
Disclaimer: This document was written in 1995 and concerns memories of 1930s life; as such there may be opinions expressed or words used that do not meet today's norms and expectations.

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- * Notes: This transcription has rendered the original text as written, including some spelling and grammatical errors. In response to letter from project which contained follow-up questions. Part of continued contact with Denis Houlston, who also took part in two interviews.

Mr A. D. HOULSTON
[redacted]
LEVENSHULME
MANCHESTER
M19 [redacted]

Not on 'phone
3rd April 95

Valentina Bold
University of Glasgow

Dear Ms. Bold

Thank you for your letter of 22nd March. Before answering your questions I should like to describe, briefly, Levenshulme as it is relevant to cinemas in 1930s.

Levenshulme, 3 ½ miles south from the city centre, is the last suburb and borders on Stockport.

Longsight, 2 ½ miles from the city centre was our next friendly neighbour.

The A6, London to Scotland cuts through Levenshulme and Longsight and comprises our shopping and former cinema area.

Levenshulme had 4 cinemas in 250 yards of the A6.

Palace – fleapit, but with a balcony

Grand - bug-hut. Single storey, raked floor

Arcadia – formerly a roller-skating rectangular rink – single storey.

Regal – posh ABC balcony cinema built around 1936

Now:

IRISH CLUB/BAR

ANTIQUES W'SE

LEISURE CENTRE

MECCA BINGO

A fifth cinema, near the A34, was the KINGSWAY built late 30s – very posh – stage, organ and music-hall acts between films. I saw Tommy Fields there, - Gracie Fields brother. Demolished.

Longsight had 3 cinemas in 100 yards on A6.
Queens – fleapit with balcony
Shaftesbury – lung-hut and balcony
Kings Theatre – literally a theatre with balcony I saw my first pantomime here.
All demolished for health centre, library, shops.

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DATE OF BIRTH	20 Feb. 1917	13 years old in 1930 22 years old when conscripted in 1939
FIRST VISIT	approx 6 years old – silent films	
REGULAR VISITS	1927 – 1939	9 years to 22 years old
CINEMAS VISITED	All those on page but mainly in Levenshulme	

I didn't visit city centre cinemas until post-war as they were too expensive and involved tram-rides and, later, bus-rides.

LEFT SCHOOL	1934 – aged 17 years
FIRST JOB	That now extinct breed, office boy. One of five dominated by a one-armed commissionaire. Weekly wage at 17 was 7s/6d = 37 ½ pence.
MAIN OCCUPATIONS	cost clerk, tax clerk and company cashier.

I would welcome your questionnaire to rationalise a sprawling subject.

Could I finish in recording the catalyst that turned me from an average cinema-goer to an avid aficionado? I think when I was 9 or 10 and in bed ill a family friend unwittingly gave my mother a large pile of "PICTUREGOER'S to interest me. I was hooked and on return to fanatically-football health bought it every week. I joined the 'Picturegoer' Picture club and amassed a collection of glossy sepia postcards 6"x4" of my idols. In later years crudely coloured cards became available but were smaller, about 3" x 2", because of the expense.

The memories I recall of those early years were that childrens' matinees were Saturday afternoons, not mornings.

Performances were twice nightly

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but my parents only allowed me to go to first house. When continuous performances came along it was a startling 'revolution'.

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The early years saw programmes of many 'shorts' as opposed to the later "grand double bill". Shorts would consist of several animated cartoons (Felix the cat) a short of some (unknown to us) big American band, Pathé or British Movietone News, and a James Fitzpatrick travelogue, later satirised by Peter Sellers in "Romantic Balham". Inevitably there were Pearl and Dean publicity shorts listing local traders. The advantage of a collection of shorts was that by the law of averages you liked some – you didn't suffer too long. With "grand double bills" if one film was a stinker you really suffered.

Programmes were changed mid-week and the choice of films, 4 cinemas times 2 films = 8, meant many visits per week to see our favourites. If, through shortage of cash we had to miss any, we crossed our fingers and saved up our pennies in the hope that we could see it at a future date in Longsight.

You can see why I need your questionnaire to crystallise my ramblings!

Yours sincerely

A D Houlston