Broadway Cinema
Filwood Broadway, Bristol

Historic Building Record

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April 2018
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Business Park
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Bristol City Council  
Bristol  
BS3 9FS |
<p>| <strong>Site location</strong>        | 18 Filwood Broadway, Filwood Park, Bristol, BS4 1JN |
| <strong>County</strong>               | Bristol |
| <strong>National grid reference</strong> | 359342 169679 (ST 59342 69679) |
| <strong>Planning authority</strong>   | Bristol City Council |
| <strong>Planning reference</strong>   | N/A |
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| <strong>Project management by</strong>| Andy King |
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Contents

Summary ..................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. iii

1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1
   1.1 Project background ......................................................................................... 1
   1.2 Site location and description ......................................................................... 1

2 METHODOLOGY ...................................................................................................... 1
   2.1 Aims and objectives ...................................................................................... 1
   2.2 Methodology ................................................................................................... 2
   2.3 Record date ...................................................................................................... 3

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND .................................................................................. 3
   3.1 Filwood Park ................................................................................................... 3
   3.2 Broadway Cinema .......................................................................................... 3
   4.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 4
   4.2 Description ....................................................................................................... 4

5 DISCUSSION ........................................................................................................... 5

6 STORAGE AND CURATION .................................................................................... 6
   6.1 Archive ............................................................................................................ 6
   6.2 Copyright ........................................................................................................ 6
   6.3 Security copy .................................................................................................... 7

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................... 8
   Bibliography .......................................................................................................... 8
   Internet sources ..................................................................................................... 8
   Documentary and cartographic sources ............................................................... 8

List of Figures

Figure 1 Site plan, showing plate directions
Figure 2 Broadway Cinema: ground floor plan, 4 May 1938 (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2)
Figure 3 Broadway Cinema: part balcony plan showing steelwork construction, 4 May 1938 (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2)
Figure 4 Broadway Cinema: balcony and projection room plans, 4 May 1938 (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2)
Figure 5 Broadway Cinema: roof plan, 4 May 1938 (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1f–2k)
Figure 6 Broadway Cinema: proposed extension to back vestibule plan, 20 July 1938 (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2)
List of Plates

Cover  Broadway Cinema, looking north-west
Plate 1  Filwood Broadway, looking south
Plate 2  Broadway Cinema, east elevation, looking south-west
Plate 3  Broadway Cinema, south and east elevations, looking north-west
Plate 4  Broadway Cinema, east elevations, looking west
Plate 5  Broadway Cinema, detail of first-floor windows, looking west
Plate 6  Broadway Cinema, north and west elevations, looking south-east
Plate 7  Broadway Cinema, west elevation, looking east
Plate 8  Broadway Cinema, south and west elevations, looking north-east
Plate 9  Broadway Cinema, south elevation, looking north
Plate 10  Broadway Bingo Club, 1992, looking south-east from balcony
Plate 11  Broadway Bingo Club, 1992, looking south-east
Summary

Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by Bristol City Council to create a historic building record of the former Broadway Cinema, 18 Filwood Broadway, Filwood Park, Bristol, BS4 1JN (centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 359342 169679), prior to a proposed redevelopment of the site.

The historic building recording was carried out to Historic England Level 2 (descriptive) standard comprising a photographic record of the building’s exterior and a descriptive written account. The site survey was undertaken on 22 March 2018. The interior was not accessed due to the unstable and dangerous condition of the building.

Broadway Cinema was constructed in 1938 in the civic centre of the new suburb of Filwood Park, which forms part of Knowle West, an inter-war housing estate to the south of the city centre. The cinema and adjacent shopping arcade were constructed in a late Art Deco style, in red brick, with concrete details. The original seating was arranged over two floors, with a projection room on the second floor. In addition to showing films, a variety of entertainments were staged at the cinema: these included music concerts, boxing matches and bingo. In 1971, the cinema became a full-time bingo hall, known as the Broadway Bingo Club, which operated until c. 1994.

Although the interior of the building was inaccessible at the time of the survey, recent photographs (taken in 2015 and published online) show that the building retained most of its original fittings. The only significant alteration appears to have been the replacement of the ground floor seating with tables and benches, which probably occurred when the building was converted for use as a bingo hall. The original cinema projectors and some of the seating are preserved in the M Shed museum.

Acknowledgements

This project was commissioned by Bristol City Council, and Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Valerie Watkis in this regard.

The survey was undertaken by Cai Mason and Owen Watts. This report was compiled by Cai Mason and the illustrations were prepared by Keren Nichols. Andy King managed the project on behalf of Wessex Archaeology.
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) was commissioned by Bristol City Council (BCC) to create an historic building record (HBR) of the former Broadway Cinema, 18 Filwood Broadway, Filwood Park, Bristol, BS4 1JN (hereafter ‘the cinema’; Figure 1). The former cinema is not listed.

1.1.2 The HBR was created to support a forthcoming planning application for the redevelopment of the site. The BCC Principal Historic Environment Officer requested that the HBR create an Historic England Level 2 descriptive record as set out in the document: Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice (Historic England 2016). No formal Written Scheme of Investigation was required.

1.1.3 Since its closure c. 1994, Broadway Cinema has become a dilapidated and dangerous structure. Due to the unsafe condition of the building, the HBR was restricted to an external photographic survey, complemented by documentary research.

1.2 Site location and description

1.2.1 Broadway Cinema is situated on the west side on Filwood Broadway, in the Filwood Park suburb of Bristol, to the south of city centre. It is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 359342 169679. Filwood Park forms part of Knowle West housing estate, which was constructed between 1924 and 1939. Filwood Broadway, which was laid out in the late 1930s, is the district shopping parade. The buildings at the northern end of the street were completed before the outbreak of World War II. The rest of the street was gradually developed in the second half of the 20th century, but it was never fully built up. Subsequent demolition of redundant buildings has increased the number of vacant plots along the street front.

1.2.2 The former cinema is a three-storey late Art Deco style structure of brick and concrete construction. The building is bounded by a parade of contemporary shops to the north, a yard and vehicular access road to the west, and a vacant plot to the south.

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims and objectives

2.1.1 The aims of the Historic Building Recording (HBR) exercise were to:

- Establish the character, history, dating, form and development of the buildings
- Provide a better understanding of the building and to compile a lasting record and disseminate the results
2.1.2 This is a basic visual record of the subject in accordance with the guidelines for Level 2 recording as detailed in the document: Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice (Historic England (HE) 2016). Level 2 is defined as follows:

‘a descriptive record’... Both the exterior and interior of the building will be seen, described and photographed. The examination of the building will produce an analysis of its development and use and the record will include the conclusions reached, but it will not discuss in detail the evidence on which this analysis is based. A plan and sometimes other drawings may be made but the drawn record will normally not be comprehensive and may be tailored to the scope of a wider project’ (ibid, 26).

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The HBR involved a combination of documentary research and photographic survey to produce the photographic and written record compiled in this report.

Documentary research

2.2.2 Documentary research was undertaken to inform the HBR. A brief online search was carried out to establish whether there is an existing record of the building and identify potential sources of information. Documentary research was undertaken at the Bristol Record Office.

2.2.3 Cartographic sources available online were consulted to inform the HBR and provide a historic map regression.

2.2.4 A full list of sources is provided in the References section.

The written account

• The written account includes the following information:

  • the building’s location as a NGR and address;

  • any statutory or non-statutory designations;

  • the date of the record, the names of recorders and, if an archive has been created, its location; and

• A description of the building’s form, function, date and sequence of development, as well as the names of architects, builders, patrons and owners if known.

The photographic record

2.2.5 The photographic record comprises:

• general views of the building in its wider setting or landscape; and

• the building’s external appearance.

2.2.6 High quality digital images were taken with a Canon EOS 5D Mark II full frame digital camera (with 21 megapixel capability). A selection of the photographs is included in this report.
2.3 Record date

2.3.1 The HBR photographic survey of the cinema was carried out on 22 March 2018. Due to the dangerous condition of the building, the photograph survey was restricted to external views of the building.

2.3.2 Sources held at the Bristol Record Office were consulted on 21 March 2018.

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Filwood Park

3.1.1 Filwood Park forms part of the Knowle West housing estate, which was constructed by Bristol City Council (BCC) on previously undeveloped agricultural land between 1924 and 1939. Knowle West contains many houses built under the Housing Act 1930. This act, passed by Ramsey MacDonald’s second Labour government, encouraged councils to undertake largescale slum clearance projects, and to rehome the displaced population in new, better-quality, houses. Designed using low density ‘Garden City’ principals, Knowle West is characterized by broad streets containing a mixture of semi-detached and short terraces of houses, all with relatively large gardens and access to green open spaces (Know your Place 2018).

3.1.2 Filwood Broadway was designed as the district shopping parade. This formed part of the district’s civic centre, which also contained a school, social centre, convent, and cinema, all built in the late 1930s. Later additions to the civic centre include a school and church (1961), a swimming pool (1962) and a library (BCC 2012).

3.2 Broadway Cinema

3.2.1 The earliest plans for a cinema on Filwood Broadway are dated 1 December 1937 (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2). The original design was for a three-storey building flanked by a two-storey shopping parade, all in a late Art Deco style. The shopping parade was subsequently redesigned as a three-storey row. Plans for the cinema were also revised: its location was moved slightly and positions of the storerooms and lavatories were changed. The latest surviving plans are dated 4 May 1938 (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2; Figures 2–5). The 1938 plans broadly correlate with the layout of the extant cinema, but it is apparent that certain aspects of the design were altered after the plans were approved. Specifically, additional windows were added to the front (east) elevation, and the pitched roof over the projector room was changed to a flat roof. There may have been additional minor variations within the building, but this could not be confirmed.

3.2.2 Broadway Cinema was designed by Dennis Hurford and F G W Chamberlain (proprietor of the Gaity cinema, Wells Road), and constructed by R J Hurford, in a late Art Deco style that matched the adjacent shopping parade (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2).

3.2.3 Construction of the cinema was supported by a £7,000 loan from the City Council, who stipulated that the building should have a 62 ft frontage and a depth of 112 ft, and should cost no more than £13,000 to build. They also added a clause that the cinema should have a doorway at the back with its own pay box, ‘to enable the lower class of patrons to use the back entrance’ (Stephenson and Wilmot 2005, 17). Plans for this addition (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2; Figure 6) were approved 20 July 1938, by which date the cinema was probably under construction.

3.2.4 The completed cinema, which opened on 20 October 1938, had 1,160 seats and was fitted with Kalee 12 projectors, manufactured by A Kershaw & Son (Stephenson and Wilmot 2005,
17; Grace’s Guide 2018). The projectors and some of the seating are now preserved in the M Shed museum.

3.2.5 In addition to screening films, the cinema was used to stage boxing matches, music concerts, and from August 1961 onwards, bingo. In 1971, the cinema ceased showing films and became a full-time bingo hall, known as The Broadway, which operated until c. 1994 (Stephenson and Wilmot 2005, 17; Flickr 2007).

4 BUILDING DESCRIPTION

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The cinema is an integral element of Filwood Broadway shopping parade and forms the south end of a continuous façade (Plate 1). Due to the unsafe condition of the building, the photographic survey was restricted to external elevations of the building. The description of its interior is therefore drawn from contemporary construction plans and online photographs of the building, taken while it was still in use, and by more recent, illicit explorations of the building, which have been published online (Flickr 2007; Stray off the Path 2015; 28DaysLater 2015).

4.2 Description

4.2.1 Exterior

The cinema is rectangular in plan covering approximately 697 square metres. The external walls are of 14 inch thick red brick construction, laid in stretcher bond (east elevation) and English garden wall bond (north, south and west elevations), set in Portland cement mortar. There is a small entrance vestibule to the rear (west).

The front (east) elevation (Cover; Plates 2–4) is three-storeys high, with each storey defined in a different manner. The ground floor is faced with concrete, which is painted with a modern mural reading ‘Knowle West’. The first floor level is defined by a row of three eight-light steel-framed windows flanked by pairs of smaller windows (Plate 5), which provide light to the various stairwells. There are no windows to the second-storey projector room.

The building has a wide entrance (boarded up) with moulded concrete surrounds. The first floor windows have concrete surrounds that incorporate simple fluted pilasters and a small canopy. Below the glazing, there are decorative iron panels with bands of raised geometric decoration. The cinema originally had a canopy over the entrance, probably of concrete construction: this has since been removed, revealing the steel girders that once supported it. The main first-floor windows are flanked by four small windows (boarded up) that provided light to the stairwells and lavatories. The sills of these windows are concrete: the lintels are brick.

The auditorium has a red Double-Roman-tiled hipped roof that incorporates a gabled upper section. The gable ends are faced with flat red tiles. There are additional areas of flat roofing above the screen and the projector room. The rear exit and entrance have pitched roofs, which are covered with a mixture of corrugated asbestos-cement and corrugated zinc sheeting. The main entrance faces Filwood Broadway and there are five additional doorways to the rear.

The only features of note on the north and south elevations (Plates 6 and 9) are raised columns of brickwork that encase the structural steel uprights of the auditorium. There are no openings on these sides of the building.
4.2.6 The north-west and south-east corner elevations of the auditorium (Plates 6 and 8) incorporate two large windows at first-floor height. The south-east window is boarded up, but missing boarding from the upper half of the north-west window, shows that it is a 48-light steel-framed window. The sills and lintels are concrete.

4.2.7 The rear (west) elevation (Plates 6–7) has four doorways and four small windows on the ground floor, all of which are boarded up. The northernmost doorway was a fire exit, whilst the others provided access to the vacuum plant, a cycle store and the rear pay booth. Apart from a chimney venting the vacuum plant and a rainwater downpipe, the upper parts of the rear elevation are plain.

4.2.8 The rear entrance vestibule (Plate 8) on the south-west corner of the building has two doorways: the north one is blocked with breezeblocks; the south one is fitted with a steel door. The original plans of the building show that this door, which was the entrance for ‘lower class patrons’, was originally fitted with ‘panic bolts’ on the interior.

**Interior**

4.2.9 The building is constructed with a core steel-frame, with a full-height octagonal auditorium that incorporates a first-floor mezzanine balcony to the east.

4.2.10 The original design plans show that the main entrance had four doors (Figure 2). These opened into the entrance vestibule, which provided access to the ground floor of the auditorium and the stairs to the mezzanine balcony. There were a further two doors either side of the main entrance: one to the manager’s room; the other to an emergency exit from the projection room. The pay box was situated directly opposite the main entrance.

4.2.11 The ground floor of the auditorium had two aisles between the seats, a fire exit in the north-west corner, and an additional entrance, with its own pay box, in the south-west corner. The auditorium had a suspended wooden floor and at the west end of the building, there were ladies and gents’ lavatories, a vacuum plant room and a cycle store. There was an additional stair adjacent to the rear pay booth that provided access to the stage and screen.

4.2.12 There were additional ladies and gents' lavatories at the east end of the first-floor balcony, and a stair that provided access to the projector room on the second floor.

4.2.13 On the second floor, there was a projector room, battery room, rewinding room and a stairwell that provided a direct access to the lower floors.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1.1 Broadway Cinema was constructed as an integral part of a civic and shopping centre for the inter-war suburb of Filwood Park. The Level 2 survey has shown that apart from alterations to the ground floor seating and cosmetic changes associated with its use as a bingo hall from 1971 onwards, the cinema remained largely unaltered from its opening in 1938 to its closure c. 1994.

5.1.2 Filwood Park contains many houses that were constructed in the 1930s to rehome families displaced by the City Council’s inner-city slum-clearance programme, many of whom were poor unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The arrival of these families caused tension with the estate’s more established residents, who were generally more highly skilled and better paid (Municipal Dreams 2014). The council’s stipulation that Broadway Cinema be fitted with an additional doorway ‘to enable the lower class of patrons to use the back entrance’ reflects these tensions, and although tickets from this entrance were probably cheaper, its
primary, and explicit, function was social segregation. It is uncertain how long the additional entrance remained in use.

5.1.3 Broadway Cinema was one of the few local entertainment venues in Filwood Park, and as such, was a hub of community activity throughout the mid–late 20th century. Although it was designed as a cinema, the building was frequently used for other entertainments, including live music, boxing and bingo. UK cinema attendance was at its highest in the mid/late 1940s, but by the beginning of the 1950s it had begun to dwindle. The advent of affordable home television in the 1960s and 70s led to a precipitous fall in cinema attendance. Filwood Broadway, along with numerous other former cinemas, was converted for use as a bingo hall in 1971; a game which ensured the continued use of the building until c. 1994. Since its closure, the building has suffered serious decay and is now in a dangerous and unstable condition.

6 STORAGE AND CURATION

6.1 Archive

6.1.1 The recording of the former Broadway Cinema has produced a written and photographic archive which is currently held at Wessex Archaeology's Bristol office under the project code 204920. An accession code has been applied for from Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, but was not confirmed at the time of writing. The complete Site archive including digital data and paper records will be prepared following the standard conditions for the acceptance of archaeological material and in general following nationally recommended guidelines (CIfA 2014; Brown 2011; ADS 2013). Any relevant archive will fully conform to the standards for deposition required and will be deposited with Bristol Museum and Art Gallery in due course.

6.1.2 An OASIS online record (http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main) has been created, with key fields completed on Details, Location and Creators forms (OASIS ID - wessexar1-312486). This record will be completed at the end of the project and a .pdf version of the final report submitted. Subject to any contractual requirements on confidentiality, copies of the OASIS record will be integrated into the relevant local and national records and published through the Archaeology Data Service ArchSearch catalogue.

6.2 Copyright

6.2.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved. The Client will be licenced to use each report for the purposes that it was produced in relation to the project as described in the specification. Bristol Museum and Art Gallery will, however, will be granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use shall be non-profitmaking, and conforms to the Copyright and Related Rights Regulations 2003.

6.2.2 Information relating to the project will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record (HER) where it can be freely copied without reference to WA for the purposes of archaeological research or Development Control within the planning process.

6.2.3 This document, the report and the project archive may contain material that is non-Wessex Archaeology copyright (e.g. Ordnance Survey, British Geological Survey, Crown Copyright), or the intellectual property of third parties, which Wessex Archaeology are able to provide for limited reproduction under the terms of our own copyright licences, but for which copyright itself is non-transferable by Wessex Archaeology. Users remain bound by
the conditions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with regard to multiple copying and electronic dissemination of such material.

6.3 Security copy

6.3.1 In line with current best practice (e.g. Brown 2011), on completion of the project a security copy of the written records will be prepared, in the form of a digital PDF/A file. PDF/A is an ISO-standardised version of the Portable Document File (PDF) designed for the digital preservation of electronic documents through omission of features ill-suited to long-term archiving.
REFERENCES

Bibliography
Stephenson, D and Wilmot, J 2005 Bristol Cinemas. Stroud, Tempus

Internet sources

Documentary and cartographic sources
BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2
OS 1931 1:2,500 plan
OS 1938 1:10,560 plan
OS 1947 1:2,500 plan
OS 1955 1:10,560 plan
OS 1965 1:2,500 plan
OS 1970 1:2,500 plan
Site plan, showing plate directions

Figure 1
Broadway Cinema: part balcony plan showing steelwork construction, 4 May 1938 (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2) Figure 3
Figure 6

Broadway Cinema: proposed extension to back vestibule plan, 20 July 1938 (BRO Building plan/Volume 169/1–2)
Plate 1: Filwood Broadway, looking south

Plate 2: Broadway Cinema, east elevation, looking south-west
Plate 3: Broadway Cinema, south and east elevations, looking north-west

Plate 4: Broadway Cinema, east elevations, looking west
Plate 5: Broadway Cinema, detail of first-floor windows, looking west

Plate 6: Broadway Cinema, north and west elevations, looking south-east
Plate 7: Broadway Cinema, west elevation, looking east

Plate 8: Broadway Cinema, south and west elevations, looking north-east
Plate 9: Broadway Cinema, south elevation, looking north

Plate 10: Broadway Bingo Club, 1992, looking south-east from balcony,
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