



Second screen is part of 2022 plans at Phoenix

By David Gritten

A second screen is part of the plans for 2022 being drawn up by the team at the Phoenix Cinema as they attempt to pull the venue out of a 21-month period when they've had to close their doors or settle for limited audiences. *The Archer* first reported two years ago that a second screen was being considered but of course all plans were put on hold by the pandemic.

Now Phoenix executive director Oliver Meek says they will refurbish the bar and call in a structural engineer to investigate the possibility of rearranging the café space to install a 20-seater second screen.

"That would be a turning point," Oliver said. "We need more programming options. It would bring a lot more diversity to our programmes and we could do many more special events."



Big plans: Oliver Meek

"There's been a lack of investment in our infrastructure behind the scenes and we haven't always had the resources to fix it. But through various bits of funding and having more time over lockdown, we've now started to do so."

Important year

However that works out, it's obvious 2022 will be an important year for the Phoenix. The signs were clear back in October when the new James Bond film *No Time To Die* drew substantial audiences. "Since then, we've seen numbers rising," says Oliver. "Slowly, but they are rising."

It's likely they'll continue to rise, with the current end-of-year release of crowd-pleasers like *The House of Gucci* and

the remake of Stephen Sondheim's musical *West Side Story*, directed by Steven Spielberg. And there's a good chance more people will have returned to cinema-going in December. As Oliver points out: "When everyone's had their third shots (jabs), that will help."

A better place

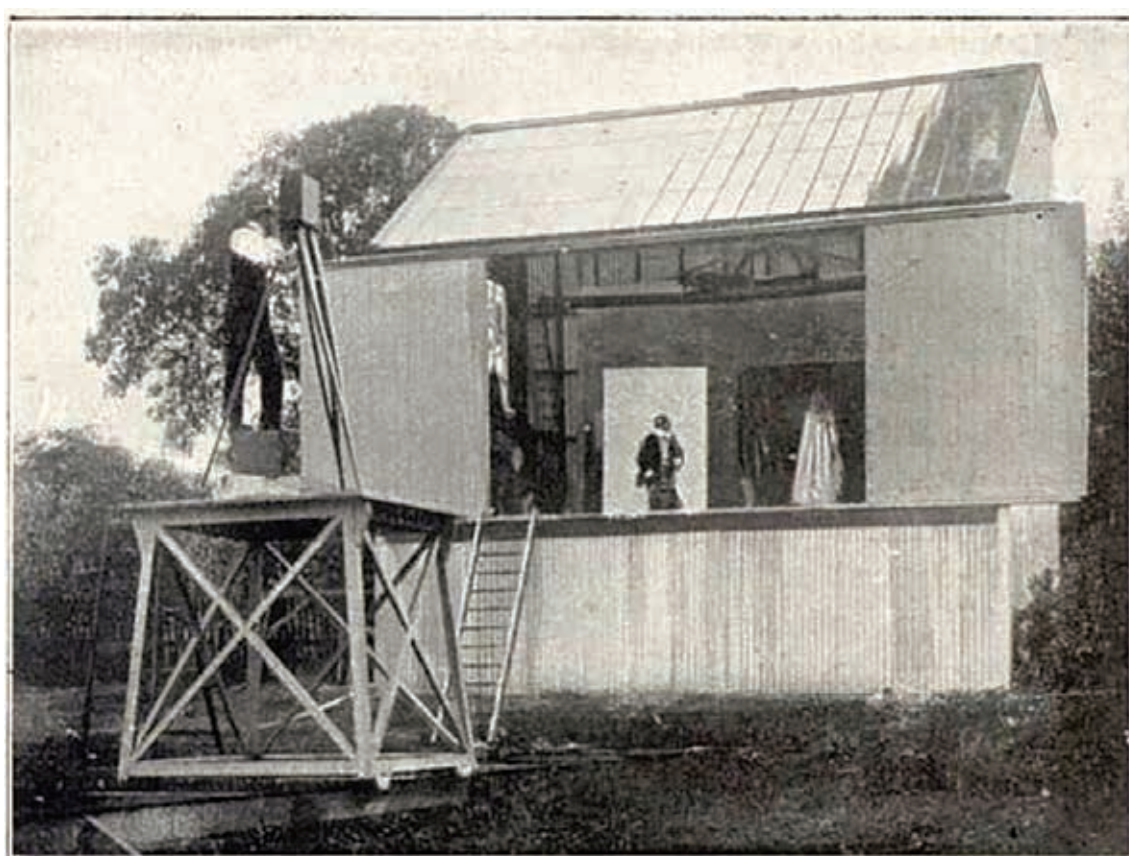
His upbeat approach seems to be shared throughout the Phoenix. Alison Gold, chair of trustees, admits: "We do feel cautiously optimistic. It's been tricky for cinemas because through the summer, when we were open, there weren't big films out there. But that's given us breathing space to make reforms and changes to improve



Upbeat: Alison Gold

the cinema and make it a better place for people to come.

"I think there's a real demand to have a good local cinema," she adds. "I see people have already booked for the operas we're showing next May and June." The Metropolitan Opera, the Bolshoi Ballet and a production of *Hamlet* have all been scheduled. "It's wonderful to have that wide range on offer and to see it's what local people want and they're buying tickets for it. It's what the Phoenix is for, to give people choices."



Open air: A view of Robert Paul's animatograph works on Newton Avenue, off Sydney Road in Muswell Hill around 1901, with the cameraman filming actors on a purpose built stage. Photo courtesy MHFGA Newsletter.

World's first film studio... in leafy Muswell Hill

By Daphne Chamberlain

Did you know that the world's first film studio was in Muswell Hill? The film-maker was an instrument-maker named Robert Paul and 2019 was the 150th anniversary of his birth, celebrated with exhibitions in London and Cardiff.

But there is still a lot of his work to discover. Many of us had our eyes opened recently by Ian Christie in one of Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association's excellent meetings on Zoom.

Born in Holloway and trained in electrical engineering at Finsbury Technical College, Paul was making instruments in Hatton Garden when two Greek American entrepreneurs walked into his workshop. They asked him to replicate a kinetoscope designed by Edison. As the patent didn't extend beyond

the US, Paul found himself with more than a magic lantern.

Starting at the Alhambra in Leicester Square, in March 1896, he was soon showing filmed 'slices of life', shot in places like Blackfriars Bridge and Hyde Park. He was showing projected films at about the same time as the Lumiere brothers in France.

In 1898, he moved to Sydney Road, in the northern reaches of Muswell Hill, where he set up his studio. In his film, *The Motorist*, we can see him driving his own car down Colney Hatch Lane. Ian Christie showed some of these clips in the meeting, telling us that his ambition was to inspire people to hunt down all the still-undiscovered work.

Unfortunately, there is no

trace remaining of the Sydney Road studio. It has all been built over.

East Finchley too

The Zoom was a fascinating glimpse into early films, and reminded me that East Finchley has its own claim to fame with a studio belonging to another of Britain's most prolific silent film makers. From 1911 to 1916, it operated in Newstead House, just north of where Sylvester Road is today. You can read more in *The Archer* online archives for July 2006, page 7. Robert Paul and the Origins of British Cinema by film historian Professor Ian Christie, was published in 2019 by Chicago University Press. ISBN-10 0226105628 / 13 978 0226105625.

Christmas car boot

The final Muswell Hill Indoor Car Boot Sale before Christmas takes place on Saturday 18 December from 10am to 1pm at Hornsey Parish Church Hall, at the foot of Muswell Hill on the corner of Cranley Gardens and Park Rd, N10 3AH. Admission is 50p and refreshments are available. For more information contact 020 8368 8180.

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East Finchley Baptist Church

Please join us for our Christmas services
Sunday 19 December

Christmas Family Service 10.30 am

Carols by Candlelight 6.00 pm

Saturday 25 December

Christmas Morning Service 10.30 am

For more information please contact the Church Office

Email: office@eastfinchleybc.org.uk

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