

A man and a woman are captured in dynamic, expressive poses in a room with peeling, aged walls. The man, on the left, wears a yellow and red striped sweater over a yellow shirt and dark trousers, leaning back with his arms outstretched. The woman, on the right, wears a vibrant red dress and black heels, also leaning back with her arms extended. A large, arched window in the background shows a glimpse of a brick building outside. The top of the image is divided into two geometric sections: an orange triangle on the left and a yellow triangle on the right.

T M

**Theatres
Magazine**
Winter /
Spring 2019

Theatres at Risk 2019
Battersea Arts Centre
Alan Ayckbourn
Bristol Old Vic
Leith Theatre
Shanklin Theatre

The road to reawakening

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Theatres Trust Magazine

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Front cover image:
Missing by Gecko Theatre Company
at Battersea Arts Centre

Photo: Morley von Sternberg

In this issue

11

Battersea Arts Centre

Photo: Fred Haworth

1
Director's
welcome

2-8
Theatres at
Risk 2019

11-16
Showcase:
Battersea
Arts Centre

19
Ambassadors
in action

20-21
In conversation
with Alan
Ayckbourn

23-24
Bristol Old Vic,
a theatre for the
whole city

26-27
Q&A with
Leith Theatre

29-30
Saving Shanklin
Theatre

23



Bristol Old Vic

Photo: Philip Vile

26



Leith Theatre

Photo: Chris Scott

Director's welcome

Theatres Trust Director Jon Morgan introduces this issue of TM which focuses on theatres at different points on the journey from being at risk to thriving.



Alexandra Palace Theatre

Photo: Lloyd Winters

Welcome to the Winter / Spring 2019 edition of TM.

The main focus of this issue is our Theatres at Risk Register. We've just announced the 2019 list which consists of 31 theatres under threat – you can see the full list on page 3. Each of these buildings has some significance whether it's architecturally or culturally, but more than that, we believe each one could have a viable future as a live performance venue with the right support. What that support might be varies much like the buildings themselves do – the feature beginning on page 5 sets out in more detail what we think it would take to restore, revive or reinvigorate them.

Regular readers will know TM to be a celebration of our nation's theatre buildings and this issue is no different. Two theatres, Alexandra Palace and The Cryer, have been removed from the list because their futures as live performance spaces are looking more secure (see page 8) but even amongst those that remain on the list there are the beginnings of what we hope will be positive stories. Leith Theatre is one of those – Jack Hunter, Chair of the campaign group talks us through the theatre's progress (pg 26).

We also revisit a past success story (pg 29), Shanklin Theatre which was on the Theatres at Risk Register in 2010. The Theatres Trust worked with the friends group to save Shanklin Theatre from demolition, secure the Grade II listing and provided further advice to the group and Isle of Wight Council.

Our showcase feature is Battersea Arts Centre (pg 11). While never on our Theatres at Risk list, it fits the theme as the fire in the Grand Hall undoubtedly would have threatened the theatre's future were it not for the tenacity of its management team and the unwavering support of the local community.

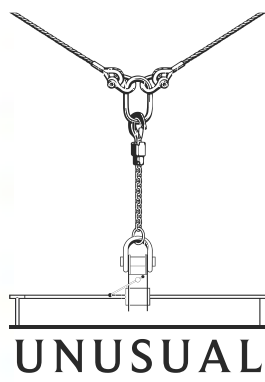
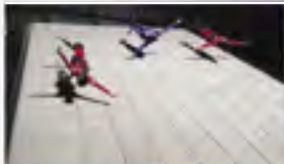
As the English-speaking world's longest continuously working theatre, Bristol Old Vic sets the gold standard for longevity and viability. Emma Stenning talks us through the recent capital project, which aimed to ensure the venue remained open throughout the work and can continue to thrive (pg 23).

Thriving theatres was the topic discussed at our recent conference. It runs through all our work at the Theatres Trust – ensuring that theatre buildings are being built, adapted and used to give them the very best chance of a secure future and playing a vital role in their communities. There is a round-up of our recent casework on page 32.

To enable us to continue to support theatres, whether they are 'at risk', established theatres looking to become sustainable or new theatres being built, we need to realise our ambitious fundraising goals. We are fundraising to establish a Theatres at Risk capacity-building programme, to increase the size and scope of our Theatres Protection Fund grant schemes, to invest further in research about theatres to support our lobbying, and to make the most of our archives.

We've enlisted 25 high profile Ambassadors to help us, as we announced in a previous issue of TM. In this issue, we provide an update on how they've been working with us, a quick catch up with actor Pippa Bennett-Warner (pg 19) and an interview with playwright Alan Ayckbourn about the impact of theatre design on his writing (pg 20).

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of TM and as ever, if you have any questions about our work, please do get in touch.



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Theatres at Risk

2019

Theatres at Risk Assessment Criteria

Theatres are assessed based on three criteria - Community Value, Star Rating and Risk Factor. Buildings are scored between 0 and 3 in each category, which are added together to give a total score. A minimum total score of 4 is needed to be included on the register and must not score zero in any category.

Where the total score is the same, Community Value is given precedence, followed by Star Rating, then Risk Factor. If all criteria scores are equal, the buildings are listed alphabetically.

The theatres at the top of the list are not necessarily most at risk, but are those whose loss would be considered a greater tragedy because of their unique character and / or have real opportunity to be used for live performances.

Community Value establishes the local support and demand for a theatre, including the viability of the building as a performance venue.

3 points: clear community demand and viability for the building to be used as a theatre

2 points: possibility and demand for returning the building to performance use, which could include community performances / music

1 point: potential for the building to be brought into use as a community facility with no / minimal community performance

Star Rating judges the building's architectural quality, workability as a theatre, heritage, and geographical uniqueness.

3 points: a very fine theatre of the highest quality

2 points: an excellent example of its type

1 point: a theatre which is of some interest or quality

Risk Factor assesses the level of threat to the building. This could be risk of demolition, alteration to another use, local development adversely affecting the theatre, change of ownership, decay of the building or capital / revenue concerns.

Theatres at Risk Register 2019

On the register

Theatre	Grade Listing	Community Value	Star Rating	Risk Factor	Total Score
Brighton Hippodrome	II*	3	3	3	9
Theatre Royal Margate	II*	3	3	2	8
Victoria Pavilion/Winter Gardens, Morecambe	II*	3	3	2	8
Dudley Hippodrome	-	3	2	3	8
Victoria Theatre, Salford	II	2	3	3	8
Spilsby Theatre	II	3	2	2	7
Streatham Hill Theatre, London	II	3	2	2	7
Theatr Ardudwy, Harlech NEW	II*	3	2	2	7
Winter Gardens Pavilion, Blackpool	II*	2	3	2	7
Burnley Empire	II	2	2	3	7
Plymouth Palace	II*	2	2	3	7
Hulme Hippodrome	II	1	3	3	7
Century Theatre, Coalville	-	3	2	1	6
Walthamstow Granada, London	II*	3	2	1	6
Leith Theatre	B	3	2	1	6
King's Theatre, Dundee	B	3	1	2	6
The Broadway, Peterborough	-	3	1	2	6
Tottenham Palace Theatre, London NEW	II	2	2	2	6
Conwy Civic Hall (Cube)	II	2	1	3	6
Mechanics' Institute, Swindon	II*	2	1	3	6
Intimate Theatre, London NEW	-	2	1	3	6
Kings Theatre, Kirkcaldy	B	3	1	1	5
Tameside Hippodrome, Ashton-under-Lyne	II	2	2	1	5
North Pier Pavilion, Blackpool	II	2	1	2	5
Garston Empire, Liverpool	-	2	1	2	5
Doncaster Grand	II	1	2	2	5
Swansea Palace	II	1	2	2	5
Derby Hippodrome	II	1	1	3	5
Odeon/New Victoria, Bradford	-	2	1	1	4
Theatre Royal, Hyde	II	1	2	1	4
Theatre Royal, Manchester	II	1	2	1	4

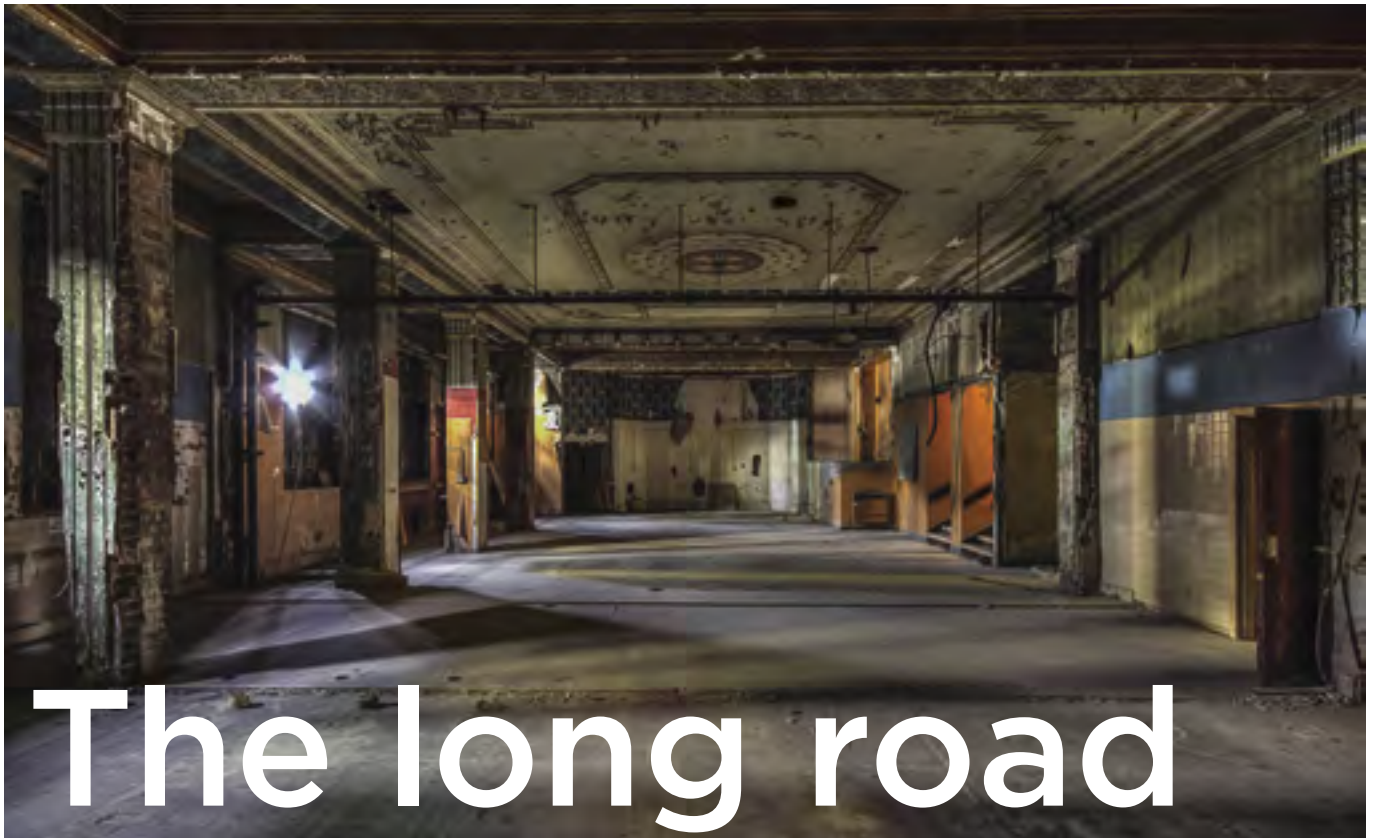
Removed from the register

Theatre	Grade Listing
Alexandra Palace Theatre, London	II
Coronet, Elephant and Castle, London	-
Hulme Playhouse	II
Llandudno Grand	II*
The Cryer, London	-
The Secombe, London	-
Workington Opera House	-

Theatres at Risk

2019





The long road to reawakening

What does it take to return a Theatre at Risk to use, especially if it has been empty for a long time? This article takes a closer look at what is needed – funding, the right owners and operators, demonstrable viability and local support.

There are 31 theatres on the Theatres at Risk Register this year. The way theatre buildings are assessed means that the list includes working theatres with capital / operational issues and venues currently partially open or open for special events but where significant restoration work or fundraising still needs to be done. Nightclub, bingo hall and church use do often provide a level of care and protection for the building but once the building is empty the problems become more difficult to rectify. More than half the theatres on the register are disused and these are the cases that are always going to be harder to return to use – indeed, eight have been on the list since it first started in 2006.

Returning a disused theatre to use is not impossible, as the recent reopening of **Alexandra Palace Theatre** and progress made at **Bradford Odeon** have shown. However, there is no quick fix – success will take a lot of hard work, patience, investment and collaborative working across key partners.

Diverse funding sources

It probably goes without saying that significant financial investment is needed in most cases, and the longer the theatre lies empty, the more money it is likely to need. Alexandra Palace Theatre, removed from the list this year, was part of the East Wing Project, reported as costing £27m including an £18.8m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Unfortunately, public funding of the scale seen at Alexandra Palace is no longer available and it is necessary to find alternative routes. For example, Bradford Odeon is using a mix of grant funding and public loan funding for its £20m restoration project, and **Leith Theatre** is taking a phased approach on its smaller-scale project, which will still cost £7m.

The right support – local authorities and friends groups

Our core message for the 2018 Theatres at Risk Register launch was the importance of local authority support. That message has not changed this year. We urge local authorities to see theatres as assets, not problems, and act quickly and decisively to start returning them into use.

As previously highlighted this does not need to be financial. For example, Thanet District Council has shown great support for **Theatre Royal**,

Bradford Odeon

Photo: David Oxtaby

Margate. As a result of its viability appraisal the council has offered an adjacent building to the theatre, which could be used as a bar and restaurant / hospitality facilities to help cross-subsidise the theatre operation. Leicestershire County Council and North West Leicestershire District Council are working on proposals for a masterplan for the Snibston Colliery site which includes the **Century Theatre**, which offers improved access to the theatre, better integrates the theatre with its surroundings and will provide a new visitor centre and café attached to the theatre, improving its future sustainability.

However, there are also examples of local authorities who offer little or no support - in this instance, the fate of the theatre is unlikely to be a happy one. In Dudley, the council voted to accept a proposal to turn the site of **Dudley Hippodrome** into a test centre for driverless vehicles, rejecting a proposal by a new friends group to restore and reopen the building. The council has offered the Dudley Driverless Vehicles Consortium a 12-month opportunity to prove its business plan and council officer support during this period - an opportunity denied to the friends group. Should the bid go ahead it will undoubtedly spell curtains for the Hippodrome.

Looking at the theatres that have been revived, or whose future is looking brighter, another commonality is a dedicated and well-organised friends / campaign group, working tirelessly to save the theatre. Their achievements and importance should not be underestimated.

The spectacular **Morecambe Winter Gardens** would surely have been lost if not for the supreme efforts of the Morecambe Winter Gardens Trust and the indomitable Evelyn Archer, who sadly passed away late last year. And at the other end of the country, and new to this year's register, the **Intimate Theatre**, where a newly formed campaign group that we have been supporting, has already managed to get the building listed as an Asset of Community Value and is lobbying hard to ensure that the theatre is retained.

A viable operating model

A solid business plan is essential - and this may reveal that compromises have to be made. The reopening of a main auditorium for performance might be some way ahead, but using a smaller space in the building as a community venue, or reopening part of the theatre only, could be a way to re-establish a theatre's place in the community. Morecambe Winter Gardens operates from part of its auditorium only, **Spilsby Theatre** is programming in its lounge area and Leith Theatre is programming events within its smaller Thomas Morton Hall and holding pop-up events in its main auditorium while fundraising continues to fully restore it. This route is also being taken at the **King's**

Theatres at Risk

2019



Theatre Kirkcaldy where it is hoped the newly refurbished YMCA building will host events in 2019 allowing restoration works to continue in the adjoining theatre.

Spilsby Theatre

Photo: Ian Grundy

The dream might be to host a programme of blockbuster musicals, but a mixed programme of comedians and live music might be what the local market can support. For example, Bradford Odeon's future is as a music venue, and the plans for **Walthamstow Granada** are for a predominantly comedy-based programme.

Securing an operator for these venues is also an important step. It has certainly been crucial for Bradford Odeon where having NEC on board as the operator has provided additional assurance about the viability and future sustainability of the venue, helping strengthen the business case and funding bids. The future of the **Winter Gardens Pavilion, Blackpool**, is also looking more secure after it was announced that the venue was to be programmed by theatre producers Selladoor Entertainment.

The 'small' matter of ownership

Another crucial factor, yet one that has not been discussed so much, is that the building owner needs to be sympathetic to the cause. Without an owner that understands the significance of the building's heritage, and what needs to be preserved for performance use, it is hard for these projects to progress. This is the final piece of the puzzle and often the hardest to unlock. Theatres are all too often bought as prime development sites, and cultural spaces rarely feature in the plans.

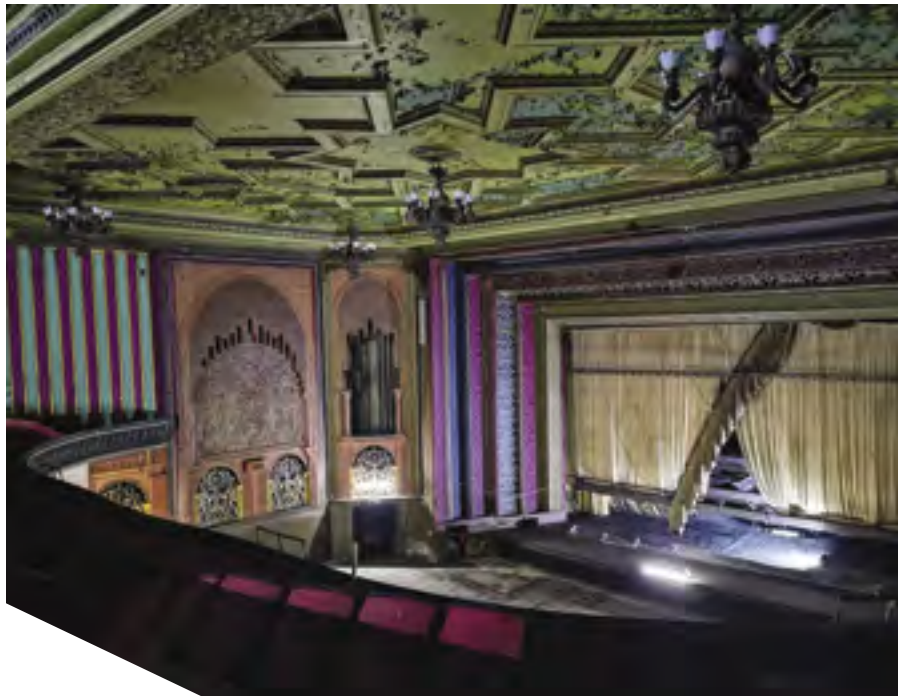
For supporters of the buildings the opportunity to buy their beloved theatre does not always arise at the right time. Burnley Empire Limited (formed by the campaign group **Burnley Empire Theatre Trust**) were, with support from the Theatres Trust and other key partners, able, in the final hour, to buy the theatre from the Duchy of Lancaster and a way forward is looking much clearer (although by no means easy). But others have not been so fortunate. **Salford Victoria**, **Kings Dundee** and **Brighton Hippodrome** have all come under new ownership in the last 18 months, despite attempts by the friends groups to acquire the buildings, making their futures all the more uncertain.

Theatres make places

Despite the time, money and energy needed to bring these theatres back into use, we truly believe it is worth it. Every theatre on the list has the potential to be a real asset to its community. This is not just about somewhere to have a good night out (although there is nothing wrong in that). Theatres can be central to placemaking, giving communities a real sense of cohesion and belonging. Culture-led regeneration is a sound proposition and a theatre building can provide the centrepiece that attracts visitors to the town / borough and encourages residents to spend their money locally.

Stockton Council, a major funder in the restoration project for former Theatre at Risk **Stockton Globe**, has estimated that the reopened 3,000-capacity entertainment venue has the potential to attract up to 170,000 visitors per year. The London Borough of Waltham Forest which announced its intentions to purchase Walthamstow Granada last year has carried out research which shows that the theatre could play a key role in the revival of the local area, estimating that once renovated the site could add between £34m and £52m to the local economy over a ten year period. Likewise, the impact of Bradford Odeon has been forecast as a £10.4m boost to the local economy through providing jobs, training, volunteering opportunities and over 200 events annually.

These cases illustrate that when arts and heritage funders and local authorities recognise the potential and opportunity of theatres and invest in their future positive outcomes can be achieved.



Don't give up

There have been many success stories over the 12 years we've been running the Theatres at Risk Register. Of the 175 theatres that have been on the list, 44% are either operating as live performance venues, are being refurbished, or have been replaced by another suitable performance space. Notable successes include Wilton's Music Hall, Theatre Royal Portsmouth, Kings Theatre Southsea, Aberdeen Tivoli, Shanklin Theatre on the Isle of Wight, Neptune (now Epstein Theatre) Liverpool, St Georges in Great Yarmouth, Normansfield Theatre in Teddington, Hoxton Hall, Tyne Theatre and Opera House, Dunfermline Alhambra and Stockport Plaza to name but a dozen.

Since the 2018 register, we have provided advice and guidance to many of the groups and councils working to ensure their Theatre at Risk has a future, from commenting on the Snibston Masterplan, which now has positive outcomes for the Century Theatre, advising the Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre on having the theatre listed as an Asset of Community Value and helping raise the profile of their campaign, to being a key campaign partner advising Burnley Empire Theatre Trust and enabling them to buy the building.

We are hopeful that many more on this year's list will have happy outcomes given with the right support and opportunity – and time. We are currently fundraising to establish a Theatres at Risk capacity-building programme to help groups which would enable us to provide even more support to these theatres. As always we would urge local authorities, campaign groups and theatre operators to get in touch with us at any point in their theatre's journey, and to work in partnership to restore these cultural gems.

Walthamstow Granada

Photo: Mike Fox



Tottenham Palace
Theatre

Photo: Ian Grundy

On and off the register

New additions

There are three new additions for this year's register – Theatr Ardudwy in Harlech, and two London theatres, Tottenham Palace Theatre and the Intimate Theatre in Palmers Green.

Theatr Ardudwy has been on our watch list for a number of years and has been on the register previously in 2010. It is currently closed due to safety concerns and deteriorating conditions in the facilities and the building. This leaves the local community with no access to the arts in the immediate area.

Tottenham Palace Theatre is again no stranger to the list. Sadly, the church that currently owns the building is no longer able to support the repair work needed and the building is severely deteriorating.

The Intimate Theatre is under threat as the owner, St Monica's Church, plans to redevelop it as a parish centre. It was recently listed as an Asset of Community Value and has played an important role in the local community as a repertory theatre and more recently in amateur use.

Removed from the list

This year seven theatres have been removed from the Theatres at Risk Register. Their fortunes are mixed – some good news stories, one sadly to be lost imminently and others we think are less likely to return to performance use.

Theatres revived

We are delighted that two theatres have been removed from the register this year because their futures as live performance venues have been secured.

Alexandra Palace Theatre reopened on 1 December 2018, following a six-year major restoration project. It is now programming a mixture of one-off shows, comedy nights and orchestra.

The Cryer Theatre in the London Borough of Sutton will be reopened as a community centre with some theatre performance. We supported this scheme as being the best fit for the space and the needs of its local community.

Theatres at Risk

2019



Theatr Ardudwy

Photo: Rob Firman

No longer at risk

Hulme Playhouse and **Llandudno Grand** have both been removed from the list because while they have not returned to live performance use yet, there is no longer an immediate threat to the buildings and they are being used and maintained in ways that mean they could become theatres again one day.

Unlikely to be saved

The Secombe Theatre and **The Cryer** were intrinsically linked – they were both on the list as Sutton was a borough without a performance venue. But good news for The Cryer unfortunately means that it is even harder now to make the case for the Secombe. Furthermore, the Sutton Town Centre Masterplan calls for a new performance and arts centre on a different site. Theatres Trust will work to make sure that this is an appropriate replacement for the Secombe.

Workington Opera House has been removed as there is neither community support for this theatre nor, we believe, a viable reuse for performance as there are other venues in Workington. We will however retain a watching brief on this building.

Permanently lost

The Coronet Theatre in Elephant and Castle is part of a site marked for redevelopment for housing, retail and leisure use, with the plans including demolition of the Coronet. Planning approval has now been granted despite us lobbying both the London Borough of Southwark and the Mayor of London. The proposals do earmark a cultural venue on the UAL site opposite, however, we do not feel it is a suitable replacement. We will continue to make the case for a similar large-scale venue in Southwark.

More information on each of these theatres can be found on our website: theatrestrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk



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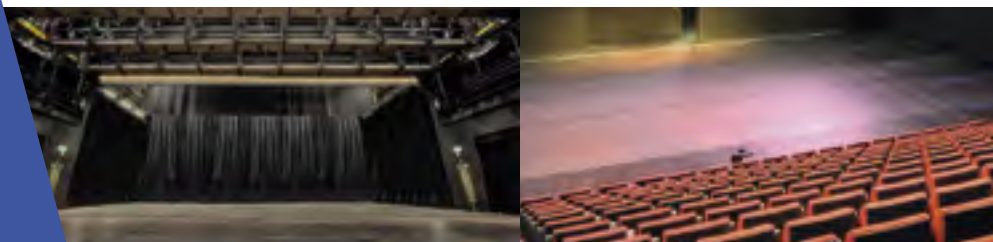
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Battersea Arts Centre



Photo: Morley
Von Sternberg

Battersea Arts Centre's Grand Hall reopened in September after a fire destroyed its roof in the summer of 2015. The restoration and reimagining of the hall is the final part of a twelve-year collaboration with BAC producers, theatre artists, conservation groups and members of the local community to expand the creative scope of the organisation and make the building more welcoming to a wider audience. We talked to the team behind the transformation.

The history of Battersea Arts Centre

Battersea Town Hall is a handsome, well-crafted civic building in south-west London, designed by E. W. Mountford in 1893. It is Grade II* listed for its architectural significance and for its important political role in the birth of the suffragette and labour movements in the early twentieth century. It comprises two parts, the municipal building containing council debating chamber and offices, and the Grand Hall, interconnected by the octagonal foyer with its beautiful stained glass dome.

The former Town Hall has been a site for radical creativity and social and political action since 1893 for the borough of Battersea. As well as regular council meetings, it has held political rallies, concerts, lectures, ceremonies, municipal events, charity fundraisers and theatrical performance. University Extension lectures were held here, including performances of Shakespeare.

Showcase



The aftermath of the fire in the Grand Hall in August 2015

Photo: Haworth Tompkins

The Grand Hall in September 2015, post salvage operation

Photo: Morley Von Sternberg

The programme for the ceremony of the opening of the building in 1893 includes mention of 'theatrephones' installed in the building to allow local audiences that could not afford to travel to listen to West End shows and operas. The building hosted a period of music hall revivals in the 60s. In 1977, the first performances of Tara players, who went on to create Tara Arts in nearby Earlsfield. In the 70s community arts continued including many workshops for children, such as Aubrey Legal-Miller, an important figure within the Black theatre making in the UK, who aimed at providing workshops for local young black British children of the Windrush Generation.

Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) opened in 1974 in the front half of the building, run by Wandsworth Council for several years, before financial difficulties and a public campaign saw the establishment of Battersea Arts Centre as an independent arts centre and the appointment

of Jude Kelly as the first artistic director in 1980. Jude invited artists to occupy the building's spaces which included a ceramics studio, dark rooms, cinema, dance studio and workshop spaces. Artists such as Grayson Perry, Mona Hatoum, and Bruce McLean, used the building at this time to develop and in some cases also present their work.

In to the 90s, Battersea Arts Centre became a site for independent theatre companies and comedians, and notably in 2007 Punchdrunk opened up the use of the entire building with the infamous production, *Masque of the Red Death* – which influenced the use of the spaces at BAC going forward.

In the past decade the theatre has reached a number of milestones. This includes the agreement of a 125-year lease with a rent free period until 2028 and the restoration of the building in partnership with Haworth Tompkins using the Playground process which involved over £20m investment to create dozens more performance spaces, including an open air courtyard theatre, artist bedrooms, production facilities and the renovated Grand Hall following a fire in 2015.

A building for all

BAC has always talked about three central ideas in relation to the building.

Firstly, the idea of being inspired by the past to invent their future. In 1893 the building was a radical proposition. Even to the point that only a third of it was occupied when it opened. The people who created it knew that new council services were coming on stream (like sanitation) that meant they would need more capacity as the decades rolled by – for services they could not imagine when the building was opened.

“We have always sought inspiration in the political, social, architectural and cultural history of the building to help shape its future.”

David Jubb, Artistic Director and CEO of Battersea Arts Centre

Secondly, the motto of Battersea from the mid-19th century, 'Not For Me, Not For You, But For Us' is now one of the organisation's core values and has consistently inspired them to think about the purpose and design of the building. How can the building be generous, open, inviting, accessible and for all?

Thirdly, the idea that they are the current stewards of the building, which belongs to the people of Wandsworth and beyond. BAC's decisions now are not permanent, they do not want to restrict the choices of future generations who might use the building differently.



The building project

At the start of the project in 2006 / 07 Battersea Arts Centre was only using a handful of key rooms at the front of the Municipal building for theatre performances, with occasional events and private hires in the Grand Hall and Lower Hall space. Rooms in the Municipal building had basic electrical infrastructure for sound and lighting, but there were no strong points to rig equipment and set, no acoustic insulation or blackout capability and there were no dressing rooms for actors. The rear part of the Municipal building was a confusing labyrinth of partitioned rooms and mismatched floor levels that were difficult to navigate and as a result, were underused. BAC staff offices were uncomfortable, most of the building had no lift access, and foyer spaces were underwhelming. The Lower Hall area was underused with low-slung suspended ceilings concealing the grandeur of the original historic rooms. Catering areas were poorly equipped, rooms were too cold in winter and overheated in the summer, and many roofs were poorly maintained with no thermal insulation.

Architects Haworth Tompkins has been embedded at BAC for over a decade, working out how the building could become more vivid, more welcoming and more creatively productive for a wider community of people. They researched the architectural history of the building in order to fully understand it – how and why it was built and what rooms and elements were highly significant, and a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) document was produced before any design work had taken place.

The CMP agreed a set of principles for future works and alterations to the building to maintain and enhance its significant features

(e.g. mosaic floors, external facades), as well as identifying areas such as the disused light well and west attic where new interventions could be conceived if required. Because of this, conservation officers and heritage bodies were involved in the design process from day one.

Haworth Tompkins adopted BAC's 'scratch' methodology of improvisation, testing and feedback, talking to as many people as possible about how the building should work - starting with small tweaks to support specific shows. This quickly led to a close collaboration with artists, theatre producers and the local community. The whole project has been a research and consultation exercise.

Each experiment has in turn shaped the future of the design, with staff, audiences and community providing feedback and future ideas throughout the process, for example through breakfast events or public tours of the ruined Grand Hall.

Gradually, they developed a series of bigger, phased projects to transform the entire Town Hall into a seamless, multi-functional creative space. The process has been based on growing mutual trust and shared authorship, far more integrated than a conventional client / architect relationship.

Building works progressed incrementally, beginning with alterations to the café and entrance foyer. To bring light deep into the building and to help orientation, a new public courtyard performance space was created by selectively stripping back and patching a disused original light well in the centre of the building. Circulation routes have been reopened and improved, with access lifts installed to all areas. Unused attics and rooftops have been converted and extended into offices, a staff garden and bedrooms for visiting artists.

From left to right

The Octagonal Hall

Photo: Morley von Sternberg

East Corridor and Grand Hall ahead of reopening

Photo: Haworth Tompkins

New Grand Hall technical galleries, concealed within the grid ceiling

Photo: Philip Vile

showcase



Performance of *Little Bulb's Orpheus*, 2018

Photo: Adam Trigg

A supporter's reopening event in 2018

Photo: James Allan



Parts of the building had been altered repeatedly and a range of detail building surveys and 'keyhole' investigations were commissioned regularly during the design and construction periods to shed light on areas of uncertainty so that they could be addressed in good time and prevent delays to the project programme or disruption to building occupants.

The first late 19th century drawings of the building are on the flat and in a straight line. But the building actually runs down a hill and round a kink in the road. When the building was built this, in effect, created a break between the front and back half of the building with changes in floor level. Though an upside, one might say, for an adventurous cultural space, was the creation of warren like mezzanine levels and a fair amount of disorientation. So this challenge both presented issues to solve in terms of access and circulation, but also opportunities to build upon in terms of adventure and atmosphere.

Detail design challenges have included careful conservation of historic features, concealing new electrical, ventilation and heating services, increasing thermal and acoustic insulation invisibly within historic spaces, and of course responding to the tragic loss of the Grand Hall.

Technical improvements such as dedicated workshop and dressing room spaces, together with a new 'plug and play' sound and lighting infrastructure, allow performances to take place in spaces all over the building and in any combination.

The entire building is designed for creative and community activity, allowing for multiple, interconnected performance, heritage and community uses, equipping Battersea Arts Centre for the next phase of its life as a resilient cultural building.

Fire in the Grand Hall

On Friday 13 March 2015 there was a fire in the Grand Hall and 80 south London fire fighters fought to save the front half of the building. Haworth Tompkins and Heyne Tillett Steel, structural engineers, were onsite immediately, and the insurers the very next morning. The theatre was open within 24 hours of the fire with shows in the unaffected front half of the building. Though the building had an acrid smell of smoke, a local passer by bought flowers for the tables that evening and the audience cheered when the house was declared open.

The public support BAC received even as the fire was being put out was amazing. Stella Duffy, writer and theatremaker, coined the hashtag #BACPhoenix which went viral around the world and people started raising money to help the organisation stay open. At a time when they could not identify a suitable or available dangerous structures contractor, a neighbour walked in off the street and talked to the box office team, telling them that they worked for a dangerous structures company and that they wanted to offer their services. The generosity and support of the wider capital project team was immense and the momentum grew apace to rebuild, re-open and re-juvenate.

It was a massive blow to lose so much fabric from such an important room, but it was also an opportunity to record a truly momentous event in the life of the building in the most honest and creative way. In the team's past work they had framed the evolving stories of the Town Hall as the product of successive change and honouring the history of the Grand Hall meant not obliterating its past. They needed to find a design solution that would be 'grand' enough to evoke memories for the thousands of people whose lives had played out there, powerful enough to mark the event of the fire itself and creatively capable enough to represent a new

chapter for the community of artists, residents and audiences.

The fire destroyed the entire ceiling but left most of the walls intact, revealing astonishingly beautiful layers of old paint and underlying structure. Together they decided to leave them as they were and add back a new interpretation of the plaster vault with the same geometry and pattern but this time in multi-layered plywood. Now, new technical infrastructure concealed in the roofspace above the lattice ceiling allows natural ventilation, a far greater theatrical possibility and a variable acoustic to suit a range of events such as spoken word, drama, festivals, weddings, gigs and orchestral recitals.

“It’s been an enormous labour of love. Throughout the whole BAC collaboration we’ve had the sense of inventing a new kind of cultural and civic space within the historic architecture, and rebuilding after the fire has been a heightened version of that process.”

Steve Tompkins, Director, Haworth Tompkins

The rebuilding of the Grand Hall after the fire was able to be assimilated into the incremental nature of the project as another, albeit highly significant, moment of evolution and change.

The Grand Hall reopening

BAC reopened the Grand Hall in September 2018. The main building project, phased from March 2009 to August 2016, cost £8.2m and the Grand Hall fire rebuild, which took place from March 2015 to August 2018, cost a further £11m.

The team thought long and hard about how to thank more than 6,000 people who supported Battersea Arts Centre following the fire: from donations, to lending stuff, to re-housing shows, to moral support. It was not possible to fit them all in to a single re-opening event, so they were invited to one of ten free Phoenix Events across the re-opening Phoenix season - a five-month celebration of risk-taking and renewal.

There were a range of events for the amazing people who were integral to the reopening of the Grand Hall. From a ceremonial photo on Friday 13 July 2018 just hours after the building was handed back from the builders; to the first night of the first theatre show in the space; to a ceremony as part of *Orpheus* for couples who have been married in the Grand Hall; to helping cook Christmas dinner for the local community. Their initial reaction? ‘nothing short of breathtaking’, ‘superhuman’, ‘creative’, ‘heartfelt’.

Battersea Arts Centre is fully open because of the community response and BAC are so very, very grateful.

Clockwise from left

The courtyard, completed 2016

Photo: Alex Brenner

Foyers, completed in 2012

Photo: Nicholas Hartwright

Grand Hall dressing room

Photo: Philip Vile



Showcase

UK Beatbox
Championships 2018

Photo: Tom Kitney

Showcase

Thoughts on a ten year project

A longer, slower project, investing more in R&D, has meant that the organisation has retained more control over its destiny, both in terms of the transformation to the building and to the organisation.

One of the great benefits of a long and gradual redevelopment of the building is that the organisation has been transformed alongside the building.

The organisation has merged with Wandsworth Museum and created the new BAC Moving Museum with new national programmes such as Creative Museums. The Scratch Hub has opened as a home for the creative industries, alongside programmes to support charities in Wandsworth and Lambeth. The organisation has opened up its young people's programme, and there have been nationwide partnerships.

The organisation has also grown its commercial income streams in-line with its purpose and reshuffled its organisational structure to create a less hierarchical and more diverse model of project working. 122 years since the Town Hall was built the theatre team have moved in to the last unoccupied space: the west attic; now a site for 60 team members.

Theatre buildings are civic spaces and the completed project is a good example of an open, accessible, creative and community space.

Design Team

Architect

Haworth Tompkins

Theatre consultant

Theatreplan

Contractor

8Build, Ashe, Gilbert-Ash

Structural Engineer

Price & Myers, Heyne Tillett Steel

Services Engineer

Skelly & Couch, XCO2

Acoustic Engineer

Gillieron Scott Acoustic Design,
SoundSpaceDesign

Quantity Surveyor

Bristow Johnson

Signage

Jake Tilson

Theatreplan at Battersea Arts Centre



Theatreplan created the technical solutions which allow for the widest possible range of activities to take place in the Grand Hall.

Working with Haworth Tompkins we ensured technical installations were cleverly concealed within the beautiful timber grid ceiling, where our innovative suspension system placed acoustic banners, hoists and tracks in the roof space, preserving the ceiling's visual impact. The lighting, sound and video technology has digital connectivity between equipment, ensuring ease of use, economical maintenance and more powerful capability, with built-in future-proofing.

Battersea Arts Centre is technically equipped to flourish at the centre of London's cultural life for many years to come.

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Ambassadors in action

An update on the work of the Theatres Trust Ambassadors who support us to ensure the UK's theatres are protected and secured for future generations to enjoy.

Since we introduced our Ambassadors in the last issue of TM, the 24 have become 25 as in October we were delighted to announce that composer and producer Andrew Lloyd Webber has become a Theatres Trust Ambassador. His first act as an Ambassador was to provide the space for the launch of the Theatres Trust's new Patron Scheme at The London Palladium.

Theatres Trust Trustee, presenter and comedian, Dara Ó Briain introduced the evening to an invited audience that included philanthropists, charitable trusts and foundations, and leading figures from the culture and heritage sectors. Fellow Trustee Gary Kemp and Ambassadors Samira Ahmed, Jo Brand and Beverley Knight gave impassioned speeches about why theatre matters to them. The event also included the first screening of a film showcasing the Theatres Trust's work, featuring many of our Ambassadors.

The film was also shown at our annual conference on 16 October 2018 at the Lyric Hammersmith,



starting the day off on a positive, inspiring note. An undoubted highlight of the whole conference was the plenary session with two Ambassadors – Cameron Mackintosh in conversation with Samira Ahmed, talking about his passion for theatre and restoring theatre buildings.

Playwright and director Alan Ayckbourn kindly agreed to be interviewed for this magazine (pg 20) about how theatres buildings have changed over the course of his career.

Thanks to all of our Ambassadors for everything they have done so far. We look forward to working with them more over the coming year.

Theatres Trust Trustees and Ambassadors: Dara Ó Briain, Beverley Knight, Jo Brand, Samira Ahmed and Gary Kemp at our Patron Scheme launch event at the London Palladium.

Photo: Sharron Wallace

We caught up quickly with another new Ambassador Pippa Bennett-Warner



What is your favourite theatre to perform in and why?

The Donmar Warehouse because it's small and intimate. As an actor it's a dream because you don't have to project too much. The audience are so close to the stage so you really feel like they're part of the show. They're like another character in the piece.

What role do you see theatres playing in society now?

I love how theatres allow people to escape. Times are tricky so being able to do that for a couple of hours is much needed! Plays and musicals can be educational, they can open our minds and allow us to see things from other people's perspectives, allow us to go on other people's journeys;

some of which are very different from our own. Theatres also provide people with somewhere to go and relax (if not relax then be distracted!) and have a good time. I love how theatres encourage audiences to truly invest in the make believe. When you really feel like you've had an experience or witnessed something epic by the time the curtain falls, that feels very satisfying.

What is your favourite theatre to see a performance in?

Really hard question but I'm going with The Royal Court Upstairs. For similar reasons to the Donmar. You're so close to the action so you never miss anything. Also, it's such a great space. The actor / audience relationship is always so interesting there because the configuration changes pretty much every time a new play begins.

In conversation with Theatres Trust Ambassador **Alan Ayckbourn**

Alan Ayckbourn

Photo: Andrew Higgins



Alan on the set of *Way Upstream*, 1982.

Photo: Scarborough
Theatre Trust / Stephen
Joseph Theatre



We spoke to Sir Alan Ayckbourn, playwright and theatre director about how theatre buildings have changed over his career.

Have theatre buildings changed in your opinion since you first started writing?

Yes. In my lifetime enormously. When I started out in the fifties as an aspiring actor (playwriting and directing were yet to follow) there were few types of theatre for professionals to work in other than ones with prosceniums. My first realisation that there were other forms came about as a result of a handful of frequently maligned devotees who insisted that, indeed, there were and indeed there had been other forms dating back in this country to the Cornish theatres in the round. One such passionate proponent was the remarkable pioneer Stephen Joseph who operated a series of in-the-round Sunday night performances in London and then, in 1955, established a makeshift auditorium on the first floor of the Scarborough public library which was dedicated to promoting this currently largely unknown form of staging twinned with a strong bias for new plays by unknown contemporary writers.

Within the decade that followed, I saw the established theatre's taste gradually shift away from the preferred choice of a proscenium or end stage with new buildings springing up everywhere and the Bolton Octagon, the Sheffield Crucible, Stoke-on-Trent's Victoria Theatre becoming viable alternatives to more conventional new projects such as Coventry's Belgrade. This swing of preferences culminated ultimately with the newly opened National Theatre choosing to make two of its three auditoria open stages.

Has the role theatres play in society changed and how do you see them now?

Again, very much and in my view for the better. A preponderance of weekly rep dominated the theatre scene in my early days with many provincial centres being offered a stream of hastily-produced under-rehearsed productions offering a pre-television audience a weekly diet of rotating comedies, dramas or light classics forty-eight weeks of the year with the much-needed relief of a four-week panto at Christmas. (I recall my first bitter experience of the latter was when I found my meagre salary

had suffered a reduction due to our not working on Christmas Day!). Considering the unremitting schedule and heavy demands made of both performers and stage management it was, in hindsight, remarkable that the standard was as high as it was.

But, with the mass spread of TV, theatre regionally was forced to examine its role in the community and re-invent itself, reverting to its original role becoming more than a mere purveyor of entertainment but also to inform, educate and provide a forum for discussion - whilst still entertaining, of course! Quite a brief. Whilst the West End's commercial wing retreated, in the main, to large scale musical spectacles with commensurately increased ticket prices!

When you start writing a play does the building affect how you approach writing it?

It has an enormous effect. I grew up as a dramatist writing part-time whilst pursuing my 'day job' as a stage manager, electrician, sound operator, actor and director within a small company. My writing was always tightly tailored to accommodate my working surroundings, regarding cast requirements (numbers, age, gender and budget) and particularly to a round staging in a specific building. My first few years were written with small casts (usually three males and three females) and two entrances in keeping with the layout of the original Scarborough Library Theatre set up. These plays later transferred, or were recast, to be re-staged for West End traditional prosceniums, but all owing their origins to a round staging. Occasionally they benefitted artistically from this transference but more often they suffered. After 1975, with our move to our second temporary home the Theatre at Westwood, with the advent of now three available entrances, the writing often took advantage of this, together with the occasional inclusion of a staircase utilising the theatre's latecomers' entrance. These features were later incorporated more permanently when we moved home yet again in 1995 to the theatre's current home, a converted Odeon Cinema building, the Stephen Joseph Theatre. At this point I took advantage of utilising the available understage facilities this new space had available, mostly for my developing children's work. I also was at liberty to make occasional forays into the end stage utilising our second space, the McCarthy Theatre with plays such as *Things We Do for Love* (impossible to produce in-the-round) and, on one occasion, taking advantage of the two available auditoria by writing *House & Garden* which played simultaneously in both with the cast rushing from one auditorium to the other.

As a footnote to this, I was fortunate to have worked, over the years at the National Theatre



where it became necessary on occasions to adapt or modify my dramatic approaches. Hence with *Bedroom Farce*, to accommodate the daunting width of the Lyttleton stage, I created three contrasting bedrooms side by side, effectively dividing the space into three. Later with the Olivier, in response to the bigger canvas and facilities, making use of the larger scale with *Sisterly Feelings*, *A Chorus of Disapproval* and *A Small Family Business*.

Stephen Joseph Theatre.

Photo: Ian Grundy

A Small Family Business at the National Theatre in 2014

Photo: Johan Persson / ArenaPAL

What is your favourite theatre?

Is there any doubt where my heart lies? The Stephen Joseph Theatre is for me the perfect round space which we, the company, virtually had built to order for us utilising the best of all we'd learned from our previous buildings. Not too big, not too small and with the audience sitting all round in the same room, sharing the performance with performers and each other. A truly magic space.

Find out more about our Ambassadors and why they support us by visiting:
theatretrust.org.uk/about-us/our-ambassadors

This is yours.

The impact of Bristol Old Vic is visible across British theatre history though its home on King Street has been largely hidden from view since it opened in 1766.

Initially an illegal performance space outside the city walls, the theatre has spent much of the following two and half centuries gradually opening its building up to the city, becoming a space for all walks of life to gather. In our latest collaboration with Haworth Tompkins, the studio theatre and front of house has been boldly re-imagined, creating an inviting space to while away the day from morning coffee to curtain call.

Bristol Old Vic, a theatre for the whole city



Photo: Jon Craig

Bristol Old Vic, the UK's oldest continuously working theatre has reopened its front of house and new studio theatre following the second and final stage of a ten-year £26m renovation and refurbishment project to safeguard the theatre's future. Outgoing Chief Executive Emma Stenning discusses how they set about saving Bristol Old Vic by building resilience in.

I joined Bristol Old Vic at a time when the theatre had been threatened with closure. At that time, the Georgian parts of the building were in need of some serious TLC – the auditorium was tired, the heating left little to be desired and the sightlines didn't satisfy the expectations of modern audiences. The 70s parts were starting to reach the end of their natural life and the street façade of the extension, which looked like a magistrate's court, needed reworking. The theatre also only opened to the public from pre-show drinks. None of this helped attract audience and offered nothing in terms of commercial trading – the theatre simply wasn't delivering for its staff or audiences.

There was so much potential at Bristol Old Vic just waiting to be unlocked. Firstly, there was a real capital need for

the works, the whole building needed refreshing. Secondly, although circulation was difficult and there was no front of house lift access the existing footprint provided us scope and space to play with. Thirdly, a real trick had been missed with trading opportunities, Bristol Old Vic is a sizable piece of real estate as a public building in the heart of the city centre, so the commercial potential for it was huge. Finally, as the oldest working theatre with 250 years of history, the heritage story could make it a real visitor destination.

We were faced with a challenge, and one we saw falling into two distinct projects: a need to invest in the historic Grade I fabric, the original parts of Bristol Old Vic being a protected building, and we also needed to rethink the 70s extension, with its long corridors and breezeblock. This joint approach could make the whole space more welcoming.

Phase 1 included the refurbishment of the auditorium, which allowed us to embrace the theatre's heritage as well as improve seating, fire protection, electrics and infrastructure, and was finished in 2012. Phase 2 works took place over the last two years. Lots of the 70s' fabric has been demolished, and we have built a new full-height timber and glass-fronted foyer, revealing the original auditorium façade to the street for the first time.

The hospitality business and events space, which will be used for weddings, corporate events and the like, should add £350,000 to £400,000 to the annual turnover.

Photo: Philip Vile



Huge sun-shading shutters, incorporating the text of renowned actor David Garrick's inaugural 1766 opening night address, and a poem by former Bristol city poet Miles Chamber, highlight the theatre's long history and look to its future role in the whole community. The foyer is now an inspirational place for the local community to enjoy throughout the day as a café, bar and meeting place. The second phase also saw the Georgian Guildhall, previously serving as a circulation space, recovered as its original grand hall, which is now available for hire. But how did we get here?

Once the auditorium refurbishment was complete in 2012, we set about writing a business plan to inform the second phase of works. In phase 2 we worked with architects Haworth Tompkins and project managers Plann Ltd, who really understood that we wanted to provide a social and creative space for the people of Bristol, both spectacular and comfortable, where people enter with a 'wow', stay to grab a cup of coffee, and then see a show. We all agreed the plurality of use was key, with a focus on the visitor's emotional experience — you can see this from the fabrics used, to the sheer scale of the new foyer.

Phase 2 was made a lot simpler by having learnt from the first phase of the capital project — we knew we had to be realistic about what we wanted for the site, and what we could fundraise for. We decided to prioritise quality over scope, a balancing act of any capital project — I think we got it right.

We knew the theatre had potential to make money, and what was crucial to the success of our project was that the organisation to come on board after Plann as project directors, were the catering consultants. With them we undertook months of analysis to inform the catering offer — looking at the local market place, comparing price

points, and honing the food offer that would work best for us. This work led the architectural brief for our front of house that would have a new catering and events business at its heart, and that would play a major role in the future of the theatre.

From the outset Plann was very conscious that this was the way forward for Bristol Old Vic. There are industry stories about cultural buildings that were very much let down by their catering offer, and were struggling financially because their catering concession was not delivering. Our goal was to ensure that our theatre would have revenue streams in place that could sustain it in the long term.

The project that followed, and that you can now see in person, included the creation of a new foyer, café and bar area, a redevelopment of Coopers' Hall to provide a range of corporate, conferencing and event facilities, and the construction of a new studio theatre. It has also become a new heritage destination, with exhibitions, interactive experiences, tours and workshops to tell the story of a playhouse that has been entertaining Bristol for over 250 years.

The challenge of audience development is continuous and theatres need to reassert their place as civic buildings. The first step is having a welcoming, inspiring building where the architecture can pull people in. We hope that the mix of our theatre programme, the celebration of our building's heritage and a strong events and catering offer is the solution to making the business model and the building self-sustaining.

The dream outcome of this project is that the city and visitors reclaim this building as their own. As I sit at my desk I am able to look out over the foyer, and I can see this starting to happen in front of my very eyes.



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Photo: Philip Vile

Q&A with Jack Hunter, Chair of Leith Theatre Trust

In 2016, after years of campaigning, Leith Theatre Trust was granted a lease to operate the B listed classical civic complex, Leith Theatre. Now hosting regular events the Theatre at Risk is on its way to a positive future. We asked Jack Hunter, Chair of the campaign group, about the steps he and the team took to get the theatre open and active.



How did you get involved in the campaign to restore and reopen Leith Theatre?

In 2004 the City of Edinburgh Council proposed to sell-off Leith Theatre as a housing development site to fund the refurbishment of other theatre buildings in the city. A local action group was formed to contest the proposal and received support from the Port of Leith Housing Association (POLHA). I was on the Board of POLHA at the time and, being a strong supporter of the wider role that housing associations can play in community regeneration, I volunteered to sit in on their meetings. At that time, we were a pressure group seeking to get the building retained, improved and brought back into full use. Of course, we were successful and now we are much more than that, with responsibility for operating the building and realising our ambitions for the venue.

Describe the recent milestones and successes for Leith Theatre.

What signalled a significant change in our fortunes was our partnership with the Hidden Door Festival. Hidden Door is a not for profit organisation who repurpose abandoned and unused spaces for an annual arts festival. They approached us with a vision for using the theatre as the basis of their 2017 Festival and in May 2017 we successfully opened the main theatre for the first time in nearly thirty years. It was attended by nearly 13,000 people which silenced the naysayers who said 'people will never come to Leith'. Since then we've focused on opening the main auditorium for key events, often delivered in partnership,

as we also develop plans and fundraise to bring it back into permanent use. Hidden Door came back this year and in August 2018 the Edinburgh International Festival returned to the theatre with 16 nights of contemporary Scottish music as part of their *Light on the Shore* series.

In terms of fundraising, in June 2017 we were successful in obtaining a small project development grant from the Architectural Heritage Fund which enabled us to hire a design team to carry out an updated feasibility study for the building. We appointed a team led by Collective Architecture who have helped us to develop some pragmatic plans for getting the building fully operational as well as some longer-term more ambitious proposals for its future. Our hard work with the council paid off when in February 2018 they announced that they would provide £1m funding in their current budget. This money should enable us to make the improvements to the power, lighting and toilets needed to get our permanent licence which will mean we can open on a full-time basis. We were also recently awarded grant-funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to improve the resilience of the organisation by appointing a new Executive Director.

All photos are of The
Hidden Door Festival
courtesy of Chris Scott.



What do you think persuaded the City of Edinburgh Council to support your project?

There are several things that have come together to contribute to our eventual success. Partly it is due to the campaign evolving into an organised company and charity with strong motivation, expert advisers and through our extensive networking and dogged promotion. Over the last few years we have approached some key people with links to Leith and have obtained the support of Irvine Welsh as our patron and a great list of ambassadors including Danny Boyle and Michael Sheen which has been helpful in raising our profile. However, I would say that it is staging major events like the Edinburgh International Festival and Hidden Door Festival that has enabled us to showcase the potential of the venue and demonstrate its viability. People were genuinely excited, and the press response was more than we could have hoped for. The council couldn't help but recognise the public support and opportunity that the project presents for Leith and for Edinburgh more widely.

What are the next steps to secure Leith Theatre's future?

The events I mentioned are all one-off events for which we obtain temporary licenses. It can cost up to £20k to run any event because of the need to bring in power, equipment and toilet provision. However, now that we have completed our Feasibility Study, we are in the process of accessing the funding that the council has committed while raising the additional capital required. This will mean we can commence the first stage of works to upgrade the power, ventilation and improve the toilets – not very glamorous, but essential for us to secure a permanent public entertainment licence and reduce operating costs.

What key piece of advice would you give a Theatres at Risk campaign?

To be successful you need to build partnerships and convince the key people, be that politicians, funders or audiences that your vision is not only possible, but can help them to deliver on their goals. It helps to have a team of dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers and staff and you must have support from the local community and wider artistic community so go out and talk to them, find out what they want. Crucially, it is likely to be a long process, so you need to 'persevere', which also happens to be Leith's motto and is displayed on the Leith coat of arms above the proscenium arch in the main auditorium!

“The council couldn't help but recognise the public support and opportunity that the project presents for Leith and for Edinburgh more widely.”



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Saving Shanklin Theatre

Shanklin Theatre, a former Theatre at Risk, is now the best attended theatre on the Isle of Wight, but ten years ago it was under local authority control and threatened with demolition for development. Chairman of the Shanklin Theatre and Community Trust, Chris Quirk, discusses their strategy for success.

In 2008 the Isle of Wight Council decided that it could no longer put an annual subsidy of £250,000 a year into Shanklin Theatre, which it owned and operated. Council officers proposed that the theatre should be closed down and demolished, with the intention that the site would be sold to developers to generate funds that could be directed at other capital projects.

At the start of 2009 Shanklin Theatre was officially closed. This once grand piece of history dating back to the Victorian heyday of the Isle of Wight had been allowed to decay both structurally and artistically. The theatre had a leaking roof, seating that predated modern fire regulations, and had nearly all of its operating procedures and records destroyed by disaffected staff who had been made redundant.

The threat of permanent closure for Shanklin Theatre was a catalyst for local people

passionate about the theatre, and in 2008 they set up the Friends of Shanklin Theatre (FOST) to save the theatre from permanent closure.

Their first priority was to stop the theatre being sold for development. Fortunately Shanklin Theatre is an architecturally interesting building, the theatre dates from 1934 and the wider building from 1879 as the Shanklin Literary Institute. FOST joined forces with the Theatres Trust and with the support of the Architectural Heritage Fund applied to English Heritage to designate the building. The theatre was listed Grade II in February 2010. This act alone saved the theatre from demolition.

The next priority was to get control of the theatre. To help the campaign, Shanklin Theatre Action Group Enterprise was formed. It gained the support of several elected members who knew their way around County Hall to quietly but efficiently make the case. They lobbied local elected members with a positive message about how the theatre really was an important community asset, avoiding criticism of the council, a 'how dare you take away our theatre' approach would not have been helpful. They also developed a close working relationship with the local newspaper (a widely read dominant publication), and the two largest local radio stations. They kept them updated with ongoing positive news and a clear message that the local authority administration should be expected to support retention of the theatre.

Shanklin Theatre at night

Images courtesy of
Shanklin Theatre and
Community Trust



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Once the theatre was a listed building the council's proposals to demolish it were scrapped. There were two options, allow someone to run it or leave it empty. The council tendered for an operator, and the only bid that did not require ongoing funding from the council was a bid between ourselves (FOST) and Shanklin Town Council, and the Mayor signed over a Licence to Occupy Shanklin Theatre in April 2010.

The next step was to establish a sound financial operating base to minimise risk, the biggest was that the operation might fail financially and so Shanklin Theatre and Community Trust, a Company Limited by Guarantee, was created to hold leases and negotiate the freehold transfer of the theatre. A wholly owned subsidiary operating company to carry out the risky business of running a theatre was set up, this separated the corporate assets from the revenue account, and registered charity status was secured.

We had removed the biggest financial risk and secured tenure, so plans moved to maximising revenue. The campaign persuaded the local authority to grant £17,000 they would have spent on theatre security in the final year of operation to kick start plans the theatre. This was supplemented by a number of Friends and Board Members committing their own money as unsecured loans or loans in kind. In our first year we also won an award from our local Rotary Club, which was ring-fenced for specific capital projects.

If Shanklin Theatre and Community Trust had accepted transfer of all the existing theatre staff we would not have succeeded in saving the theatre. Our staffing strategy was to employ only those staff members that were essential

to operate the theatre. We started with a paid staff that included a sound and light engineer, a stage manager and a cleaner; all had been previously employed by the theatre but were reemployed on a different, more flexible contract, and to fill the gaps we used volunteers from the Friends group.

A key strength of Shanklin Theatre was and still is the general management experience and technical competence of the staff and the Board of Directors. We have three former Mayors on our Board. We now operate with two paid, full-time theatre managers, one handling bookings and operations, the other financial control; both were recruited from our volunteer force. It is our Friends that provide a crucial volunteer base without which it would not be possible to run the theatre. We have a membership of over 550 Friends, 150 of whom are registered volunteers whose age range is from 14 to over 90 years old. An active group of around 60 volunteers are involved every week, and we have a wide pool with particular skill sets willing to be called on when required. Volunteers run the front of house, they clean and maintain the building, distribute theatre brochures locally, promote the theatre at events across the island and organise an annual garden party. They also hold a bucket collection after every show which has now realised over £125,000 for the refurbishment of the theatre.

It took a few years to finalise the freehold transfer due to the complexity of negotiating the value of the theatre building. Local authorities have a legal mandate to deliver good value for the community when disposing of assets. As an empty building plot the theatre was worth around £250,000, but to rebuild would cost in the region of £4m, although the council's own survey identified that £2m needed to make the theatre fit for purpose. In the end we paid £170,000 for the freehold interest, and the local authority lent us the money on a long-term mortgage, with repayments appropriate to income.

We receive no ongoing funding from the local authority, so a significant proportion of our programme is made up of what the public are willing to attend, whilst paying commercially viable ticket prices. We are home to a number of amateur theatre groups, but our bread and butter is in mainstream entertainment which gets priority at prime times.

Ten years on Shanklin Theatre is a beautiful, well-maintained building that puts on top flight entertainment, both professional and amateur. The theatre is home to an excellent stage school that trains young islanders from 5 to 18 years old, and runs theatre workshops for visiting school parties and week-long intensive theatre courses for overseas students out of season.



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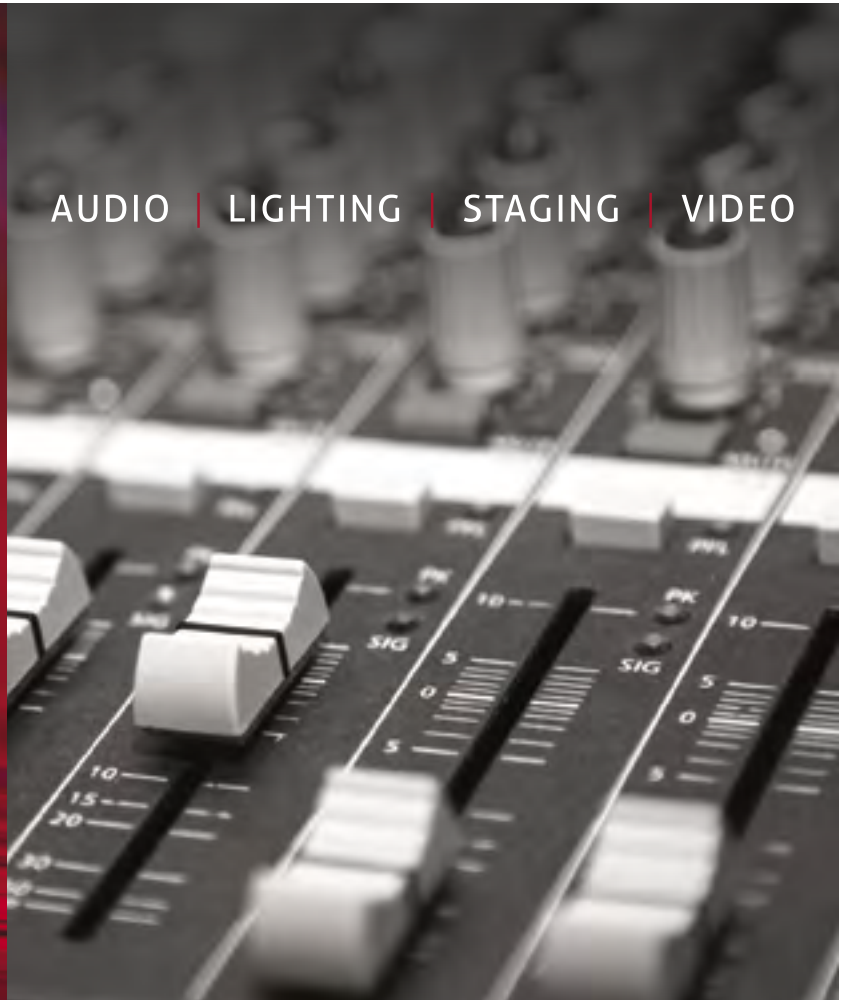
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Our Work

We provide advice on the planning and development of theatres.

Ovalhouse, Brixton

Previsualisation: Picture Plane / Foster Wilson Architects



We were consulted on proposals to demolish the existing **Ovalhouse Theatre** in Lambeth (18/04183/FUL) for a new hotel. The theatre is moving to a new site in Brixton as part of the 'Somerleyton Road Project', a community partnership which is also being delivered alongside new homes, community facilities and space for social enterprises. The new theatre is set to open in 2020. Our planning response made it clear that a formal condition should be in place preventing loss of the theatre until the new site is suitable progressed, and we welcomed that the applicant had themselves put forward such a commitment.

New theatres

In October a major application was submitted to the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham (2018/03100/FUL & 2018/03101/LB) for **redevelopment of the historic Olympia Exhibition Centre**. The proposal included a new 1,000-seat theatre as well as a large **new 3,000 capacity music and performance venue** as part of a plan to significantly upgrade Olympia's conferencing and exhibition offer and bring retail, a cinema, leisure and hotels to the site. We are supportive of the initial designs for the theatre, more detailed designs will follow as the scheme progresses.

In November we received notification from Oldham Council (MMA/342441/18) of revised plans for the replacement **Oldham Coliseum**, however it has been announced that the Coliseum project would no longer be going ahead. We will work with the council as they look at other options, including improvement of the existing Coliseum theatre.

We supported an exciting plan by the Awen Cultural Trust to redevelop the **Town Hall in Maesteg**, Bridgend (P/18/761/LIS & P/18/762/BCB). The scheme includes a new studio theatre, café and heritage centre alongside repairs and improvements to the existing listed building. This will enable a wider range of productions to take place than are currently suitable for the Town Hall's existing larger space, as well as to bring regular cinema to the town. The studio theatre will be housed within a striking modern extension to the Grade II listed building.

We responded positively to a proposal for a modern extension to the Grade II listed **Lancaster Grand** (18/00832/FUL & 18/00852/LB), which includes a new studio/rehearsal space. The plan is to demolish part of later additions to the building and to construct a new two-storey extension. The theatre currently suffers from a lack of space for circulation and at its bar, as well as having a need to improve access.

We were also consulted on and supported a number of proposals for works at smaller and community theatres around the country. This includes a small side extension to facilitate additional female WCs at **Clacton's West Cliff Theatre** (18/01465/FUL), a rear extension to



Town Hall Maesteg

Previsualisation: Purcell

Redevelopment and replacement

The Theatres Trust actively encourage theatre owners and operators to invest in their buildings to ensure they meet current building and safety standards and the expectations of audiences, staff, and performers.

Contact us if you are planning a capital project or want advice and guidance on maintaining your theatre building: advice@theatretrust.org.uk.



Cromer pier

Photo: Douglas Atfield

provide a new store room for scenery and props at **Sheppey Little Theatre** in **Sheerness** (18/504036/FULL) and various improvements at the **Robin Hood Theatre** in **Averham** near Newark (18/01869/FUL). The Robin Hood Theatre, a previous recipient of the Trust's Small Grant Scheme, has also submitted plans to provide an accessible dressing room and WC, new ramps into the building, an extended foyer area and improved thermal/energy conservation measures.

Non-theatre use for former theatre buildings

The Theatres Trust is also consulted on works to former theatre buildings, and we welcome proposals that retain significant architectural features or allow for a return to public use, or live performance.

We wrote to Cheshire East Council in support of a proposal to convert the **Rex** in **Wilmslow** back to a cinema (18/4422M). The Rex was built as a cinema in 1936 and had been used as a theatre in its earlier history. It was in retail use since the cinema closed in 1996 but had been vacant following the collapse of furniture retailer Multiyork. A community group, Rex Revival, had fought to bring cinema use back and the site was taken on by a small independent operator. The application was permitted in late October.

Improving policy

We submitted written evidence to the **House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns** highlighting the role we believe theatres can play. There is opportunity to restore and repurpose these theatre buildings as year round cultural hubs to serve their local communities and drive regeneration.

Our response includes common challenges faced by seaside towns, economic benefits of theatres in coastal communities, financial measures to support culture-led regeneration of seaside towns, and the role of local authorities.

We also responded to a consultation on the new **Scottish cultural strategy**, calling for an audit of existing cultural infrastructure in order to ensure a good provision of theatres for all of Scotland's communities.



Better protected

Historic England has listed the **former Carlton Theatre**, more recently known as the Empire Cinema on Haymarket at Grade II. The building was designed by architects Verity and Beverley and is the last remaining West End cinema from the inter-war period with substantially intact interiors. The owners, Crown Estate, had applied to Historic England for a Certificate of Immunity (COI) from listing of the building, but this was denied and Grade II status awarded. The listing will protect the much loved building from unnecessary loss or insensitive development. The Cinema Theatres Association led the campaign to protect the building. We wrote to support their listing recommendations and to oppose the COI. We have since given advice on a viability study for the theatre and will continue to work with the owners and all interested parties to secure a sustainable future for this beautiful building.

Former Carlton Theatre
Haymarket, London

Photo: Ian Grundy



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