

Time Travel Tuesday: The Show Must Go On Tuesday 9 June 2020

Welcome to Time Travel Tuesday: The Show Must Go On – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

With theatres being closed from late March, like us you'll be missing watching live performances – in person – rather than streamed, so today we are going to get all theatrical!

Last month, on May 17th, saw the 100th anniversary of the death of one of the UK's most important figures in theatre and music hall design, the architect Frank Matcham (1854-1920). Not only is Matcham known for building some exceptional theatres throughout the UK, he also has three significant connections with Haringey, having lived in Crouch End and building two theatres here - the Wood Green Empire and the Queen's Opera House (one of its three names!) in Crouch End. Unfortunately, neither theatres exist today, with only some parts of the façades surviving, so we will have a look at what those theatres looked like and what great names performed there.



Cheapside and Wood Green High Road, with the Empire in the background, c.1910

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

First, let's have a look at the man himself. **Francis (Frank) Matcham** (1854-1920), originally from Devon, moved to London in the 1870s and began working for Jethro Robinson's architectural practice, who was the consulting theatre architect to the Lord Chamberlain. Soon after marrying Hannah, the boss' daughter, and Robinson's sudden death, he was made the head of the practice – quite something for a man in his mid-20s who had never qualified as an architect! Over the next 30 years Matcham became the most sought-after and prolific architect of theatres and [music halls](#) in the UK. He is known to have fully designed at least 80 theatres, and worked on the refurbishment and refitting of as many again.



Frank Matcham in *Vanity Fair*, 5 July 1911, Vanity Fair Prints Co.

Matcham lived at 10 Haselmere Road, Crouch End between 1895 and 1904. As this extract from the 1901 Census shows, he was living in his house, Fernleigh, with his wife Hannah and daughter Constance and their two domestic servants Eleanor and Lily.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--|-----------------|----------|---|----|--------------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| 136 Fernleigh | 1 | | Agnes Payne | Serv | S | 16 | General Servant Domestic | Employer | Worcester - Worcester |
| | | | Frank Matcham | Head | M | 46 | Architect | | Worcester - Worcester |
| | | | Hannah M | Wife | F | 42 | | | Worcester - Worcester |
| | | | Constance M | Daughter | F | 16 | | | Worcester - Worcester |
| | | | Eleanor G. Biny | Serv | S | 27 | General Servant Domestic | | Worcester - Worcester |
| | | | Lily Bennett | Serv | S | 16 | General Servant Domestic | | Worcester - Worcester |

In November 2007, [actors Timothy West and Prunella Scales](#) unveiled an [English Heritage Blue Plaque](#) on the house to commemorate Matcham's time there.



[This image and article](#) by Janet Owen of the Hornsey Historical Society, gives a bit more information about his time in Hornsey.

Matcham's humble background (his father was a brewery clerk) and lack of qualifications meant he was snubbed by fellow architects. In spite of this, his attention to detail (each of his theatres were unique) and his ability to build on difficult sites with speed and to budget, meant that theatre owners quickly turned to him for their builds or refurbishment. Theatre and music hall goers flocked to his theatres, as he designed them with the audience in mind, paying attention to their comfort, the building's acoustics and of course their visual splendour. A visit to one of Matcham's theatres was to be enjoyed on many levels. All of these aspects meant that the owners could book the top performers of the day – something else which brought the audiences in and made the owners very happy. He also designed pubs, cinemas, hotels, ballrooms and shopping arcades – including the stunning [County Arcade in Leeds](#).

The height of his work was during the period where he partnered with [Moss Empires](#) from 1892-1911. During this period some of his most noted theatres in London were built including the [Hippodrome](#) (1900), [Hackney Empire](#) (1901), [Coliseum](#) (1903), [Palladium](#) (1910) and [Victoria Palace](#) (1911). In total, Matcham was responsible for designing 21 theatres for Moss Empires over a 20-year period which ended with our very own Wood Green Empire, in 1912. Sadly, now only around 25 of his theatres still run as theatres in the UK, some others exist as bingo halls, churches and other spaces.

Have a look at the [Frank Matcham Society's website](#) for more about the man and his amazing buildings he designed.

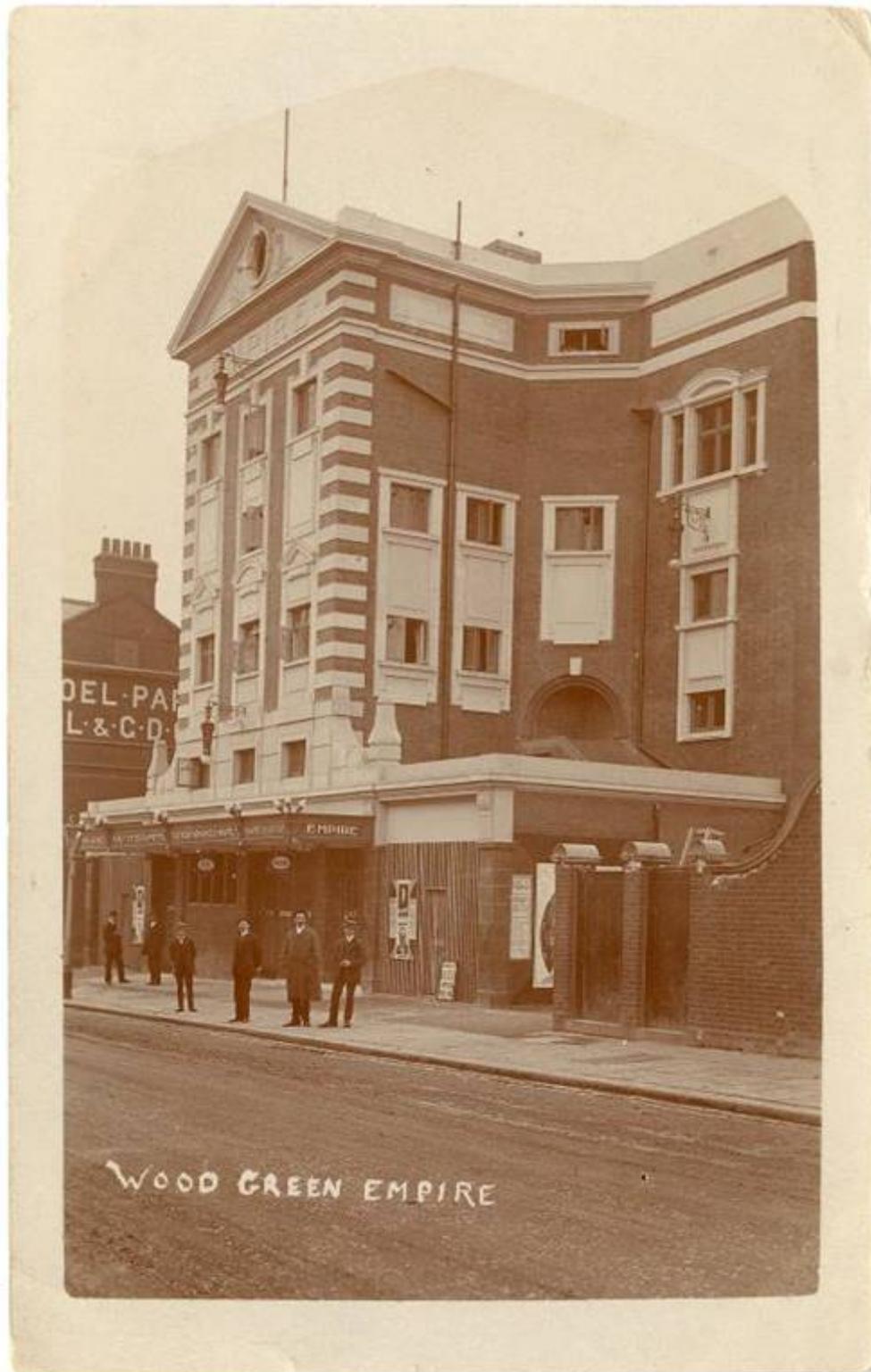
So let's now take a look at the [Wood Green Empire](#). The theatre opened on the High Road, Wood Green on the 9 September 1912. The exterior of the building was included in a parade of shops named Cheapside and the entrance to the theatre had a tiled mansard roof with an open dome on top. The auditorium ran

parallel to the High Road, behind the Cheapside shops. The theatre had a capacity of almost 3,000 (including standing) over three levels - Stalls, Dress and Upper Circle. The stage was 37 feet deep and there were eight dressing rooms. As it was a purpose-built variety theatre, it was equipped with a cutting-edge Bioscope (early movie projector) from its opening, and films were a part of the variety programme.



The theatre in the 1940s

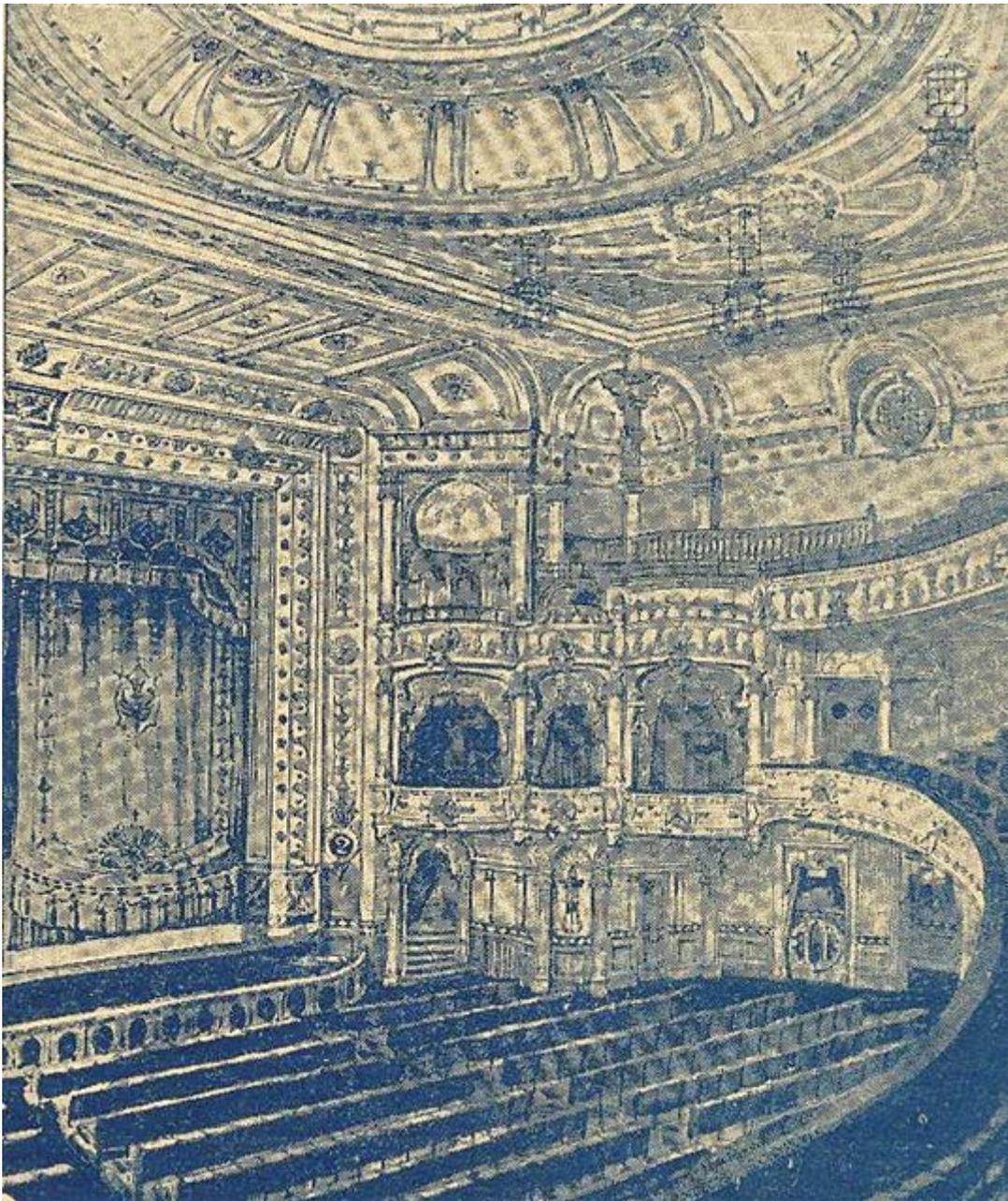
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



The back of the Empire, c.1910

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Inside the auditorium the decoration was typical of an Edwardian variety theatre, with finely detailed plaster decorations. There was a large dome in the ceiling, which contained a sliding roof, to allow for ventilation.



Detail from a Programme from 1915 showing the elaborate interior of the auditorium.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Famous acts to perform at the Empire included Marie Lloyd, Norman Wisdom, Shirley Bassey and Max Miller. Below is just a small selection of programmes from the Empire that we hold in the Archive.

GET THE WAR SEAL HABIT.

" 'Tis not in mortals to command success but we'll do more—deserve it."—ADDISON.

WOOD GREEN EMPIRE

Theatre of Varieties in Opera, Concert, Drama, Circus, Music Hall & Cinema.

HIGH ROAD, WOOD GREEN. In Association with the London Coliseum.

Proprietors . . . WOOD GREEN EMPIRE THEATRE OF VARIETIES, LTD.
Chairman and Managing Director . . . OSWALD STOLL.
District Manager . . . J. CHRISTIE. Manager . . . B. J. SEABROOK.

First Performance, 6.40. **PROGRAMME.** Second Performance, 9.0.
Doors open, 6.10. Doors open, 8.45.

Monday, Sept. 27th, and Twice Nightly during the Week. **B**

1. **Overture** Selected
Empire Grand Orchestra.
Musical Director FORBES RUSSELL.

2. EDELSTEN & BURNS present a Parisienne-American Song Revue—

"LE PETIT CABARET"

(Second edition), introducing

MISS HILDA GYLDER (America's Leading Comedienne).

Also featuring

BILLY DOUST, The Acme of Quaintness and Originality.

CLAUDE ANDERSON, Tenor Vocalist.

NAN FOSTER, Soprano Vocalist. UTY ROWLANDS, Welsh Comedian.

DORANE SISTERS and WOOD,

The Anglo-American Trio, presenting their Original "Parisian Pony Trot."
Visitors to the Cabaret:

Monsieur Le Gendarme (France) Mr. Fred Osborne.
Private Brabazon (Belgium) Mr. Chas. Osborne.
Soldatta Angellelli (Italy) Mr. Leslie Doney.
Grand Duke Petrograd (Russia) Mr. Frank Miller.
Wee McGregor (Scotland) Mr. Bert Sinclair.
Tommy Atkins (England) Mr. Reg. Austen.

American Dollar Princesses—Misses W. Pearce, C. Hope, E. Courtney,
J. Rose, M. Hope and Phyllis St. Clair.

The Production Staged by Jack Haskell.

Manager and Stage Director Henry Ainsworth.
Electrician and Stage Carpenter Bob Gordon.

3. **Intermission** Selected

4. **Syd Sydney**, Comedian and Eccentric Dancer.

5. **Cosgrove & Burns**, Comedy Vocalists, in "HARMONY AND TROUBLES."

6. **Wee Georgie Wood**, the Boy Phenomenon, in his new scena, "WINKLES." From the London Coliseum.

7. **War in Pictures.**

Reduced Prices for Soldiers and Sailors in Uniform—Please see below.

If the programme pleases you, tell your friends—if not, tell the Management, as we are here to please.

Lost property found by staff of this theatre is handed to the Manager, to whom all applications for same should be made.

The PRICES OF ADMISSION are: Private Boxes (4 persons), 7/6 and (8 persons) 6.-; Extra Seats, 2/- and 1/8. Fauteuils, 1/6, may be reserved without extra charge. Grand Circle, 1/-, may be reserved without extra charge. Stalls, 9d., may be reserved in advance, 3d. extra. Pit, 6d. Balcony, 4d. Gallery, 3d. Children half-price to Fauteuils and Grand Circle at First Performances only, except Saturdays and Bank Holidays. Box Office open 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Phone, Hornsey 1615 and 1878.

SOLDIERS AND SAILORS IN UNIFORM—Fauteuils and Grand Circle, 9d., Stalls 6d., and Pit 4d. (Except Saturdays and Bank Holidays.)

TWO PERFORMANCES NIGHTLY, at 6.40 and 9.

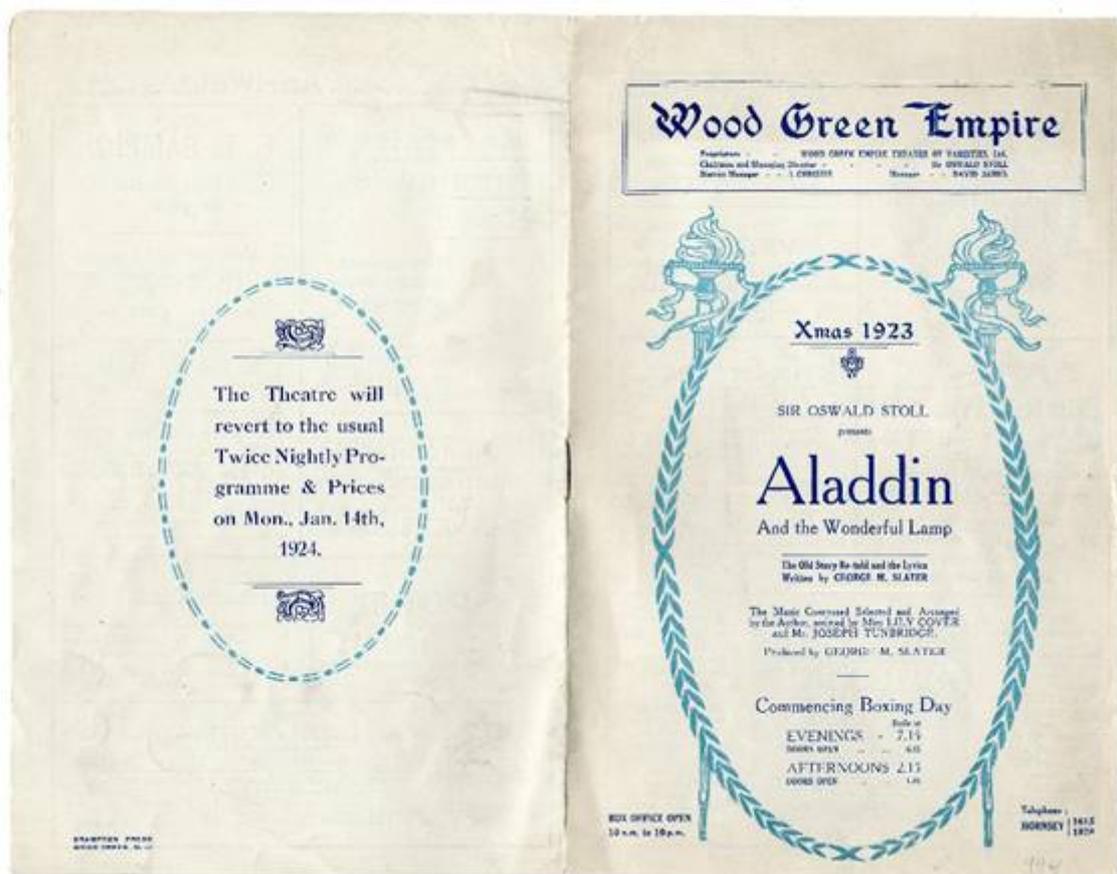
All Artistes appear at both performances, and both performances are alike.

Children under Twelve accompanied by adults half-price to Fauteuils and Grand Circle at First Performances only, except Saturdays and Bank Holidays.

The Stage Furniture supplied by Messrs. Albert Simmons & Co., Complete House Furnishers, 81-88, Lancefield Street, Kilburn Lane, N.W.

The Piano supplied by Messrs. Ascherberg, Hopwood and Crew, Ltd.

Wood Green Empire programme from 29 September 1915
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



Wood Green Empire programme for a pantomime performance of *Aladdin*, from December 1923
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

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 WEEK COMMENCING MONDAY : OCTOBER 25 : 1954
 Evenings at 7.15 : Matinee Saturday at 2.30

PRICES OF ADMISSION (including Tax)

| | Mon. to Fri. | Sat. Evng. | Sat. Mat. |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------|
| Boxes (to seat four) | 30/- 24/- | 30/- 24/- | 24/- |
| Fauteuils | 6/- | 7/6 6/- | 6/- |
| Stalls | 4/6 3/6 | 6/- 4/6 | 3/6 2/6 |
| Grand Circle | 6/- (4/6 Mon. & Tue.) | 7/6 6/- | 5/- 3/6 |
| Balcony | 1/6 | 1/6 | 1/6 |

Reduction for Children : Saturday Matinee 3/- and 2/6

NEXT WEEK

THE ONE AND ONLY

MAX MILLER 

"THE PURE GOLD OF THE MUSIC HALL"
 —also—
 TESSA SMALLPAGE : REG. SALMON & CO.
 RAY STEVENS : MIKE & BERNIE WINTERS
 and big supporting company

Wood Green Empire programme from 1954 advertising Max Miller the following week, with supporting acts including Mike & Bernie Winters, who grew up in Tottenham (see the [Tottenham Summerhill Road website](#)).

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)
 In January 1955 the theatre closed and was restructured for [television use](#) by the new television company ATV, which was owned by the theatre's owners Stoll Moss. The *Morecambe and Wise Show*, was first broadcast live from the Wood Green Empire in the early 1960s, and a host of others shows were filmed there including Val Parnell's *Saturday Spectacular*, *The Sid James Show*, *The Strange World of Gurney Slade*, and many children's TV productions.

Does anyone remember the hospital/medical drama TV series *Emergency Ward 10*? It was filmed in the theatre by ATV from 1957-1967. The series starred Jill Browne, Charles 'Bud' Tingwell, Desmond Carrington and Ray Barrett, with many other actors starting off their careers in the show including Albert Finney, Joanna Lumley, Edward Woodward and Ian Hendry. *Emergency Ward 10* also showed the first interracial kiss on British television in 1964. [Here is an interview with Ray Barrett](#) one of the stars of the show.

ATV moved out of the Empire and the theatre's interior was demolished in December 1970 as well as the turret and cupola. When the building was being demolished c.1973, Bob Eden risked life and limb climbing the outside of the building to collect a very special piece of the theatre's history – two original grotesque head decorations, similar in style to a 'Green Man'. Bob very kindly

donated the two sculptures for the collections at Bruce Castle, to keep as part of Haringey's theatrical history.



Sculptures from the Wood Green Empire c.1912, made of painted plaster & hessian scrim (H70 x W75 x D15 cm), presented by Mr and Mrs Eden, c.1973

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



The building still showing some of the original signage in the 1970s.
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



The Empire in 2019, with extensive changes in the lower and middle sections, and the removal of the turret and cupola of the original building.

One of Matcham's earlier theatres was the [Queen's Opera House](#) (later called the Hippodrome) in Tottenham Lane, Crouch End. The theatre opened on 27 July 1897 with a production of '*The Geisha*'. It was a refurbishment of a previous theatre on the site called the Athenaeum and was built for the owners and managers H. H. Morell and Frederick Mouillot, who at the time owned another 17 theatres between them. Tom Woolnough was the architect and Frank Matcham was, for this build, the consulting architect. Like the Empire, it was built as part of a block of shops - known as Topsfield Parade. The entrance was under an elaborate iron and glass veranda.



The Queens Opera House at its opening in 1897

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

With the railways coming to the area in the 1880s, the theatre was thought not only to be for locals, but for those living in the outer London suburbs who could attend the theatre and make their way home in good time by rail.



Topsfield Parade, Crouch End c1900 with the Queen's Opera House showing its distinct sun window above the entrance and the veranda set into the footpath.

It was a relatively small theatre, with a seating capacity of 1,200, but it still hosted some big names in its early years including Ellen Terry and Lillie Langtry. In 1907 the theatre was renamed the Crouch End Hippodrome hosting variety performers and some plays and in 1913 it was refurbished again to become a full time cinema.

The building suffered serious bomb-damage during the Second World War and the theatre eventually closed. By the 1950s it had been used as storage facilities and the building was finally demolished, apart from the facade.



The building today is no longer a theatre and it has no original interior features remaining, but the original façade on the top floors and its distinct sun window are still evident.

Do you or a member of your family remember going to the Empire in Wood Green? Or going back in time even further, memories of the Queen's Opera House/ Hippodrome in Crouch End? If so we'd love to hear about who you saw and when that was. Do you have programmes or tickets – a lot of people keep them for years! – we'd love to see that too!

Finally, if theatre and music hall is your thing then do have a look at [British Music Hall Society's website](#) which is full of tales of the great performers. Sadly, their President Rod Hudd OBE died recently, so they have a tribute to him on their site. And this [website dedicated to the singer Arthur Lloyd](#) has a wonderful collection of information, images about theatres and music hall.

And for those of you missing your theatre fix, don't forget there are some amazing plays and performances being streamed through national and independent theatres' websites now. One advantage being that we can watch things from all over the world, and old performances you wished you'd seen, but couldn't get tickets to. So have a look what's out there, and sit back in the comfort of your own home and enjoy.

Take care, keep well

With best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

Julie Melrose
Archivist

Deborah Hedgecock
Curator

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