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Theatres
Magazine
Winter
2022

Theatres at Risk

Theatres at Risk Register 2022
Up-front carbon and theatre buildings
The Globe, Stockton-on-Tees
Los Angeles Historic Theatre Foundation
Q&A with Jack Dee

Protecting theatres
for **everyone**

Theatres
Trust



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We believe that current and future generations should have access to good quality theatre buildings where they can be inspired by, and enjoy, live theatre.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road
London WC2H 0QL
T 020 7836 8591
F 020 7836 3302
info@theatrestrust.org.uk
theatrestrust.org.uk
@theatrestrust

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Justine Harvey Editor-in-chief
Kate Carmichael Managing Editor
Nicola Rowland Advertising sales

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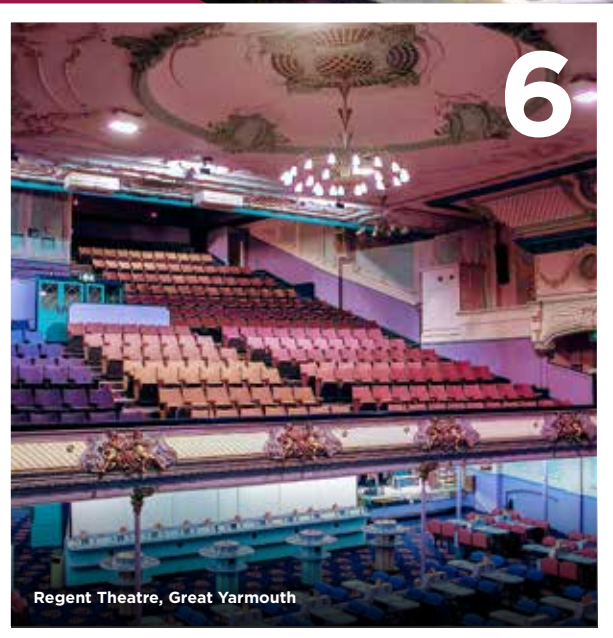
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The Globe Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees

David Wilmore of theatresearch, the lead consultant for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council on the Globe project, offers a personal reflection on the history of the theatre and its recent restoration.

I remember visiting Stockton-on-Tees in 1981 while writing up some of the north-east entries for Theatres Trust's original theatre guide *Curtains!!! or A New Life For Old Theatres*. With a brief to look at all theatres built before 1914 my main focus of attention was the Stockton-on-Tees Hippodrome, designed in 1905 by Newcastle architect William Hope. The Hippodrome has since been erased from the streetscape, but I also recalled a fleeting visit to a fly tower spotted across town, the Globe – one of those rather modern inter-war theatres which at the time was no more than of passing interest. Forty years later, I am sitting down to write an article about the Globe Theatre – a building that was almost on no-one's radar for a time.

The building fell into disuse after Mecca Bingo had finally called the last card in 1996. Subsequent planning applications attempted to convert the building into student accommodation and retail, but for various reasons the proposals thankfully never came to fruition and the building was finally listed Grade II in 2001. It was included in the Theatres Trust's Theatres at Risk Register when the list began in 2006.

By 2010 Stockton was in fact already provided with two imaginative performance venues. The Arc had been built on the site of the demolished Hippodrome and the Georgian Theatre continued to thrive. The Globe seemed like an unlikely candidate for restoration not least of all

Showcase

The 3,000-capacity auditorium features an original, fully restored 1935 Art Deco interior

Photo: Sally Ann Norman

**The 1935 Bar -
a VIP style lounge**Photo: Sally
Ann Norman

because the auditorium was by now a veritable swimming pool having been flooded with several thousand gallons of ground water.

At this stage it's probably worthwhile telling you about the local authority, an organisation quite unlike any we had previously worked with. The glass was forever half-full - the attitude was always one of can do - with the bar of ambition always set high. The council saw immediately the potential role that a theatre could play within a crisis-ridden high street economy. I will never forget the response I received from the Chief Executive when I complimented him on Stockton's commitment - it was typically straight to the point, "How else can we attract 3,000 people into Stockton on a wet Tuesday in November?"

The Globe was built in 1935 and designed by the Newcastle based architectural practice of Percy L. Browne and Son, though it seems likely that the senior partner Alfred Harding was the architect in charge. An article in the April 1939 edition of the *Ideal Kinema* stated that the Percy L. Browne practice had been responsible for a staggering 130 cinemas in the last 30 years. This extraordinary output has been generally unrecognised by the architectural history of twentieth century entertainment - in other words the north-east theatre designing tradition that had grown up with Hope and Maxwell, Oliver & Leeson, and William and T.R. Milburn (not to mention Browne's contemporaries Steinlet and Gibson) formed a strong and continuing architectural genealogy which they were able to draw upon. By 1935 Stockton already had a good number of theatres: the Hippodrome (2,700 seats), the Castle Theatre (2,580) the Grand Theatre (1,800) - and the Globe with another



**Tricolour fixed
seating on the balcony**

Photo: Sally Ann Norman

1,750 seats and the unlikely strap line 'The Play's The Thing' devised by the owners, two brothers (who also ran a butcher's shop in the theatre). A more unsuitable drama house you could not possibly imagine, resembling a typical Odeon auditorium with a good-sized stage. The butcher brothers sold out to the ABC chain in 1938.

Inter-war theatres are a building type that has perhaps received unfair press and consequent neglect in the past. As we now sit comfortably beyond the millennium and gaze back to those inter-war years of the twentieth century it is now possible to reassess these buildings in a new light. They form an architectural watershed between cinema and theatre. So many of these larger super-theatres have in the past been considered as primarily cinemas, even though they had a stage house. Our friendly Stockton butchers in cahoots with their architect intentionally hedged their bets, creating a building that could comfortably resort to either kind of entertainment. The first talking picture *The Singing Fool* was released in 1926 and the Globe opened only nine years later - the cinema as we now know it, was still in its infancy.

Cine-variety was a genre that defined a period of architectural cross-fertilisation, something which would in time sub-divide into two distinct architectural entities, yet in 1935 it was all still in the melting pot.

By 2010 the privately-owned Globe had deteriorated dramatically and it was clear that only major capital investment would save it. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council commissioned Theatresearch to prepare a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF now NLHF) Heritage Enterprise Scheme. While the local authority wanted to see the Globe restored within a high street that had already received massive capital streetscape investment it did not envisage a role as the operator. In consequence we engaged with potential commercial operators to examine the possibilities and after much discussion terms were agreed with Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG). With the HLF award of a little under £5m and a suitable operator on board, the building was removed from the Theatres Trust's Theatres at Risk Register - it was a watershed moment, the building would now be restored.

Showcase



The restored elevation of the Globe complete with the 1935 neon sign

Photo: Sally Ann Norman

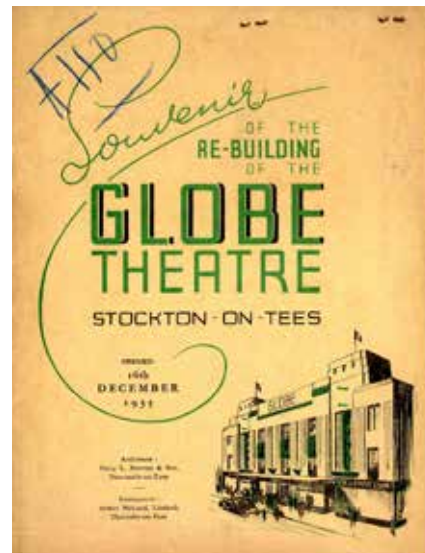
Showcase



**Interior of The Link
café bar at street level**

Photo: Sally Ann Norman

The building offered enormous challenges both in terms of its condition and its construction. The fact that the stage was almost 8m and the stalls almost 9m below street level presented all kinds of access issues that were not on the radar of 1935 architects. Walking the tightrope of conservation on the one side and operational expediency on the other can be hazardous, but the collaborative approach demonstrated by all the stakeholders saw the project finally delivered during spring 2021. That was not however before the inevitable unforeseens had been dealt with; single skin terracotta pot walls 12m high without a single wall tie, a subterranean location requiring over half a million pounds worth of tanking, a lattice steel roof structure incapable of sustaining any more load, a building riddled with asbestos. Yet despite these issues the local authority never wavered in its determination to deliver, and in doing so the bar was raised even higher. Operational requirements needed to be able to increase the old seating capacity from 1,750 to something approaching 3,000 when the option for a standing audience was introduced to the stalls. In taking this approach the toilet provision had to be significantly increased and, in these strange pandemic times, the provision for increased mechanical ventilation had to be enlarged dramatically.



Reopening brochure from 1935

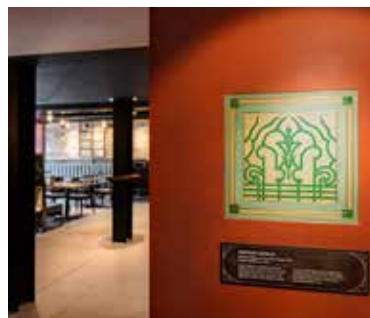
Image: [theatresearch archives](#)

**Restored bas-relief entitled Sight
and fibrous-plaster cascade
fountain lit with colour
changing LEDs**

Photo: Sally
Ann Norman



The stage house had been provided with a modest counterweight system in 1935, but by 2010 little remained. The stage floor that had once supported The Beatles (on the night that President Kennedy was assassinated) had deteriorated to the consistency of Weetabix, and the raked stage with its unusually low stage riser would have created sightline problems for a standing audience. The decision was taken to level the stage, install a Serapid get-in lift, a new counterweight system with advance flying positions, and a Serapid orchestra elevator. The latter innovation was introduced to not only accommodate an orchestra, but also to act as a seating transfer lift for the storage of seats beneath the stage during standing gigs, to form a forestage for certain events and of course for that ever-essential feature, the transfer of heavy kit e.g., mixing desks and grand pianos, between stage and stalls.



**Heritage Trail Mosaic - a commission from
artist Andrew McKeown - made from
recycled terrazzo from the theatre**

Photo: Sally Ann Norman

Showcase

Project team

Client

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Lead consultant

Theatresearch, David Wilmore

Main contractor

Willmott Dixon

Architects to RIBA Stage 2

Sansome Hall Architects

Architects at RIBA Stage 2 practical
completion

Space Architects

Mechanical and engineering consultants

Max Fordham, Manchester Office

Structural engineers

BGP Teesside

Quantity surveying and project management

Driver Project Services

Fire consultants

Design Fire Consultants

Technical equipment consultant to RIBA
Stage 2

Chris Baldwin

Stage engineering

Centre Stage Engineering

Technical equipment and infrastructure

Stage Electrics

Showcase

A final note for future projects; think very carefully about the procurement of the building contract. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council took the wise decision to procure an enabling contract of works before committing to the main contract. The single philosophy of know your building before you start the main works is always a strong pointer, both in terms of conservation philosophy and certainty of cost. Had we not carried out preliminary investigation and opening works the cost would have been significantly higher.

The Globe reopened in spring 2021 at a cost of £28m funded by £4.5m from The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Heritage Enterprise scheme, a £774,000 grant from the Capital Kickstart Fund and the remainder by the local authority. It is visionary, it rejuvenates the high street and it stands as a shining example of how to reinvent the surrounding properties and reinstate a much-needed sense of place.

The balcony staircase complete with Art Deco light fittings

Photo: Sally Ann Norman



Technical specification

Stage engineering

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 angle hoist unit
- Safe working load: 300kg
- 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

- Panel size: 16m width x 9.05m high
- Panel weight: 7.5 tonnes
- Hydraulic arrester motorised FireFly hoist rated at 500kg safe working load (SWL)

Single purchased counterweight system

- 26 sets, 4-line suspensions, 450kg uniform distributed load on the bar
- Truss bar length: 15.74m
- Travel: 16.5m

Adjustable tormentors and side masking panels

- Side stage adjustable tormentors: 7.9m high x 2m wide
- Travel on and off stage: 1m

- Side masking panels: 7.86m high x 1.26m wide

Auditorium lighting / audio trusses and chain hoist system

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

Circle lighting ladders

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

Technical equipment

Production lighting (main house)

- Stage Electrics custom stage lighting boxes: 246 circuits
- ETC Sensor power distribution system: 288 ways
- High-end Road Hog lighting console
- Custom 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 ColourSource console
- Custom internally wired bars

Houselights and worklights

- ETC Paradigm control system with touchscreen control and full control of houselights / worklights that 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: 200m feature lighting

Production audio

- D&B Audiotechnik loudspeaker system with an average 105db across the auditorium: 3 left, 3 right, 2 centre, 7 front fill, 8 subs, 18 delays
- D&B Audiotechnik fills and monitors: - M4 and V7P
- D&B Audiotechnik R1 control via touchscreen from console location
- Yamaha CL5 audio console
- Primary and secondary Dante networking (building wide)

Production communications

- Stage Electrics custom audio / visual boxes
- Symetrix audio systems for calls and show relay systems with Symnet user interface
- RCF ceiling speakers (building wide)
- Stage Electrics custom stage managers desk with Stage Electrics cue light system
- Panasonic pan tilt zoom camera system
- Altair wireless and wired intercom systems
- Blackmagic video distribution

Infrastructure

- Data cable: 9km
- Loudspeaker cable: 8km
- Fibre: 2.4km
- HD video: 3km
- Analogue audio cable: 2.1km

Other

- Specialist lighting control in main bar and VIP bar
- Interpretation lighting and control