

DANGER WITHIN - ESPECIALLY FOR THE GAUMONT

Iain Wakeford 2017

In the early 1990's the Surrey Federation of Women's Institutes compiled a book on 'Surrey Within Living Memory'. In it numerous members of local WI's recalled often amusing incidents from their childhood, including one lady from the Chobham Institute who recalled the shooting of various films in the area during the 1940's and 50's.

'In the 1940s at Chobham, a film crew shot the scenes for a St Trinians' film, and managed to do it on a Wednesday afternoon as that was half-day closing! They also shot the film Danger Within at Chobham Clump with several famous names. When we eventually saw it in a Woking cinema (there were three then, the Ritz, the Odeon and the Plaza) the film opened with several of the stars lying in the sun, and the caption underneath stated "Italy 1944" – which caused much laughter and cheering from the locals'.

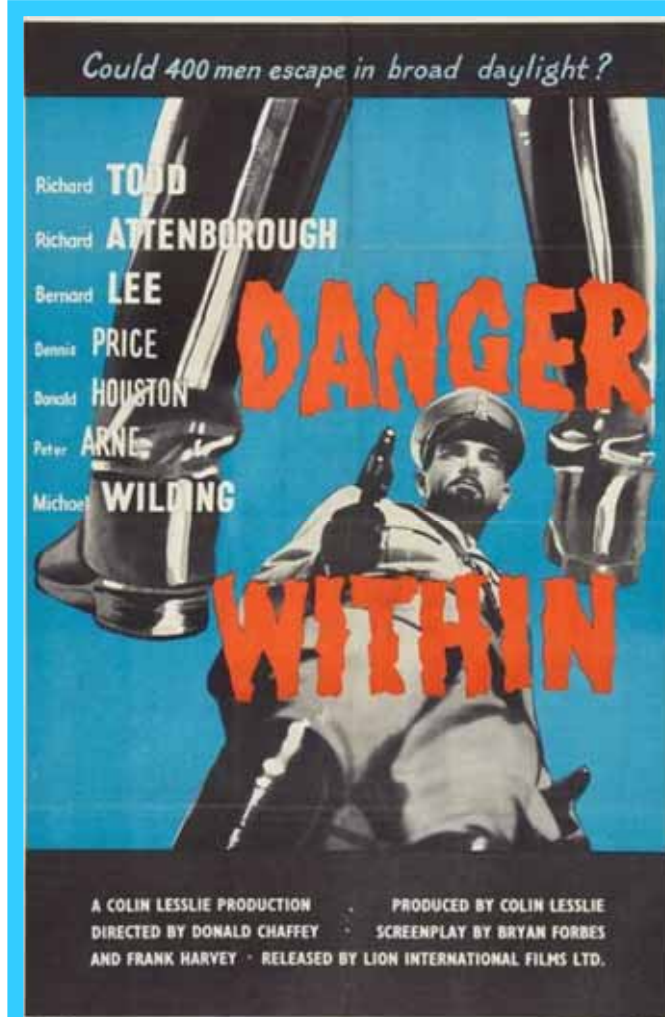
The film, which was released in 1959, was a sort of Prisoner-of-War whodunit, starring Richard Attenborough, Bernard Lee and Richard Todd. Coincidentally a year before the WI book was released, Todd recorded in an interview his

own memories of the film, directed by Don Chaffey.

'It was filmed on the heath in Surrey, where they constructed a complete prison camp. The opening was inspirational on Don's part. It opened with a full-scale battle in the desert, stock shots taken from actual war footage; the titles rolled over this huge battle and, when they finished, the camera came in to a body lying in the sand, face down. You naturally think this is one of the casualties of the battle. The camera dwells on the body for a few moments and suddenly its right hand comes around and scratches its backside. Then the camera pulls away and you see it is just one of the prisoners-of-war snoozing in the compound. It was a wonderful shot'.

The film obviously had its amusing moments, although I suspect that few who saw the film laughed as much as the kids from Chobham - they knew that 'Italy' was really just a few miles up the road!

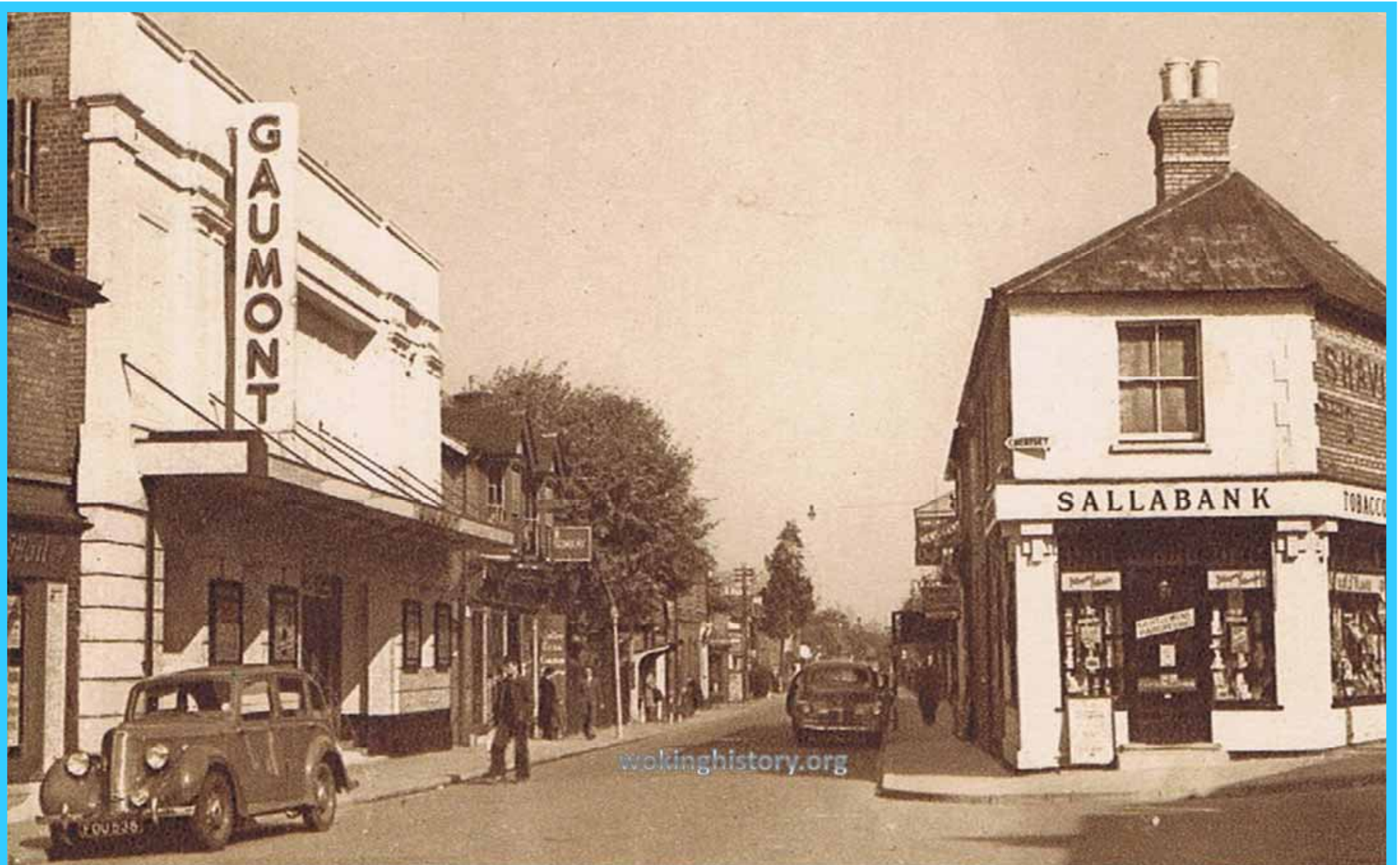
By the time 'Danger Within' was on show in Woking, The Plaza (which by then had actually been renamed the Gaumont), was on its last



A poster for the film that was partially shot on Chobham Common.

The Clump Chobham Common.





The cinema in its heyday

legs. The venue had originally opened in 1911 as the Central Halls Cinema in a building that had previously been the local Liberal Club (until entrepreneur Henry Quartermaine got hold of it).

There is a wonderful story that one day a local farmer herding his cows through town to

market discovered that at least one had gone missing – only to be discovered in the balcony of the Chertsey Road cinema!

In 1927 it was rebuilt as Woking's 'Super Cinema', the 'palatial Plaza', before becoming the Gaumont in 1952 when £1,200 was spent on installing new curtains and £1,400 on re-carpeting the stalls and balcony. In 1955 sixteen workmen installed a new 'stereo



The Gaumont closed in 1959 and was demolished the year after, the site later being developed with five new shops.

metallic screen' and other equipment 'almost overnight' to allow the latest cinemascope films to be shown, but even with the introduction of seven-day a week opening in 1956 the cinema was in decline. The showing of Bill Hayley & His Comets' film 'Rock Around the Clock' didn't help, when several seats were damaged by the over-enthusiastic members of the audience trying to 'jive' to the film.

By 1959 it was decided to close the cinema and build new shops on the site – the building being demolished in the early 1960's and the row of five shops constructed soon after.

