

Cottage Road Cinema

Cottage Road, Leeds, LS6 4DD

PRESS RELEASE

(release date : immediate)

BIG CELEBRATIONS FOR CINEMA CENTENARY

The Cottage Road cinema in Far Headingley reaches its centenary on Sunday 29th July 2012. It is the oldest surviving cinema in Leeds and has been showing films continuously since it opened, which makes it almost unique in the country.

The historic occasion is being celebrated with the unveiling of a heritage plaque commissioned by the Leeds Civic Trust and sponsored by the Far Headingley Village Society with the support of several local businesses and individuals.

Leeds North West MP Greg Mulholland has tabled an Early Day Motion congratulating the cinema on its achievement, also the Far Headingley Village Society and local residents for campaigning to save the cinema when it was threatened with closure in 2005, plus the present proprietor, Charles Morris, for saving the cinema and others in Yorkshire and elsewhere.

The heritage plaque unveiling ceremony will be performed by Leeds-born drama writer Kay Mellor and will be followed by a special tribute from local poet Linda Marshall.

At 4.00 pm there will be a public screening of "THE SMALLEST SHOW ON EARTH", the classic comedy from 1957 starring Bill Travers and Virginia McKenna playing a couple who inherit a small-town cinema. The cast also includes Peter Sellers, Margaret Rutherford, Bernard Miles and Leslie Phillips.

Visitors on that day will also be able to experience for the first time the new bar lounge which has been in the course of construction by the cinema manager and staff during the last few weeks.

The cinema was originally a private motor garage, built 1908 by the wealthy Kirk family of Castle Grove mansion for the benefit of their sons who were keen motorists at that time. The cinema was the brainchild of Owen Brooks (also a young motor engineer) and George Reginald Smith. In later years the cinema was bought by Frank Thompson, of Golden Acre Park fame, in order to close it

when he had built a new super cinema nearby. When this plan failed he sold the cinema to Associated Tower Cinemas who had built up a substantial circuit of cinemas in Leeds and nearby towns, and who later acquired the Lounge cinema. The Lounge closed amidst a great uproar in January 2005 and the Cottage Road was destined to follow suit, but was rescued by Charles Morris in an eleventh-hour deal in July that year.

Leeds had sixty eight cinemas in the heyday of cinemagoing, and over one hundred venues have been cinemas at different times. Twenty four cinemas had opened before the Cottage Road (originally called the Headingley Picture House) but most of these had disappeared before WW2. The Cottage Road predates and has survived all the super cinemas of the 1930s including the Paramount (later Odeon), the Ritz (later ABC), the Majestic and the Coliseum.

"It is quite a responsibility taking on such a distinguished cinema," said Charles Morris. "With so much history behind it, and it being so beloved by the community, it has to be more than just a business proposition."

Charles in fact has four cinemas in Yorkshire and two in Cumbria - all with significant anniversaries in the next few months. The Cumbrian cinemas celebrate 75 and 85 years of operation this year and all the Yorkshire ones - the Plaza Skipton, the Rex Elland and the Picture House, Keighley, as well as the Cottage Road - have their centenaries in the next few months.

Charles Morris was born in the Wirral and has been hooked on cinemas ever since seeing his first film, Walt Disney's "Lady and the Tramp", when aged seven. He spent his youth helping voluntarily at his local cinema but after school and university he pursued an engineering career. He continued to work part-time in cinemas before embarking on a Summer season of film shows at the Victoria Hall, Settle, in the Summer of 1986 with the help of his family and a friend. He acquired and reopened the Rex, Elland in 1988 and four years later gave up engineering to take over the Royalty cinema, Bowness on Windermere. The Picture House Keighley made up a trio in July 1996, which was joined by the Plaza Skipton in 1998. The closed ABC cinema in Lancaster was reopened briefly as the Regal in 2003 and then the Cottage Road was saved from closure on his and the cinema's birthday in July 2005. A similar rescue operation was performed on the Roxy cinema, Ulverston, in 2006.

Further screenings of films representing each decade of the cinema's existence are planned over the next few months, leading to a silent film show with live musical accompaniment as part of the Leeds Film Festival. One of these will be a showing of "Singing In The Rain", a favourite film of Sir Gerald Kaufman, MP, who was is a native of Leeds and used to visit the Cottage Road, who will

introduce the film.

(ends)

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