

## iconic Ballrooms

### Blackpool Tower Ballroom undergoes refurb

The iconic ballroom is part of Blackpool Tower the Grade 1 listed building and it re-opened in August 2021 after Covid having had a £1.1million

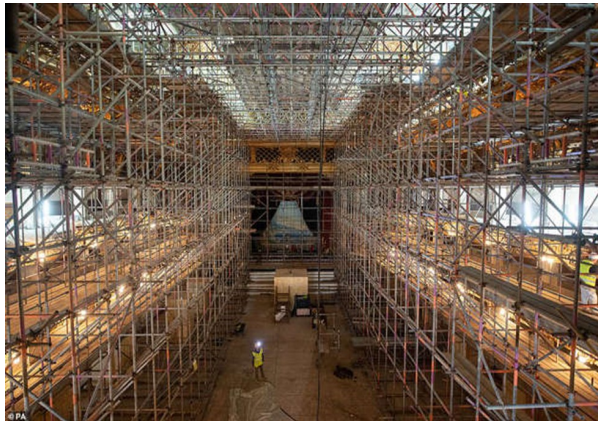
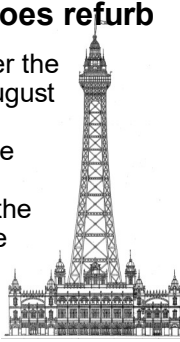
refurbishment. Built in 1894 it has undergone the most extensive programme of work and deep clean for more than 60 years.

The work uncovered some incredibly rare and unusual finds in the angel figures adorning the ballroom ceiling such as old cigarette packets, 1911 newspapers and an old walking stick.

Taking advantage of the lockdown, a team, including some of the most highly skilled craftsmen in the country spent more than 21,000 hours, over a period of six months to restore the historic venue.

The team discovered signatures under the murals on the ornate plasterwork ceiling showing the last time anyone was in this space was in 1957 following a fire which caused severe damage to the ballroom.

At the time this rebuild was estimated to cost over half a million pounds and took 17 months to complete.



For the present restoration a grant of £764,000, part of the Government's £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund, was received together with funding from Blackpool Council, taking the total to £1.1million. Keith Langton, project manager, said: 'I thought Buckingham Palace had the wow factor - which obviously it absolutely did, but working here at The Blackpool Tower Ballroom

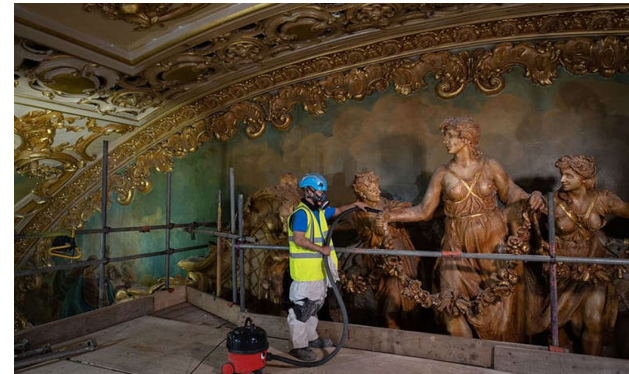
has literally blown me away. This really is something else.

'It is a project I will never forget – and perhaps even a project for me to retire on. 'Everyone wants to end their career on a high – and I don't think I could get a better high than working at the Ballroom. 'It has been an absolute pleasure and honour!'

He has, however, warned of the desperate need to recruit more young craftspeople into what he describes as a 'rare trade.' He added: 'We are just not seeing enough young people coming through. 'Fibrous plastering – the key trade being used on the refurbishment - is becoming a rare trade and we just cannot allow this to happen. 'Without people being skilled in this way, buildings like this would be forced to close. It is essential more young people take up careers in this sector.

This the longest period of time in its history the ballroom has been closed, with the exception of the fire in 1956/7.

Tamsin Cooke, Heritage at Risk Projects Officer at Historic England, said: 'It really is incredible to see the work which has gone on here – which is exactly as it would have been carried out when the ballroom was built all those years



ago, those traditional methods are still being used today. 'This is an extremely rare and precious building. Only one in 40 Listed Buildings are given Grade 1 Listed status. 'Blackpool is a real icon of British seaside. And the ballroom is a real jewel in Blackpool's crown!

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic the ballroom was closed for over 12 months. Just before the end of lockdown Kenny Mew, General Manager of The Blackpool Tower, said 'The works which have been carried out really are something very special. This is a once in a lifetime project that I feel incredibly fortunate to have been involved in.

'We cannot wait to reopen our doors and invite the public to experience the splendour of The Blackpool Tower Ballroom first hand, whether they are taking to the dance floor, enjoying afternoon tea or simply taking in the incredible surroundings. Strictly Come Dancing will be back with a bang this winter, and is expected to return to Blackpool as part of its 13-show run.



*Grahame Baldwin, Archivist*