

Greasepaint and Limelight Trail Act I

About the Greasepaint and Limelight Trail Act 1

The cultural life of Huddersfield has been enriched for over 200 years by a range of theatres and cinemas, that have brought celebrated performers and spectacular events to the town. While some former theatres and cinemas no longer exist, there remain some impressive buildings as well as fascinating stories to tell.

The trail was prepared by the late Brian Haigh, who sadly passed away in August 2021 before his trail could be published. Brian, well known as a local historian and vice-chair of Huddersfield Local History Society, had intended this as the first act of a two-part story. Act 1 is a tribute to Brian with the hope that a second instalment will be prepared shortly.

Text: Brian Haigh

Images: Maureen Mitchell, David Wyles, Kirklees Image Archive, Huddersfield Exposed.

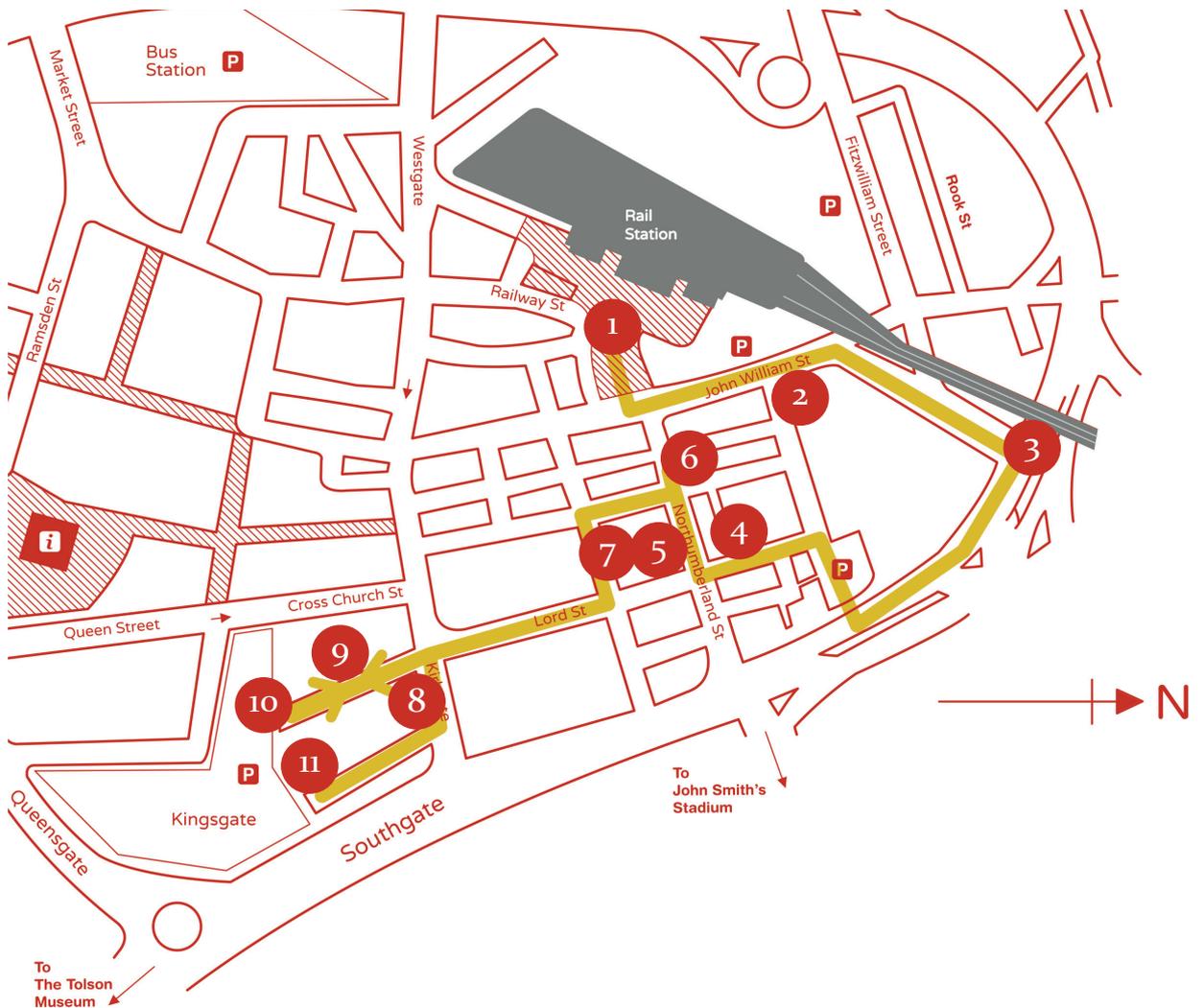
Information

For more information about Discover Huddersfield or to learn more about the project and how to get involved, please get in touch through the following media:

www.discoverhuddersfield.uk

Email: info@discoverhuddersfield.uk

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Discover Huddersfield offers new ways to experience this amazing Yorkshire town, through guided walks, talks and trails. See Huddersfield at its very best: grand listed buildings and small independent shops; a place for radicals from the Luddites to the Sex Pistols; birthplace of Rugby League; a town rich in creativity, stories, heritage and the odd ghostly encounter.

1 Harold Wilson Statue, St George's Square



In 2004, the whole square became a stage for Barry Russell's opera 'Snogging Harold Wilson'. One of the performers sang from the roof of Britannia Buildings, the site of which was once considered for a town hall. Lion Buildings once housed a grand Victorian arcade which in the 1920s developers planned to convert into a cinema.

2 Empire Cinema



The town's second purpose-built cinema, opened 8 March 1915 with a capacity of 870. Under the management of Mark Freedman until 1922. Completely re-furbished April-July 1940 by Clifford Hickson, successor to Stocks & Sykes, the original architects. The auditorium is hexagonal in shape, with seating on three sides of the hexagon. Closed 4 August 1973. The listed building with its faience tiles and architectural decorations is now a vintage store and houses an adult cinema.

3 Majestic

Opened as Olympia Picture House on 21 October 1912 in former Hirst's Toffee Works. After disagreements with the licensing authorities, re-opened in December 1916 as Star Picture House. 15 August 1931, saw the last (routine) performance of a silent film



in Huddersfield. From 1940 until its closure in 1968, known as the Majestic. Now home to Majestic Interactive. See the ventilator on the roof.

4 Site of Theatre DeLuxe Picture Hall

The site of the Market Offices was occupied by a wooden roller-skating rink, opened 1 May 1909. In December 1910, it re-opened as a picture hall. After re-furbishment its name changed from Post Office Picture Hall to Theatre DeLuxe. Closed 1922.

5 Post Office

The Robinson brothers brought in the great theatre architect Frank Matcham in 1899, to design a new theatre and opera house for the site. This was abandoned as too expensive and Northern Theatres, as their company was called, turned their attention to the Armoury which they re-furbished as the Hippodrome in 1905. A new post office opened on the site in 1914, replacing the earlier building which stands directly opposite.

6 Princess Cinema



Originally a wool export warehouse, (Dickinson's). Converted by architect Clifford Hickson to accommodate cinema and cafe dansant (tea dance). Opened 19 May 1923. Cost £34,000. Seating 813. Last silent cinema to be opened in town and first to be converted to sound.

Mark Freedman overreached himself with this venture and left after 10 months pursued by creditors.

Closed 24 April, 1982. Re-opened as a casino following a £1 million investment in 2008; the casino went into administration. Briefly re-opened before being mothballed. Cleopatra's gentlemen's club continued to operate in the former restaurant before moving to the Kirkgate Inn.

7 Site of Rowley's Empire

Here on 21 September, 1896, Huddersfield audiences were treated to the first showing of moving pictures. Rowley's Empire was a wooden building 160 ft x 80 ft, built in 1884 to house a circus. Seating 3000, it was lit by gas jets, a serious fire risk.

Local comedian J.W.Rowley took over the building in 1887. The first film presentations were part of Rowley's plan to make the building pay - he is said to have lost £20,000 on the venture.

8 Palace Theatre



Opened 1909. By Horsfall & Sons. Capacity 1164. Part of McNaughten Circuit. It was re-built after a fire in the Art Deco style by Roland Sandwell and Ernest S. Roberts.

A variety theatre with occasional film screenings, revues, musicals, plays, and pantomimes. Variety programmes featured Houdini. Struggled against rise of television. Tried a cabaret format as the Cafe Continental, before succumbing to Bingo in 1963. That too was in decline by 1997. Became variously Chicago Rock Cafe, Shout and Society, before conversion to student accommodation. Listed; all but the facade was to be preserved in an earlier scheme which would have seen it incorporated in Kingsgate II.

To the right behind the former public house is the site of

9 New Theatre

The short-lived successor to the Theatre Royal. Nita Valerie took over former Empress Ballroom. The New Theatre opened on 29 November 1963 with pantomime, 'Puss in Boots'. Repertory seasons followed, but audiences dwindled and the project failed. Roy Barraclough began his career as a member of the company which included stalwarts (including Kenneth Waller and Nita Valerie herself) from the Theatre Royal. The building became a West Indian Social Club and a noted music venue. (Reggae)Cleopatras and the Silver Sands are fondly remembered. The building was demolished in 1992.

To the left, now subsumed in Kingsgate, the site of

10 Venn Street Arts Centre



An Arts Centre re-housed in the former St Peter's Parish School (architect Edward Hughes) after structural problems were found in the Queen Street Chapel where it had been set up 18 months earlier. Provided a home for local amateur operatic societies, the Thespians, as well as the Huddersfield Music Society. Also programmed a variety of small-scale touring companies like the Century Theatre and was a popular venue for pre and post Edinburgh tours. The Reduced Shakespeare Company was one of these with its 'Complete Works' along with Godber's 'Bouncers'. Worked well for these companies, but the facilities and the capacity of the house were problematic for the amateur operatic societies., which moved to the LBT on its opening in 1993. The former school site became part of the Kingsgate Shopping Centre. Demolished 1996.

11 'New Theatre' in the Kirkgate Barn

The site of one the earliest Huddersfield theatres for which a record exists - a playbill, dated 7 February 1816.