

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1991
THE REGISTERED BUILDINGS (GENERAL) REGULATIONS 1991

To: Department of Tourism and Leisure, Sea Terminal, Douglas.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that at a meeting held on the 31st January 2002, the PLANNING COMMITTEE of the Department of Local Government and the Environment, in pursuance of its powers under the above Acts and Regulations REGISTERED

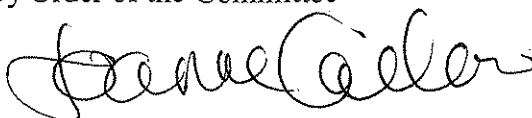
The Gaiety Theatre
Harris Promenade, Douglas

as represented by the buildings shown outlined in red on the plan hereto attached, in the PROTECTED BUILDINGS REGISTER by reason of its special architectural and historic interest.

THE EFFECT OF THIS REGISTRATION IS IMMEDIATE and prohibits the alteration or demolition of the structure or appearance of any part of the building except in compliance with an obligation imposed by or under any statutory provision or with the prior written consent of the Planning Committee.

Dated this 24th day of September 2002

By Order of the Committee



J Callow
Secretary, Planning Committee.

1st Floor, Murray House,
Mount Havelock,
Douglas,
IM1 2SF.

NOTE :

Rights to request de-registration of the building are provided under the Registered Building Regulations and in summary are that:

Applications in writing for the de-registration of the building may be made by the owners or occupier of, any other person having an interest in the building, within a period of 28 days of service of this notice. Such application should be sent to the Secretary, Planning Committee, 1st Floor, Murray House, Mount Havelock, Douglas, IM1 2SF.

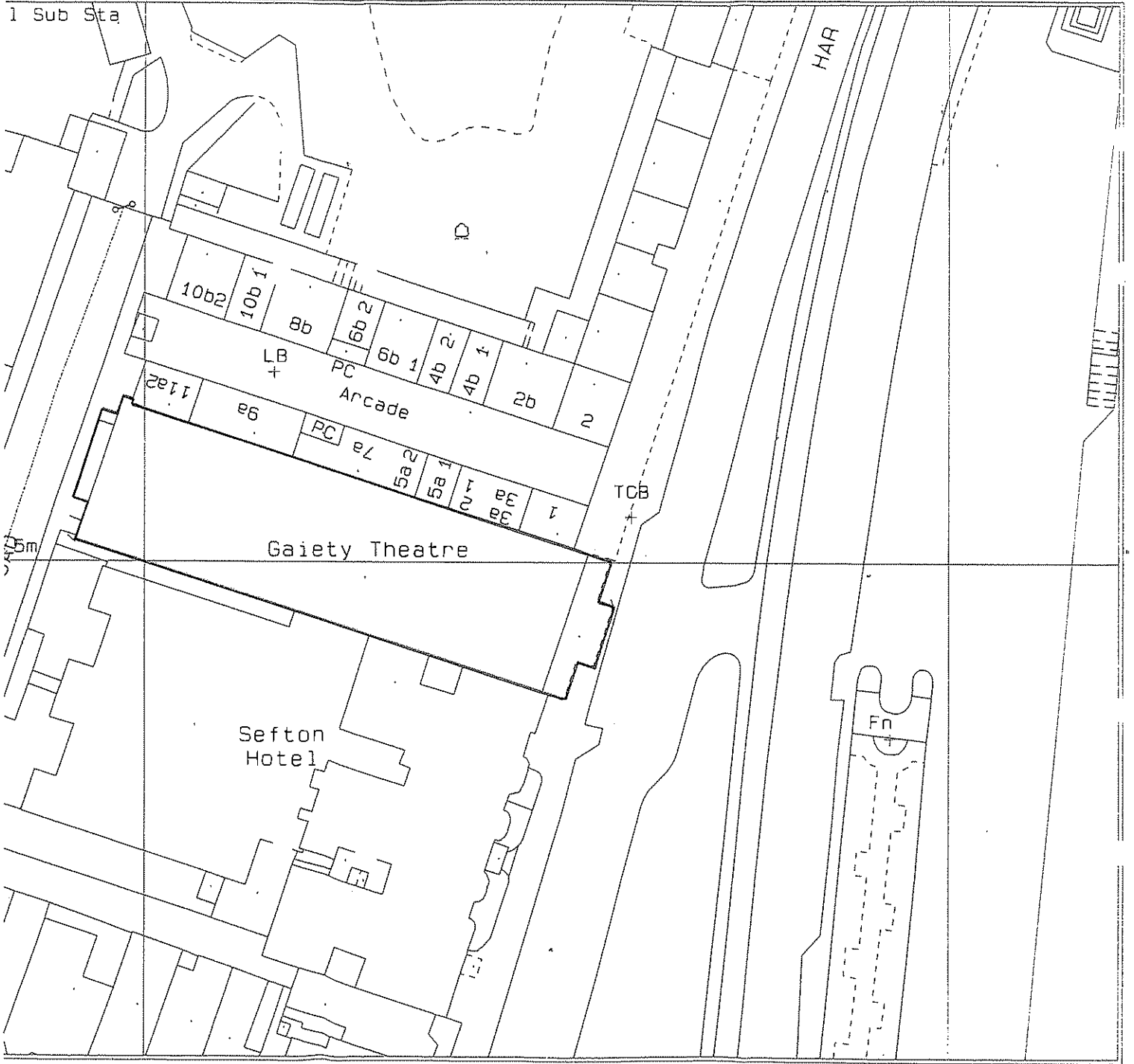
In the event that de-registration is not requested by any party within the 28 day period described above, then de-registration may not be requested within a period of 3 years.


c.c.:- Town Clerk, Douglas Corporation, Town Hall, Ridgeway Street, Douglas
Director, Manx Museum and National Trust, Kingswood Grove, Douglas
Advisory Council on Planning & the Environment, 52 Alberta Drive, Onchan
Mr Mervin Russell Stokes, Gaiety Theatre, Harris Promenade, Douglas

Scale 1:500

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1 Sub Sta



jurisdiction Douglas Corporation	code DU/A/B/C
location 38277609	
ownership	
origin	

description

The Gaiety Theatre, Marina Road, Douglas.

The cement rendered masonry structure is the equivalent of three or four storeys in height, terraced between the Sefton Hotel and the Marina Arcade. The facade (there being really no other "sides") can perhaps best be described as "burlesque architecture" in that the "skin deep" decoration has been applied to the surface of the building to stimulate the imagination of would-be customers and the massing of the structure serves to invite them in rather than to indicate what is happening inside. Thus the overall impression is of two rather "Moorish" commissionaires (/3 storeys high) holding an undulating blanket between them for you to pass beneath on a journey to the light hearted. It would not be possible to convey "charm" if this building were described in purely architectural terms, for it has no such pretensions. It is well named.

No interior inspection has been made

recommendation

The Gaiety Theatre is perhaps the best example of this type of building (or for that matter any entertainment structure) on the island. Based on experience elsewhere it would seem reasonable to assume that the building is economically vulnerable. Its position however is ideal and that, combined with its "appeal" should warrant some steps to be taken to ensure that if there were to be a reduction in the number of entertainment "houses" in Douglas, then the Gaiety should be the last to go. The suggestion is made in these terms because the financial consequences of enforcing the preservation of a building of this type might be punitive.

GAIETY THEATRE, DOUGLAS.

For some time now it has been the intention that we should take forward the Registration of The Gaiety Theatre. The building has unquestionable merit in terms of its potential for Registration and attached hereto is a summary of notes extracted from the recent publication: *A Full Circle* by Roy McMillan. This volume marks the Centenary of the building in the form that we now know it.

The building is judged worthy of Registration on the following grounds:-

- 1. Architectural interest and Aesthetic quality;**
- 2. Historic interest and the important part that the building has played in the development of live Theatre in the Island;**
- 3. Association with the renowned Theatre designer of the time – Frank Matcham: the building is now one of the best-preserved examples of his work anywhere.**

23rd July 2001

History of The Gaiety Theatre and Opera House, Douglas, Isle of Man

- 1971 – Isle of Man Government decided to buy the theatre. It was one of the first theatres in the British Isles to be rescued by a public authority in this way.
- 1984 – Mervin Stokes became manager of the theatre and set about completing restoration.
- Dr. David Wilmore was the consultant on the restoration.
- *“Only a combination of the amateur theatre companies on the Island, the Manx Government, the first restoration by Victor Glasstone and the creation of The Friends of The Gaiety that allowed its continued existence.”*
- The different entrances and exits were used to separate different classes.
- *“There is a computerised sound and lighting system, yet beneath the stage are wooden paddles and traps making up one of the most complete examples of Victorian machinery in the world.”*
- Has been used as a cinema and iced-over for one-off shows in the past.
- Built mainly to satisfy the mass visitors’ need for entertainment in competition with other theatres and dance halls in such cities as London, Manchester, Blackpool and Glasgow. Theatre in its Victorian form was booming.
- Frank Matcham was the Theatre Designer.
- In the Gaiety Theatre the air vent is above a glass light known as a sun-burner. The intense heat causes the air nearest it to rise and allows fresher air to enter. This was due to the fact that the theatre sat 2000 people and has permitted smoking in need of expelling.
- The Gaiety was the new theatre around the corner from its rival “The Grand” which was bought twenty years later by The Palace and Derby Castle along with other properties for some £205,000.
- Transition to Gaiety wasn’t smooth and Broadbent sold it in 1898.
- Frank Matcham in 1899 conducted negotiations and he presented plans to Douglas Corporation in March. It was approved at this time, yet no work was done on the site until the last summer season of the century.
- Matcham made the Gaiety light, playful and refreshing as well as *“sufficiently grandiose to appeal to the upper end of the market. Visually rewarding and*

perfectly designed to accommodate the masses” and “provide them with a temple of illusory.”

- *“The Pavilion was constructed on the Belfast Roof Principle. This involved hoops of iron forming the basic barrel-vault shape of the building’s skin – effectively a sturdy Nissen hut. Each main beam was comprised of three metal plates blocked out for strength and stability with laminated wood, which followed the curve of the beam rather like a ship’s hull.”* Two metal rings either side of the middle of each beam suggested acrobatics. Dressing rooms either side of stage, and the Gallery ran all the way around, this and sparse seating gave impression of large Methodist Hall.
- From the outside the Pavilion did not look particularly appealing – ruabon brick and sandstone decoration.
- When the building work began the stage was extended by forty-two feet, which lead to a reduction in seating capacity which Matcham compensated for by enlarging the circle and building the gallery. A third level was also added.
- Under-stage machinery was put in place by the firm J.L. Killip and Collister of Tynwald St, Douglas. It was operated by manpower and a collection of winches and windlasses, counterweights and ropes.
- The basic design for The Gaiety Theatre was a century old by the time it was built.
- Italian Renaissance is the general feel, with a Baroque ceiling and Elizabethan strap work under the circle.
- Monday 16th July 1900 – Opening night, with the opening play being “The Telephone Girl”.
- *“The Gaiety was recognised as a fine example of its kind, and a first-class addition to the Palace and Derby Castle Company’s stock. The Stage was big enough to accommodate opera, and all the spectacular scenery that went with it.”*
- 50s - Serious problems.
60s - Evident action and overhaul were necessary.
70s - Evidence of revival.
90s - Alive and in rude health
- After the Second World War film took over the building for the next twenty years. Not a great success.

- The 50s saw scandal and decay, firstly in "Soldiers in Skirts" and the 80s showed "Steaming" containing nudity.
- With the arrival of the Second World War a long, slow decline began. Film was kept on at The Gaiety but lack of maintenance led to further dilapidation, and in 1957 Douglas Corporation attempted to lease the building and wanted to encourage live theatre. They decided not to renovate the building and it was seen simply as a building which could house people and make money.
- The Gaiety came within one signature of being demolished, until it was declared as a "Public service."
- In 1971 Tynwald approved the purchase from The Palace and Derby Castle Company of The Gaiety Theatre for £41,000 and granted permission for a further £9,000 to be spent on essential repairs.
- 1976 – Mannin Entertainments freed themselves from the contract when it became clear that the cost of maintenance would be astronomical and out of reach of the minor profits the theatre could generate. Government then had to run the theatre.
- Dawn Daly, early 70s remembers first clean-up of theatre. Dress circle bar, toilets, stage etc all needed a complete re-vamp. Restoration however rather than re-build.
- Victor Glasstone, an architect, theatre consultant and historian was chosen expert to consult. He asserted that everything should be done to put Gaiety back as closely as possible to original scheme of decoration.
- John Betjeman described theatre as finest outside London.
- Much restoration done between 1900–1970. Gaiety left to its own devices from 1978-1990.
- Friends of The Gaiety were established in 1978, with the intention of attracting a larger audience – coaches around the Island, radio slot, shows etc. A Sub Committee formed in 1990 with the aim to restore fabric restoration works and these restorations went ahead without the theatre having to shut down. Monies - £3000 from Friends of The Gaiety and through a fund-raising restoration document from the Isle of Man Bank.
- Original backdrop, amphitheatre, seating, sun-burner and ceiling were restored to original conditions.
- 1993 – The exterior of the building received most of its substantial work. Canopy removed. All work on façade paid by Manx Government and they provided

capital funds for major projects too, and an annual subsidy is provided to cover maintenance of building.

- The total number of people going to The Gaiety each year during the restoration to see a show, averaged over 50,000.
- 1994 – Canopy completed with reinstatement of four large canopy lamps and two hanging lanterns.
- Mechanisms underneath the stage completely recreated, including the Corsican Trap.
- 1995 – Gallery slips and stalls papered. New emergency lighting installed. The frieze at the rear of the dress circle was also re-structured.
- 1996 – Quiet year, coffee kiosk behind dress area was removed and replaced with kiosk designed from pictures of other Matcham bars.
- 1985 – “Manx Last Night of the Proms” first introduced. Generated a substantial sum for the restoration.
- Early 1996 sound reinforcement system installed.
- 1997 Upgrading of the fire-alarm system.
- Stage entirely reboarded.
- 1998 – Disastrous year. Wet weather lead to water seeping into the left side of the auditorium. The damp removed all the paper from the amphitheatre level through the box corridor down as far as the lower part of the stalls. The government paid for repairs to cladding and supports and insurance covered other damage.
- 1999 – Government re-opened the bar, which had previously been used as a boardroom.
- Manager reintroduced barriers, which had previously been used to separate different classes. Yet these seem to be the only things reinstated which encourage a separate class system as changes have yet to be reinstated.
- Gaiety is one of the finest examples of what theatre-going in the Victorian age would have been like.



