

Melton Mowbray, the Leicestershire town with a population of 25,000 is perhaps more famously known for its pork pies. However, the pies may soon find themselves stiff new competition! The new owners of The Regal, re-opening in March, intend for Melton to be just as equally well known as a cinema destination. The reasons for this I hope will be made clear in this article.

Owners ... past and present

The Regal was run by the late John Merryweather for 10 years until mid-2012. John was a well-known and much respected figure in the industry and before setting up on his own had worked for Apollo Cinemas for many years before that. I had known John when my practice worked on Apollo cinema projects in the 1990s.

The new owners of The Regal are however Tony and Amanda Mundin. I had worked with Amanda on the design of The Ritz Belper some years ago (see CT 'Puttin' On The Ritz' June 2006 and 'Puttin' On The Ritz (II)' March 2007).

Amanda has said that 'they had known John since setting up The Ritz in 2006 when they received much valuable and generous advice from him and were very sorry to hear that he had passed away'. However it was not until a little later that they heard that The Regal had become available on the property market. Amanda again: 'We knew immediately it was a project we wanted to take on - a single screen in a busy market town is perfect for us and we knew we could apply the same principles as had worked for The Ritz'. With more research Amanda found out that a local group was trying to get the cinema open, so she knew they had the immediate support of the community. More importantly, the new owners had the blessing of Neil Merryweather (John's son) and his wife Carol who wrote to say 'how pleased they were that it was Amanda and her family who had taken over'.

Business model

For an independent, The Regal had a near perfect catchment profile. The nearest multiplexes in Grantham, Loughborough, Leicester and Nottingham are roughly 15-18 miles away and public transport in the evenings is particularly poor. According to Amanda there are also regional film cinemas funded by the Arts Council in Leicester, Nottingham and Stamford. After meeting The Save Regal Melton group, the owners decided to proceed with The Ritz 'business model' and offer a variety of commercial,



Photo courtesy Bill Chew

Return of The Regal

Melton's 'new' independent cinema

By Bill Chew, who acted as cinema architect on The Regal and is Director of Bill Chew Architect Ltd, specialising in cinema, leisure and media-related projects. He can be contacted on 07401 425986 and at billchew@btinternet.com / www.billchewarchitect.co.uk

classic and cultural films coupled with documentary, foreign language films, low budget independent, animation and live action, children's films and live alternative content such as opera, ballet and plays respectively from The Met, Bolshoi and National Theatre.

Architecture and management

The original cinema had 216 seats but like Belper, the new cinema is to receive a complete makeover having much fewer seats but with the aim of providing patrons with a completely new and more personal cinema-going experience as compared with multiplexes. The auditorium has been completely overhauled to include spacious and comfortable seating in an air-conditioned environment offering good sight lines, big picture - Scope size 7.62 x 3.24 m (25'0" x 10' 7"), digital surround sound, i.e.d. floor

lighting, induction loop and infra red facilities. There will be seating for 108 consisting of a combination of 14 luxury seats, 5 sofas and 84 standard seats. The digital projector is a 2K Barco 12C installed by Omnex Pro-Film Ltd. The screen installation will consist of fully operational curtains and wall drapes in crushed velvet, black serge masking and matt white perforated screen, installed by Cinema Screens Ltd. Side wall and rear wall treatments will consist of 'Decorcord' acoustic wall carpets from Eomac Ltd.

In the foyer and ticket area, the room has been completely transformed with the previous non-loading bearing walls and the old ticket desk removed to open up the area to showcase 3 'feature' windows facing the front of the building. A new concessions kiosk, licensed bar and ticket counter will be established on the auditorium wall side.

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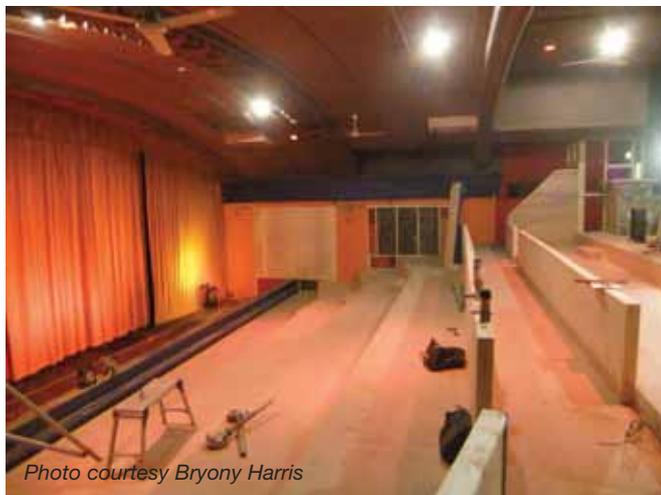


Photo courtesy Bryony Harris



Photo courtesy Bryony Harris

New and better toilet facilities have been added and a new entrance foyer complete the refurbishment of the cinema.

The cinema will be managed by Jacob Muddin and Bryony Harris and a team of staff recruited locally. Social media now plays an important part in the running of a cinema and The Regal is no exception with its Twitter and Facebook account.

The 'independent trend'

At the end of 2012, the newspapers announced the acquisition of City Screen Ltd (owner of the 21 site Picturehouse Cinemas) by Cineworld, a publicly quoted cinema behemoth. Before the acquisition, Picturehouse was one of the UK's largest operator of independent art house cinemas. If one reads the news too literally one might be forgiven for thinking that life for the independent sector might be at an end given that one of the biggest exponents of the genre is now owned by a multiplex company. In my view independents are necessary to provide a balanced alternative fare for cinema goers who may not necessarily want to go to a multiplex. As I have written previously in CT, independents have come along way in the last 2 decades in the films, environment and facilities they now provide their audiences. Since multiplexes were introduced from the US to the UK in the mid 1980s they have led the way in greatly improving cinema design which independents have to a large extent emulated and perhaps also improved. The Regal Melton is a good example of this trend with its emphasis on audience comfort combined with the latest digital technology, big picture, good sight lines, varied programming-catering to the requirements of all sections of the community. Long may independents continue to exist and thrive in the UK!

A further detailed article on The Regal will follow in the June issue of CT so keep a lookout for it.

Bill Chew © 2013