

## **Where the Exceptional and Everyday Meet: Post-War Cinema Culture in British Seaside Towns**

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Despite their central place in twentieth century British cultural life, seaside towns have been marginalised within the fields of both urban history and cinema history. Seaside towns are seen to fall outside the standard frameworks and everyday concerns of both sets of historians. If seaside towns are discussed, it tends to be within the field of tourism studies, which offers some excellent leisure histories, both general and place specific, of significant coastal resorts.<sup>1</sup> However, as might be expected, these tend to focus on the exceptional experiences of tourists rather than the everyday practices and provisions for residents and, perhaps in part resultantly, there is scant research into the place of cinemas and cinema-going within them. The few cinema histories of seaside exhibition and cinema-going focus on the heyday period of ‘the picture palace’ in the late silent and early sound eras of the 1920s and 1930s in large resorts such as Blackpool and Brighton.<sup>2</sup> But what about smaller resorts that are less able to rely on the income generated during holiday periods? How did they negotiate the often conflicting demands of tourists and locals? What strategies did they employ to address fluctuating market conditions in which the population might escalate to more than double in the summer months, as hundreds of thousands of metropolitan visitors bolstered and changed the nature of their marketplaces?

In order to address these questions, this chapter, will focus upon the coastal towns of Great Yarmouth (52,970 inhabitants in 1961) and Gorleston-on-Sea (4,892 inhabitants in 1961) in East Anglia rather than the larger and still buoyant destinations of Brighton or Blackpool.<sup>3</sup> It will also concentrate upon a period marked by contradictory tendencies and uncertainties, the early 1950s to late 1970s, when declining cinema attendance was contrasted with the steady rise in British seaside tourism.<sup>4</sup> This study serves therefore not only to offer synchronic comparisons of different sized seaside towns, but also diachronic comparisons of seasonal shifts in the cinemas’ strategies across these turbulent decades. Programming analysis and newspaper discourse analysis of key cinema sites is used to build a picture of cinema culture in these British seaside towns. I will detail the different strategies cinemas adopted, both on and off-season, to address these complex, at times conflicting social and economic factors. In his historical study of film booking in the coastal town (now a city) of

Portsmouth – not a significant tourist destination – Robert James explains that ‘relationship between cultural provision and cultural pleasure is complex, and that consumer tastes could be highly volatile, even over quite short periods of time.’<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I demonstrate a very different form of volatility, however, with taste cultures contested cyclically across even shorter seasonal and weekly periods, as power relations shifted from tourists to locals and back again. I also highlight the divergent strategies employed within a larger and smaller seaside town – and the different cinema sites therein – as they competed to maintain a foothold in simultaneously volatile and predictable market conditions.

The cinemas in the coastal town of Great Yarmouth operated very differently from those in both urban and coastal cities, and in non-coastal towns. They also adopted widely divergent strategies from the cinemas in the smaller neighbouring town of Gorleston, constructing very different identities through their programming and promotional discourses. Into the late 1970s, the seafront cinemas in Yarmouth alternated film entertainment and live performances (variety theatre, amateur opera societies, pop concerts) to target different demographics and niche audiences not only on and off-season, but at different times of the week as the make-up of the towns’ inhabitants shifted. In Gorleston, however, this blurring of cultural categories and markets was far less marked, with a commitment maintained to the everyday concerns of its smaller local community, respecting more clearly defined cultural distinctions and spatial boundaries. As this chapter will demonstrate, there is a clear contrast between the paternalistic proprietorship and predictable programming of the small town cinemas in Gorleston and the transient targeting of more fluid audiences and tastes in the larger seaside town of Great Yarmouth. The chapter will build upon the research of those working within the ‘New Cinema History’ in using comparative analysis of localised case studies not as a means to ‘illuminate national trends’ but to indicate the specificities, incongruities and shifting landscapes (both seasonally and historically) of cinema-going in two adjacent but diverging seaside towns marked by the conflicting demands and intersecting experiences of the everyday (locals) and the exceptional (tourists).<sup>6</sup>

### **‘Oh I Do Like To Be Beside the Seaside’: Cinema Culture Along The ‘Golden Mile’**

This analysis of seaside cinema-going in Great Yarmouth and Gorleston in the postwar period (mid-1950s to mid-1970s) must be understood not only in relation to the contradictory tendencies of declining British cinema attendance and escalating seaside tourism, but also in

the context of ongoing concerns and discursive struggles over the appropriate ‘social tone’ of seaside resorts, with ‘status-conscious visitors and residents’ in competition with ‘working class tourists for access to leisure time and space.’<sup>7</sup> Whilst domestic tourist expenditure grew across this period, the increase in the number of more affluent Brits holidaying abroad was more dramatic; this period also held the seeds therefore for the decline of the domestic seaside industry. The search for middleclass distinctions overseas alongside declining standards in resort facilities and accommodation due to a general lack of investment (from businesses and government) – factors which of course are interconnected – meant that lower-income holidaymakers (typically younger and/or working class) became the key market.<sup>8</sup> A 1964 report on the Norfolk holiday industry stressed that the majority of tourists came from London and the Midlands (particularly the East Midlands), followed by those from the more rural East region and from the industrial North.<sup>9</sup> I am particularly interested, therefore, in the programming strategies different cinemas adopted to address these complex and conflicting social and economic pressures in relation to the perhaps divergent tastes of metropolitan and rural visitors, and the competing demands and concerns of local residents.

In light of these research interests, I will focus not on more recognized and, comparatively, still buoyant destinations such as Blackpool and Brighton, but the less revered seaside resort of Great Yarmouth – a town in East Anglia now most famed in entertainment terms for housing the ‘World’s worst waxworks museum’<sup>10</sup> – and its smaller, neighbouring town of Gorleston-on-Sea. The populations of Brighton and Blackpool were and continue to be around three times larger than that of Great Yarmouth. However, Yarmouth’s population is subject to considerable fluctuations. Even following a steady decline in the tourist trade since the postwar period I am focusing upon, the population of Great Yarmouth effectively doubles in the summer months due to tourism, with 1.3 million staying visitors and 3.7 million day visitors each year.<sup>11</sup> Gorleston also has a long history of tourism but the resort is more exclusive, maintaining a smaller, older and more affluent market for its ‘Edwardian Beach’ that is congruent with the town’s wealthier and more middleclass resident population and, perhaps resultantly, its wider perception. Despite the resilience of its tourist industry, the overarching perception of Great Yarmouth, both within and outside, is of a run-down town in steady decline since the bygone eras of the Victorian, Edwardian and inter-war periods.

Great Yarmouth has a long and illustrious cinema and entertainment history stretching across these periods and beyond. The chapter will initially focus on the three cinema

buildings along Great Yarmouth seafront known as the ‘Golden Mile’, as this has been the town’s main entertainment and tourist attraction from the mid-Victorian era. These are The Windmill (previously The Gem), The Empire and The Royal Aquarium (now the Hollywood). Whilst Biograph films were presented in the Britannia Pier’s variety programme from 1902, Yarmouth’s first cinema was The Gem which opened on 4 July 1908. It was one of the earliest purpose built cinemas in Britain, screening a continuous flow of ‘electric vaudeville’ to potentially more than 1,200 paying customers at a time. Its then manager C.B. Cochran (later to become a famed impresario) stipulated that men and women had to sit on opposites sides of the auditorium.<sup>12</sup> The Gem was taken over by Jack Jay (whose son Peter still owns this site and the other two Great Yarmouth cinemas I am analysing) in 1938, and was refashioned as The Windmill, offering ‘cine-variety’ and summer stage shows (featuring the likes of George Formby and Norman Wisdom) from the end of the Second World War through to the late 1970s, then solely film programmes out of season. It closed as a cinema in the 1980s, becoming a children’s play centre, a Ripley’s style ‘odditorium’ and currently an indoor, movie-themed miniature golf course.

A few hundred meters along the ‘Golden Mile’, The Empire opened on the 1 July 1911 as Yarmouth’s second purpose built cinema, and operated almost solely as such until the 1970s, when it alternated between bingo, late night horror bills and children’s cartoon shows. It is now closed after being unsuccessfully relaunched in the 1990s as a nightclub and bar complex based on New Orleans’ Bourbon Street.<sup>13</sup> The third site I am analysing still operates as a cinema, as part of the East Anglian Hollywood cinema chain. The oldest and most prestigious of the sites, it opened as The Aquarium in 1876 – later the Royal Aquarium following the patronage of King Edward III, then Prince of Wales – but the attraction of sharks, penguins and other sea life didn’t prove popular with either locals or tourists. It closed after six years and was extensively rebuilt in 1883 to accommodate theatrical performances and vaudeville (with the likes of Oscar Wilde and Lily Langtry gracing its stage). It remained as such until the early 1930s, after which it operated most of the year as a cinema. However, it continued to offer live entertainment in the summer, staging Sunday pop concerts and summer variety shows from the 1930s until the 1980s, when it was converted into a five screen multiplex under the management of the Hollywood chain.<sup>14</sup> The Aquarium and The Regent (opened as a prestigious picture palace and theatre in 1914, and located off the ‘Golden Mile’ on Regent Street) competed for the prestige pictures and roadshow releases

across most of the twentieth century, until The Regent was converted to a MECCA Bingo Club in 1982. I will make some reference to The Regent (later the ABC Regent) in this chapter but my focus will be on The Windmill, The Empire and The Royal Aquarium along the Golden Mile.

Gorleston-on-Sea had two cinemas in the postwar period, both single screen cinemas with around 1,000 seats. The first cinema in the town, the ‘tiny, but cosy’ Filmland, opened in July 1913 and went through a number of name changes, settling on the perhaps overly grand Louis Quatorze – the locals are said to have affectionately dubbed it Lousy Quarters – but was shut before the Second World War and destroyed during an air raid.<sup>15</sup> Quick to follow Filmland’s lead, however, was The Coliseum, which opened on the August bank holiday of 1913 and was a little more lavish than its competitor. Following a takeover by the Douglas Attree in 1931, the cinema was given an art deco facade, and remained looking largely the same and under the same ownership – though with son Douglas Attree Jr taking over management in the 1940s – until it was demolished to make way for a shopping centre in 1970. In the postwar period the cinema was a second-run cinema which, according to a local historian, ‘seldom if ever ran a film for more than three days’, unlike Yarmouth cinemas such as The Aquarium which had access to premium product.<sup>16</sup> The Palace, another art deco style second-run cinema, opened on Gorleston’s main high street in 1939, but converted to become a casino/bingo hall in 1964 and remained operating as such until 2012.

I will discuss the programming strategies and newspaper commentaries on these sites taken from Great Yarmouth and Gorleston’s main daily newspaper, the *Yarmouth Mercury*, analysing how these five cinemas’ products, pleasures and patrons were differentiated on and off-season in the years 1954, 1964 and 1974. I have therefore adopted a systematic sampling method that, whilst small, will give a reasonable sense of continuity and change across the period I am analysing, and between the different cinemas within these two coastal towns. The analysis is therefore comparative in relation to a number of factors, comparing the programming and promotional strategies based upon: the three decades; on and off-season periods; size and nature of seaside towns; size and nature of cinemas; and, in regard to different forms of entertainment.

### **‘Roll Up! Roll Up!’: Programming for Great Yarmouth’s Summer Season and Winter Trade**

The seasonal character of Great Yarmouth's three cinemas across the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s – although adjusted to accommodate changes in the availability and popularity of particular genres, cycles and trends – remains somewhat consistent. What is significant, however, is the way in which the products they offered and the audiences they targeted shifted across the on and off-season periods of the annual calendar, particularly to accommodate the 'summer show season' which stretches from June to September, and, to a lesser extent, during other holiday periods such as Easter and Christmas. The shifts in the three cinemas' programming are far more marked by cyclical seasonal changes than linear historical change across the decades, as the cinemas shifted their strategies to appeal to summer and winter trade. There are, however, some diverse and, I think, astute approaches adopted by the different cinemas in adjusting their character and offerings to appeal, sometimes at different times within the week, to tourists and locals.

Although the divergent characters of these cinemas is exacerbated across the years 1954, 1964 and 1974 I looked at – particularly in regard to the issue of social tone – the overall pattern remains quite consistent. Across the periods I analysed, The Windmill's main commitment remained its summer season theatrical shows, with film-only entertainment returning for only parts of the off-season trade and filling daytime slots before the summer shows. In 1954, January to early February saw the programming of older Hollywood films, ranging from Cecil B. DeMille's *Greatest Show on Earth* (1952) in early January to Humphrey Bogart in the almost two decades old *Angels With Dirty Faces* (1938) finishing 6 February when the theatre closed for almost four months to prepare for the summer season. The twice nightly 'Summer Review Show' was advertised from late May until its last week in late September. Although The Windmill continued to have continuous daily film matinees until the first performance of the live show (and the same film-only bill throughout Sundays when the live show did not run) during the summer season, it did not promote the specific film titles, only advertising it as 'the ideal family show: sixty minutes of Walt Disney Cartoons etc'. The advert for its 1964 season – a nostalgic 'Old Thyme Music Hall' celebrating the 'good old days from the naughty '90s to the roaring '20s' – elaborates a little more on the daily film show billing, advertising Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy and the Keystone Cops, in addition to Disney and Tom and Jerry cartoons. The Windmill very much positioned itself, therefore, as a family oriented space aimed at children, but also at the nostalgic reminiscences of childhood – and in some cases of childhood holiday's spent in Yarmouth and

other resorts – of the parents and grandparents accompanying them. In a pre-season Anglia Television ‘Here and Now’ news item, the news reporter challenges The Windmill’s decision to stage such an old fashioned review show in the ‘age of the pop singer’. The ‘Old Thyme Music Hall’ show’s producer counters that it is time ‘older people had something for themselves’, highlighting the cine-variety theater’s explicit targeting of an older demographic.<sup>17</sup>

In the winter season of 1954 (late September through to Christmas), The Windmill reverted to a fulltime cinema – changing its program twice weekly and double billing almost exclusively Hollywood fare – offering recently released family adventure films and comedies such as *Crossed Swords* (1954) with Errol Flynn, the Bowery Boys in *Paris Playboys* (1954) and Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis in *The Caddy* (1953), as well as a number of Universal westerns. The cinema seemed to maintain its commitment, therefore, to family audiences with almost all films having an all ages permitted ‘U’ certification and some adverts explicitly highlighting that ‘children are admitted unaccompanied.’ However, in the 1964 and 1974 seasons The Windmill did not open outside the live summer season, with the only film entertainment on offer being the daily film show of silent shorts and cartoons prior to the live shows in the summer of 1964. Even these children’s matinees switched to the Empire in 1974. The only exception to this policy was the hire of the venue to the Great Yarmouth Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society for one week, prior to The Windmill’s live summer season, throughout the 1950s (though not in 1954) to put on their annual drama festival. This concession to residents’ highbrow (or at least middlebrow) proclivities and practices – there was a particular taste for amateur productions of Noel Coward plays – highlights the ongoing cultural negotiations between exhibitors and local residents.<sup>18</sup>

The late 1960s and 1970s saw an interesting development in The Windmill’s summer shows, switching from nostalgic revue and variety shows to specialising in summer seasons of current British TV sitcoms and their stars which were unique to this venue. In 1974, The Windmill billed twice nightly stage performances of current popular ITV comedy *Love Thy Neighbour* (1972-1976), starring main cast members Jack Smethurst and Kate Williams, across the whole of the summer season. Other seasons included *Carry On* film stars Sid James and Frankie Howard and the cast of sitcom *On the Buses* (1969-1973) both of which had contemporaneous films that transposed the franchises to seaside holiday resorts, namely *Carry on Camping* (1969) and *Holiday on the Buses* (1973).<sup>19</sup> There is an interesting

overlaying for audiences here between different mediums, extending and eliding the distinction between holiday and home entertainments. This certainly raises questions as well in regard to social tone, with *Love Thy Neighbour*, *On the Buses* and the *Carry On* films all being deigned as low cultural forms by middlebrow critics at the time and, if retrospectively, having been condemned as quintessential examples of politically incorrect British culture of the seventies.<sup>20</sup> However, a discussion of the implications of this for the perceived social make-up and political perspectives of The Windmill's audiences is outside the scope of this chapter.

The Empire is interesting in that from the 1950s to the 1970s it actively targeted a more adult local audience, increasingly fostering a more disreputable almost 'exploitation' cinema type character. From mid January to June and mid September to late December 1954, the Empire almost exclusively double billed 'B' and programmer westerns (mostly Republic) and American hardboiled crime films some, as with *I the Jury* (1953) and *Without Warning* (1952), 'X' rated films available exclusively to audiences over 16. This was not the case during Yarmouth's summer seasons and other holidays such as Christmas, however. The advert for its 'Terrific Holiday Programme' features western romance *Fortune Hunter* (1954) and sci-fi action in *Tobor the Great* (1954), double-billed for the second week in June, is representative of its summer programme. It was also able to attract some bigger first-runs like *The French Line* (1954) with Jane Russell (billed as the 'First Time in Yarmouth') as by early June first-run cinemas such as The Royal Aquarium and The Regent had given most of their programmes over to live comedy and musical stage shows. This model was replicated in the 1964 winter season but with Hammer and sub-Hammer horror (both UK and US) and 'exploitation' films (mostly American crime and social problem films) replacing westerns as the key genres on offer. The Double 'X' bill now became a regular feature rather than an occasional offering, with two 'X' rated films tending to be billed Sunday to Thursday. Slightly more family oriented fare (Hollywood westerns and adventure films and some British comedies such as *Carry on Jack* [1963]) were then billed over the weekends when families might be visiting Yarmouth for short breaks. During the summer months, however, the Empire billed only 'U' and 'A' pictures, such that children could always attend even if they had to be accompanied by an adult.

In 1964, the Empire also adopted a strategy to attract youth audiences by programming recent and classic youth films featuring music, rerunning Elvis films including



*Kid Galahad* (1962) in June and *Follow that Dream* (1962) in July, to coincide with the release of the latest Elvis film at the Regent, and screening *West Side Story* (1961) over the Easter weekend. The summer of 1964 saw the now infamous clashes between Mods and Rockers along the south coast seaside resorts of England- most famously Clacton, Margate and Brighton as extensively and sensationally reported in the British tabloid press.<sup>21</sup> As the front page headline of the *Yarmouth Mercury* declared, the August bank holiday saw “‘Mod and Rocker’ trouble spread to Yarmouth’ with 28 arrests for assault, threatening behavior and obstructing the police.”<sup>22</sup> It was explained at length that this ‘rowdy-ism’ might have been as bad (or good depending on whose perspective) as in Clacton or Brighton if it weren’t for the preparedness of police. Venues in Yarmouth were seemingly also prepared for the influx of youth, booking popular rock bands such as the Kinks into smaller venues and the Royal Aquarium giving pop singer and teen heartthrob Billy Fury top billing at their ‘Big Star Show’ that summer.

During the summer months The Aquarium did screen films on Sundays – often the type of ‘X’ rated fare that proved popular with The Empire crowd – suggesting an attempt to draw back a local audience on nights when holidaymakers were returning home from their weeks holiday. Whilst The Empire shunned the ‘X’ rated films for the summer months, it reverted to its winter trade strategy in late September 1964, billing two ‘X’ rated horror or exploitation films Sunday to Wednesday and something a little more family friendly (typically ‘A’ rated) over the weekend. 1974 would see The Empire become almost exclusively Yarmouth’s horror cinema, scouring the depths of British, European and American horror such that it could change its late-night horror bills four times a week. This now included the summer months when instead of giving over its space to family audiences from June to September, it instead designated mornings for children’s cartoon shows and encouraged families to switch across to its sister venue, The Windmill, for its TV sitcom stage shows in the evening before the 11.15pm horror shows. There is little criticism of these horror shows in the *Yarmouth Mercury*, however, despite The Empire’s attempt to build up a somewhat salacious image for them. This may in part be because they respected spatial and temporal regulations (including admittance rules via the purposefully fore-grounded certifications of films in adverts) thus offering predictable and ordered transgressions. The increasingly youth-frequented amusement arcades along the ‘Golden Mile’, however, continually threatened to spill out onto the streets at any time of the day or night.

As Chapman and Light have highlighted, as seaside resorts went into decline in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and many entertainment venues transformed into amusement arcades where young people could gamble on slot machines. These street-level, typically open-fronted venues became increasingly associated with antisocial behaviors and low level criminality.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the gravest concerns expressed in the local press regarding these cinemas were that they might be transformed into amusement arcades as business declined. For example, the 1969 takeover and planned redevelopment of The Aquarium by the Forte Group inspired the chairman of the Great Yarmouth and Gorleston Publicity Association to state: ‘I shudder to think this might include another amusement arcade- I think there are sufficient on our seafront already’.<sup>24</sup> As discussed above, The Aquarium had traditionally maintained its distinction from second-run and cine-variety theatres such as The Empire and The Windmill, by highlighting its luxurious, even majestic qualities. For example, the 1954 winter and spring season included Yarmouth premieres for Hollywood epic *The Robe* (1953) and *Flight of the White Heron* (1954), a Cinemascope documentary detailing the Royal Family’s 1954 commonwealth tour.<sup>25</sup> Adverts also stressed that the cinema’s luxurious, fully-licensed lounge featured live music from The Royal Aquarium trio.

However, despite their less salubrious reputations, The Windmill and The Empire – and their audiences – were still positioned in a hierarchy above the adjacent amusement arcade sites and Yarmouth’s fun fair, The Pleasure Beach, located at the far end of the ‘Golden Mile’. The main objections to the 1969 plans to demolish The Windmill and The Empire, and build new multi-purpose entertainment buildings on these sites, were not regarding demolishing these historical buildings but with the plans to include ground-floor amusement arcades. These plans never came to fruition. Summarily, later newspaper articles went on to show more respect for these venues and their histories. A 1996 *Yarmouth Mercury* article juxtaposed the ‘dignified frontages of these Victorian and Edwardian buildings’ to the ‘amusement arcades of dubious aesthetic merit’,<sup>26</sup> whilst a condescending 1980 article highlights that ‘the youngsters who have been to see the Sex Pistols in the *Great Rock and Roll Swindle* since The Windmill resumed presenting films [...] are unlikely to realise that this particular building pioneered cinema in the borough of Yarmouth.’<sup>27</sup> If there is an issue regarding social tone in the local press, therefore, it seems to relate far more to youth’s disregard for keeping certain types of entertainment housed within their designated spatial

and temporal boundaries, than it does to contestation over specific spaces between locals and tourists, or between different classed individuals and groups therein.

### **Tea and Sympathy: Middlebrow Distinctions Meet Everyday Concerns at Gorleston's 'Coli'**

Whilst the newspaper reports on the repurposing, closures and decline of Great Yarmouth's cinema buildings in the late 1960s and 1970s focus on their once palatial grandeur and historical and national significance – particularly the patronages of exceptional figures from British monarchs to Hollywood royalty – the comparable articles on Gorleston's cinema closures focus on more everyday concerns and continuities.<sup>28</sup> The *Yarmouth Mercury* articles reporting on the closure of Gorleston's last remaining cinema, The Coliseum, in late 1969, draw upon more local memories in highlighting the central role that this cinema – and to a lesser extent The Palace – played in local community life across a number of generations. A November 1969 article commiserated that the closing of the 'Coli' – as it was affectionately known by its regulars – to make way for a shopping centre would leave Gorleston a 'Place Without Cinema.' It celebrated the 1914 cinema not as a marker of the town being apace with modernity – as with some reports on Yarmouth's place in British cinema history – but as a sign of a 'a more leisurely age' and 'part of a Gorleston which, even now at times and places, hints of a community, with rather special links between its people.' The article reminisces that 'time was that a more expensive seat at the Coliseum also bought a cup of tea and a biscuit' and that the cinema programme was often interrupted by longtime and much-loved manager Douglas Attree's 'plea[s] for a good cause' over the auditorium speakers.<sup>29</sup> The cinema's benevolent, even paternalistic role within the community is furthered in subsequent, nostalgic articles explaining, for example, that at Easter, children were admitted to the cinema for free if they donated a decorated egg which was then taken to Gorleston's Cottage Hospital as Easter gifts and food for patients.<sup>30</sup>

This focus on local community interests and tastes – whilst respecting underlying distinctions between classes of audiences – is articulated in The Coliseum's and The Palace's programming strategies in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1954 neither cinema changed its programming strategies significantly in and out of the holiday season, maintaining coherent identities and, likely, target audiences across the year. The Coliseum – promoted in the 1950s with the very everyday tagline of 'the best in entertainment in a friendly and homely

atmosphere' – tended to program more middlebrow fare than the Yarmouth cinemas discussed previously. Midweek bills included *Roman Holiday* (1953), *The Glen Miller Story* (1954) and *Young Bess* (1953) and, significantly, more 'quality' British cinema such as *Hobson's Choice* (1954). Although it tended to programme more family friendly films at weekends (Thursday to Saturday) – such as Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953), *Treasure Island* (1950) and *Genevieve* (1953) – there is no discernible shift in generic or audience appeals across the year as a whole. Likewise, The Palace's programming strategies are fairly consistent across the winter and summer seasons, but there is more of a focus on Hollywood westerns and adventure films – *Boy From Oklahoma* (1954), *Pony Express* (1953), *Tarzan and the She Devil* (1953), *Abbott and Costello Meet Captain Kidd* (1952) – across the 1954 programme. This is comparable with The Empire's off season and weekend bills, and appears aimed at more of a youth audience. The other entertainment that populates Yarmouth's cinema bills over the summer – plays, variety shows and concerts, olde thyme and modern dance, local talent shows etc – are billed at Gorleston's Pavilion Theater and Floral Hall Ballroom throughout the year. There is far more sense, therefore, of spatial and temporal boundaries being respected and maintained throughout the year in Gorleston, as opposed to the mixed entertainment bills and shifting venue uses of Yarmouth's cinemas. The certainty and communality offered by the paternalistic proprietors of Gorleston's cinemas are perhaps the key distinguishing factor between them and those in the larger seaside town of Great Yarmouth who switched their cultural and social allegiances as the seasonal market shifted.

The use of The Palace in Gorleston did change for good in 1964 however. Following a few films being programmed in January, including *The Great Escape* (1963), The Palace Cinema converted to the Palace Casino in February, offering roulette and bingo all year round. The members-only Palace Casino positioned itself as more up-market than the Yarmouth bingo halls aimed chiefly at the holiday trade – including The Empire – and significantly, whilst no longer advertising a cinema programme, offered its members 'free films before bingo' at weekends. It also booked occasional specials such as live wrestling matches. Following The Palace's conversion, The Coliseum switched some of its attention to The Palace's youth market – through 'X' rated European art-house films like Boccaccio '70 (1962), Japanese sci-fi *King Kong Versus Godzilla* (1962), and British new wave film *Billy Liar* (1963) all booked on Sundays – whilst maintaining its staple middlebrow family audiences during the week through Disney films (*The Sword in the Stone* [1963], *The*

*Incredible Journey* [1963]), Hollywood historical epics (*Mutiny on the Bounty* [1962], *55 Days at Peking* [1963], *The Long Ships* [1963]), and class-obsessed British comedies and dramas, many starring Dirk Bogarde, such as *Doctor in Distress* (1963) and *The Servant* (1963). The Coliseum's billing of increasingly out-dated blockbusters such as *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *The Colditz Story* (1955) in 1964, attests to the increasing difficulties the Gorleston cinemas were facing in affording premium or recently premium product in an increasingly squeezed market. On the announcement of its closure, manager Douglas Attree Jr explained that declining local interest and increased competition didn't bode well for future prospects. Despite a recent successful run with *The Sound of Music* (1965) – some three years after its initial release – Attree explained that, regrettably, he had been forced to sell 'Gorleston's last cinema' after forty years of family ownership. A further forty five years on, Attree's prediction that 'I cannot see there being another cinema in Gorleston again' has been proved correct.<sup>31</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The comparative analysis of Great Yarmouth and Gorleston's cinema programming across 1954, 1964 and 1974 reveal significant differences in their exhibition strategies and, perhaps resultantly, the understandings of these spaces within their local communities and the local press. Operating in a much larger and competitive tourist market, which more than doubled the summer population of Great Yarmouth to that of a small or mid-sized city, cinemas like The Windmill, The Empire and The Royal Aquarium were able to tap into a large seasonal audience seeking exceptional and eclectic encounters, whilst maintaining a steady income from more everyday audiences – albeit demographically shifting ones – off season and on Sunday nights throughout the year. Gorleston's smaller population and more exclusive tourist appeal meant that it was necessary for the cinemas to 'keep things in their place' – both spatially and temporally – in order, at least initially, to maintain a regular audience for its less raucous offerings whilst preserving the town's cultural distinction from its noisy neighbour. The seaside is often characterised as a 'liminal' even 'carnavalesque' space outside everyday concerns and power relations.<sup>32</sup> However, analysis of the programming and discourses surrounding Great Yarmouth's cinemas indicate highly-coordinated strategies to satisfy the enduring demands of both winter and summer trade, rather than genuine

transgression of cultural or social expectations. If these sites can be seen as in any way ‘liminal’ in the periods I am addressing, it is in their privileging of cyclical over linear time. Rather than transgressing rules and regulations, both on and off-season, these sites offered locals and tourists the reassuring promise of repeated pleasures and pastimes they had enjoyed across a number of seasons and in other realms of their lives.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See for example: Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard, *Power and Politics at the Seaside: The Development of Devon's Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1999); John Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See for example: Sue Arthur, ‘Blackpool Goes to the Talkies: Cinema and the Seaside in Thirties Britain’ *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 29(1), 2009, 27-39; John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmmaking in 1930s Britain* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2000)

<sup>3</sup> General Register Office, ‘Table 3’, *Census 1961: Country Report, Norfolk* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1964), p. 1. The current populations of Great Yarmouth and Gorleston are fairly comparable with these figures. Great Yarmouth Borough Council, *Borough Profile (Facts and Figures) 2012* (Great Yarmouth Borough Council, 2012), 6. Brighton and Blackpool’s populations were and continue to be around three times larger than those of Great Yarmouth.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart Hanson. *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen: A History of Cinema Exhibition in Britain Since 1896*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 93; Julian Demetrirdi, ‘The Golden Years: English Seaside Resorts 1950-1974’ in G. Shaw and A. Williams (eds) *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts: Cultural and Economic Perspectives* (London; Cassell, 1997), 53.

<sup>5</sup> Robert James, ‘Cinema-going in a Port Town, 1914–1951: Film Booking Patterns at the Queens Cinema, Portsmouth’. *Urban History*, 40, 2013, p. 335

<sup>6</sup> Arthur, 37. This chapter draws its inspiration for longitudinal, comparative approaches to localised case studies from, for example, Katherine H. Fuller-Seeley (ed) *Hollywood and the Neighbourhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing*. (Berkeley: California University Press, 2008); Richard Maltby, Phillippe Meers and Daniel Biltereyst (eds) *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, edited by (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Van de Vijer, L. and Biltereyst, D. (2012) ‘Cinemas as a Conditional Part of Everyday Life: Memories of Cinemas in Ghent from the 1930s to the 1970s’. *Cultural Studies*, 27(4), 2013, 561-584.

<sup>7</sup> Morgan and Pritchard, 29.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, 41-42.

<sup>9</sup> R.I. Maxwell, *Report on the Norfolk Holiday Industry*. (Norfolk: Norfolk County Council, 1964), p.6.

<sup>10</sup> Emily Allen, ‘World’s Worst Waxworks Faces Closure’, *Daily Mail*, 31 October 2012 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2225636/Worlds-worst-waxworks-museum-Louis-Tussauds-faces-closure-elderly-owners-run-it.html>

<sup>11</sup> Great Yarmouth Borough Council, *Report 2009*, (Great Yarmouth Borough Council, 2009), 23.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Peart, *The Picture House in East Anglia* (Lavenham, Suffolk: Terence Dalton Ltd.,1980), 26-27.

<sup>13</sup> Peggoty, ‘Times Change at Empire’, *Yarmouth Mercury*, 8 March, 1996.

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Bagshaw, 'Centre of Fun and Glamour', *Yarmouth Mercury*, 18 July 1975. This conversion had already begun in 1969 when the Forte Group took over the cinema and converted it into the Three-in-One in the 1970s, comprising of 2 screens and a 'fun pub'. This takeover is discussed at the end of the chapter.

<sup>15</sup> Peart, 157

<sup>16</sup> Peggoty, 'When the Silver Screen and Style', *Yarmouth Mercury*, 3 August 2001

<sup>17</sup> Anglia TV, 'Here and Now: Show Business', 1964. *The East Anglian Film Archive*. <http://www.eafa.org.uk/catalogue/205542> Accessed 12th July 2014. The report significantly focuses on the young female dancers – and their tastes for fashion and rock and roll – in order to target a younger and more 'hip' demographic than that for the music hall show.

<sup>18</sup> Tinkler, 'The Windmill, 1946-1972, Green Book', *Tinkler and Williams Theatre Collection*, Archives Department, University of East Anglia, Norwich.

<sup>19</sup> Peggoty, 'An Odd Way To Live On ...', *Yarmouth Mercury*, 20 March 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Leon Hunt, *British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation*. (London: Routledge, 1998). The now notorious ITV comedy *Love Thy Neighbour*, based around the reactions of a white working class family when a black family moves in next door, has since become shorthand for politically incorrect television of the 1970s.

<sup>21</sup> See: Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: Creation of Mods and Rockers* (London: Routledge 1972/1980).

<sup>22</sup> Anon, 'Courts Told of Weekend Rowdy-ism', *Yarmouth Mercury*, 7 August 1964, 8.

<sup>23</sup> A. Chapman and D. Light, 'The "Heritagisation" of the British Seaside Resort: The Rise of the 'Old Penny Arcade'', *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 6 (3), 2011, 223

<sup>24</sup> Anon, 'Aquarium "Must [Not Be Another Fun Hall]"', *Eastern Daily Press*, 22 March 1969.

<sup>25</sup> A story in the *Kinematograph Weekly* 'Showmanship' section highlights that civic leaders were invited to a special screening of *The Robe* (1953) at the Royal Aquarium and a local preacher mentioned the film in his sermon, 15 April 1946, 36. The cinema also exploited its history as an aquarium for the Cinemascope underwater spectacle of *Beneath the 12 Mile Reef* (1954), arranging for member of the local aquarist society and diving club to put on exhibitions in the foyer's giant tanks which were left over from the buildings aquarium days. As the *Kine Weekly* highlighted: 'quite the right place for such a film, Great Yarmouth. Therefore one expected the the exploitation to be a s good as it was', 3 June 1954, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Peggoty, 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Peggoty, 'Films Again at the Windmill', *Yarmouth Mercury*, 20 June 1980.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Bagshaw, 'Centre of Fun and Glamour', *Eastern Evening News*, 18 July, 1975.

<sup>29</sup> 'Place Without Cinema', *Yarmouth Mercury*, 5 November 1969.

<sup>30</sup> 'Cinema Admission Cost an Egg', *Yarmouth Mercury*, 9 June 1989. In addition to these 'egg matinees', in the 1950s the Coliseum held popular 'Christmas children's matinees' during which, as Gorleston resident Joe Carr recalls, 'The manager dressed up as Father Christmas and all the children were given a gift of nuts and sweets.' *Our Great Yarmouth*, [http://www.ourgreatyarmouth.org.uk/page\\_id\\_257\\_path\\_0p5p94p.aspx](http://www.ourgreatyarmouth.org.uk/page_id_257_path_0p5p94p.aspx) Accessed 3 June 2014.

<sup>31</sup> 'Gorleston's Last Cinema', *Yarmouth Mercury*, 7 November 1969.

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<sup>32</sup> Rob Shields, 'System of Pleasure': Liminality and the Carnavalesque at Brighton', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7, 1990, 39-72.