

Folk of Forest Gate

HAVING FUN



John Maltby photographed Forest Gate Odeon in 1937. The later photo (L) is from 1975: film adverts on the bus are for Odeon’s competitor, ABC Cinemas.

There used to be many more cinemas on the high street, and their decline shows the change in leisure, particularly since televisions became affordable from the 1950s onwards. Before the era of the multiplex, cinemas also hosted concerts and variety shows on their stages, which were later often converted into bingo halls. Particular to Forest Gate was a large, indoor skating-rink, which itself used to be a cinema, as well as a theatre, billiard club, and indoor-tennis hall.

“There was the Queens... then next to that was the Odeon... There was another one down Green Street, called the Carlton. There was one at Manor Park, the Coronation. There was a small one up Woodgrange Road at one time... They were different circuits. They had different films at different times.”
– Beryl Giller

“I used to go to the cinema three times a week. Three new films each week, and you could go in any old time... You’d get two films; the B-film was much shorter... The ashtray in front of you was always full. Every time you saw a film you’d look up towards the light shining on the screen: smoke going up. Smoke was everywhere and everywhere was brown with smoke.”
– Keith Green

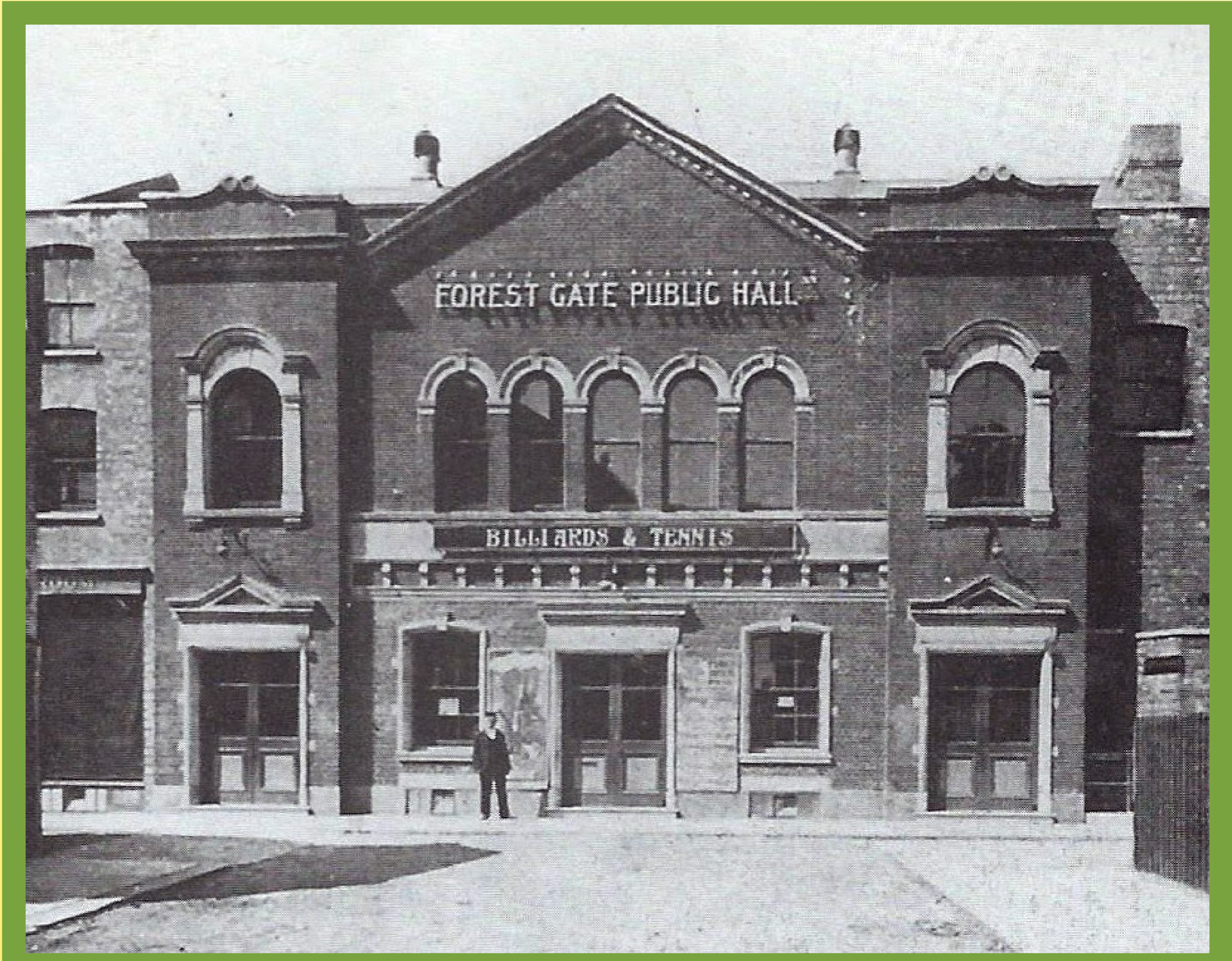
“You know what they used to call ‘em? The ‘bug hutch’. You’d sit down on the seats and ‘pffft’, clouds of dust lifting up... It went to bingo. There was people ‘til ten at night playing bingo. Very popular.”
– Michael Prendergast



The Odeon (pictured 1983) closed, but reopened for snooker and bingo.

“I could hear the music blaring out frequently. It was usually Sousa’s marches; rousing music to encourage people to come along and skate around... For a kid going in it was a dark area, a big wooden floor. There were seats around the outside where you could sit and watch. There was a bar which separated the actual skating surface from where you came and where you walked around the edge... If you went round there just as it was opening up on a Saturday morning, you could go in there and pick out all the ball-bearings. What we used the ball-bearings for I haven’t the faintest idea. It was just for the fun of it.”
– Harold Gillow

“I was quite amazed that I came out and my bike was still there! I mean, if you wanted to go roller skating you’d go to Forest Gate or Alexandra Palace. Everyone had skates. Everyone could skate... I think in the end I actually used my skates to make a box car. That was all the rage. You put a pair of skates on the back and big wheels on the front.”
– Kevin Molyneux



The Public Hall, built in 1902, which became the skating-rink.

An advertisement for the rink. Wooden skates had to be hired for indoor use.

Stills from a British Pathe film, ‘Soccer on Skates!’, made in 1934.

FOREST GATE RINK

Telephone : MARYLAND 4466

2 Sessions Daily - - 2.30 — 7.30

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