

the cinema shows held at the Central Hall from February to 25 May 1907. The financial information recorded here is significantly more detailed than that contained in Joshua Duckworth's surviving business ledger which I discussed in my article. It is also of great value, as David indicates, in the way that it identifies what the Duckworths saw as the principal attractions amongst the films they hired each week, and also in revealing how their opening hours and takings were respectively affected by the competition from travelling film shows visiting the district and the vagaries of the local weather. I fully agree with David that it is a wonderful and rare piece of primary evidence concerning Edwardian film exhibition, and I'm immensely grateful to him for letting me peruse and copy its contents.

There is nothing in the diary which contradicts any of the information I presented in my article, however. And, though (as a Lancastrian) I'd dearly love to be persuaded otherwise, there is nothing in David's letter which changes my view that the Central Hall was probably not Britain's first purpose-built cinema. David argues that I'm wrong to suggest this on the basis of two entirely hypothetical suppositions. One is that Joshua might have actually placed his order for a Gaumont Chrono projector at the time when he built the Central Hall in 1905, but had to suffer a lengthy delay before it was delivered to him, just as the Ministry of Defence sometimes waits years for an order for missiles or aircraft to be fulfilled. The other is that if he only took receipt of the projector in February 1907, there is no way he would have been able to start showing films by the end of that month (we are both agreed that this is when the venue began functioning as a cinema) unless he had purposely designed and built a projection enclosure within the building and received official approval to do so, all of which would need to have been done 'some considerable time in advance' - i.e. back in 1905 when the building was completed.

Let's take the latter point first. I see absolutely no reason why Joshua Duckworth could not have been showing films within a matter of days of receiving his projector, without having had to make any particularly elaborate preparations for doing so. This was, after all, predominantly the era of the travelling showman. It was a most common practice for film exhibitors to journey from town to town, temporarily installing projectors in local municipal halls on the day they arrived and opening their shows the very next evening. Before the 1909 Cinematograph Act became law in January 1910, the majority of local authorities did not require film exhibitors to follow any kind of special safety

impresario to the... of historians like John Barnes, we do know quite a bit about the then-burgeoning and highly competitive business of making and supplying film projectors, and I'd suggest that it does not bear any comparison to the way that modern-day government munitions contracts are handled, however 'high-tech' the product may have been. The UK branch of Gaumont, founded in 1898, was one of the pre-eminent film equipment manufacturers of this period, and offered an over-the-counter sales service at its shop in London's Cecil Court. It would have been some feat to maintain that position if it took them nearly a year-and-a-half to supply each customer with a projector costing £35 - the price in today's money of a high-end laptop or home cinema projector - in what was then very much a fly-by-night entertainment industry. Even supposing Gaumont did occasionally prove themselves to be hopelessly unreliable, if Joshua Duckworth was only half the businessman I take him to be, he'd surely have cancelled his order and gone elsewhere rather than unintentionally let the Central Hall stand idle for so long.

There is one aspect of my original article which I wish I could amend in the light of David's correspondence, and that is its title. I have no one to blame but myself for calling it 'The Case Against Colne', but this is clearly apt to seem rather hostile and negative and was not at all fitting for a piece about someone who, as I stressed at the time, should be regarded as a very significant pioneer in the development of film exhibition in this country, irrespective of whether he purposely built the Central Hall as a cinema.

## THE CASE AGAINST THE PECKHAM ELECTRIC THEATRE

I was interested in Jon Burrows' article in PH30 citing the former Electric Theatre at Peckham as a possible contender for the award of Britain's earliest purpose-built cinema. Interestingly, this cinema belonged to the same circuit as the Electric Theatre (later Biograph) in Wilton Road, Victoria, which itself was for many years purported to have been the first building to have been erected purposely for showing films. However, having researched the area in some depth for a forthcoming book on the cinemas of Southwark, I am able to add the following facts and information in refutation of any such similar claims concerning its earlier sister at Peckham.

The Electric Theatre opened on 31 August 1908 and occupied the ground floor of a newly-erected, four storey building that still stands adjacent to the

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The history of the building at 13B Pye Lane in front of the former Bussey factory.