The Marquee Vanishes……. (sounds like a great title for a film)

9 August 2023// by Neil Goodwin



The approach to The Parade Cinema, through the marquee

Yes, the marquee over the apron in front of The Parade Cinema disappeared…. Just as quickly as it appeared some while ago.

Why? Apparently resulting from a demand by Wiltshire Council as, although it's only a tent, a (very) temporary structure, it didn't chime with the opinion of the Conservation team at the Council. They demanded that it be removed, although it will be allowed to return for limited time(s) in future.

Since it screened its first film, and was then **formally opened by Camilla, then Duchess of Cornwall (now our Queen)** in December '21 The Parade Cinema has developed into one of Marlborough's popular and important cultural centres. All the latest films (and many old as well), live screenings from the prestigious venues in London and elsewhere, business networking sessions, kids and family films and entertainments and much more. And, in the cinema itself, comfortable seats, excellent sound and a crystal clear screen.

But more than just films or entertainment in the auditorium, its bar and cafe has become a magnet for many in the town, especially when able to sit outside (as well as inside) under a heated awning, but protected from any inclement weather by a large and clear marquee.

Marlborough has many coffee shops and cafes, but none that offers the quiet seclusion of The Parade with easy disabled access, and an open air environment whatever the weather. And parking in The Parade is easy too – two hours and free.



The marquee was extremely popular during the recent Family Fun Day in The Parade

The recent **Family Fun Day in the Parade** demonstrated how useful the marquee can be. Too much rain outside and although the bands playing were on a covered stage in the central part of The Parade, many of the visitors used the marquee as somewhere to congregate, socialise and keep dry. It showed its true worth.

But not any more, thanks to some 'decision' of Wiltshire Council Conservation team.

The building was rescued several years ago. Originally the old Union Reform Chapel, it had long since been deconsecrated and used for a variety of purposes over the years. But it was falling into a state of disrepair, and likely – unless some significant and costly renovation work was done – it would probably have fallen down. Or been sadly knocked down.

But the vision of a team led by Robert Hiscox was for it to become Marlborough's cinema, and created to a standard that isn't normally found outside the UK's film industry world around Wardour St. in London's Soho. The Parade Cinema could easily be a West End Preview Theatre. But it's here, and it's Marlborough's own iconic Cinema. And it's kept the character and feel of the original Chapel, although the preachers inside may now be just that bit different. Everything had to be renovated or restored. Foundations, roof, **rotten flooring** – in fact the whole building, and also soundproofed and air conditioning installed. An expensive and extensive programme of necessary works, but all adhering carefully to the directions of the Council's Conservation team.

But, as in any entertainment business, to be successful there needs to be more than just the main attraction. A good pub will succeed on the quality of food it serves rather than just excellence of the beer on tap. The Cinema has an excellent cafe and bar, which supports the cinema side of the business, whilst also keeping the ticket prices down. But the building isn't large, it's not a restaurant, and the use of the space to the front, covered against the weather by the marquee made this side of the business, and by extension the Cinema business as a whole successful. It helps, enormously.

Wiltshire Council's 'decision' to order the marquee to be removed will place pressures on the business as a whole, unnecessary pressures but hopefully (according to founder Robert Hiscox) not so great as to necessitate raising ticket prices.

So when will it be back? And when can we eat and drink outside without keeping a continuous eye upward for the incessant scuds of dark grey rain clouds that have plagued our summer this year.

"Soon, I hope" said Robert Hiscox in answer to that question, but qualifying the answer by noting that it will, as ever, be with the blessing of the Wiltshire Council Conservation team.