

Some History of 70mm on Tyneside

The exterior of the Queen's Theatre was nothing much to look at. Although the cinema had access from Newcastle's main shopping street (the door and archway are still there), the main entrance was on a narrow side street. The outside of the building with its narrow facade on Northumberland Place was less than impressive. The auditorium though was fabulous, and there was something of what is probably best described as the 'tardis effect' when walking through the doors.

The Queen's had been used for 70mm roadshows before the Cinerama conversion during which it had quite a few extended runs (including 81 weeks of South Pacific). The 6 month Cinerama conversion (which involved adding 12 feet to the overall height of the building), was completed in 1963 and operated for 11 months before the Century projectors & Ashcraft arcs were removed. The relatively simple 70mm reversion took place in 1964. The proposal to install new Vic.8s' in baker box was firmly rejected by the chief - who wanted his DP70s' back! His wish was granted; 892 & 896 plus a complete spare mech head were obtained from the Odeon, Hanley. The 29ft louvered screen was replaced with a conventional surface and a floor to ceiling height of 31ft was achieved. The cinema re-opened in October with It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World. The Sound Of Music ran continuously from April 1965 to December 1967. Fortunately, during this period Rank had another venue in the city, the Pavilion (equipped with Vic.10s') to cover other roadshow bookings.

The Newcastle based Essoldo chain upgraded their flagship theatre around 1965 (re-opening with My Fair Lady). They installed a pair of Vic.8s' alongside the existing Westars and a single Simplex E7. The theatre was twinned in 1971, creating a second screen from the former circle with original proj box. A very plush 600 seater was created from the former stalls area; it was very comfortable indeed. Dual gauge Fedi XTs and RCA sound were installed in the newly constructed box. Despite the mixed reputation of Fedi machines, presentation was always first class. The venue closed in 1990 with Back To The Future, sadly signalling the end of 70mm in Newcastle.