

1 Introduction

- 1.1 On the 18 May 2010 I was instructed by Jersey Heritage to carry out an independent assessment and produce a report on the architectural and historical interest of the 1952 Jersey Odeon Cinema. The building is listed as a Site of Special Interest (SSI). The brief included placing the Odeon into the wider UK context with reference to the development of cinemas generally. Photographs of the building were also requested. A full inspection was carried out on 6 July 2010.
- 1.2 I am a freelance consultant working in the planning, heritage and conservation sector. I am also currently employed by The Theatres Trust - The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres and a statutory consultee in the planning process within the UK - as its Planning and Heritage Adviser. An acknowledged expert in theatre and cinema buildings, I have over 20 years planning, architectural, urban design, conservation and regeneration experience. Previously I was Principal Urban Design and Conservation Officer for the London Borough of Hounslow dealing with listed buildings, conservation areas, planning and urban design issues and more recently (2008) working as a freelance conservation and design consultant for the London Borough of Hillingdon. I hold a degree in Estate Management and a Postgraduate Diploma in Historic Building Conservation from the Architectural Association (AA). I am a Chartered Town Planner (MRTPI) and a Full Member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC). I also serve on the Casework Committees of the Cinema Theatre Association, the Twentieth Century Society and the Victorian Society.
- 1.3 Dr Elain Harwood has agreed to edit this report. Dr Harwood is an acknowledged international expert on twentieth-century architecture, particularly on the period from the 1930s to the 1970s. She holds a PhD from Bristol University (2010) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Historic Building Conservation from the AA; she is also a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. She is an Architectural Investigator conducting research for English Heritage, a Trustee of the Twentieth Century Society and a Committee Member of the Cinema Theatre Association. Here, however, Dr Harwood is working in a freelance capacity.

Recommendation

The Odeon, Jersey, has architectural, cultural and historic interest. Externally, the building is virtually as constructed and fits well within the context of the street scene. It retains many features of interest (albeit in some cases hidden behind later subdivision) and, although the building has been subdivided and the overall volume of the original auditorium is no longer evident, the core quality and plan form, along with the decorative fixtures that remain, make a coherent whole. The subdivision is mainly lightweight and reversible in nature. Cinema buildings define the history and culture of twentieth-century society and as an exemplar of the genre from the post-war period the Odeon is a unique surviving example. The Odeon, Jersey, compares very favourably to the limited examples of the period within the British Isles. Similar to the way in which the Festival of Britain provided a cultural impetus in mainland Britain, the building is symbolic of Jersey Island's regeneration after wartime occupation. It is a building which has very significant interest in accordance with the States of Jersey's current criteria and should remain as a Site of Special Interest.

2 Odeon Jersey

- 2.1 The Odeon, St. Helier, Jersey, was in 1952 the first new purpose built cinema designed and constructed within the British Isles since 1939. Architecturally, it is one of the best surviving post-war cinemas of the period 1950-1960 and is the only complete example of an Odeon cinema from this period. Additionally, it is the only historic cinema building left in Jersey and has architectural merit both internally and externally. The Odeon was designed by T. P. Bennett & Son of London. Its interest is historic as well as architectural. It follows the traditions of the Odeon 'house-style', evident in the line of windows above the entrance, horizontal banding at ground floor level and tower to Bath Street. But it also illustrates the ways in which the design of cinemas were to evolve in the post-war period, with such features as the gentle curves within the auditorium and plain walls only decorated by acoustic tiles arranged in a decorative effect. With a better understanding of acoustics in the post-war period, elaborate decoration was no longer needed - and nor was it welcomed in an age given to greater simplicity by choice as well as economic necessity.

3 Background

- 3.1 The Odeon cinema in Jersey was part of the Odeon circuit, which was originally built up by Oscar Deutsch during the Depression of the 1930s. To understand the architectural and historic interest of the building it is important to reflect on the background of these early purpose built movie palaces.
- 3.2 The purpose built cinema was born from travelling fairground booths, rented shops and assembly rooms. These darkened rooms were always prone to fire due to the notorious instability of early film and poor projection equipment. Nevertheless, film was so popular that cinema became the fastest growing and one of the most recognisable new building types of the twentieth century. It became the new focus in the urban landscape, more so than theatre or music hall. In a staggeringly short space of time, cinema became established as the undisputed 'populist' pastime.
- 3.3 Cinema buildings, often referred to as 'dream palaces', embodied escape and fantasy, a temporary relief from the mundane and repetitive world of work. And cinemas, every bit as much as the films they showed, were the physical embodiment of their eras: the extravagant choreographed musicals of Busby Berkeley and the glittering Art Deco picture palaces of the 1930s encapsulate the urge to escape from the Depression and the insecurity which plagued the decade following the 1929 financial crash. The B-movie horror of aliens and radiation represented a fear of communism and the pioneering spirit of the 1950s austerity - the post-war years and the freedom brought by the car. The art-house cinemas of the 1960s reflected a rebellion against Hollywood escapism. And the emergence of the out-of-town multiplexes exclusively showing big studio blockbusters echoed a self-satisfaction of the 1980s and corporate domination.
- 3.4 With television and, even more significantly with the spread of video in the 1970s and 1980s, cinemas were seen as redundant. Some were adapted to hold more screens, as was the Jersey Odeon, but many others were simply demolished and sites redeveloped for more profitable uses. Such survivals are therefore rare, and have been recognised by widespread listing in Britain and abroad.

4 Oscar Deutsch

- 4.1 Oscar Deutsch was born in Birmingham in 1893, the son of Jewish immigrants. After leaving school, he and some school friends formed Victory Motion Pictures Limited, becoming agents for a London film distributor. From film distribution, Deutsch turned his interest to cinemas, taking over the Midland Amusement Company and with it acquiring several cinemas in Coventry and the Black Country. His first Odeon opened on 4 August 1930 at Perry Barr. It was built in partnership with several businessmen, one of whom suggested a simplified version of the 'Odeion'ⁱ, a Greek amphitheatre as an appropriate name. At the same time, an illuminated sign manufacturer called Pearce approached the group and designed the distinctive 'squared-shaped' Odeon lettering – soon to be used throughout the circuit. But it was not until 1933 that Odeon was formed as a separate company.
- 4.2 As the chain expanded, so the Odeon 'house-style' developed. It can be summed up as being streamlined, with large areas of cream faience tiling, the standard geometric red and gold letters of the name Odeon, and the minimum advertising space on the building. On most cinemas of the 1930s and 1940s details of the films were displayed on large poster boards. The restrained advertising of films at each Odeon allowed the shape of the cinema to be appreciated and it was hoped that by not plastering the cinema with ostentatious posters, a new 'class' of patron would be attracted. One of Deutsch's hopes was that his cinema brand and service would be enough to attract the patron as much as the film showing on screen.ⁱⁱ Indeed, he created a distinctive house-style that no other circuit managed. When a new Odeon opened, a grand opening ceremony took place. Most Odeons were opened by a film star, the mayor or the local MP. By way of contrast, ABC cinemas opened quietly, without any sort of ceremony.
- 4.3 Oscar Deutsch died of cancer on 5 December 1941, aged 48. His wife, Lily, inherited his shares which she sold to J. Arthur Rank and the Deutsch family ceased to be involved with Odeon at that point.

5 The Architect

- 5.1 Sir Thomas Penberthy Bennett, KBE, FRIBA (1887-1980) was a renowned British architect. He trained as an architect at Regent Street Polytechnic while employed in the drawing office of the London and North Western Railway. He went on to study at the Royal Academy School, joining the Office of Works (later Ministry of Works) in 1911. A career in both education and government followed, until he set up his own practice in 1921. In 1922 he became a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects. In 1940, he became Director of Bricks at the Ministry of Works, where he was awarded the CBE in 1942, but returned to private practice immediately after the Second World War. He was knighted in 1946.
- 5.2 Bennett was responsible for the development of Crawley New Town, and in 1947 he was appointed Chairman of its Development Corporation - a post he held until 1960; he meanwhile also became Chairman of Stevenage Development Corporation. At Crawley he was responsible for the scrapping of the existing plans for the New Town, and for the appointment of Sir Anthony Minoprio to create the town's new Master Plan. Bennett was awarded the KBE in 1954. His private practice, T.P. Bennett & Son, expanded into an architectural company and was passed to his only son in 1967. Bennett died on 29 January 1980.
- 5.3 His practice designed many commercial landmark buildings throughout the UK, such as the former Saville Theatre (now Odeon, Shaftesbury Avenue, listed Grade II July 1988), 1929-1930; No.2 Davygate, York, a bank, restaurant, shops and offices (listed Grade II, March 1997), 1929-30; Smithfield Poultry Market (listed Grade II, 1961-3); a mews residence, Mount Row, London

(listed Grade II, May 1976), 1927; Dorset House, Gloucester Place, Marylebone, a block of 185 flats above underground parking garage, ground floor filling station, restaurant and 16 shops (listed Grade II, March 1998), 1934-5; John Barnes Department store and apartments, Hampstead (locally listed), 1934; the London Mormon Temple, Lingfield, Surrey, 1958 and Hawkins House in Dublin, 1961.

- 5.4 It is not established why the practice of T. P. Bennett and Son were commissioned to design the Jersey Odeon. But it was a recognised and successful commercial practice that had designed a number of pre-war cinemas for the Odeon circuit, including the Odeon, Haverstock Hill, Hampstead in 1934, and designed the Odeon Highgate, which was eventually built in 1955. The practice went on to design a number of cinemas for Rank, including the Gaumont, Barnsley (1956); Gaumont, Bootle (1956) and the Odeon, Marble Arch (1967), as well as rebuilding a number of bomb-damaged cinemas such as the Gaumont, Holloway Road (1958), now Odeon Holloway Road. T. P. Bennett and Son were clearly a favourite with the Rank company after the war, the success of the Jersey venture leading to many other commissions that confirmed the practice at the forefront of modern cinema design.

6 A Description of the Odeon

- 6.1 The external façades survive intact with only the loss of the original entrance doors and vertical ODEON sign to the tower and the boxing-out of the canopy. The external walls are constructed of load-bearing concrete blocks (made on the Island) with a steel frame used to support the roof, confirmed from reports of the time and viewed on site. The chequered-board pattern was created by rubbing down alternate squares with carborundum stone and appears in very good condition (although it requires a clean to allow its original colour to be appreciated)ⁱⁱⁱ. All the 1950s steel windows survive, with horizontal glazing bars that give a strong banding to the design. The small windows with horizontal hoods to the escape staircase survive, as do the windows and doors at the external terrace level. So does the quirky billiard-ball motif above the windows to the circle foyer. The tower feature to Bath Street, which carried the only Odeon sign with a projecting hood, paid homage to the 1930s circuit style^{iv}. Also reminiscent of the 1930s Odeons, just below roof level, is the rounded corner with the corridor enclosed by glazing (see Odeon, Shannon Corner, Morecambe, illustration 2). Allen Eyles suggests that the chequered-board pattern recalls the faience squares of previous Odeons and the basketweave alternations of tiles^v. It is also a feature found in Scandinavian architecture, then fashionable in the British Isles. Certainly it appears that in the 1950s Rank was maintaining the Odeon house-style (as seen by comparing Jersey with the Odeon, Worcester (1950) and Odeon, Westbourne Grove (1955).
- 6.2 Internally, the plan form is still recognisable despite the subdivision for twinning in 1981, the upstairs screen being itself subdivided in 1989 and the downstairs in 1992. The foyers survive particularly well. The entrance foyer has lost its central paybox and bar, but the feature columns and trough lighting remain. The two staircases at either side designed in the spirit of the Festival of Britain especially the curved wooden handrails, are intact. The circle foyer is almost unaltered, save for the loss of soft furnishings. The original light-box fittings remain in situ, together with the neon strips edging the ceiling and wall junctions. Many internal doors remain throughout. The circular uplighters remain in what was originally the rear of the auditorium (now corridors in some cases) and the screens. Although the original auditorium has been split, many features remain such as the acoustic tiles, grills, handrails, dado, skirtings, architraves, barriers, balcony front and light fittings. Other features appear to survive behind later fitting out for the subdivision such as the proscenium (see illustration 1). The inserted walls and dropped ceiling all appear reasonably lightweight and reversible. The original projection room survives mainly intact, complete with its projectors. It is not known what remains of the stage or if the original curved ceiling and pendant lights remain above the inserted one.

6.3 The Odeon, Jersey, retains much architectural and historic interest. It has a well articulated façade and internally a large amount of original features and detailing. The plan form, particularly the circle foyer and main staircases survive well. Despite subdivision, features appear to survive - particularly the acoustic tiles, mouldings, doors and staircases, along with the proscenium. A good percentage of the original scheme thus survives in situ.

7 Comparable listed cinemas in England

- 7.1 The Curzon in Mayfair is only other statutory listed post-war cinema in England. It was listed Grade II in July 1997. It is a cinema with restaurant, offices and flats. Designed in 1957 (when the plans were exhibited at the Royal Academy), it was built in 1963-6. The architects were Sir John Burnet, Tait and Partners, with H. G Hammond the principal designer and job architect; Ove Arup and Partners were the engineers. The interior of the cinema is the most elaborate and best surviving of the post-war period. It has a coffered 'waffle plate' ceiling and wall murals of fibre glass by William Mitchell and Associates, which reflect lighting and help disperse sound, whilst giving a glowing cave-like impression in rich primary colours. The carpets, seating and other fittings have been carefully maintained true to their original finishes and colours. This auditorium has itself recently been subdivided with listed building consent. The refurbishment with two screens opened in February 2003.
- 7.2 The English Heritage Culture and Entertainment Buildings Selection Guide produced by the Heritage Protection Department in March 2007 (see extract 1) advises on page 10 that for statutory listing cinema buildings *'need to be assessed in the context of their chain: each had distinctive styles and in-house architects and designers to which the gazetteers by Allen Eyles are useful aids'*.
- 7.3 The Odeon, Jersey, is of national importance as a survivor of its type and date as part of the Odeon house-style and Rank circuit. It was published in the architectural press of the time and features in Allen Eyles book *'Odeon, 2: From J Arthur Rank to the Multiplex, 2005, pp 21-23'*.

7.4 Comparisons with other Odeons: 1950 - 1966

Location	Date	Architect(s)	Listed	Condition/significance
Westbourne Grove	1955	Andrew Mather, redesigned by Leonard Allen after the war	No	Demolished
Worcester	1955	Harry Weedon	No	Tripled in 1974 and was never architecturally significant
Harlow	1960	T P Bennett & Sons	No	Tripled, and never architecturally significant
Haymarket	1962	Leslie C Norton	No	Altered, and never architecturally significant
Leeds, Merrion Centre	1964		No	Altered, and never architecturally significant
Leicester	1964		No	Altered, and never architecturally significant
Marble Arch	1966	T P Bennett and Son	No	Altered, and never architecturally significant
Elephant & Castle	1966	Ernö Goldfinger	Yes, if survived	Demolished

- 7.5 As can be seen from the list above, few Odeon cinemas were constructed for the Rank circuit in the decades following the end of the war. The Odeon, Worcester and the Odeon, Westbourne Grove, were the only two cinemas to be built at a comparable time. It is interesting to note that these were redesigns of earlier pre-war proposals, whereas that for Jersey was fresh. Although still displaying the house-style, the plainness and simplicity of new designs were of the period and appear similar to that of Jersey (see illustrations 3 & 4). Nevertheless, in comparison, Jersey is of a superior quality in terms of architectural design.

- 7.6 It is difficult to compare Jersey with many of the 1960s Odeons as most, such as the Merrion Centre in Leeds, were not of any real architectural significance or merit; they formed part of larger mixed-use schemes of offices and shops. The Odeon, Elephant and Castle, by the renowned architect Ernő Goldfinger was the only significant cinema building of the post-war period in the UK which could have been considered comparable with the Odeon, Jersey, or Curzon Mayfair, and was under consideration for listing at a high grade when it was demolished in 1989.
- 7.7 It has been argued elsewhere that the Odeon, Jersey, is too altered in terms of the subdivision. However, there are many examples of Odeons and other 1930s cinemas within the UK that have been listed after subdivision, where enough of the original survives and the sum of the whole serves as an exemplar of its type. Examples include the former Regal Beckenham (now Odeon) built in 1930 (listed Grade II, January 1998). Other examples have received listed building consent for major alterations such as the Odeon in Blackpool, which was constructed in 1939 (listed Grade II, March 1994) and which is now a nightclub, as well as the Curzon Mayfair.

8 Conclusion

8.1 The Odeon, Jersey, has architectural, cultural and historic interest. Externally, the building is virtually as constructed and fits well within the context of the street scene. It retains many features of interest (albeit in some cases hidden behind later subdivision) and, although the building has been adapted and the overall volume of the original auditorium is no longer evident, the core quality and plan form along with the decorative fixtures that remain make up a coherent whole. The subdivision is mainly lightweight and reversible in nature. Cinema buildings define the history and culture of twentieth-century society and as an exemplar of the genre from the post-war period the Odeon is a unique surviving example. The Odeon, Jersey, thus relates well to the limited comparable examples of the period within the British Isles and its principal features are clearly intelligible. The full inspection undertaken on 6 July 2010 confirmed that chief features of interest remain.

ⁱ Clegg, Rosemary, *ODEON*, Mercia Cinema Society, 1985, p16

ⁱⁱ Clegg, Rosemary, *ODEON*, Mercia Cinema Society, 1985, p16

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Architects' Journal*, October 16, 1952, p468

^{iv} Eyles, Allen, *Odeon Cinemas, 2: From J Arthur Rank to the Multiplex*, Cinema Theatre Association, 2005, p23

^v Eyles, Allen, *Odeon Cinemas, 2: From J Arthur Rank to the Multiplex*, Cinema Theatre Association, 2005, p23