

The Chingford Odeon

The Odeon Cinema in Cherrydown Avenue was one of the original Oscar Deutsch Odeon

Theatres chain. It opened on 9th September 1935 with Shirley Temple in "Bright Eyes" and Monty Banks in "So You Won't Talk".



futuristic constructions that often had immense pillars triumphantly reaching skywards together with smooth curves inspired by ocean-going liners. And to inform you of the excitement of what they contained, the name 'Odeon' was always declared proudly in huge lettering outside

The Chingford Odeon was a classic Oscar Deutsch cinema that were



The building fitted well into the Albert Crescent setting of 1930's art deco buildings that surrounded a central paved area forming the hub of the Chingford Mount shopping area.

Picture left: Albert Crescent c1960, The Council have recently carried out renovation and restoration works to the area that effectively restores it to this period.

Architect Andrew Mather's bold New York skyline classic art deco building had 1,400 seats. The Foyer contained the Pay Box,

where the tickets were sold and stood in the centre of the foyer with staircases leading to the auditorium and gallery. The word 'Odeon' was picked out on the floor and decorative potted palms stood around the walls. The 'Odeon' cinemas were often described as the 'People's Palaces' and this was very much the image they sought to convey.



Above: The 1935 opening. Oscar Deutsch is seated on the left. Above: The cinema Foyer, Pay Box in the middle and the main body of the cinema on the right!

Oscar Deutsch

He was born in 1893 at Balsall Heath, Birmingham and was the son of Leopold Deutsch, a successful Hungarian Jewish scrap metal merchant and he attended the prestigious King Edward VI Five Ways Grammar School. His father died when Oscar was only ten years old and his mother continued the business.



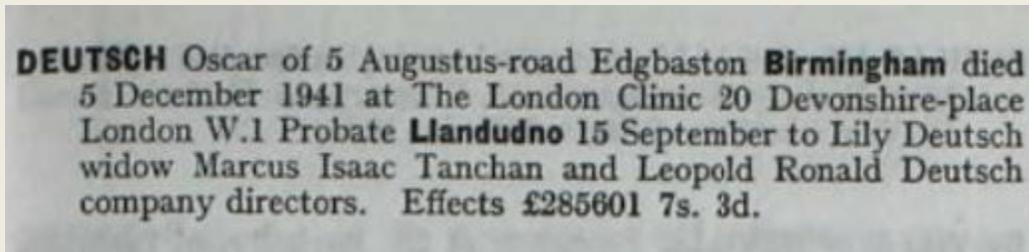
Although always a small 'sickly' man, he was a successful entrepreneur and opened his first cinema in nearby Brierley Hill, Dudley in 1928. He named his cinemas 'Odeon' probably after the ancient Greek amphitheatres. However, his publicists said that the word stood for: **Oscar Deutsch Entertains Our Nation**"

He was generous and sentimental man. Staff were offered interest free loans when they got into debt. His acts of everyday kindness were legion. Oscar Deutsch also worked around the clock. He had to: there was no other way so many new cinemas of such quality could have been built in such a short space of time.

By 1933 he had 26 Odeon cinemas and in 1935 he adopted a modern architectural art deco style for all his future cinemas. The cinema chain increased rapidly and by 1937 there were 250 Odeons, including the flagship iconic cinema in Leicester Square, London. This made Odeon one of the three major circuits in the UK.

Odeon cinemas were considered more comfortable and respectable for middle-class filmgoers than those of the two other circuits, Associated British Cinemas (ABC) and Gaumont-British Cinemas.

After Oscar Deutsch died of cancer in 1941, his widow sold the Odeon chain to J. Arthur Rank and it became part of the Rank Organisation, who also bought, but managed separately, Gaumont-British Cinemas.



(Equivalent to £14,256,623.97 at today's value!)

When We Went To The Pictures

Today, we without stirring from our arm chair by using our Wifi linked televisions, smart 3D & HD computers, tablets and smart phones we can access a world wide range of digital information and entertainment. I have a digital collection of some 3000 plus recordings and a huge number of local and family images. If I want to know something I can ask my computer search engine for the answer. If I want to watch a film, I can download it direct to my computer, store it on a USB memory stick or burn it to a DVD. If I want to read a book I can purchase a digital copy on the internet and download it to my reading device. If I want to listen to music I can download or stream to my phone, tablet or computer. I don't have to worry about size and space limitations of storing my data because I can store it in the digital cloud.

Home Entertainment In 1935



In 1935, when the Chingford Odeon opened it wasn't like that. Home music was provided by the wireless (That's what it was wire-less and the term radio was for communication equipment) and wind up record players. if you were lucky, your wireless was a state of the art EKCO radio that theoretically could access, via a pre-set dial, a number of regional UK radio stations and two

foreign stations. However, most people had large multi valve wireless with a large accumulator battery that needed to be recharged at a local wireless shop or cycle shop or garage. In order to use your wireless you had to possess License certificate that cost 10/- (Equivalent today to 50p)



In addition to the wireless, most homes also possessed a record player for which you had to buy large shellac records. You had to wind up the spring on the record player to enable it to rotate. You then carefully put the pick-up arm containing a metal needle on to the record so that the needle would run in the groove of the record and transcribe this into sound that was amplified through an acoustic speaker.



Although there were telephones available few houses had them but there were many public red automated telephone boxes at which you could make calls.

Outside Entertainment In 1935

Outside entertainment was via a local music hall or cinema. Since the introduction of the cinema, music hall attendance had declined dramatically and many music hall were turned



into cinemas or had a dedicated cinema built on the same sites. An example of this being the Victoria Music Hall in Hoe Street that became the Granada cinema. The nearest music hall to Chingford was the Palace Theatre in the High Street, Walthamstow and this couldn't

compete with the Regal Cinema at Highams Park (That in 1931 had been substantially upgraded from its predecessor, the Electric Theatre) the Doric Cinema in Station Road and the Chingford Odeon at the Mount, for accessibility, comfort and quality of entertainment.



Image above left: The Regal, Highams Park. Above right: The Doric, Station Road,

The Golden Age Of Entertainment



By 1939, the cinema was easily the most important form of mass entertainment in the UK with 20m tickets being sold and 3 new cinemas being opened each week, admission cost only a few pence, and provided probably the cheapest form of mass entertainment in most towns and cities. The 1930's were the golden age of cinema entertainment and with it came a host of Hollywood stars that included: *Paul Muni, Eddie Cantor, Mae West, Dick Powell, W. C. Fields, J Bing Crosby, Jeanette MacDonald, Barbara Stanwyck, Johnny Weismuller, Gary Cooper, Myrna Loy, Tyrone Power, Alice Faye, Errol Flynn, Bette Davis, Spencer Tracy, James Stewart, Veronica Lake, Katharine Hepburn, Deanna Durbin, Judy Garland, Ronald Colman, Basil Rathbone, Charles Laughton, Leslie Howard. James Cagney, Greta Garbo, Clark Gable, Shirley Temple, Will Rogers, Joan Crawford, Boris Karloff, Wallace Beery, Marie Dresler, Robert Taylor, Janet Gaynor, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Mickey Rooney, Joe E Brown, Jean Harlow, Spencer Tracy, Norma Shearer, Claudette Colbert, Carole Lombard.*



There were also the British produced stars such as :*Robert Donat, Frances Day, George Formby, Anna Neagle, Arthur Askey, Gracie Fields, Lawrence Olivier, Greer Garson, Will*

Hay, Jack Hulbert, Cicely Courtneidge, Elsa Lanchester, Charkles Naughton, Evelyn Laye, Jack Warner, Vivienne Leigh, Merle Oberon, Jessie Mathews, Ray Milland, Googie Withers, Lillie Palmer

Saturday Morning Pictures

While there are a large number of people who have fond memories of their attendance at the Odeon cinema, without any doubt it is their memories of their attendance as a child to the Saturday morning pictures that evoke the most nostalgia.

As far as I can determine Saturday Morning Picture started sometime during WWII in the late 1930's and carried on throughout WWII. In fact it was the war, with the difficulty of obtaining American films that encourages the growth of British cinema production.

Before the days of films made especially for children, what was shown within the children's cinema matinees would often be an adult film which had either a 'U' rating or one which had been edited for the children's matinee. Many of these films were said to "have a



certain harmful morale and psychological influence on children " There would often be adult themes shown, with very few child actors having a main or starring role until the development of Children's Entertainment film in the 1940's later The Children's Film Foundation. This began as a trend in the market and resulted

in a profitable business in producing films specifically for a young audience Foundation. This began as a trend in the market and resulted in a profitable business in producing films specifically for a young audience.

Above: Childrens Film Foundation production. The Salvage Gang (50 min): When four children try to raise money to replace a broken saw, their schemes take them on an unexpected journey through the capital.

'The Tuppenny Crush'

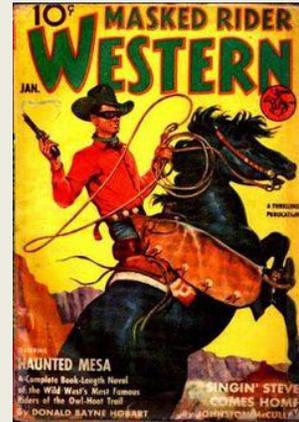
Before the war, the children's shows were known as the 'tuppenny rush' and established a basic format that was to continue throughout the duration of children's Saturday morning cinemas.

The programme consisted of a cartoon and a sixty minute B Western and sandwiched in between was a ten minute episode of a twelve part serial. Each episode ended in a cliff hanger situation designed to entice the audience back next week. Also featured in the programme was a community sing-song.

The Odeon chain enthusiastically took the format and built on it by establishing in 1943 the Odeon Kinema Club

The Odeon Children's Kinema Club.

The *Children's Newspaper* reported on May 8th 1943 on the formation of The Odeon Kinema club for children and that every Saturday morning members of the Odeon Club gathered in their 150 kinemas and pledged themselves to keep the *Promise of the Club*. This is a set of rules that are highly reminiscent to those who were in the Scouting movement and three of them are:



- *I promise to tell the truth, to help others and to obey my parents.*
- *I promise to be thoughtful to old folks to be kind to animals and to always play the game.*
- *I promise to try to make this country of ours a better place to live in.*

The Odeon Kinema Club had its own theme song sung by Uncle Ernie accompanied by the children who roared out the words:



*" We come along on Saturday morning greeting everybody with a smile,
We come along on Saturday knowing it's all worthwhile,
As members of the Odeon Club we all intend to be, Good citizens
when we grow up and champions of the free,
We come along on Saturday morning greeting everybody with a smile... smile...smile.
Greeting everybody with a smile"*

(You can listen to Uncle Ernie sing this at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RJOURKXBZ8>)

Club members had their own badges and could join the Birthday Club. On a member's birthday they received a card and on their birthday would go on stage to either receive ice cream or free tickets to the following week's matinee. The cinema managers ran weekly talent and fancy dress competitions and children would practice hard to enter these.



Remembering Saturday Morning Pictures

David Piggott of Acorn Films interviewed by the Guardian remembers paying four pence to attend 'Saturday morning pictures'. [http://www.guardian-series.co.uk/news/chingford/11716163.The changing face of south Chingford s high street/](http://www.guardian-series.co.uk/news/chingford/11716163.The%20changing%20face%20of%20south%20chingford%20s%20high%20street/)

He said: *"As a young lad, used to go there and watch cartoons, comedies and westerns - it was all part of growing up."*



Robert Randal, now in Colchester, writes: <https://www.francisfrith.com/south-chingford/southchingford-parks-and-lakes-memory-50811>

"We used to go to the Saturday morning pictures at the Odeon up the Mount, Mr. Paul the manager (we come along - on Saturday mornings) - sixpence to go in - 9d upstairs) and loved the varied items the Odeon put on there. Cartoons, news, documentary bit and the main film. In those days, the films often entailed a car chase - looking out of the back

window - and seeing the chasing car crashing and bursting into flames, didn't they. Always remembered the Laurel and Hardy film where the cook 'skins them alive' and they are then shown to be walking skeletons. Pretty horrible and I have never seen that film shown in modern times. Same as the Sinbad film - where Captain Hook's hook is shown to hook into the man's chest skin - never seen that version in modern times.

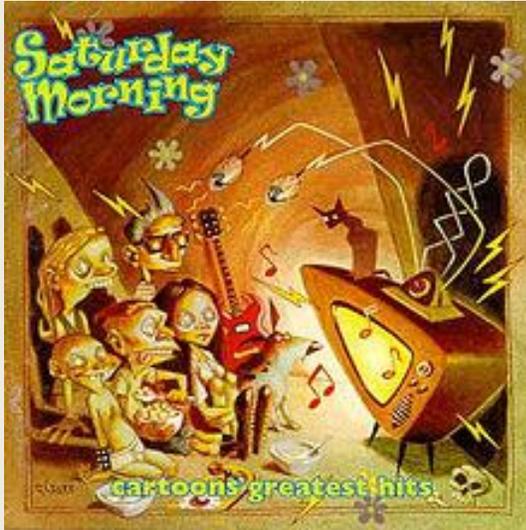
We used to walk through Chingford cemetery on the way to school and collected cemetery conkers en route. That was the only somewhat 'naughty' thing we did in there - always had the proper respect for the graves - these days there has been vandalism going on in there - such a shame"

Karen Anderson on the Walthamstow Times Facebook tells us:

"During the interval of Saturday morning pictures, there was always a bit of entertainment on the stage by someone or a group of children from the audience singing and dancing etc! It was great because you often knew the children as they were local. There was also a lucky seat number called out to receive a box of chocolates! I remember one time sitting in the lucky seat but I was too shy to go up for the chocs!!!!"

Lorraine Swift on the Walthamstow Times Facebook remembers:

“Saturday morning pictures. Sixpence for downstairs and nine pence for upstairs. We had to sing at the start... We come along on Saturday mornings, greeting everybody with a smile!”



Steve Howe on the Walthamstow Times Facebook says:

“Ok Bill, since I have to blame you for stirring up all sorts of memories and it is now Saturday morning, for me anyways being other side of the world lol... My first trip to the cinema was here, saw The Aristocats, had a B movie, something about boats I remember and you just went in and sat down so might see a film from half way through and then all the way round. Saturday morning pictures had the usual fare of cartoons, bugs bunny et al and then Flash Gordon, or some other adventure series,. There was also some serial about a dragon from outer space who's ship was an invisible globe..... or was that some weird dream ???!. The smell in the theatre was of hot dogs and the sweet aroma from popcorn and icecreams. You got to meet up with mates from school and then off to watch your team play football, that all started at 3.00pm... on a

Saturday !!!. “

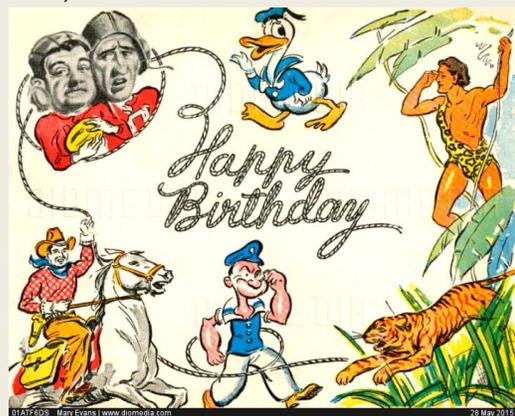
Linda Worboys-Cox who runs the Chingford & Highams Park Facebook writes:

“I remember seeing that Martin, also 'The Love Bug', 'Half a Sixpence' 'Yellow Submarine' and 'Westside Story'..and the 'Doe Rae Me' film, (cant think of the proper name)

As kid's we would 'rehearse' all week, miming plus a dance routine to a record of our choice, just so we could get up on that stage in the interval to win a jigsaw puzzle, a hair dressing set or a large bar of chocolate, great childhood memories”

Various memories from Old Chingford Facebook:.....

Sally Pearce: *“Loved Saturday morning pics here..... Old Mother Riley films, and sometime a live band called the Beaucrees....they gave out "love beads".... Happy days when a crowd of us from Titley Close all went. “*



Helen Tant: *“Saturday morning cinema, we had to stand up for God Save the Queen and sing the Club song. I remember the organ too, and the birthday cards. Loved it. It gave our mum and dad a bit of quiet time. If we walked there from Chingford Hatch instead of taking the bus we had more pennies for sweets. Happy days”.*

Christine Thomas: *“Saturday morning pictures !! On your birthday you got a card and could take someone in for free with you ... Maynards for pre cinema sweets ... stamping our feet and booing at the baddies Oh happy days ... The days before computer games and mobile phones , i wonder if the kids these days would be happy with such simple pleasures”*

Maynards Sweet Shop

Christine Thomas is not the only one who remembers the Maynard Sweet Shop.

A selection of Facebook memories:

Jolie Jones: "I remember going to Saturday morning pictures around 1967 / 68. The sweet shop next door was the smallest on Earth- Even as a 7 year old I knew it was a squeeze all of us children getting our sweets. I have fond memories of this cinema"

Elaine Godley: "I used to Maynards next door"

Denis Palmer: "have 1 shilling for Saturday morning pictures. 6d to get in and 6d for sweets at good old Maynards the sweet shop"

Gary Fall: "Saturday morning pictures 6 pence a room full of noisy kids, the sweet shop with the curved"

Tracy Goodall: "Yes indeed Saturday morning pictures Flash Gordon in black & white and sweets in Maynard's first anyone remember those lollipops with a rough outside that was like sandpaper on your tongue and bubble gum with horror movie monster cards in them"



Alan Stevens at: http://www.francisfrith.com/uk/south-harefield/chingford-after-the-second-world-war_memory-82671

Around the corner from Evans the greengrocer was Maynards the sweet shop, handy for the Odeon cinema where we went to the Saturday morning flicks. I still have a certificate presented by Mr Poole to me for a painting competition I won.

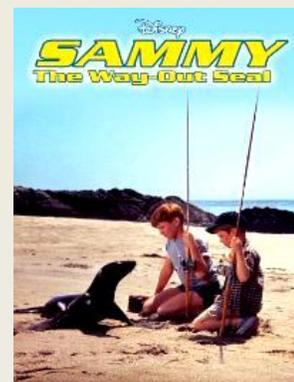


Roger Walker: from *War Days In Chingford* 1939 46

Maynards sweet shop next to the Odeon 2 ounces of sweets a week with the ration book

The Beginning Of The End

The Chingford Odeon was one of a batch of Gaumont-British cinemas that were sold by



the J Arthur Rank company to the Classic Cinemas chain in December 1967. It was re-named 'Classic' Cinema and continued until it finally closed on 3rd June 1972 with Dean Jones in "The Love Bug" and "Sammy, the Way-Out Seal". The actual final programme was



a late night screening of Pierre Brasseur in "Eyes Without A Face and Joan Crawford in "Sudden Fear".

The building was demolished and a plain building currently occupied by a supermarket and offices was built on the site. The supermarket is Poundstretcher who are one of a chain of discount stores operating in the

United Kingdom and who are based in Deighton, Huddersfield. This drab transformation would have shocked Oscar Deutsch, who passionately believed in bringing glitz and entertainment to the masses. It is a great pity that the magnificent exterior of the building was not incorporated into the new building.

Bill Bayliss

June 2015

Some sources used for this article:

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<http://cinematreasures.org/theater/18277/>

<http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/articles/AtTheFlicks/Page14.htm>

Various social media sources including: Walthamstow Times & Old Chingford Facebook.

Some Images from the above and from the WWW

Ancestry.com