

NEW EMPIRE, SUNDERLAND.

The site of this theatre is practically an island site, being surrounded almost on all sides by streets of varying widths and importance. The theatre being a block away from High Street West, it has been necessary to make an approach directly from this street, utilising the buildings intervening as waiting halls and spacious approach corridors.

The auditorium is exactly 80 feet square, and the theatre is what is known as a three-tier house. The stalls consist of twelve rows of tip-up chairs, and the pit behind, which is large enough to hold 1,000 people, is covered with wood-block flooring, and furnished with upholstered seats with arms. The grand circle is elliptical in shape, and is roomy and well approached. There are six private boxes at the back of the circle, with a bioscope-box in centre. The circle is provided with handsome lounges. The balcony, which is the next tier, is particularly large, and contains nine rows of upholstered seats. The gallery, above this again, has nine rows, and will hold about 450 people. The total accommodation of the theatre approaches 3,000.

The house is constructed on what is known as the cantilever system, the modification only being that one column is placed at the back of the pit so as to obviate the use of very long girders. The whole of the girder work rests on turned steel columns, and the construction of the doors, and, in fact, the theatre throughout, is fire-proof, being all in concrete reinforced with expanded metal resting on iron girders.

The approach to the circle and stalls is from High Street West, the main entrance being under a circular tower rising to a height of about 100 feet. This tower is of massive stonework, freely embellished with columns with Ionic caps and moulded and enriched cornices, and the whole is surmounted by a copper dome, with stone lunettes. Above the dome, standing on eight columns, is a revolving ball, round which is the word "Empire," shown in gold letters by day and illuminated by electric lights at night. This ball is worked by an electric motor, and makes a striking feature over the entrance. Above the revolving ball is a female figure in copper representing Prosperity.

The circular tower and staircase at the entrance is lined with alabaster and marble bands up to a height of 8 ft. In the tower the upper part is ornamented and panelled in rich fibrous work, and covered at a height of 30 ft. by a fibrous dome very richly decorated in gold and colours. The walls are panelled, and paintings of Shakespeare, Mozart, Garrick, and Sheridan are introduced. These figures are painted life-size, and form a striking feature in the entrance.

The circle saloon and circle waiting hall are approached direct from the staircase, the ceiling being richly modelled in fibrous plaster in segmental form. The windows here are round bays, and advantage is taken of each of these to have upholstered seats for those waiting for the second house. Good provision is made off the circle waiting hall for cloakroom accommodation, and the crush rooms are handsomely decorated and treated in pine and fabricana panels.

Special care has been taken to provide ample exits, each part of the house having at least two exits, and in some cases three and four. The whole of the exits are fire-proof, and the flights of stairs are kept short with broken landings and half-paces.

The auditorium is treated decoratively in a quiet way, the ceiling being crossed with moulded ribs and the dome over the centre being ornamented with Ionic columns and richly moulded cornices and brackets. The walls of the auditorium are all panelled with reeded pilasters and Ionic caps, the walls being panelled with enriched mouldings and the panels filled with silk teeko.

The proscenium opening is filled in with an entire surround of Breche rose marble, and the space above the proscenium divided with marble pilasters into panels which are treated with painted figure subjects. The feature of the auditorium is the dispensing with the usual side boxes, the space being used to better advantage, it is thought, for the providing of about fifty additional seats which form part of the dress circle. The balcony boxes are surmounted by domes in fibrous plaster and divided by short columns with moulded consols and other fibrous ornament. The box fronts are richly modelled in fibrous work and ornamented in gold and colour. The prevailing tint of the decorations in the auditorium is cream and gold, but the panels in the ceiling are enriched in various other subdued tints.

Ventilation is amply provided for by means of fresh air inlet ventilators with due provision against draughts, and the outlet by means of a Blackman's fan placed at the back of each tier and at the top of the dome in the auditorium. These fans are worked by electric motors, and will change the entire air in the auditorium two or three times in the hour. The whole of the theatre and approaches are efficiently heated by hot water apparatus on the low-pressure system.

The stage measures 70 feet by 40 feet, and the height from the floor of the stage to the gridiron is 62 feet. The stage is shut off from the auditorium by an asbestos fireproof screen, 36 feet by 30 feet, with all the latest arrangements for raising and lowering. The stage is also shut off from both the dressing-rooms and auditorium by fireproof automatic doors at all other openings. The scenery is fitted up on the latest lines, with ballast weights and fireproofing. The electric light installation is of the latest type, the mains being brought in from two points in case of failure, the number boxes, wiring resistances, stage effects, and other electric appliances being thoroughly up-to-date and of the latest type.

The sixteen dressing-rooms are all divided by fireproof partitions, and each room has a fireplace with gas stove, and is provided with hot and cold water. These rooms are very commodious, and provide accommodation, if necessary, for the largest companies on the road.

The tableau curtain, vallances, and draperies throughout are handsomely designed in red plush with sateen linings and borders, and are fitted up to drape all openings.

The sanitary arrangements are perfect, lavatories being provided in every section of the house.

Very extensive tests have been carried out under the supervision of the Borough Engineer, the tiers being loaded with cement equal to the full capacity of the various tiers, the greatest deflection registering 1-4,000th part of the span of the girders.

The building has also been inspected by the local Watch Committee, and the full dramatic licence has been granted.

Mr. Duncan Straughen has acted as clerk of the works.

The building has been designed and carried out under the supervision of Messrs. W. and T. R. Milburn, F.R.I.B.A., Fawcett Street, Sunderland, Mr. J. W. White being the builder. As stated in a recent issue, the New Empire will be opened on Monday next, July 1, the bill being topped by Miss Vesta Tilley, who laid the foundation-stone on September 29 last. There will be an orchestra of twenty performers, directed by Mr. Charles P. Lohr, of the Empire, South Shields. Mr. Richard Thornton is managing director, and Mr. Harry Eden is resident manager.