



## The Broadway Cinema Pitsea. 1930 - 1970



22 Pages

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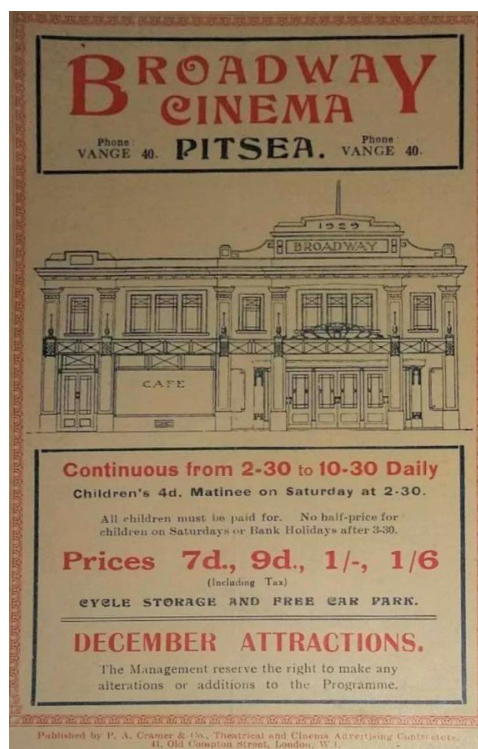
Alan Cox 2023

Registered address: The Green Centre, Wat Tyler County Park, Pitsea Hall Lane, Pitsea, Essex, SS16 4UH





White Shadows in the South Seas 1928, was a silent film



1930

Broadway, Pitsea  
Imposing Construction  
Built in Tudor Style

The Broadway Kinema, Pitsea, owned by Roger H Howard, which was opened last week, stands on the Southend – London Road, and forms, with its 55ft frontage, an imposing corner feature to new shopping centre.

Built in Tudor style, by J. C. Flaxman and Son's Ltd, the work has been made to harmonise with the main features of the New Town. The two local architects responsible for most of Pitsea's design, A.J. Varndell and L.A. Green, F.F.A., L.P.A., undertook the work of planning the new Kinema.

The Pitsea Broadway has an area of 15,000 sq. ft., all on one floor, with ample rake, and good provision has been made for a motor park and cycle accommodation.

## Well – equipped stage

The foyer and vestibule have been laid out on most generous terms, and stage is equipped to deal with any musical or dramatic performance.

The interior decorations have been carried out in a restful scheme of brown, buff and cream, the design being Neo Grec, the fibrous plaster decorations of walls and ceilings being supplied by Brown and Medley, Finsbury Park, London. Hangings and draperies which harmonise, by the addition of blue and green, with the wall decorations, were carried out and made by Kemballs, of Westcliff. The tableau curtain and pelmet are old gold and blue velour, the screen curtains being of a lighter shade of silk.

The terrazzo flooring of the vestibule, introducing an original design of mosaic pavement modelled on the sun's ray's emanating from a semi-circular centre, was the work of Tramontini Ltd, of Westcliff.

Flood lighting effects have been allowed for in the design, and some charming results, harmonising with the general colour scheme, have been produced by F.P. Richard and Co., Westcliff.

The cellulose bronzing to the entrance door, and other parts, where such treatment could be artistically given, has been done by Decra Ltd, Acton. The floors in the main are of reinforced concrete, with "self-sentering" expanded metal. The auditorium ceiling of plaster on double mesh herring-bone steel lath, has been supplied by the Self-Sentering Expanded Metal Co Ltd, London.

# Heating and Ventilation

Heating arrangement consist of an accelerated low pressure hot water system of radiators, ensuring an equal distribution of warmth. Ventilation, which has been executed by Edw. Deane and Beale Ltd., London Bridge, has been constructed to ensure an ample circulation of pre-heated fresh air, the vitiated air being extracted by the operation of a large electric fan over the proscenium opening. Fresh air inlets are provided in suitable positions in the auditorium.

This theatre possesses its own electric generating plant, which is driven by a Crossley crude oil engine of 45 h.p The electric generator is a Newton with an output of twenty five K.W.

The projectors used are Kalee No "8" with ninety-four feet throw.

Prices of admission have been fixed at 6d. to 1s 6d, with nightly performances from 5.15 to 10.30, except Wednesday and Saturday, when the doors will open at 2.30.

Located in Pitsea, Essex. Its original name was Broadway and was one of a number of buildings funded by local businessman Roger H Howard. The theatre also featured a below floor level orchestra pit and upstairs living accommodation. It was independently operated and presented both films and variety performances in the early days.

The Century Cinema first opened its doors on Friday 28th March 1930. The chairman of Pitsea Parish Council, Mr. William Pedlar performed the opening duties

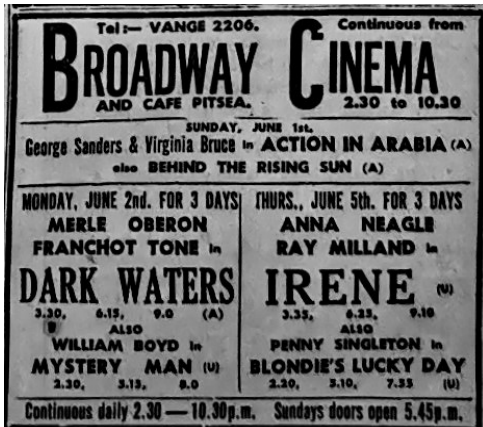
By 1945 it had become part of Mr B Fortesque's Radion circuit and later passed to Mrs R F Webster along with the Regal at Rayleigh.

## FIRE AT CINEMA

A Fire broke out in a dressing room at the Broadway Cinema, but it was soon extinguished. The afternoon performance was stopped, but the audience stayed in their seats, after fifteen minutes the programme was resumed.

*The Essex Chronical December 1936*





1947



April 1954



May 1954

A café is now a part of the activities of  
The Broadway Kinema, Pitsea.

*Kinematograph Weekly July 1934*



*Kinematograph Weekly April 1951*

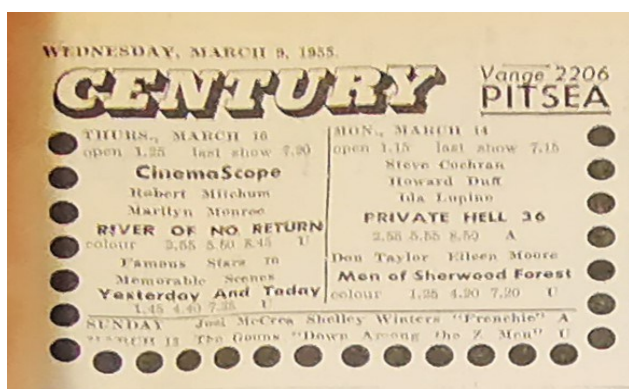


1954

The Broadway Cinema was taken over by the Granada Theatres Ltd. chain on 28th June 1954 it was closed it on 2nd January 1955 for modernisation. And re-opened as the Century Cinema on 15th February 1955.



Basildon Standard December 1955



March 1955



1957

## Granada Kinema for New Town

First of the major groups to enter the new town areas is Granada, which Will open it's Century Theatre early next month in the rapidly growing Pitsea - Basildon district of Essex.

The Century is the new name for the old Broadway on the London-Pitsea road.

Granada technical staff under the direction of Mr C W Bisbing and Mr Charles Mudd, interior decoration are busy making this theatre the best to rival any in the group.

The theatre will be fully equipped with Cinemascope and have it's own restaurant, snack bar, shops and car park. The Century reopens with the pre release of 20th Century - Fox Cinema Scope film "Long John Silver"

Tuesday Evening 15th February 1955



## Projectionist Jack Fisher remembers when he worked there,

The Cinema was built by the Howard group and named "The Broadway" and opened in 1929.

It was built as a 650 seat Theatre as well. In the auditorium the seating was arranged with 3 isles. One down each side, with 6 exits, and one down the middle. The stage was arranged so shows could be put on in front of the screen with access to the stage from both sides with a changing room on each side.

The screen was flat on the rear wall of the stage and had two sets of curtains (Tabs). There was a half-moon shape orchestra pit in front of the stage

with access to the rooms under the stage. For some reason the orchestra pit door and the rear access door to the under stage rooms were in line with each other. If one was left open and someone opened the other door light would flood into the auditorium.

The heating was a solid fuel, manual fed coke boiler accessed from outside.

This heated the radiator's down each side in recesses on the side walls

behind them were vents to let air in through the radiators to heat the auditorium.

Extraction of the air was through the main chandeliers.

These chandeliers were three wooden framed glass panelled round discs close to the ceiling, they were the main source of lighting for the auditorium.

Because the air was extracted through the chandeliers. They had to be kept clean to allow them to light the auditorium.

Most audience smoked and this was drawn, up through the chandeliers making them brown with nicotine.

To clean them they were lowered to the floor on a cable,

On the side walls in decorated panels, and either side of the stage were strip lights.

All lighting was operated from the projection room on manual dimmers.

In the projection room were installed two projectors. These were Ross F.C. A good British made. Easy to maintain and very reliable.

Lighting for the projectors were Ross arc lights powered by the cinema's own generators.

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The Granada Group bought the cinema in 1956 and renamed it "Century" Any cinema in the Granada Group that was under 1000 seats was called a Century any over 1000 was a Granada. The "Broadway" was revamped.

The seating was changed and realigned so there was two isle's instead of three.

The orchestra pit was removed and floored over. Two of the side exits were bricked up This gave them room to install extra a 100 seats

making it a 750 seat cinema. The strip light on the side walls and the arch of the stage were removed. The foyer was reduced in size and a sweet shop was introduced.

The flat above the foyer was closed and part of it made into a Restaurant supplied from the kitchens on the ground floor with a manual operated dumb waiter.

There was little change in the projection room. The arc light were changed to an American make called Peerless but were still powered from the generators.

The generators also powered the emergency lighting. It was not till 1965 that the power for the arc lights for the projectors and secondary lighting system was changed to mains power.

The arc light were powered with mercury rectifiers and the emergency light was a battery system.

Also installed was a new system called Projectomatic. This enabled the projectors to change over from one to the other automatically.

This was the first automatic system in the south east. Other projectionist from all over Essex would visit to see it working.

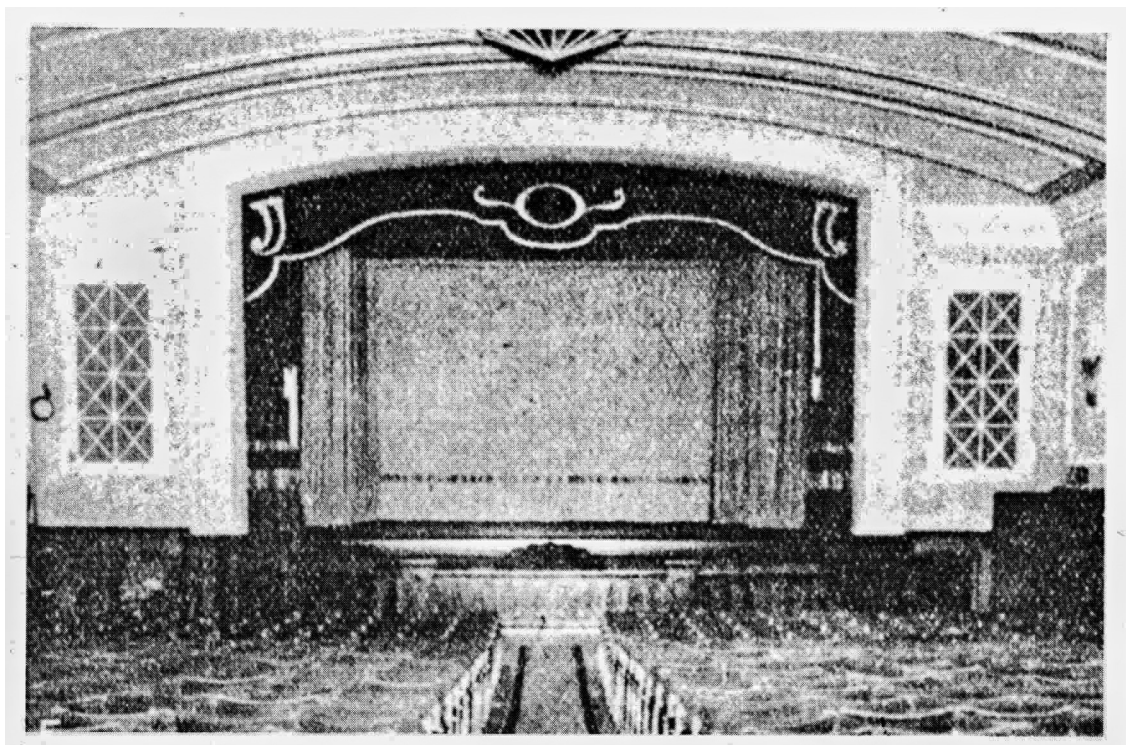
On the stage they installed a new curved screen on a metal frame and brought it forward on the stage

In the late 60s the manager a Mr Haines decided to try and increase the audience on Sundays. He wanted to put a pop group on for half an hour every other Sunday.

This meant trying to increase the size of the stage. In the power house where the generators were housed were two chain jack's on H girders. Above the screen on the stage were another two H girder's.

By Transferring the jacks from the power house to the stage we were able to jack up the screen and role it to the back wall making more than adequate room to put a group on.

One of the groups that played there were the Espresso five, later to become the resident group at the Locarno in Basildon.



150 Scooter Club ( Lambretta) met at the Century Cinema Café.

*October 1958*



Winners of the Guy Fawkes competition held at the Century Cinema Saturday morning, First prize went to Barry White in the centre , second was brothers Raymond and Peter Clark on the left And third was Alison Thomas, Mr Dawson the manager at the back.

*October 1956*



After crowning Joan Bartle carnival queen with recording star Russ Hamilton.



Russ Hamilton on the balcony of the *July 1958*





Basildon Standard reporter Lorna tried a spell as an  
Usherette and sales girl  
1960



Pictured with the young members of their audience outside the Century Cinema are Peter Watts, Roy Miller and Alan Goodall of the Basildon Brotherhood of Magicians. The Brotherhood entertained the youngsters with a special show before the showing of their usual films on Saturday.

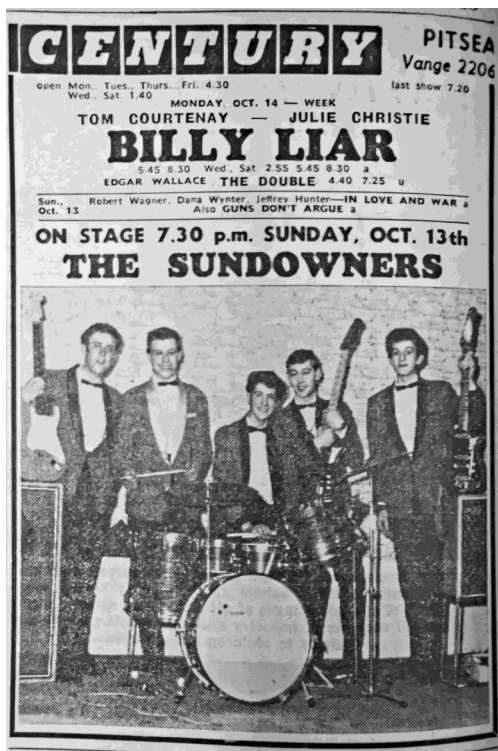
September 1961



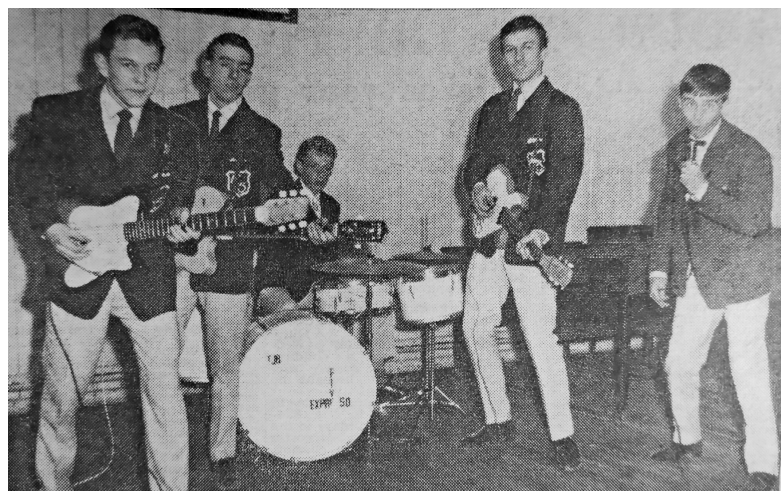
The excitement is too much to bear. Wrestling fans jump to their feet shouting and shaking their fists during the bout between Doctor Death and Mike Marion at the Century Cinema Pitsea on Friday.  
*Times and Recorder 1962*



Charles Fisher, Roy Page and Tony WarDekker



October 1963



Expresso Five rehearsing at Craylands Youth Centre



November 1963



Entries in the Pitsea Carnival Queen Contest

Back row - Maureen Toland, Georgina Sammett, Pat Barker, Christine Harrison,  
 Middle row - Christine Wiggins, Margaret Howard, Rosemary Whitehead, Pam Morris,  
 Front row - Christine Cole, Veronica Hack, Carol Payne, Brenda Sartain

*Basildon Standard May 1964*



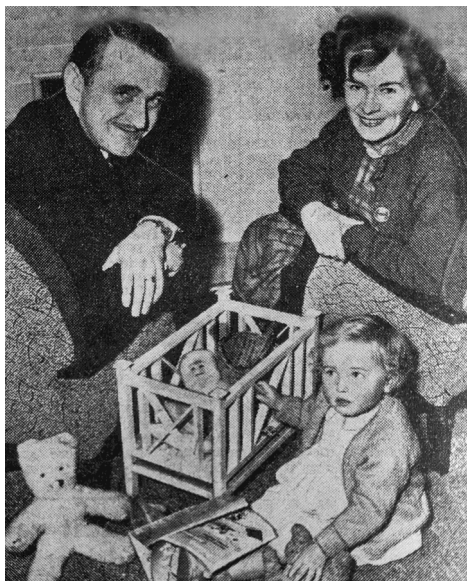
## Some of the Managers



Mr Fred Dawson manager at the Century Cinema, Pitsea, with some of the Competitors in Wednesday's Davy Crockett - Calamity Jane competition.



*Fred Dawson 1958*

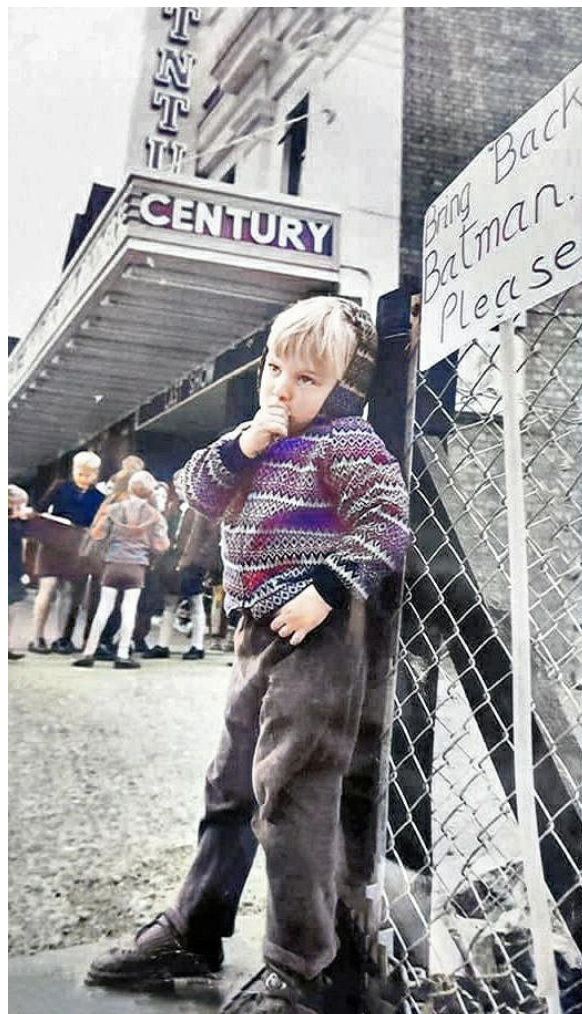


New manager of the Century Pitsea is Mr G S Bird.  
*1958*



Mr Haynes  
*August 1963*

Mr George Wilson co-manager from around 1967 till closure and remained employed at the venue till 27th February 1971 when he retired.



# BINGO AT THE CENTURY WILL MEAN TOWN HAS NO CINEMA

The Century Cinema at Pitsea, the only one in the New Town , will close in the near future if the owners, Granada Theatres Ltd, have their way.

If this happens, the only cinema in the country's second biggest urban district will be the Ritz at Billericay, which was bought by Billericay Town Football Club. Has an uncertain future itself.

Granada this week applied to Basildon Council for planning permission to change the use of the cinema.

They want to run the building as a family leisure centre with prize Bingo and amusement machines. A few months ago, Granada made a different application to the Council. At the time they wanted to turn it in too a supermarket - this request was turned down.



*Basildon Standard Recorder February 1969*





**CENTURY** PITSEA  
**£1500 SUPERBINGO**  
 .....  
 FOUNDER MEMBERSHIP—FREE   
**THURSDAY MATINEE** DOORS OPEN 1.30  
 EYES DOWN 2.15  
**THURSDAY EVENING** DOORS OPEN 7.00  
 EYES DOWN 8.00  
**SUNDAY EVENING** DOORS OPEN 6.30  
 EYES DOWN 7.30  
 ★ **MAGNIFICENT FREE JACKPOT**  
 ★ **PLUS BIG INTER-CLUB PRIZES**  
 -----  
 To: CENTURY, PITSEA Date .....  
 I wish to apply for membership of the Granada and Century Bingo  
 and Social Club and if elected I agree to abide by the rules of the  
 Club for the time being or as hereafter amended. I declare that  
 I am over 18 years of age.  
 FULL NAME MR./MRS./MISS .....  
 ADDRESS .....  
 OCCUPATION ..... SIGNATURE .....

*Standard Recorder August 1967*





*Standard Recorder October 23rd 1970*

## No more films at Century

BASILDON'S last remaining cinema is to come under the axe.

The Century, in High Road, Pitsea, will show its last film at the end of this month before becoming a six-days-a-week bingo centre.

The move will leave the urban district without a commercial cinema.

*Standard Recorder October 23rd 1970*



*With thanka to Glen wood*

The Compton organ opposite was removed from the cinema and was kept at the Nurses College, Rochford, Essex. until 1994 when the college was demolished.

After a couple of years in storage it now resides at Sutton Hall, Rochford, Essex. The photo opposite is dated November 2008.

It had a twin installed at the State Cinema, Grays, Essex.





*November 1971*



*May 1991*



The club was renamed Gala in 1991 when Granada Social Clubs (Granada Theatres Ltd.) merged with Coral Social Clubs who were owned by brewery company Bass.

In 1997 Bass sold their bingo chain in a management buy-in and the club continued as Gala until owner Gala Coral Group Ltd announced their intention to close down the venue following a reorganisation of the company that also saw other bingo clubs closed throughout the United Kingdom. .

The final bingo session was held on Monday 27th July, 2009

In the late-2010's squatters took over the building and on the afternoon of 3rd September 2019 six fire engines attended a blaze which had broken out in the building.

The building is now being demolished late February 2023



*Taken Friday 28th February 2023*

## VANGE BOOKLETS

All Saints Church Hall 1931 £2.10  
Barges at Vange Wharf £2.10  
Cashes Well No5 £2.10  
John (Paddy) Hemingway £1.50  
The Barge Inn 1832 – 2015 £2.50  
The Bull Public House 1878— 1961 £1.50  
The Vange Crystal Well £1.50  
Vange Board School 1876 £5.80  
Vange Fire Station 1934 – 1962 £3.90  
Vange Hall Brick Works 1886—1921 £3.30  
Vange Reservoir & Southend Water Company £2.00  
Vange Swimming Pool 1933-1952 £2.00  
The Shops of Vange London Road & High Road £5.00  
The 1st Pitsea and Vange Scouts 1913—1970 £4.50  
3rd Battalion Essex Home Guard. Vange and Pitsea. £2.80  
Royal Observer Corps, Monitoring Post, Vange, Essex. £2.10

## BASILDON BOOKLET

Locarno Mecca Dancing £6.00 1961 - 1971

## PITSEA BOOKLETS

W. J. Wager Dairies £1.50  
Tuskite Works Pitsea Hall Lane £1.50  
Broadway Cinema 1930—1970 £3.00  
Pitsea United 1909—1971 £8.70  
The Old Pitsea Market 1924—1969 £2.60



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SS16 4UH.

Monday & Wednesday's 10am—12pm

Saturdays 10am—3pm