

## STOCKPORT'S PLAZA TAKES TO THE STAGE! January 2010

The eye-catching art deco façade of Stockport Plaza may be a monument to a bygone age when the silent movie was king but it's now making plenty of noises about its future intentions as a super cinema and variety theatre!



Opened in 1932, this distinctive venue in the heart of Stockport has recently undergone a comprehensive £3 million refurbishment funded predominantly through a £1.9 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund together with £650,000 of RDA money. The work has included an immense amount of specialist plastering work carried out by Pudsey-based Ornate Interiors.

The Plaza served as a cinema until the mid 60s when it was converted into a bingo hall by the Mecca Group before finally closing its doors in 1999. A year later the building was purchased by the Stockport Plaza Trust and saw its listed status upgraded to

II\* by English Heritage. It's one of only a handful of cinemas across the UK to have this status.

Jim Dodd, Contracts Manager for Ornate Interiors, explained: "This has been a long and challenging project that started in the spring on 2009. It involved work on numerous, difficult to reach high ceilings and walls including the main auditorium and we've had to be creative as to how we've matched to existing and reproduced six distinctive Artex style patterns.

"Much of the plasterwork was in a very poor state having been patched up at various stages throughout its history with plastering on many of the stairways and ceilings having completely disappeared with the brickwork showing.

"We took samples of the existing plasterwork and it was revealed as a lime and gypsum solution originating in Belgium. The brief meant we had to recreate as close to the original mix as possible and we opted for two coats of haired lime plaster followed by a finish coat of 50% Knauf 50% lime plaster which gives the building a chance to breathe and will last for decades.

"The existing ceilings were stripped back to the original timber and reinstated with traditional Larch lath and three coats of haired lime plaster including the specialist lime plaster pattern which matched the original design.

"The damaged and rotten areas of the fibrous plaster mouldings were taken off and sections and squeezes of the original mouldings were taken in order to reproduce the exact required profile and pattern which were then cast in our Leeds workshop.

"The new sections were then transported to site and fixed in the required location to provide a seamless finish," added Jim

The existing walls were also stripped back in a similar fashion to the ceilings revealing the original background and were then reinstated with three coats of haired lime plaster.

In the auditorium and front of house area as well as the staircases at the side of the building many ceiling and wall areas were reinstated in a similar fashion. In addition two niche heads within the front of house were modelled in clay from drawings and then a silicone rubber mould was manufactured from the model. Casts were then manufactured from the mould and the two heads installed on site.

Another area of the building in need of attention was the rear of the Cafe wall which required the reproduction of 3 fibrous plaster niches. Jim went on: "A big issue was that there were no longer original features left to copy for the niches. The project architects were able to produce architectural drawings of the original niches from historic photographs, we then produced a full size drawing of the niche shaft and manufactured a mould from this."

"The head and base details were modelled in clay from drawings and then a silicone rubber mould was manufactured from the model. Casts were then manufactured from the moulds and the three elements of the niche installed on site into purpose made recesses formed within the walls," he added.

Ornate Interiors Ltd work on many of the UK's most recognised stately homes, listed buildings, hotels, churches, homes and theatres and was founded in 1989. It currently employs 18 staff.

The beautifully restored auditorium with its gold and silver decorative plaster opened its doors in December 2009 after nine months of work with the pantomime Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs taking to the stage. A true fairy tale ending indeed for Jim and the team from Ornate Interiors!

For more details visit [www.ornateinteriors.co.uk](http://www.ornateinteriors.co.uk) and [www.stockportplaza.co.uk](http://www.stockportplaza.co.uk)