

# Streatham Hill Theatre

One of London's most lavish 'sleeping beauties' and the last theatre designed by W G R Sprague, the architect responsible for some of the most beautiful theatres in London.



ADDRESS

110 Streatham Hill, London, SW2 4RD

LOCAL AUTHORITY

London Borough of Lambeth

OWNER

Pollmount Ltd

OPERATOR

Praesepe plc (Beacon Bingo)

ARCHITECT

W G R Sprague & W H Barton

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION

1929

LISTING

**Grade II**

CAPACITY

**c. 2800**

DATABASE LINK

**[View in Theatres Database](#)**

## **Significance**

Built in 1929, this was the last theatre designed by Sprague, but possibly his largest and one of the best-equipped in London, outside of the West End. The theatre has an imposing facade to Streatham Hill in faience by Doulton. The foyer is spacious, with tall gilded Ionic columns and arches, terrazzo floor and two round kiosks each side of the grand central stairway. This sweeps up to dress circle and balcony levels, parting at the centre into two flights with iron balustrading. The auditorium is lavish and has excellent sightlines with two balconies. The foyers, auditorium and public areas were described as being 'in the Adam manner' but are quite eclectic, with friezes of sphinxes, angels and garlands in abundance. The theatre was hit by a V1 flying bomb in 1944 but reconstructed in 1950 to the original designs. The original wooden stage machinery is also still in situ, together with the counterweight flying and forestage lifts.

Whilst a theatre of such a size is unlikely to be viable at this time, it would lend itself to adaptation for smaller-scale and/or studio style performances which would preserve the historic significance of this beautiful building. By also using the range of ancillary spaces, the building would function well as a multi-purpose arts centre and home for community and arts organisations, supported by bar/café/restaurant facilities open to the public.

## **Why is this theatre at risk?**

Beacon Bingo closed its operation in the main auditorium in January 2017 and currently operates a '*Cashino*' slot-machine lounge out of the rear of the stalls only, leaving the future of the building uncertain. Beacon Bingo has 10 years remaining on its lease. It is understood that the company will be liable for dilapidations at the end of this term, which could have a substantial cost implication.

In the meantime, it is feared that the current owner may have plans for redevelopment. There is also concern that if the more saleable parts of the building are let or developed separately – such as for offices or flats – the auditorium itself may be left in an unsustainable position, without the income it would need from the rest of the building.

## **Current situation**

From 2013 to 2017 the local amateur community theatre company Streatham Theatre staged a number of performances in a pop-up theatre space in the circle foyer, and ran tours and promenade performances around the building. These activities were well supported by Beacon Bingo, but since bingo ceased, access has not been possible.

Beacon Bingo has stated that it would like to find a cultural use for the building and has been approached by a number of potential users and developers. It is understood that there may be a potential user investigating a performance-related use for the building as of December 2017.

The So and So Arts Club rented two front of house spaces for a theatre festival in July 2017 and would have liked to continue live performance from the circle foyer space, with grander ambitions to gradually inhabit the remainder of the theatre and to fully restore the auditorium. To this end the club proposed a viability study on the theatre to Beacon Bingo, but there was no response. The club has since found premises elsewhere. Theatres Trust has been providing fundraising and viability study advice.

The Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT) Historical Research Committee has carried out extensive research into the theatre's history and current condition. Meanwhile, local residents have their own concerns and have formed The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre as a focus for their interest in returning the theatre to an arts and performance use.

*Image: Streatham Hill Theatre, Tim Hatcher*