

## THE THEATRES TRUST CONCERN FOR TOP HISTORIC THEATRE BUILDINGS AT RISK



*Embargoed until 9.00am 23 July 2007*  
*London, UK*

As English Heritage announces its 'Buildings at Risk Register 2007' The Theatres Trust today voices its concern for the lack of awareness of the risks facing historic theatres in England through demolition, lack of funding and insensitive redevelopment.

In light of recent demolitions such as that of *Dalston Theatre* in February this year, Mhora Samuel, Director of The Theatres Trust says, "We eagerly await the release of English Heritage's 'Buildings at Risk Register 2007' and expect to see a number of significant theatre buildings highlighted in the report, not least *Wilton's Music Hall*".

A Grade II\* listed building, *Wilton's Music Hall* is thought to be the last remaining example of a large mid-Victorian London music hall and is included among the World Monuments Fund 2008 list of '100 Most Endangered sites in the World'. Previously identified by English Heritage as a site 'in slow decay with no solution agreed' it featured in the BBC's *Restoration* in 2005. HRH The Prince of Wales is the patron of *Wilton's Music Hall*.

Mhora Samuel added, "Historic theatre buildings across the UK face ongoing risk, whether through sale or change of ownership, difficulty in meeting the high costs of necessary physical works, the loss of theatres through change of use, the threats of vandalism to a vacant building, developments demolishing theatre sites or insensitive development surrounding these historic buildings. The Theatres Trust keeps a watching brief over UK theatres and our own register includes more than 66 sites which have been identified as at risk".

These include The *Lonsdale Cinema, Carlisle*, an Art Deco 1930s cine-variety building previously not thought listable by English Heritage, but a prime example of what can be achieved by a local theatre with strong community backing. The 'Save the Lonsdale' campaign also secured high profile support from HRH The Prince of Wales, Ken Dodd and latterly, former Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell whose recent surprise ruling secured a Grade II listing for the building. Similarly, *Hyde Theatre Royal* another Grade II listed theatre which is located in the home constituency of the new Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, James Purnell, also faces significant challenges in securing its future.

The World Monuments Fund suggests that for many historic sites, inclusion on [their] List is the best, and sometimes the only, hope for survival'. Mhora Samuel agrees, adding "Inclusion on these lists identifies theatres as significant priorities in the minds of funders and the public, and any initiative which raises the profile and promotes the value of continued theatre use can only be applauded. Our role at the Trust is to remain vigilant and continue to support all UK theatres – historic and modern, and help them to secure a certain future".

Theatres in use have a special place in their communities and are able to draw on high levels of local support. But closed or empty theatres can face serious obstacles to their survival.

*Swindon Mechanics' Institute*, a Grade II\* listed building which includes a theatre, currently faces total demolition. The *Institute*, centre-piece of the GWR village which makes up the Swindon Conservation area, was the subject of a task force nominating it as a World Heritage Site. In its objection to the planning application The Theatres Trust in July said, "A model village such as this which placed theatre as a priority within the community deserves significant support and we call on Anne Snelgrove MP for South Swindon to give the protection of this site her immediate attention and backing. In the absence of any justification for demolition, Impact Assessment, Conservation Plan or Feasibility Study the building's continued existence cannot be taken for granted not least with a request for demolition currently in place".

Mhora Samuel added, "The loss of these listed theatres, would be a loss to everyone and The Theatres Trust will champion their future. We will be working with English Heritage to develop understanding of the risks facing these buildings."

ENDS

Notes for Editors /

## Notes For Editors

**About The Theatres Trust:** The Theatres Trust is the National Advisory Public Body for theatres and a statutory consultee on planning applications affecting land on which there is a theatre. This applies to all theatre buildings, old and new, in current use, in other uses, or disused. It was established by The Theatres Trust Act 1976 *'to promote the better protection of theatres'*. The Theatres Trust champions **all theatres, historic, contemporary and new** as important places in our lives and supports and develops awareness of the protection and needs of UK theatres.

### **The Theatres Trust Top Ten Historic Theatre Buildings at Risk:**

Wilton's Music Hall, London (Grade II\*)

Swindon Mechanics' Institute (Grade II\*)

Plymouth Palace Theatre (Grade II\*)

Lonsdale Cinema, Carlisle (Grade II)

Theatre Royal Hyde (Grade II)

Derby Hippodrome (Grade II)

Burnley Empire (Grade II)

Doncaster Grand (Grade II)

Hulme Hippodrome and Playhouse, Manchester (Both Grade II)

Globe, Stockton-on-Tees (Grade II)

**Statutory Listing:** Grade I and Grade II\* identify the outstanding architecture or historic interest among the top 6% of all listed buildings in England; Grade II represents the remaining 94% of listed buildings in England.

**Images:** Images can be provided upon request.

### **For further information and images:**

Suzanne McDougall: 020 7836 8591

[suzanne.mcdougall@theatrestrust.org.uk](mailto:suzanne.mcdougall@theatrestrust.org.uk)