

HS

CINEMAS

'Ritz'

S.E.E.

27.6.61

RITZ IS LATEST IN LIST OF CLOSURES

"Echo" Film Correspondent

EACH year a Southampton cinema dies. This has been the way of things since 1956. Victim in 1961 is the 850-seater Ritz at Bitterne, most recently built of the Borough's picture palaces, which closes its doors for the final time on Saturday night.

"When this cinema was built just before the war," manager Mr. R. L. Paton sadly told me, "it probably had an expectation of a 50 to 60-year life. But we've tried everything..."

People blame the "telly" for lack of business he went on. But it wasn't just a case of television; people's tastes seemed to have changed. "We've put on every type of programme, but we can't get a whole audience."

The Ritz is one of a small circuit of "halls"—the company, with headquarters at Bournemouth, is Harry Mears Theatres—and the smaller circuits were "frozen out" to quite a large extent on "product," which today was very limited, Mr. Paton pointed out.

The manager, who has 42 years' experience in cinemas and live theatres behind him, told me that this will be the third time in three years that he has gone into a cinema—he has only been manager for a few months—literally to close it.

"Each time I've gone in with the knowledge that I'm not even flogging a dead horse—just picking up the bones."

The death of the Ritz will cause mourning among the children of Bitterne, for the management also runs a 6d. matinee for the kiddies every Saturday morning. Regular attendance: Anything up to 700 children.

Re-equipped

Since Harry Mears' company took over the Ritz three or four years ago it has been re-equipped and re-furnished. "A tremendous amount of money was spent on it," Mr. Paton added, "but it hasn't done any good at all..."

Among the staff of 18 is Mr. Arthur Smith, the doorman and "general factotum," who has been at the Ritz since shortly after it opened.

The company is trying to absorb as many of the staff as possible into either their other local cinema, the Woolston Picture Theatre, or—if they are able to travel the distance—into their cinemas at Bournemouth—they have three there.

The other cinemas which have closed are the High-street Gaiety

(1956), the Northam Plaza (1957), the Portwood Palladium (1958), the Swaythling Savoy (1959), and the Shirley Rialto (1960).

Ironically, the title of the last film to be shown at the Ritz is "The Last Command"!



The Ritz—"Echo" photo.