

Chapter 21: That's Entertainment

At the start of this period, grandad was recording all the books he had read. He continued to do this until December 1923, recording more than 160 titles in this period. The last of these was noted as "*Scarlet Domain*".¹ He did read many well-known titles including Don Quixote, Westward Ho, Gulliver's Travels and various books in the Tarzan series. He was also interested in non-fiction books, particularly dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

Also, at the start of this period, he recorded his regular trips to the cinema, particularly to The Star.² Over time, these visits seemed to reduce but, in part, this was because he was attending a wider range of cinemas and theatres. During this period, he went to the [Portland](#)³ in Sutton, the [Picturedrome](#)⁴ and the Grand Theatre⁵ in Mansfield and to a number of cinemas in Nottingham including the Elite⁶, Long Row Palace⁷, the [Hippodrome](#)⁸, the [Empire](#)⁹ and [King's](#).¹⁰



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Former Grand Theatre in Mansfield when it was the ABC in 1964

¹ Although I have not been able to identify this

² See Chapter 4.

³ Opened in 1937, the [Portland Theatre](#) was re-named the Savoy in 1968. It closed in 1978 and the building was initially converted to be a supermarket. In 1990, it was demolished to build a car park and two small retail units.

⁴ Opened in 1920, from 1928 to 1934, the [Picturedrome](#) became a billiards hall before becoming the Queen's Theatre from 1934 to 1939. Since then it has been a dance school, restaurant, social club and night club. It was demolished in 2010 and replaced with a car park.

⁵ Opened in 1906, the [Grand Theatre](#) was acquired by Associated British Cinemas (ABC) around 1930 but was only renamed in 1963. It closed in 1997 and the lower part became a snooker hall. In 2013, it was bought by a [church](#).

⁶ Opened in 1921, [the Elite](#) was taken over by Associated British Cinemas (ABC) in 1935. It was closed in 1977 and converted into a bingo hall until the early 1990s. It is a grade II listed building and is currently used as a nightclub with some retail and office use.

⁷ I think he was referring to the [Picturehouse](#) in Long Row. This opened in 1912 and it closed in 1930. In 1937, it was converted to a café/restaurant and it is now an amusement arcade. It is a grade III listed building.

⁸ The [Hippodrome](#) opened in 1906. It was taken over by the Provincial Cinematograph Theatres (PCT) chain in 1927, which in 1929, was taken over by Gaumont. It was re-named Gaumont in 1948 and was closed in 1971. It was demolished in 1973 and replaced by an office block.

⁹ Adjacent to the Theatre Royal, the [Empire](#) variety theatre was opened in 1898. Bioscope films were screened. It closed in 1958 and was demolished in 1969 and the Theatre Royal extended.

¹⁰ Located in Arnold, the [King's](#) cinema started life as The Empress Picture House. It closed in 1930 and re-opened as the King's Theatre in 1934. By 1953, it was operating as the New Empress Theatre. It was demolished in 1956.



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Top left – Arena church in Mansfield formerly the Grand cinema
Top right – the Elite cinema on the corner of Queen Street and Upper Parliament Street in April 1949
Middle left – former Elite cinema in Nottingham
Above left – Picturehouse on Long Row Nottingham circa 1936
Above right – King's Picture House, which was also known as the Empress, circa 1917

In addition to going to the cinema, grandad sometimes went to other types of performances including opera¹¹, a circus¹² and several pantomimes. Perhaps one surprising performance that he and grandma went to see¹³ was "[The New Splinters](#)" in October 1928 as they appear to have been a [drag dance act](#).

One thing that interested grandad was the arrival of talking movies. From then on, at least initially, he no longer just referred to seeing a movie but to seeing and hearing one! The first "talkie" he saw was "[Sunny Side Up](#)" at the Star in September 1930.¹⁴ A new cinema, the [Regent](#) opened in Kirby in October 1930¹⁵ and the first film he saw (and heard) there was "[Gold Diggers of Broadway](#)".



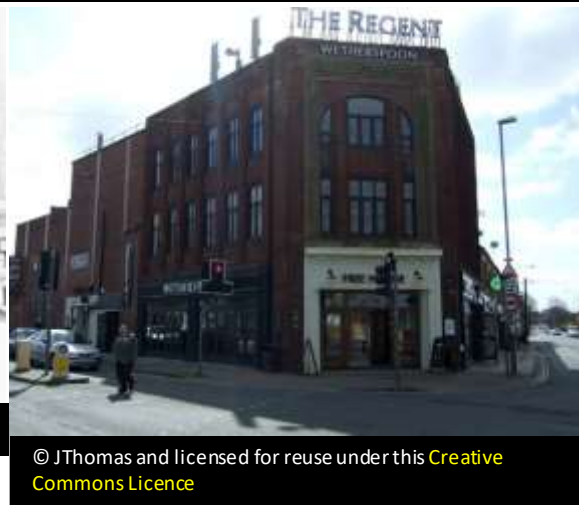
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Top left – the Regent cinema under construction – according to the Inspire website, this photo is dated 1932 but it was constructed in 1930. It is possible that this shows renovation work.

Top right – the Regent cinema in 1932

Above left – the Regent cinema in 1950 – there is another photo of the Regent in that year in Chapter 73

Above right - the Regent pub in Kirkby which was formerly the Regent cinema

¹¹ In 1924, he saw "[The Beggar's Opera](#)" in Nottingham.

¹² At Nottingham Hippodrome

¹³ Given their staunch religious background

¹⁴ Gerald Lee's book "[Kirkby-in-Ashfield: Yesterday Remembered](#)" has a chapter (15) dedicated to "[When the Pictures started Talking](#)" from p70. In that, he says that "[talkies](#)" arrived in October 1930 with the opening of the Regent. However, according to grandad, he saw (and heard!) his first talkie a month earlier at the Star. Edith Searson, in her book(let) "[I Remember](#)" (p62), noted that the Regent was built in 1932 (although other sources suggest 1930) and she highlighted that they offered talking movies.

¹⁵ The [Regent](#) opened in 1930. It was renamed Essoldo in 1961 and closed in 1965 with the stalls becoming an Essoldo Bingo Club. The circle area reopened as a cinema in 1988 and remained open until 1993. It reopened briefly as a Cineplex from 2004 to 2005 and then remained vacant. In 2013, the stalls area was opened as a Wetherspoons pub.

Kirkby carnival was an important annual event. The first time grandad mentioned this was in 1935 when he referred to it as a four-day hospital carnival. He was pleased because he won a bike as a prize in a competition. In the 1936 carnival, there was a lorry with family members, including Roy Evans and Bert Cirket "dressed as Indians". During the carnival that year, grandad took mum (who was two) to see an ox roasting.¹⁶



*Left - Carnival 1936
Below - while this photo is not labelled, it was with the one of Carnival 1936 so it may be that this is also a Carnival float*



Other entertainment

The family sometimes had parties, e.g. for 21st birthdays and for Christmas, and picnics. Grandad occasionally noted playing billiards and, in 1922, he played his first game of chess. The next year, he went into Nottingham with his sister Olive and she bought him a chess set. In 1932, he noted attending a whist drive. In 1937, he twice went fishing with a friend Alf, but was disappointed not to catch anything either time. He kept budgies in the aviary he built and, in 1938, they bred. He was interested in cameras and, from 1922, developed films. He also attended the Kirkby wakes.

He attended agricultural shows in Derby and Nottingham. In 1928, he attended the Nottingham Homes Exhibition. He attended an exposition in Nottingham in 1938. He visited illuminations in Matlock Bath and Blackpool.

¹⁶ There is a picture of this from the previous year in the book by Frank Ashley, Sylvia Sinfield and Gerald Lee "Kirkby & District from Old Photographs", p17

One of the activities grandma and grandad particularly enjoyed was boating. They visited a number of places for this including Belper, Hazelford Ferry, Highfields, Matlock and Nottingham. They took grandad's nieces and nephews, Olive, Roy and Basil, there one at a time in June and July 1927.



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*Top left – boats at the River Gardens in Belper
Top right – birds and boats at Highfields lake in Nottingham
Middle row left – postcard of boating stages in the River Gardens in Belper – posted 1910
Above left and above right – postcards of boating in Matlock*

During this period, grandad and the wider family started to take week-long holidays, mainly to traditional British seaside resorts, including Llandudno, Lytham St Anne's and Scarborough. In 1936, grandma and mum went for a week's holiday to Yarmouth but it appears that grandad did not go. Mum, who was not quite two, did "write" him a card though (see below)! In July 1937, grandma took mum and grandad's father to Skegness shortly after grandad's mother had died. Again, grandad did not go but he visited for half a day on one of the days. Other resorts visited by other family members included Blackpool, Bournemouth, Brid[lington] and Mablethorpe.

Card "written" by mum aged nearly 2 to grandad from Yarmouth in 1936



Card from grandad to his parents from his and grandma's holiday to Llandudno in 1927



Dear Mother & Dad
 I am writing this card while Ethel is paddling. This morning (Thurs) went to Conway & went in the house on the other side ["The smallest house in Wales"]. My word you talk about a subsidy house. I had to bend, Well Ma we shall not write again this time but hope to leave here on Sat about 1 o'clock & get home about 9 or 10.
 Love from Ethel & Gordon