

THEATRE: *Burnley Empire***Listed:** Grade II**Address:** St James Street, Burnley, Lancashire BB11 1NL**Local Authority:**

Burnley Borough Council

Town Hall

Manchester Road

Burnley BB11 1JA

Tel: 01282 425011

Email: enquiries@burnley.gov.ukwww.burnley.gov.uk**Current Freehold Owner:** John Stanbury**Current Leasehold Owner:** Vacant**Current Operator/Manager:** None**Local Contact:** Mr Colin Sanderson, Chairman, Burnley Light Opera Society. Tel: 01282 433694

Erica Eden-Porter, Conservation Officer, Burnley Borough Council. Ext: 2545

The Theatres Trust Contact: Suzanne McDougall. Tel 020 7836 8591Email: Suzanne.mcdougall@theatrust.org.uk

Original theatre architect(s): 1894: G B Rawcliffe, 1911: Bertie Crewe, auditorium reconstructed.**Building Description**

The first *Empire* on the site was by G B Rawcliffe but in 1911 it was radically reconstructed by Bertie Crewe. Both theatre architects incorporated parts of earlier buildings. Rawcliffe included the remains of Tunstill Mill and Crewe formed a new main entrance in an earlier façade of the adjoining *Victoria Opera House* and the two buildings became interlinked. Internally, Bertie Crewe's interior is largely intact and has two slightly curved decorative balconies, culminating in superimposed stage boxes, framed between Corinthian columns surmounted by large eagles. The lower balcony was extended forward in 1938 and the sweep modified. There is a segmental arched proscenium and panelled ceiling with circular centre and rich Classical style plasterwork throughout. Externally, the 1911 façade has been lost with the subsequent demolition of the *Victoria Opera House* in 1955 to make way for an extension to Woolworths. A tunnel-like passage through a former shop leads from the foyer through to a staircase giving access to front stalls and dress circle.

Theatre Use

The *Empire* was last used as a theatre in the late 1960s. It was then used as a bingo hall until the 1990s when it closed. The theatre was due for demolition until it was listed in 1996 and saved due to active campaigning by the Burnley Light Opera Society. The building is in an extremely poor state of repair.

Occupancy: Vacant.**Building location**

The *Empire* is in a central location within the town centre. However, the demolition of the former *Victoria Opera House* has meant that it no longer has an eye-catching façade or formal entrance - in effect the building is isolated within backland development. The main access to the theatre is from the shopping street with no indication of the theatre behind.

Risks

The theatre is not being maintained and is suffering dry rot. Burnley may lose its only listed Victorian theatre. Burnley Light Opera Society wishes to purchase the building and see the theatre brought back into theatre use. Burnley Borough Council has applied for a warrant to gain access to the building to assess what urgent repairs are necessary for remedial work and stabilisation.