

THEATRE: *Mechanics' Institute***Listed:** Grade II***Address:** Emlyn Square, Railway Village, Swindon, Wiltshire SN1 5BP**Local Authority:**

Swindon Borough Council

Civic Offices

Euclid Street

Swindon. SN1 2JH

Tel: 017 9346 3000

Email: customerservices@swindon.gov.ukwww.swindon.gov.uk**Current Freehold Owner:** Forefront Estates Limited**Current Leasehold Owner:** Vacant**Current Operator/Manager:** None**Local Contact:** Donald Brunwin, The New Mechanics' Institution Preservation Trust, The Former Railway Museum, Farringdon Road, Swindon SN1 5BJ. Tel: 017 9352 0592Email: mail@new-mechanics.com**The Theatres Trust Contact:** Suzanne McDougall. Tel 020 7836 8591Email: Suzanne.mcdougall@theatrust.org.uk

Original theatre architect(s): 1853-55: Edward Roberts (London)**Building Description**

The *Mechanics' Institute* was built by Great Western Railway as a social and community centre for staff, opening in 1855, with a library, coffee room, reading room and market hall. It was originally built with a lecture/concert hall with a stage, elaborate barrel vaulted plaster ceiling and a decorative curved balcony at one end. However, in 1930 the centre of the building was badly damaged by fire and the first floor hall was rebuilt a year later as a theatre with a fly tower, pit, stalls and dress circle and an elaborate proscenium. Externally it gives the appearance of a great hall with buttresses, and was designed in Tudor Gothic style in Swindon limestone rubble with Bath ashlar dressings.

Theatre Use

Swindon Mechanics' Institute was last used as a theatre in the late 1980s. It closed along with the entire Swindon works in 1986.

Occupancy: Vacant**Building Location**

The Institute stands in the centre of the Great Western Railway Village and is surrounded on all sides by residential accommodation.

Risks

The theatre has been at risk of demolition since the 1980s. Planning Permission was granted in 1990 for the change of use to a hotel with the construction of hotel accommodation in place of the fly tower and subdivision of the *Institute*, but planning permission elapsed. The building was upgraded to Grade II* in 1999 and since then there have been 6 applications to demolish the theatre and convert it to hotel and/or residential use. Each have either been withdrawn or refused. Although the building was given a new roof in 2001 the building is in a very derelict state and the site is not secure. A planning application was made on 5 May 2007 for total demolition of the theatre, which was refused in July. The applicants appealed but withdrew the application in May 2008. If demolition were granted Swindon would lose its only listed Victorian theatre. The New Mechanics' Institution Preservation Trust wants to see the building and the theatre brought back into theatre and community use. It is raising funds to buy the building.