

The Stockton Globe or

“Theatre Stock in a Global Pandemic”

by David Wilmore



The Globe Theatre: a grade II listed building built in 1935 by two local butchers as a replacement to two earlier cinemas and incorporating their very own meat emporium whilst using the Shakespearean quotation, “The Play’s The Thing”. Frankly a more unlikely intimate drama house you could not imagine – seating almost 2,372 with a wide single balcony the Globe was from the outset a classic “super-theatre” designed during that much neglected period; the inter-war theatre building boom. Novocastrian architects Percy L. Browne and Alfred Harding created a classic piece of architectural “hedging” – it looked like a typical Art Deco cinema equipped with

a huge projection room, and (just in case) a large stage house fully equipped with single purchase counterweights, dressing rooms and an orchestra pit.

During those heady inter-war years the Globe must have sat slightly uncomfortably within a High Street which was recognised as one of the most complete Georgian market towns in the country. It is likely that the planners even as early as 1935 insisted upon the stalls being excavated 8 metres below street level in order to reduce the massing of this huge building within such a sensitive setting.

Clearly “The Play *Wasn’t* The Thing” and the butchers sold out to ABC Cinemas in 1938, but the building continued as a split operation for many years with annual pantomimes, and visits from all the usual touring companies including Carl Rosa Opera, the Royal Ballet and D’Oyly Carte.

On the 22nd November 1963 Beatlemania arrived in Stockton and during the performance news broke of President Kennedy’s assassination. In 1977 the bingo fraternity came riding over the hill to take control of the building – our surviving theatre heritage would have been so much poorer without this numbers game! Unwittingly they have been (and in certain instances continue to be) temporary occupants, custodians and ultimate saviours of so many historic theatres. Eventually even bingo began to struggle in Stockton and the doors were finally closed in 1996. The building then changed hands





on numerous occasions, but against all the odds planning application after planning application failed to gain consent and the building fell asleep ... and in consequence of its subterranean nature it became a flooded “aqua-drama” on the Theatres Trust “Theatres At Risk Register”.

Move forward to 2012 – and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council were already in hindsight ahead of the game – redeveloping and restoring the town centre, whilst repurposing the High Street to halt the perceived decline – a decline which no one could have envisaged would accelerate so quickly for so many different reasons. It is fair to say that the grade II listed Globe was in the last chance saloon – forgotten about and boarded up. Yet it simply would not lie down in front of the bulldozers! The Council took out an option to purchase the theatre and move forward



with a National Lottery Heritage Fund bid which was eventually awarded through the Heritage Enterprise Scheme. With COVID-19 “top-ups” the project received £5.2M out of a total construction cost of £28M. Sceptics may gasp at the cost, but let’s be absolutely clear about this: theatre restoration has now moved into a completely new era. It is no longer just about the restoration of a historic theatre for performance, it is about the regeneration of our High Streets. When the decision was made to move forward with the project I always remember commenting to the Chief Executive of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council about what a brave move they had made. His reply was typically straight to the point, “How else can we attract 3,000 people into Stockton on a wet Tuesday evening in November?” The figures that support this statement are unequivocal:

The gross value added (GVA) after 5 years of operation is estimated at £38.3 million and £80.5million after ten years. 256 jobs created with 90 from direct operation and the supply chain and 166 from attendee spend.

Work started on planning the project in 2011 and in April 2012 the project was handed over to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council who entered into an operating agreement with Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG) who will programme and manage the venue which is scheduled to open in September 2021.

So what do you get for all the blood sweat and tears of almost a decade’s work?

A theatre capable of seating 1,661 and with standing rather than seats in the stalls the capacity rises to something approaching 3,000. The design specification has been developed for a mixed programme of entertainment which will focus on live music, comedy and theatre use. There is always a tightrope to walk when careful consideration has to be given to both the historic nature of a grade II listed building and the needs of a commercial operator and a twenty-first century audience. In a footprint originally intended for 2,372 using the standards of 1935 we found ourselves needing to accommodate toilets and bars for 3,000 in far more demanding times. Good fortune smiled upon the project because the property adjacent to one side of the theatre was also in the same ownership but also grade II listed! By combining the two properties (Art Deco meets 18th century!) it was possible to provide all the necessary additional facilities whilst at the same time providing a café bar fully equipped with a small stage within the adjacent building now known as “The Link”. This provides not

only useful overspill and direct connectivity into the main venue but also doubles as a 200-capacity venue in its own right as well as a daytime facility which helps to invigorate the High Street during the day.

Bingo, as it so often has done, covered up a lot of the original features within the building, but the development of a full Conservation Plan at an early design stage allowed us to understand the architect's original intentions and we were further gifted by the survival of the original architectural drawings and the discovery of a copy of the original opening brochure. Elements that had been lost, such as the two wonderful Commedia D'Elle Arte mirrors depicting Harlequin and Columbine in the main foyer were faithfully reinstated. Yet this could not be a slavish restoration – it had to be responsive to the needs of the future and interventions such as the levelling of the stage which was like Weetabix after years in an underwater habitat. This change was driven by the need to modify the sightlines from the stalls to accommodate standing, as well as to store all the removable seats under the stage. After much consideration we installed a Serapid elevator which also triples as a transfer lift for the removable seating, an orchestra pit lift, and a forestage extension. Similarly a get-in more than 8 metres above the stage needed to be carefully considered and again a Serapid lift was the preferred solution.

The journey of the restoration has been a long and winding road – constantly challenging, enormously complex added to which the little matter of COVID-19 compliant construction and everything that comes with it. Whilst many people reading this article will be interested in the theatre and its architecture, the real story here is the one of vision and determination that has been driven by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. A budget of £28 million is of course an enormous undertaking, but when you see the Globe within the context of what else is happening in Stockton it becomes a critical piece in a much bigger piece of strategic thinking. This vision includes: the construction (with a retained financial stake) in a Hampton by Hilton hotel adjacent to the Globe, the purchase of two enormous shopping centres; one scheduled for demolition and future redevelopment as an urban riverside park with office space and community facilities along a reinvigorated River Tees waterfront. Whilst the other will be consolidated for core retail centre ... and oh yes I forgot to mention an already completed £25million streetscape initiative complete with fountains, automaton and event street lighting for the Stockton International

River Festival (SIRF). This is how to re-invent the High Street, it requires vision, bravery, long-term commitment and investment ... and the message for our industry, local authorities and government? Theatres are here to stay ... they are the heart of our communities and the soul of our High Streets.

CREDITS

Client:	Stockton Borough Council
Lead Consultant for SBC:	Theatresearch Ltd., David Wilmore
Main Contractor:	Willmott Dixon Construction Ltd.
Architects to RIBA Stage 2:	Sansome Hall Architects Ltd.
Architects: RIBA Stage 2 to Practical completion:	Space Architects Ltd.
M&E Consultants:	MaxFordhamLLP, (Manchester Office)
Structural Engineers:	BGP Teesside
Quantity Surveying and Project Management:	Driver PLC
Fire Consultants:	Design Fire Consultants
Technical Equipment Consultant to Stage 2:	Chris Baldwin
Stage Engineering:	Centre-Stage
Technical Equipment & Infrastructures:	Stage Electrics

STAGE ENGINEERING by Centre-Stage

Orchestra Pit Lift

Serapid Linklift drive transmission.
 Floor area = 26.87m²
 Dynamic load 2kN/m² (5.48 tonnes)
 Static load 7.5kN/m² (20.55 tonnes)
 Travel 2.835m (from basement to stage)

Powered House Curtain Hoist

Zero Fleet Angled hoist unit
 300kg safe working load
 Maximum speed 1.2m/s

Scenery Get In Lift

Serapid Linklift drive transmission.
 Floor area = 18.15m²
 Dynamic load 2.5kN/m² (4.625 tonnes)
 Static load 10kN/m² (18.5 tonnes)
 Travel 4.5m (from stage to scene dock)

Interlocked barrier system

Proscenium Safety Curtain (counterbalanced) System

Safety curtain panel size 16m width x 9.05m high.
 Safety curtain weight 7.5 tonnes.
 Hydraulic arrestor motorised hoist (FireFly Hoist) rated at 500kg SWL.

Single Purchased Counterweight System

26 sets, 4-line suspensions, 450kg UDL on the bar.
 Truss bar length 15.74m
 Travel 16.5m

Adjustable Tormentors & Side Masking Panels

Side stage adjustable tormentors 7.9m high x 2m wide
 Travel on and off stage 1 metre.
 Side masking panels 7.86m high x 1.26m wide

Auditorium Lighting/Audio Trusses & Chain Hoist System

10 number 500kg SWL rated motorised chain hoists
 2 demountable trusses suspended via chain hoists for lighting/audio
 5 number ESpool cable management units

Circle Lighting Ladders

2 number circle lighting ladders complete with fall arrester and hauling line system.
 Ladder 5m high x 0.6m wide.



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TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT by Stage Electrics

Production Lighting (Main House)

Stage Electrics Custom SLBs (Stage Lighting Boxes) – 246 Circuits
 ETC Sensor Power Distribution System – 288 ways
 High End Road Hog Lighting Console – 1 no
 Custom IWBs (Internally Wired Bars)
 Custom Curved Stainless Steel Balcony Bar
 sACN and DMX Network with Swisson Distribution

Production Lighting (The Link)

ETC ColourSource Power Distribution System
 ETC ColorSource Console 1 no
 Custom IWBs (Internally Wired Bars) 2 no

Houselights & Worklights

ETC Paradigm Control System – with touchscreen control full control of houselights/worklights with ability to record and recall scenes
 ETC Arc Lamp Houselights – 206 Fixtures / 104 Drivers – Custom RAL Fixtures
 ETC Blues System – 24 Zones – 88 Fixtures
 TDE LED Tape – Feature Lighting – 200m

Production Audio

D&B Audiotechnik Loudspeaker System – Average 105db across the auditorium – 3 Left 3 Right, 2 Centre, 7 Front Fill, 8 Subs, 18 Delays
 D&B Audiotechnik Fills & Monitors - M4 and V7P
 D&B Audiotechnik R1 Control – Via touchscreen from console location
 Yamaha CL5 Audio Console
 Dante Networking Building Wide – Primary & Secondary Dante

Production Communications

Stage Electrics Custom AVBs (Audio/Visual Boxes)
 Symetrix Audio Systems for Calls & Show Relay Systems with Symnet User Interface
 RCF Ceiling Speakers Building Wide – 86no
 Stage Electrics Custom SM Stage Managers Desk with Stage Electrics Cue Light System
 Panasonic PTZ Camera System
 Altair Wireless & Wired Intercom Systems
 Blackmagic Video Distribution

Infrastructure

9km of Data Cable
 8km of Loudspeaker Cable
 2.4km of Fibre
 3km of HD Video
 2.1km of Analogue Audio cable

Other

Specialist Lighting Control in main Bar & VIP Bar
 Interpretation Lighting + Control