

Theatre had a long and distinguished history in Sunderland. The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, built in the 1760s and redesigned internally in 1840, was replaced by a new and more elegant establishment of the same name in Bedford Street in 1855. The old theatre, extended and improved, became in 1871 the New Wear Music Hall. The new Theatre Royal was perhaps in response to competition from the Lyceum Theatre, Lambton Street, opened 1852 and extensively altered in 1855. Within months the Lyceum burned down, was rebuilt, and in 1856 saw the debut of Sir Henry Irving on the professional stage. After another destructive fire, in 1880, its site was taken for a Salvation Army citadel, a warlike structure with battlements.ⁱ

Music hall had enough mass appeal to support several establishments. The Avenue Theatre (1882), Gill Bridge Avenue, was in 1898 swallowed by the expanding Vaux brewery. The People's Palace (1891), High Street West, was said to be the first designed as a 'Theatre of Varieties'. The palatial Kings Theatre in Crowtree Road, where six shops occupied the ground floor, opened in 1906 at a cost of £28,000. Replacing the Avenue, the Empire in High Street West, an Edwardian Baroque palace overflowing with sculpture, is a theatre enjoyed by performers and treasured by the town.ⁱⁱ

Music hall was soon overtaken by the novelty of cinema. Monkwearmouth Picture House was the town's first permanent cinema, converted in 1906 from St Stephen's Presbyterian chapel on Bonner's Field, whose wooden pews were retained for the new audience. There were several other small picture houses around the town centre by 1914: West End Electric Cinema, Silksworth Row (1912); Theatre de Luxe Cinema, Fawcett Street (1912); Queen's Hall Cinema, Bridge Street (1913), and the Millfield Picture House, Hylton Road (1913).ⁱⁱⁱ

The Havelock Cinema, on the site of Havelock House, achieved new standards in luxury in 1915, its £60,000 cost including shops, offices, and a café which matched the 2,000-seat cinema interior in Louis XIV style. Setting out to attract all social classes, it boasted a 10-piece orchestra. The Picture House, High Street, (1912) was also a prestige cinema. National cinema chains brought many more extravagant establishments to Sunderland between the wars.^{iv}

ⁱ *Sund. Herald*, 28 Feb. 1840; 4 Jan. 1856; 27 Aug. 1852; 24 Aug. 1855; 14 Sept. 1855; *Sund. Times*, 7 Oct. 1871; *Monthly Chronicle*, Feb. 1891, 86-7; *Sund. Year Book* (1906), 17-19; *Sund. Daily Echo*, 3 Aug. 1891.

ⁱⁱ *Sund. Daily Echo*, 24 Oct. 1882; 3 Aug. 1891; 24 Mar. 1906; 27 June 1907; A Pickersgill, *Sunderland in Times Past* (1981), pl.; *Builder*, 91, 12 Jan. 1907, 32; 93, July 1907, 88; L.F. Pearson, "'The Architecture of Entertainment Run Riot': William Hope of Newcastle, 1862-1907", *Northern Hist.*, 27 (1991), 184-97; G.R. Potts, 'A Biographical Dictionary of Sunderland Architects, 1800-1914' (typescript in Sund. Lib., 2007); I. Mackintosh & M. Sell (eds), *Curtains!!!, or a New Life for Old Theatres*, (1982), 214.

ⁱⁱⁱ Corfe, *Short History*, 80; A. Anderson, *The Dream Palaces of Sunderland* (n.d.), 20-3; *Sund. Daily Echo*, 23 Dec. 1912; 30 Apr. 1912; 19 Dec. 1913; 18 Nov. 1913.

^{iv} *Sund. Daily Echo*, 10 Dec. 1915; Anderson, *Dream Palaces*, 52-5, 44-5.