

Saturday Morning Pictures

By Bill Bayliss

'Saturday was the best day of the week, No school and Saturday Morning Pictures. Two hundred screaming children all in one place and not a teacher in sight. As well as the film there was other good stuff. There would be competitions, fancy dress or a talent contest'

http://www.andmas.co.uk/the_pictures/saturdays/saturdays_1.htm

Local memories "Saturday morning pictures at the Dominion in Buxton Road. Before the film started my friends and I would regularly sing and dance on the stage and we had great applause. For this we were allowed in free". Carol Monaghan www.walthamstowmemories.net/html/postbag06.html

The Grenadiers & The ABC Minors

The children who went to Saturday Morning Pictures at the *Granada* in Hoe Street were the Grenadiers. Those who went to the ABC (Associated British Cinemas) at the *Dominion* in Buxton Road were ABC Minors. They had their own badge and song that they sang with great gusto to the tune of 'Blaze Away'.

"We are the boys and girls all known as



Minors of the ABC

And every Saturday all line up

*To see the films we like and shout
aloud with glee*

*We like to laugh and have our sing-
song*

Such a happy crowd are we

We're all pals together

We're Minors of the ABC."



Above top Left - The Dominion in Buxton Road when still a cinema. Above right - The interior of Dominion, Buxton Road c1961 after it was converted to a Bingo Hall.

Left - The Dominion before demolition. (There is now a supermarket on the site)

As a child in Islington, I paid six-pence (Worth 2 ½ new pence) to get in to a Gaumont British (GB) Saturday Morning matinee at *The Rink Cinema* at Finsbury Park .We sang:

*"We come along on Saturday morning, greeting everybody with a smile,
 We come along on Saturday morning, knowing its well worth while,
 As members of the GB 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"*

The Bouncing Ball Singalong

Soon after this came the singing of well known songs with the lyrics written on the screen. As you sung the words, a ping pong ball bounced along the words of the song in time to the tune..

Often, during the show, the reel of film would break or require a quick change and the cinema was plunged into blackness. This was the cue for boys to shout 'Put a coin in the meter' and pretend screams and squeals of fright from the girls. It's sobering to reflect that today most children wouldn't understand what was meant by the expression 'Put a coin in the meter'.

The Programmes & The Children's Film Foundation

Depending upon which cinema chain you patronised, the programmes included a talent show, bouncing ping pong ball singalong, a cartoon, a short cliff-hanger serial, a main film that might be a 'period' adventure film (Robin Hood, William Tell, Scarlet Pimpernel), a cowboy film (Tom Mix, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, a film with children as the heroes and heroines with the baddies getting their come-uppance and sometimes animal films like Lassie and Black Beauty.

In the 50's, many of the films came from the Children's Film Foundation. This was a non profit organisation that for 30 years made films for children. In 1955, there were 1,915 cinemas in the UK screening children's matinees, of which 1,400 carried the works of the Children's Film Foundation. Stars of the Children's Foundation included: Phil Collins, Michael Crawford, Dennis Waterman, Susan George, Gary Kemp, Keith Chegwin and Matthew "The Wright Stuff" Wright.

<http://www.atlasdvds.com/cff.html>

Usherettes & 'Bunking-In'

The several hundred excited children inside the cinema were 'controlled' by cinema Usherettes who patrolled the aisles with their flashlights. Any suspected bad behaviour was literally highlighted by the Usherettes with their torches and the miscreants were warned that unless they behaved they would be removed from the cinema..

There were always children who enlisted the help of their mates to try to 'bunk in'. Cinemas were required by Health & Safety regulations to have emergency exits that could be quickly and easily opened. The emergency exits often opened on to an alleyway where patrons could reach the safety of the open air outside of the building. The mechanisms that controlled the emergency doors were 'panic' bolts that allowed people on the inside to exit the building. This was achieved by pushing down a bar that released the door bolt and allowed the door to open. The system was a one way and didn't allow such access to the inside from the outside.

If you had a friend on the inside who released the panic bolt and opened the door, you could sneak in without paying. Of course the cinema Usherettes were wise to this and would station themselves near the Emergency Exit doors to stop this happening. The optimum time for 'bunking - in' was during the interval when the cinema interior lights were turned on and there were lots of people milling about buying ice creams or going to the toilets etc. This is when the Usherettes were at their busiest and hopefully their attention was elsewhere!.

Bill Bayliss
January 2012