

STOCKSBRIDGE PALACE

Proprietors : Schofield Bros. (Stocksbridge) Ltd, a Public Company with an interest in motor transport and Picture house management (Registered 13.2.20.)

Managing Director : Percy Schofield, Albert Ernest Schofield was also a director and there were nine others (*) mostly local residents. The first secretary was Sydney Lee but Reginald Walton took over in July 1920.

Location : Manchester Road, Stocksbridge, between Nanny Hill and Hole House Lane.

Neither the architect nor the general contractor have been traced.

Opened : 12.5.21. by R.H. Rimmington of Broomhead Hall.

Promotional display : The Penistone, Stocksbridge and Hoyland Express 14.5.21.

The hall was built of red toned bricks with stone facings and pillars the design incorporated three shops fronting on to Manchester road. An interesting feature was a bay window set at high level and embellished with an ornamental stone support. Midway between the window and the front entrance was a tablet of stone carrying the word 'PALACE'; to the right there is a more ornate plaque on which '1920' has somewhat optimistically been inscribed. The main entrance at the front of the building was flanked by two side openings but these were quite narrow. (**) The entrance Hall displayed decorative Italian marble and the steps leading to the circle were surfaced with terrazzo. There were two payboxes but the second was only used on busy Saturday evenings and dispensed tickets for the circle; a third paybox served a side entrance for those who sought the cheaper seats. There was a spacious stage enclosed by massive columns decorated in cream and blue. The walls of the auditorium were chocolate tinted, fringed with a cream border and decorated with blue panels; the curtains were also chocolate coloured. Suspended from the ceiling were a number of chandeliers with Alabaster bowls. Total seating capacity was 1,000 of which 300 were in the balcony; tip-up seats were provided throughout. Carpeting extended over the whole flooring in the circle but none was laid between the seats downstairs. A cafe was planned at the circle level but there was no access except from the cinema; to pay its way a cafe needed to be a rendezvous open to the general public as well as cinema audiences and eventually the space was used for office accommodation. There were other design faults and an emergency exit needed to be reconstructed soon after the opening.

(*) Thomas F. Batty, William Booth, Willie Broadhead, Charles Crossland, John Fletcher, Ernest Jackson, James P. Kennedy, Wilson Moorhouse, Robert R. Smith.

(**) Bernard Dore states that these had been blocked up before he became manager in 1945, possibly because they did not comply with fire regulations.

At the official opening there was a full house and the village was 'en fete'. The opening programme was 'Kismet'; 'A woman in grey' (episode 1) a topical, a travelogue and a Larry Semon comedy. Prices were :- pit (5d.), stalls (9d. and 1/-), back circle (1/3d.) and front circle (1/6d.). Children were admitted at half price. There was a small orchestra, the musical director being Ernest Aspinall. Performances were at 7 pm. , except on Monday and Saturdays when there were two houses at 6 pm. and 8 pm. However, from 12.9.21. performances were continuous from 6.30 pm. and on Saturdays from 6 pm. but continuous performances did not prove a success for many were working on early shifts and towards the end of the evening the cinema was nearly empty. The first manager was H.J. Butler but he was replaced by Jack Haines when the Electric Theatre, Stocksbridge closed in February 1922. This had been bought by the Schofield brothers from the West Riding Electric Theatres and promptly closed 'temporarily'. In 1923 the proprietors of the Palace felt it necessary to go into voluntary liquidation and set up a new company to take over the cinema side of the business; this was registered on 20.2.24 as the Palace (Stocksbridge) Ltd. , Percy Schofield establishing himself as chairman. By this time the orchestra had dwindled to a pianist and sometimes a violinist. However, for some eighteen months that pianist was Reginald Dixon whom Haines had immediately recognised as

an extremely talented musician still in his teens. (*) Advertising in the Penistone, Stocksbridge and Hoyland Express had been discontinued in March 1922 but it is known that variety acts were booked from time to time when there were signs of a drop in attendances; Wilson, Keppel and Betty and possibly Ted Ray were among the artists engaged. In the twenties projection was from the ground floor and Haines, assisted by his wife Mary, doubled both as manager and operator; at the close of the performance he would hasten to the entrance hall so as to be on view as the audience trooped out. At the time of the 'general strike' Haines exercised ingenuity in keeping the cinema open during a period when Stocksbridge was without electricity; he used a steam engine to operate his dynamos and later a petrol engine.

(*) Peter Ashman in his biography of Reginald Dixon titled 'Mr Blackpool' gives an account of Dixon's stay at the Stocksbridge Palace (pp.10-12).

The parting came as a result of Dixon's demand for a better piano and, while probably justified, some might feel that in his enthusiasm for devising special effects he had hastened its downfall.

Shortly before the coming of sound a new a new operating box was constructed at circle level; it projected over the carriage way at the side of the cinema and was supported on stilts. The first 'talkie' was 'Let us be gay' which starred Marie Dressler and Norma Shearer; this played the week beginning 4.8.31., the sound equipment installed being British Thomson-Houston (B.T.H.). Adverts did not reappear in the local press until April 1936 but then continued on a regular basis until the hall closed. During 1940 the practise was adopted of offering three programmes a week, each running two days; this booking pattern was maintained throughout the forties and early fifties. There were occasional stage performances, Gypsy Petulengro in 1946 and Zillah, a mental telepathy act, in 1950.

Haines stayed until towards the end of 1931 and was succeeded as manager by W.O. Jackson but by November 1934 there was a manageress, Mrs A. Lovatt who still held the post at the end of 1939. Lawrence Jones followed and was still manager in December 1941. The Palace changed hands when it was taken over in April 1942 by Star Cinemas (London) Ltd. , as the company was then known. By this time the manager was Tom H. Barnett but he left before the end of the year. E. Noble became manager in January 1943 and he was followed by Bernard Dore who, after a period of overlap was in sole charge from July 1945 to October 1954. Children's matinees had been held previously on Saturdays but Uncle Bernard, as he was popularly known, took a particular interest in this side of the business, which gave scope for his talents as a magician and ventriloquist. His children's club organised occasional outings and tried to instill the elements of road safety; before he left in 1954 he was invited to a meeting of the Stocksbridge Urban District Council and publically thanked for his work in the community. The next manager at the Palace was E. Dance but Dore returned in March 1956 after a spell at the Don and he remained until shortly before the cinema closed in July 1966; his tenure of office at the Palace had extended over more than 19 years. During the last few months Dore was managing the Hillsborough Park Cinema, although continuing to have a supervisory responsibility at the Palace; the manageress at the Stocksbridge was Mrs. Lena Jubb.

The first Sunday film shown was on 4.1.53. a different programme was screened on Sundays so that from 1953 to 1956 there would be four changes of programme each week. Cinemascope was installed in November 1955; in the opening week the features were 'Vera Cruz', 'The high and the mighty' and 'King Richard and the Crusaders'. From 1957 to 1961 there were usually three programme changes a week; Sunday; Monday – Wednesday and Thursday – Saturday. However the more popular films might run Monday – Saturday or exceptionally the whole week. From then on the spectre of bingo made life more complicated and caused a few heartaches. From 2.1.62. bingo sessions occupied every Tuesday evening and films played Sunday; Monday and Wednesday; Thursday – Saturday. There were still three programme changes a week. From 10.2.62 to 15.9.62 there were also bingo sessions on a Sunday afternoon but this did not interfere with the evening film performance.

All was to change in the week beginning Monday, 13th May 1963 when films were abruptly withdrawn and it was announced that the Palace would be reopened as a 'Bingo casino'. Peter Adamson – Len Fairclough of Granada's

'Coronation Street' was scheduled to participate in the reopening ceremony on Friday 17th May but was met by angry demonstrators bearing such placards as 'It's not fair Len, we want flicks'. The procession carried a mock coffin and chanted 'No more Bingo'. Vandals in the crowd used the occasion to start trouble and the manager was quoted as saying 'This is the worst night I have ever experienced'. Not surprisingly this led to unfavourable newspaper publicity and, in the light of public reaction, films were brought back. From 13th June films were shown Thursday, Friday and Saturday: Saturday matinees for children were reinstated from 29th June. From 15th July it was back to Bingo on Tuesdays with films being shown throughout the remainder of the week. All Bingo was discontinued from 4.8.64.

Despite the last ditch stand of 1963 the end was not long delayed. Saturday children's matinees were dropped from 4.8.64 but all other performances were continued until 23.7.66. what proved to be the final performances was 'Our man Flint' with James Coburn following in the footsteps of James Bond, supported by 'March of the movies'. No public announcement was made about the closing but the building was boarded up immediately the Saturday night audience had left: after the dust had settled it was reopened as a Bingo hall.

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