

## Context

Former Empire nightclub (formerly Crown Cinema, Paris Cinema and Riley's American Pool & Snooker Club), located at 151 Far Gosford St, Coventry CV1 5DU.



Figure 1. The Paris Luxury Continental Cinema in 1958<sup>i</sup>



Figure 2. Current situation

## Assessment – Discussion

The Empire Nightclub on Far Gosford Street was formerly the Crown Theatre/Cinema, and then the Paris Cinema.

The Crown Theatre opened on August Bank Holiday Monday 1912 and the architect was J.H. Gilbert. It had a decorative façade, which was topped by a centrally placed crown. It was licenced to screen pictures and had at first only had a temporary licence for accompanying music. Seating was provided for 558, but the cinema was so successful, that in April 1913, it was extended to seat 771.

On 1st June 1925 it was taken over by Oscar Deutsch (his first cinema) who later built up the Odeon chain. It only remained under Deutsch's control for a while as it was sold as a going concern in 1928. It was temporarily closed in October 1940 by air raid damage.

In October 1957 it was closed again for modernisation and re-opened on 1st March 1958 with Eva Bartok in "Her Crime Was Love" with the film's star appearing 'in person'. It was now known as the Paris Luxury Continental Cinema, later shortened to Paris Cinema.

After several operators and openings and closures over the years, it finally closed on 21st November 1981. The building lay derelict and suffered damage by fire in 1991. However, by mid-1999 it had re-opened as a Laser Quest centre, then Riley's American Pool & Snooker Club. More recently it became the Empire Nightclub. Recent relocation plans for the Empire to move into Hertford Street, have left the building vacant.

## Assessment – Criteria

Assessing the heritage asset against the Local List criteria; the heritage asset is valued locally for the following:

**Historic:** The former Paris Cinema shows a strong associative interest to Oscar Deutsch, the founder of the nationally-significant Odeon chain of cinemas, being the first of his cinemas.

**Artistic:** Although the façade has lost some of its features; the scale, massing and materials, as well as the steps to the entrance, are all remnants of the original cinema, an important early 20<sup>th</sup> century building in this area.

**Community:** The former Paris Cinema is important to the identity, cohesion and memory of people who live and visit Far Gosford Street and has played a key role in the social life of the area since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The building sits in Far Gosford Street conservation area and has been a leisure destination since 1912. After being a cinema, it was a Laser Quest Centre then Riley's American Pool and Snooker Club.

**Evidence:** This physical building itself is an important resource for understanding the development of entertainment venues in Coventry.

**Age.** This former cinema dates from 1912.

**Rarity.** This is a unique building, being the first cinema run by Oscar Deutsch, the famous founder of the Odeon Chain of cinemas.

**Integrity.** The building is externally structurally complete, and contains fragments of the earlier cinema buildings. Internal composition has been significantly altered over time.

**Coventry's identity.** It is a distinctive historic element of one of Coventry's surviving early-20<sup>th</sup> century entertainment venues, previously owned by the famous founder of the Odeon cinema chain.

## Conclusion

The application for local listing is valid and therefore the proposal may be promoted for public consultation. Further to the findings of the public consultation, CCC conservation officer will finalise recommendation for a future Cabinet Member Meeting.



*Figure 3. Empire Nightclub, March 2017*

<http://www.coventry.gov.uk/localist>

<sup>i</sup> Image © <http://cinematreasures.org/members/prodarren/photos/37416>