

AMBASSADORS THEATRE



John Earl
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AMBASSADORS THEATRE

HERITAGE STATEMENT

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AMBASSADORS THEATRE

The Stephen Sondheim

John Earl FSA MRICS FRSA IHBC

AMBASSADORS' THEATRE

The Stephen Sondheim

FOREWORD

When I completed the first draft of the Heritage Statement in July 2014, important design decisions had yet to be taken. I suggested that the prior decision to be taken was, in fact, on a matter of principle. Was it reasonable to consent to a major reconstruction of a listed (if flawed) theatre in order to secure permanent benefits for a whole working population of listed theatres?

The project now presented in full detail, appears to me to achieve the main objectives in a design which has outstanding merits in its own right. It will be a first class working theatre, flexible in use and architecturally pleasing, inside and out. It will meet modern imperatives with regard to audience comfort and convenience. It will also retain important parts of the original Sprague fabric and the character of new work will be informed by Sprague's decorative vocabulary.

The over-arching question of principle remains. In considering this, I have studied the many responses so far received from theatrical interests and from officials and statutory consultees at both national and local level.

The need for such a West End transfer house seems to me to be settled beyond question. The subsidised theatres that will benefit, artistically and financially from such a facility are unanimous in their support. So far as the initial official responses are concerned (notably those of Historic England and the Theatres Trust) I am impressed by their apparent general acceptance of the need and the manner of meeting that need.

A number of safeguarding conditions have been proposed, notably concerning careful recording of the existing building and an assurance that the promised benefits will be permanent. It appears to me that all such conditions will be readily met and the legacy, in particular, will be given a guaranteed future.

If this project if allowed to proceed it should, in my opinion, bring great benefits to subsidised and unsubsidised theatre activity, in a generous act which can bring no personal gain to the benefactor.

There seems to me to be no need to revise my Heritage statement. This paragraph may be added as an Appendix.

John Earl July 2016

AMBASSADORS' THEATRE

The Stephen Sondheim

Heritage Statement

Note: Bold figures in brackets refer to numbered illustrations

1. Context: Questions of Principle

1.1 The building immediately under review is the Ambassadors Theatre, but the application raises issues beyond that of the treatment of this one building.

1.2 The building itself is undoubtedly of special architectural or historic interest and is, therefore, correctly included in the statutory list at Grade II. Listing does not freeze a building in its present condition forever and it has generally been recognised by heritage officials that theatres, by their nature, must adapt to changing needs of production. Many such adaptations last no longer than the life of a single production and are, as a matter of normal theatre industry practice, carefully reversed when a run ends. Others are more permanent. Theatres need to be continually updated to meet advances in stage technology and, as importantly, audience expectations. It is acknowledged by the great majority of building owners that official oversight and consent to all such works is not only a legal necessity but essential, since ad hoc alterations, even if made with the best intent, can be architecturally erosive.

1.3 Happily, there are many examples of theatres being judiciously and sensitively improved to meet modern requirements, without damage to their special interest. To take only one fairly recent example, Wyndham's, also a Sprague theatre and also owned by Sir Cameron Mackintosh, was architecturally and decoratively restored in 2007-8, in a manner which has attracted general admiration. The fact that the restoration incorporated a number of alterations to improve the operational viability of the theatre is apparent only to exceptionally well-informed visitors or to those who have had the changes pointed out to them. Wyndham's is, in a real sense, a model, showing that an enlightened owner, employing a specialist architect can make a late Victorian theatre into an efficient machine for the 21st century without damaging its visible character.¹

1.4 The present case is different in that it envisages an unusually radical treatment of a particular theatre, with a view to meeting a perceived need of the wider theatre community, popularly known as West End Theatreland. There is, thus, a question of principle to be considered before the detailed treatment of the theatre is examined. The fact that the presented design is also intended to create a theatre to honour Stephen Sondheim is of considerable interest, but is not crucial to a consideration of the acceptability or otherwise of the project.

1.5 The outstanding contextual issue is that of the health of Theatreland itself and its ability to adapt to modern demands, just as the individual theatres have had to adapt. This remarkable concentration of working theatres in the centre of the London (more than 40 in the central block alone) has made this the theatre capital of the world. As well as being a place for relaxation and

¹ The Gielgud Theatre (also owned by Delfont Mackintosh) provides further telling evidence of this process.

entertainment, it is a centre of artistic excellence, an educational asset and a great exporter of product, talent and technical expertise. It is one of the major magnets drawing tourists to London and has had an extraordinary record of success throughout the years of the recession. It is a civilising influence, supporting London nightlife and making the crowded centre attractive and safe after dark. Its cultural importance is beyond question, but it is also a great generator of economic activity and employment. In these terms alone, it is in the national interest that it should thrive.

1.6 Theatreland, then, is a precious inheritance. But it is also vulnerable. Its strength lies in its variety of theatres of varied kinds and a wide range of capacities. If it is a cliché to say that it has critical mass, it is nevertheless, true. But its range of provision falls short of perfection and not, as some less well-informed commentators have occasionally said, because the theatres are all old and weary and should be replaced by state-of-the-art modern buildings. That would, in fact, be a short cut to total, irreversible destruction.²

1.7 Contrary to popular belief, the commercial and subsidised theatre sectors are not totally independent, one from the other. Commercial theatre receives from subsidised houses artistically advanced and experimental productions that could never have been originated in the commercial sector. The subsidised theatres, for their part, receive substantial financial benefits from transfers to West End commercial theatres. There are mutual benefits for the two sectors.

² '[This] healthy giant...Theatreland is, in many ways as delicate as a moth. It came into existence by a series of unpredictable events and in economic conditions that will never, ever, be repeated, This is the great truth about Theatreland. If it did not already exist we could not create it.' JE in *The Matcham Journal* No.1 2014, p.31.

1.8 Strengthening the link between commercial and subsidised theatre would underpin the security of both. In this connection, Sir Cameron, whose knowledge and experience of theatre production and of the theatre environment is unchallengeable, has identified the most significant gap in Theatreland's range of provision. There is no West End transfer house designed specifically to receive non-proscenium productions from the National and other subsidised theatres (including regional theatres) for 16 week or longer runs. At present, nearly all such transfers have to be fitted into proscenium houses, with costly restaging, or they do not transfer at all.

1.9 Sir Cameron believes that a 450-plus seat studio theatre with an open, adaptable stage, would meet this need and have a vigorous life. But the idea that this could be done by building a completely new theatre on newly acquired land in the West End is simply too remote to contemplate. Even the most successful theatre looking for additional space that it does not already control, would be unlikely to purchase land adjoining. If the kind of development now in view is to take place at all it will almost certainly have to be accommodated on a site fully occupied by an existing theatre.

1.10 If, as a matter of principle and policy, the planning and heritage authorities accept that the positive strengthening (in addition to present safeguarding) of Theatreland as a working entity is an objective that it is proper to assist in exercising their planning and listed building controls, it becomes necessary to examine what may then follow. In one important respect, such action would serve conservation ends, since this community of theatres is made up almost entirely of listed buildings, nearly all of them engaged in the beneficial uses they were designed for. It does however raise the question of the

appropriateness of permitting the material alteration of one listed building for the benefit of others.

1.11 This question and the issues of precedent that it raises can only be determined by the planning authority, who will doubtless take advice to resolve any legal or procedural uncertainties. They are required, before determining any listed building consent (lbc) application affecting a theatre to refer the case to English Heritage. In addition, all planning applications affecting a theatre, listed or unlisted, have to be referred to the Theatres Trust for formal consultation. Most authorities will also consult with the Trust on related lbc applications, although they are not required to do so. All lbc applications which include the demolition of all or part of a listed building (of any kind) have also to be notified to named national amenity societies, to give them the opportunity to express their views. It is also open to the authority to notify other national and local amenity bodies if they see fit.³

1.12 The views of English Heritage will carry most weight and they may be unamenable to the idea of extensive inroads being made into a listed fabric, but it would be unwise to attempt to predict what the outcome of consultations with them and with the other bodies may be.

1.13 For the present purpose, it is necessary to look in detail at the theatre to which the present application applies and to put that theatre in the context of its architect's other works..

³ This is a very bare statement of the procedures surrounding determination of an application.. It does not, for example look at the definition of 'partial demolition', concerning which there is now case law, but to go into more detail would, in my opinion, be distracting rather than helpful.

2. The Architect: W G R Sprague (1863-1933)

2.1 William George Robert Sprague was one of the leading architects of the phenomenal theatre building boom which took place in Britain in the thirty years before the Great War. He was born in New Zealand but his family moved to Australia while he was a child. He was articled (i.e. apprenticed) for three years, from age sixteen, to the leading English theatre architect, Frank Matcham, completing his articled years with Walter Emden before sharing an office with another young architect, Bertie Crewe. A little later the two men launched individual theatre design practices in London.

2.2 Sprague built at least 40 theatres. His works, like those of all other late Victorian and Edwardian theatre-builders, suffered badly in the tidal wave of demolition that occurred after 1945. All of his larger theatres and music halls have gone. Ten, mainly suburban houses, were lost in London alone. Of the fourteen survivors, nationwide, no fewer than eight are in the West End, all of them playhouses.

2.3 Sprague expressed a preference for the architecture of the Italian Renaissance but his theatres usually have a fashionable (for the time) French flavour. He was always prepared in his designs to depart from strict architectural precedents but never engaged in the kind of eclecticism that typifies Matcham theatres. Where Matcham's joyous interiors throw architectural caution to the winds, Sprague's are models of controlled elegance.

2.4 It must be said that Sprague, unlike Matcham, was inclined to accept the then current view that the occupants of the cheapest seats should be satisfied with less than perfect viewing conditions. In several of his theatres, the orig-

inally unreserved (and crowded) pit benches, behind the expensive stalls seats, were heavily overhung by the dress circle. This resulted in a severe 'cut off', masking the top half of the stage picture. Now that pit areas have invariably been converted to back stalls, this can be a cause of customer dissatisfaction. Sprague's theatres are, nevertheless, among the most impressive of their time.

2.5 It is a curious fact about Sprague's eight West End playhouses that four of them appear in architecturally balanced pairs (Gielgud with Queen's and Ivor Novello with Aldwych), while the remaining four, although not paired in an architectural sense, are grouped two and two in close proximity (Wyndham's with Noel Coward, back to back, and Ambassadors with St Martin's, side by side).

2.6 The Ambassadors and St Martin's theatres were the last to arrive and they effectively mark the end of the great theatre building boom. The adjoining sites were both earmarked for theatres, designed at the same time by the same architect, but for different owners⁴ and on architecturally different lines. The site for the Ambassadors was cleared first and it opened in June 1913. St Martin's was delayed by the outbreak of war and did not open until November 1916.

3. The Ambassadors

3.1 The Ambassadors was the smaller of the two and by far the smallest of Sprague's West End theatres. It is set in an interesting streetscape at the

⁴ The Ambassadors was built by a small syndicate created for the purpose (not one of the big variety syndicates).

southern end of a designated conservation area (Seven Dials), at the conjunction of West Street, Lichfield Street and St Martin's Lane, where the close-knit historic street pattern and generally low scale development, like that seen in much of the Seven Dials area, has visibly survived despite post war intrusions.

3.2 Externally the theatre forms a pleasing group (1) (2) with the former West Street Episcopal Chapel,⁵ whose present c.1840 yellow brick facade is late Georgian rather than Victorian in character, and St Martin's Theatre, from which it is separated by the pedestrian path called Tower Court (2) (4).

3.3 The two theatres invite comparison. They both present the appearance of being ashlar-faced (actually stucco) classical buildings, but the Ambassadors is like a little sister to its taller neighbour.⁶ There is a clear family likeness in their matching channeled rustications⁷, but where St Martin's has a full giant order of attached Ionic columns rising above an arcaded base, the Ambassadors has a modest pilastered order between slightly projecting end pavilions with segmental pediments. The main cornice aligns with that of the old chapel adjoining. Above this there is a crowning balustrade with orb finials above end pedestals. (20) The curved corner entrance bay turns into Tower Court, where the return elevation is in red brick (4) (5) (6). The low fly tower is not visible from West Street.

3.4 In its long life, the theatre has seen an unparalleled success with Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* which opened in the Ambassadors in November

⁵ Later became the St Giles Mission Church, now converted to studios behind the original facade.

⁶ Th height of the Ambassadors was severely restricted by the ancient lights rights of adjoining buildings. Ironically, these buildings were demolished a few years later for the building of the St Martin's Theatre.

⁷ But none whatever in their internal treatment.

1952, transferring to St Martin's Theatre 21 years later, where it still continues its world record run. The current production, 'Stomp' is another long-running show which began a West End run at the Vaudeville in 2002 and has been packing the Ambassadors since 2007.

4. 'A Feat of Compression'

4.1 The Ambassadors has been described as 'a small theatre on an impossibly small site... a planning tour de force by Sprague (and) possibly his most striking feat of compression, front and back of house'.⁸ The dimensions of the site were actually sharply reduced before or shortly after Sprague was commissioned (16) (see footnote 14 and Appendix B).

4.2 The most striking virtue of the original auditorium can be summed up in one word - 'intimate'. It has been described by Simon Bradley⁹ as 'charmingly compact... ornamented by ambassadors' crests'.¹⁰ The main lines of the design are determined by a shallow-domed ceiling (9). The curving walls have a series of arched recesses, set between Ionic pilasters, with nodding arches rising into the deep cove encircling the dome. There are single tall boxes on either side at stage level, at present totally blacked out for stage technical uses (14) (15). There is only one upper tier which, like the stalls, extends backward beyond the main domed space (10). It is divided into a front and back circle.

⁸ *Theatres Trust Guide to British Theatres 1750-1950*, 2000 p.98

⁹ In Bradley & Pevsner, 'Buildings of England' series *London 6: Westminster*, 2003, p.382. Bradley does not comment here on practical aspects of theatre design.

¹⁰ The style seems to signal a tentative move toward a more restrained manner of theatre decoration than had hitherto been the norm. Three years later, this trend reached its climax (and its end) in the sober domesticity of the polished wood-panelled interior of the St Martin's Theatre.

4.3 Apart from the auditorium, the tiny elliptical entrance hall (7) and the main staircase, there is little to see in the way of architecturally conceived spaces.

4.4 The Ambassadors Theatre's small stage and modest original capacity of 490 (today far fewer seats are considered to be acceptable; see 5.2 below) made the theatre most suitable for the then new form of entertainment called intimate revue and for modestly scaled drama.

5. The Ambassadors Today

5.1 In modern times the little Ambassadors has served mainly as a playhouse. Even with the relatively modest demands of such a use, it has often had to be physically adapted to suit incoming productions.¹¹ The visual obliteration of the stage boxes (15) seems to have become a permanently tolerated example of this trend.

5.2 Seating configuration, notably at stalls level, shows Sprague straining for a greater capacity than the volume of the building could comfortably contain. Rear stalls extend back under the overhang of the circle, so that the rear nine rows cannot be described as better than tolerable (13). The rear seven rows have, in fact, what can only be called a 'letterbox' view (12)¹², while the rear-most seats in both stalls and circle are so close to the rear wall that noises from the street can be clearly heard (probably not a great distraction while the present production 'Stomp!' continues its run).

¹¹ From 1996 to 1999 it was divided into two small studio theatres to house Royal Court Theatre Upstairs productions.

¹² This is exacerbated, but not caused, by the raised acting area for this production.

5.3 The entrance foyer (7) is minuscule, as are all circulation spaces. Meetings of friends and pre-show chats are more likely to take place outside than within the theatre. Bars (8) and toilets are extremely tightly planned. The dressing rooms are adequate, but their linking corridor, at all levels, is no wider than a doorway, which makes it difficult for two actors to pass (19).

5.4 There are now many examples in London and elsewhere of the skill of specialist theatre architects in finding ingenious ways of mitigating (rarely completely eliminating) such conditions, but the Ambassadors is an uncommonly hard case. It is tempting, when looking at plans, to suggest that sacrificing the most unsatisfactory seats could create space for significant improvements, but the result would be to reduce capacity to a completely uneconomic level. It is, in fact, difficult to see any way of making much in the way of practical improvement which would not involve major interventions into Sprague's design.

6. The Next Step

6.1 If the questions of principle set out in 1.1 to 1.11 above are regarded as open to discussion, the nature of the submitted project will need to be examined in detail on the submission drawings. What here follows is a brief summary, based on revised drawings seen in January 2015.

6.2 Sir Cameron's vision of an ideally equipped, modern, non-proscenium theatre, suitable to receive a range of production styles in transfers from subsidised houses, predicates an adaptable open-staged auditorium with an au-

dience of at least 450, seated on two levels with excellent sighting throughout and with the ability to alter seating configuration to suit end-stage, traverse, in-the-round and other non-traditional forms of production. Auditorium and stage would occupy most of the present building volume above ground level. The decorative plasterwork of Sprague's auditorium would be taken down and set aside for reuse or copying.¹³

6.3 The interior design and decoration of the new auditorium are advanced in development but are open to discussion in respect of detailed treatment.

6.4 A crucial feature of the new design is the re-colonising of space lost in the widening of the former Lumber Court (now Tower Court) when the theatre was built (see site plan of 1913) (16)¹⁴. This will allow important improvements to facilities and circulation at all levels.

6.5 At entrance level on the West Street front, replanning will improve accommodation and sound isolation. Space will be linked to improve the foyer, while retaining the elliptical shape of the entrance lobby (7).

¹³ The accurate copying of fibrous plaster details is perfectly practicable and, on the whole, preferable to reusing elderly plaster that has undergone even the most careful removal. An earlier case involving the removal and re-creation of auditorium plasterwork can be seen in the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. Here, the demolition of the listed Matcham theatre was permitted after a public enquiry in 1969, provided 'pieces or patterns' were kept so that the auditorium could be recreated 'if the buildings to be erected on the site shall include a theatre'. A theatre was eventually erected in 1979 on a neighbouring site and in a quite different architectural context. The auditorium seen today appears to be a faithful reproduction of the original but, is in fact, cunningly modified to accommodate the wider and higher proscenium opening needed for a range of modern productions. Every *detail* now seen was designed by Matcham, but for a smaller space.

¹⁴ This strip of land is still occupied by the theatre at basement level. The widening of the court followed the common practice at the time, of making space for future road 'improvements' whenever and wherever opportunity offered. Today the accommodation of unimpeded traffic flows is not the overriding consideration that it once was, particularly in places where pedestrian movement is seen as having a higher priority. It is presumed that, in this context, the re-colonisation of the space taken from the site in 1913 will be seen as acceptable, and from a townscape viewpoint, possibly desirable.

6.6 The basement area would be further excavated to a uniform level to replace the lost dressing rooms and provide technical accommodation. Also at basement level, a large new circular foyer bar (a ‘Sprague Room’) would be created, its dimensions determined by the reuse of replicated Sprague auditorium ceiling (9). Similarly reused ornamental niches and arches would open in one quadrant to a raised seating area. The height of the room would, necessarily, be less than that of the old auditorium, but all the decorative elements would be Sprague’s, used in appropriate relationships. The actual height would be close to what is perceived today by a person near the centre of the forward division of the circle. The room, which will be capable of use as a small performance space or recital room, will be decorated in appropriate manner (the original auditorium was described in 1913 as being in the style of Louis XVI with a colour scheme of Parma violet, ivory and dull gold).¹⁵

6.7 An added storey above the roof would contain rehearsal rooms. A passenger lift would be provided to this level, capable of serving other levels when required.

6.8 The added height would be accommodated by extending Sprague’s classical elevations to the height of his adjoining St Martin’s Theatre. There would be no contrasting modern structures visible and the established character of the street scene would be maintained. The new face of the Ambassadors would be readily absorbed and the setting of the other listed buildings would be unharmed.

¹⁵ Contemporary newspaper descriptions of colours are rarely a useful guide to the actual appearance of a room. A scientific examination of paint sections (*not* ‘paint scrapes’) can provide far more reliable information in this respect, but the question of how far it might be appropriate to reproduce an original or early colour scheme would become matters for discussion if the new context now being proposed is found to be acceptable.

7. Summary and Conclusions

7.1 The Ambassadors Theatre is a building of special architectural or historic interest, rightly included in the statutory list at Grade II. It was designed by one of the leading architects of the late Victorian and Edwardian theatre-building boom, W G R Sprague. It is his smallest surviving theatre in the West End. It is essentially a playhouse of traditional proscenium form.

7.2 The Ambassadors has what are now regarded as severe design shortcomings, notably with unsatisfactory sighting from a large number of seats (12) (13); also with regard to the scale and convenience of public circulation spaces and facilities (7) (8). These latter defects are, to an extent, common to commercial theatres of the kind and period, but greatly accentuated here by the fact that, unlike most of its contemporaries, there is little scope for improvement within the extremely restricted structural envelope of the Ambassadors. Any attempt to make more than marginal improvements would be likely to call for major incursions into the historic fabric.

7.3 What is now proposed is a bold approach involving extensive reconstruction of the building to achieve a high standard of provision, in terms of both the working theatre and the comfort and convenience of the public, but it also looks beyond the four walls of the Ambassadors, to the health of the whole West End theatre community

7.4 What will be achieved will be the fulfillment of Sir Cameron Mackintosh's vision of a flexible theatre specifically designed to receive, on a regular

and continuing basis, a variety of non-proscenium productions from the subsidised sector. This will be a first for the West End and a major benefit to both the subsidised and commercial theatre worlds. It will significantly broaden the range of offerings in the commercial West End and, simultaneously, make financial returns to the exporting subsidised theatres.

7.5 The proposal breaks completely new ground and raises issues of principle which have been set out clearly in this statement. Put forward by anyone with a less impressive record of sound judgement in theatrical matters and without Sir Cameron's proven accomplishments in the care of historic theatres (and notably those of W G R Sprague) there might be resistance to such an approach. But in my opinion, Sir Cameron's proposal merits the most serious discussion. If the underlying principle is accepted, then the presented design appears to me to be an ingenious and sensitive way of creating a completely new theatre, while maintaining the presence of the original architect within and without the building.

John Earl August 2014

Text ends. Appendices and illustrations follow

Appendix A

Statutory List Description

Theatre. 1913. By WGR Sprague for a syndicate. Built by Kingerlee and Sons.

Stucco. EXTERIOR: low elevation of 3 storeys, 4 bays. Ground floor entrances with continuous canopy. Centre with 4 pilasters & deeply recessed windows, above & below a central moulded string course. Slightly advanced end bays with banded pilasters and circular opening on 2nd floor, crowned by segmental pediments. Cornice, balustered parapet with ball finials. Right-hand end corner on curve with flanking, slightly advanced repeat of the end bay.

INTERIOR: not inspected but noted to retain a small auditorium, with seating for only 450, the decoration in Louis XVI style with fluted Ionic pilasters around walls, supporting round arches containing small roundels with ambassadorial crests. Circular decorated plaster ceiling. Dress circle with curved balcony front with plasterwork decoration, and part of the same tier at the back is another small circle raised up. Within the proscenium tall narrow round-headed boxes with balustered balconies. Rectangular proscenium arch with rounded angles. Stage machinery: one frail single trap, no other machinery survives. Small lobby with first-floor bar over. A small but excellent site design.

Appendix B

A Pre-Sprague Theatre (unbuilt)

Drawings submitted to the London County Council, now in the London Metropolitan Archives, show that a theatre was designed, but not built, in 1898 for the location later occupied by the Ambassadors (21).

The architect was Frank Swift. Swift does not appear in the Directory of British Architects 1834-1914, but he may be the architect of that name mentioned in Survey of London Vol 47 as having been involved with abortive projects in the creation of Rosebery Avenue in 1896.

His design was for a fairly conventional theatre for the time, with circle, upper circle and gallery, but the site was significantly larger than the one that Sprague had to cope with. A printing works which had appeared on the north west corner by 1913 had not yet been built and the widening of Lumber Court had not yet taken up a 7 to 8ft wide strip on the south side. Despite enjoying what would, at the time, have been seen as a relatively comfortable space for a theatre, Swift still felt the need to move his stage door and dressing rooms to the opposite side of Lumber Court, with bridge links.

The fact that he made his main entrance from Tower Street and placed his stage house and get-in on West Street, coupled with the way that he gave the address of the theatre as 'Cambridge Circus' (which is fairly near, but not very near!) may say something about contemporary views of the lingering undesirability of the Seven Dials area.

Comparison of Swift's 1898 plan with Sprague's 1913 design for a far more tightly confined site (17) (18) (19) can only increase one's astonishment at the latter architect's breathtaking confidence, underpinned by the fact that theatre business had been enjoying decades of unparalleled profitability. Audience expectations in the lower-priced seats were also much lower than they are today.¹⁶

¹⁶ Sprague's sightlines were severely strained in places and subsequent alterations to the seating (1929 and later) have had a further disimproving effect.



From left to right, the former West Street Chapel, the Ambassadors Theatre and the St Martin's Theatre, forming a statutorily listed group on the Southern edge of the Seven Dials Conservation Area



The Ambassadors Theatre corner entrance. Former West Street Chapel on the left. Tower Court on right.



The fan-shaped canopy over the entrance appears to have been extended later along the street front to form a queue canopy. It now provides an advertisement fascia.



Flank elevation to Tower Court. The former Lumber Court was a narrower passage (as seen distantly here), widened when the theatres were built, making the Ambassadors site uncomfortably restricted (see ill.16).



The stage door in Tower Court



Rear elevation, dressing room windows, stair tower, stage door and get-in on left



The elliptical booking hall is small and sparsely ornamented. An original patterned floor is now concealed and its exact nature and condition are unknown



Circle bar (above) is extremely small and stalls bar (below) has to have 'in-out' doors to handle the interval traffic.



Circle bar (above) is extremely small and stalls bar (below) has to have 'in-out' doors to handle the interval traffic.



The auditorium ceiling, as viewed from a standing position near the front of the circle



Rear circle. Nearly all circle seats have good sightlines



View from back of circle, with lighting bar on downstand beam



View from back stalls, showing 'letter box' effect. Acting surface for 'Stomp!' is at head level of standing figures.



Cut-off view from mid-stalls



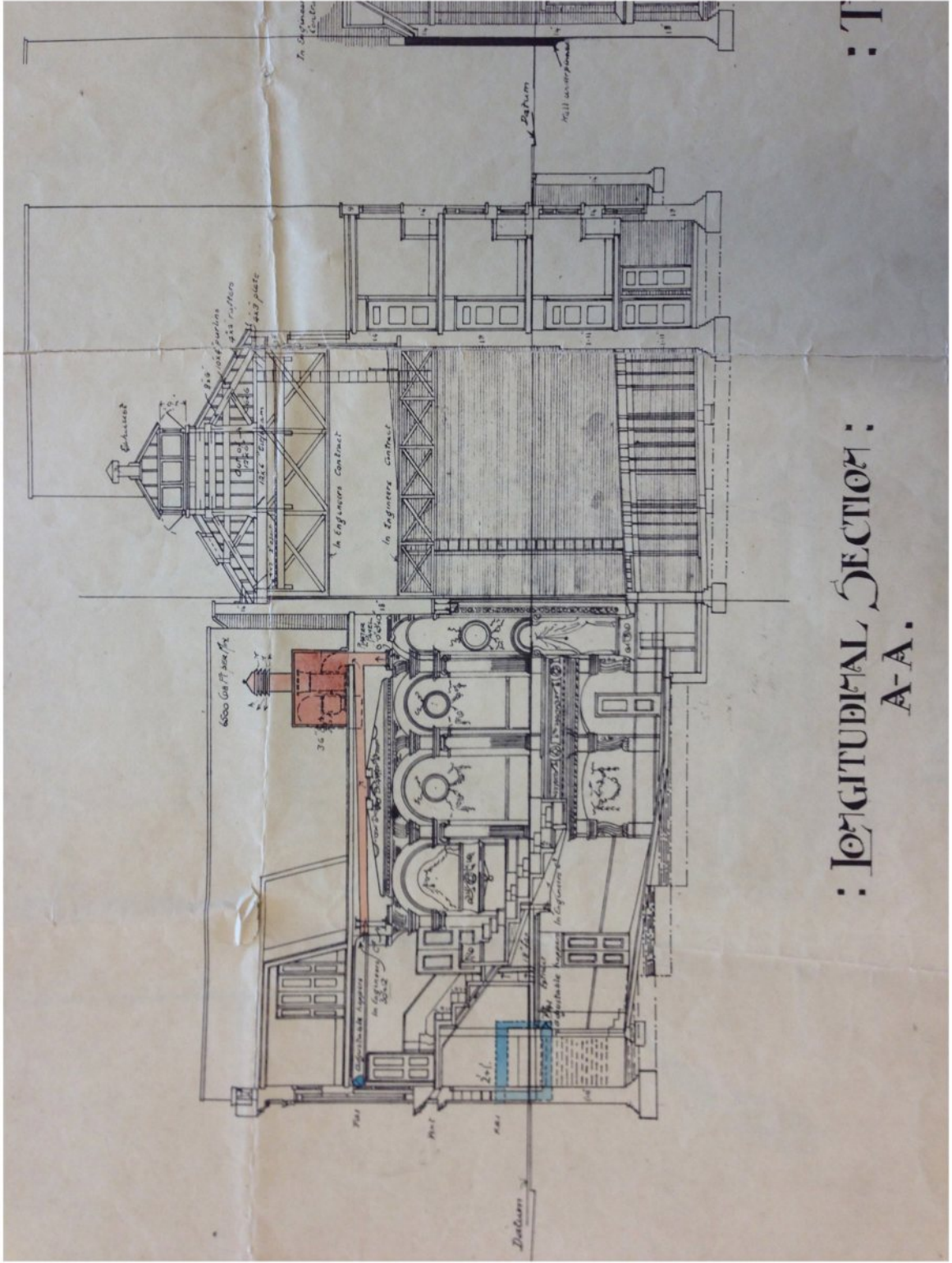
Proscenium SR with blacked-out box. Orchestra pit area is carpeted. Even with stage at original level, patrons in front rows would not see feet of dancers.



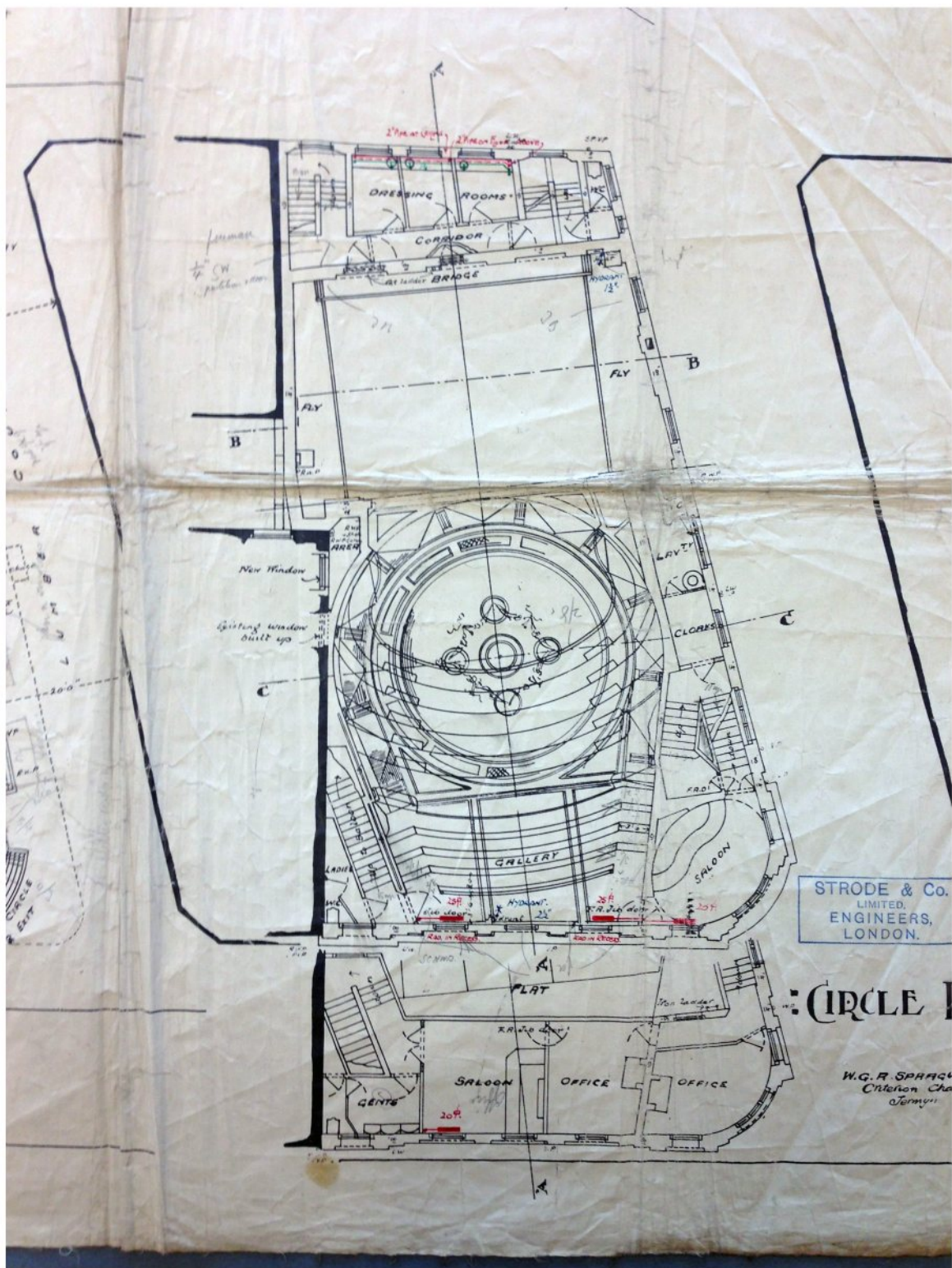
Narrow SR stage box blacked out. Big loud speakers and raised stage level for current production



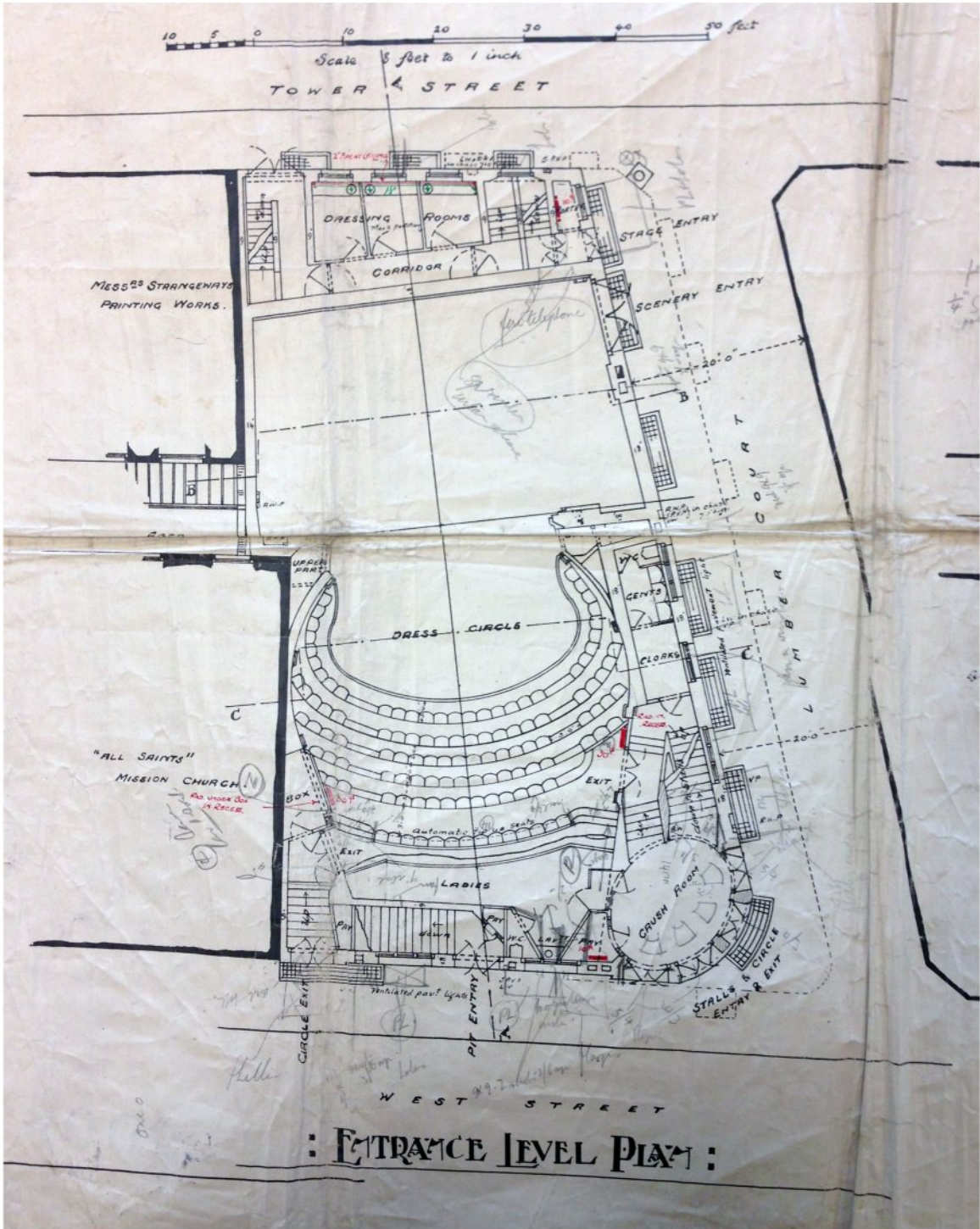
Site plan 1913, showing Lumber (Tower) Court widened from 12ft 9in to 20ft, reducing the area available for building
A recolonisation of this space is now sought



Long section of Sprague's 1913 theatre. Tall building visible over stage house is a printing works, presumably built after 1898



Sprague's circle level plan 1913, with part plan of upper floor



Sprague's 1913 plan at entrance (i.e. front circle) level

NEW THEATRE: WEST STREET:

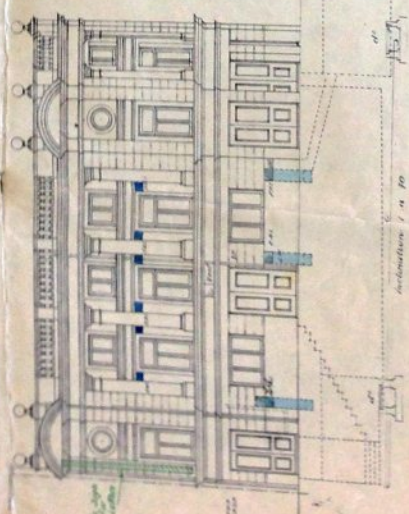
Scale: 1/4" = 1 foot

Proposed Ventilation Apparatus.

Blue - Main Air.
Red - Exhaustion.

3

T.M.C. 11-6-13
Approved



ELEVATION TO WEST ST.



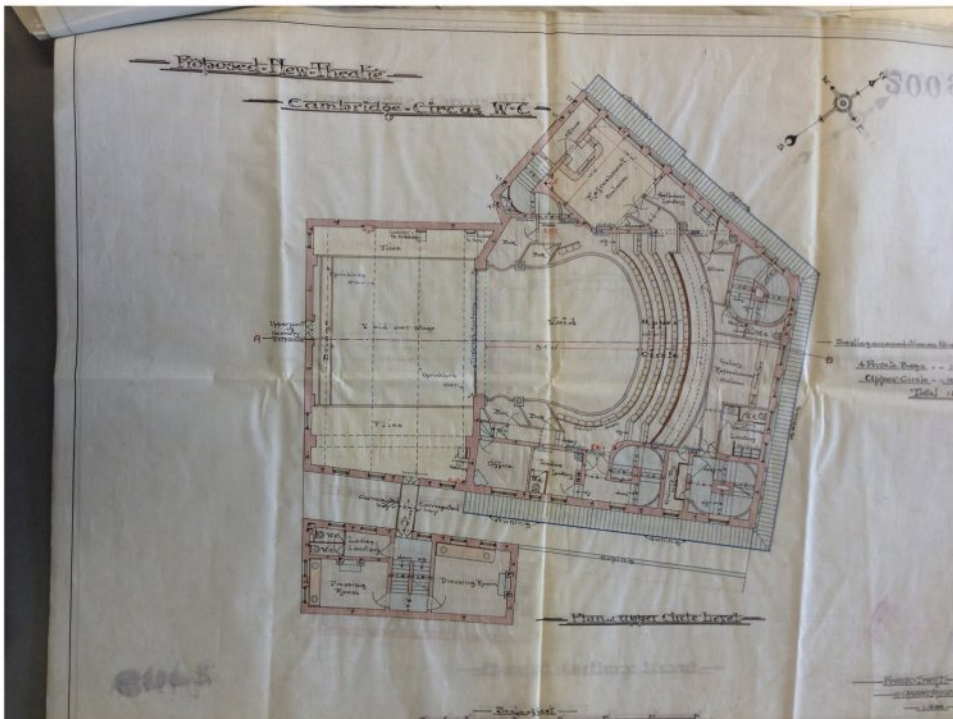
ELEVATION TO LUMBER COURT.

2009
1 MAY 1915
LONDON FREE

STRODE &
LIMITED
ENGINEERS
LONDON

M.G.R. Sprague, Clerk
City of London, Chamberlain
21, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4

Sprague's 1913 design; elevations to West Street and Tower Court



Frank Swift's 1898 design Upper Circle
Dress circle (below)

