

ELECTRIC THEATRE, STOCKSBRIDGE

Proprietor: West Riding Electric Theatres Ltd. (registered 8.8.11)  
Chairman: S. Spencer Managing director: George H. Dyson

Location: Edward Street, Stocksbridge in the former Public Hall.

Neither the architect nor the general contractor have been identified; the general contractor responsible for the cinema conversion was G. H. Smith and sons.

Opened : as public hall 1.12.04  
as electric theatre Monday, 18.9.11

The Public Hall was a stone building owned by the Aerated Water Company whose premises were nearby. Occasional picture shows were held in the hall but in 1911 the proprietors acquired a lease and converted it for use as a regular cinema with a raked floor and a fire-proof 'bioscope box'. There were two projectors and two projection ports; the projectors were cranked by hand, although a generator provided electricity for illumination. Seating capacity was stated to be about 500 but was probably somewhat less. The so-called 'circle' seats were the back 6-7 rows of the stalls; these tip-up seats, upholstered and covered in velvet, were the best in the house and priced at 9d. The 6d. seats were upholstered but not tip-up, while the pit seats at 3d. were wooden forms. The opening programme included 'Back to the primitive', 'Ceylon' and 'A Romany tragedy'. There was a single evening performance at 7.30pm. with a children's matinee on Saturday at 2.30pm.

The manager was Jack Haines, who was also the operator. (\*) His wife Mary (also known as Molly) was in the paybox before the show and then went to assist her husband in the projection box; there were no usherettes. The pianist was Frank Gregory and in later years Hetty King. The floor was uncarpeted and, if the younger members of the audience lost interest in the pictures, the music was apt to be accompanied by the sound of mineral water bottles (empty) rolling down the aisles. Jack Haines had gained his early experience of 'animated pictures' as a travelling showman touring the fairgrounds and he sometimes introduced novelty contests into the evening's entertainment at the Electric Theatre; contestants suitably handicapped might be invited to eat sticky buns or aim blows at each other. There was a weekly advert in the Penistone, Stocksbridge and Hoyland Express except for a period extending from February 1913 to April 1914; regular advertising was then resumed until the cinema closed in 1922.

During the war Haines was in the Royal Flying Corps and Mrs. Haines struggled to keep the show running with the aid of Dan Barraclough, a handyman, and some cleaning help; Dan also doubled as chocolate boy.

(\*) The account is heavily dependant on the childhood recollections of Mrs. Alice Marsden, whose parents were Jack and Mary Haines.



In December 1920 the hall was redecorated and refurnished after being bought by West Riding Electric Theatres; the co-directors at this time were G.H. Dyson and W.H. Melton. However, a new cinema was being built in Stocksbridge and the Palace opened in May 1921. Everyone flocked to sample the comparative luxury of a purpose designed cinema but after six months or so people began returning to 'the old pictures'. The proprietors of the Palace reacted by buying out the opposition and promptly closing the Electric Theatre. Many cinemas in and around Sheffield had been experiencing hard times and an announcement said that the Electric Theatre had closed temporarily pending a return to normal conditions of trade. What proved to be the final performance was on Saturday, 20th. February 1922 when the feature was 'Alias Jimmy Valentine'. The hall was extensively reconstructed following a fire and is currently occupied by the Stocksbridge Legionnaires Club; part is being used as a postal sorting depot.