

Memories of the Regal Cinema

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In 1933, my Father, Arthur John Stratford, started showing films in the former Church Institute in Laburnum Walk. It was a corrugated iron structure located on the site now occupied by Orchard Place flats [opposite the Co-op car park, alongside an existing bungalow]. Dad named it the Regal.

Dad's father was so impressed with the business that he took over an existing cinema in 1935 at Corsham, Wiltshire, and my Father would exchange films with him each week. Sadly my Grand-father died shortly after he started that cinema in Corsham, so my Grandmother and my Auntie ran it between them, helped by my Father, until 1958.

In 1936 the building by Laburnum Walk was destroyed by fire. [A local newspaper reported that the fire was spotted, just before 5am, by Mrs Chapple, who lived in a cottage opposite the cinema. Although Stroud Fire Brigade arrived before 5:30am, the firemen's efforts were to little avail.]

In 1937 my Father had the new Regal Cinema built in Gloucester Road, next to the railway bridge (where the Esso garage is sited today). The new cinema had 406 seats. Many people will remember the double seats which were always popular with courting couples.

In 1938 my parents married and I was born. We lived in Church Road, Cainscross.

The house next door to the Cinema was built and our family moved there when I was a year old. My parents named it 'Regalside'.

In 1940 my Father was called up to serve in the Royal Navy in World War II. During his absence my Mother ran the cinema with the help of friends and relatives. Lots of American servicemen visited the cinema at that time and I remember, as a child, asking them: "Got any gum, chum". During the War there were long queues at the cinema and children under 16 would wait outside for someone to take them in. My Grandmother was the cashier, my Auntie was an usherette and Dad's friend and my Uncle were the projectionists — so it was quite a family affair. When my Grandmother became too old to sell tickets, my Auntie took up that task. After the War my Dad took up the reins again.

Dad used to get lots of cowboy films — which my Mother disliked. But Dad always said they were the most profitable. The cinema was profitable for many years until television became popular and then profits started to fall off. [A local newspaper reported that, 3 years before closure, Arthur Stratford had cut the performances to only one each evening — presumably as a measure to cope with the reduction in patrons.]. Dad sold up in 1959.

The last film shown at the Regal was 'Operation Amsterdam'. Dad took a job delivering paraffin and, subsequently, was employed at Grundy's until his retirement.