



**CHEL TENHAM
FILM SOCIETY**



NEWSLETTER

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BIRTH OF A NOTION

Tuesday May 1, 1945, was a strange day in Cheltenham, as it was everywhere in Europe. Hitler was dead; but the *Echo* would only predict "Germans May Submit Within Few Days".

Despite the uncertainty, 450 Cheltonians gathered at the School of Art in the centre of town to bring to fruition an idea: a club to show serious films ignored by the town's numerous commercial cinemas.

The first film, shown at the Daffodil in July, was Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky*; *Battleship Potemkin* came shortly afterwards. The Soviets were still our gallant allies and all things Russian were in vogue. In that first season, the Society also showed 35mm films at the Ritz (currently the Ace Bingo, and soon to be demolished), and at the Coliseum (most recently the Springbok bar, demolished in 2011). Later it added a separate season of 16mm films at the School of Art and then the Playhouse.

For the first three seasons CFS had 1,100 members, making it the fifth largest society in the country. Also under the CFS umbrella in the early

days were the Amateur Cine Society and the Scientific Film Group, which showed such gems as *Obelia*: "Obelia is a colony of polyps," ran the synopsis in the Society's *Film News*. "It develops blastostyles from which small medusae are set free." There is more, but you get the gist.

Film News, initially monthly, carried waspish one-line reviews of the town's commercial offerings ("*The Bells of St Mary's*: Eroticism, Piety and Bing Crosby"). Then there was a CFS library of film books, talks at leading schools (Lindsay Anderson spoke at the College), a "Third Programme" of highbrow films, and some poorly-attended discussion groups.

But then came television. Soon, CFS's membership started to shrink. The committee stopped selling tickets for individual films, adopted a flat fee ("21 shows for 21 shillings") and then had to devise a way of discovering which films the members actually liked.

In 1970 the forerunner of our current audience reaction system was introduced, with three grades: A (excellent), B (good), and C (poor). The most popular film of that year was

Never Strike A Woman, Not Even With A Flower, a Czech film not heard of since. But French films have always been the most popular choice with CFS audiences. In the 1945 opening season of 24 films, it showed pre-war works by Jean Renoir, Sacha Guitry, Julien Duvivier, Jean Renoir and Marcel Pagnol (twice).

The Society has since shrugged off many of its peripheral activities and some of its crusading zeal. But it thrives; membership has increased every year since 2007, and we are showing five more films each year than we were then. With increasing demands on people's time and attention, however, the future cannot be taken for granted. A thriving cinema culture is one of the gifts that 1945 – that remarkable year – gave to the people of Cheltenham, and we should look after it.

MEMBERSHIP FOR 2015/16

The standard membership subscription will remain at £34, covering 17 films again.

We expect to open membership for next year in early July when an advance email will be sent out to all current members and those on our waiting list for whom we have email addresses – **make sure that we have yours!**

Overall numbers will be limited if necessary – the Bacon Theatre has a badged capacity of 566, but we will cut off at a lower number than this in the interests of comfort. We have closely monitored attendance throughout the current season and will again use this information to judge when to close the doors to new members.



HOW WE CHOOSE THE SEASON'S FILMS

For its main season in 2015/16, CFS will be screening 14 films. That selection will have been whittled down from a long list of films considered by our viewing panel.

The panel, currently made up of 10 volunteers, watches films throughout the year, selected from a list of releases published by the Film Distributors' Association.

Panel members watch the films independently of one another and report back with their ratings (from A to E) and comments. Most films have at least three viewings, but promising films may have five or six. Ratings

are converted into a score – like our normal audience reaction scores – and films achieving 80 per cent or more are marked as having 'potential'.

In May the panel meets to decide on the final selection. Films with high scores are likely to be especially popular with the CFS audience. But we also need variety: lighter films amongst the heavier ones, films from around the world, films in different genres, and so on. Achieving a varied, balanced programme involves hours of animated discussion.

For the coming season, there have been at least 300 viewings of more

than 70 films. We now have 30 or so potential films to choose from and are ready to devise what we hope will be another interesting and enjoyable season.

Would you like to be involved in choosing films for CFS? We are always keen to find new members for the viewing panel. No qualifications are required except a love of films – and time to watch lots of them. Contact us on the usual email: cfs@cheltfilmsoc.org.uk.

RETRO CINEMA IN GLOUCESTER

There's a brand new cinema in Gloucester – but it looks as if it's been there for ever.

The Sherborne Cinema, in Sherborne Street, Kingsholm, has been lovingly constructed inside a redundant 134-year-old Christadelphian Hall, using fixtures and fittings from early in the last century.

The 140-seat cinema is the brainchild of Mark Cunningham, who spent two years creating it. Its look, including glass chandeliers and an authentic period ticket booth, is intended to evoke the 1920s. Nonetheless, it has up-to-date digital projection and Dolby surround sound.

Mr Cunningham said, "To me it's kind of reviving the idea of a suburban, small city cinema. When I analyse the situation with cinemas in Britain today, they don't exist any more at all. I suppose it's comparable with places like the Park End Empire in Gloucester or the Daffodil in Cheltenham in its time."

The cinema is intended to appeal to two audiences. There are family films at 12.30 and 2.30 on weekends and bank holidays, and quality films

for a more mature audience at 5.30 and 8.30. Most of the films he shows will only have had one week in the multiplexes before coming to The Sherbourne four or five weeks later.

"We are bringing out an audience that hasn't been to a film in years, because to some extent they find the multiplexes intimidating or too expensive," he said. "They're fine, they do what they do, but they're not for everyone. My idea was to make the place as different as possible in terms of being done up in old-fashioned style."

Mr Cunningham, who used to be the projectionist at the Gloucester Guildhall, restored and reopened the Palace Cinema in Cinderford before selling it on. His aim is always to "carve out a little niche between the multiplex and pure art house. There is a gap in the market and I don't think anybody's really filling it."

Seats in the evenings are £5.50, with concession for the over-60s, the under-21s, and disabled people. It does not take bookings or, for now, card payments.

www.sherbornecinema.co.uk

THE FILM THAT CHANGED MY LIFE



La Jetée

During my misspent youth I was lured into a film screening with the promise that the film to be shown would stay with me a long time; true to these prophetic words, *La Jetée* by Chris Marker has haunted me ever since.

Only 26 min long, it was shot almost entirely as a still black and white photomontage, with virtually no dialogue. The story is told by a voice-over narrator and concerns a prisoner in the aftermath of World War III, in post-apocalyptic Paris, being sent back in time to rescue the present. His key to the past is a vague but obsessive childhood memory of a woman he had seen on "the jetty" at Orly Airport shortly before witnessing a man die; this haunting image was actually that of his own death.

Made in 1962, and way ahead of its time, it is still genuinely disturbing and not in the least dated. The story was also used by Terry Gilliam in his film *12 Monkeys*.

Chris Keeling, CFS Secretary.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

CFS's 70th season starts on September 15 and continues through to April 26, 2016. Membership will open in early July, and will close when we approach the practical capacity of the Bacon Theatre; last year that happened at the beginning of September.

Newsletter compiled by the CFS committee.
Comments and contributions to cfs@cheltfilmsoc.org.uk

