# Bristol’s forgotten IMAX reopens as community megascreen in cult cinema revival



In a heartwarming revival story, Bristol's forgotten IMAX screen is witnessing a resurgence as a beloved community cinema space, celebrated in the documentary *The Big Picture* by director Arthur Cauty. This documentary, which will premiere in May, encapsulates the cinema's journey from its inception at the turn of the millennium to its closure in 2007, followed by a decade of neglect and its eventual grassroots revival.

Originally regarded as a cutting-edge venue in the southwest of England, the Bristol IMAX boasted a massive 19 by 15 metre screen and was equipped with a projector that rivalled the size of a small car. Unfortunately, financial mismanagement and shifting market dynamics led to its closure, leaving the grand auditorium largely abandoned. Arthur Cauty, who lived in Bristol for ten years before discovering the cinema, reflected on its strange disappearance from the public consciousness, noting, “I knew the building—a cylindrical, red brick tower in the harbour side—but as it was right next to the aquarium, I’d assumed it was a giant fish tank.”

Cauty’s curiosity compelled him to explore the reasons behind the IMAX's neglect and its eventual transformation. This exploration reveals a broader narrative: Bristol’s rich cinematic heritage, which includes being the birthplace of notable figures like Cary Grant and motion picture innovator William Friese-Greene. The city was once home to forty cinemas, and its status as a UNESCO City of Film underscores its vibrant cultural landscape.

The revival was spearheaded by Timon Singh and Dave Taylor, two local cinephiles who recognised the potential of the dormant space. Singh, known for his Bristol Bad Film Club, and Taylor, the owner of the iconic 20th Century Flicks video shop, sought permission from the Bristol Aquarium—now responsible for the site—to launch the Forbidden Worlds festival in 2022, marking the 40th anniversary of the video shop. What began as a simple celebration of cult cinema quickly gained traction, bringing audiences back to the previously forgotten IMAX.

However, the road to revival was fraught with challenges. The duo could not utilise the original IMAX projector, forcing them to depend on their own equipment, which led to moments of tension, as illustrated by Taylor’s nervous explanation of how a misstep during lamp changes could be catastrophic. Their efforts, described by Taylor as being akin to “squatting” in the cinema, relied on community creativity and collaboration, shining a light on the power of grassroots initiatives in an era of commercialisation.

The reformed cinema has been rebranded as the Bristol Megascreen and now offers an eclectic mix of screenings, from cult horror to sci-fi classics, significantly contributing to the city’s independent cinema culture. Dr Charlotte Crofts, a professor of cinema arts at UWE Bristol, emphasised that the resurgence of the Megascreen is a “profoundly significant moment” for local cinematic experiences, highlighting how the venue has re-energised Bristol's cultural landscape. Crofts further noted, “Its revival has injected a vital energy into a landscape that thrives on unique cinematic experiences,” signalling the importance of community-driven efforts in maintaining cultural spaces.

As the *Big Picture* documentary gears up for its premiere during the Forbidden Worlds festival, it stands as a testament to the resilience of local cinema communities. The film, along with screenings of cult classics such as *Aliens* and *Tremors*, will serve to reinforce the collective memory of the IMAX and honour its journey from abandonment to renewed relevance. In an age where streaming services dominate the film industry, the revival of Bristol’s Megascreen offers a fresh reminder of the enduring magic of shared cinematic experiences, enriching the city’s film narrative as it steps back into the limelight.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/18/revival-of-bristols-forgotten-imax-cinema-revealed-on-the-big-screen), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/18/revival-of-bristols-forgotten-imax-cinema-revealed-on-the-big-screen), [[3]](https://www.bristol247.com/culture/film/new-documentary-tells-story-bristol-cinema-brought-back-life/)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/18/revival-of-bristols-forgotten-imax-cinema-revealed-on-the-big-screen), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/18/revival-of-bristols-forgotten-imax-cinema-revealed-on-the-big-screen), [[3]](https://www.bristol247.com/culture/film/new-documentary-tells-story-bristol-cinema-brought-back-life/)
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7. Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/18/revival-of-bristols-forgotten-imax-cinema-revealed-on-the-big-screen), [[3]](https://www.bristol247.com/culture/film/new-documentary-tells-story-bristol-cinema-brought-back-life/), [[4]](https://bristolcityoffilm.co.uk/see-the-big-picture-at-forbidden-worlds-festival/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/18/revival-of-bristols-forgotten-imax-cinema-revealed-on-the-big-screen> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/18/revival-of-bristols-forgotten-imax-cinema-revealed-on-the-big-screen> - An article from The Guardian detailing the revival of Bristol's IMAX cinema, highlighting its closure in 2007 due to financial issues and its transformation into a grassroots community cinema space. The piece features insights from director Arthur Cauty, who lived in Bristol for a decade before discovering the cinema's existence, and discusses the cinema's history and its significance in the city's film culture.
3. <https://www.bristol247.com/culture/film/new-documentary-tells-story-bristol-cinema-brought-back-life/> - A Bristol 24/7 article announcing the world premiere of 'The Big Picture,' a documentary by filmmaker Arthur Cauty. The film chronicles the Bristol Megascreen's journey from its former life as an IMAX cinema to its decade-long abandonment and eventual community-backed restoration. The piece emphasizes the grassroots nature of the project and the challenges faced during production.
4. <https://bristolcityoffilm.co.uk/see-the-big-picture-at-forbidden-worlds-festival/> - A Bristol City of Film post promoting the screening of 'The Big Picture' at the Forbidden Worlds Film Festival. The article provides details about the film's premiere, its focus on the Bristol Megascreen's transformation, and the significance of the venue in the city's independent cinema culture. It also mentions the festival's lineup and ticket availability.
5. <https://bristolcityoffilm.co.uk/forbidden-worlds-film-festival-returns-16-19-may-to-bristols-former-imax-screen/> - An announcement about the return of the Forbidden Worlds Film Festival to Bristol's former IMAX screen. The article highlights the festival's dedication to screening repertory fantasy, action, science-fiction, and horror films, and its use of the Bristol Megascreen as a venue. It also mentions the festival's expansion and the inclusion of special guest appearances.
6. <https://www.headfirstbristol.co.uk/whats-on/bristol-megascreen-bristol-aquarium/wed-28-may-the-big-picture-world-premiere-125870> - A listing for the world premiere of 'The Big Picture' at the Bristol Megascreen, part of the Forbidden Worlds Film Festival. The event details include the date, time, ticket price, and a brief description of the documentary's focus on the revival of the Bristol Megascreen as a community cinema space.
7. <https://www.heyuguys.com/waterworld-jawsploitation-gale-anne-hurd-on-imax-bristols-forbidden-worlds-film-festival-returns-for-2025/> - An article from HeyUGuys discussing the lineup for the 2025 Forbidden Worlds Film Festival at Bristol's former IMAX screen. The piece highlights special screenings, guest appearances, and the festival's expansion, emphasizing the significance of the venue in hosting such events and the community's role in its revival.