

30 OCT 1970

DAILY TELEGRAPH
MAGAZINE

DISC TO HAVE
Shortly after my trip the grand old place expired completely and is due to reopen shortly as a restyled space-age cinema. While it was alive it was one of the finest of London's forsaken cinemas.

A mere two tube stops from the Cincuenta you'll find, if you look hard enough, "the cheapest cinema in the UK" - The Tolmer.

It stands well back from the Hampstead Road, down an alley and alone in the middle of a small dark square, looking something like a lethargic Mexican town hall.

At 2s 6d downstairs and 3s 6d up, it probably is the cheapest cinema around and, just to make sure that this fact doesn't breed contempt, there's a little notice pinned up above the ticket

Essoldo, Kilburn

Tony Matthews

Daily Tel. Mag.
30/10/70

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NEW TOLMER CINEMA?

Application Lodged With Camden

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Director of New Tolmer (1944) Ltd., Mr. David Pomson, told this journal that a hotel on the present site of the Tolmer cinema would attract businessmen arriving late at Euston station, or travelling from it early in the morning.

"We believe there is a definite need for a combined cinema and hotel in the area, and it would be a first class development," he said.

Mr. Pomson said that he had been considering the idea for many years, but thought that the council were not too keen.

"With the area being developed, we thought it time to modernise the cinema, and we are confident in the long run of getting the Council's permission," he added.

No date has yet been fixed for the redevelopment to be completed, if the Council give permission, but Mr. Pomson says: "We will not waste time."

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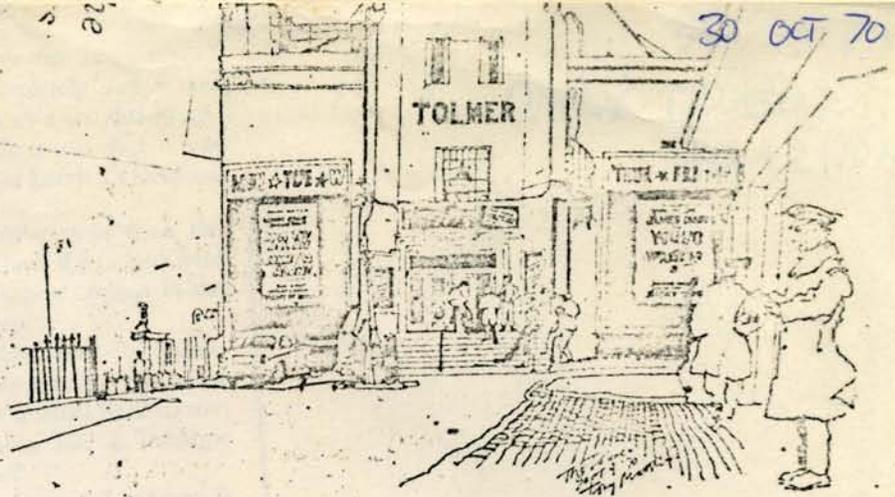
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Tolmer, Hampstead Road

booth: No Sleeping in the Seats. It's a surprisingly large, comfortable cinema and I watched *King Kong Escapes* in comparative luxury, apart from the old man with the eight-day beard who fell asleep in the row behind and came lurching and wheezing over my left shoulder. (It's amazing how much lurching goes on in these places.)

While most of the cinemas I discovered were as bleak as Nissen huts, the Tolmer was almost gaudy with its orange and green paintwork in the corridors and the gold plaster bust above the screen.

King Kong Escapes is a Japanese film made about the time of the Korean War and dubbed into American with some pretty weird political overtones. After 20 minutes, a Japanese family came and sat in front of me; the mother well in the centre of things with her sons radiating from either side. They dubbed the film back into the mother tongue with great enthusiasm while she snorted and grunted her verdict at the end of each scene.

Ten minutes into the Western that followed she was obviously out of her depth and banging her broilley on the floor she pronounced the performance over and marched out followed by her sons.

When the lights came up I staggered after them into the labyrinth of corridors.

On the flight of stairs punctuated by a framed photograph of Sophia Loren, behind a door marked PRIVATE, I came across the manager, Mr Dennis Reynolds.

He's been manager for about 18 months and talks about the past and future of his cinema in a soft, precise way.

"We keep our prices low, so our turnover is high. We try to give them Westerns too, they like that.

"Of course, when you can get a warm, comfy seat and a whole evening's entertainment for a couple of bob you start to attract all the bums and layabouts. When I first arrived here things were looking pretty bad.

"But then I threw out the bad ones and started making sure that nobody

now. The university crowd are turning up and we get a lot of young couples. There's a very loyal matinee too: old-age pensioners. Some of them come three times a week. We only charge them 9d."

I asked him the age of the cinema and he smiled the smile of one who has a story to tell.

"This cinema was the private chapel of Lord Tolmer. That was in the days when all this," he swings an arm, "was Lord Tolmer's estate. Then, one day, a priest hanged himself in the vestry and the chapel was never used again. In 1921 it became a cinema and the present owner took it over in 1944. And sometimes," he adds casually "late at night, when the cleaners arrive, a strange light appears from the far corner of the theatre, glows darkly, then moves up the right aisle, along the back of the stalls, down the centre aisle and disappears into the centre of the screen. We think we've got a ghost."

The Plaza, Camden Town, is just four tube stops from the Cinema and, at 7s and 6s a time, one of the most expensive cinemas I visited.

It also has a hotdog stand that must be held against it - though actually the hotdogs themselves weren't too

Daily Telegraph Nov
30/10/70

