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When Coco the Clown came by

Denise Kennedy, of Coppetts Road, N10, has some unique memories of the Odeon Muswell Hill, which celebrated its 75th birthday last month, and of one very special visitor.

My father, Harry Kennedy, became the manager of the Odeon Muswell Hill in 1945; in fact that is why my parents moved to Muswell Hill. He had previously been the manager at the Odeon in St Alban's.

My father was the manager in Muswell Hill until about 1954; I cannot remember exactly the year he left. I came with them as a new-born baby and we lived in a flat opposite the cinema.

In those days, the manager was more like an acting Host and would appear on stage to announce the films. My father ran a children's Saturday morning show and anyone of my sort of age who still lives in Muswell Hill would remember him as Uncle Harry.

When I was a child going to the children's show I was allowed to sit upstairs alone, which I loved. I had the whole place to myself. Downstairs was always very noisy.

From our Pet to the Kinks

I remember my father going off to work each evening in full evening wear, black dinner jacket and bow tie. Various stars would appear from time to time and I believe it is where Petula Clark appeared when

she was just 14 years old.

I remember Coco the Clown (my father had known him for some years) paying a visit. I have a photo of myself holding Coco's hand crossing the zebra crossing (which is still there) opposite the cinema. I was wearing my school uniform, which was that of St. Martin's Convent, Pages Lane, then a private school run by nuns.

Maybe some of your readers would recognise themselves in the photo. I would have been about seven so it was probably taken around 1952. I remember being fascinated by the string coming down from Coco's sleeve, which he would pull to make his hair stand on end.

When my Dad left the Odeon, he bought a café at the top of Muswell Road. He called it The Palace Café and there is still a café on the same spot, now called The Broadway Cafe. There was a nice lady who worked for him as his cook by the name of Mrs Davies. She was the mother of Ray and Dave, who became The Kinks. I knew her well and she was absolutely delightful. They had a really wonderful mum and my parents were very fond of her.



Denise Kennedy crosses the road in Muswell Hill with Coco the Clown in the early 1950s.

Things that used to be in 1936

By Daphne Chamberlain

It was *Things to Come* and things that used to be at Muswell Hill Odeon on 9 September. The cinema celebrated its 75th anniversary with a lunchtime charity screening of the first film shown there, plus advertisements and trailers from that first evening.

Did any "intelligent young man of 16 or thereabouts" in the 1936 audience respond to the advertisement for a trainee projectionist? Did anyone help out Stanley Holloway as Sam, searching his memory for something that "began with a D" in the Co-op? That was a mini-feature in itself.

I was among the large audience transported to 1936. So was Denise Kennedy, whose memories of the time her

father managed the Odeon are printed here too. Denise particularly enjoyed the newsreel clip of 1930s stars arriving for that first-ever screening. A bonus for her was that it was filmed from inside the foyer, looking out.

She said: "You could see in the background the shop named Humphreys. It was a well-known clothing shop in Muswell Hill then and I remember it well from my

childhood as we lived in the top flat above."

Getting it right

The main feature, *Things to Come* by HG Wells, starring Ralph Richardson and Raymond Massey, had the 2011 audience totting up the right and wrong prophecies on the way out. Off the mark with 21st century characters in Roman togas and leaping untrained into space rockets, but "He got the blitz right", and "Was that epidemic radiation sickness?"

Then a stirring rendition of the National Anthem froze everyone in their tracks. We may not all have been around in 1936, but most of us remembered the time when you scooted out at top speed to avoid the anthem. If you got caught, though, you stood to attention, and early training prevailed.

Thanks for an entertaining afternoon, Odeon, from which one third of the ticket sales was divided equally between the Variety Club and the NSPCC.

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