

# A Conservation Study

for

The Shaftesbury Theatre, London

November 2017

by

**theatre**research



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## The Shaftesbury Theatre, London

### A Conservation Study

#### Introduction

To place the *Shaftesbury Theatre* (which originally opened in 1911 as the *Prince's Theatre*) in both architectural and theatrical perspective it is important to understand how this building sits in a national context. Remaining historic theatres are few, good ones are rare, and the erosion of the nation's theatre buildings has only begun to slow down during the last ten years. Prior to this the wholesale demolition and destruction of theatre buildings was seen almost as an essential part of inner city renewal. Today the opposite view is the reality.

Architects, historians and theatre practitioners recognise that a purpose built theatre of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century can offer many opportunities which cannot be provided within a new theatre, or indeed a building which was not originally designed for theatrical performance.

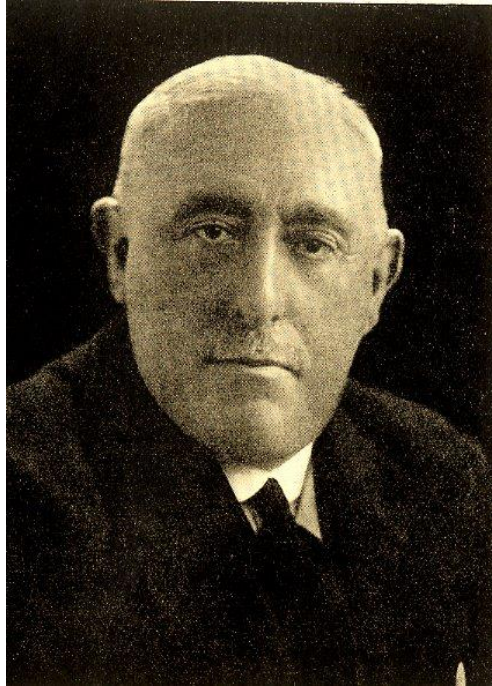
In 1982 a theatre gazetteer entitled *Curtains!!! or A New Life For Old Theatres* was published. It examined how many pre-1914 historic theatres were still left in Great Britain. These findings placed the *Shaftesbury Theatre* for the first time in a national context.

“Eighty-five per cent of the 1,000 Theatre Royals, Grands, Alhambras and Empires, which flourished in Britain between 1900 and 1914 have been destroyed or irretrievably altered. Under a tenth of this marvellous heritage of popular theatres which once enlivened every High Street are still in use as theatres. This leaves some 70 yet to be reawakened - ‘Sleeping Beauties’ spread throughout England, Scotland and Wales.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Shaftesbury Theatre's* architect Bertie Crewe was one of the most prolific theatre architects of his day, building during his career over 60 theatres throughout Great Britain, and several in Europe. As no comprehensive up to date list of theatres designed by Bertie Crewe has been published for almost 20 years, *Theatresearch* has compiled and updated various lists of his known works and this is given below. This helps to provide an insight into his prodigious output, and includes virtually all of his significant work at both national and international levels.

## William Robert “Bertie” Crewe [1864 -1937]

Architectural education in the office of Clement Dowling, London, and at the Atelier Laloux, Paris, a firm that did the Gare d’Orsay, etc. From Crewe’s architectural practice sprang four theatre/cinema architects who gained fame in the post-boom period: Robert Cromie, J.C. Derham, Edward Jones and Cecil Masey.



Bertie Crewe [1864 -1937]  
[From: [theatresearch](#) archive]

Crewe specialised almost entirely in theatres and, subsequently, cinemas. One of the most dynamic architects of the 1890’s -1900’s, with a florid, at times almost wild splendour, coloured by a mannerist Baroque, probably the influence of his time in Paris. His early work with W.G.R. Sprague was tepid by comparison with his later extravagance (Lyceum, London; Palace, Glasgow; Shaftesbury, London). Crewe’s work is typified by horizontal balconies tied to ranges of stage boxes set in a frame, the whole making a gorgeous and elaborate frontispiece. His decorative features are inevitably completely three-dimensional, stunning caryatids, giant elephant heads, seated Gods - an invigorating atmosphere for the music halls and melodrama houses which his theatres invariably were. In the London Opera House, he designed a theatre rather more dignified than his music halls, but exuberantly magnificent in the best Continental mode, with borrowings from American giantism, influenced no doubt by his client Oscar Hammerstein. Unlike Matcham, whom in many ways he resembles. Crewe could produce really competent facades which were convincing in both theatrical and architectural terms.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sell, Michael & Mackintosh, Iain, *Curtains!!! or A New Life For Old Theatres*, pp.211-212, augmented by Theatresearch

## Bertie Crewe - A Chronology of His Work

(extant buildings in **bold** type)

Crewe's surviving theatres are few, and many of the ones listed here are simply theatres where Crewe carried out alterations and reconstruction work, an \* denotes that the theatre is wholly by Crewe e.g. internally, externally and without joint authorship:

1885: Metropole Theatre, Birmingham

1888: **Royal Court, Sloane Square (with Walter Emden)**

1889: Shoreditch Olympia (with W.G.R. Sprague)

1890: Olympic Theatre, Wych Street, London (with W.G.R. Sprague)

c1890: Alhambra, Brussels

1892: Palace Theatre, Bow, London

1893: **Theatre Royal, Lincoln (with W.G.R. Sprague)**

1894: Camberwell Empire (with W.G.R. Sprague)

1898: Queen's Poplar - *Alterations and facade reconstruction*

1899: Bedford Palace of Varieties, Camden Town, London

1900: **Victoria Theatre\*, Salford**

1900: Euston Palace (with Wylson and Long)

1900: Hippodrome, Woolwich

1901: Sadler's Wells, London - *Partly remodelled*

**1902: Hippodrome, (Zoo & Hippodrome) Glasgow - External shell survives**

1902: Royal Hippodrome, Liverpool - *Alterations* (with A. Shelmerdine)

1904: Palace Theatre, Glasgow

1904: Queen's Poplar

1904: **Pavilion Theatre\*, Glasgow**

1904: **Lyceum, London** - *new auditorium constructed behind Beazley's façade*

1904: Alhambra\*, Paris

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1904: Orient Theatre, Commercial Road, London

1905?: Alhambra, Brussels\* – *burnt down c.1906*

1906: **Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds** - *minor alterations to the auditorium*

1906: Royal Hippodrome\*, Belfast

1906: Tivoli Palace, Liverpool

1906: Hippodrome, Coventry

1906: Hippodrome, Paisley

1907: Hippodrome, Sheffield

1908: Hippodrome\*, Devonport

1908: Hippodrome\*, Portsmouth

1908: Royal Hippodrome, Nottingham

1908: Palace Theatre, Oldham

1908: Hippodrome, Accrington

1908: Empire Theatre, Edmonton

1909: Britannia Theatre, Hoxton - *alterations*

1909: Hippodrome, Southend

1909: Theatre Royal, Blackburn - *rebuild*

**1910: Empire Theatre, Kingston (with C.J. Bourne)** - *exterior only survives*

1911: London Opera House\*, Kingsway, London

**1911: Shaftesbury Theatre\*, (Prince's Theatre), London**

1911: Bedminster Hippodrome\*, Bristol

1911: **Empire Theatre\*, Burnley** – *currently on The Theatres Trust at risk register*

1913: **Palace Theatre, Manchester** - *auditorium reconstructed by Crewe*

1913: **Palace Theatre\*, Redditch**

1913: **Hippodrome\*, Golder's Green** - *non-theatrical use*

1913: **Theatre Mogador\***, Paris

1913: Hippodrome, Aldershot

1913: The Coliseum\*, Dublin (burnt down by Sinn Fein in 1918)

**1913: Hippodrome, Oldham** - *exterior only survives*

1915: Theatre Royal, Belfast - *Conversion to Cinema*

1921: Queen's Poplar - *Alterations to Circle and Front of House*

1921: Wolverhampton Hippodrome - Internal alterations

1928: **Piccadilly Theatre, London (with Edward Stone)**

1930: **Phoenix Theatre, London (with Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and Cecil Masey)**

1931: **Saville Theatre, London (with Bennett and Sons)**

The Victoria & Albert Museum's *Theatre Collection* also has a collection of theatre designs attributed to Bertie Crewe, but possibly never built. These include: *New Theatre, Anerley*; *Palace of Varieties, Dublin*; *Palace Theatre, Margate*; *Prince of Wales Theatre, Southampton*; and the *New Theatre of Varieties, Paris*.

Very few drawings survive from the Bertie Crewe practice. A few were donated to the Theatre Museum some years ago<sup>2</sup> but unfortunately Crewe's office manager and successor Henry Kay<sup>3</sup> could not find anyone to take the archive when he closed the practice in the 1950s. As a consequence most of the surviving documents were all burnt in Mr Kay's back garden<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> see *Sightline*, "Drawing On The Past", by Dr. James Fowler, Vol.23, No.2, April 1989, pp.29-31.

<sup>3</sup> Not Herbert Kay as quoted in *Directory of British Architects 1834-1914*, p.464 vol.1, pub:Continuum, London, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> From a discussion between David Wilmore and Mr.Kay's son.

## Cinemas by the Bertie Crewe Practice

### London Cinemas

Balham - Electric Theatre

Battersea - Globe Cinema

Blackheath - Roxy Kinema

Camberwell - Bijou Electric Theatre

Clapham - Globe Kinema

Enfield - Odeon Theatre

Greenwich – Hippodrome

**Kennington - Regal: 1937 (with Henry Kay)**

Kingsway - Stoll Picture Theatre

Southgate - Odeon Theatre:1935

Strand - Tivoli Palace (with Gunton and Gunton):1923

Woolwich - Beresford Square Cinema

### Provincial Cinemas

Belfast - Royal Cinema (conversion of Theatre Royal)

**Birmingham - Electric Theatre, Station Street:1910**

Birmingham - Masonic Hall Theatre, New Street:c.1910

Burslem - Electric Theatre

Croydon – Palladium

Devonport - Electric Theatre Fore Street:1909

Kingston, Dublin - Pavilion Cinema

Leeds - Electric Theatre

Liverpool - Electric Theatre, Scotland Road:1915

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Londonderry – Kinema

Longton - Electric Theatre

Manchester - Electric Theatre, Piccadilly

Newcastle-under-Lyne, Electric Theatre

Norwich - Electric Theatre, St. Andrew's Street

Southend - Garons Cinema, High Street:1911

Southend - Palace de Luxe, Leigh Road

Tunstall - Electric Theatre

Walney Island - Vickers Cinema Palace



## Other Buildings by Bertie Crewe

(non-definitive)

London - Forest Gate – Synagogue

London - Hammersmith - Palais de Danse, Brook Green

London - Skating Rink, Brook Green Road

London - Wimbledon - Skating Rink - Merton

Beaconsfield - Survey for Great Central Railway

Gloucester - Skating Rink

Paris - Skating Rink - Rue Amsterdam

[Compiled by **theatresearch** from various sources including: *Curtains!!!* (Ibid.), *Edwardian Architecture* by A. Stuart Gray, and *Theatre Architects in the British Isles*, from *Architectural History*, vol.13, 1970, pp.82-83, *Drawing On The Past* by Dr. James Fowler, *Sightline*, Vol.23, No.2, April 1989, pp.29-31, a typescript originating from the Bertie Crewe office (courtesy John Earl) and new information from *The Theatres Trust* database.]

## Bertie Crewe's Architectural Practice Offices

It has been suggested that Crewe worked during his formative years in the practice of the nationally renowned theatre architect Frank Matcham, though no concrete evidence has ever been produced to substantiate this. He does not however appear in the London Street Directories as an independent architect until 1890, despite the fact that he had been designing theatres in his own right since 1885.

1890-91: Bertie Crewe & W.G.R. Sprague, Fitzalan House, Arundel Street, London, W.C.

1896: Bertie Crewe & W.G.R. Sprague, 13 Arundel Street, London, W.C.

1900-06: Bertie Crewe, 3-4 Savoy Mansions, Savoy Place, Strand, London.

1911-16: Bertie Crewe, 75-77 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.1.

1935-39: Bertie Crewe & Kay, Architects, 75-77 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.1.

1948: No listing for Bertie Crewe or Henry Kay

1959-69: Henry Kay, Architect, reappears at 1 Green Lane, London, N.W.4 - it is not apparent from the entry whether this is an office or a domestic residence. This is definitely the same Henry Kay, as Bertie Crewe's will is witnessed by Kay from this address.

## Planning Policy & Guidance

The Shaftesbury Theatre is situated in the Borough of Camden's Bloomsbury Conservation which was given formal designation on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1984. It is divided into 14 sub-areas and is located within sub-area 8 as shown on the accompanying map.

Camden adopted the *Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy* on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011. Sub-area 8 is described as being;

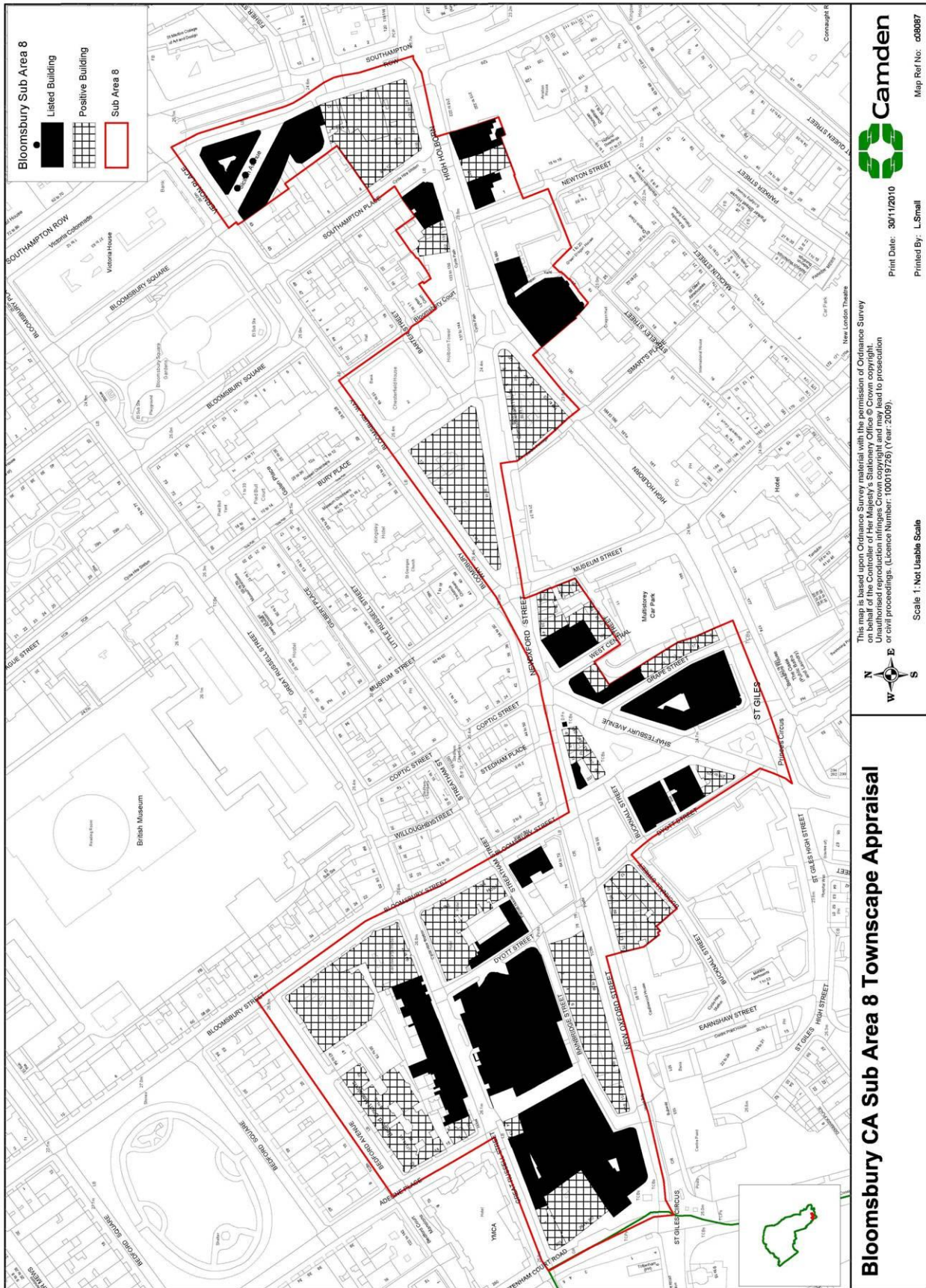
“characterised by areas of large-scale, late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century blocks fronting busy thoroughfares. Development followed construction of new routes combined with the widening of earlier streets, thereby cutting through the earlier 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century street pattern. The narrow back streets in the sub area reflect the earlier layout. The predominant use is commercial, with a range of shops, banks, offices, hotels and theatres. Residential accommodation generally takes the form, of mansion blocks.....

The southern space is known as Princes Circus and is enclosed by the Shaftesbury Theatre on the eastern side and Nos.219-229 (odd) Shaftesbury Avenue on the western side, The grade II listed theatre was built in 1911 to the designs of Bertie Crewe employing stone, terracotta and brick with elaborately ornamented Renaissance-style elevations and a landmark corner tower over the corner entrance at the junction with St Giles High Street. The bright lights of the theatre signage give the area a vibrant atmosphere during hours of darkness.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy*, p. 57.

# Shaftesbury Theatre – Conservation Report



Print Date: 30/11/2010  
 Printed By: L.Small  
 Map Ref No: c08087

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Scale 1: Not Usable Scale

## Bloomsbury CA Sub Area 8 Townscape Appraisal

## National Planning Policy Context

The Shaftesbury Theatre is a designated heritage asset which was listed at Grade II on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1974 (list entry number 1378647). This means that any works which might affect its significance are subject to statutory controls and Government guidance.

The following section summarises the relevant national and local planning policies which are relevant to managing the historic environment.

### Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The overarching legislation governing the consideration of applications for planning consent that affect heritage assets is contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Act require local planning authorities, in considering whether to grant listed building consent, to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Section 72 of the Act requires local planning authorities, in considering whether to grant planning permission with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

### National Policy: National Planning Policy Framework (2012)

The National Planning Policy Framework was adopted in March 2012. It is a material consideration in planning decisions and must be taken into account by Local Authorities when preparing local and neighbourhood plans.

The NPPF (2012) aims to deliver sustainable development by ensuring that policies which concern the historic environment recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.

Section 12, entitled *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*, contains guidance on heritage assets, which include listed buildings and conservation areas.

- Paragraph 128 requires an applicant to give a summary of significance of the building or area affected, proportionate to its importance.
- Paragraph 129 advises local authorities to take account of that significance in assessing proposals to avoid or minimise conflict between the proposals and conservation of the asset.

- Paragraphs 131 and 132 emphasise the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of individual assets and wider, local distinctiveness, and the desirability of viable and fitting uses for a building being found or continued.
- Paragraphs 133 and 134 carry on to detail how significance can be harmed, and what tests are required to demonstrate that the harm can be justified. Any harm or loss to a heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification and any substantial harm should be exceptional.

### National Guidance: Planning Practice Guide

The Planning Practice Guide (PPG), produced by the government, gives further information on how national policy is to be interpreted and applied locally and underlines the support for sustainable development required by the NPPF. The PPG includes particular guidance on matters relating to protecting the historic environment in the section *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*.

### National Guidance: Good Practice Advice notes

Historic England has prepared a series of Good Practice Advice notes (GPAs) to explain how the policies outlined above should be applied in practice. Note 2, *Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment*, gives advice on the application of the NPPF and PPG, and amplifies the policies outlined above.

### London-wide policy: the London Plan

In July 2011, the Mayor published an updated spatial strategy for London, the London Plan. Subsequent amendments to this plan include: Early Minor Alterations, to bring the 2011 London Plan up to date with changes to government policy; Revised Early Minor Alterations (2012); the Further Alterations to the London Plan (2015) which was published as the updated 2015 London Plan in March 2015; the Minor Alterations (MALP); and March 2016 amendments. The following policies are relevant to the application:

#### London Plan: Policy 7.4 (local character)

##### Strategic

A. Development should have regard to the form, function, and structure of an area, place or street and the scale, mass and orientation of surrounding buildings. It should improve an area's visual or physical connection with natural features. In areas of poor or ill-defined character, development should build on the positive elements that can contribute to establishing an enhanced character for the future function of the area.

## Planning Decisions

B. Buildings, streets and open spaces should provide a high quality design response that:

- a. has regard to the pattern and grain of the existing spaces and streets in orientation, scale, proportion and mass
- b. contributes to a positive relationship between the urban structure and natural landscape features, including the underlying landform and topography of an area
- c. is human in scale, ensuring buildings create a positive relationship with street level activity and people feel comfortable with their surroundings
- d. allows existing buildings and structures that make a positive contribution to the character of a place to influence the future character of the area
- e. is informed by the surrounding historic environment.

Paragraph 7.13 states the following:

*The social, cultural, environmental and economic relationships between people and their communities are reinforced by the physical character of a place. Based on an understanding of the character of a place, new development should help residents and visitors understand where a place has come from, where it is now and where it is going. It should reflect the function of the place both locally and as part of a complex urban city region, and the physical, economic, environmental and social forces that have shaped it over time and are likely to influence it in the future.*

## London Plan: Policy 7.8 (Heritage Assets and Archaeology)

### Strategic

A. London's heritage assets and historic environment, including listed buildings, registered historic parks and gardens and other natural and historic landscapes, conservation areas, World Heritage Sites, registered battlefields, scheduled monuments, archaeological remains and memorials should be identified, so that the desirability of sustaining and enhancing their significance and of utilising their positive role in place shaping can be taken into account.

B. Development should incorporate measures that identify, record, interpret, protect and, where appropriate, present the site's archaeology.

### Planning Decisions

C. Development should identify, value, conserve, restore, re-use and incorporate heritage assets, where appropriate.

D. Development affecting heritage assets and their settings should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to their form, scale, materials and architectural detail.

E. New development should make provision for the protection of archaeological resources, landscapes and significant memorials. The physical assets should, where possible, be made available to the public on-site. Where the archaeological asset or memorial cannot be preserved or managed on-site, provision must be made for the investigation.

## London Borough of Camden Local Plan (July 2017)

### Policy D1 (Design)

The Council will seek to secure high quality design in development. The Council will require that development:

- a. respects local context and character;
- b. preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets in accordance with “Policy D2 Heritage”;
- e. comprises details and materials that are of high quality and complement the local character;
- f. integrates well with the surrounding streets and open spaces, improving movement through the site and wider area with direct, accessible and easily recognisable routes and contributes positively to the street frontage;
- m. preserves strategic and local views;

The Council will resist development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions. Paragraph 7.2 states the following:

*The Council will require all developments, including alterations and extensions to existing buildings, to be of the highest standard of design and will expect developments to consider:*

- *character, setting, context and the form and scale of neighbouring buildings;*
- *the character and proportions of the existing building, where alterations and extensions are proposed;*
- *the prevailing pattern, density and scale of surrounding development;*
- *the impact on existing rhythms, symmetries and uniformities in the townscape;*
- *the composition of elevations;*
- *the suitability of the proposed design to its intended use;*



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- *inclusive design and accessibility;*
- *its contribution to public realm and its impact on views and vistas; and*
- *the wider historic environment and buildings, spaces and features of local historic value*

### Policy D2 (Heritage)

The Council will preserve and, where appropriate, enhance Camden’s rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas, listed buildings, archaeological remains, scheduled ancient monuments and historic parks and gardens and locally listed heritage assets.

### Designated Heritage Assets

Designated heritage assets include conservation areas and listed buildings. The Council will not permit the loss of or substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, including conservation areas and Listed Buildings, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- a. the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site;
- b. no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation;
- c. conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- d. the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

The Council will not permit development that results in harm that is less than substantial to the significance of a designated heritage asset unless the public benefits of the proposal convincingly outweigh that harm.

### Conservations Areas

Conservation areas are designated heritage assets and this section should be read in conjunction with the section above headed ‘designated heritage assets’. In order to maintain the character of Camden’s conservation areas, the Council will take account of conservation area statements, appraisals and management strategies when assessing applications within conservation areas.

The Council will:

- e. require that development within conservation areas preserves or, where possible, enhances the character or appearance of the area.

## Listed Buildings

Listed buildings are designated heritage assets and this section should be read in conjunction with the section above headed ‘designated heritage assets’. To preserve or enhance the borough’s listed buildings, the Council will:

k. resist development that would cause harm to significance of a listed building through an effect on its setting.

Paragraph 7.46 states the following:

“In order to preserve or enhance important elements of local character, we need to recognise and understand the factors that create that character. The Council has prepared a series of conservation area statements, appraisals and management plans that assess and analyse the character and appearance of each of our conservation areas and set out how we consider they can be preserved or enhanced. We will take these into account when assessing planning applications for development in conservation areas. We will seek to manage change in a way that retains the distinctive characters of our conservation areas and will expect new development to contribute positively to this.”

## The Construction of the Theatre

### Opening Account for the New Prince's Theatre

"This new theatre, of which Mr. Bertie Crewe is the architect, has a total frontage of 215 feet and occupies a conspicuous position, on the corner of Broad Street and Shaftesbury Avenue, New Oxford Street end, a few minutes' walk from Holborn Tube Station and Charing Cross.

The stage abuts upon Grape Street, and there is a courtyard between the theatre and the adjacent mansions. This almost complete isolation of the site renders adequate means of egress easily obtainable upon the three frontages, so that the whole house could be cleared, if desirable, in three minutes at most.

The main entrance comes naturally upon the corner, and is surmounted by a graceful tower, which can be seen from all points of the compass – a new and prominent feature of the square, opposite the French Church – built of Messrs. Shaw's buff terra-cotta, like the rest of the façade, to match the adjoining property. This tower is illuminated at night by high power electric arcs, and adds yet another interesting note to the gamut of London's architecture.

Externally the new theatre is an example of the modern Renaissance style, and the management have studied both the aspect from the street and the comfort of its patrons in providing a wrought-iron and glass canopy, with beaten copper shields, over the principal entrances, with extended verandahs to every entrance of the house.

Internally a new treatment of French decoration has been followed, a hackneyed style having been studiously avoided, and visitors can hardly fail to be impressed by the distinctly bold, artistic, and original *motif* upon which the architect had based his treatment. Particularly noticeable will be the saucer-domed ceiling with its symbolical groups representing "The Light of the World," "Love," "Endeavour," "The Coming of Success," and "The Torch of Destiny," while the painted side panels in autumnal tints will form at once a rest to the eye and a foil to the cream and gold of the decoration. In these paintings a departure has been made from the stereotyped pseudo-Italian school both in the design and the amber warmth of the colouring. This is the work of Messrs. Medcalf and Walshe.

Another distinctive feature of the interior is the modelled figure work. Four life-size groups, weighing over a ton apiece, surmount

the boxes and represent the muses, “Comedy,” “Tragedy,” “poetry,” and “Music,” while the proscenium arch is crowned on each haunch by a bas-relief group. This is the work of Mr. Thomas Rudge, the well-known sculptor. Ionic columns with figured drums, fluted and enriched, separate the boxes (of which there are ten), and add considerable dignity to an already dignified interior.

Messrs. John Tanner & Sons were the contractors for the decoration, and 100 men were employed both at their works in Westminster and on the scaffold day and night labouring towards the completion for the opening night.

The carpets, furnishings, draperies and upholstery throughout were supplied by Messrs. Dean, of Birmingham, and their rich crimson velvet will help to make this house a model of elegance and comfort – especially in conjunction with the expensive pink and white marbles, alabaster and gold mosaic with which portions of the auditorium sides are panelled, at a cost of £1,000 for this item alone.

Note must be made of the saloons, one being provided to each tier – a speciality being made of those on the stalls and circle levels. These two saloons are carried out in the Old English manner with oak panelling, wrought-iron lantern fittings, and tapestries after famous models, and with leaded lights in the windows.

The stalls saloon, with its heavily beamed ceiling and Elizabethan fashion, is somewhat different from that on the circle, which is Jacobean in detail.

From the domed entrance hall, with its marble Roman mosaic floor, gold walls, and two mahogany pay offices, an “Adams” foyer leads to the best parts of the house through short corridors panelled in white and dull crimson.

The electric equipment everywhere is notable, the entrance hall being illuminated by a specially designed fitting of gilt brass and Bohemian cut glass, while somewhat similar fittings were chosen for the foyer. The auditorium has a central ring of sixty 30 candle-power electric lamps suspended from the ceiling on winches which require two men to lower, and four large, similarly suspended wrought-brass chandeliers of rather novel design.

All the very latest battens, dimmers, projectors, &c., have been obtained for the stage, and a biograph-box is conveniently arranged at the back of the circle, with a clear “throw of 74 feet and at a low rake”.

The electric installation was carried out by Messrs. J.H. Offer and Sons of Kingston-on-Thames.

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It is hardly necessary to say that in appointing an architect who has built fifty theatres, including the London Opera House, Messrs. Melville have ensured a house, planned on the most approved lines, replete in every essential appertaining to the comfort of the audience and the management of the stage.

The sight-lines from every seat and all available standing room is perfect, and the acoustic properties the result of long experience.

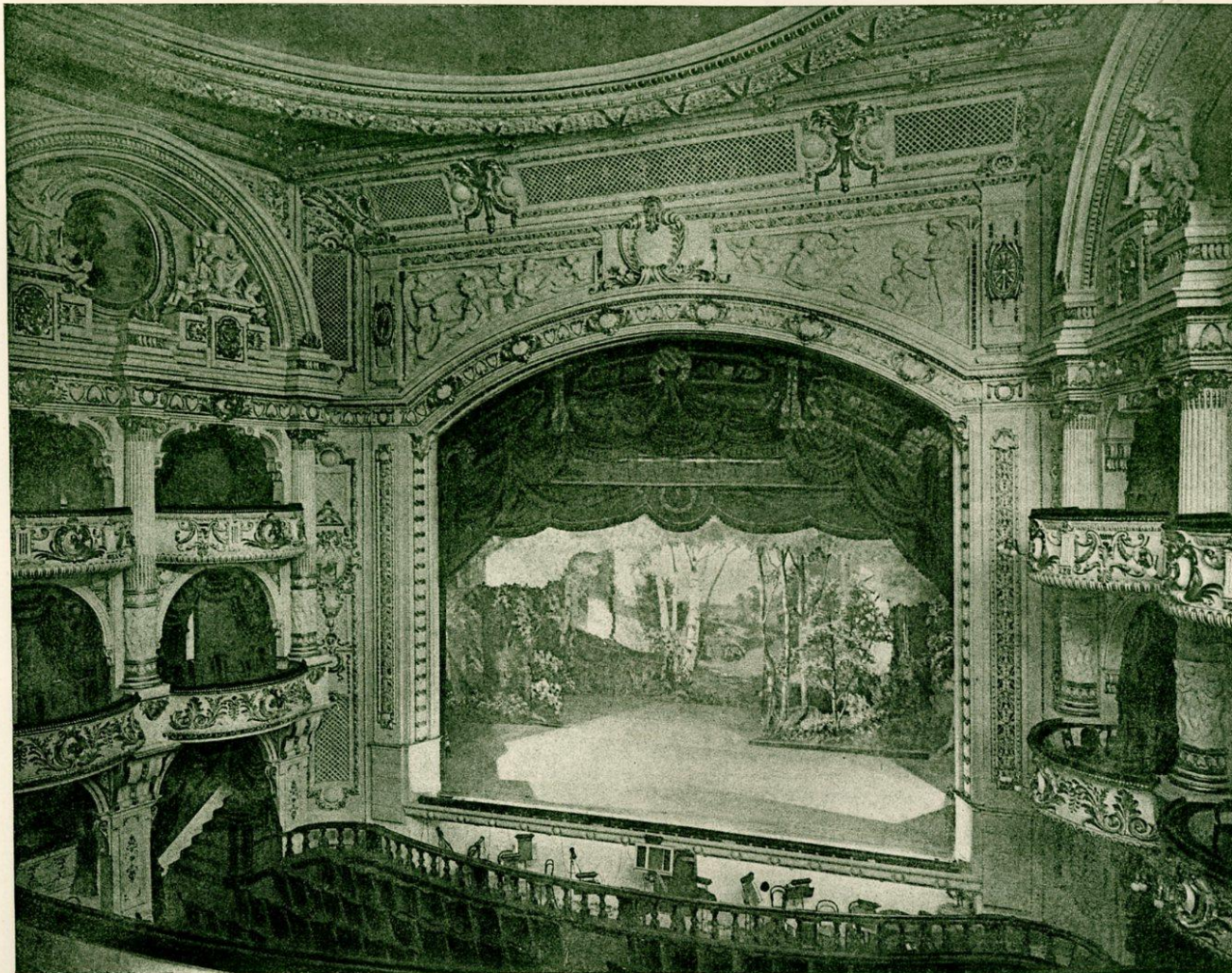
The difficult matter of heating and ventilation, was placed in the hands of experts (Messrs. Strode & Co.), and the installation of the Plenum system of forced air ensures a gradual change of atmosphere without draught at a rate of six times an hour, while as a summer auxiliary a sliding-roof has been provided in the eye of the dome.

Every appurtenance for the prevention of fire has been installed, although the building is the nearest thing to fireproof modern construction can give us. The circle, gallery, stairs, roof, and partitions are of concrete – wood being reduced to an absolute minimum. The plaster work is fireproof, and even the draperies and carpets have been chemically treated to render them non-inflammable. The safety curtain, with its automatic water-flushing apparatus, the sprinklers, and self-acting draught over the stage – all of the very latest pattern – have been provided on the most approved lines, tested and passed by the London fire Brigade.

The building is chiefly constructed of steel, Messrs. Smith Walker & Co. being the contractors. The judicious combination of brick, concrete, steel and fibrous plaster have made modern building a rapid business, and the fact that this theatre, only commenced in August, was opened on Boxing Day, speaks volumes for modern methods, especially when it is remembered it has a greater seating capacity than any of the Strand theatres.

Messrs. Parkinson & Sons, of Blackpool, were the general contractor.”

[From: *The Architect & Contract Reporter*, April 12<sup>th</sup> 1912, p.240.]



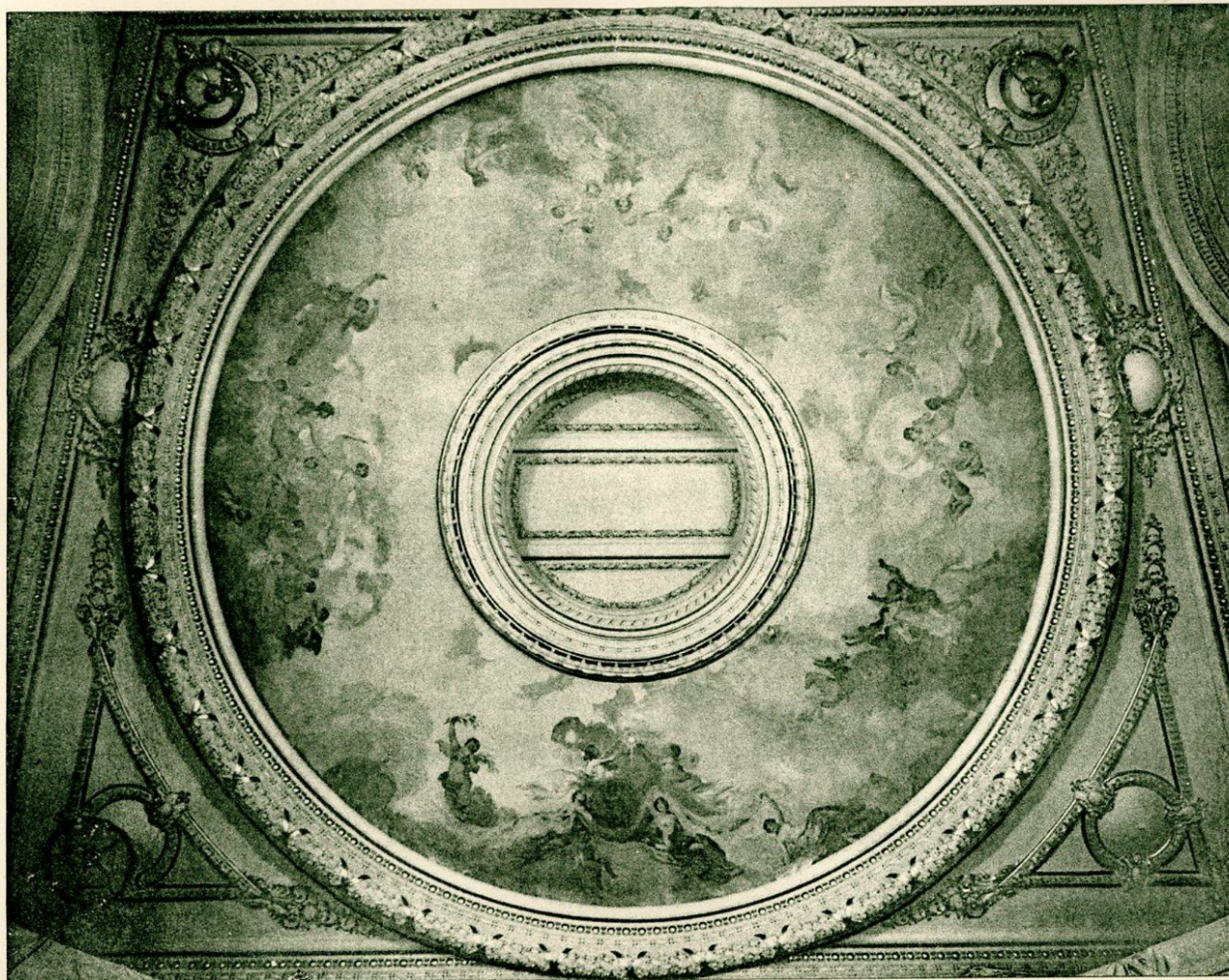
Edin. Architect, April 12th 1912.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BEDFORD LEHNER & CO. 147, STRAND, W.C.

"INK-PHOTO" SPRAGUE & CO. LTD. 69 & 70, DEAN STREET, SOHO, W.

THE NEW PRINCES THEATRE, SHAFTESBURY AVENUE: THE PROSCENIUM.

MR. BERTIE CREWE, ARCHITECT.



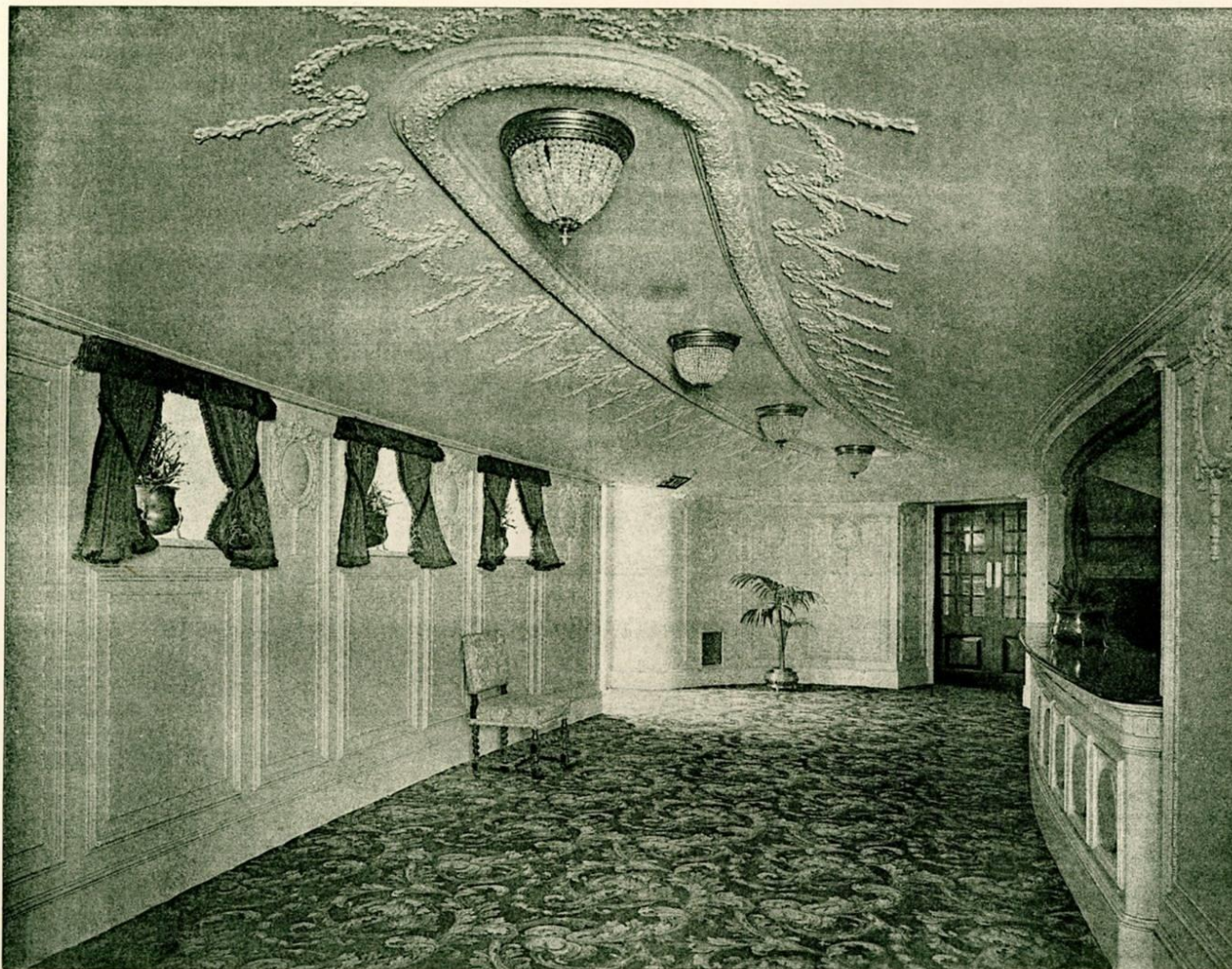
Opie Architect, April 12th 1912.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BELFRID LEMERE & CO. 147, STRAND, W.C.

"INK-PHOTO" SPRAGUE & CO. LTD. 69 & 70, DEAN STREET, SOHO, W.

THE NEW PRINCES THEATRE, SHAFTESBURY AVENUE: CEILING OF AUDITORIUM.

Mr. BERTIE CREWE, Architect.



The Architect, April 12th 1912.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BEDFORD LEMERE & CO. 147, STRAND, W.C.

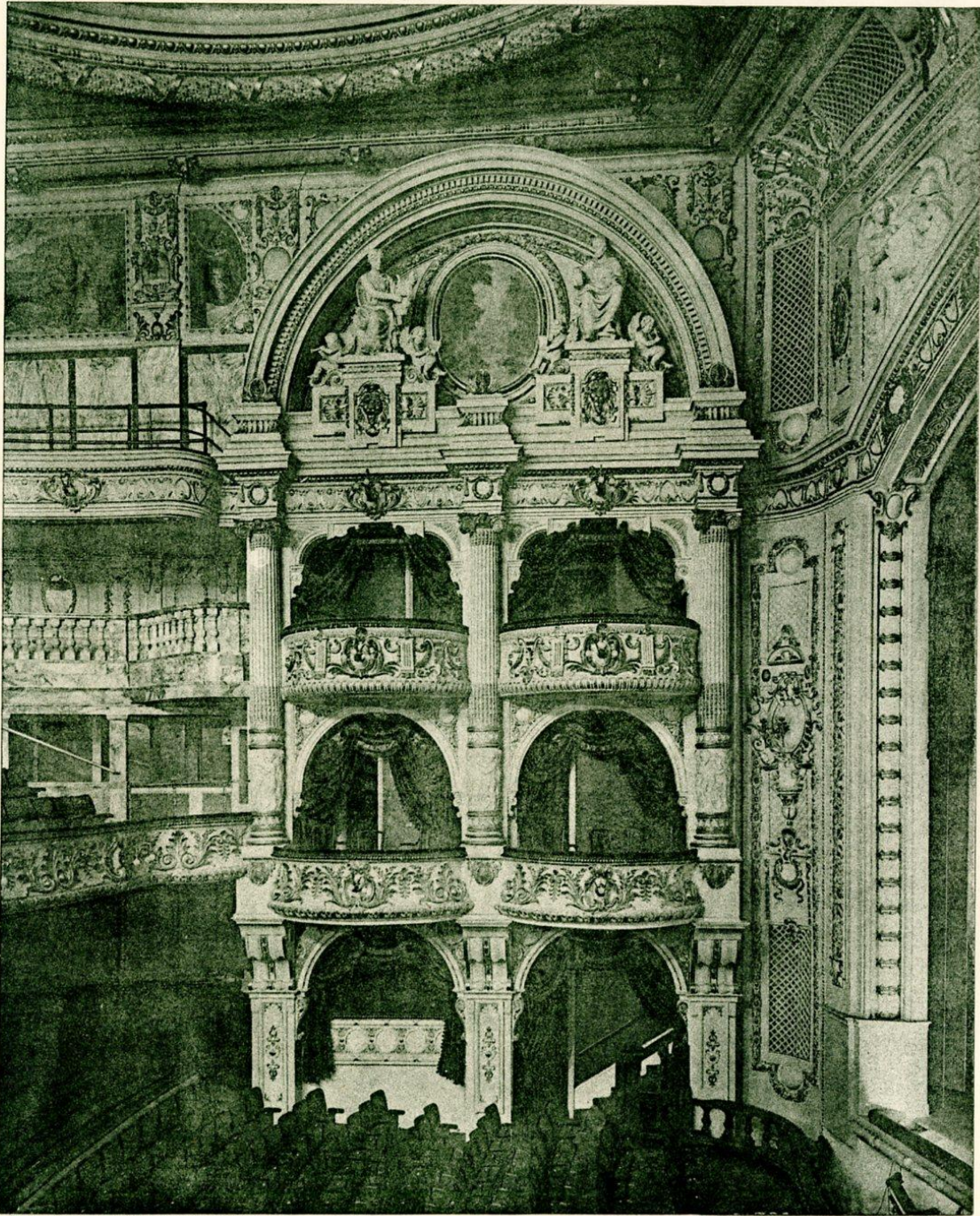
"INK-PHOTO" SPRAGUE & CO. LTD. 69 & 70, DEAN STREET, SOHO, W.

THE NEW PRINCES THEATRE, SHAFTESBURY AVENUE: THE LOUNGE.

Mr. BERTIE CREWE, Architect.



*The Architect*, April 12<sup>th</sup> 1912.



PHOTOGRAPHED BY BEDFORD LEMERE & CO. 147, STRAND, W.C.

"INK-PHOTO" SPRAGUE & CO. LTD. 69 & 70, DEAN STREET, SOHO, W.

THE NEW PRINCES THEATRE, SHAFTESBURY AVENUE: THE BOXES.

Mr. BERTIE CREWE, Architect.

## Current Position & Context

The *Shaftesbury Theatre* freehold is currently owned by The Theatre of Comedy Company, and the building forms a keystone of London's West End theatreland.

The current proposals are designed to allow the building to respond to the needs of a twenty-first century audience whilst respecting the heritage context and fabric of the building. Wherever practicable the scheme seeks to reverse unhelpful and insensitive interventions that have been made to the building since its original construction.

This Conservation Report was commissioned in March 2017 to inform the future restoration and redevelopment of the *Shaftesbury Theatre*. Part of the research undertaken has sought to understand in greater detail Bertie Crewe's architectural style and output. Particular emphasis has been placed upon the work of the trades people and artisans that he worked with on a multitude of projects.

The theatre was listed grade II by then *English Heritage* on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1974. Out of the 374,000 + listed buildings in England the *Shaftesbury Theatre* falls into a key represented category of buildings constructed between 1900-1944 which form only 3% of all listed buildings. The full listing description for the theatre is given in *Appendix 1*.

## Historic Context

The construction of the Shaftesbury Theatre was commissioned by theatrical impresarios Walter [1875-1937] and Frederick Melville [1877-1938] (their surname was actually Robbins).

Frederick and Walter Melville were impresarios and playwrights who belonged to the third generation theatrical family. By the 1850s and 1860s their grandfather, George Melville, had established a reputation as a leading actor in Shakespearean and contemporary roles. By contrast his son Andrew Melville, popularly known as “Mr. Emm”, went on to achieve success as a low comedian and playwright of popular pieces. As a theatrical manager he is credited with the management of at least 14 provincial theatres, and was responsible for the building of the Grand Theatre, Birmingham.

Frederick and Walter, both born in the 1870s, capitalised on and continued the family tradition of working in popular theatre. Their success can be measured by the advances the brothers themselves made as theatrical managers. After they had purchased the Terriss Theatre, Rotherhithe, and the Standard Theatre, Shoreditch, at the turn of the century, both of these were sold in 1907 and the brothers then moved into the West End, taking over the Lyceum Theatre in 1909 and building the Prince’s Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, in 1911.<sup>6</sup>

The Prince's Theatre was the last theatre to be built in Shaftesbury Avenue, and is located near New Oxford Street. It had considerable success with an 18-week season of Gilbert and Sullivan operas, presented by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, in 1919. These became a regular attraction at the theatre in the 1920s, interspersed with runs of theatre productions transferred from other venues. Basil Rathbone appeared at the Prince's Theatre in May 1933 when he played Julian Beauclerc in a revival of *Diplomacy. The Rose of Persia* (with music by Sir Arthur Sullivan and a libretto by Basil Hood) was revived at the theatre in 1935. The D'Oyly Carte returned once again in 1942.

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<sup>6</sup> See: Aston, Elaine & Clarke, Ian, “The Dangerous Women of Mevillean Melodrama”, *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol.XII, No.45, February 1996.

## Chronology of Theatre Managements

- 26.12.1911: Walter Melville
- 1.1.1919: Seymour Hicks
- 1.12.1919: C.B. Cochran
- 30.11.1922: Walter and Frederick Melville
- 1.12.1934: Harold James Pilbrow
- 1.12.1936: Walter and Frederick Melville
- 1.12.1937: Frederick Melville
- 1.12.1938: Bert Ernest Hammond

The theatre opened in 1911 under the Melville's management but was actually operated by the Lawrence Wright Music Co., the well known musical publishers. In 1934, however, control was acquired by three members of the Pilbrow family, who mortgaged the theatre £90,000 to W. and F. Robbins (in other words Walter and Frederick Melville). However, the following year (August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1935) W. and F. Robbins filed a winding-up petition against the company, Princes Theatre (Shaftesbury Avenue), Ltd. Thus they re-acquired control of the theatre as mortgagees. Upon their deaths the theatre continued to be administered by their executors and was let to various managements including Bertram Montague.<sup>7</sup>

The theatre was sold to EMI in 1962, and changed its name to the Shaftesbury Theatre the following year. Broadway productions that transferred to the theatre for long runs in the 1960s included *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1962) and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1963).

Part of the ceiling fell in on 20 July 1973, forcing the closure of the long-running musical *Hair*, after 1,998 performances. The theatre almost fell victim to redevelopment, but a campaign by Equity succeeded in having the theatre placed on the 'Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest', and the theatre was listed Grade II by English Heritage on 1st March 1974.[see *Appendix I*]

The theatre reopened with *West Side Story* a year later. Long runs in the 1980s included *They're Playing Our Song* (1980) and *Follies* (1987). The next decade included long runs of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1992), *Eddie Izzard: Definite Article* (1995) and *Rent* (1998). During the redevelopment of the Royal Opera House in nearby Covent Garden in the late 1990s, the theatre was booked as an alternative London venue for performances including Benjamin Britten's *Paul Bunyan*.

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<sup>7</sup> See: *Theatre Ownership In Britain*, pub:Federation of Theatre Unions, London, 1953.

## Shaftesbury Theatre – Conservation Report

Since 1983 the theatre has been owned by the Theatre of Comedy Company , originally a joint owned venture financed by a group of actors, directors and writers that, in 1986, was joined by the television executive, Don Taffner Senior. On joining he became the major shareholder which resulted in him taking over the management in 1991, becoming sole owner in 2008.

Today the theatre runs as successful theatre for musicals but struggles in an ever competitive market to provide adequate front of house facilities, especially in the area of accessibility. The current proposals seek to rectify the shortcomings of the current arrangements whilst respecting the historic fabric of the building.

## Artisans and Craftspeople

Bertie Crewe was a theatre architect who developed a network of key collaborators who worked together on numerous occasions to create some of the most important theatres in the British Isles. During the research for the preparation of this report it has been possible to identify some of the artisans and craftspeople who worked on the Shaftesbury Theatre in 1911.

Whilst the proposed works to the auditorium will follow during a later phase, this initial conservation study sets out to investigate some the people that contributed to create this masterpiece of theatrical confection.

## Sub-Contractors for the 1911 Construction

Main Contractor: J. Parkinson & Sons

Electrical Engineers: J. H. Offer & Sons, Kingston-upon-Thames

Ventilation: Strode & Co.

Heating: Strode & Co.

Decoration: John Tanner & Co. of London

Upholstery: A.R. Dean & Co. of Birmingham

Murals & Paintings: Medcalf & Walshe

Statutes and Modelling: Thomas Rudge

Fibrous Plaster: John Tanner & Co. of London

Carpets: A.R. Dean & Co. of Birmingham

Curtains: A.R. Dean & Co. of Birmingham

Iron and Steelwork: Smith, Walker & Co.

Safety Curtain: Strode & Co.

## Thomas Rudge [1868-1942] - Sculptor

Thomas Rudge was responsible for the modelling of the many internal decorative features;

“Another distinctive feature of the interior is the modelled figure work. Four life-size groups, weighing over a ton apiece, surmount the boxes and represent the muses, “Comedy,” “Tragedy,” “poetry,” and “Music,” while the proscenium arch is crowned on each haunch by a bas-relief group. This is the work of Mr. Thomas Rudge, the well-known sculptor. Ionic columns with figured drums, fluted and enriched, separate the boxes (of which there are ten), and add considerable dignity to an already dignified interior.”

Very little has been written about Rudge but during the course of the research for this study we have been able to collate his known work as well as list some of his key theatrical commissions. There is clearly much more to be discovered. The following article was discovered on the www, although the reference attribution cited is incorrect.

“Mr. Thomas Rudge – artist, sculptor and inventor – is perhaps one of the most brilliant exponents of the applied arts in England, for the genius which he has brought to bear upon “inanimate stone” – making it live as glowing memorials to our noble dead – he has applied to mechanical art, by inventing artificial arms and hands for our wounded; which, having been adopted by the government authorities, are proclaimed in all quarters to be a marvel of modern construction and ingenuity and simplicity of design. As a sculptor and designer, Mr. Rudge is in the very first rank, and a visit to his studio – St. Vincent’s Studios, Bolingbrooke Grove, Wandsworth Common, SW, is in itself a feat of artistic delight. Perhaps two of his most admired war memorials are those in Canterbury Cathedral and Wrexham Parish Church. The first, the beautiful monument to the memory of the first Buffs, who fell in the Chitral and North-West Frontier Campaign – that holocaust of “little wars” – and the second, the splendidly dignified memorial to the battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers who laid down their lives in South Africa and China. Both of these works – which were unveiled by their majesties – the King and Princess Louise – stand as typical examples of British sculpture, and prove conclusively that our modern men have little to learn in the way of ecclesiastical sculpture from Italy, for the far-famed memorials of Rome can show no fairer or more chaste tributes to the heroic dead. The dexterity of the intricate carving, the delicacy of the tracery, the simple yet commanding beauty of the design, are in both memorials enhanced by the life like nobility of the statues in

the niches on either side, the nervous reality of the soldiers modern uniforms – most difficult to treat effectively in stone, and yet here restfully harmonious – veiling in characteristic dignity with the more romantic and artistically fashioned mediaeval armour of the earlier period. Mr. Rudge designed and executed a series of these memorials, which were greatly admired.

Born in Cheltenham, Mr. Thomas Rudge is the son of the late Mr. Edmund Rudge, the inventor, and owner of the famous Mills and Tanyards at Tewkesbury, which Mrs. Craik made world known in her book “John Halifax Gentleman.” From an early age he had a predilection for sculpture, and for six years was articled to Messrs. R.L. Boulton of that town. It was whilst here that his talent was early displayed, and the statues in many notable buildings owe their origin to his artistic chisel – seven remarkable figures in the great screen at Winchester Cathedral being executed by him. Coming to London – that *ultima thule* of all young genius – the sculptor went for nine years into the studios of Messrs. Farmer and Brindley of Westminster, where he produced many works of classic and ecclesiastical importance. Starting in his own studio, Mr. Rudge quickly found himself in the midst of work his first commission being all the external carving on the latest restoration of Salisbury Cathedral, and at a later date the nobly designed statue of St. Edmund, and the bishops intricately sculptured prayer desk – a very flowing piece of thoughtful carving. This was followed by a commission to execute the reredos, pulpit, screens, font and organ case, and all the external and internal carvings of St Barnabas’s Church, Clapham Common. Among the more important public buildings which the carvings of this earnest and gifted sculptor adorn, may be mentioned Marlborough House, the Imperial Institute, the London Opera House, Colchester Municipal Buildings, Claridge’s Hotel, the Ocean Accident Offices, Pall Mall, Halifax and Huddersfield Union bank, and countless other building and edifices, which, in addition to Canterbury and Salisbury cathedrals already mentioned, his work is seen in such distant places as Chester cathedral and the cathedral in Trinidad, where he executed the magnificent reredos ornate with beautiful statues and carvings in memory to their late Bishop. As recently as last week Mr. Rudge had a war memorial unveiled by the Chaplain General to the Forces, to the memory of 230 North Finchley men. This design was the selected one in a competition of seven of our best London firms.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Reference cited on the internet as: *London Magazine*, 1917 – but this is incorrect.



## Rudge's Known Works:

### Ecclesiastical Sculptures

St Barnabas' Church, Clapham Common:

Reredos, pulpit, screens, font, organ case and all internal and external carvings

Winchester Cathedral: Seven figures in the great screen

Salisbury Cathedral: External carvings during restoration work

Bishop's sculptured prayer desk, Statue of St. Edmund

Chester Cathedral: Memorial to the Men of the Cheshire Regiment who died in the Boer War (1904)

Cathedral in Trinidad [Port of Spain]: Reredos

### Public Buildings

Marlborough House

The Imperial Institute

The London Opera House (by Bertie Crewe) – external statues to parapet

Colchester Municipal Buildings

Claridge's Hotel

The Ocean Accident Offices in Pall Mall

Halifax and Huddersfield Union Bank

70-71 New Bond Street – Three standing figures in Portland Stone of Science  
Commerce and Art [Art is by Rudge]



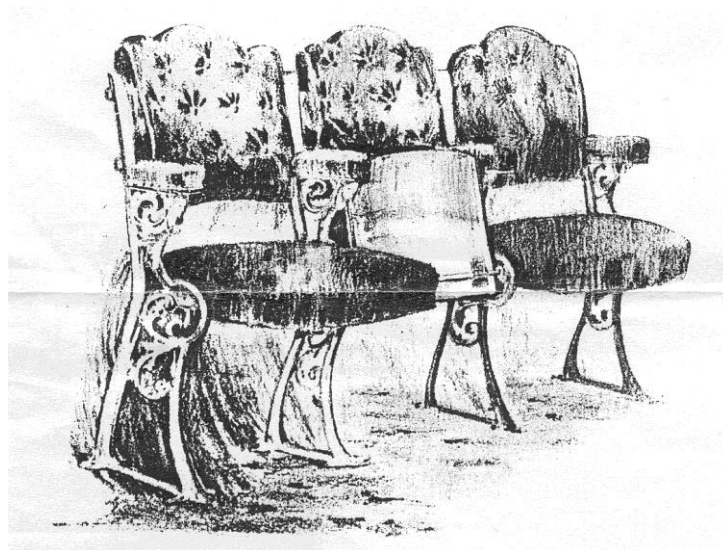
London Opera House – Rudge's Statues Removed from the Parapet Prior to Demolition, November 1957  
[theatresearch archive]

## Seating & Sightlines

The Shaftesbury Theatre's original seating layouts were based upon a fundamental desire to create an auditorium where intimacy and line of sight were paramount. Thus, there was a direct relationship between every seat in the theatre and the raked stage, traditionally laid out at 1:24 or  $\frac{1}{2}''$  to the foot. The complex three-dimensional gradients of the tiers and the stalls, was a carefully formulated geometrical exercise, producing that intimate and special atmosphere so synonymous with an Edwardian theatre. A well designed theatre of the period should have sightlines that are finely balanced - on one side of the scales the auditorium on the other the stage.

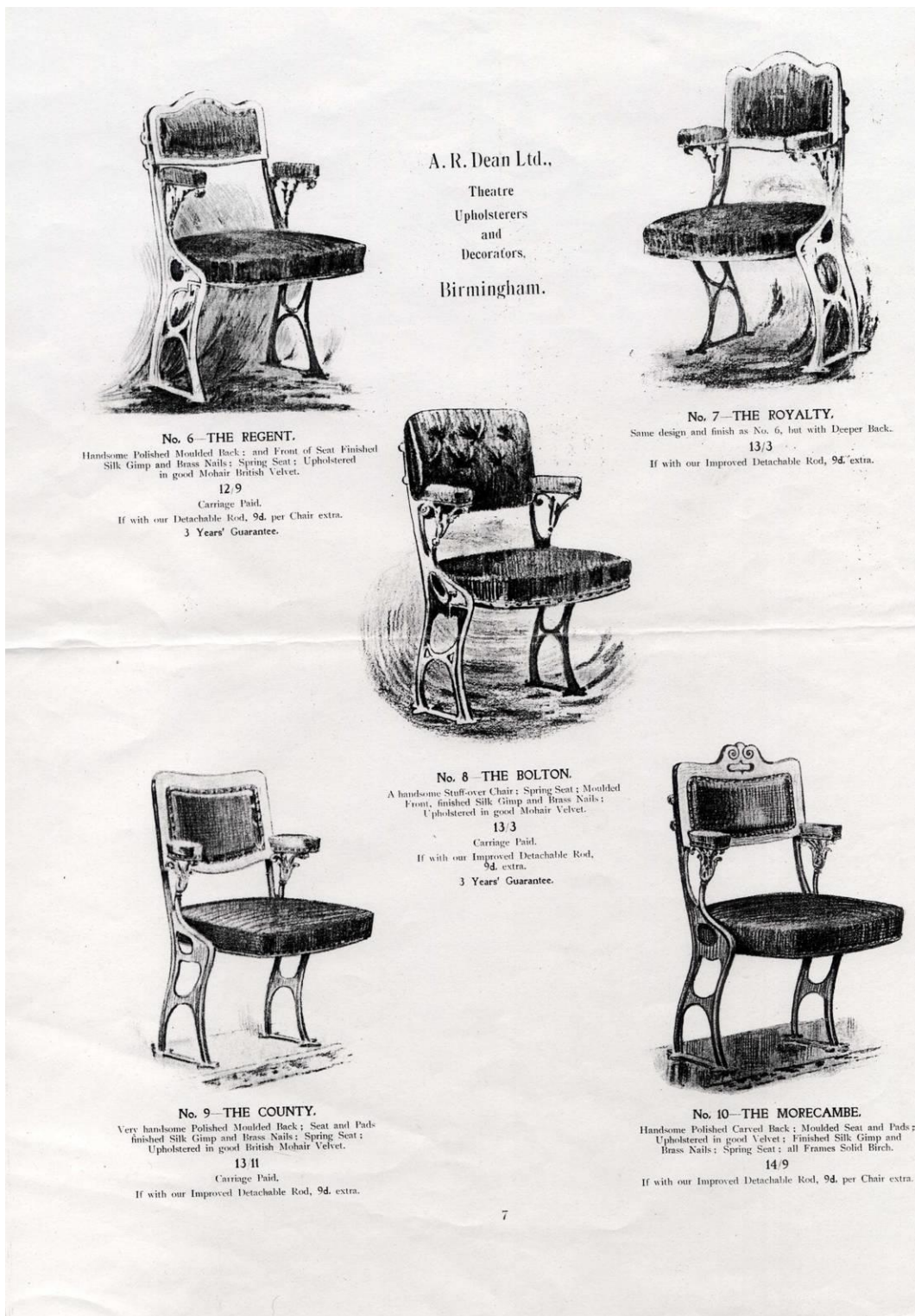
The original seating has been replaced several times since 1911. Originally the theatre would have been seated with various types of seating commensurate with ticket prices. Whilst the present designs do have some empathy with an Edwardian theatre seat, the seating height is approximately 6 cm lower, which inevitably impacts on the sightline and consequential leg room. A future re-seating would need to take this into account, coupled with any changes to the original 1911 layout of the tiers.

The illustration below is taken from A.R. Dean's trade catalogue and clearly shows the style of seat that would have been used. The Design Team must understand that the seat design is a dominant and important feature of any historic auditorium. It performs a critical function whilst also contributing to the overall aesthetic of the space. It is therefore essential to understand that any re-seating of the theatre should ultimately take account of this factor.



A.R. Dean Seat c.1910

[From: A.R. Dean Trade Catalogue, [theatresearch](#) archive]



Extracted Page from A.R. Dean Trade Catalogue c.1905  
[from: theatresearch archive]

## Seating Capacities

Year	Pit	Stalls	Dress Circle	Gallery	Boxes	Total
1946 <sup>9</sup>	169	584	393	550	40	<b>1,736</b>
1952 <sup>10</sup>	66	687	393	550	40	<b>1,736</b>
1971 <sup>11</sup>		624	391	257	28	<b>1,300</b>
2007 <sup>12</sup>	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	<b>1,406</b>
2017		692	439	285		<b>1,416</b>

From the descriptions already cited it is clear that the theatre had a number of different seats within various areas of the theatre. These undoubtedly provided differing levels of comfort and discomfort depending on the price of the ticket. It should certainly not be the intention nor the desire to recreate the discomfort, but there is most definitely a need to provide a comfortable period seat which might adopt a number of different yet generic designs within the various seating areas.

The theatre seating was considered to be both a functional and perhaps more importantly, an architectural element of the auditorium. Furthermore, there was an inseparable association between the design of the original seating and the sightlines within the various tiers.

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<sup>9</sup> Stage Guide 1946

<sup>10</sup> Stage Guide 1952

<sup>11</sup> Stage Guide 1971

<sup>12</sup> British Performing Arts Yearbook 2007-08

## Soft Furnishings

The architecture and furnishings of an Edwardian theatre were seen as a unity, with architects overseeing many aspects of interior design as well as construction. The soft furnishings therefore add considerably to the building's architectural ambience and overall decorative harmony. They should essentially be considered as 'soft architecture' and elements include:

- Box Curtains and Pelmet
- Main House Curtain
- Main House Pelmet
- Auditorium Seating
- Orchestra Rail Valance
- Auditorium Door curtains
- Soft fabric Panels e.g. Dress Circle Barrier
- Tier Rester e.g. Boxes and Dress Circle

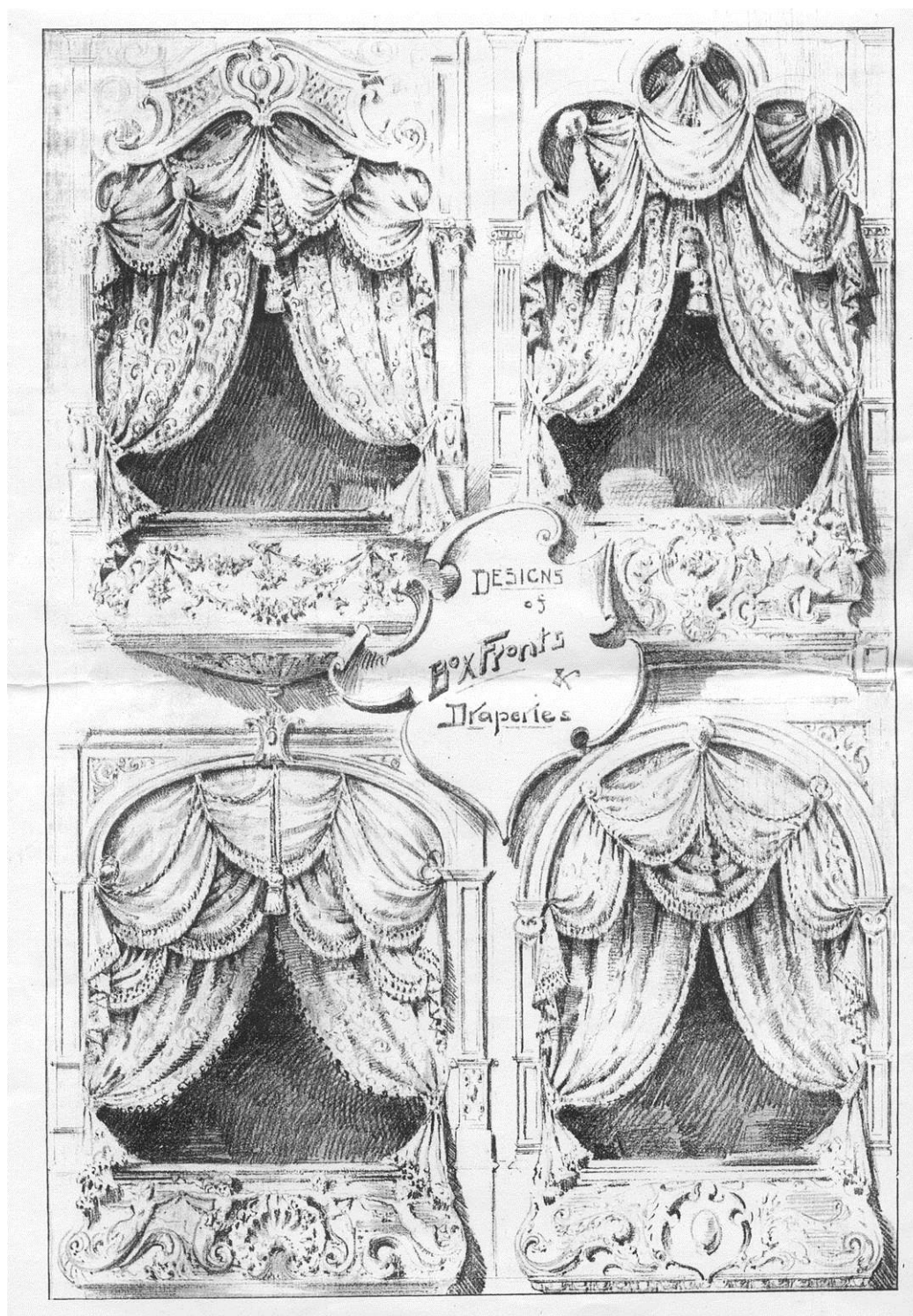
The upholstery for the Shaftesbury Theatre was provided by A.R. Dean & Co. of Birmingham. The opening reports describe the soft furnishings thus:

"The carpets, furnishings, draperies and upholstery throughout were supplied by Messrs. Dean, of Birmingham, and their rich crimson velvet will help to make this house a model of elegance and comfort – especially in conjunction with the expensive pink and white marbles, alabaster and gold mosaic with which portions of the auditorium sides are panelled."<sup>13</sup>

The best available references on A.R. Dean's drapery, box dressings and passementerie come from their c.1905 trade catalogue. The images that are reproduced on the following page provide a key indication of the type of work that they were creating at this time in the company's history.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Architect & Contract Reporter*, April 12<sup>th</sup> 1912, p.240.



A.R. Dean & Co's Trade Catalogue c.1905  
[from: [theatresearch](#) archive]

## Shaftesbury Theatre – Conservation Study

The involvement in A.R. Dean & Co. with both decoration and seating underlines the fact that they were closely involved with the overall interior design concept of the theatre. Theatre seating was considered to be both a functional and an architectural element of the auditorium, contributing significantly to the overall ambience of the theatre interior.

A.R. Dean & Co., of Birmingham were the recognised experts in theatre decoration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The major theatre architects of the day, Frank Matcham, Charles Phipps, Bertie Crewe used their expertise on a regular basis. This helps to explain why the Shaftesbury Theatre was such a successful decorative ensemble. Dean's had such a wealth of theatrical experience to bring to the project, and it clearly shows.



Albert Reuben Dean

[From: *The Owl*, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1891.]

An examination of the pages of *The Era* (a weekly theatre newspaper of the period) reveals regular extensive adverts for the company quoting prestigious work to their potential clients.



## Shaftesbury Theatre – Conservation Study

In 1911 they were able to include in their “work in progress or just completed” advertisements for other Bertie Crewe designed projects:

- Empire Theatre, Burnley (Bertie Crewe architect) – extant grade II
- The London Opera House (Bertie Crewe architect) - demolished

The theatre furnishing trade was a recognised industry in 1905, it employed thousands of people and would continue as the cinema furnishing trade well into the twentieth century. The design lineage of the Shaftesbury Theatre is clear – Dean’s collaborated on the design of the interior with Bertie Crewe, bringing to bear their previous professional relationships and ongoing projects.

From the perspective of 1911 the theatre building boom continued, but three years later this would all change with the advent of the First World War. Theatre construction would come to a halt, and by 1918 entertainment had reinvented itself in the form of the cinema. In consequence Bertie Crewe and A.R. Dean would both have to respond to these new more modern demands.

## John Tanner & Co. of London – Fibrous Plasterers



Workshop of Fibrous Plasterers John Tanner & Co.  
[photo: © Victoria & Albert Museum]

### List of Known Theatre Work

1910: Royal Court Theatre, Liverpool – Architect: Frank Matcham

1911: London Opera House, Kingsway (in association with A.R. Dean & Co.) –  
Architect: Bertie Crewe

1913: Opera House, Manchester – Architect: Gill & Richardson

1913: Repertory Theatre, [Playhouse] Liverpool – Architect: Stanley D. Adshead

1925: Empire Theatre, Liverpool – Architect: William & T.R. Milburn

It is clear that 1911 was an extremely busy year for Bertie Crewe and his team of artisans and craftspeople. It would appear that A.R. Dean and Company were originally appointed to carry out the fibrous plasterwork at the London Opera House. However A.R. Dean had only recently bought his company back from a syndicate he had sold it to some years previous. In consequence, given the size of the London Opera House project he sub-contracted a significant portion of the works to John Tanner & Co. It would appear that they in turn over-stretched themselves, being already involved with the construction of the Shaftesbury Theatre. As a direct result of this it would seem that John Tanner & Co. went into liquidation shortly after the completion of the Shaftesbury Theatre.

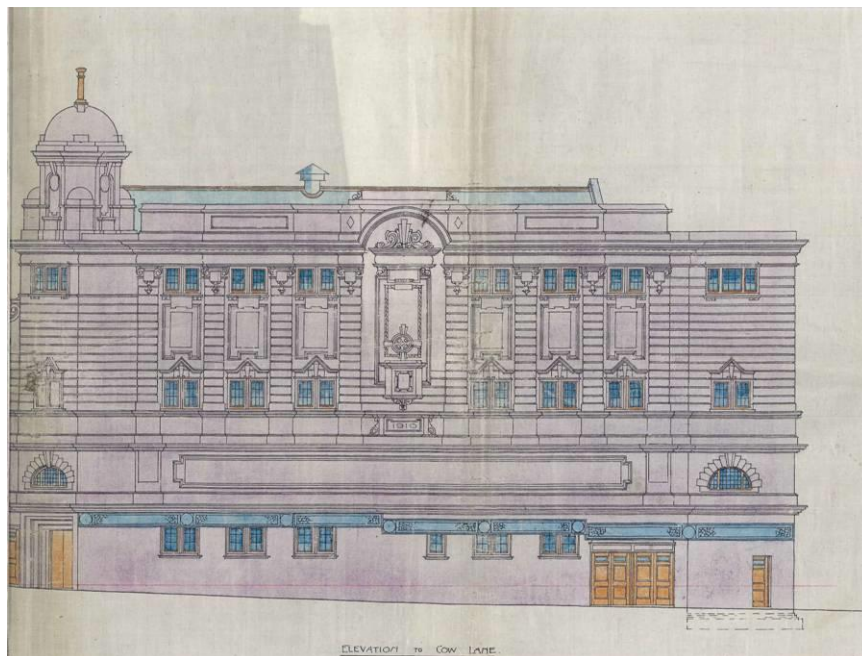
Nevertheless, as can be seen from the known list of works they re-surfaced commercially and were commissioned in 1923 to undertake the fibrous plasterwork for the reconstruction of the Empire Theatre in Liverpool, where they were actually based.

## External Elevations

The Bertie Crewe portfolio of 1911 is very extensive with projects such as the Empire Theatre, Burnley; the Bedminster Hippodrome, Bristol and the gargantuan London Opera House in Kingsway all under construction. The evolved house style had begun to include highly decorative external elevations, which in some instances were far more homogenous than those of Crewe mentor and ultimate competitor Frank Matcham.

The Shaftesbury elevations possess a dominant use of Terracotta blocks lightly punctuated with interspersions of brick. The cost would have been significantly more than the stucco used for instance at the Burnley Empire. Terracotta was in ‘architectural vogue’ during the first ten years of the twentieth century, notable examples being Matcham’s Hackney Empire (1901) and his London Coliseum (1903) Clients who wished to make a clear statement about the quality and propriety of the product placed upon the stage often opted for a rather more lavish finish to the exteriors of their theatres. It is clear that the Shaftesbury falls into this category forming a key corner site at the junction of High Holborn and Princes Circus.

The theatre has in the past responded to external change in a piecemeal manner. It is therefore critical for the present proposals to encompass every element of the building’s external presentation. It is clear that the building needs to respond to the demands of a twenty-first century audience whilst simultaneously celebrating both its theatrical and heritage contexts.



Burnley Empire Theatre – Crewe’s Main Elevation [1911]

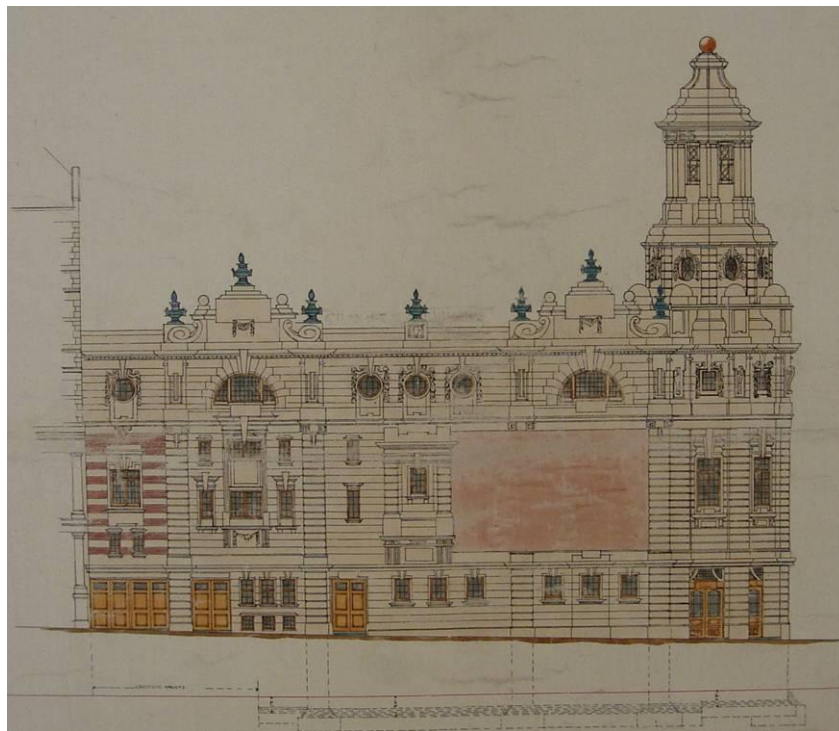
Note the Rustication, Fenestration and Corner Tower Similarities

## External Elevation Proposals

The current proposals have developed a design philosophy which addresses a number of key concerns:

Originally designed by Crewe to provide a large panel for external unashamed “broadsheet advertising” facing onto Princes Circus. The theatre of today relies far more upon other advertising mediums in shapes and sizes that no longer use the old imperial broadsheet proportions. In consequence there is no longer a need to have such a large emblazoned panel on the main elevation.

The current proposals suggest a reduction in size to account of these modern requirements. Detailed discussions have considered a number of options drawing the conclusion that a peripheral unused panel of stucco would be a most unwelcome blemish on a fully conserved elevation. It is therefore proposed that the current incomplete rusticated pilaster is completed to provide a sense of architectural connectivity which is currently lacking. It is clear that Crewe would not have cut short the rustication had it not been an essential requirement for advertising and on that basis the justification for completion is wholly justified. This principle has been extrapolated across both of the main elevations in order to ensure a seamless connectivity which joins us a number of potentially disparate architectural elements. Similarly, where windows have been blinded they are reopened to create a sense of architectural balance and internal transparency which has become somewhat distorted over time by gradual change and intervention.



Original Princes Circus Elevation Design by Crewe [July 1911]

At ground level a similar approach has been taken but this concept of transparency has been interpreted in a different way. Public access is currently a problematic issue for the theatre offering limited wheelchair accessibility, as well as being visually semi-secluded rather than overtly welcoming. Whilst the upper floors will be reinvigorated with careful lighting behind the decorative windows, the ground floor needs to be physically opened up to the public.

The proposed pedestrianisation of Princes Circus creates, for the first time in the theatre's life a real opportunity to create a welcoming transition between streetscape and foyer. The proposals introduce the idea of additional glazing to allow greater transparency and physical access using the geometry of Crewe's original elevation. A purist approach to restoration at ground floor level would increase the blindness of the front of house spaces – something which would be commercially disastrous at a time when the additional revenue spend over and above the ticket price is a key element of any theatre's business plan.

The redefining of the existing doors and windows specifically to the Princes Circus elevation immediately solves the lack of transparency and carefully deals with the front of house transition from foyer to streetscape – a streetscape which will ultimately be populated with an elegant garden setting based upon the traditions of the café chantant music hall tradition. The emergency exit doors, which currently turn their back on the streetscape will be redefined to provide elegant public access pathways into levels of the foyer that are currently awkward to access because of the fall of the external pavement.

The dominant corner entrance was originally enhanced and focused by the provision of a decorative canopy which provide weather protection and external illumination using double torcher light fittings and hanging globes. This side elevation was additionally illuminated with 13 No. carbon-arc light fittings mounted on decorative brackets. (several of these can be seen in the photograph below).



Corner Elevation c.1913

In conclusion the architectural approach to the ground floor needs to redefine the theatre's street persona. The current problems cannot be resolved through pure restoration alone, and in consequence the change in philosophy is both valid, appropriate and just as importantly respectful of the past.

## Front of House Spaces

The current limitations within the front of house region demand a comprehensive but sensitive reassessment of the various spaces, some of which have been radically altered since 1911 e.g. public bars.

The physical segregation of the various seating areas within the theatre, something which was a standard feature of theatre design prior to 1940, is neither acceptable to the twenty-first century audiences or the theatre managements. This, coupled with the significant issues associated with physical access, people movement through front of house spaces, location accessibility and number of toilets, leads to the inevitable conclusion that changes need to be made. Whilst limitation of footprint will almost certainly be a long term issue, the current proposals initiate a fresh approach which addresses these concerns. It creates a more efficient and logical layout within the key historic areas whilst addressing the shortcomings of the present facilities which are wholly inadequate.

An examination of the original deposited planning drawings reveals an evolutionary design process within Crewe's offices. The main corner entrance and the box office location are elements which evolve between the earliest surviving drawings of July 1910 and the final approved drawings of July 1911.

The 1910 and 1911 drawings reveal variant proposals for two box office kiosks within the main foyer with the bank of 4 steps accommodating the change in external street levels set in different locations. The site evidence suggests that the present location of these steps has in fact been changed once more since their original construction in 1911.



Ground Floor Ambulatory [1911]  
Note Location of Bar Since Removed

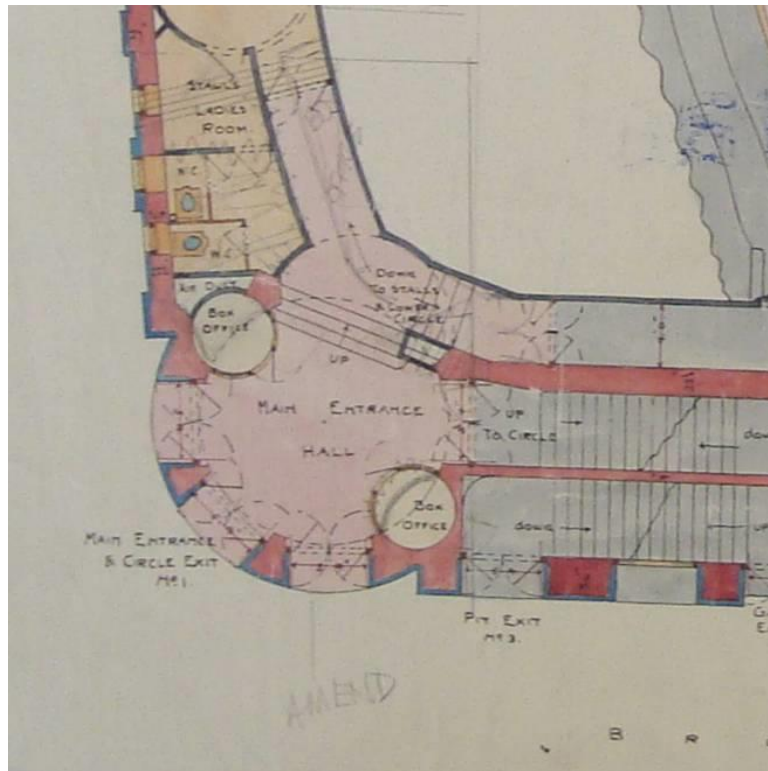


The ground floor ambulatory as depicted in the photograph above is a key element of the front of house identity and a classic piece of Crewe design which skilfully orientates the audience by incorporating the radius curve of the rear auditorium wall. Whilst the bar fixtures were removed many years ago the integrity of the volume remains as a key design feature which with sensitive decoration and dressing will once more be a wonderful transitory space to the auditorium.

The original bars which are embedded at stalls and dress circle half-levels on the north side of the auditorium have lost much of their original integrity. The volumes are extremely tight and the provision of inadequate adjacent toilet facilities simply compound the public circulation problems. The proposals to provide new much enlarged toilet accommodation is to be welcomed, and there is an absolute logic in creating a large modern basement space which can provide so many of these badly facilities without compromising any of the original historic fabric.

Fundamentally the whole front of house is now so constrained and torturous as to be considered wholly unsuitable for efficient theatre management. The proposal to create an undercroft running underneath the pavement of Princes Circus addresses the fundamental problem – lack of space. An external extension would have been easier to construct but is considered to be both an inappropriate and unachievable way of resolving the issue. By excavating beneath the pavement, and at the same time incorporating the existing sub-pavement vaults which might even pre-date the theatre it will create additional volume in order to address so many of the present shortcomings. This is achieved in an honest architectural style which handles the transition from heritage to contemporary in a restrained and logical manner.

Inevitably a subtle yet radical intervention of this kind offers up significant challenges but it also takes the pressure away from the front of house areas that remain largely intact from 1911. In creating a new sub-pavement volume the public pressure is reduced on bar space within the original footprint. These proposals begin to outline the fundamental principles that are required to re-enable the historic front of house facilities. A fine balance can only be achieved between sensitive heritage areas and the new contemporary spaces – it will demand extensive and minute architectural detailing, but this is something which is already implicit in the over-arching philosophy of the scheme. A sense of honest balance will it is believed deliver resolution which allows both the commercial and comfort elements of the scheme to co-exist alongside the restoration of Crewe's surviving heritage areas.



July 1910 Main Foyer & Box Office Above

## Front of House Staircases

Crewe's architectural approach to theatre design was predicated on the assumption that the tiers within the theatre were not interconnected, and by implication the social classes were unable to mix. In consequence the staircase provision is often more than is actually required in the twenty-first century because:

- The theatre originally had a greater seating capacity
- The staircases were dedicated to tiers – no interconnections

With advances in fire engineering, a reduction in seating capacity and an acceptance that the tiers can now be inter-connected it is sometimes possible, and often desirable to reduce the number of staircases in order to create more spacious front of house accommodation.

Crewe's emergency exits are unremarkable utilitarian service staircases, sometimes wound as a double or even occasionally as a triple helix. The current proposals allow for the removal of the basement to first floor section of the Bloomsbury Street staircase, driven by a desire for greater space and clarity within the front of house areas.

## Significance Drawings

In line with standard conservation protocols Theatresearch has collaborated with Bennetts Associates to produce a complete set of sensitivity and significance drawings. These are given in *Appendix 2* of this document and also inserted into the main Design Team study report.

They are produced to provide a hierarchical understanding of the many areas within the theatre, providing an indication of the relative importance and sensitivities associated with the various areas of the building.

This significance drawings should be read in conjunction with the Conservation Significance Register which is given below and deals with individual conservation issues embedded within the various elemental areas.

<b>CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE REGISTER</b>			
<b>1. External Elements</b>	<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Degree of Significance</b>	<b>Approach &amp; Mitigation</b>
1.1 Terracotta to Main Elevations	Highly vulnerable - highly delicate medium – needs a detailed long term conservation strategy	<b>High</b>	Detailed reports and investigation prior to works
1.2 Leaded Light Glazing	Some windows require careful conservation; both glazing and leadwork	<b>Medium/High</b>	Work to be carried out by specialists – all original glass to be retained wherever possible
1.3 Timber Window Frames	Conservation of original timber window-frames	<b>Low</b>	Use of recycled pitch pine, re-mastic, original paint colours reinstated (analysis required)
1.4 External Heritage Lighting	Further research required on location of original architectural light fittings	<b>Low</b>	Early photographs are scarce – likely to be carbon arc lamps which were a Bertie Crewe signature item in 1911.
1.5 External Door Furniture	Restoration of missing door furniture e.g. handles, kicking plates (and commensurate approach to inner faces)	<b>Medium</b>	Where missing new patterns to be made using same materials as original – fixings to be vandal proof
1.6 Re-defining External Windows	Some original windows have been blocked or internally blanked	<b>Medium</b>	Re-opening and relighting internally with a consistent colour temperature lighting behind every original window opening.
1.7 Original Render Advertising Panels	Part of the original Bertie Crewe Design	<b>Medium</b>	Need to be re-sized for 21 <sup>st</sup> century formats – self colour render to new reduced size panels – completion of terracotta pilasters and detailing where incomplete
1.8 Main External Canopy	Has a practical application – some restoration required on top of previous interventions	<b>Medium</b>	Further detailed analysis and proposals required

<b>CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE REGISTER</b>			
<b>1. External Elements</b>	<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Degree of Significance</b>	<b>Approach &amp; Mitigation</b>
1.10 Lightning Conductor Tapes	Choice of appropriate coloured tape with conservation fixings to facade	<b>Medium</b>	Early design co-ordination required
1.11 Pigeon Prevention	Sensitive but effective pigeon management to be carefully designed – conservation fixings required	<b>Low</b>	Early design co-ordination required
1.12 Streetscape	Co-ordination required for services – including finishes and colours to enclosures e.g. BT	<b>Low</b>	Early design co-ordination required
1.13 Terracotta Mortar	Terracotta re-mortaring needs to be carefully undertaken using the correct mix and colouration	<b>Medium</b>	Detailed reports and investigation prior to works
1.14 External Doors	Some timber restoration works required	<b>Medium</b>	Use of similar materials – preferably recycled pitch pine etc.

<b>CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE REGISTER</b>			
<b>2. Main Foyer Elements</b>	<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Degree of Significance</b>	<b>Approach &amp; Mitigation</b>
2.1 Main Corner Entrance Hall	Has been modified and changed several times sine 1911 – the resultant lack of geometry needs resolving	<b>High</b>	Careful re-evaluation of the space to reclaim the geometry whilst replanning for 21 <sup>st</sup> century public circulation
2.2 Main Entrance:Decorative Floor	Careful restoration required	<b>Medium</b>	Work to be carried out by specialists – detailed conservation report required
2.3 Main Entrance:Mosaic Upstands	Careful restoration required	<b>Medium</b>	Work to be carried out by specialists – detailed conservation report required
2.4 Internal Light Fittings	Many originals have been replaced – lighting needs to be reappraised with consistent low colour temperature set at around 2200 Kelvin. New light fittings commissioned to reinstate original ambience	<b>Medium/High</b>	Some evidence survives on early photographs – these should be used as a base reference.
2.5 Internal Door Furniture	Restoration of missing door furniture e.g. handles, kicking plates (and commensurate approach to outer faces)	<b>Medium</b>	Where missing new patterns to be made using same materials as original – fixings to be vandal proof
2.6 Re-defining Internal Windows	High level windows to ambulatory provide limited daylight to front of house areas set at difficult heights. New approach desired by current proposals to open up these to provide greater connectivity to the external streetscape	<b>Medium</b>	Retention of original glazed panels and modified terracotta blocks for re-use in locations to be agreed.

<b>CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE REGISTER</b>			
<b>Main Foyer Elements</b>	<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Degree of Significance</b>	<b>Approach &amp; Mitigation</b>
2.7 Re-defining Front of House Circulation: Ambulatory & New Staircase	Original fitments have long since been removed. This area has no originality and as such could be reconfigured to make the ambulatory and connectivity work harder. Introduction of new staircase needs to be handled in a sensitive yet honest manner – handling the transition will be the greatest challenge.	<b>High</b>	The front of house circulation is as with so many Edwardian theatres very limited. In consequence sensitive replanning will enable circulation and make it fir for 21 <sup>st</sup> century audiences. Detailed design drawings will be required paying careful attention to decorative finishes, materials and lighting – all as a co-ordinated ensemble
2.8 Decorative Finishes	Original paint scheme to be analysed in original front of house areas	<b>Medium</b>	Early analysis required – reinstatement of scheme may be an option with gold leaf and correct colour temperature architectural lighting (see above)
2.9 Heritage Doors	A careful study of all original doors needs to be made in order to investigate how, where required, they can be upgraded for fire purposes	<b>Medium/High</b>	This is a critical element which will require an independent fire door study to mitigate the necessity to replace original doors.
2.10 Box Office	The location and architecture of the box office has been modified several times since 1911 – it is currently inefficient and poorly planned.	<b>Medium/High</b>	Practical operational considerations are absolutely paramount. The proposed revised location provides an empathy with Crewe's original ideas whilst improving functionality
2.11 Emergency Exit Staircase	The proposed removal of the emergency exit staircase is intended to create additional front of house space. The staircase is original 1911 but has no significant original decorative features of note. It occupies a significant footprint and its removal would greatly assist with making the front of house spaces far more navigable.	<b>Low/Medium</b>	Providing that the fire engineering and public safety strategies support the viable removal of the staircase, there seems no major reason to resist the change.

<b>CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE REGISTER</b>			
<b>Main Foyer Elements</b>	<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Degree of Significance</b>	<b>Approach &amp; Mitigation</b>
2.12 Main Foyer Downstand Beam	There is a curious structural downstand beam in the main foyer ceiling which appears to be an unfortunate element of the original design	Medium	Alterations to the main foyer will attempt to reduce the visual inadequacy of this downstand beam and it is therefore to be welcomed
2.13 Inner Vestibule Foyer Steps	The original Crewe designs show a number of options for both the inner vestibule steps. It would appear that the present ones have been modified at some point in the past.	High	The proposed reconfiguration would assist with public flow, enable to box office relocation to take place. It would need to be carried out to a very high standard using appropriate materials and requiring detailed design prior to execution.
2.14 Exits/Entrances: Tile Transition Areas	The many entrances and exits to the theatre have been fitted in the last 30 years with inappropriate tiles – the next stage of design needs to reconsider this	Low	For further consideration during the next stage of design
2.15 Decorative Finishes	Some areas are lacking high-quality decorative finishes which have clearly been removed e.g. lincrusta papers	Low	Detailed interior research and design required at the next development stage
2.16 Existing Bar Spaces	The existing bars have been significantly altered internally – it may be possible to restore certain elements to create a rather more sympathetic ambience which correlates with the front of house heritage areas	Medium	Further physical investigation and research will be required at the next design stage.
2.17 Carpeted Floor Finishes	Original carpet patterns have been re-woven by Brintons – this to be maintained as a continuing approach	Low	This to be maintained as a continuing approach



## Historic England Listing Description

### SHAFTESBURY THEATRE

#### List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: SHAFTESBURY THEATRE

List entry Number: 1378647

#### Location

SHAFTESBURY THEATRE, HIGH HOLBORN

SHAFTESBURY THEATRE, SHAFTESBURY AVENUE

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Greater London Authority

District: Camden

District Type: London Borough

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 01-Mar-1974

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Includes: Shaftesbury Theatre HIGH HOLBORN. Theatre. 1911. By Bertie Crewe. Terracotta, stone and brick in elaborate Renaissance style. Rectangular plan on a corner site, the main entrance being at the angle of Shaftesbury Avenue and High Holborn. EXTERIOR: 3 storeys, 4 bays to each return, the entrance bay being curved. Ground floor rusticated with continuous plain canopy over. 1st floor rusticated, much of the fenestration covered by hoarding. 2nd floor with Diocletian windows & oculi in alternate bays, the entrance having rectangular windows with enriched architraves, all having large consoles under a cornice and elaborate parapet. Above the entrance front, a cupola. INTERIOR: foyer and booking hall with delicate plaster decoration. Auditorium of considerable richness with 2 cantilevered balconies, the fronts varied in form and decoration. Rectangular ceiling with enriched cove and cornice and circular

## Shaftesbury Theatre – Conservation Study

flat-domed centre. Segmental proscenium arch with figure reliefs in spandrels over. Bow-fronted boxes paired in two tiers and framed by giant Ionic columns rising from heavy console brackets and carrying an entablature with figures, the whole composition crowned by a semicircular arch and a heavily moulded eaves cornice. In the arch tympanum a sculptural group is set over each upper box. Balustraded balcony terraces at upper box level run laterally along the walls towards the boxes and balustraded front to filled orchestra pit. **HISTORICAL NOTE:** the theatre was designed as a melodrama house. (Curtains!!! or, A New Life for Old Theatres: London: -1982: 157-58).

Listing NGR: TQ3013781354

Selected Sources

Books and journals

Mackintosh, I, Sell, M, Curtains!!! or New Life for Old Theatres, (1982), 157,158

National Grid Reference: TQ 30137 81354

## Sensitivity Drawings

Please refer to Design & Access Statement