

THE ELECTRIC THEATRE FOSSGATE YORK

Historic Building Assessment

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November 2015



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Fig 1: Location plan

1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes and assesses the fabric of retail premises in Fossgate York which were formerly a cinema named *The Electric Theatre*, opened in 1911. The assessment has been commissioned by prospective purchasers and is intended to inform proposals for refurbishment and redevelopment of the structure: which is a Grade II listed building. The list description is given below (Section 5).

The site of the cinema, a traditional burgage plot in the heart of the City, is clearly an ancient one [Fig 1]. It was anticipated that the construction of the Theatre in 1911 would have incorporated the remains of earlier structures. To a limited extent this has turned out to be the case. It was also expected that the relatively unusual function of the building would be reflected in the layout and other details of the surviving structure and perhaps would also be evidenced by service arrangements and specialist methods of construction. Fireproof construction and other associated constructional details have indeed been noted but disappointingly nothing was seen in the course of this survey of the original electrical installation. When the cinema was closed in 1957, and became a shop, a thorough refurbishment was carried out to fit the building to its new role. This appears to have begun with a wholesale stripping-out of many earlier details and concealment of others behind cladding and shop fittings.

The site was visited by the author on a number of occasions in October 2015 when, with the help of the owner, all parts of the building which were safely accessible were investigated. This included the basement, the roof space, and the large void over the shop windows. The south external elevation could not be viewed closely as a large proportion of this elevation is either rendered or obscured by a neighbouring structure.

More recent work within the building has included dry lining of most of the walls of the retail area (the former auditorium) and of one of the three rooms on the first floor of the office range at the east end of the building. Two of these rooms also have suspended ceilings. Some of the conclusions about construction and decoration of these areas (drawn from old photographs and conversations with the present owner, who did not himself see the building before conversion) must therefore remain tentative without opening-up.

An attempt has been made to colour up the ground floor plan to show the known extent of the 1911 fabric: the cutting plane is about 1.5m above ground level to take account of the fact that the lower levels of some walls are of earlier date [Fig 2]. Site inspection confirms that the whole of the entrance elevation and about three-quarters of the north wall of the building date from 1911; and it seems probable, for reasons given in the text, that some of the south wall is also of this period. Most of the two-storey east office range is also of 1911. The remainder of the building includes footings, and sometimes large areas of actual wall, retained from earlier buildings. Currently this earlier fabric is almost entirely concealed behind C20 internal wall finishes and external cement render.

2. HISTORY

The earliest feature on site is the late mediaeval brick east boundary wall to the plot immediately to the north of the cinema plot; the eastern end of this plot, occupied by a C20 hut, also lies within the development site. An archaeological desk-based assessment by On-Site Archaeology has been prepared which describes the mediaeval topography of the area and of the friary in more detail; the wall itself is described below.

In the late C19 the burgage plot now wholly occupied by the cinema building was taken up by a loose grouping of individual buildings, doubtless of widely differing dates, separated by small open yards. The two frontage buildings onto Fossgate were both timber-framed, with jetties: they appear in historic photographs. Given their form of construction the likelihood that any part of these frontage structures survived the construction of the cinema is vanishingly small. Fig 2 shows the extent of firmly identified fabric of 1911 in the present building; Fig 3 shows the 1851 survey overlaid with the footprint of the cinema. At high level it is likely that *all* the fabric of the principal external walls dates from 1911 since only brickwork of that period could be seen in the roof space beneath the wall-plate.

The first dedicated cinema in York was in New Street Hall, formerly the New Street Wesleyan chapel: this was opened in 1908. New legislation in 1909, described below, made these non-compliant conversions of older buildings virtually obsolete by the end of the following year. Many had shown themselves to be death-traps in any case - not least for the hapless projectionists who were regularly exposed to considerable danger from fire and explosion.

It was against this rapidly-changing background of legislation and technology that National Electric Theatres of London - the first country-wide cinema chain - constructed the Electric Theatre in Fossgate in 1911. The architect was a local man: T. Whincup of 31 Claremont Terrace, York. Whincup was Surveyor to the York Education Committee. He is unlikely to have had any specialist knowledge of cinema building - but few architects would have done in 1911. Nevertheless the cinema has a layout and principal elevation which closely resemble others built by this company so the existence of a standard brief and specification must be suspected.

The site, though ideal in one way (it rises very slightly to the east, aiding the construction of a raked floor), was a tight one, already crowded with older buildings. As described above some of these were demolished, others pressed into service in ways never intended by their original builders. As a result of all this the resulting building was in fact slightly twisted on plan with two very noticeable kinks in the south wall.

In the absence so far of any definitive evidence the details of the technical installation can only be suggested by analogy with other more complete cinema examples. By 1909 35mm gauge cellulose nitrate film stock was accepted as the industry standard; the 1909 Cinematograph Act imposed strict fire regulations on public film shows; while by 1911 carbon arc lamps were standard in cinema film projectors. In one form or another they were to remain so until after the Second World War. By 1912, as films grew longer, two projectors were recommended in order to avoid the use of an

all-too-familiar slide bearing the words "Just a minute - changing the spool". These parameters define the functional character of The Electric Theatre, Fossgate, of 1911: a reliable source of electricity was essential, fireproof construction was required by law, and a single projector was still the norm.

As luck would have it the almost intact survival of the Electric Palace cinema in Harwich provides some interesting parallels. Time and funding did not allow a visit to this Grade II* listed cinema but a great deal of information is available online. Interestingly the Harwich Electric Palace had its own power supply - a Crosslee gas engine driving a 100v DC generator. This engine, complete with its 7' flywheel, survives in the basement of the cinema. It is thought that the Electric Palace cinema had a Kalee projector made in Leeds at the factory of Abram Kershaw.

Architecturally the two buildings are very similar: both have elaborate street elevations organised and decorated along much the same lines, using virtually identical exterior pendant lamps, while both auditoria have segmental barrel-vaulted plaster ceilings (full-length in Harwich) punctuated by circular moulded architraves in which the ventilator ducts are set. The architect in Harwich was a young Ipswich designer at the beginning of his career, Harold Hooper. Both buildings, and many others, may be based on a common, presumably American, original.

There is now nowhere in the Electric Theatre in Fossgate where a gas engine with a flywheel could have operated although the company may well have owned an adjoining property or shed where such a machine could be sited; so the possibility cannot be ruled out. However Harwich had no mains electricity until 1924 whereas York had possessed its own generating station on Foss Islands Road since 1900. After c.1910 this was required to provide additional power for a tram system which suggests that the output of the original generators may have been augmented. The Electric Theatre presumably operated chiefly in the evenings, when the tram service may have been reduced and excess power would be available.¹ On the whole the use at the Electric Theatre of the public electricity supply, already employed for trams, street lighting, and a small number of private subscribers, is almost certain. A gas supply seen in the fireproof block (see below) was intended for emergency lighting; one internal gas lamp fitting survives over the rear entrance.

Conformity with the 1909 Act ensured fireproof construction; this is described in more detail below. The projection room has only one opening to the auditorium, consistent with what seems to have been the normal situation before 1912 - a single projector. The possibility that it may also have been a Kalee projector - given that the factory was in Leeds - is also high. The off-centre projector opening suggests that the film spools were opened on the left-hand side of the projector and interestingly Kalee made such models. Either way this detail suggests that the matter had been carefully considered at the design stage of the cinema. A tall iron chimney, to carry away the great heat of the carbon arc, is shown on the 1911 section drawing; its site is currently concealed by a C20 inserted ceiling but the remnants survive above the flat roof.

¹ Early public electricity supplies were around 100V DC: making them suitable for running carbon arc lamps without the need for rectification on site

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FABRIC

Long views down the ceiling cornices on both sides of the former auditorium reveal some quite startling changes in the alignment of external walls. These adjustments naturally reflect the builders' need to follow the equally irregular plot boundaries. External cracks in the rendered areas confirm what is clearly implied in the historic maps: that the walls of the cinema are the product of decisions, some of them quite daring, taken by practical men over a period of at least two centuries. In places the underlying fabric can be seen but nowhere is it coherent enough to provide any real information about the phasing of those pre-1911 buildings. Hence in this account the phases will be limited to three:

Phase I	before 1911
Phase II	1911 - 1957
Phase III	later C20

The architect's drawings - three separate schemes, all produced in 1910 - have survived although the building was not constructed exactly as drawn [Fig 5]. On Fossgate there was an elaborate entrance designed to recall the traditional fairground arrangements of the showmen who first introduced film-going into this country; entrance doors are shown to left and right which led to lobbies either side of a pay-box and the manager's office. High above the lobbies and low-ceilinged pod-like offices was a segmental barrel-vaulted plaster ceiling, the structural elements of which survive. Next came the screen wall, with no proscenium arch, and a musicians area, and beyond that (seating 620) the long narrow auditorium - here, very unusually, under a flat ceiling; apart from the easternmost bay where a segmental ceiling was used. The reason for this departure from the norm is unclear: nearly every other cinema built in this period had a segmental barrel-vault right through.² One advantage of the flat ceiling was that this arrangement allowed the use of tie-beams: perhaps seen as desirable in this case given the patchwork construction of the side walls.

Apart from the front entrances the auditorium was to have a rear door (for the cheap seats) which was eventually placed at the east end of the south elevation and a side emergency exit door (not built) near the front of the north elevation. At the east end of the auditorium Whincup drew a two-storey fireproof block, under a flat concrete roof, with a small basement. In this block were three rooms housing stores and a WC on the ground floor and a rewinding room, projection room, and film store on the first floor. In the basement was a coke-fired boiler: the cinema had central heating, with radiators, from the start. A contemporary postcard shows the front elevation, with all the cinema staff, on opening day, 3rd June 1911 [Fig 6]; another, the interior on the same day [Fig 7].

3.1 *Phase I before 1911*

² Initially this was thought to be a typical alteration made to improve acoustics following the introduction of 'talkies' in 1929; but it is undoubtedly of one build with the 1911 roof structure.

At the base of the north elevation of the building a variety of early footings may be seen. They are of several different builds. Towards the extreme east end the footings are of coursed brickwork; further to the west they are of coursed brickwork on stone rubble. There are occasional patches of less organised brickwork which may be footings, or repairs, or the bases of blocked openings. However they all have one thing in common: the bricks are around 2" - 2½" thick and bonded in lime mortar. In other words, they are all likely to be C18 in date.

At the east end of the south elevation of the building a similar situation exists. There, however, small areas of render have fallen: and now larger, C19, bricks up to 3" thick can be seen. This side of the cinema must therefore have had a slightly different building history. On both sides of the auditorium there are projecting stubs of brickwork which provide evidence for adjoining wall alignments most of which can, without difficulty, be related to structures shown on the 1852 and later OS sheets.

It is easy to look at this rather ramshackle construction work and imagine that the original owners and builders of the cinema were a bunch of cheapskates. However it is clear from the 1931 and later OS sheets that many of these adjoining buildings stood for at least twenty years after the cinema opened. The owners, then, were simply making the best of a difficult job on a congested site: a situation not unknown today. It also follows that the demolition of virtually all the enclosing buildings was carried out in the mid-late C20.

The one building which has survived from the time of the 1852 survey is the lean-to shed against the south wall of the auditorium. This is currently in use by the owner for storage but is entirely dry-lined: no internal details can be seen. Externally the west elevation is a compendium of C19 and C20 brickwork, the outcome of numerous alterations which included the lowering of the roof pitch. However the SE quoin, and perhaps most of the south wall, is of 2" brickwork: the shed appears to have early C18 origins.³

On the north side of the cinema the plot boundary is followed by a narrow side alleyway. The path is defined on its north side by the reduced remnant of the plot boundary wall, establishing that this side access belongs to the cinema plot and not that to the north. This wall is apparently of C18 date (to judge from brick sizes and the use of stone rubble as a core) but it has been underbuilt in hard blue 3" brickwork. This brickwork dates from c.1911; it was probably inserted as a tough replacement for badly eroded low-level C18 brickwork. In the cement capping along the top of this wall are indications of a corrugated iron 'fence', long gone, which tends to confirm the date of alteration.

The east end of the plot to the north now falls within the same ownership as the cinema and is included in the current proposals. For unknown reasons it is at a slightly higher level than the cinema plot; it is currently almost wholly occupied by a dilapidated mid-C20 hut of the kind only too familiar to ageing former Boy Scouts.

³ This shed is not included in the present scheme: it is to be returned to the adjoining plot, to which, historically, it belongs, and the opening from the shop will be blocked off

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It has been suggested in the past that the boundary wall along the west side of Black Horse Passage is associated with a Carmelite friary which occupied much of the land to the east of the Fossgate properties.⁴ A section of this wall, of several different dates to judge from brick sizes, can be seen to form the rear boundary wall of the plots on which the cinema and the Scout Hut stand. One section in particular is of importance. Historically it forms the rear boundary wall of the Scout Hut burgage plot but as part of this now falls within the application area it will be considered here.

Several lengths of the boundary wall along Black Horse Passage look 'old': they comprise coursed masonry rubble topped by a rebuilt brick wall of comparatively modern date. This pattern of stone 'wall' with later brick upperworks appears superficially to be regularly interrupted by old brickwork repairs.

However, in at least one area, it is the other way around. This section of brick wall - a length with a high and neatly-made basal plinth which forms the east wall of the Scout Hut plot to the north of the cinema - is in fact partly constructed of bricks measuring about 10" long by 1" - 1½" inches thick; they are set in a yellowish lime mortar. These bricks, which can be paralleled from a number of churches and a few secular buildings in East Yorkshire, are late mediaeval. It is in fact the brick sections which are remnants of the Carmelite friary wall, and the stone-built lengths which are probably post-mediaeval repairs or insertions.

3.2 Phase II 1911 - 1957

Materials and plan

The account of the site history and of the Phase I buildings, above, will already have made clear how the construction work was approached. The two jettied timber-framed buildings on the street frontage [Fig 4] were taken down and replaced by an elaborate frontage; it is possible that the south side wall of the southern frontage building was partly retained (that would account for the rendering) but the north side wall was completely replaced by a well-built new wall in 3" brickwork with hard red brick dressings. This new wall extended to the east to meet the west wall of an earlier structure aligned north-south. What must have been an internal wall of that structure provided the cinema with a further few meters of its own north wall. Further to the east again other earlier walls took the cinema north wall right back to what is now the east plot boundary wall. A very similar but less visible process on the south side gave the cinema a south external wall. It is likely that all the older walls were raised in new brickwork to give the cinema regular eaves heights.

Across the east end of the auditorium a two-storey flat-roofed block was constructed to provide offices and a WC on the ground floor and a suite of three fireproof rooms on the first floor. However the brickwork details show that the lowermost 1.5m or thereabouts of the east wall of this block is the reduced wall of an C18 structure

⁴ The historical topography of the site is described in the archaeological desk-based assessment by On-Site Archaeology (2015)

which stood on the same site. There is now little trace above basement level of this earlier east building: no attempt was made in 1911 to retain any of its internal walls. Above this height all the external brickwork, window detail, and internal structure dates from 1911 or later. At pavement-level on the east elevation is a small blocked basement opening in 2" brickwork: the basement, of C18 origin, was the site of the boiler-room, which survives intact.

The plan of the cinema has already been described. The auditorium possessed a raked floor rising to the east which may survive beneath the modern floor, at least in part. The flat lath and plaster ceiling over the auditorium is carried on a traditional joisted structure suspended from the tie-beams while the roof structure itself is a massive affair of queen-post trusses, double side purlins, and ridge piece all constructed from plank-sawn softwood sections and secured with bolted iron or steel plates. It incorporated three large ventilators with plank-built trunking which descended to the centres of the large lozenges with which the ceiling is enriched; these were sawn off just beneath the ridge in 1957, and the ceiling vents sealed.

Over the east end of the auditorium there is a segmental barrel-vaulted ceiling and above it the roof, which is higher, is of a different pattern; it has a smaller ventilator which, along with its ceiling vent, appears to have survived owing to its comparative inaccessibility.

Both ceilings retain moulded plaster ceiling cornices, and the plaster detailing of the flat ceiling also survives although there is no sign of the perhaps stencilled decoration seen in the 1911 interior photograph. In the public areas of the present shop there is no visible evidence for any wall decoration (the walls have been dry-lined) but from the west end of the roof space it is possible to look down into the large void above the glazed shop windows. This area was the foyer, with lobbies and offices; and on the walls it is possible to see part of the 1911 geometrical wall decoration, now reduced to shadows. Above it the framing of the segmental plaster vault also survives, although the laths have all been stripped from it. In the distance is the extrados of the half-dome over the entrance facade which appears to be of mass concrete. The uppermost metre or so of the transverse screen wall - a light structure of framed softwood - also seems to have survived.⁵

At the rear of the auditorium there was a further doorway, again with paired doors, at the east end of the south wall. By analogy with other early cinemas this less salubrious route was probably for the cheaper ticket-holders only: since in 1911 cinema entertainments were by no means classless.⁶ The back door was initially reached via a narrow open passage between the older buildings shown on the 1852 survey; a short flight of stone steps led up to the door. By 1938 this route had been roofed over to create a narrow first-floor store with its own taking-in door over a short ground-floor tunnel; nevertheless, in the large void below the tunnel floor, the steps survive.

⁵ This fascinating area would reward further survey and investigation

⁶ Although the ceiling was set a little higher above the seating to improve ventilation the working-class film-goers of York were presumably spared the fate of the fishermen of Harwich: who were sprayed by usherettes on their way in

Behind this line there lay the two-storey fireproof block. It is now hidden from the retail area by a light inserted partition wall but it seems certain that as originally built the three doors to its three ground-floor rooms opened directly off the back of the auditorium. The room to the south was an office; the centre room was a store or perhaps a staff room; the north room was a WC (probably for the staff rather than for the clientele). At the north end a narrow single-flight stone stair with timber handrails rises to the first floor.

The first floor structure is a fireproof one. Two plain iron columns support a substantial transverse rolled iron or steel beam which carries the weight of the west wall of the first floor rooms on a line which is some distance west of the west wall of the ground floor rooms. The transverse beam also carries east-west iron or steel joists which carry the fireproof first floor structure of shuttered concrete.

There are three first floor rooms: they are of course larger in a EW direction than those on the floor below. The north room, opening directly off the head of the stair, has no readily identifiable function but was probably a workshop and rewinding room for the projectionist. The room has a C20 suspended ceiling: no details are visible. The centre room is the projection room: it has a small opening, with C20 glazing, to the right-hand side of the west wall. The projection room has been completely dry-lined with a suspended ceiling and so no other details are visible. Between this room and the south room there is a fireproof door in a timber architrave. The construction of this door bears a strong resemblance to fireproof doors in textile mills and other factories where fire was a disastrous possibility: the door itself is of timber, protected by thin sheets of iron neatly arranged and nailed down. It hangs, not surprisingly, on heavy iron pintles. The other chambers on this floor doubtless had similar doors, now replaced with C20 timber examples. The south room was probably a fireproof film store; it is sited above the boiler room and the boiler flue passes up through it. This was an important consideration as somewhat counter-intuitively cellulose film stock was a good deal more dangerous damp than dry. In the later C20 part of the south wall of this room was removed to give access to the new store over the rear exit passage, described above.

The flat concrete roof structure is built on a pattern first introduced in the late C19 and later given a much wider currency on the Western Front. Overlapping sheets of corrugated iron were laid east-west across the walls and when all was in place concrete was poured over them; to a depth of at least 250mm. To prevent sagging each sheet was given a slightly pitched profile. This was accomplished by bashing the corrugations flat in a transverse line across the middle to make the sheets easier to bend to the angle where they would resist compression for at least as long as it took the concrete to go off. The marks made across the sheets by a cross-peen hammer are still clearly visible.⁷

The roof structure over the south room incorporated an escape hatch although given the rapidity with which early film stock is known to have burned its safe and effective

⁷ Until recent demolition a very similar structure existed over a basement in a 1912 brewery building in Ogleforth, York. Corrugated iron and concrete were also sometimes used in this way in industrial buildings; for example to make steeping floors in late C19 malshouses.

use is debateable. There is also an inserted high-level external door in the east wall on which hangs a more efficient, up-to-date, alternative: a rope ladder.

From the rooftop (which is inaccessible, and also difficult to see) rise one, possibly two, badly corroded stove-pipe chimneys. One of these is certainly for the projector, as shown on the 1911 section drawing. The function of the other must remain uncertain until access and investigation become possible.

The small basement is really a semi-basement: the floor level is only about a metre below pavement level. It is currently reached by a trapdoor and iron ladder at the east end of the auditorium but in 1911 may have been reached by a door in the south wall immediately adjoining the steps up to the rear entrance to the cheap seats. This arrangement was concealed by the construction of the later tunnel and store room. The east end bay of the basement is a remnant of the C18 building on this site: it still accommodates the intact 1911 solid fuel boiler, with some pipework, and is crossed by a segmental brick arch carrying the west wall of the east range of offices. In 1911 the cellar was extended by excavation into the large void beneath the raked seating. This is now the site of an ancient coke heap.

External details

The richly embellished entrance front onto Fossgate is well known in the City. It takes the form of an oval half-dome carried on Ionic columns; an odd enough creation in itself and made still more distinctive by the wealth of relief detail in faience and glazed tile. As originally constructed it included three pendant overhead lights: in the proudly self-conscious publicity photograph taken about the time of opening these are shown burning brightly. Before their removal to make way for a shop front the facade also included two classically-detailed canted bays (one for the manager's office, the other for the ticket office) and two doorways under a frieze, all lavishly enriched with Doulton faience detail. The frieze and cornice over the principal arch returned around the north side wall for a short distance, terminating at an attached column. The effect of all this on the inhabitants of narrow Fossgate, a York street which with its Walmgate continuation was never regarded as being particularly salubrious, must have been quite literally electrifying. Even now the elevation brings astonished looks from visitors.

Other external details are few. The north wall of the cinema was punctuated by a series of four-light timber windows in contrasting engineering brick surrounds. Originally there were four of these but now only three survive; the easternmost has been reduced to a doorway. All the timber windows are of 1957 and it appears that until that date these openings were bricked up so that if the cinema failed, they could be opened up and glazed to suit new uses. The openings in the east wall of the two-storey block at the east end include narrow windows with tilting lights at ground floor level. All the first floor openings to this block have been enlarged and fitted with C20 replacement windows.

Surviving internal details

It is said that the wall cladding introduced in the late 1950s to create the shop interior disguises a certain amount of surviving detail: principally radiator boxes. These are

presumably those shown in the postcard view taken after the suspended ceiling was inserted. The work of the 1957 strippers-out and shopfitters was in fact so thorough that almost nothing of the decorative detail in that photograph can now be seen.

More detail survives in the two-storey east block. The decorative detail of the back exit door includes a moulded architrave and an overlight; the latter has been heavily painted over but is known from casual investigation over the years to contain coloured glass. In this respect it may well resemble the front entrance doors, lost in the late 1950s. Above it are the remains of a gaslight fitting seemingly fixed there by someone with little feel for tools. Nearby on the east wall of the auditorium is a wall-mounted fire-fighting hose and its accessories, all neatly secured on a purpose-built and well-made wooden frame.

The three ground floor rooms all had four-panel doors in plain architraves: two of the doors, and all three architraves, survive. The north room, a WC with washbasin, is lined with glazed tiles and also includes a well-joined cupboard and WC door: the door furniture is battered but survives.

The two supporting columns, one shoe (there only ever seems to have been one), and the cross-beams of the first-floor structure survive unaltered. The column bases - flat flanges - are bolted down onto large gritstone blocks beneath the floor which in turn rest on engineering brick plinths, as may be seen in the basement. The stair to the first floor with its newel and handrails also survives. On the first floor one fireproof door and its architrave and the projection window (now filled with C20 glazing) can be seen; as noted above the projection window is not in the centre of the west wall but is displaced to the right, or north. There may be other detail surviving in this room but if so then it is hidden behind a complete late C20 dry lining. In the less altered south room there is a suspended timber tray, carried on wrought-iron brackets, which supports an incoming gas pipe for emergency lighting, and the remains of the original paint scheme - dark green paint beneath a mid-wall black line, cream paint above.

What is unexpectedly absent at this level - and indeed throughout the building - is any evidence for the original DC electrical installation including switch gear and cabling; although it may be hidden behind the mid-C20 cladding.

The heavy raked timber floor structure of the auditorium survives. It is carried on substantial dwarf walls which are built off a concrete raft.

Later alteration: 1938

With the introduction of 'talking pictures' in c.1929 many cinema operators found themselves undertaking major works to install sound horns and speakers and to improve the acoustics. This seems not to have happened at the Electric Theatre although holes were apparently made through the screen wall for the sound apparatus. Then in 1938 two major changes were made: the screen wall itself was remodelled and the rear seating was raked up further to assist visibility [Fig 8]. All sign of the change in seating angle has been concealed but one small detail of the modish 1938 screen surround survives: over the present entrance doors there is a deep ceiling coving which clearly cuts across the 1911 plaster cornice. Above it, in the roof space,

the upper side of the coving (which seems to be made of flexible board, perhaps early plywood) can be glimpsed.

The name of The Electric Theatre was changed in c.1951 to The Scala; in 1957 the cinema closed.

3.3 *Phase III later C20*

After the cinema had closed much of the lower half of the Fossgate elevation was removed to make space for large plate-glass shop windows with deep display areas. The 1911 rear column, unavoidably supporting the rear of the half-dome over the ticket booths, was stripped of its decorative faience cladding and given a prosaic cladding of terrazzo concrete instead. It now looks very much of its time. More terrazzo concrete cladding was applied to the 1911 flanking walls as well as to the new shop-fronts. Within the cinema virtually all fixtures and fittings were removed, including most of the screen, and areas of the raked floor were concealed or removed. The walls were dry-lined almost to cornice level. The intention seems to have been to strip the building of any detail which might publicly conflict with its new, modern, image as a furniture shop, and to disguise what had to be left.

The roof structure, particularly over the former foyer, now the shop front, was beefed up with inserted steel trusses, steel-flitched purlins, and other members. The timber ventilator trunking was sawn out and the ceiling vents infilled.

The projector was removed from the projection room; probably with all the cabling, switch gear and fuse boxes that must have accompanied it. The solid-fuel boiler in the basement was eventually abandoned and a new gas boiler installed in the former film store.

Since 1957 a multitude of minor changes have occurred, chiefly affecting the late C20 interior only. One major alteration has been the insertion of a mezzanine floor reached by a flight of steps within the retail area; this floor is supported on steel stanchions which pass through the 1911 boarded floor to the concrete below. Externally the easternmost window in the north elevation was converted to a door; there is also a modern replacement fire escape which rises to a similar door at mezzanine level.

4. ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Phase I before 1911

Little significance can be attached to the remnants of any earlier structures within the application area with the exception of the east boundary wall to the north Scout Hut plot; as a remnant of the Carmelite friary this is demonstrably of great historical and archaeological significance. The buildings shown on the 1852 survey are now represented only by damaged walls incorporated with some difficulty into the structure of the cinema in 1911; without large-scale opening-up it is impossible to interpret or assess them.

Phase II 1911 - 1938

In general the significance of The Electric Theatre, as completed in 1911, is high. It was the first purpose-built cinema in York and incorporated what was considered at the time to be up-to-date electrical and fire safety technology. It also possessed a number of fine and unusual decorative features including the entire Fossgate entrance front and a comparatively restrained interior enriched with simple geometrical decoration and stencilled paintwork. The following surviving items are considered to be of special significance:

- The surviving details of the entrance front and the north return wall including three fixing plates for external pendant lights;
- The remains of the ceiling structure and the wall decoration over the foyer bays;
- The remains of the screen wall;
- The flat ceiling over the auditorium, and its decorative plasterwork;
- The segmental barrel-vaulted ceiling over the eastern bays of the auditorium;
- The ridge ventilators and the remains of the timber trunking;
- The rear doorway with moulded and enriched architrave and overlight with gas fittings;
- The fire-fighting apparatus;
- Any fixtures, fittings, and decorative details concealed behind late C20 insertions and claddings;
- The fireproof structure and roof of the two-storey east block;
- The stair;
- The fireproof door;
- The projector window but not the C20 glazing;
- The projector chimneys;
- The paintwork and other minor details of the south room.

Later work:

- The ceiling coving above the screen position (seen from the roof space).

Items detracting from the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building

- The later tunnel and store-room extension
- All the alterations carried out in 1957 and later
- The rendering to the external walls (although this may have been a practical necessity)
- All the late C20 additions including the Scout Hut and the plywood shed in the north yard.

5. LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION

YORK

SE6051NE FOSSGATE 1112-1/17/338 (North East side) 24/06/83 Nos.19-22
(Consecutive) and attached boundary wall

GV II

Electric Cinema; now shop: boundary wall attached to rear building. 1911, incorporating late C19 building at rear; remodelled 1957. Boundary wall medieval, C17, C18 and C19. MATERIALS: cream-brown mottled brick in English garden wall bond, part rendered, with cinema front of glazed tile and faience; rear building of orange-cream mottled brick in English garden wall bond, with lower courses of orange-red brick: slate roofs, with brick stack to rear building. EXTERIOR: full-height cinema front, of 3 unequal bays, treated as form of Palladian arch in Ionic order. Central arch is ribbed elliptical hemi-dome on columns with moulded bases on tall pedestals, beneath moulded modillion cornice hood, returned over flanking arches. Frieze above rises to segmental pediment terminated by volutes and capped with enriched moulded coping with ball and pedestal finial: frieze filled with moulded mask and garlands and swags of fruit. Shopfront behind cinema front has glazed double doors between arcaded with plate glass windows. Rear building: 2-storey, 3-window front to Black Horse Passage: openings altered. Boundary wall attached to north-west, approximately 4 metres high and 30 metres long. INTERIOR: of shop: wall pilaster strips moulded with drops of flowers and musical instruments beneath impost band and plain frieze support moulded cornice. Ceiling panelled with flat plaster ribs, some enriched with moulded fruits. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: boundary wall red brick on lower courses of magnesian limestone. HISTORICAL NOTE: the Electric Cinema was the first cinema in York. Boundary wall attached to rear building incorporates remnants of former precinct wall of Carmelite Friary, suppressed 1538. (City of York: RCHME: The Central Area: HMSO: 1981-: 50).

Listing NGR: SE6057251769

6. FIGURES

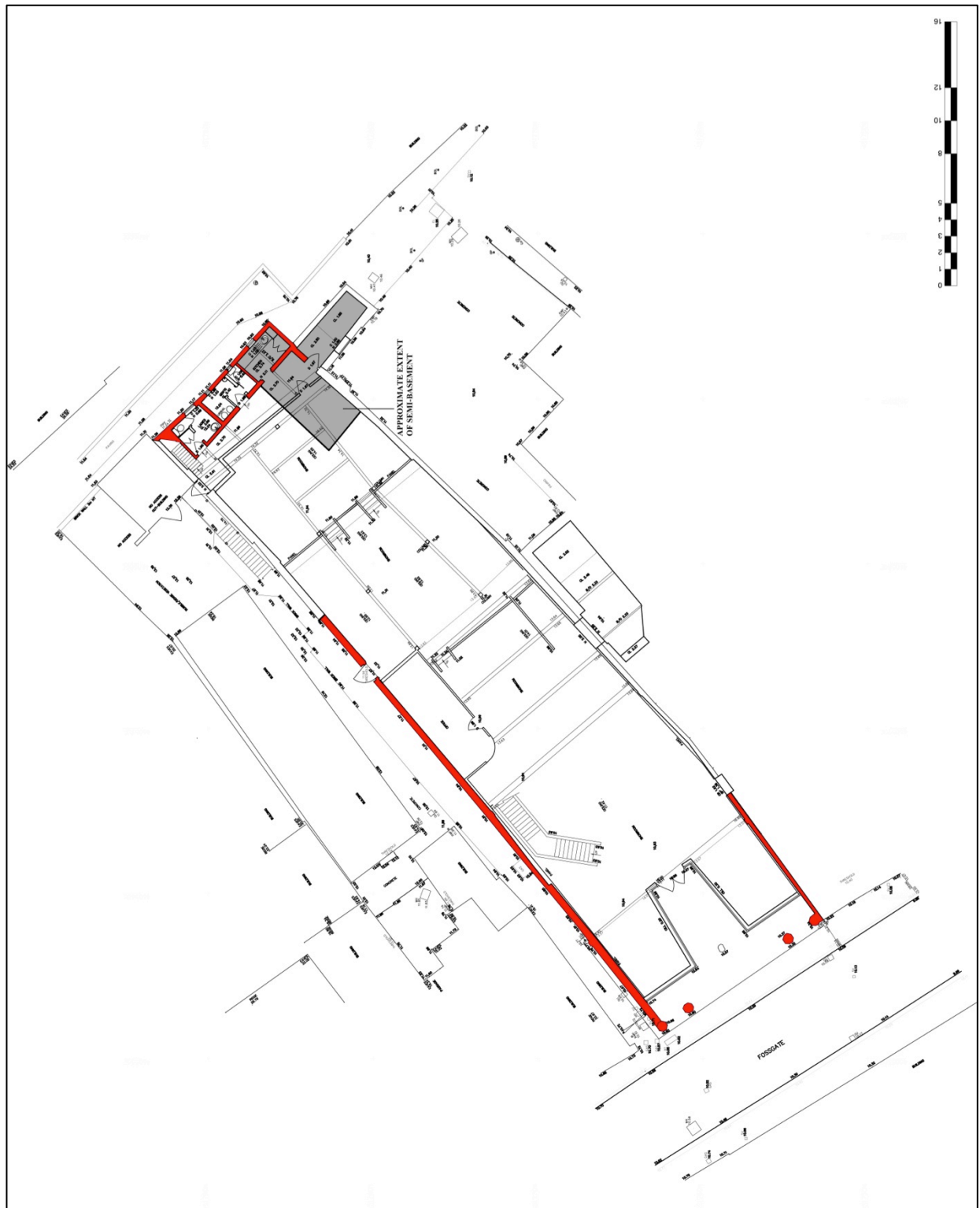


Fig 2: Extent of 1911 fabric shown by red line; basement in grey shading



Fig 3: Outline of 1911 cinema superimposed on 1852 OS



Fig 4: The street frontage before 1911

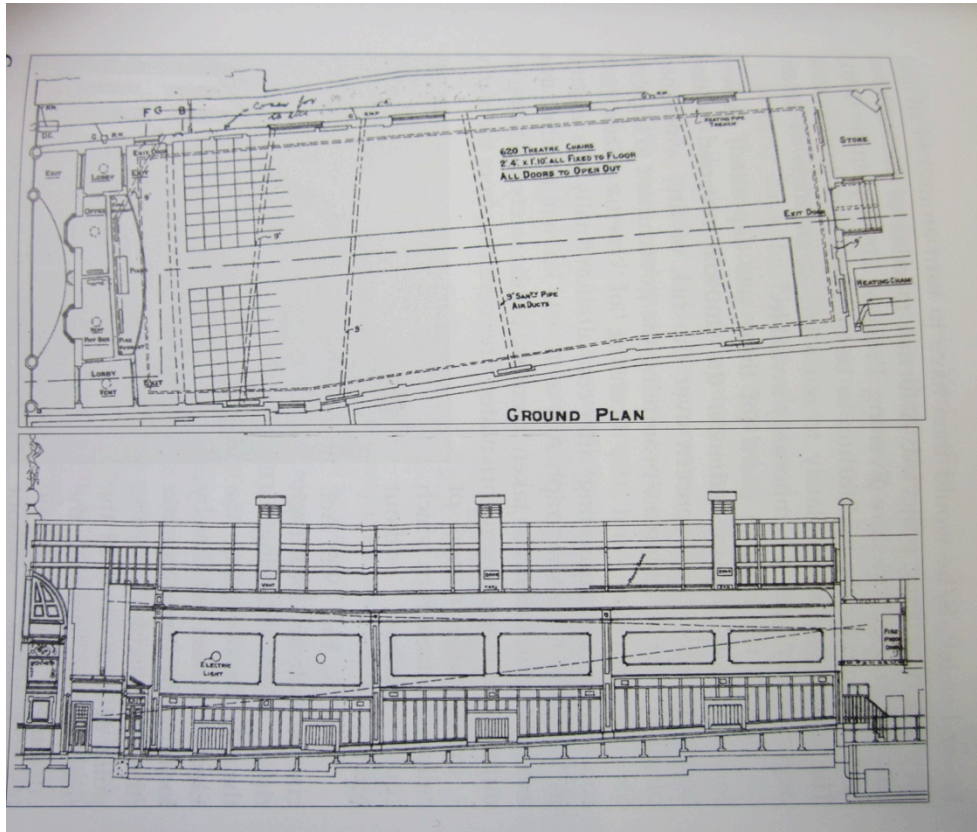


Fig 5: proposal drawing of 1910



Fig 6: 3rd June 1911



Fig 7: 3rd June 1911

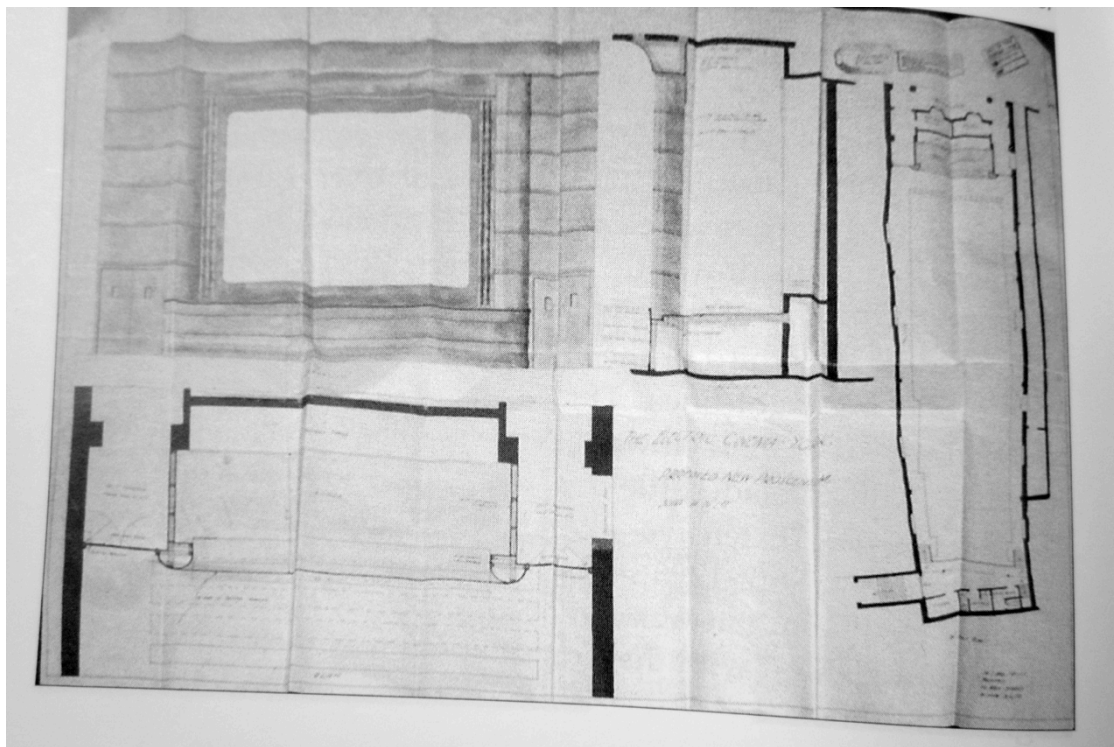


Fig 8: Alterations to screen area c.1938