminster.gov.uk, Planning Application No. 12/07853/FULL [accessed 21 January 2015].



Fig. 138
*The ceiling of the Regent Street
 Cinema during building work,
 October 2014.*

autonomous. The new single rake also unifies the audience in an arrangement that allows comfortable seating dimensions, good sightlines and safe means of egress in an emergency. Modifications were made to the original proposals to take account of representations from The Twentieth Century Society and The Cinema Theatre Association. As a result, the 1927 balcony has been maintained, with openings in the balustrade to meet Building and Licensing Regulations. Inappropriate later alterations – such as the ceiling light – have been replaced with elements based on the original Victorian design.

The updated scheme was approved in December 2013. It allows the Cinema auditorium interior to reconnect with its historic structure and development – and subsequent layers of historical significance – combined with state-of-the-art technology to achieve its contemporary ambitions. The interior recreates the anticipation and excitement of earlier cinema-going, as well as telling the story of the building. A box office has once again been installed in the foyer area. Inside the auditorium the 1927 proscenium and plaster mouldings are visible, along with the curved balcony from the same era. The Cinema's rare and much-valued Compton organ (itself restored in 2006) can be raised or lowered to stage or stalls level on a platform lift.

The existing projection room has been adapted to accommodate 16 mm, 35 mm and the latest digital projection and sound control systems, enabling the Cinema to show the range of formats that reflect the full development of screen media. Backstage, there is a multi-purpose learning room for use as a small studio or film-editing suite for community activities and workshops with school children and community groups as well as the University's own students.

The Cinema's new facilities include a café and bar area, which is also home to a permanent exhibition telling the story of this unique space and its special place in British cinema history. The exhibition draws upon much of the material covered in this book and provides the opportunity to share content from our own and other archives through an engaging narrative display.

The programmes of screenings, film cycles, festivals, conferences, lectures, workshops and other public events complement and enrich our academic courses as well as providing a focal point for cultural exchange and debates. Schools and community groups have the opportunity not only to visit the permanent exhibition about the history of the cinema, but also to engage in a range of activities, including practical film and photography projects, in the theatre and educational spaces alongside the auditorium.

OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

The University of Westminster's distinctive character and mission today continue to reflect Sir George Cayley's vision for an educational institution that would stimulate innovation and change people's lives when he established the Polytechnic Institution in 1838. They are also inspired by the values and aspirations of Quintin Hogg when he refounded the Polytechnic in the latter part of the nineteenth century to provide opportunities for education to all who could benefit, regardless of their background or gender, for the purpose of 'educating mind, body and spirit'.⁷

This legacy of inclusive, transformative education, contemporary relevance and innovation continued to define the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL), one of the first of the thirty institutions comprising the 'new' polytechnic sector introduced by the Labour government in the 1960s. The new polytechnics were aimed at addressing the under-representation of lower socio-economic groups and invigorating economic growth by establishing a better-educated workforce.⁸ They represented a 'new' brand and the polytechnic sector was at the forefront of innovation in pedagogy, curriculum design and the introduction of new areas of degree-level study.

PCL's incorporation of Holborn College of Law, Languages and Commerce in 1970 brought opportunities to expand the curriculum and to extend the application of research directed at business, industry and the professions. Subsequent amalgamation with Harrow College of Higher Education in 1990 broadened the academic portfolio with art and design, fashion and graphic communication, complementing established taught courses and research in photography, film, media and communications and increasing our reputation as a leader in education for the creative industries.

Westminster was granted the University title in 1992 and we have continued to strengthen our position at the forefront of innovation and creativity. Our global reputation is built on our long history of international partnerships, our network of alumni across the world and progressive international education programmes such as the MSc Medical Molecular Biology, developed in collaboration with universities in the South Caucasus region, which received the Times Higher Education (THE) 'Award for International Collaboration of the Year' in 2012. The University has twice received the Queen's Award for International Enterprise, in 2001 and 2005. We pride ourselves on the diversity of our community – our students in London alone represent over 150 nationalities,

7 See Elaine Penn, (ed.), *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit: The Legacy of Quintin Hogg and The Polytechnic 1864–1992* (Cambridge: Granta Editions, 2013).

8 Prof. Geoff Petts, 'Afterword', in *Educating Mind, Body and Spirit*, pp. 242–44.



Fig. 139

The University's 175th anniversary celebrations at Westminster Abbey included performances by the Polyphonics (the University of Westminster Students' Union Choral Society) with the Centre for Commercial Music, Istock Place School, Broomfield House School, and associated colleges.

making Westminster one of the most popular UK universities for international students. The University was awarded the THE 'Award for Outstanding Support for Overseas Students' in 2005. In 2002 we co-founded Westminster International University in Tashkent, the first UK international university in Central Asia, and launched centres in India and China in 2012.

In addition to the drive for more diverse engagement in higher education, the last decade has seen significant changes in government policy and funding structures for Universities, including the introduction of student fees, accompanied by a national loan scheme, progressive deregulation of the sector and relaxing of student number controls, some of which are likely to be removed altogether.⁹ The fundamental change in HE funding arrangements has been accompanied by progressive deregulation of the sector, opening up to new providers, including the private sector. While the correlation between increased competition through deregulation and driving up the quality of higher education may be less direct than policy headlines suggest, increased student choice of institution and the cost of degree courses have sharpened student expectations of value-for-money of their learning experience and the facilities and environment in which they study. In turn this has focused the attention of all higher education institutions on the quality and distinctiveness of the learning and wider experience they offer.¹⁰ Our newly restored Cinema will help meet our objective of providing an exciting learning environment and a wealth of different opportunities for engaging all our students and other visitors.

Building on the University's reputation as an inclusive organisation firmly embedded in the community, the Cinema involves local groups and partners

9 The extent to which deferred graduate repayments will actually cover the escalating costs of providing what is still regarded as one of the best educational experiences in the world remains a matter for conjecture.

10 For a more extensive overview of the growth and funding arrangements of HE UK, see Petts, pp. 241–57.

INSPIRING SPACES

The University has made significant investment in the physical and virtual learning environment and infrastructure to support the changing teaching, research and academic enterprise activities of the twenty-first century. Major projects on all University campuses have incorporated forward-looking specialist and general teaching facilities as well as imaginative social learning areas to reflect the blurring of boundaries between formal and informal space. The opening of a new 220-seater lecture theatre completed a programme of works at the Little Titchfield Street building that also

included a new café and social learning spaces and redesigned library spaces with flexible group and study areas (Fig. 141, bottom left). The ‘Learning Platform’ at Marylebone (Fig. 142, top right) and the ‘Learning Forum’ (Fig. 140, top left) at Harrow offer flexible and innovative multi-functional spaces encouraging group work and cross-disciplinary learning. The ‘Learning Forum’ also provides flexible state-of-the-art performance space creating an inspiring context for showcasing student work. The second phase of the redevelopment project at Harrow will deliver spaces for a gallery and catwalk, flexible performance areas, a café, reception and a new multi-media newsroom.



Figs. 140, 141, 142, 143

The University's campuses have been extensively refurbished in recent years offering flexible and innovative multi-functional spaces.

in planning and exhibiting film programmes and other events and activities. As part of the community activity programme, people learn about the Cinema's heritage through workshops, film programming, tours, exhibitions and other events. Local people and students are involved through volunteering and training programmes and membership schemes. The Cinema has a dedicated learning and engagement officer who supports the development and delivery of community activities and also works closely with the University's Archive Service, and external organisations, such as the BFI.

The Cinema brings together a rich programme of activities drawing on the special facilities and heritage of this historic space for both internal and external audiences. It offers a rich mix of internal and public-facing University events and presentations, community and outreach activities, teaching and other educational events associated with the University's academic Faculties.

A major fundraising campaign took place alongside the design process and provided opportunities to engage individuals and organisations, as well as to educate and inform people about our heritage. By the start of the renovation work in summer 2014, the University had secured over three quarters of the £6 million cost of the project. The Quintin Hogg Trust provided £2 million and this generosity reflects the unique value, significance and resonance of the intertwined histories of education and visual culture of this remarkable cinema. The wider significance of the Cinema in the history of both education and the moving image is reflected in the generous support and collaboration of the HLF. On awarding the University a £100,000 development grant (which enabled the project to later achieve a full HLF award of £1.5 million), HLF head of region Sue Bowers commented: 'We're extremely pleased to give initial support to the project, which aims to bring a unique building back into use and preserve it for future generations'.¹¹

A voluntary Cinema Advisory Board was recruited to support the campaign, comprising leading and successful practitioners with experience in education, heritage arts, the film and television industry, business and the civil service. The Board included Tim Bevan, co-chairman of Working Title Films who holds an honorary doctorate from the University, and four other University alumni as members.¹²

The fundraising campaign also allowed us to further cement ties with our past. In the late nineteenth century, the former 'Great Hall' was a focal point of Quintin Hogg's championing of public engagement with new ideas and inventions. The continuing close relationship between the University and the Hogg family and the Quintin Hogg Trust is reflected not only in the awarding of a major grant from the Trustees, but also in their personal support for the restoration project. Dame Mary Hogg, great-granddaughter of Quintin and Alice Hogg, said:

Quintin and Alice would be delighted that their vision and work live on not only in our memories but as the University of Westminster. The history of our cinema lends much to the history of the British Cinema. We must maintain our mutual history.¹³

- 11 *University of Westminster News and Events*, 6 July 2011
www.westminster.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2011/university-of-westminster-given-green-light-from-the-heritage-lottery-fund-for-landmark-cinema-restoration [accessed 4 November 2014].
- 12 The full list of members of the Regent Street Cinema Advisory Board is: Tim Bevan CBE, George Fenton, Tony Grisoni, Roy Hudd OBE, Tracey Josephs, Asif Kapadia, Nicolas Kent, Peter Kyle OBE, Sir Francis Mackay, Seamus McGarvey, Mike More, Professor Geoffrey Petts, Paul Trijbits.
- 13 Cited in Editor, 'Gathering Audience for the Regent Street Cinema Campaign', *Network: University of Westminster Alumni Magazine*, 2013, p. 18.

Other significant donors and supporters have included the Garfield Weston Foundation and alumni, governors, staff and friends of the University, as well as a number of local businesses and organisations – including those based on Regent Street. Many have taken the opportunity to support the revival of the Cinema through the ‘name a seat campaign’, including a group of former students brought together through a crowd-funding initiative by former course leader, Joost Hunningher, a key figure in the successful development of film courses at Westminster and author of the fourth chapter of this volume.

In the midst of the fundraising, we reflected on our history and heritage throughout 2013–14, the 175th anniversary year of the founding of the institution. The occasion was marked by a series of commemorative events, including a contemporary restaging of the famous Pepper’s Ghost illusion in the Cinema.¹⁴ The celebrations culminated in a moving ceremony at Westminster Abbey on 30 January 2014 (see Fig. 139). Events were also held in Uzbekistan (Westminster International University in Tashkent), and among our teams and alumni networks around the world, including in India and China.

WORLD-LEADING FILM, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Film programming in the Cinema is distinctive and highly informed, combining cutting-edge and experimental work with a stimulating mix of the best of current UK, independent and World cinema, documentary films, retrospectives and classic repertory and archive films. It draws on our local and global contacts and academic expertise to provide unique opportunities to view new

Fig. 144

The University’s purpose-built studio facility in Harrow includes two sound stages, a set construction workshop, and extensive post-production facilities.



14 See also Chapter 4.

film productions, documentaries, non-Western and especially Asian cinema, artists' cinema, film archives, experimental moving image and animation in a state-of-the-art environment. The regular programme of screenings is re-establishing the Cinema as a leading screening venue in central London.

By highlighting the latest developments in image-making, the Cinema maintains and nurtures the pioneering character of the University and acts as a showcase for our activities and successes in film, television, moving images and photography. It enables students at the University to be part of professional exhibition and industry-led events from the vibrant screen media culture of central London.

It also captures the same sense of excitement experienced by visitors encountering optical illusions, 'dissolving views' and 'the art of phantasmagoric evaporation' in the Royal Polytechnic Institution's Great Hall. In 1843 the comic journal *Punch* spoke of 'such a whirlwind of machinery in full action – wonderful things going up, and coming down, and turning round all at once, that the mere view of them, acting through the retina, might well addle the brains of ordinary visitors'.¹⁵ The newly restored Cinema has reopened its doors amid the excitement of another significant moment of change as the ubiquity of the image, the speed of technological change, converging media platforms and the porousness of disciplinary and epistemological boundaries generate a new context and environment for the creative exploration of visual media. The Cinema is once again poised to act as a major catalyst for creative experimentation and to all of its audiences it offers a magical place for learning, engagement and inspiration.

Throughout our history, film, photography and visual culture have been prominent in the development of educational courses, research, new media practices and public engagement activity. The Polytechnic's reputation for showcasing new inventions and astonishing and delighting the public with both informative and entertaining exhibits and events, such as the famous magic lantern shows and optical exhibitions of the mid-nineteenth century, made it a natural choice for the first demonstration of the Lumières' moving pictures to a public audience in Britain in 1896. The theatre, purpose-built from the outset for optical exhibitions, went on to show films over the next eighty-four years.

Small wonder, perhaps, that the first course in cinematography in the country was introduced here at the Poly in 1933.¹⁶ Pioneering courses in Photographic Science and Media Studies were introduced in the 1960s and, by the 1980s, PCL had well-established teaching and research programmes in photography, media and communications complemented by the addition of graphics, art and design and fashion when Harrow College of Higher Education was incorporated in 1990. In 1993 the first course in the UK in commercial music was introduced.

Today the University has a world-leading reputation in film, media and communications, preparing students not just to enter the creative industries, but to shape and lead them. A strong reputation for professional and practice-based education is matched by a distinguished record in academic teaching



Fig. 145
PCL's School of Communication was housed in Riding House Street (now known as 4–12 Little Titchfield Street) throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

15 Anon, 'The People's Hand-book to the Polytechnic Institution', *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 26 August 1843, p. 91.

16 See Chapter 1 for details.

ALUMNI

Our graduates include BAFTA winners, director Asif Kapadia in 2003 (Best British Film for *The Warrior* (2001)) and 2012 (Best Documentary and Best Editing for *Senna* (2010)), and Bond screenwriter Neal Purvis in 2013 (Outstanding British Film for *Skyfall* (Mendes, 2012)). Other notable Westminster alumni include director Michael Winterbottom (*24 Hour Party People* (2002), *In This World* (2002), *The Look of Love* (2013)), producer Paul Trijbits (*This is England* (2006), *Fish Tank* (2009), *Tamara Drewe* (2010), *Saving Mr Banks* (2013)), screenwriter Tony Grisoni (*Tideland* (2005), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998)) and editor Lucia Zucchetti (*Ratcatcher* (1999), *The Queen* (2006)). Between 1993 and 2014, there have been twenty-eight nominations of our former students for BAFTA awards, eight of which have been won by six different Westminster alumni, and three Academy Award (Oscar) nominations between 2008 and 2014.

The International Centre for Documentary and Experimental Film's work includes a major three-year project supported by a £400,000 AHRC award, 'Genocide and Genre', which has developed new

filmmaking methods to explore people's memory, narratives and performance of acts of genocidal violence. One of the project outcomes is the documentary film *The Act of Killing*¹ (2013) produced by the Academic Director of the Centre, Professor Joram ten Brink and directed by its Artistic Director and Reader, Dr Joshua Oppenheimer. The film won a string of international awards, culminating in the 2014 BAFTA for Best Documentary and nomination for an Oscar for Best Documentary Feature at the eighty-sixth Academy Awards ceremony in March 2014. Oppenheimer's new film, *The Look of Silence*, had its first Indonesian screening on 11 November 2014. Two public screenings were held by the National Human Rights Commission, an organisation of the state, and the Jakarta Arts Council. It is hoped that this openness will lead to a campaign for truth and reconciliation in the country.

Oppenheimer has been awarded a MacArthur Fellow 'genius' grant, one of the most prestigious US awards for academics, creative and public intellectuals. The award of \$625,000, paid out over five years, comes with no stipulations and allows recipients maximum freedom to follow their creative visions.

1 Catherine Shoard, 'The Act of Killing wins top prize at first Guardian Film Awards', *The Guardian*, 6 March 2014.



Fig. 146
Director and Westminster graduate Asif Kapadia teaching film students at the University of Westminster's Faculty of Media, Arts and Design.

Fig. 147
Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* won best documentary at the 2014 BAFTA awards.

Fig. 148
Screenwriter and Westminster alumnus Neal Purvis and writing partner Robert Wade have co-written five James Bond films.



and scholarly research, encouraging the development of reflective critical practitioners. This reputation placed Westminster's Communication and Media Studies in the top twenty in the world in the 2012 QS World Rankings.¹⁷ REF2014 has recently confirmed the internationally excellent quality, reach and significance of our scholarship and impact. Our broadly based submission in thirteen Units of Assessment ranging from health to art and design reflects the depth and quality of our portfolio of research areas. The REF confirmed our world leading positions in art and design and media and communications. REF2014 included a measure of 'impact' and our achievement was outstanding, with most of the case studies submitted being judged to be world leading and internationally excellent. Our achievement was outstanding with 100 per cent of the case studies submitted being judged to be world leading in media and communications, art and design, health and psychology. Better than 70 per cent of the research submitted by English, architecture and built environment, and politics and international relations was also considered to be world leading for impact.

The Faculty of Media, Arts and Design is the major, although not the exclusive, focus of the University's research and teaching relating to screen media, still and moving images. The Faculty is based at the University's Harrow site, which offers industry-standard studios and workshops to provide a student experience that matches the workplace as closely as possible. Teaching and research in film studies has a national and international reputation. Westminster's Film BA Honours (formerly Film and Television Production) course has long been recognised as one of the best of its kind in the world, with an international reputation for its academic and practical teaching. PCL offered the first such course to be awarded Honours degree status in 1970. Westminster develops thinking filmmakers who learn to collaborate creatively as they develop production specialisms, and who have something to say to and about the world.

Among many accolades for our students' work, the film *For Elsie* (2011), written, filmed, produced and directed by a team of Film and Television Production students, was selected as the Gold Medal winner in the Foreign Film category at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' thirty-ninth Annual Student Academy Awards in 2012. This was an extraordinary achievement for undergraduates who were competing against the leading postgraduate and national film schools worldwide.

Film occupies a central role within the University's Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media (CREAM).¹⁸ The Centre has a portfolio of research across the disciplines of film, photography, experimental media, visual arts, music and fashion, with a number of researchers working across these fields. The outstanding quality of CREAM's research has placed the University among the top art and design departments in the UK. Moving image research spans documentary theory and practice, non-Hollywood cinemas as well as experimental film and video. CREAM has been a key participant in debates on practice-based research in audio-visual media. It has hosted a number of large research projects and was a founding member of the Arts and Humanities

Figs. 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154
Broad Vision is an original art/science research and learning collaboration engaging students and academics from diverse disciplines in exchange and experimentation. Through interdisciplinary exploration students become teachers, researchers and producers as they explore questions relating to biology and psychology, technology and creativity, art and science. Since 2010, Broad Vision has worked with over 200 undergraduate students from courses across art, science and technology subjects at the University of Westminster. See www.broadvision.info [accessed 4 November 2014].

17 The QS World University Rankings are the most widely read university comparison of their kind.

See www.topuniversities.com [accessed 26 November 2014].

18 CREAM website: www.westminster.ac.uk/cream [accessed 4 November 2014].



Fig. 149



Fig. 150



Fig. 151



Fig. 152



Fig. 153



Fig. 154



Research Council (AHRC)-funded initiative, AVPhD, set up to develop a training and support network for all those undertaking, supervising and examining audio-visual, practice-based doctorates.

The India and Africa Media Centres, based in CREAM, provide pioneering platforms for developing and disseminating cutting-edge research and moving image projects through conferences, seminars, workshops and film screenings and gathering distinguished scholars, researchers and professionals around area-related film and media projects, such as the highly successful 2013 International African Film and Politics Conference and the 2014 conference, *Moving On: South Asian Screen Cultures in a Broader Frame*. The China and the Arab Media Centres, based in the University's Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI), also organise regular film screenings and conferences relating to their world-leading research in media policy and economics, media history, and digital media.¹⁹

The University has built on a strong presence in documentary film through the newly established International Centre for Documentary and Experimental Film.²⁰ The Centre is developing a unique approach to film making at the intersection of and between 'artefaction' and 'artefiction', promoting cross-fertilisation between approaches to documentary study and experimental exploration of the language and material of film. Through its film production, academic research, screenings, and by building industry links, the Centre brings together researchers, filmmakers, producers, UK and European-based

Fig. 155
The newly refurbished auditorium of the Regent Street Cinema. See also Fig. 58 for the opposite view from the stage.

19 CAMRI website:
www.westminster.ac.uk/camri
[accessed 4 November 2014].

20 International Centre for
Documentary and Experimental
Film at Docwest website:
www.docwest.co.uk [accessed
3 August 2014].

film companies and PhD students. It is the only centre in the UK dedicated to this fast growing field.

Film, image and visual culture are focal points for innovative research and teaching across the University. These include exploring relationships between history, cinema and representation, representations and memories of war in cultural histories and cultural production, film censorship and the law, and the application of multi-disciplinary approaches to the study of visual culture. The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities' cross-disciplinary Institute for Modern and Contemporary Culture (IMCC)²¹ hosts a number of artists, curators and writers working with new media, including artist Alison Craighead who, in collaboration with her partner Jon Thomson, has produced several experimental films exhibited at various major international institutions such as Tate Britain, ZKM (Karlsruhe), Pompidou Centre (Paris), and the Berkeley Art Museum (San Francisco). Among other current projects, the IMCC also runs the successful Print Screen: Writing and the Moving Image series, which has hosted events at both the University and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London with contemporary artists working across literature and film.

Our cross-disciplinary work also extends into the natural sciences and technology with initiatives such as Broad Vision, a collaborative Arts/Science research and learning programme. Broad Vision is an example of synergistic research and learning projects that extend STEM activities to the wider STEAM agenda.²² Students become teachers, researchers and producers as they explore questions relating to biology and psychology, technology and creativity, art and science through interdisciplinary collaboration and experimentation. Since 2010, the project has produced several exhibitions, books, presentations and papers.

The refurbished Cinema is an important resource and focal point for the rich range of discipline-based and interdisciplinary research and teaching in film and visual culture across the University. All of the University's Faculties draw on and contribute to the vibrant programme of activities drawn together in the Cinema through their engagement with the power and potential of the moving image. The Cinema will also act as a catalyst for the development of the University on an international level. With students from over 150 different countries and more than 100,000 members of our Alumni Association around the world, Westminster continues to develop overseas partnerships and to enhance the employability of our graduates as global citizens.

As we set out our vision for the next stage of the University's development, reflecting on our past with pride and looking towards the future, the restored and refurbished theatre stands as a powerful physical symbol of our heritage of innovation in education, science and the arts and, particularly, the institution's long and prominent role in the history of film and visual culture. It embodies Westminster's values, ethos and aspirations today as a focal point for academic activity, a place for engagement with our local and wider communities and for partnership and collaboration with industry, cultural and other organisations.

21 IMCC website:
www.westminster.ac.uk/imcc;
 the IMCC also has a blog at:
www.instituteformodern.co.uk/
 [both accessed 4 November 2014].

22 Broad Vision website:
<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/craam/news/broad-vision/>; see also
www.broadvision.info/ [both
 accessed 4 November 2014].
 See also *University of Westminster
 Report and Financial Statements
 for the year ended 31 July 2014*,
 approved at Court of Governors,
 meeting of 25 November 2014.
 See also Figs. 149–154.

Contributors

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Ronald Gow is a production designer, film-maker and film theory and practice lecturer. He has designed many films (*Poe Purloined*, 2003) and exhibitions (*The Lumière Festival Exhibition*, 1996) and, with Julie Lambden, has made films (*Digital Snapshots*, 2006, *Spice of Life*, 2008). He lectures in film theory and practice at the University of Westminster and University of the Arts – Central Saint Martins.

Joost Hunningher

Joost Hunningher is a consultant and film director/producer. He was Principal Lecturer in Film at the University of Westminster and course leader of the BA (Hons) Film for over thirty years. He is proud to have been involved in producing more than 300 student films. From 2002–2006, Joost was Chair of the Digital-Cinema Research Group for CILECT and he organised two conferences at the National Film Theatre on the new digital film technologies. In 2009 he delivered a lecture at the Budapest Cinematography Masterclass (with Vilmos Zsigmond) on the ‘Promise and Problems of Digital Cinema’. He has made films for the Royal Shakespeare Company, the University of Westminster and World Expo City Culture Pavilion, Shanghai. He directed two plays for the Soho Poly. In 1996, he was director of the University’s Lumière Festival and contributed a chapter in the University’s publication *Cinema: the Beginnings and the Future* (1996).

Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas

Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas was Deputy Vice Chancellor at the University of Westminster from 2008–2014. Her responsibilities included leadership of learning and teaching and the wider student experience. She joined the University in 2003 as Dean of the School of Social Sciences, Humanities & Languages and subsequently held roles as Provost of the Cavendish Campus and Pro Vice Chancellor. Rikki was previously Dean of the School of Languages and Social Sciences at Anglia Ruskin University (1998–2003), and held various roles at Thames Valley University (1983–98). She is a Hispanist with a particular research interest in cinema and cultural studies. Her doctorate focused on the cultural analysis of contemporary Spanish cinema and she has published widely on the representation of history, politics and gender in Spanish cinema.

Guy Osborn

Guy is Professor of Law in Westminster Law School. He holds degrees in Philosophy (BA, Leeds) and Law (LLM, Leicester; PhD, MMU), is a Barrister (Middle Temple) and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Guy is a founding editor of the *Entertainment and Sports Law Journal* and Co-Editor of the

Routledge Series Studies in Law, Society and Popular Culture. He is a Director of the Centre for Law, Society and Popular Culture at the University and his current research interests include work around the legitimacy and scope of law relating to mega events and work on the juridification of urban parks. Guy was a co-author of *Film and the Law, The Cinema of Justice* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2010), curated the public exhibition *Classified* (2012) and contributed to the book celebrating the centenary of the BBFC in 2012.

Elaine Penn

Elaine Penn is the University Archivist & Records Manager at the University of Westminster. She has previously worked as a records manager at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and as an archivist at the Rothschild Archive. She holds a PhD in Information Studies from UCL where her research thesis, 'Exploring Archival Value: An Axiological Approach', explored the potential analogies between axiology and concepts of archival value. Elaine has edited and overseen the production of the University history series of publications.

Ro Spankie

Ro Spankie is Course Leader for Interior Architecture BA Honours at the University of Westminster. She is currently enrolled part-time on the PhD by Architectural Design at UCL; her thesis, 'Thinking through Drawing', is focused on the role of drawing in the design process. Recent publications include: *Basics Interiors 03: Drawing Out the Interior* (London: AVA Academia, 2009); 'Drawing Out the Censors Room', in *IDEA Journal, 2012: Writing/Drawing: Negotiating the Perils and Pleasures of Interiority* (2012), 72–87; 'The Art of Borrowing', in *The Handbook of Interior Architecture and Design* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) and *An Anecdotal Guide to Sigmund Freud's Desk* (London: Freud Museum, 2014).

Archive Services Staff

In addition to sourcing and researching the majority of images in this volume, University of Westminster Archive Services staff have also contributed the double-page features that highlight various aspects of the cinema's history in this volume. Claire Brunnen has written The Royal Polytechnic Institution (pp. 24–5), The Lumière Cinématographe (pp. 40–1) and Raising the Union Jack (pp. 118–9); Anna McNally has written Sound at the Cinema (pp. 54–5), The Cameo-Poly (pp. 90–1), The Regent Theatre (pp. 98–9) and The Home of Films of Reality (pp. 124–5).

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Ronald Grant Archive (Fig. 66, p. 75; Fig. 86, p. 91)

The Projection Box (Fig. 101, p. 110)

Tim Ronalds Architects (Fig. 20 and Fig. 21, p. 27)

University of Exeter, Bill Douglas Cinema Museum (Fig. 36, p. 41; Fig. 73, p. 80; Fig. 75, p. 82; Fig. 83, p. 89; Fig. 113, p. 121; Fig. 119 and Fig. 120, p. 125)

University of Sheffield, National Fairground Archive (Fig. 61, p. 68)

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