

## Sunderland Empire

**Specialist in Flame Retardant Fabrics. Manufacturer and Installer of all types of Theatrical Drapes and Stage Equipment**

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Draping and stage machinery specialists J&C Joel has manufactured a magnificent new set of deep red front tabs, complete with a scalloped top border featuring intricate appliqué work, for the Sunderland Empire— just in time for the venue to celebrate its centenary.

For the busy receiving house, operated by Live Nation for Sunderland City Council and subject to a £4.5 million refit in 2004, the new curtains were “the icing on the cake” according to technical manager Mel James. The last set of new front curtains was installed in 1972!

J&C Joel won a competitive tender to manufacture and install the curtains and border.

The project was managed for them by James Wheelwright. Sewing workroom manager Neal Cartwright oversaw the manufacturing process and worked painstakingly on the final design, including making two site visits to ensure every minute detail was correct. He also co-ordinated the physical installation, which went like clockwork.

Joel’s brief was to bring the curtains back into keeping with the theatre’s original Edwardian style and ambience, which had been recreated in

the auditorium during the 2004 refurbishment project.

The two fully lined curtains measure 7 metres wide with a 9.5 metre drop and weigh 120 Kgs. The Pelmet is 13 metres wide with a 4 metre drop weighing 50Kgs.

Both elements are made from specially dyed heavy velour fabric. The pelmet is inscribed with “1907” in ornate gold appliqué numbers. The border replaces the theatre’s previously plain one, and has “done wonders for the general aesthetics of the auditorium” affirms Mel James.

He sent a sample of the original paint (the last layer they found before hitting the plasterwork during the refurb) to J&C Joel, who then consulted with their specialist dyers to ensure the fabric was perfectly matched.

A run of gold tassels grace the bottom of the tabs. Above these are two strips of gold work running horizontally across the curtains, which J&C Joel painstakingly created, referencing the contours and form to the scrolling plasterwork of the auditorium boxes and side ‘slippers’.



The shape surrounding the “1907” on the border is taken from the plasterwork designs around the proscenium arch. “I was really impressed with the level of attention to detail from J&C Joel” says Mel James, who adds that the curtains were also delivered exactly on time.

James Wheelwright comments, “It is always a great challenge and very rewarding for all involved to see such a splendid finished product. J&C Joel’s vast experience under Neal’s guidance, especially with his attention to detail allowed us to provide a magnificent Front of House curtain. Most importantly, it’s

been great to have such a happy client as Mel James who has been such a pleasure to work with”.

### About Sunderland Empire

Sunderland Empire (capacity 1864 seated and over 2000 standing) was designed by local architects William and TR Milburn and first opened (as the Empire Palace) in July 1907. It is one of the largest capacity theatres in the north of England and the only one between Manchester and Edinburgh with the space and facilities to stage modern large-scale West End productions. Many leading entertainers have played there over the years including Charlie Chaplin, Laurel & Hardy, George Formby and The Beatles.

### Content

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