

NORTHERN MORRIS ASSOCIATED CINEMAS

Cottage Road Cinema, Cottage Road, Leeds, LS6 4DD

PRESS RELEASE

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BIG CELEBRATIONS FOR CINEMAS' CENTENARIES

Independent cinema entrepreneur Charles Morris is in the midst of some celebrations - lasting for more than a year. For each of his six cinemas passes a significant milestone in the next twelve months.

Charles has four cinemas in Yorkshire, three of which celebrate their centenaries this year and the remaining one in 2013. His two Cumbrian cinemas have achieved seventy five and eighty five years of operation already this year.

The Yorkshire cinemas are the Cottage Road cinema, Headingley, Leeds, the Plaza Skipton, the Rex Elland and the Picture House, Keighley. The Cumbrian cinemas are at Ulverston and Windermere.

The Roxy cinema, Ulverston, screened Rose Marie, starring Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, on Thursday 21st June - 75 years to the day since the cinema first opened with that same film. The Roxy was a super cinema designed by noted cinema architects Drury and Gomersall and seated 1200. It was converted in 1974 to provide bingo in the stalls area but retaining the cinema in the former circle, which still seats more than 300. The gala night was attended by two ladies, one of whom saw Rose Marie when it was first released and the other who remembered the cinema being built. Several hundred pounds were raised for a local hospice.

The Royalty in Bowness-on-Windermere turned 85 years last February, but the event is to be marked in October to coincide with the completion of the installation of a Wurlitzer theatre organ, transplanted from a cinema in London. One event planned is the screening of a silent film to the accompaniment of the organ.

The Cottage Road cinema, in Far Headingley not far from St Chad's church, is first in line for a telegram from the Queen. It was originally stables for a large house nearby and was converted to a motor garage before becoming a cinema in 1912. It was acquired by Associated Tower Cinemas, once a large concern in Leeds and North Yorkshire, and rescued from closure by Charles in July 2005. It goes from strength to strength and its monthly "Classics at the Cottage" film shows have

become an institution. The celebrations there will begin with the unveiling of a heritage plaque at 2.30 on the anniversary date, Sunday 29th July, followed by a reception for invited guests and then a public screening of "The Smallest Show On Earth", the classic comedy from 1957 about a young couple who inherit an old cinema. 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.

The Plaza, in Sackville Street, Skipton, was originally the Temperance Hall, built in 1873. Its exact opening date as a cinema (originally the Gem) is a bit uncertain but it was definitely advertising in August 1912. In the 1920s it was bought by Matthew Hartley and Sons, who had another cinema in Skipton plus others in Barnoldswick and Earby, and stayed in that family for three generations until being bought by Charles in May 1998. As far as can be ascertained, both the Cottage Road and the Plaza have been showing films continuously since 1912.

The Rex, Elland, Charles's first cinema, was purpose-built as the Central Picture House, opening on the 16th December 1912 and changing its name in 1959. The opening featured "A gigantic programme ! All star pictures !", though the titles were not announced. Prices were 6, 4 and 3 old pence, the proceeds of the first night going to the St. John's Ambulance Association. The films were all silent in those days, but the cinema manager, Mr. Harry Taylor, accompanied them on the piano and we are told that the proceedings were enlivened by the sweet and appropriate music he played !

"Talkies" were installed in 1931 (rather later than most cinemas) and the share capital of the company had to be increased to finance the new equipment. The Central closed in January 1959, changed hands and then reopened as the Rex in November the same year. Bingo took over in 1964 though films returned for nearly two years in 1975. It had been derelict for about three years when Charles and his then business partner Peter Berry reopened it in October 1988.

The Picture House, Keighley, the town's first purpose built cinema, began life on the 10th May 1913 with a programme of "all star pictures", prices ranging from three old pence in the stalls to one shilling in the circle for the privilege. The films, again being silent, were accompanied by a four-piece orchestra under the direction of Mr. EJS Craven. The owing company had about thirty shareholders and the principal directors included Sir Harry Smith and his brother Arthur who owned the engineering firm of Dean, Smith and Grace. In the 1950s the cinema was bought by the Essoldo cinema combine which sold out to Classic Cinemas Ltd in the early 1970s. For a time,

one-night stands by 1960s pop stars were a feature. The cinema was closed in 1983 due to structural defects but was renovated with a large sum of public money and reopened in 1985. It closed five years later but was reopened by Charles in July 1996. In the meantime it has never suffered the indignity of bingo.

Charles Morris was born in the Wirral and nurtured an ambition to have his own cinema ever since seeing his first film, Walt Disney's "Lady and the Tramp" when aged seven. He spent his youth helping voluntarily at the Winter Gardens cinema, Hoylake, later pursuing an engineering career in Blackburn. He had worked part-time in more than a dozen 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 his engineering career 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 as the Regal in 2003 but had to close again three years later when the promised multiscreen cinema finally opened nearby. Charles saved the Cottage Road Leeds from closure on his and the cinema's birthday in July 2005 and then performed another rescue operation on the Roxy cinema in Ulverston in 2006.

"When we started at Elland, the cinema trade thought we were mad," remembers Charles, " But twenty four years later we are still here. It's been jolly hard work, but generally good fun. It took a long while to get established, but after a year we showed "Shirley Valentine" and have never looked back since. I never set out to own six cinemas though; it just sort of happened. The quid-pro-quo for my having cinemas was that my wife could have a house in the country, preferably in the Lake District. So that's how we came to have the Royalty in Bowness and also made our home there. But people just kept coming along offering these other cinemas, and I just couldn't bear to see them close. It's been a struggle sometimes, what with the opposition from the multi-screen cinemas - and also, I might add, from all these places which are Lottery or local authority funded - but we have carved our niche among an audience which wants to see films from a broad spectrum in comfortable and relaxing surroundings. Buildings which are a hundred years old need their share of repairs and refurbishments, plus we are now required to invest heavily in digital and 3D technology, but I aim that they should continue for many years to come.

"A centenary is quite some achievement and it is quite remarkable that these cinemas have seen the rise and fall of the art deco palaces of the 1930s and have survived the emergence of the multiplexes so we are planning some big celebrations over the course of the coming year."

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