

# Pictures Return to Campbeltown

**DAVID TREVOR-JONES** charts the renaissance of a Scottish cinematic gem

The Picture House in Campbeltown has reopened after a £3.5million restoration and extension designed by architects Burrell Foley Fischer. In this article, the well-documented history of the 'Wee Pictures' will be summarised and then the fascinating 'Centenary Project' will be reported in detail.

## Background

Campbeltown is situated at the southern end of the Kintyre Peninsula, 140 miles by road from Glasgow and nearly 90 miles from the nearest town of comparable size, Oban. It is described as Britain's most remote town. Its population today is around 5,000, somewhat reduced from the 8,000 cited in the *Kine Year Book* for 1949. Yet in 1949 its two cinemas - the Picture House and, just along Hall Street overlooking the harbour, Green's Rex - seated nearly two thousand patrons between them. How did such a remote place support not just one but two cinemas, accommodating between them almost a quarter of the population at one sitting?

The answer lay in Campbeltown's prosperity and the density of passing trade. The town was then well connected by steamer with Glasgow and with other coastal towns around the Firth of Clyde and Northern Ireland (it is as close to the port of Larne as it is to Ayr, across the Firth). Its principal industry was whisky distilling, mostly for blending, and this was the basis for the trade with Glasgow. Locally mined coal fed the furnaces for the stills. The surrounding countryside was arable country, a large fishing fleet sailed from its harbour and the hillside overlooking the loch was dotted with the substantial houses of well-to-do captains of commerce and industry, as well as of boats. Additionally, the Royal Naval Air Service built an airfield at Macrihanish, just west of Campbeltown, during the First World War and during

the Second it became one of the three busiest stations in the UK. There was a substantial audience for the two cinemas, buoyed after the war with tourists coming in by steamer from Glasgow both on day trips and for their holidays.

Campbeltown is undergoing something of a renaissance in the early twenty-first century. Its strategic and beautiful location has brought new industry in the form of the wind turbine fabricating factory at the former airbase, life to the harbour as the vast turbine 'sleeves' are shipped out, and influxes of golfers arriving now by air rather than by steamer to play the spectacular links at Macrihanish, staying in one or other of the restored hotels at Macrihanish or in Campbeltown itself. Even the ferry has returned, albeit with a limited and awkwardly timed service of three return sailings a week from and to Ardrossan in the summer only.

The Picture House has joined the renaissance with a major restoration and extension designed by Burrell Foley Fischer architects. In this article, the features of that work will be explored in detail, along with some of the commercial and management issues faced in running such a remote cinema with relatively a small potential catchment. First, though, a very brief historical background will set the scene.

## History

The history of 'The Wee Pictures' is set out in detail in Norman Newton's book of that name and further developed in a new book, itself a product of the 'Centenary Project' (see bibliography). The Picture House was built for a company of that name that had been formed in 1912 by three local business people, two of them members of the Armour family, together with the pioneering Glasgow exhibitor Frederick Rendell Burnette. Their perception was that the tourist trade would reinforce local demand for a

*The Picture House Campbeltown. The illuminated fin signals the new entrance to the cinema, the original stepped entrance beyond now permanently closed. (Keith Hunter Photography.)*

Facing page:  
 Top, A. V. Gardner's 1912 plan for the stalls level of the proposed Picture House. (Argyll & Bute Archives, LiveArgyll.)  
 Bottom, Burrell Foley Fischer's 2014 plan, in reverse orientation, for the stalls level of the re-ordered and extended Picture House with altered circulation to the rear of the stalls, extended stage, new café, foyer, facilities and second screen. The reduced seating is striking. (Burrell Foley Fischer Architects.)

modern facility that would be the match of anything that Glasgow had to offer. Many local people subscribed to shares in the Company, which was eventually bought out by the Armour family in 1947. The cinema's architect was 28-year-old A. V. Gardner, who went on later to form a partnership with W. R. Glen, who would become the principal architect for the ABC circuit. Albert Victor Gardner had been among the first students at the Glasgow School of Art to study architecture in the Charles Rennie Mackintosh building and was therefore steeped in the Glasgow School of Art Nouveau design. The façade of the Picture House is very much of that style, unique in Britain and, according to Richard Gray in *Cinemas in Britain*, looking like the cinema that Mackintosh might have designed had he ever been asked. It seems that the money was spent on the façade. Inside, it appears that the auditorium was plain and functional. No photographs of it have yet come to light but paint sampling for the restoration revealed a great deal about its décor and likely appearance. Long-serving projectionist George Durnan described stained glass windows to either side of the proscenium (these might be the ones set into the proscenium to either side of the screen and might have inspired the atmospheric overlay that came later) with a 'wee box' in front of one of them, and potted plants and coloured lights. All of the 640 seats were upholstered tip-ups distributed between the stalls and balcony. A narrow orchestra pit separated the stalls seating from the shallow stage, to one side of which there was a small dressing room. The original screen was painted onto the back wall, behind which lay the engine house and dynamo and a 'heating chamber'. The whole building was electrically lit.

As originally configured, the front of the building on Hall Street was open to the elements on both ground and first floors. Two stone steps up from the street, the external paybox was flanked to either side by entrance doors leading straight into a screened passage to the rear of the stalls. The small balcony was reached from a staircase rising from the left-hand end of the passage while a stair from the right-hand end afforded access to the manager's office on the first floor, and from there across the open loggia overlooking the harbour to the projection box a further floor above. The loggia was also

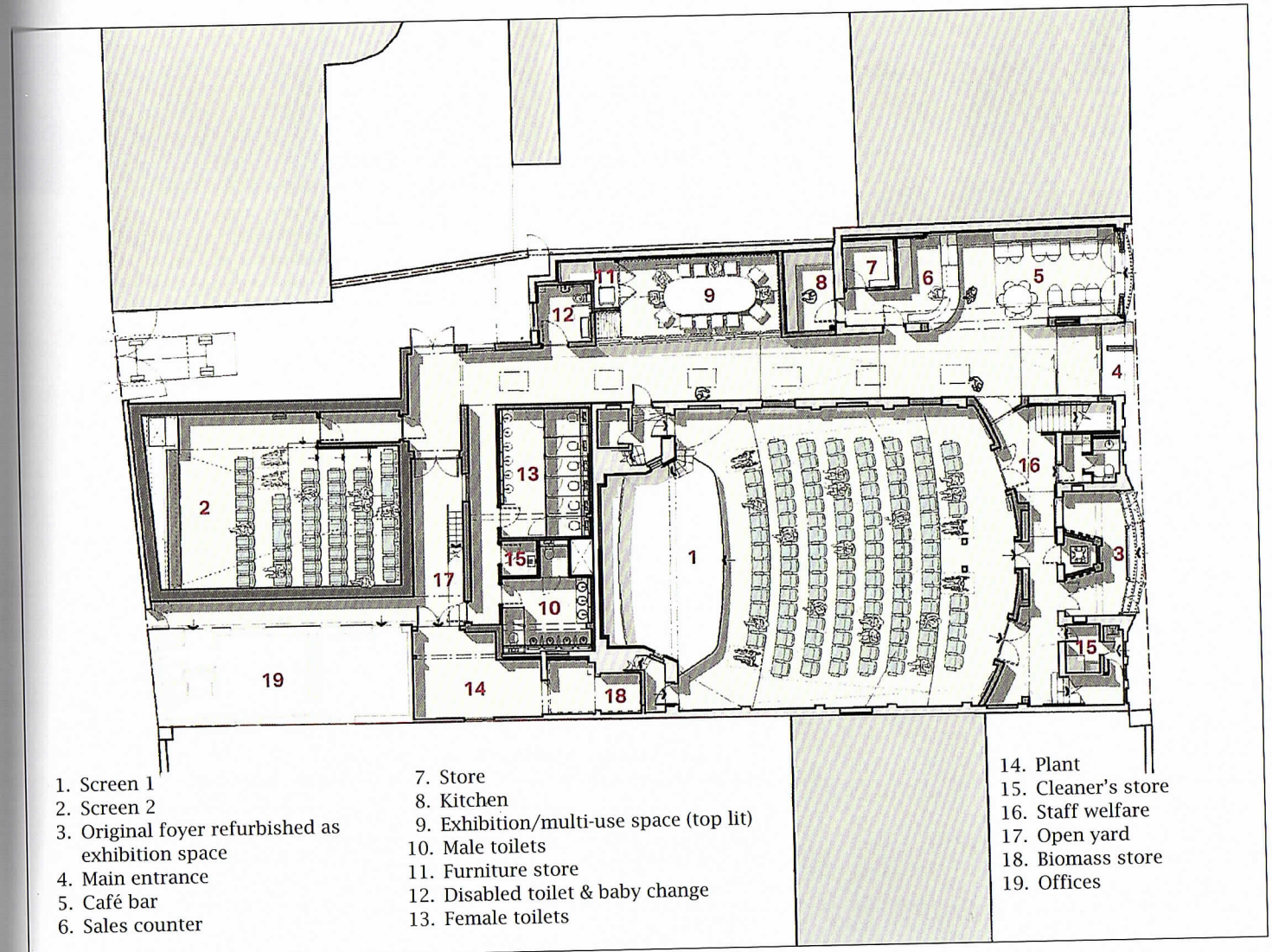
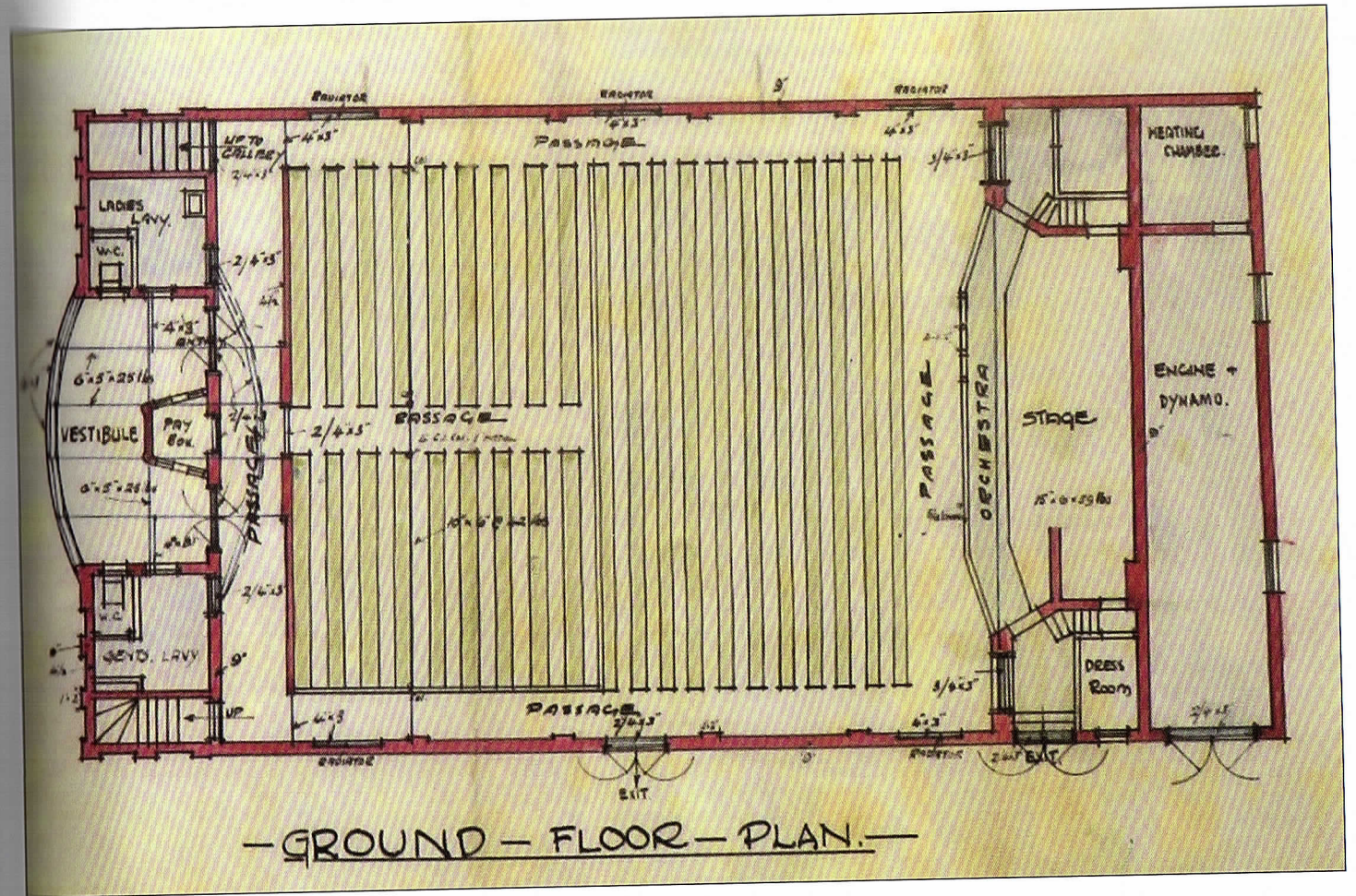
accessible from the balcony stair. Alongside the cinema, a separate 'annex' building in complementary style was built and initially occupied as a shop.

The Picture House opened on 26 May 1913 with a show for local worthies, councillors, shareholders and guests followed that same evening by the first public show to a 'modest audience'. Numbers quickly picked up and the cinema generated a handsome profit through the Twenties, justifying the installation of BTH sound on disc equipment during a short closure in July 1931 when the auditorium was also re-lit and re-decorated. Given the cinema's effective monopoly over its audience for nigh on 100 miles, the major reconfiguration that Gardner was brought back in to design in 1934/5 appears rather an extravagance. By now an established cinema architect, he had designed atmospheric schemes for the Orient cinemas in Glasgow and Ayr and adopted the same style for Campbeltown.

In Gardner's initial plans, which survive, the cinema is considerably extended both back onto the open yard to its rear and to its right-hand side, absorbing the annex building and doubling its seating capacity. A large stage would have completed the scheme. In the outcome, the original auditorium block was retained, the only additional capacity coming from extending the balcony forward by a couple of rows and reconfiguring the access to it. A new escape stair was added to the right-hand side of the street front leading from the balcony passage down to the alleyway separating the auditorium from the annex.

However, patrons attending the re-opening show in 1935 found the décor dramatically changed within. The auditorium now sported a sky ceiling, albeit compromised in concept by the suspension of one large and two smaller art deco electric light pendants. Simple but effective faux building façades had been built into the corners to either side of the proscenium, an Hispanic mission-style church to the left facing a vaguely Germanic timbered house with heraldic shields and a castellated turret to the right. The side walls were lined with acoustic panels in the form of ashlar stone courses.

The planned but unbuilt extensions did suggest that Gardner, at least, saw potential for hugely increasing the audience. He was a shareholder



The Rex stood some 50 metres to the south of the Picture House on Hall Street. The listed library and museum came between. (Stenlake Collection.)



himself and by now a major player in the Glasgow cinema industry. Maybe he had foreseen the possibility of competition. That came in July 1939 with the opening of Green's Rex cinema just a few doors along Hall Street from the Picture House. Its capacity of 1,222 was almost double that of the Picture House. Its opening was, perhaps, prescient insofar as the war brought a huge new transient and working population to the area through the development of the Macrihanish airfield and naval facilities. The loss of the Rex's auditorium to a fire in 1944 could not have come at a worse time for Green's though it provided a huge bonus to the Picture House, which cashed in with five shows a day. The Rex was able to re-open in 1946, in time for the post-war height in UK cinema admissions though also as the airfield was being wound down. The Rex then staggered along, always on film, until closing in December 1977 and being demolished not long after. Meanwhile, the Picture House diversified into bingo for two days each week.

With declining attendances both for film and for bingo in an increasingly shabby auditorium, the Armour family leased the building to Minor Bingo Entertainments Ltd, a small operator based in Lochgelly. They maintained the film/bingo mix for three years but struggled. The Picture House closed 'until further notice' on 31 December 1986.

### A Community Business

There was no immediate local response. It seemed that the loss of the cinema was un mourned, an inevitable sign of progress. However, not everyone in Campbeltown saw it that way. Campbeltown Community Business Ltd. (CCB) was incorporated in September 1987 as one of the first community businesses in Scotland, with a remit to create jobs and amenities for Kintyre. Its first project was to refurbish, re-open and run the Picture House.

When it acquired the Picture House in 1987, CCB, a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity, took over the operating company, The Picture House Campbeltown Ltd. (PHC) that had been incorporated in August 1912 and that had owned the cinema ever since. CCB continued to run it as a wholly owned trading subsidiary, profits from which were remitted to CCB for use in its charitable objectives. PHC Ltd was dissolved on 2 October 2015 when CCB Ltd assumed both ownership and operation of the cinema directly. CCB's logo has been designed consciously to resemble that of the 1912 company, represented in the cartouche surmounting the proscenium arch in the cinema.

After a huge fund-raising effort that engaged the whole community, together with contributions from local celebrity Paul McCartney and the servicemen of the Macrihanish Airbase, the Picture House was re-opened on 29 May 1989.

However, the cinema always struggled and was reliant on continual fund-raising and grants. It lost a substantial element from its catchment when the Airbase closed in 1994. The decline continued and by the early 2000s the state of the building itself was beginning to give cause for concern. CCB had re-wired, re-lit and redecorated but beneath the surface the ravages of damp and decay were taking hold. Fortunately, early thoughts of radical action including complete demolition behind the façade for replacement of the historic auditorium with twin screens and an art gallery came to naught as the funding needed and prospective revenue could not be reconciled. Basic repairs were undertaken including re-roofing in 2008, funded from a substantial grant, but a deeper re-think was required to secure the future of the cinema.

### The Centenary Project

From this emerged, slowly and via a number of twists and turns, 'The Centenary Project', so-named as its adoption marked the centenary of the building. The principal funding agencies played a large part both in the shaping of the project and in the delay to its start. Extraordinarily, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Scotland saw no need for a second screen and would not initially fund it. Creative Scotland brought commercial reality into play, bringing the HLF and HS round and releasing the funds. The other major contributors were Argyll and Bute Council, Highland and Island Enterprises, The Architectural Heritage Fund, Coastal Communities Fund and The Robertson Trust. With the best part of £3.5 million granted, Ron Inglis was appointed as Project Manager. He had been running the Screen Machine, the mobile cinema serving the rural communities of the Highlands and Islands, and had been instrumental in swinging the HLF round to the second screen.

The scope of The Centenary Project included:

- restoration and conservation of the historic auditorium, including installing modern heating, ventilation and seating
- restoration and conservation of the Glasgow School Art Nouveau façade
- construction of a new foyer in the gap between the main cinema building and the annex
- transformation of the annex to provide a new entrance foyer, pay desk and café
- creation of a multi-purpose room suitable for social, business and educational uses
- addition of a second screen
- improvement of energy use and sustainability
- improvement to accessibility, and
- initiating a programme of heritage interpretation and education focused on the history of the Picture House, of cinema and of the town's social and cultural life.

The last element was an especially important and interesting component in the funded scheme. The cinema had become something of a time capsule. A great deal of documentary and other historical material had accumulated within the building while outside in the wider community an oral history and further photographic and documentary evidence waited to be found and brought together. The work of doing so brought community involvement right into the heart of the project and the resulting archive is an important historical record and resource, itself informing the restoration elements in the Project. It is now held by Argyll and Bute Council but stored in the National Museum of Scotland's Moving Image Library at Kelvingrove in Glasgow, where, arguably, it is more accessible to researchers than it might have been had it been retained in Campbeltown.

A design was prepared by a previous architect but failed to pass Stage 1 of the HLF's funding evaluation. Burrell Foley Fischer LLP were approached to re-think the scheme. Their subsequent appointment as Project architects with Stefanie Fischer as the leading job architect was through competitive tender rather than a design competition and much design work had already been done. The second screen and café were already in the scheme and crucial to the business plan. Nevertheless, BFF reviewed everything before taking the lead in working up the final design, which included both newly built and conservation elements as well as a re-ordering of circulation around the 1913 auditorium and bringing its compliance with fire and means of escape regulations up to date.

The cinema was closed in August 2014 for the stripping out and investigative survey work required before restoration and new construction could begin.

To some degree this was an archaeological process. The conservation aspects of the work were underpinned by meticulous research. As accreted layers of decorative and damaged fabric were carefully peeled away, elements of earlier schemes and techniques emerged. Helen Hughes was appointed to undertake paint analysis and was able to determine the colours of both the original 1913 and the 1934 atmospheric decorative schemes in the auditorium as well as those of the circulation areas and façade. The reference date for the restoration clearly had to be that of the atmospheric scheme as it largely survived, most obviously in the form of the anteproscaenium 'wee houses'.

### Restoration of the auditorium

The re-ordering of circulation around the original auditorium was driven initially by the need to create a new entrance affording level access from Hall Street into a new foyer and from there into the stalls. The original foyer was closed to the street with the external doors permanently shut. The extant pay box

was of no historical significance and after some discussion of recreating the original one, documentary evidence of the design for which survived, it was removed to open up the small, oval space as an exhibition area. Its permanent exhibit, visible to passers-by on Hall Street, is the original mercury arc rectifier, lit with miniature blue spotlights and explained in interpretation boards alongside. To lead patrons to the new entrance rather than trying to access the cinema through the original one, a vertical fin, illuminated at night, signals its location.

The new entrance leads into a foyer hub with the pay desk offset to the right ahead, and with the entrance to the café to the right, the entrance into the original auditorium (Screen 1) to the left and corridor to the multi-use room, toilets, and second screen ahead. A single staff member can therefore oversee the whole building at quiet times from the pay desk. To access Screen 1 and its balcony from the new foyer required a new side entrance pushed back from the street line, in turn requiring the 1934 back wall to be cut away and rebuilt on a curve that is mirrored



Top: left, the foyer as seen during a CTA visit in 2009; and, right, today with rectifier on display behind column.

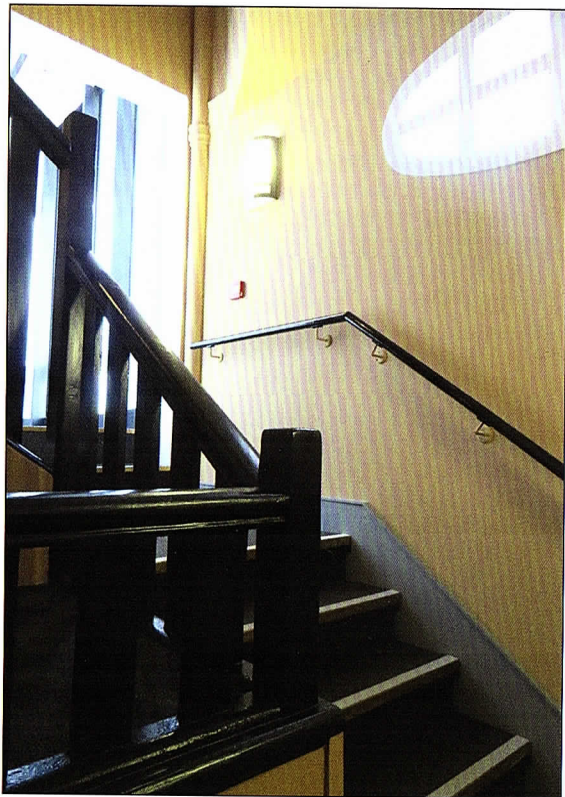
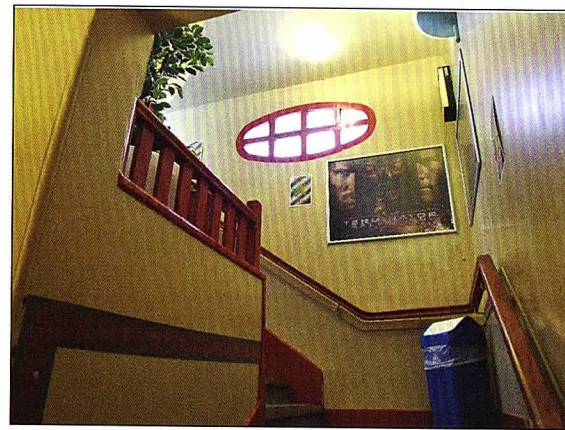
(Photographs: 2009 by Allen Eyles, 2018 by David Trevor-Jones.)

Bottom: left, the entrance passage from the original box office foyer to the rear stalls and stairway to the balcony in 2009; and, right, the rear stalls entrance passage in 2018, photographed from the new foyer. The back wall of the stalls has been curved inward at either end with new, wider doors into the auditorium inserted. The red and green panels replicate the originals from 1934, though solid rather than glass. (Photographs: 2009 by Allen Eyles, 2018 by Keith Hunter Photography.)

Left: The stairs from the entrance passage up to the loggia and balcony, top in 2009 and (bottom) in 2018, restored to their 1934 appearance. A matching staircase has been reinstated at the other end of the passage.

Right: top, the loggia in 2009 - the windows sit on the balustrade with opaque infill panels beneath; centre, the restored loggia is accessed from the landing and the balcony is accessed from a further short flight of stairs to the left, mirrored at the further end of the loggia with the stairs reinstated in the Centenary Project; bottom, the restored loggia is now accessible from both ends - the glazed enclosure has been brought inside the balustrade to restore its original appearance from the outside and the brick bands have been exposed.

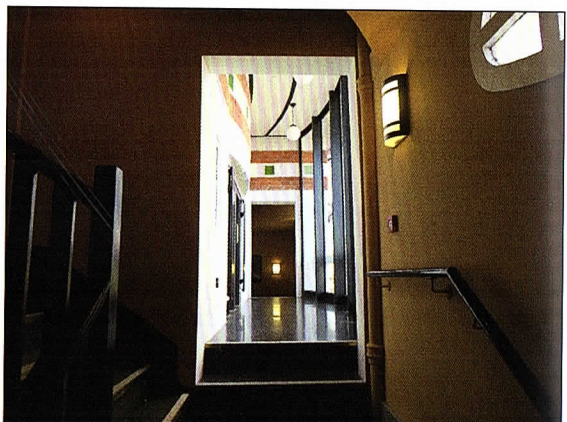
(Photographs: 2009 by Allen Eyles, 2018 by David Trevor-Jones.)



on the far side. This has reduced the seating area at the back of the stalls but has allowed the stairs in the right-hand stair tower to be reinstated so that the balcony can now be reached from either side, both staircases affording access to the formerly open loggia.

New glazing to the loggia replaces the unsatisfactory glass enclosure installed in 2005, that itself replaced the unsightly casement windows acquired sometime earlier. The new glazing has been set back behind the original rendered balustrade and detailed so that the carefully restored Art Nouveau façade can be read as originally intended. The brick pilasters and horizontal banding have been cleaned of accreted paint and the harled infill panels restored to their original creamy white. Green glazed ceramic tiles at the top of the loggia façade have also been cleaned and restored and the planked soffit beneath the deeply overhanging curved roof has been painted flat white with black iron banding picking out the contour of the outwardly bowing wall behind and loggia in front. The opaque white glass globe lights, as with the lighting in the auditorium, replicate those in the original 1934 scheme.

The central doors into the rear stalls of the original auditorium have been retained as a fire exit but the main access now is by doors to either side echoing the locations of the original, narrower doors and



inset with a chequerboard of green and red inset panels that are now solid and painted but that were originally glazed with squares of red and green glass.

The stalls seating has been returned to a central block plan with the rows accessed from either end rather than from a central gangway. That, along with larger modern seats and more widely pitched rows and with the loss of space at the rear to make way for the relocated back wall, has reduced the stalls seating capacity to 122, including four wheelchair spaces, compared with 205 before the restoration. In the balcony the larger new seats accommodate 75, down from 81. The total capacity of Screen 1 is now 197, compared with 265 before the works and more than 600 when the cinema first opened.

The sky ceiling over the auditorium has been repainted but compromised, as it was originally by Gardner, by the suspension of one large and two smaller tinted glass art deco chandeliers. The intention of the atmospheric style was that patrons should imagine themselves to be outdoors. The sky does not have chandeliers, of course! In the great John Eberson auditoria in the USA that exemplify the idea, the lighting is indirect, cast across the 'sky' from the sides. The art deco pendant frames with golden tinted glass panels had been lost but have been replicated from photographs and from the 1934 supplier's quotes found preserved amongst the mass of historical paperwork as the cinema was emptied of its accumulated contents. Similarly preserved suppliers' quotes have informed the replication of the screen tabs, exquisitely complementing the restored colours to the walls.

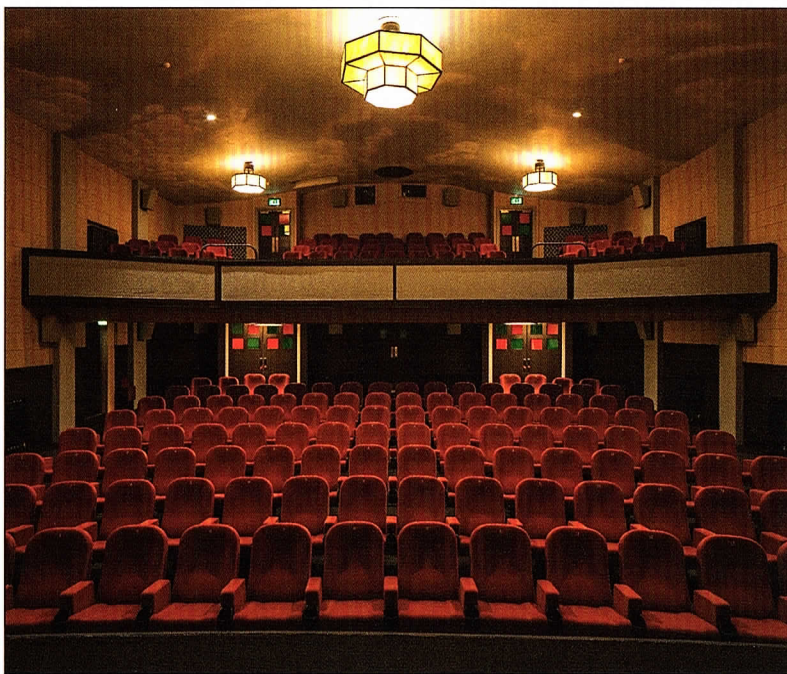
The most difficult part of the auditorium restoration was to replicate the faux ashlar block side

wall linings. The originals were individual bevelled panels of strawboard, heavily stained and damaged by damp and no longer fire-compliant. The affordable solution was found in the form of large panels of a modern, cement-bonded fire-treated strawboard incised to replicate the ashlar bonding.

The business plan for the cinema anticipates some live performance and so a thrust stage has been provided, slightly larger than the one installed for the 1989 re-opening. The original proscenium front survives beneath it. One small dressing room can be augmented with dressing space in the multi-use room, doubling as green room. Permanent lighting

The auditorium with flaking ceiling in 2009. (Photograph by Allen Eyles.) And authentically restored as Screen 1 in 2018. Pendant lights hang beneath the reinstated sky ceiling. See also back cover. (Keith Hunter Photography.)



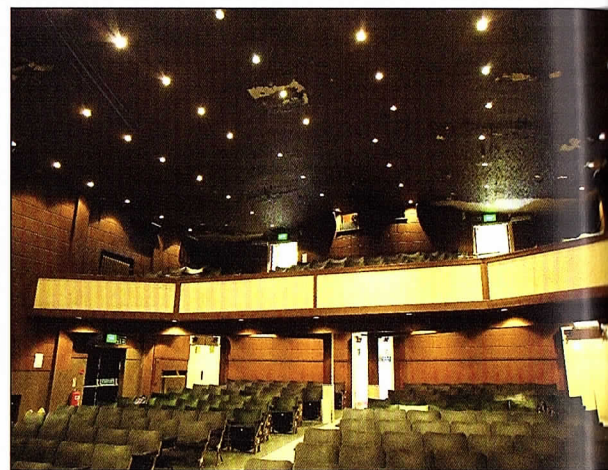


The flaking, damp-affected ceiling (right) was studded with downlighters. After restoration, the auditorium has regained its sky ceiling and art deco pendant lights. The stalls seating no longer has a centre aisle. (Photographs: 2009 by Allen Eyles, 2018 by Keith Hunter Photography.)

bars are set into the pilasters ahead of the balcony front.

### Extension

Fortunately for the Centenary Project, the 1913 building occupied only around half of its plot. The new work around the original auditorium block makes use of the spaces that were originally an open yard to the rear, a side passage running the length of the building from the street to the yard and, on the opposite side of it, the 'annex'. This was a single-storey, pitched roofed building built as a part of the 1913 development but completely separate from the main cinema building. Its common origin is evident in the oval window set into its gable end, perfectly matching those to either side of the cinema façade.



Another of Stefanie Fischer's challenges in the restoration part of the project was locating a source for replacing the textured, patterned glass from a Glasgow glass-maker with which these had originally been glazed.

The annex had been used at various times as a shop for photographic supplies, a queueing area (referred to as 'The Byre' because it was laid out like a cattle shed), and as a 'kiosk'. The open passage between the cinema and the annex was about three metres wide and had at one time or another been partly roofed with a canopy to protect queueing patrons from the worst of the weather. In the 1934 re-ordering, the stairs from the balcony that bypassed the internal stair to the manager's office, loggia and projection box were accommodated in a flat-roofed masonry side extension at the street end of the passage, the fire escape doors opening out to the rear.

The original annex building now accommodates a new café with full height glazing to the street front, overlooking the harbour. The servery extends from the pay desk into the café and a kitchen and store room occupy the rest of the space. Access from the

foyer is through a large opening cut through what had been the solid side wall. The long, linear foyer occupies the once open side passage. Access to Screen 1 in the original auditorium is through another new aperture cut through the side wall almost opposite the café and pay desk, past which the newly created, curved corridor wraps around the rear stalls and gives access to the stairs to the balcony and to the gallery in the former foyer. The fire escape stairs added in 1934 have been removed, replaced by the reinstated original internal stair to the balcony and loggia.

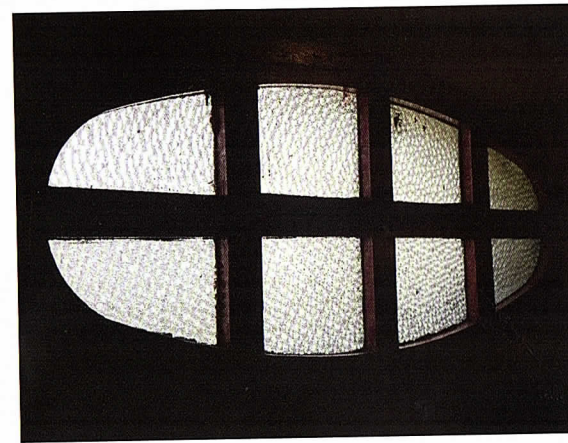
The formerly external side wall of the original auditorium, now an internal wall to the linear foyer, is lined along its length with historical interpretation panels incorporating reproductions of photographs and documents found during the archiving project, illustrating the history of the cinema and its place in the town's cultural life. Beyond the annex a new infill accommodates the multi-use room. At the far end from the new entrance the new Screen 2 lies ahead, occupying part of the former rear courtyard. Behind the stage are new toilets, the new plant room and fuel storage. Finally, a further new building slotted in alongside Screen 2 accommodates the management offices and the server.

The multi-use room is separated from the foyer by a fully-glazed folding screen that can be opened completely so that the room becomes an extension to the café or a space for social gatherings. With the separating wall closed, it is a bright, light, top-lit room for conferences, or, curtained, a dressing room or green room for performers when Screen 1 is used for a live event.

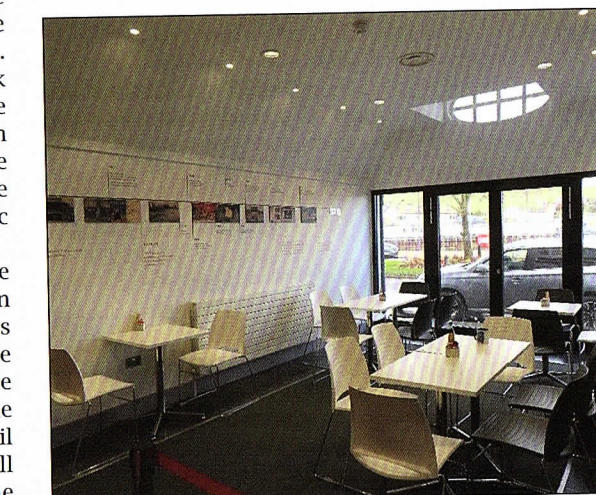
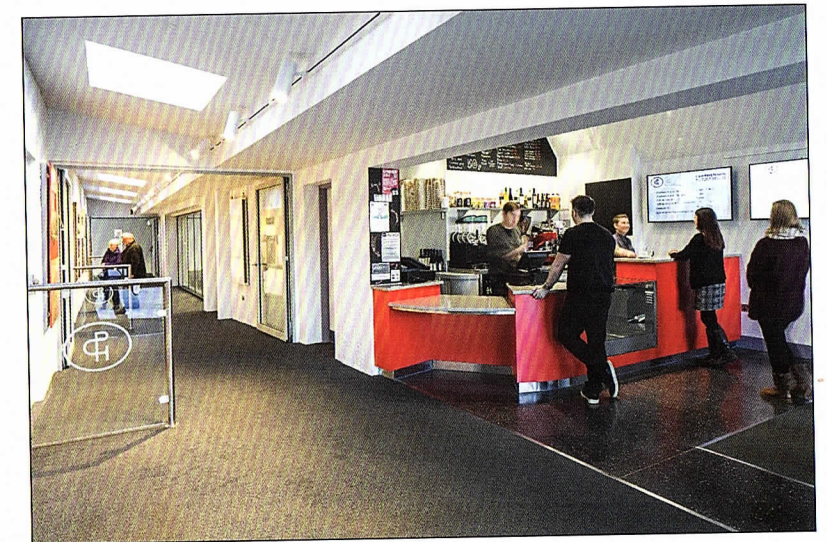
The café is decorated to contrast with the two auditoria. Bright white walls and ceiling, bright white downlighters illuminating white tables with black or white chromed steel-framed chairs set out on a light grey carpet contrast with the red of the pay desk and servery front, all clean-lined and modern. The glazed street front with views across to the harbour beyond can be completely opened up in warm weather. A timeline of the cinema's history runs the length of the long wall.

Screen 2 is aligned with Screen 1, the screen against the new back wall to the building so ahead of patrons as they enter from the foyer. It seats 54 including two wheelchairs, two rows on the flat floor at the entrance passage level with four rows on shallow steps behind them. The overall colour scheme is sky blue, the walls articulated with black vertical strips that can be read as pilasters between the blue panels. It cleverly echoes the decorative scheme of the original 1913 auditorium before the 1934 atmospheric one was carried out, but with the modern twist that pencil-thin vertical LED tubes in alternating blue and red light mark the edges of the panels. This is a zingier treatment than BFF's more usual minimalist approach to auditorium décor. Stefanie Fischer points out that the object is to mark Screen 2 as different from Screen 1, appealing to the younger audience that might not have any interest in the historical interior and fulfilling the aim for the whole complex that it should appeal to the entire community across the age and socio-economic spectra.

Screen 2 is available for hire and the multi-purpose room can be used as a break-out space in conjunction with it, further opening the building to opportunities for all-day use and the generation of revenue. The business plan relies on the café as a source of income too, open from midday or half an hour before the first film, whichever is earlier, and remaining so until the last evening screening starts. In a small community where neighbourly relations matter, the



Textured glass matches the Glasgow-made original. (Photograph by Stefanie Fischer.) Below, the new entrance opens into the foyer with the ticket sales point signalled in red. The café is to the right, toilets and Screen 2 ahead and the original auditorium to the left. (Keith Hunter Photography.)



The new café occupies the former annex building. (Keith Hunter Photography.) The front is fully glazed with doors that can be opened out to a seating area on the street. (Photograph by David Trevor-Jones.)



*Above: The once external main auditorium wall now supports historical interpretation panels. Screen 2 lies ahead. Right: The multi-use room. Below: The décor in Screen 2 echoes the 1913 pilaster and panel scheme in the original auditorium. (Keith Hunter Photography.)*



performance as possible, with a daytime programme – never a priority in the earlier eras – to appeal to the audience coming into town for shopping and services. In such a remote location, the town serves a rural hinterland extending the length of the Kintyre peninsula and beyond. The potential audience comes from as far away as Tarbert, 37 miles, and even Lochgilphead, 53 miles to the north. The closest competing cinemas are in Oban, 90 miles north, and Dunoon, 70 miles away including a ferry crossing. However, while the Picture House has successfully drawn a young audience since its re-opening and children's films do very well, the adult audience is taking longer to return to the cinema after its period of stagnation and closure. The potential has been enhanced by the development of the wind turbine

café is carefully managed so as not to compete with established local businesses. It does, though, offer something distinctive and special – so special, indeed, that it has become a retail outlet. The products are those of the Wee Isle Dairy on Gigha, the small Hebridean island off the west coast of Kintyre a few miles north of Campbeltown. As well as being the Project architect, Stefanie Fischer introduced the idea of selling the Dairy's luxurious ice cream (including its Bramble & Whisky flavour) and that has developed into the use of its milk in the café and to the sale of both to the public.

A further key to commercial success in this location is to offer as wide a range of film and



factory at Macrihanish, a big business with a skilled workforce, and of golf. The Royal Hotel in Campbeltown and Ugadale in Macrihanish have been restored and refurbished to serve the luxury end of the market and guests fly in to Macrihanish (Campbeltown) Airport rather than arriving by steamer. The challenge for the Picture House is to attract the new tourists.

### Operation

Programming is contracted out to INDY. In a typical week there will be three screenings a day in both Screens with one-off, children's and classic films taking the afternoon slot and some evenings in Screen 2. Along with special event screenings, this brings the total to ten or eleven different programmes a week underpinned by two main features on national first release. Jane Mayo, co-Trustee of the cinema's owning and operating company, comments that the Picture House's audience is taking its time to accustom to live transmissions but that, for example, National Theatre productions are drawing from a wider catchment than film does. Live performances have not developed as originally planned but the potential is there, especially for music.

The Picture House does not have a film club but it does offer Supporter Cards with an annual subscription that entitles holders to discounted ticket and café prices, as well as invitations to special events and discounts at other local businesses. At the time of writing the full peak time admission prices are £7 for an adult, £6 for a senior and £5 for children under 14 and students. These drop by £1 off-peak.

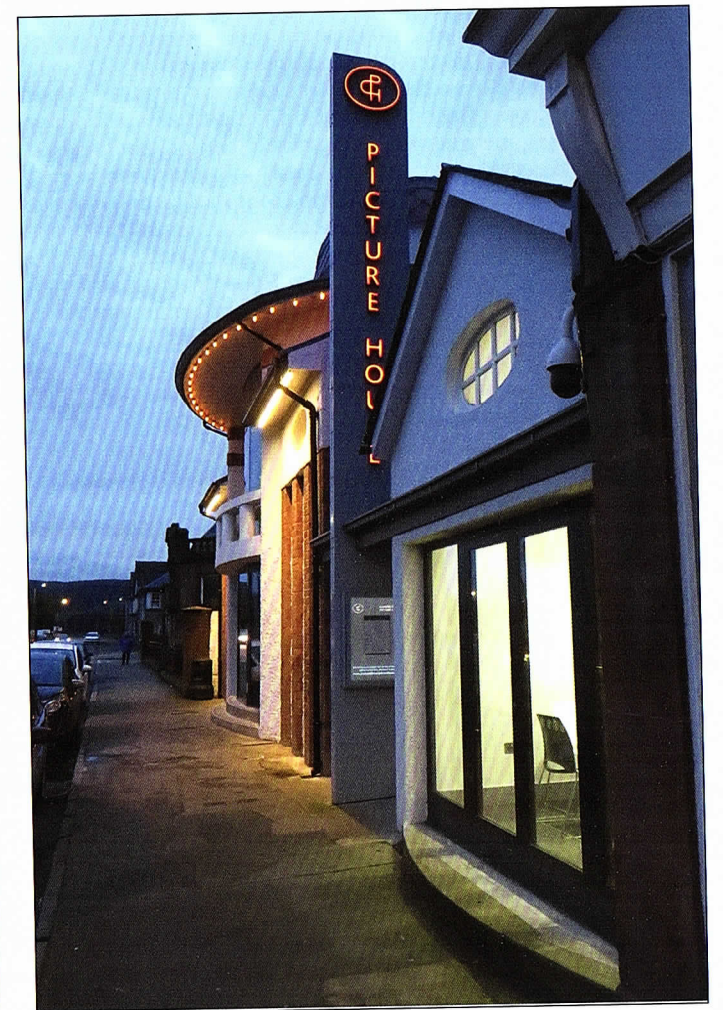
The General Manager is Ellen Mainwood formerly of the Picturehouses (no relation) in Brighton and



Oxford, ably assisted by her dog, Jed, and by three or four full-time and up to eight part-time or ad hoc staff. All of the surplus revenue generated by the whole operation is mandatorily passed back through the Community Business to fund the upkeep of the cinema.

Projection is entirely digital. The Barco DP2K-6E unit serving Screen 1 is located in the original box and can provide 3D. Screen 2 is equipped with the very first installation in the UK of an entirely new integrated pod system incorporating a lift, rails, ventilation system, turntable and projector supplied as a single unit by the Polish company Arttech Cinema. The projector is a Barco DP2K-20C. The

*The panels are articulated with pencil-thin LED light tubes. See also back cover. Below: The restored façade and incorporated annex. The vertical sign indicates the new entrance. (Keith Hunter Photography except lower left, David Trevor-Jones.)*



The present Picture House logo (right) echoes that of the 1912 Picture House Campbelltown Ltd company. (Courtesy of David Mayo).

sound systems in both screens are Dolby. Stefanie Fischer points out that the integrated pod is a significant technological development as it obviates the need for the rigorous load testing required of the bespoke projector lift and mounting systems commonly used up to now. It takes the risk out of the technical fit-out.

The cinema is not energy self-sufficient but does generate a significant proportion of its electricity demand (which is high in a cinema) from the photovoltaic cell array that extends over the whole roof of the original cinema building and that of Screen 2. All of the lighting is low-energy LED with auto-triggering in areas such as the toilets. Heating is provided by a wood pellet boiler with gas back-up. Sadly, as yet there is no local source of wood pellets - but with forestry a major industry on Kintyre, that might be remedied sometime in the future.

### Building and reopening

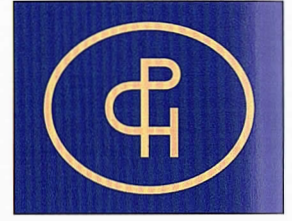
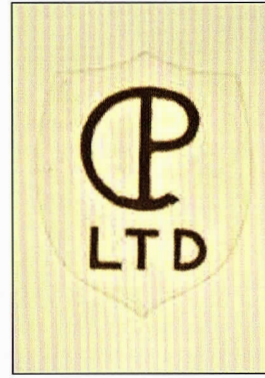
The Centenary Project construction programme was originally planned to start in March 2015, some six months after closure, and to be completed in a year but in fact construction was not commenced until February 2016 and practical completion was not achieved until January 2018. Unplanned additional works are inevitable in building restoration as hidden problems are revealed but, in this case, the self-generated power became a delaying factor as wiring in the two-way meter - the cinema now exports as well as imports electricity - turned into a major problem. A further delay was caused by unexpected complications in the groundworks for Screen 2. The road behind the cinema is Shore Road - the cinema itself stands on reclaimed ground that was once the beach - so piling and tanking were planned and costed but less straightforward than anticipated.

Another complication was the remoteness of the site. The main contractor, Corramore Construction, was from Northern Ireland and found that the most cost-effective way of bringing in key personnel and some materials was by helicopter. Six local people were employed on site. The fit-out team came from Wales, the seats came from Paris, the construction team and materials came in mainly by boat. The client was represented by David Mayo, Project Director for the Picture House, who comments that when the supply line is that long something as simple as a missing part can be a major problem.

The Picture House re-opened to the public on 22 December 2017 and then was officially re-opened by Nicholas Ferguson CBE, Chairman of Savills and Chairman of the Argyll & Bute Economic Forum, on 19 April 2018.



Above: Jed, the blind cinema dog. Right: A farewell contrast between 2009 and 2018. The new entrance to the cinema is signalled by the vertical sign between it and the annex, now the café, the external fire exit having been removed. (Photographs: 2009 by Allen Eyles, 2018 by David Trevor-Jones.)



The Picture House stands as a very fine example of how sensitive and thorough restoration of an historic cinema building, blessed with the space around it for well-judged, strikingly modern additional facilities, can produce a community asset fit for the twenty-first century, contributing to its economic regeneration as well as to its social and cultural life. It is no longer good enough for a small town cinema to switch the lights on and open the doors in the evening for one show nightly and expect to thrive. The reinvented Picture House takes its place in the daytime economy of Campbeltown, offering stylish modern facilities to local businesses as well as to shoppers and tourists. By night it offers a range of entertainment far exceeding anything that the 'old' Picture House could aspire to, an important asset to the town and its extensive rural hinterland. Yet externally and in Screen 1 it is completely authentically and beautifully restored to its 1934 state, a gem in Scotland's and the UK's cinema history.

### Bibliography

*'The Wee Pictures' A History of The Picture House (Campbeltown) Ltd.* Norman S. Newton. First published by Campbeltown Community Business Ltd, 1989; second, augmented edition 2008.

*Campbeltown Picture House A Century of Cinema.* Campbeltown Community Business Ltd. Published by Stenlake Publishing Ltd, 2018.

(The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Directors of Campbeltown Community Business Ltd and Burrell Foley Fischer architects. Interviews were conducted with Jane Mayo (Chair of Trustees) and David Mayo (Centenary Project Director) at The Picture House in Campbeltown on 24 September 2018 and with Stefanie Fischer at BFF's office in London on 8 November 2018.)

