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Picturedrome, Bognor Regis

DESCRIPTION: Picturedrome

LOCATION: 49 Canada Grove, Bognor Regis, West Sussex PO21 2AH

GRADE: II

DATE LISTED: 15 July 2009

ENGLISH HERITAGE BUILDING ID: 505528

OS GRID REFERENCE: SZ9334799353

OS GRID COORDINATES: 493347, 99353

LATITUDE/LONGITUDE: 50.7862, -0.6771

LOCALITY: Bognor Regis

LOCAL AUTHORITY: Arun District Council

COUNTY: West Sussex

COUNTRY: England

POSTCODE: PO21 2AH

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Listing Text

BOGNOR REGIS

745/0/10055 CANADA GROVE
15-JUL-09 Picturedrome

II

Cinema, originally built as community assembly rooms in 1886, and used for various local functions and entertainment; converted to full cinema use in 1919. Two storey brick building with gabled tile roof and prominent octagonal tower on the facade. It was designed by a local architect Arthur Smith.

MATERIALS: Red brick laid in Flemish Bond; rough cement rendering to first floor side bays, middle section of octagonal tower and to external projection room at the south end of the building. Iron columns and decorative braces support the front glass canopy. Tiled roofs.

PLAN: The plan of the building is based around the auditorium. An entrance at the east side of the building opens to a foyer with a pay desk and refreshment kiosk. To the south side of the foyer are offices and to the north, stairs. The first floor was previously accessed by a separate door to the side of the main entrance, and the stairs were separated from the foyer by a wall making a completely separate access to the first floor. The entrance from the foyer is in the east wall of the auditorium, which is aligned north-south with the proscenium of 1911 at the north end. On the west wall is a room with a fireplace which appears to have been an earlier dressing room, and in the south east corner of the auditorium is an exit which leads to the exterior via the 1919 pay box. The first floor has a smaller auditorium and the 1919 projection room.

EXTERIOR: The facade is dominated by its octagonal lantern tower with tiled roof, in which the original revolving top section is still intact, although the mechanism no longer survives. The tower has three full length, arched sash windows and forms the centre of a symmetrical facade, flanked by a two-storey brick range with balustraded parapet. The original coloured glass canopy in decorative iron scrollwork, emblazoned with the Picturedrome sign occupies the centre of the facade. Windows in the central projecting bays are small pane sashes; the lintels of those on the ground floor have shouldered flat arches and those on the first floor have round arches and a central keystone. In the side bays there are a mixture of window styles with some having been boarded over. The rear elevation has a number of accretions, some of which are later service additions, and there is an extension with cat-slide roof which was a dressing room. The north side elevation, the ground floor of which used to be the cinema cafe, has now been modified during use as 'Rick's Cafe'; but the first floor, which is Screen 2, has its original sash windows. At the south elevation is a plain squat tower, which was the 1911 external projection room.

INTERIOR: The interior still retains much of the original fabric, and where there are alterations they are illustrative of the development of the building. The lobby has been somewhat altered for the accommodation of a new pay desk and food kiosk, requiring the removal of a wall which divided the entrance from the stairs. The timbers of the ceiling including the boxed-in spine beams may be original, but the panel doors which lead to the auditorium and most of the other internal doors are original. The auditorium has a barrel vaulted ceiling with circular moulding dating from 1911, with supporting arches which probably date to 1954; pilasters on the wall are used to form part of the blind arcade decoration. The proscenium of 1911 survives; flanked by boxes dating to 1919 with ornate broken pediments. Similar broken pediments are set above the main entrance and exit doors, with moulded decoration on the wall above. A pay box dating to 1919 still stands at the corner of the auditorium. At the north end of the building is 'Rick's Cafe', previously the cinema cafe. There is still much original fabric here, including stairs to the first floor function room. The stairs from the foyer to the first floor are in original condition and have ornate metalwork balusters to one side. The first floor function room has been re-modelled to provide an extra screen (Screen 2), but wall decoration in the form of pilasters, moulding and blind arcading is original. On the first floor there are toilets and the 1919 projection room although both updated for modern use.

HISTORY: The Picturedrome was opened in May 1886 as the New Assembly Rooms. At that time it was used for a variety of community activities including shows, dancing, roller-skating, and was also hired out to travelling film showmen. The main features of the early

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building were a principal ground floor hall and a smaller one on the first floor. Perhaps the most notable feature of the building is the octagonal lantern tower, which housed a revolving light which was operated by a bicycle-type mechanism (this no longer survives). In 1911 the owners, WH Lorden and Sons, lowered the ceiling to improve the acoustics and built a customised projection room on the outside of the building. The Assembly Rooms was re-named the Queens Hall and had a capacity of 700.

During the First World War it was used as a drill hall. The building was converted into a permanent cinema in 1919 by a new owner, Peter D Stoneham, who was an Eastbourne architect and business man; the cinema was then re-named the Picturedrome. Stoneham already owned another successful Picturedrome in Worthing which he had built in 1913. In conversion to a cinema a glass canopy supported on columns was installed at the entrance, the position of the screen was reversed and a new side entrance and a paybox was established in the corner of the auditorium. In addition, the floor was raised as a slope, new seats and improved ventilation were installed, four boxes were built at the rear of the auditorium to the side of the old proscenium arch, a new projection box was built inside the original proscenium and a tea room created on the ground floor.

The Picturedrome competed with the Pier Theatre, but this situation was resolved in 1922 by both establishments becoming united, under the ownership of MW Shanly and A Carter, as the Bognor Pier Company. By 1930 both the Picturedrome and the Pier Cinema had been equipped with Western Electric Sound. Just after the Second World War control of the Picturedrome passed to the Manchester-based Buxton Theatre Circuit, and was later leased out. In April 1954 the interior of the Picturedrome was damaged by fire and, as this was the era of wide screen, it was decided to almost double the width of the proscenium arch to take a Cinemascope screen. The auditorium was redecorated and refurbished, and it is probable that the present ceiling braces date to this period.

In 1959 the Picturedrome was taken over by Drummer Theatres (Bognor Regis) Ltd, then in 1962 to John Robertson, a cinema owner from Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire. The cinema now had 533 seats and the small upstairs hall, which had been used for whist drives and dances, was used for bingo. When John Robertson died in 1975 the lease was inherited by his son; by 1980, now with a reduced 522 seats, the Picturedrome was the only full-time cinema left in Bognor Regis. In 1983 Robertson sold the cinema, now reduced to 472 seats, to the Cannon Classic circuit and it was soon re-named the Classic. The cinema was now modernised; a second screen was added in place of the first floor bingo hall and a new false ceiling was added here to meet the arches on the side walls. This second screen seated 96 and was opened in August 1984. Other changes were made to the main building including the restoration of the previously boarded-up tower, Dolby stereo was installed and there were plans to open the boxes to either side of the original proscenium. The old Picturedrome name was left in coloured glass on the canopy over the front entrance. In 1996 Virgin, who had taken over the Canon/MGM circuit, sold it to ABC, but in November of the same year it was acquired by Picturedrome Theatres Ltd., and reverted to its original name. Finally in 2003 it was bought by Reeltime Cinemas Ltd.

SOURCES

Picture Palaces, New Life for Old Cinemas - English Heritage 2000.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

The Picturedrome is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- * It is an unusual example of an early cinema, derived from an assembly hall of 1886, which has retained its original architectural character.
- * The bold massing and facade details largely survive, including a stylish Victorian canopy.
- * The interior has good survival of the principal areas, including auditorium and staircase.
- * There are special features such as the coloured glass Picturedrome sign, the external projection room, the boxes flanking the 1911 proscenium, and the unusual survival of an early pay desk both dating to 1919.
- * It is also notable as exemplifying an entertainment building in a traditional seaside townscape.

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Source: English Heritage

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