

## **Historic Cinema Set To Re-Open In Bo'ness**

An important piece of cinema and architectural history is set to reopen its doors again following a £2.15m restoration and fit-out programme.

The Hippodrome, Scotland's oldest purpose built cinema, which first opened in 1912, will reopen with a special community screening on the 6th of April 2009. It will open to the public on Thursday 9th April.

The historic, A-listed building in Bo'ness will reopen just over 97 years after its first customers sat in its uniquely designed, round cinema.

The Hippodrome, which was the vision of local film-maker Louis Dickson and designed by renowned Scottish architect Matthew Steele, opened on the 11th of March 1912.

The Hippodrome redevelopment forms a central part of the Townscape Heritage Initiative to restore significant buildings within the attractive historical town centre of Bo'ness. The Hippodrome is owned by Scottish Historic Buildings Trust, which undertook the first phase of restoration, and is now leased to Falkirk Council. The architects for the restoration project are Linlithgow based Pollock Hammond Partnership.

The £1.95m initial restoration programme was funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund, Falkirk Council through the Townscape Heritage Initiative, Historic Scotland, the Architectural Heritage Fund, Falkirk Environment Trust and the Manifold Trust. The £200k technical fit-out has been funded by Falkirk Council with support from The National Lottery through the Scottish Arts Council.

Thirteen new jobs will be created including technicians, catering and box office staff.

Councillor Adrian Mahoney, the convener of environment and heritage at Falkirk Council, said: "The Council has been working hard with the building's owners, the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust, and a number of funders to bring this historic cinema back into use. It's great to see the refurbishment work coming to a close and the opening day finally confirmed."

He added: "Local people will be at the very heart of the launch celebrations in April - after all, they've waited a long time for the Hippodrome to re-open. The building stopped showing movies in 1975 and finally closed after a spell as a bingo hall in 1980. The structure fell into disrepair and many people saw it as a something of an eyesore. Thankfully, others also saw the potential for it to be saved and fully restored.

"This restoration process has breathed new life into the Hippodrome and made people realise what a fantastic place this is. We've used the colour scheme when the building was remodelled in the 1920s. In the next few

weeks, the old, worn-out projectors will be replaced with new, 21st century models. We've also added more comfortable seats - along with adaptations to make the building more suitable for disabled visitors.

"These additions - in conjunction with the sensitive restoration work - will give local people and visitors a chance to relive the golden age of cinema-going, in far more comfortable surroundings than ever before.

"I hope the revamped building will be a great success - and a real asset to the many attractions we have in the Falkirk area. I can't wait until the first performance."

And, in contrast to its early days when 510 people crammed into the distinctive round movie theatre's stalls and 215 squeezed into the balcony, 178 customers will be seated in comfort in The Hippodrome's beautifully restored interior.

The restoration programme has seen extensive works undertaken, both inside and out, including the installation of new seating and repair and reupholstering of some old seats; reinstatement of the 1926 decorative scheme and repair of the original copper dome above the manager's office. The exterior and interior of the building were refurbished including the re-harling of the distinctive white exterior and re-roofing of the cinema.

Internally, the fit-out includes the installation of state-of-the art digital and 35mm projection and sound equipment and new screen. A new kitchen and café-bar servery have been installed to provide a modern cinema experience.

Early screenings at The Hippodrome were films made by Louis Dickson himself and included films of the annual Miners' Day Gala in Bo`ness which evolved into the Bo`ness Children`s Fair. Several of Louis Dickson's films survive to this day and are part of the Scottish Screen Archive. Louis Dickson had previously been the official `Kinematographer` at the 1908 Scottish National Exhibition in Edinburgh.

In the 1960's The Hippodrome added bingo to its repertoire and finally stopped screening films in 1975 but continuing for a few more years as a bingo hall. The Hippodrome finally closed its doors in 1980 and until October 2006 it lay empty. It is believed that the last film was The Golden Voyage of Sinbad shown on the 16th August 1975.

The Hippodrome is a key project in the My Future's in Falkirk economic development initiative which also includes the £5 million regeneration of Bo`ness and a £150 million mixed use development to redevelop the town's foreshore.

Further details of The Hippodrome's programming schedule will be released nearer to the opening date.

**Louis Dickson** was born in 1880 and trained as an electrical engineer before entering the cinematograph trade in 1899. A keen cameraman, Dickson was quick to establish himself within the industry and in 1908 he was appointed the official 'Kinematographer' to the Scottish National Exhibition in Edinburgh. Dickson produced local topicals for the Hippodrome including films of the annual Miner's Day Gala in Bo'ness, which evolved into the Bo'ness Children's Fair Festival.

**Matthew Steele** was born in Bo'ness in 1878 and trained as a draughtsman in an architect's office in Glasgow from the age of fifteen. He returned to Bo'ness twelve years later (1905) and set up his own practice. He was responsible for many prominent buildings around Bo'ness, mostly residential. After The Hippodrome, Steele designed a further three cinemas in the area for Louis Dickson. None remain today.

### **The Hippodrome design**

The original design of The Hippodrome featured a circular auditorium with wrap-around gallery facing an archway and small stage.

Two entrances with separate payboxes led in from Hope Street - one to the front stalls, one to the rear, where a stair accessed the balcony. The stalls were shown as seating 510, and the balcony 215.

The balcony was supported on cast-iron pillars and a folding metal stair served as a fire escape for the balcony. A dedicated (but tiny) Operators Box was at the rear of the gallery.

In March 1926 plans were lodged - again by Matthew Steele - to raise the roof, replacing the original flat ceiling with a pitched replacement. The blueprints for the steelwork were drawn up by the Fleming Bros company of Glasgow. At some point after this but before 1930, a second stairway was constructed to give an additional exit from the back of the balcony, and the projection room was also expanded.

In March 1930 further alterations took place, when permission was sought to insert a fire exit door at the centre rear of the stalls. Then in June of that year, the balcony front was realigned to improve sightlines - these plans were by architect John Taylor.

Around 1936, the manager gained a new, large office when an additional floor was constructed over the tiny entrance, allowing what had been the office on the ground floor to add to the foyer space. This was topped by a new dome on the corner. The new, enlarged entrance foyer was decorated with panelling rescued from a ship, which had been broken up locally.

By 1947, the Hippodrome was being run by Caledonian Associated Cinemas, who employed their house architect - Alex Cattenach of Kingussie - to bring the facilities at the cinema up to date. The separate front stalls entrance was blocked up, and a new ladies toilet formed from the space. Other toilets were

refurbished, and the seating respaced and realigned. The main alteration involved enlarging the projection facilities with a new larger box that slightly overhung the back of the balcony and featured a new tight winding staircase to it, and a steel escape ladder from the booth. The orchestra pit was also removed and floored over at this point.

**My Future's in Falkirk** is an innovative 10 year economic development initiative which is transforming the Falkirk area into a diverse and modern economy and a desirable place to work, live and visit. The area already makes a major contribution to the Scottish economy through its position as the hub of the chemicals industry, its extensive transportation links and its growing reputation as a tourism and leisure destination.

My Future's in Falkirk is a partnership between Falkirk Council, BP, Scottish Enterprise and INEOS with funding support from European Regional Development Fund.