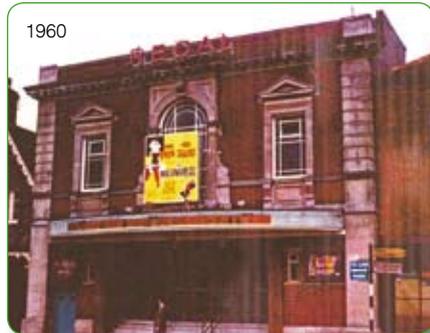


# NOW and THEN

## Town Hall/Old Cinema, Market Place. (Part 2)

The big change came in 1937, when the building was drastically modernised by cinema architect Ernest S. Roberts. The owners were by then A. Austin Pilkington's Theatres, with Barrington Lynham remaining as manager. The steep mansard roof, the balcony and the original entrance were all done away with. The interior was gutted and a circle seating area was created giving the Ringwood audiences a plush new auditorium. The cinema also acquired a new name, the Regal, and it is this cinema which is still fondly remembered by many Ringwood people today. The photograph showing the Regal in 1960 comes from local cinema enthusiast, Phil Wills.



The Regal was also the home of Ringwood Musical & Dramatic Society for many of their performances. Other live concerts were held there, notably Status Quo in 1969. However, declining numbers finally spelt out the end of the cinema, which closed about 1972.

There followed a move to acquire the Regal for the town, which led to a public vote. With hindsight it seems a pity this proposition was defeated, as other towns in the neighbourhood such as Wimborne and Christchurch managed to retain their cinemas/theatres with great support from their residents.

Instead the Regal was turned into an arcade of small shops on the ground floor with a squash club above and an Italian restaurant in the semi-basement below. The arcade was never really

a success and in about 1990 the building was turned into a night-club, initially named Route 42 and subsequently by various other titles. A couple of shops at the front and the restaurant were retained.

During the early 21st century the entire premises were bought by the owners of the Furlong Centre who had plans to restore its Town Hall exterior and create retail space on the ground floor with residential accommodation above. However legal wrangling and the recession delayed these plans being put into practice. The property became very rundown with scaffolding holding up the crumbling facade. A couple of years ago the scaffolding was removed and the building given a slight spruce-up, but it still presents a sorry sight, especially compared to its past glories.

Over the years and up to the present day many different attempts have been made to revive the cinema, without success. Now in June 2015 Development Securities, the owners of the Furlong Centre, have come up with new proposals which again include the restoration of the old building back to more like its Victorian Town Hall appearance.

What the outcome will be is not yet clear but let's hope the building will soon once more stand out as one of Ringwood's most prestigious properties and not as its biggest eyesore!

