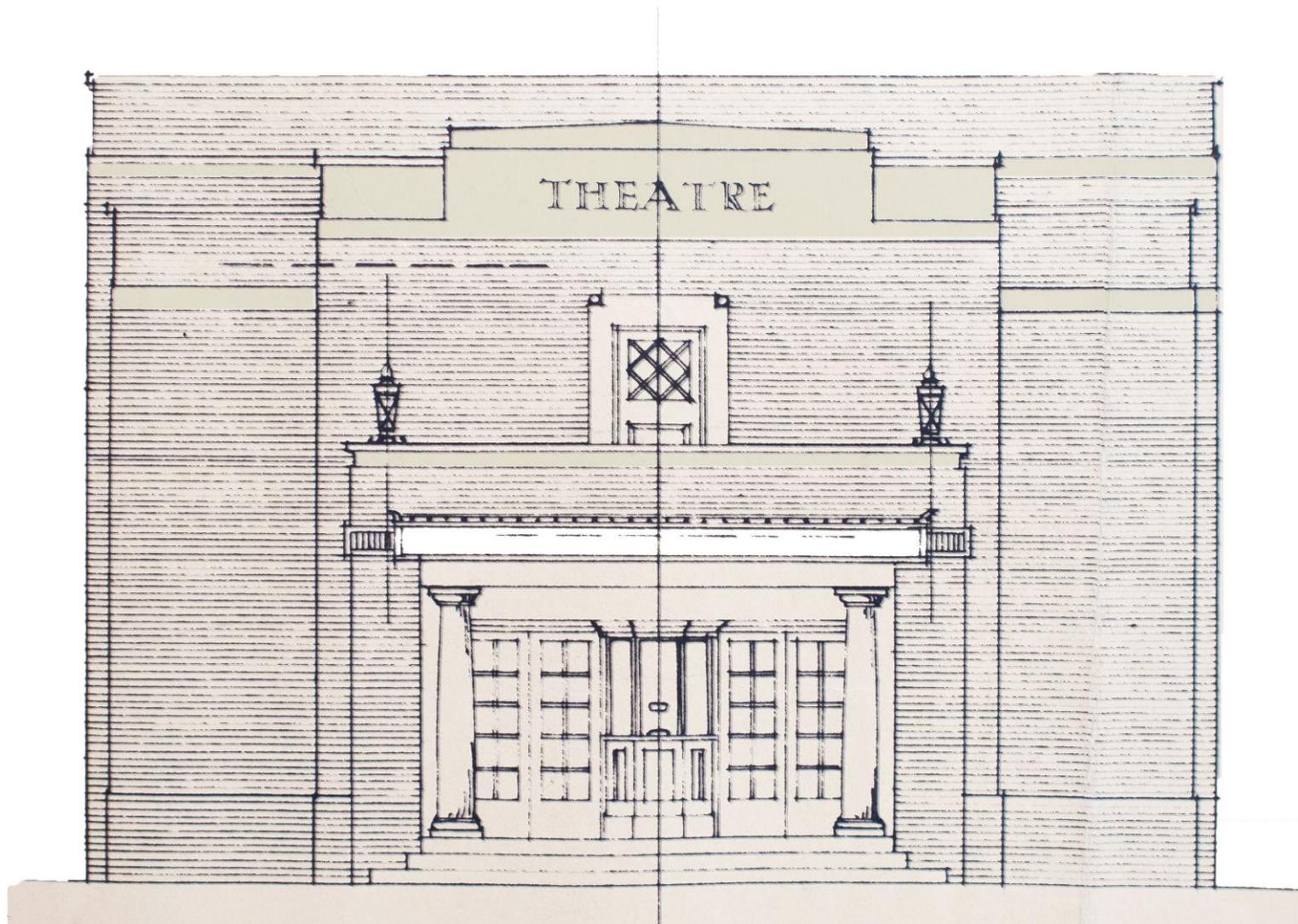


HERITAGE STATEMENT:
THE MARVEN CENTRE - FORMERLY SPICERS THEATRE
SAWSTON VILLAGE COLLEGE

August 2017



Cover image : Re-coloured detail from G P Banyard Drg 264, 1931.

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I The Asset

The Marven Centre (originally Spicers Theatre) is a free-standing building which, today, is part of the Sawston Village College site. The building is a 1932 purpose-built cinema, which is sited facing New Road in Sawston and has separate access from the school site. The street facade is a formal composition in a restrained, modern neoclassical style. The design is by George P Banyard FRIBA, a Cambridge architect who is responsible for three local cinemas of the era, of which the Sawston building is the only one still in use as a cinema.

As a largely intact, architect-designed, purpose-built village cinema of the 1930s, the building is almost unique. Unlike the 1930 buildings on the Village College campus, the design does not follow the domestic style established by Cambridge County architect H H Dunn. Instead, the restrained mix of neoclassical and modern concepts reflects Banyard's stylistic development at the time.

The building has a number of features unique to its designed purpose. These include:

- A projection room, with fire escape and ventilation via a roof light;
- An orchestra pit, which is now hidden by an extension of the stage;
- A pitched floor to improve sight lines to the stage/screen at the rear of the hall (now obscured by 1960s' flooring and steps);
- Fireproof construction throughout;
- Fire escape doors and fireproof escape stair for the projection room.



Fig 1: Site location plan. The Marven Centre (outlined in red) faces onto New Road and now forms part of the Village College complex. Note that the playing field retains the Spicer name.

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1.1 Outline History of the Building

- 1931: Commissioned as a result of the Morris/Spicer dispute over use of the new Village College hall as a cinema.
- 1932: 3 March: commemorative stone laid by Mrs H G Spicer.
- 1932: 13 September: opened by Mr H G Spicer.
- 1932: October: first screening - reported by Douglas Page as 'Thark', directed by and starring Tom Walls.
- 1932: Dufay-Spicer colour process developed by Spicers at Sawston.
- 1935: Release of Dufay-Spicer colour film "Radio Parade of 1935".
- 1946: Temporary Nursery built adjacent to cinema.
- 1949: Seating plan revised: probable removal of orchestra pit and enlargement of stage.
- 1963: Closed as a cinema.
- 1964: Refitted as 'Sawston Village Youth Centre' by Cambridgeshire County Council, with day-to-day management by Sawston Village College.
- 1965: Valence, pay booth and lobby doors removed.
- 2003: January: funding received from Screen East and South Cambridgeshire District Council for a feasibility study into refurbishment of the building as a part-time cinema/part-time community centre, a centre for audio-visual education and as an exhibition centre/museum for relevant film archives, e.g. BFI, Imperial War Museum, East Anglian, and 'Dufaycolor'.
- 2003: May: architects' plans drawn up for a refurbished building incorporating a 181-seat auditorium, along with exhibition and educational spaces. The feasibility study showed the project was financially viable. However, the project did not receive funding and faltered.
- 2008: 35mm projector, digital projector and cinema sound system installed with support from the Cambridge Film Trust and funding from the UK Film Council.
- 2009: Sawston Cinema established, operated by the school.
- 2009: 'Projecting the Past', a film exploring the history of the building, is made, as part of a project at Sawston Village College funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 2010: Ownership transferred from Spicers to Sawston Village College and building renamed 'The Marven Centre'.

Fig 2: Crash fire door exit on East elevation showing Ketton stone and patent glazing details. The building has meticulous brick and stone detail and restrained Roman decoration with patent glazing largely intact: it is both functional and stylish in concept and execution.



1.2 Present Condition

Exterior: The solid brick construction with precast 'fireproof' concrete flat roof appears to be in good condition. However, the failure of some cast iron rainwater details and the rusting of poorly looked after Crittall window frames show the effects of maintenance failure.

Interior: Intact interior details of period design and functional significance include the:

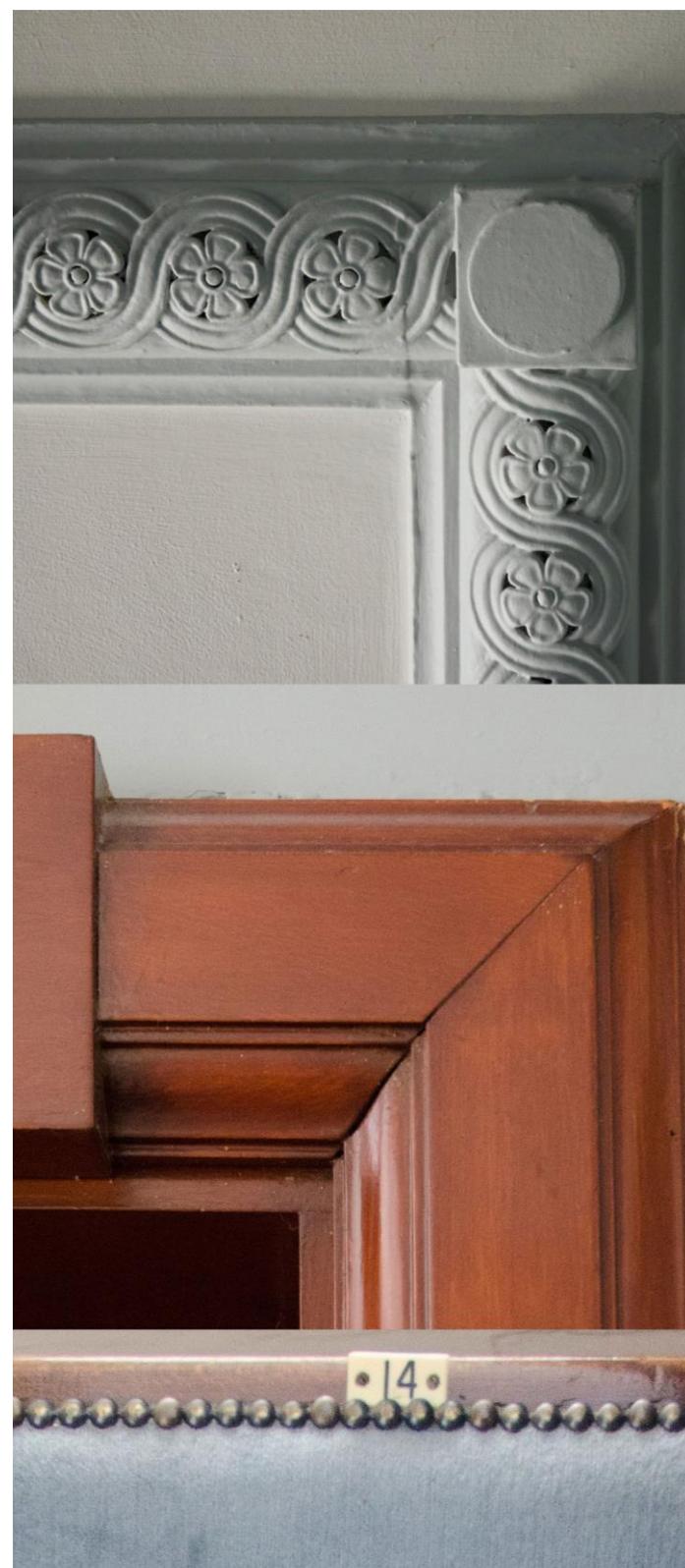
- Cornice and ceiling of the lobby and hall;
- Pitched floor for raked seating (covered by 1964 floor);
- Orchestra pit (hidden below present stage extension);
- Ventilation system for original (Kaylee carbon arc) projectors;
- Steel fire escapes with original fire doors.

Authenticity: The 1960s' youth club re-fit has obscured the original ceiling detail, which is largely intact. The custom combined light fitting/ventilation units have been removed. The ceiling cornices in the lobby and main hall survive, as does the proscenium arch with original detail and décor hidden above the 1964 suspended ceiling. The quality of finish and design detail is indicative of Spicer's challenge to Morris as a philanthropist.

Completeness: The largely intact interior is a testament to the durability of the design. The only missing items from Banyard's interior decor are light fittings, seats and ventilation equipment. The re-modelling of the South Elevation (front entry) has meant that the glass canopy, the original doors, grille and pay-booth are lost. The original sound, lighting, projection, ventilation and power systems have been removed, along with the original seating, although a single rank of the 1931 seating has been preserved and is stored in the building. Projection, lighting and sound are now operated from a new projection suite added in 2008 on the 1964 mezzanine, and the seating capacity is presently reduced to 148. The interior layout survives with the 1931 internal fire doors removed but retaining the fireproof stair and crash exit doors.

The conversion to a Youth Centre in 1964 by R H Crompton for Cambridgeshire County Council was achieved with relatively little damage to the fabric to the building and, by keeping the building in constant use, has assured its survival.

Fig 3: Surviving interior finishes: Top: lobby ceiling, Middle: door lining, Btm: restored bench seat back.



2 Heritage Significance

2.1 National Significance

The Marven Centre is one of a diminishing number of survivals of the 1930s' cinema age. It is unusual in being an intact example of a purpose-built village cinema, and it is rare to find a local architect-designed, quality building with so little modification to its original layout in working condition.

The company responsible for the building of the cinema, Spicers Ltd, was also responsible for developing the Dufaycolor film process, funding research to turn Dufaycolor into a workable colour motion picture film process. A subsidiary of the Spicers group, Dufay-Chromex Ltd, was established at Sawston in the 1920s to develop the manufacture of non-inflammable colour film, and continued production there until 1951.

“In 1926, the Dufaycolor process was purchased by British paper manufacturing firm Spicers. The firm then funded research to turn Dufaycolor into a workable colour motion picture film process. In 1932, Spicers finally released Dufaycolor as a motion picture process ...”

The cinema opened in 1932, the same year Spicers released Dufaycolor as a motion picture process. Few films were made using Dufaycolor and, while Dufaycolor screenings may have taken place in Sawston, it is not known definitively if they did. However, the association of Dufaycolor, Sawston and cinema is significant.

Sawston Village College was the first village college in the country, and the cinema's connection to the establishment of this first village college is important. As a reminder of the difficult beginning of the Village College project, Spicers Theatre stands as a monument to the first local supporter of the scheme.

2.2 Regional Significance

At present, Cambridgeshire has only a single listed cinema, the 11* Empire Wisbech. Survivals from the golden age of cinema outside the city are rare: the loss of the 1935 Ramsey Grand, which was demolished in 2005, shows the vulnerability of such structures. Spicers Theatre therefore stands



Fig 4: Cinemas in the region. Top: the Ramsey Grand, demolished in 2005. Below: the Wisbech Empire, the only listed cinema in Cambridgeshire.

alone in the county as an outstanding example of a rural 1930s' cinema in current use for screenings. Furthermore, of the 49 cinemas in the East Anglia region, the village location of Sawston's cinema is unique. Although there are a few survivals of the 1930s' cinema boom, few are of the compact completeness of Sawston and all are in town high street locations.

<http://cinema-theatre.org.uk/uk-cinemas/>

By its association with the first village college, the cinema building also becomes part of this unique regional group of sites.

2.3 Local Significance

As perhaps the best surviving of George P Banyard's cinema designs, the value of his work as a local architect may be better understood.

In addition to school use, the building continues to be used widely by and for the community and is an important resource. It is used, as the school-run Sawston Cinema, to screen both films on general release and to broadcast the National Theatre Live programme of relay performances. It is also used as a theatre by Sawston Youth Drama, a group with over 150 members staging at least three major productions a year, which play to full houses. The Friday Singers, an adult education group with over 60 members, also meet in the building.

In addition to this, cubs, Pilates, youth groups and others also meet regularly in the building, and annual events such as the ACE pantomime and Sawston Drama Festival take place there.

Fig 5: Top: detail cornice to hall as hidden by 1964 suspended ceiling.

Fig 6: Right: present elevation to street.



3 Architecture

3.1 The Architect - George P Banyard

Although the work of G P Banyard (1880-1948) is now largely forgotten, his work as a Cambridge architect in the 1920s and 1930s is of some note.

Banyard came from humble roots. He is recorded in partnership with his father Philip, trading as Banyard & Son builders of 28 Gwydir Street, an enterprise which went into receivership at Cambridge Court in November 1907.

In 1922, the architect was working from an office shared with the bookseller Galloway & Porter at 30 Sidney Street. By 1930 he had moved to the more prestigious address at 4a Market Street, Cambridge.

3.2 Banyard's Cinema Designs

Of the three cinemas designed by Banyard, the Sawston cinema building is the only building still in use as a cinema.

3.2.1 The Tivoli (1925)

The Tivoli, Chesterton Road, was Cambridge's second purpose-built cinema (and the sixth in the town at the time). It was commissioned by S B Andrews of Milton Road and opened on 19 March 1925. It later closed as a cinema on 19 November 1956, but continued to be used for other purposes. The building (with the exception of the street facade) was destroyed by a major fire, which broke out at 3.00 am on 14 March 2015.

“The electric installation has been made a special feature, the lamps being hidden in six large domes placed in the main ceiling and two smaller domes under the balcony; each dome is fitted with 120 lamps, giving a reflected light with coloured tint effects, and dimmer operation. The lighting during the showing of the picture is so arranged that the gangways and access to all seats can be distinctly seen, and the necessity for the attendants to carry hand torches is obviated. The architect has also made a special feature of the interior decoration and ornament, and the general colour scheme consists of blue at floor level, which graduates through brown and orange tints to a pale blue ceiling.”

The Cambridge Chronicle & University Journal, March 1925

Fig 7: The Banyard Cinemas: From top: The Tivoli c1929, the Central present day, Spicers present day.



3.2.2 The Central (1929)

The Central, Hobson Street, opened showing Cambridge's first 'talkie'. It closed as a cinema in 1972. As of 2016 the building stands empty but intact. Like the Tivoli, it is compressed in plan by the surrounding buildings. It was not designed as a free-standing structure but uses the street facade to announce its function.

3.2.3 Spicers Theatre (1932)

Spicers Theatre is unlike the earlier designs. It is smaller (as a result of a 'village hall' capacity brief), and the hall is contiguous with the public facade. The two Cambridge cinemas use steel framing for the hall and a brick screen wall for the frontage. At Sawston, the smaller scale allows for an integrated design. A manager's flat is included in the scheme, an indication of the serious commitment by Spicer to a strong presence in the community.

The architectural style is taken from regional American practice (in particular, the pay booth and entry plan) with a mix of art deco massing with classical decoration. The decoration is modest compared to the picture 'palace' style but is formal, giving a public, institutional appearance. Some progression towards a modernist design is evident in the construction technique but the decorative style is essentially neoclassical. The building is up-to-date for 1932 compared to the much more traditional College buildings by Dunn.

3.2.3.1 Design Development

Of the three cinema designs, Sawston is the most restrained and functional, giving the impression of a refined and modern concept shorn of the decorative (swags, escutcheons, etc.) elements used on the earlier examples. The decorative street facade leading to an industrial hall space of the earlier designs is replaced by an integrated whole at Sawston. The public hall in the two earlier designs is a separate steel framed structure with a 'screen' facade, while at Sawston the building is formed as a whole. Construction is in local brick with Ketton stone detailing, and with a Siegwart system roof and floors. In keeping with period practice, soldier courses cover steel elements and cue facade components giving a refined thoughtful composition to the front and east elevations. Common details in Banyard's designs are 'Roman' railings, a mannerist approach to classical detailing (use of pilasters/column and capitals) and modern 'radio set' massing (masking the gable end of the public hall).

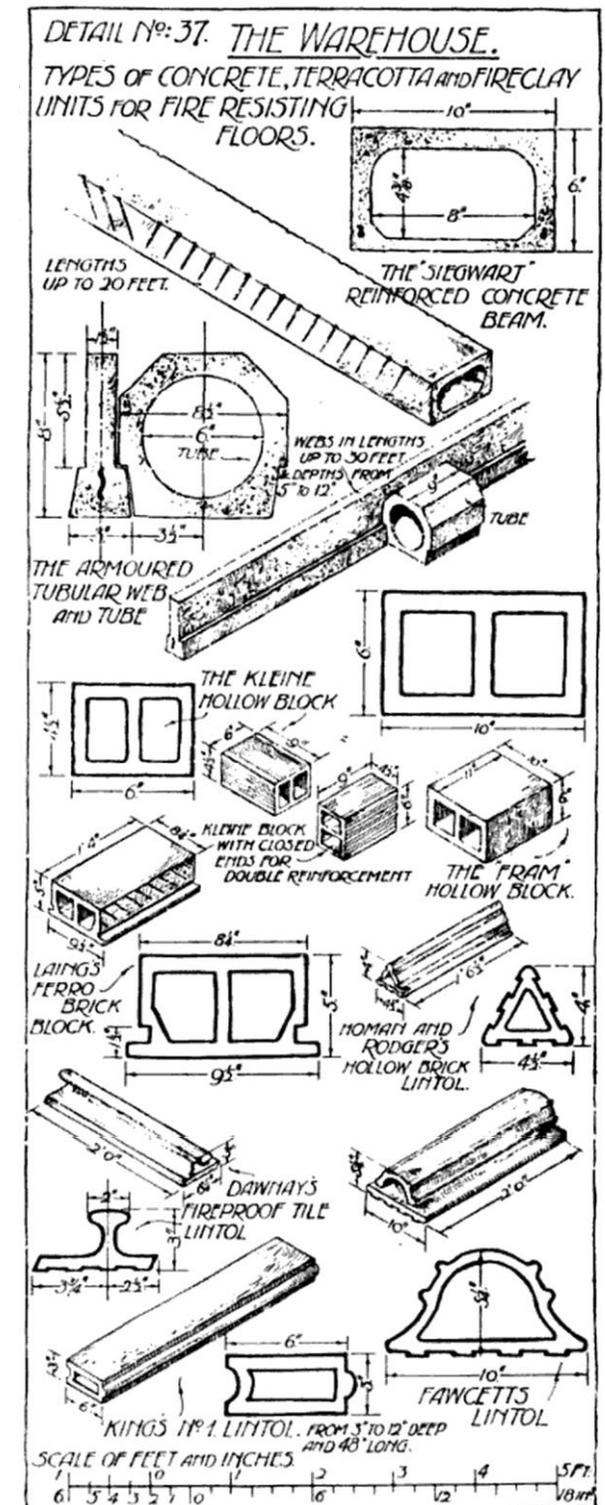


Fig 8: Details of Siegwart beam system used in the floor and ceiling of the Cinema. Dray & Jagger, 1947.

3.2.3.2 Use of the Patent Beam System

The Sawston cinema building makes extensive use of the precast Siegwart beam system of floor and ceiling components. The system provides protection for the steel re-enforcement whilst also providing insulation and warm air circulation. From Hans Siegwart's US patent description of 1901:

"The present invention has reference to improvements in floors and ceilings in buildings, and relates more especially to floors or ceilings used as heat or cold transmitters for heating or cooling rooms; and the object of the invention is to provide a floor or ceiling, respectively, which allows of a constant current of the heating or cooling medium passing in at one side, circulating freely through it, and passing out at the other side."

Architectural Building & Construction Vol 2. p60, Druy & Jagger, 1947

The system allows lightweight floor and ceilings to be achieved supported by rolled steel joist cross beams (marked 'RSJ' on drawing No 264 shown in Fig 18). The Siegwart beams were supplied up to 20' in length. Banyard used a maximum span of 13' for the main hall between doubled RSJ spans of 35'6".

3.3 Banyard's Domestic and Other Buildings

3.3.1 274 Hills Road, Cambridge (1920)

The earliest known application by Banyard in Cambridge, for which approval was granted in November 1920, was for a house on Hills Road (approximately at the site of the present No 288). It is uncertain as to the status of the proposal as the site is now redeveloped.

3.3.2 No2 Covent Garden, Cambridge (1922)

In 1922, approval was granted for the Page family to build a sausage factory behind the shop. The factory was designed on two storeys with a basement. The first floor was a bakery with oven, where the pastry cases for pork pies and puff pastry for sausage rolls were made. On the



Fig 9: Right: Proposed extension of No 2 Covent Gdn, Cambridge, 1922.

first-floor frontage was a pair of narrow doors (now the tall window) through which the finished products could be winched down to a van for delivery. The basement was probably a fuel store.

3.3.3 The Coppice, Long Road, Cambridge (1925, extended 1937, 1939)

Described as 'Arts and Craft', this substantial house was drawn up at Banyard's Sidney Street practice. The house incorporated popular suburban details of the Edwardian era with inglenook and timber framing details. This was the Banyard family home from 1926 to 1939.

3.3.4 Houses at plot Nos 6, 7, 22, 23 Barrow Rd, Cambridge (1931)

Built on newly released University-owned land Banyard designed to accommodate the middle classes in modern detached convenience, in a mix of suburban styles: the houses still stand.

3.3.5 Wimpole Hall (1940)

Banyard is listed as responsible for the survey of the hall in 1940. This may have been part of the restoration work for George Bambridge after the 1938 purchase. The survey drawing passed to the National Trust with the house in 1976.

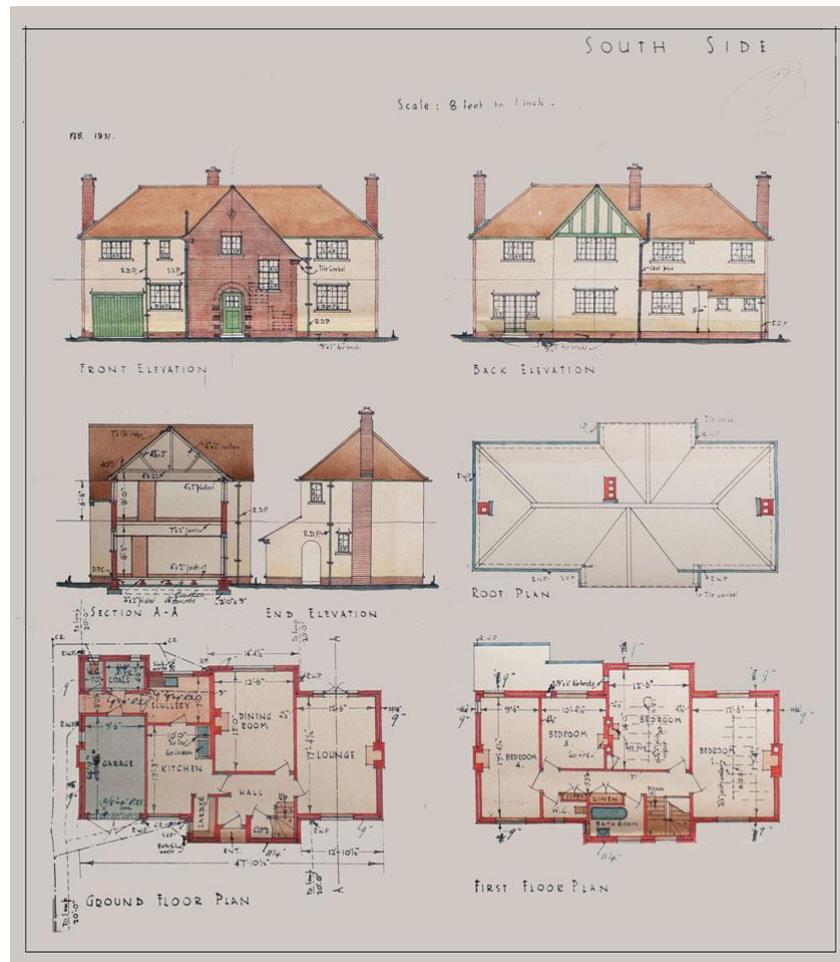
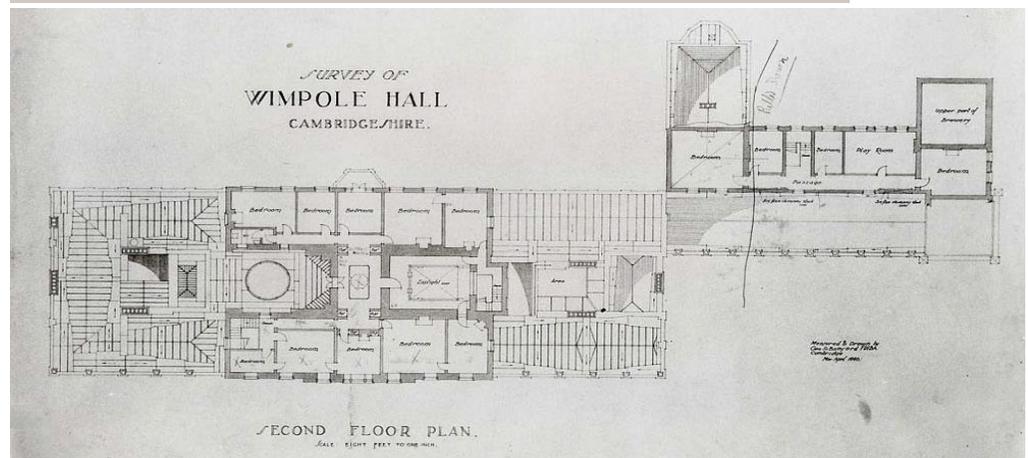


Fig 10: Top: House proposal at Barrow Rd by Banyard 1931. The expansion of suburban Cambridge in the 1930s assured his career as a local architect.

Fig 11: Right: Survey plan of the ground & second floor of Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire, 1940, 'Surveyed & Drawn by George P. Banyard, FRIBA, Cambridge Feb. Mar. 1940'. Scale 'eight feet to one inch'.



4 The Spicer Story

Paper had been made at Borough Mill since c. 1753, when the mill was bought by Joseph Keir, a paper-maker, and William Fairchild. They built a new mill adjoining the old one and insured both in 1760 and 1778, although only one was recorded thereafter. Fairchild went bankrupt in 1779, and in 1784 Borough Mill was bought by Joseph Vowell, a London stationer, whose heir sold it in 1791 to Charles Martindale. The mill had two vats in 1778 and 1791. The Fourdrinier family, inventors of paper-making machines, were associated with the mill by 1780, and some of the earliest machinery in England was installed there. By 1835 Martindale's widow Elizabeth had leased Borough Mill to Edward Towgood, a paper-maker of St. Neots (Hunts.), who in that year transferred his lease to his brother Matthew. The mill was owned and worked for the rest of the 19th century by Edward's sons, Edward and Hamer Towgood, and it became the largest industrial concern in Sawston, employing nearly 400 people in 1871. Steam-power was introduced, and a new factory was built in 1851. Women, and children over 12, were employed in the mill, where the work was generally cleaner and more regular, though less well paid than in the leather industry. In about 1890 falling wages caused an unsuccessful strike.

In 1917, after the death of Hamer Towgood, the business was sold to Spicer Bros. Ltd., and continued as Edward Towgood & Sons Ltd. to produce high quality paper. In 1963 the mill had recently been modernised and reconstructed to produce top grade stationery paper and processed paper with a plastic base. A large paper-conversion factory, built near the railway by Spicers in 1925 and considerably enlarged in 1964, produced items such as envelopes, waxed wrappings, and account books. In 1972 it employed 600 people, and like Towgoods, was part of the Reed International Group.

A subsidiary of the Spicers group, Dufay-Chromex Ltd., was established at Sawston in the 1920s to develop the manufacture of non-inflammable colour film, and continued production there until 1951.

Edited and amended from BHO Parishes: Sawston
<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol6/pp246-263#anchorn295>



Fig 12: The new Spicers paper conversion plant c 1925.

5 The Origins of Spicers Theatre

Spicers Theatre arose from the disputed provision of a cinema at the new Village College instigated by Chief Education Officer, Henry Morris. The Spicer company clearly saw employee welfare extending beyond the factory gate, and its provision of facilities for football, cricket, a brass band, and a Mother & Child Welfare Club were well established by 1928 when Henry Morris chose Sawston as the site for his first Village College.

On 30 October 1930 Sawston Village College opened, with a large well-appointed hall intended to be a new village hall as part of Henry Morris's idea of a community college, a new concept in education whereby adult education and community involvement would encourage lifelong learning and improve provision for the rural population. In raising funds, Morris made many friends but also an enemy of H G Spicer when, despite the gift of land and money for the College, he did not get the use of the College hall for the three shows a week he felt he was promised.

In bringing the cinema to Sawston, Spicer had provided a new social focus. Initial screenings in the old village hall were popular, and the prospect of moving to a new venue provided by Morris's new Village College in 1930 shows a rural community in transition subjected to external philanthropy with apparently opposed ideas of community provision.

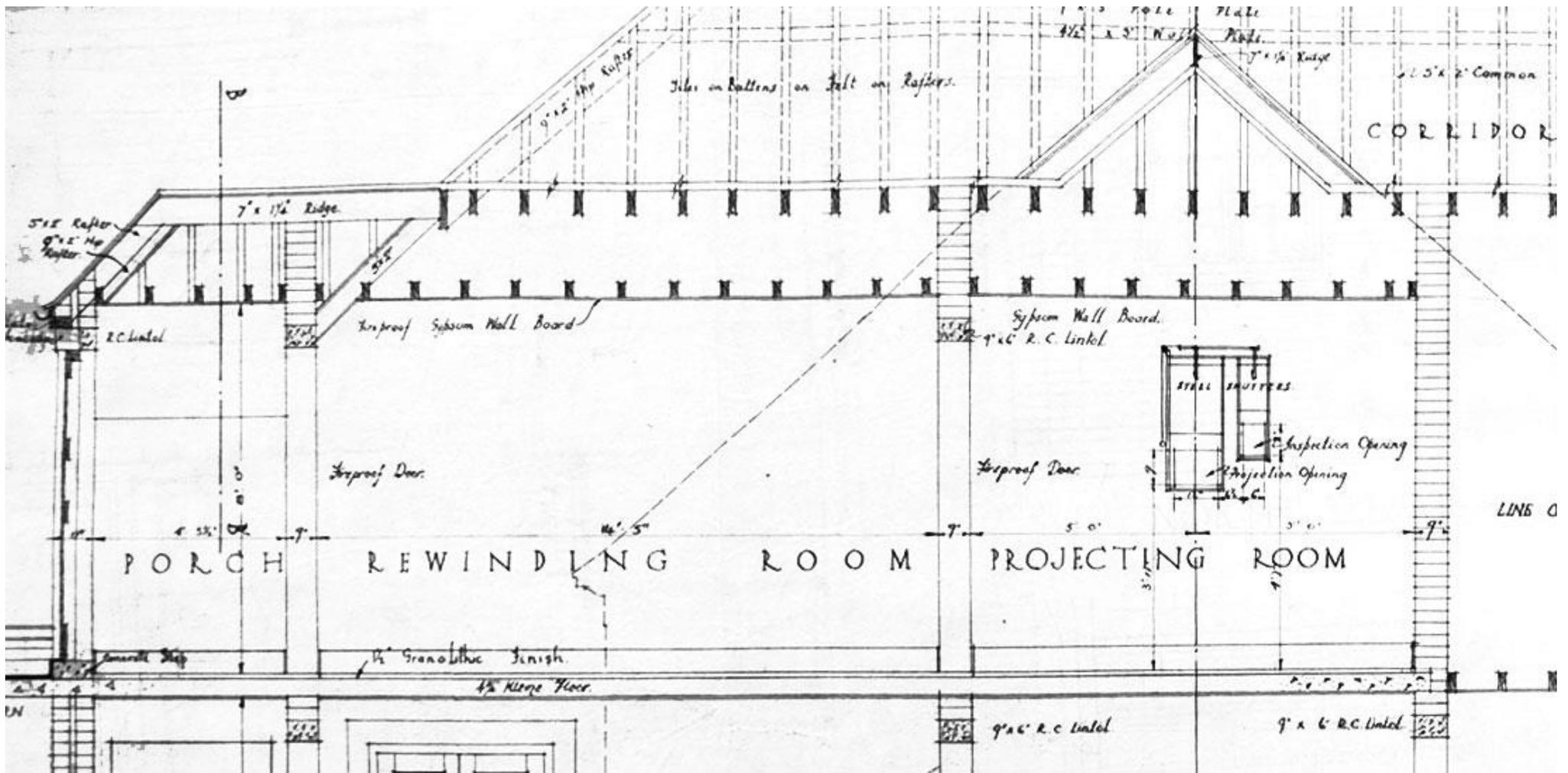
Both H G Spicer and Henry Morris saw the future of the community in different ways, and Spicer's initial support of Morris's project shows a readiness to support the local community and an appreciation of the social impact of cinema, which was ultimately resisted by Morris. Spicer's reaction was swift: in 1931 he commissioned a new cinema to be built on the very edge of the Village College site. The antipathy between Spicer and Morris was such that the windows of the theatre facing the College site are blind. Viewed from the College, the building presents a 'spite' wall, a reminder of two very different views of community in 1932.

On the opening of the cinema (reported on 13 Sept, 1932) Henry Spicer's speech made public his dissatisfaction:

"I would frankly say I much regret the 'College' in its present location, and in the interests of the scheme it originally set out to fulfil, I am very sorry that local sympathy and goodwill (the essence of any possible success) have been so fully alienated and dispelled, in so many needless ways. I have now done with this matter. We have in this building what I believe you will agree, is a splendid place. We shall get on with our business, and with your goodwill and assistance, on which we know we can count, I trust we shall have great success and never look back."

In the same address, Banyard's design is recognised and the lighting scheme, perhaps similar to his designs at the Tivoli, is mentioned:

"We hope, too, to have, in due course, concerts here, variety entertainments, theatricals, dances and various meetings and gatherings, and we have a unique coloured lighting equipment."



The 1929 proposal drawing for the College by H H Dunn clearly shows the projection facility requested by Spicer as a condition for his gift of 8 acres for the school site and £1,000 toward its construction. Provision for a projection room, rewinding room with fireproof door, walls, ceiling and escape stair was made, but Morris did not agree to film shows in 'his' school. Morris had sought funding from all quarters for his project, and benefactor control of the new space became a source of some discomfort. The conflict of interest between educational priorities and community use was seen by Spicer as a broken promise once the College opened.

Fig 13: Detail from H H Dunn's 1929 proposal drawing of the Hall at Sawston Village College.

“In reality the governing board of the college was not as representative of different groups and classes as Morris had hoped. Instead of being directly elected, members of the board were appointed by the County Council, the rural district council and the parish council. Injunctions were laid upon these bodies to appoint several women and a representative of the University. The results were perhaps predictable. The chairman of the governors, for example, was Commander Eyre-Huddleston, who owned nearby Sawston Hall and had guaranteed the loan for the village hall. (In fact in 1939 villagers had to remind the college management that the 'adult wing' of the building had been paid for by the villagers themselves and by voluntary organisations on their behalf, and therefore it was unfair that they should subsidise educational activities through paying high fees for rent of the hall.)

Morris initially won full support from the owners of the local paper mill, the Spicer family, convincing them that their interests would be met by contributing to the college rather than by building a separate cinema.

The Spicers were very generous with land and money, like other members of the local elite. Once the village college was built, however, Mr and Mrs Spicer felt that their Cinema shows should take precedence over other uses, and proposed that other village associations might use the hall one Thursday a month and on Sunday - and only with four weeks' notice. Mr Spicer was a member of the governing board of the new college, which also made up the letting committee of the hall; when the board agreed to the cinema schedule there was an outcry at this special treatment, and the county council intervened. Despite efforts to find a compromise, the Spicers then withdrew their support from the college and built their own cinema on land next to the college.”

*The English Countryside Between the Wars: Regeneration Or Decline?
Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt, Lynne Thompson, Eds. Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2006:
Chapter 3: Rural education and reform, Caitlin Adams.*

Through the 1930s the Morris/Spicer dispute over the conditions attached to the £1,000 given by Spicer for the Village College Hall was an issue in local parish council elections.

The full speech given by Henry Spicer on the opening of Spicers Theatre is given on the next page.

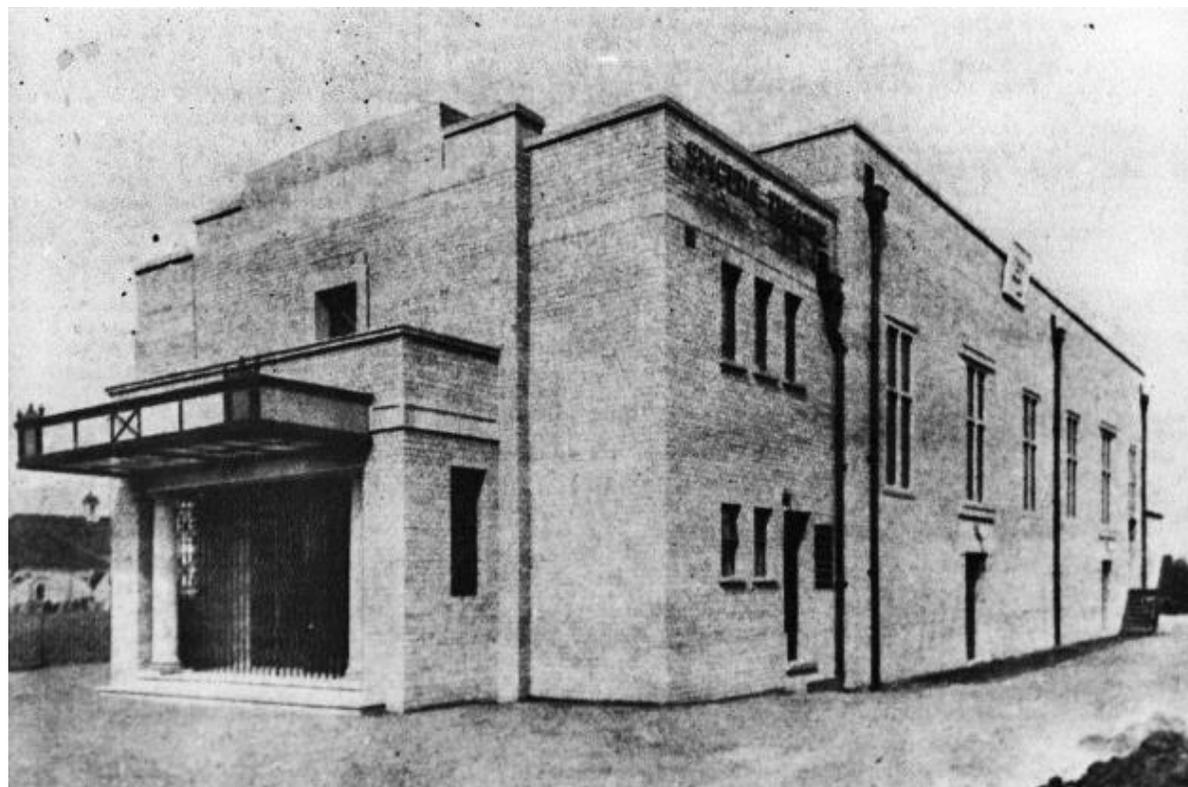


Fig 14: Spicers Theatre prior to the 1963 re-fit. With the exception of the valence and grille details, the view today is much the same. The fixings for the 'SPICERS THEATRE' sign on the East wall are still visible. It would appear that the torch finials to the portico proposed by Banyard were never fitted.

SAWSTON'S NEW THEATRE

Chairman's Speech at Opening THE VILLAGE COLLEGE

Education Secretary Criticised

We have received a copy of the speech delivered by Mr H G Spicer on the occasion of the opening of Spicer's Theatre at Sawston. Hundreds of invitations were issued for the first two performances and the varied programmes presented, including Tom Walls and Ralph Lynn in "Plunder," was thoroughly enjoyed.

Mr Spicer's speech was as follows:-

"Fellow neighbours and friends, - We have waited a long time to get this hall, but I am sure you will agree with me that we have all waited to advantage. It has involved a great deal of time and care and thought. We have spent a lot of money, and I hope the place meets your approval.

A word of hearty congratulation is due to the architect Mr Banyard of Cambridge, for what he has produced. I would like to thank the builder too, and say how satisfied we are with him - Mr Kidman - and then a word is due to the clerk of the works and every worker in connection with it, and all those of my own company who have so willingly assisted.

As far as the equipment goes, I do not think it could be possibly improved, and I hope it will receive such a large measure of support from Sawston and the surrounding districts that it will prove not only a great success, but a permanent boon to the locality.

We hope to show here 'pictures' of varied type that will meet with the widest approval, and it will always be our aim to select them with the greatest care.

For ten years, as you are aware, we provided 'pictures' at the hall, which we were lent, and we owe our thanks to Mr Etchells who was responsible for the selection of them, for the excellent programmes he provided. It is true that, in the past, they were 'silent pictures' and now, as a general rule, they will be 'talking' or 'musical' and this fact in itself makes the programme a more difficult one to choose, but I am sure Mr Etchells, who will be still chiefly responsible, will have an equal measure of success.

We hope, too, to have, in due course, concerts here, variety entertainments, theatricals, dances and various meetings and gatherings, and we have a unique coloured lighting equipment. The equipment for these other entertainments is not yet entirely complete, but I was anxious to make a start, and get opened with the 'pictures' as early as possible, and we hope you will all be pleased with the opening event today.

I desired to say a few words too at the opening - to you who are particularly, if I may say so, our own immediate people - neighbours, and friends - so many of whom have supported in the past, our ventures, and so, we have commenced by issuing invitations for our first two performances to between five and six hundred people, which gives us an audience, representative of those we wished to see here.

THE VILLAGE COLLEGE.

It is just two years since the 'Village College' opened, where as most of you know, we were expecting to continue showing 'pictures' in the way we had done formerly (namely, the three nights a week), at the old Hall. From that day,

when we were turned down at the College, and it was made impossible for us to show 'pictures' there, until this day I have kept silent on the matter.

A great many people have talked on the subject, and you have heard many tales, but I want to tell you briefly what I have to say on the matter. To put it mildly, we were very badly treated, and I can assure you that we shall see to it that it will not occur again. In a word, we were far too simple and trusting!

Fully seven years ago Mr Morris came to me, early in the inception of the 'Village College' scheme, to try and interest me in it. Included in that scheme was the idea of a hall, and I told him that we should eventually build a hall ourselves, and then showed him plans already got out. He begged me not to build a hall, but to link up with him in his scheme in every possible way, and he said we could give at the College all the 'pictures' we were then giving, and indeed almost anything else we contemplated for the benefit of the locality.

He asked us, not merely not to build a hall of our own, but to give the land for the college, and a substantial sum of money towards the building as well. He asked for the site which he eventually got, though we did not want to part with this particular piece of land - and then only on the understanding that he had to be satisfied with the amount of land allotted to him, as otherwise he would get none - because all the rest in the immediate vicinity was needed by my company for its own uses.

He said that what we offered was enough, and on that understanding the gift was made. In addition he got a substantial sum of money.

A word more on the matter of the land. So much did we dislike giving that particular piece of land that again and again I asked him to select some other site, which I would pay for and present as a gift. But 'No' - no other site would do - and as I said, we eventually gave the present location on his agreeing that the site was large enough, and that no more could be got and he had to accept all the qualifications and restriction we insisted upon.

THREE IMPORTANT POINTS.

Here I want to tell you, what in the main influenced us in the matter - they were three things:

That we would be able to continue our 'pictures' in the College Hall.

That the College scheme seemed to present an educational centre that would be beneficial in producing a better type of lad or girl - and

That Mr Morris said there would be a full scheme of adult education which we thought would be beneficial to our staff, and others in the district.

These three things in the main caused us - rather against our better judgement - to give way to Mr Morris's importunity.

I got a little bit annoyed in the early summer of 1930 when he wanted more money. Among other things, he asked for a substantial sum to form a fund to increase the salary of any headmaster who might be appointed, and I said 'No' - get ahead, and get the place going, and let us see what you can do, before one goes any further and considers any further money.

The fact is, friends, we did everything we possibly could for him - we were far too apt to say 'Yes' to what he wanted. One day in 1930 he told us he wanted more land than we had agreed to give, in order to close the Junior School at Sawston, and rebuild it alongside of the College, and he asked us to help him as regards the money for this by buying the present school - that is the Junior school - and to give him additional land.

Here again in this new scheme we desired mostly to help him, and this purchase of the old school we actually agreed to, but nothing came of it, because, before the transaction could be completed we were turned down at the College, as regards showing pictures and I withdrew everything additional to the original gift including an offer of a gift of further land.

We were in no real way anxious to purchase the 'old school' but I did in fact actually offer to pay what he asked for the 'old school'.

I would like to stress the point that not once since Mr Morris denied the understanding with me in regard to the 'pictures' at the College Managers' meeting in 1930 has any member of the County Council asked me officially what I understood the arrangement was, or approached me on the matter at all.

To say the least, this seemed a little curious after all we had done.

NOTHING IN WRITING.

It may be asked why there was little or nothing definite in writing. I have never dreamed the understanding would not have been carried out wholeheartedly. Had I had any doubt, we should not have given the land and we should have proceeded to carry out our original intention of building our own place. In all my conversations with Mr Morris, I presumed he was speaking for the County Council as I was speaking for my Company.

Had we thought there might have been any difficulty, we should have inserted a clause covering the point in the deed of gift. That would have brought the full position to light beyond Mr Morris, and the issue could not have been in doubt at any time thereafter.

I should like to mention that there was, to me, abundant evidence as to the true position in what Commander Huddleston stated publicly was the understanding in regard to the showing of pictures at the College Hall and the remark in the local Press reported to have been made by Alderman W. C. Jackson that Commander Huddleston's statements were untrue to (Alderman Jackson's) knowledge, I have never been able to understand.

However, in September 1930, we knew where we stood, our eyes had been opened, and we took our course - and in looking back - though I regret exceedingly that our own activities have been humbugged up as they have - I have no regrets that we are not having any of our activities at the College, for we could never have done there what with your help and support we can attempt here.

I would frankly say I much regret the 'College' in its present location, and in the interests of the scheme it originally set out to fulfil, I am very sorry that local sympathy and goodwill (the essence of any possible success) have been so fully alienated and dispelled, in so many needless ways.

I have now done with this matter.

We have in this building what I believe you will agree, is a splendid place. We shall get on with our business, and with your goodwill and assistance, on which we know we can count, I trust we shall have great success and never look back."

Cambridge Press & News Sept 13th 1932

In a 1930 letter to Leonard Elmhirst of the Dartington Trust, from whom Morris also sought funding for the development of Sawston Village College, Morris outlined his aims for cinema in Sawston, at odds with Henry Spicer's. The gulf between the two benefactors of Sawston was huge: Spicer wants to carry on as he did with the three shows a week, while Morris has other ideas. Morris's understanding of cinema is not technical (his use of the term 'cinema machine' betrays his ignorance) but ideological: he clearly sees entertainment as a distraction from the more worthy function of education:

“You will remember that we have provided for the Hall (of Sawston Village College) a properly fitted up cinema chamber. But we have no cinema machine, and my keen ambition to show how the cinema might become an instrument of real education and culture is held up. For some years Sawston had had cinema in a local chapel provided by a local magnate. But this has been run on commercial lines and shows have been of the usual trumpery and insipid type. The local magnate was prepared to put his cinema into our Hall but under such conditions, from which he refused to budge, that the County Council, backed by the Carnegie Trustees, turned the offer down as being entirely against the spirit of the village college scheme, and one calculated, in fact, to wreck it. He demanded to have the Hall every Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the year to show what films he liked, and to run shows on a commercial basis and with the usual atmosphere and accompaniments of a cinema palace.

What I, and many people, especially the intelligent working people of Sawston want, is a Sawston Cinema Society. The cinema would be used in school time for lessons on geography, nature study, travel etc. Once or twice a week an evening show would be given for all the nine villages served by the Village College. In addition to entertainment films, in which a high standard would be secured, there will be other films of a really interesting and fascinating character shown... Such films are easily available from the Society of Cultural and Educational Films...

In the meantime there is no cinema in Sawston, the local magnate having closed his down. My fear is that if we do not act quickly some commercial travelling film exhibitor will appear and spoil our field. This is the moment to start our scheme if we can get someone to present us with a cinema machine. A quite useful machine can be got for about £100... two machines would enable us to give shows technically adequate from the point of view of speed and lack of interruptions.

It is a fine chance to show how a rural community can organise its own entertainment on a cultural basis, and to show how the cinema can be redeemed. Would this not provide an example to other rural areas and indeed to towns? I am a poor man, but if we can get the necessary machine equipment I will start off the maintenance fund of the Sawston Cinema Society with a subscription of £5.”

Ree, H. (1973: p 41). *Educator Extraordinary: The Life and Achievement of Henry Morris*, London: Longman.

6 The History of Spicers Theatre

By 1931 the silent movie was all but finished. Spicers Theatre was designed with 'loud speaker storage' and an orchestra pit: it was a modern facility equipped for both silent film shows with accompaniment and the new talkies.

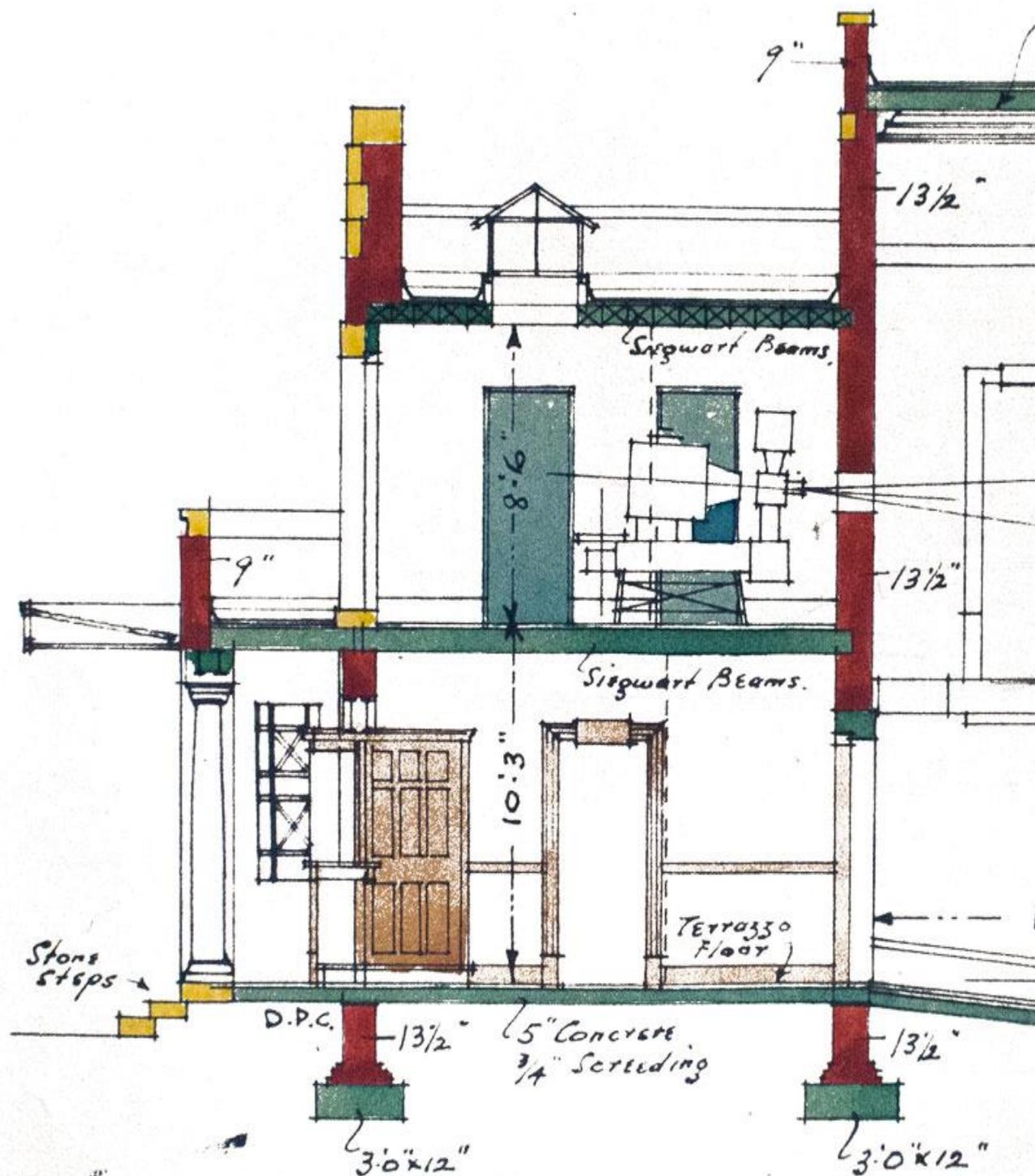
The original equipment in the cinema was to the best specification of the day:

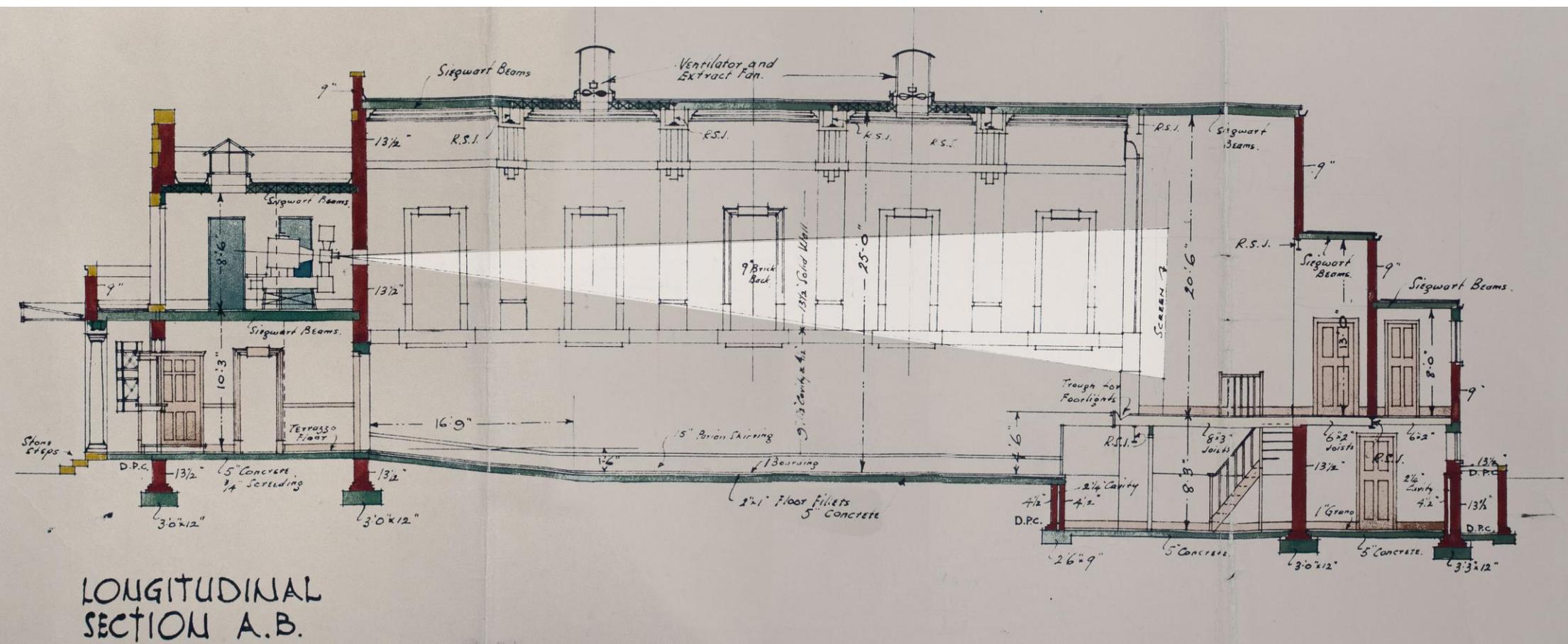
"...there were two Kaylee projectors, 35mm, worked in tandem to show long films without a break. Each reel held about 20 minutes worth of film, and the clever bit was to start projector No 2 and get it up to speed just before projector No 1 reached the end of its reel. There was a shutter controlled by either operator, which opened his 'gate' and closed the other 'gate' simultaneously. The light source then was carbon - arc (as used on searchlights). The carbon rods quickly eroded, but they were automatically moved to keep the right distance apart to maintain the light source."

Bryan Howe, Local Historian and Archivist

Arthur Garrett (Manager in 1935) is quoted as saying attendances were light, with the hall not often full until the outbreak of war.

Fig 15: Extract showing long section from Drg 264 showing projector installation, lobby, ticket booth and glazed vent detail. G P Banyard Sept 1931. Note use of fireproof patent floor, ceiling to the projection room and auditorium screen wall in double thickness brick construction. An external escape stair was provided. All structural details with the exception of the valance and grille shutter survive.





The living memory of the early years of the cinema was recorded by the 2009 Sawston Village College 'Projecting the Past' project, which gathered local people's experiences. Pupils interviewed older community members to capture and record first-hand accounts of the early days of the cinema, and a short film was produced with recorded reminiscence of staff and cinema goers as interview and re-enactment.

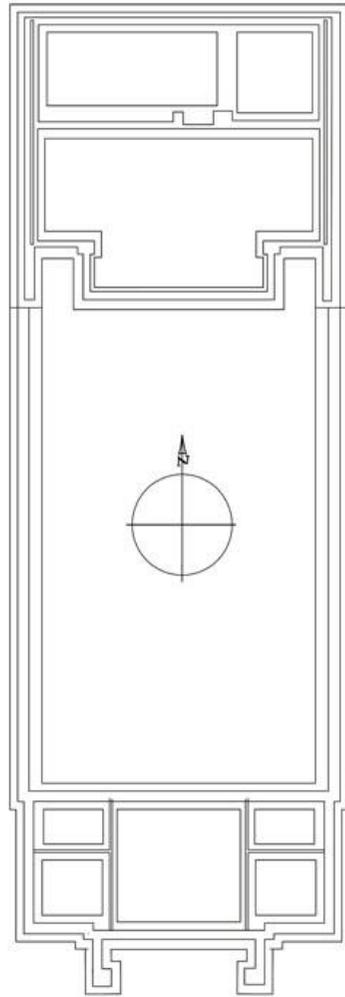
Fig 16: Above: Long section from the 1931 Drg No. 264 proposal drawing, showing pitched floor, orchestra pit, lighting troughs and ventilation system.

On following pages:

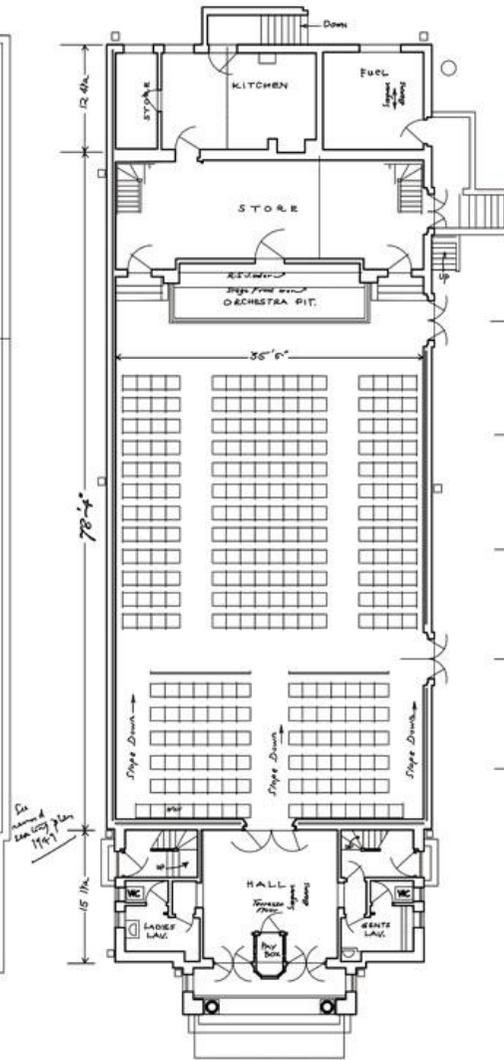
Fig 17: Drg 260 foundation, basement, ground and roof plans, G P Banyard, 1931.

Fig 18: Drg 264 sections and elevations, G P Banyard, 1931.

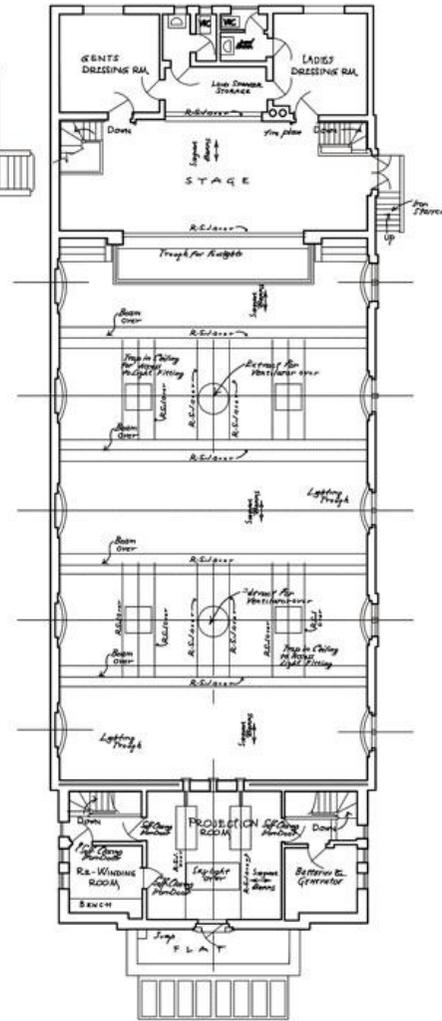
(Digital reconstructions by BBHD, 2017.)



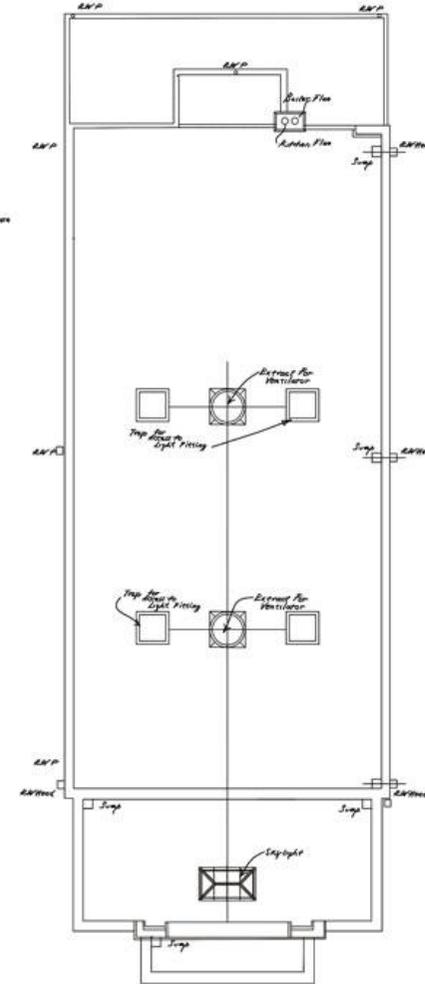
FOUNDATION PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



ROOF PLAN

077 36484

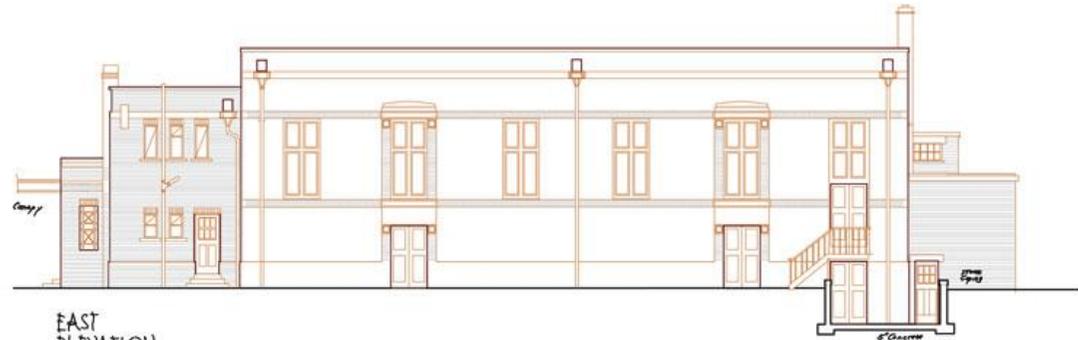
PROPOSED THEATRE SAWSTON CAMBS. for MESSRS. EDWARD TOWGOOD & SONS LTD.

GEO. P. BANYARD
ARCHITECT
4A MARKET STREET
CAMBRIDGE
SEP 1931. DRG No. 260

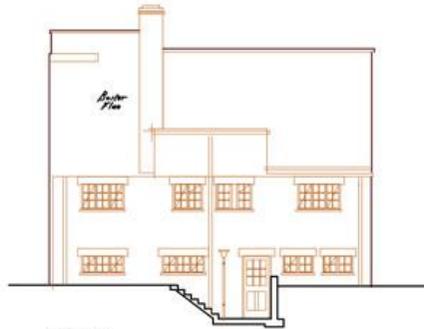
NOTE ON USE OF THIS DRAWING.
This drawing is derived from a microfilm copy made by Microfilm Systems Ltd, Caxton House, Old Rd, London, E.C.4.
No reliance on exact performance can be made.
Under no circumstances should any construction be based on this drawing



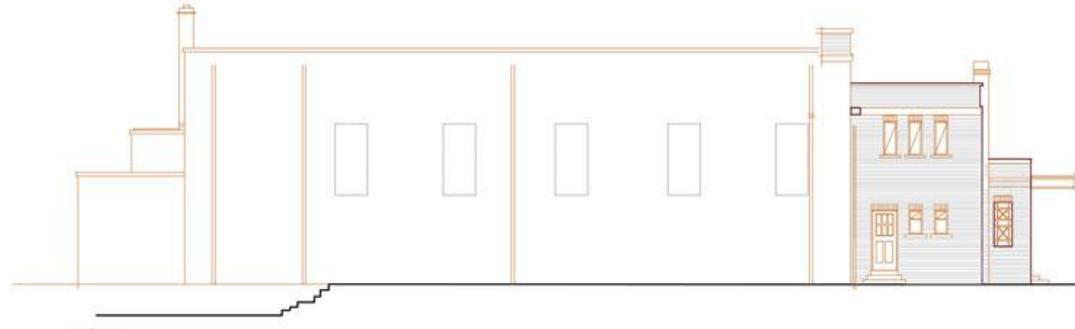
SOUTH ELEVATION



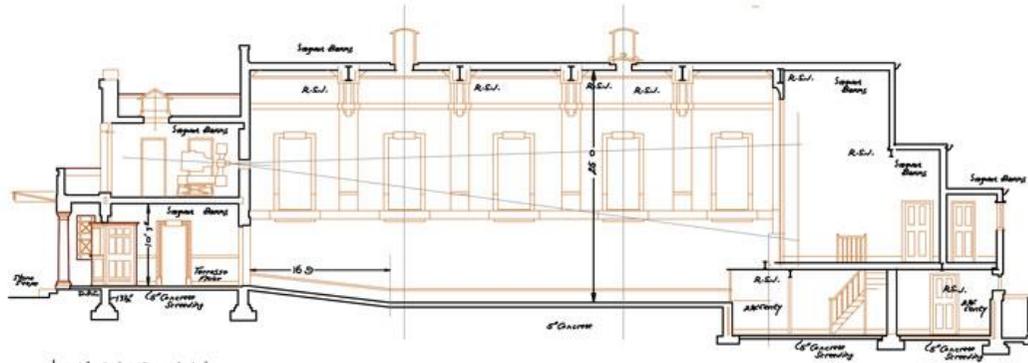
EAST ELEVATION



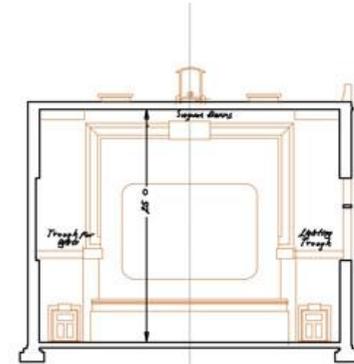
NORTH ELEVATION



WEST ELEVATION



LONGITUDINAL SECTION A B



CROSS SECTION C D

PROPOSED THEATRE SAWSTON CAMBS. for MESSRS. EDWARD TOWGOOD & SONS LTD.

GEO. P. BANYARD
ARCHITECT
14 MARKET STREET
CAMBRIDGE
SEP 1931. DRG No. 26f

NOTE ON USE OF THIS DRAWING
This drawing is derived from a microfilm copy made by Microfilm Systems Ltd, Castle House, Old Rd, Luton, Beds.
No reliance on metric performance can be made.
Under no circumstances should any construction be based on this drawing

As part of the project, the local community value placed on the cinema was celebrated, and the unique relationship between the village and cinema, particularly during WW2, was explored.

For three generations the cinema in Sawston was a focus of social life, and during the Second World War it was a popular venue for RAF and USAF personnel based at the surrounding airfields. Newsreel screenings at Sawston were memorable:

"I remember when we had evacuees in the village. We had a wife and kids living with us, and the husband was away at war. One evening, the newsreel came on at Spicers Cinema, and a friend of this lady's saw her husband on the screen fighting in the war at a time he was reported as missing. The wife went to see for herself the next night but it was a different newsreel. That was a great let down."

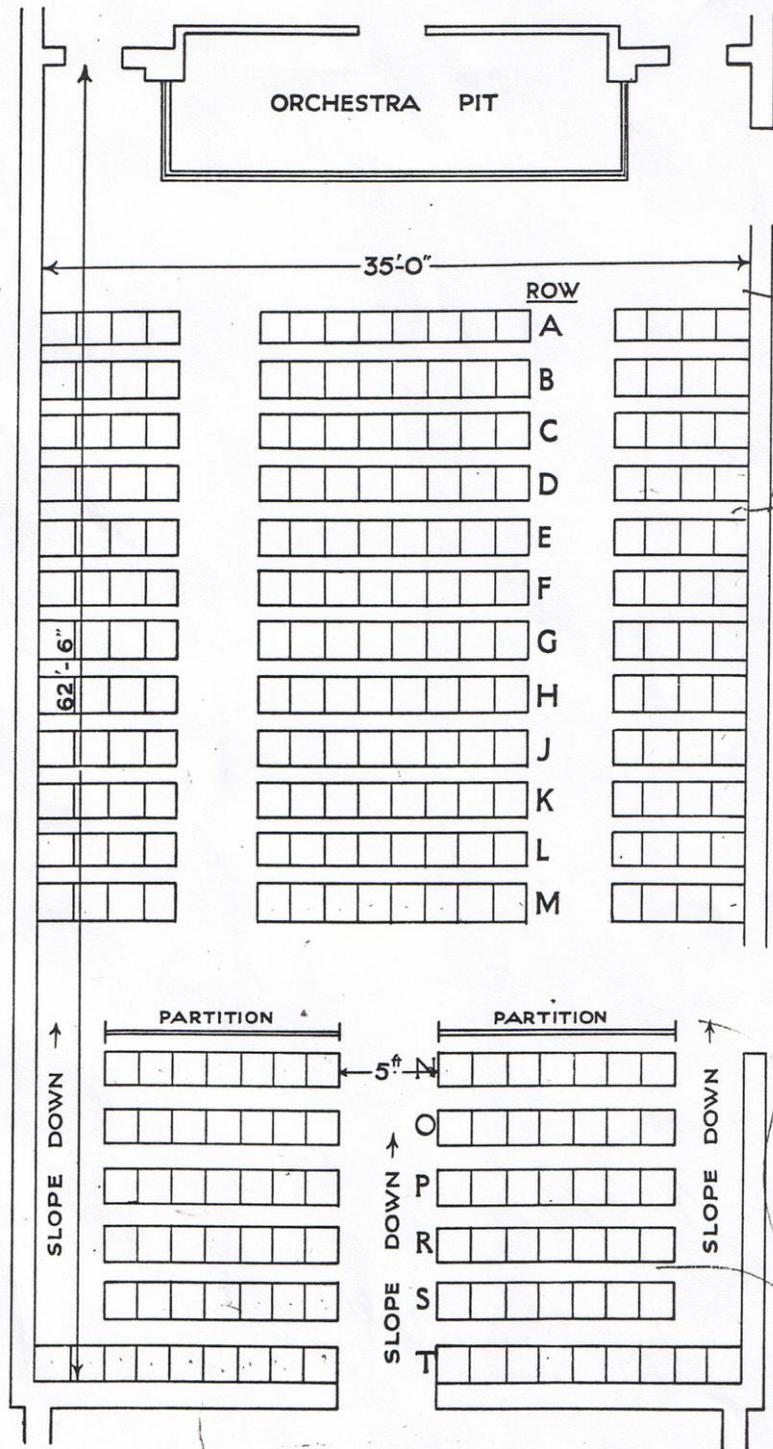
Claude Matthews to the Projecting the Past project, 2009
<http://sawstoncinema.org.uk/cinema-club/our-projects/projecting-the-past/>

The cinema hosted a variety of performances, not only film. The seating in front of the stage could be removed for dances, and the social value of the venue was remembered by Ruby Brown and recorded by the Projecting the Past project:

"At sixteen I was allowed to become a cashier as well as an usherette. The Americans were stationed at Sawston Hall and at the Nissen Huts outside the Chapel. There were also airmen at Duxford so a lot of military would go to the cinema at Sawston. Back then we would use it for 'socials', which was a dance but with games as well. We would play musical chairs, which we thought was hilarious. In those days we used to jive but I never got asked for some reason or other. I do remember one night when I did though. I thought, 'This is good.' But it wasn't as good as I thought, and the American got a bit fresh so my knee came up, and that was the end of my US association."

Ruby Brown to the Projecting the Past project, 2009
<http://sawstoncinema.org.uk/cinema-club/our-projects/projecting-the-past/>

Fig 19: Seating plan after 1949: Prices are marked as 2/9 (rows S, T), 2/3 (rows N to R), 1/9 (rows E to M), and 10 pence ha'penny (rows A to D).



THEATRE & CINEMA, SAWSTON, FOR E.T. & S.L.

SEATING PLAN: SCALE 8ft TO 1".

Handwritten notes: 2/9, 10/-, 2/9, 10/-

The seating plan was revised in 1949 to increase capacity. A note on a copy of Banyard's plan indicates the date. Post-war movies had sound by default, and it is assumed the orchestra pit was filled and the stage enlarged at this time. Live performance had moved from the pit to the stage.

6.1 End of the Spicer Era: Saving the Theatre: 1963

By 1963 cinema audiences were down, and it was decided to close the cinema. Spicers had been taken over by the Reed International Group, and running the cinema was an overhead too far. The closure was announced in August. The local reaction to the closure was vociferous, and the building was passed into the care of the Education Committee who saw it as part of the Village College campus and a youth resource, thus beginning a process which brought Spicer's gift of a cinema to the village back into Morris's College where it had initially been promised to be in 1930. By 1963 the post-war baby boom had created something of a 'teenage crisis'. It was a time of great concern for youth provision, and the loss of the cinema was seen as an invitation to delinquency.

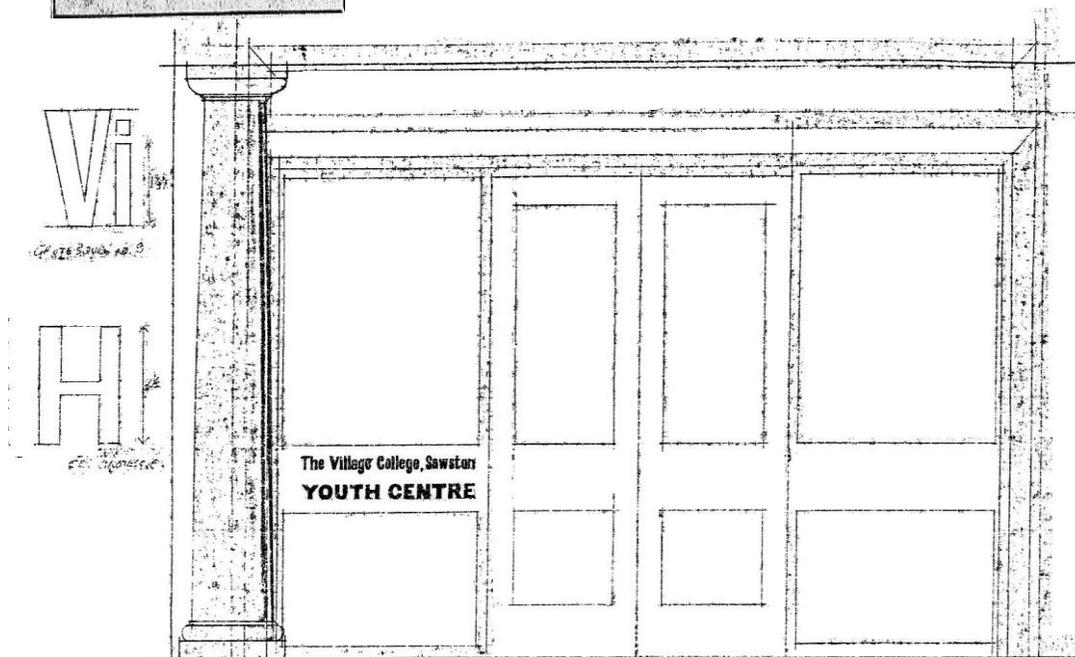
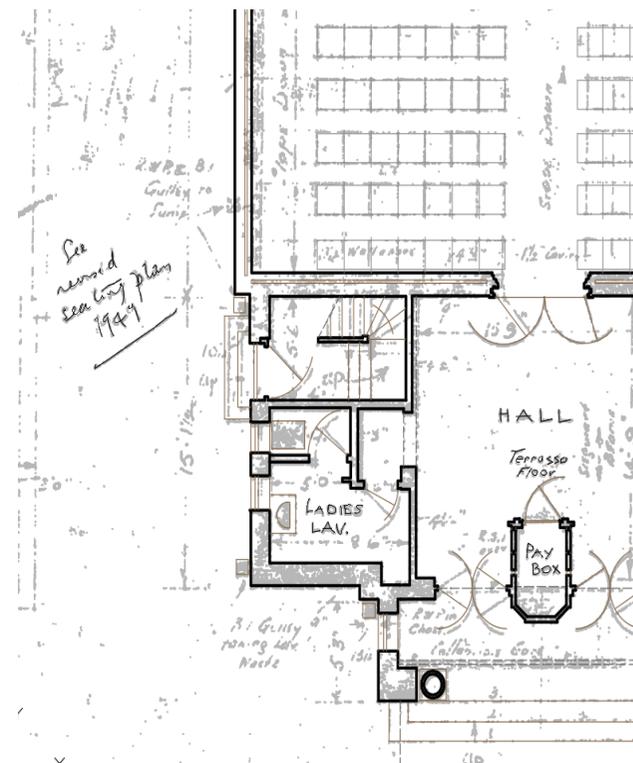
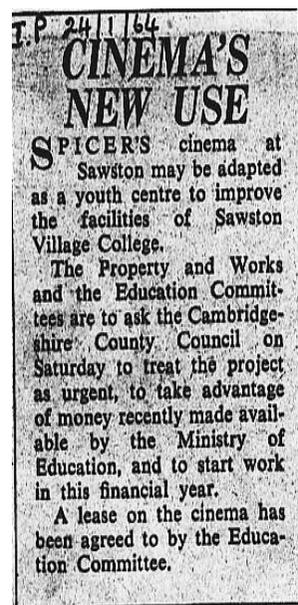
The County Council stepped in, and the County architect R H Crompton drew up the conversion plans for use of the building as a Youth Centre. A mezzanine floor was added, and provision for a dance floor with accommodation for a bar and kitchen was made.

Continuing use of the building as a home to Sawston Youth Drama and other local groups, and as a community cinema has ensured the building has survived.

Fig 20: Top right: Note on plan indicating revision of seating plan in 1949.

Fig 21: Top left: Press cutting announcing the conversion of the Theatre to a Youth Centre, January 1964.

Fig 22: Right: Detail from Cambridgeshire County Architects Office drawing, 1963. By glazing the lobby screen Compton reworked the façade with a minimum intervention to provide uncluttered access to a space for the youth of Sawston.



7 Future of the Theatre

The building is in need of care. The 1964 refit has worn well but half a century of use has taken its toll and a number of original features are suffering:

- the Critall glazing system is in need of urgent conservation;
- the cast iron rainwater goods are suffering severe corrosion;
- the surviving ceiling is in need of cleaning and consolidation.

Given that so much of the decorative detail of the ceiling and proscenium arch survive, albeit hidden, it would be fitting to refurbish the interior to re-establish the 1930s' décor.

At present, the levelled floor space created by the removal of the seating means it is very flexible, but recovery of the pitched floor might improve sight lines for audiences.

Given the significance of the building in the history of Sawston's pioneering community provision in the 1930s, the Theatre is to be treasured as a monument, not only to the glory days of cinema but also to a community who found themselves at the heart of a conflict between paternal philanthropy and the idealism of a progressive education movement that has shaped lives since the inception of the village colleges.

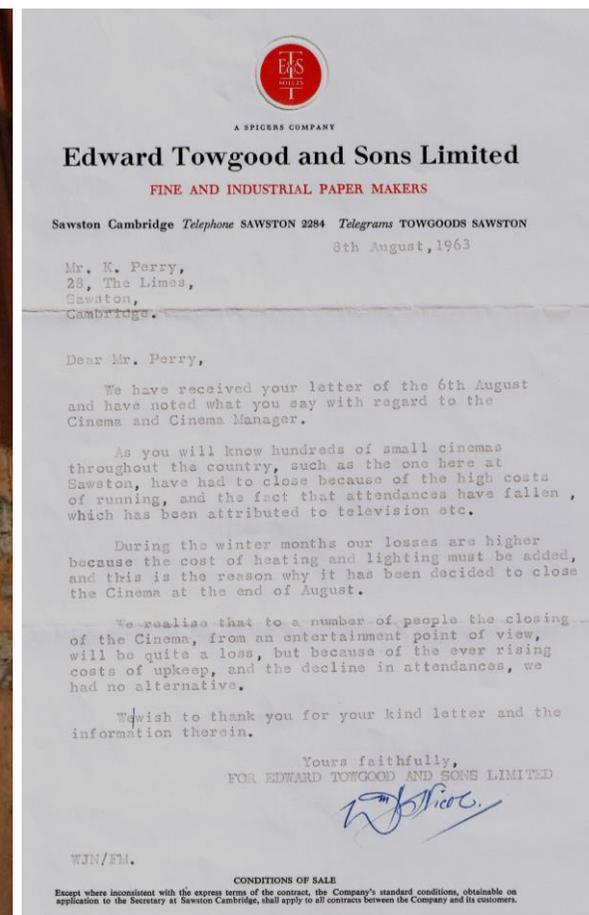
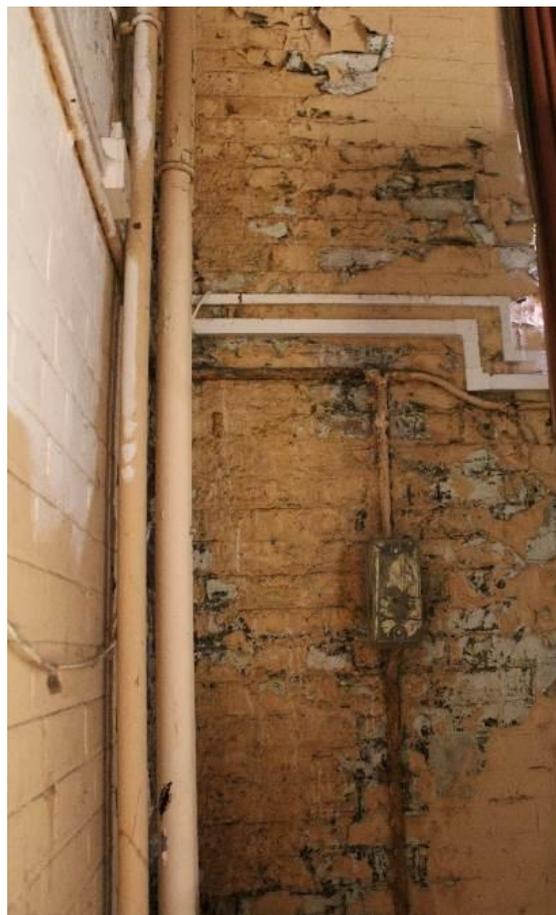


Fig 23: Above left: Present interior condition, back stage, 2017.

Fig 24: Above right: Letter to local resident K Parry giving an explanation for the closure of the cinema, August 1963.

Bill Blake Heritage Documentation

www.bill-blake.co.uk

August 2017

8 Selected Sources

British History Online Parishes : Sawston

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol6/pp246-263#anchorn295>

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<http://cinema-theatre.org.uk/uk-cinemas/>

Projecting the Past:

<http://sawstoncinema.org.uk/cinema-club/our-projects/projecting-the-past/>

Cambridge Cinemas:

<https://therealcambridge.com/2012/03/02/the-lost-cinematic-palaces-of-cambridge/>

Banyard's Mill Rd Development:

<http://www.capturingcambridge.org/mill-road-area/covent-garden/the-sausage-factory/>

Banyard Survey at Wimpole Hall:

<http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/206303.1>



Fig 25: Top right: Audience in for an event.

Fig 26: Right: Sawston Youth Drama perform in the building.