

# The Granville Theatre, Fulham

KEITH WHITEHOUSE

THE GRANVILLE Theatre of Varieties, on the 30th September 1971, resounded again to a mighty roar, not of an enthusiastic audience, but the hammerings of demolition men.

With no prior warning, planning permission was granted for demolition and redevelopment of this famous old music-hall, without consultation of local amenity societies or the Historic Building Division, Greater London Council. Nor was provision made, for the removal and preservation of the internal decoration. The building was not scheduled for preservation as of architectural or historic interest and the reason why has never been satisfactorily explained.

When the Fulham and Hammersmith Historical Society realised what was happening and decided to conduct an eleventh hour preservation campaign, a demolition team were already poised to move in. The Department of the Environment was asked to intervene and spot-list the building, but they chose to consider the appeal at length. As a result, a beautiful theatre, the auditorium lavishly decorated with Eburite faience, an egg-shell glazed material like majolica, and several large allegorical paintings (see photo), has been lost to enthusiasts of the music-hall and lovers of beautiful buildings.

Built in 1898 by Dan Leno, the music-hall star, he was so astounded by the beauty of the small intimate auditorium, that he declared it "the drawing-room music theatre." It was considered by his contemporaries one of the wonderful creations of the Victorian age.

A mature example of Frank Matcham's work, the creator of the London Coliseum amongst many other theatres, the Eburite faience covered the tiers in green and yellow in classical design with mythological heads; the proscenium was decorated mainly in brown and white surmounted by two cherubs holding the word "MUSIC"; the beautiful domed ceiling, allegorical paintings and the tiled walls in many designs and colours—it is not possible to describe its beauty. The Eburite was the work of Alfred Whitehead of Leeds who had combined with the Campbell Tile Company. An unusual feature was a cantilever girder.

Perhaps it is appropriate that the site of this theatre of varieties, erected on the old green of the village of Walham Green (now Fulham Broadway), had been a centre of recreation for hundreds of years.

## Brief History

For 6d. upwards, stars such as Leno, Marie Lloyd, George Robey and Little Tich could be seen. The 1914-18 war brought about free concerts for wounded soldiers and after the war variety alternated with straight drama. Closed for a while in 1926 for extensive alteration, it was again closed in 1939 and later reopened, reverting to variety. Once again, it closed for a short while in 1945 but reopened for a season of Grand Guignol, the decor of the theatre contributing to the atmosphere.

Bernard Delfont bought the theatre in 1947 but the expected resurgence of variety after the war never blossomed and the Granville, like so many other theatres, appeared not to have a future. However, in 1955 it became a television studio and enjoyed 15 years of broadcasting under many guises and the making of commercial films. Popular T.V. shows



Interior of the theatre

(Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum)

were broadcast live, such as "Opportunity Knocks," and up to the very end it was used for making short industrial films.

The application for redevelopment is shrouded in mystery. Even after planning permission had been granted, the period preceding demolition was kept very quiet.

The Office of Architecture and Development at Hammersmith replied, to a request for preservation, that "the building—though historically of some interest—is of less quality than is required for the imposition of a Preservation Order" and "to fall short of the required standard for preservation." However, the Chairman of the G.L.C. Historical Buildings Board has written to the Fulham and Hammersmith Historical Society stating the Board's concern for the loss of this theatre: "undoubtedly a building of special architectural and historic interest and an example of the mature work of a leading Victorian theatre architect."

John Betjeman had visited the Granville many times, and on his most recent visit declared what

a shame it would be if ever pulled down, unaware that his words would soon be proven true.

Few theatres, even in the West End, can boast such a wealth of variety as billed at the Granville, with a host of famous stars from variety to straight drama. With its interior decoration, its loss is a tragedy to those who believed that the 70's had opened up a new era in the meaning of conservation.

Another theatre in Hammersmith, awaiting demolition, is the Lyric, although in this case the interior, another example of Matcham's work, may be removed and re-erected elsewhere at a later date.

The demolition of these two theatres, soon to be followed by the Putney Hippodrome, will have truly rung down the curtain of the music-hall in West London.

Following this scandalous demolition, the G.L.C. Historic Buildings Board is to recommend to the Secretary of State for the Environment "the importance of ensuring that all important theatres of this type and date are safeguarded by inclusion in the statutory list."

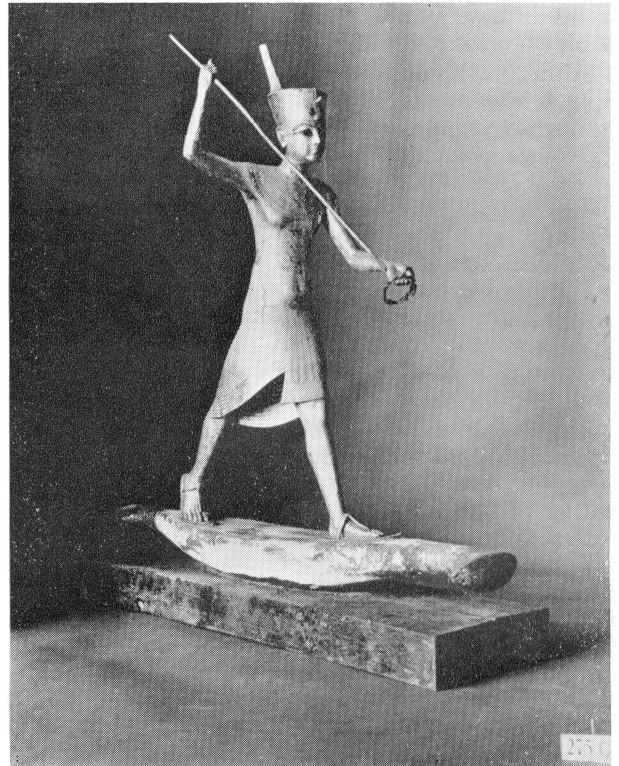
## Tutankhamun Exhibition

THE FORTHCOMING Tutankhamun exhibition which is to be 'the most splendid in Europe,' will open on the 29th March, 1972, and will continue for at least six months. The priceless treasures from Tutankhamun's tomb have only been loaned out on exhibition three times before—to the U.S.A., Japan and in 1967, France. Those enthusiasts who made a special journey to see the Paris exhibition, will be interested to know that of the 50 "choicest objects" destined for the British Museum, only 29 were shown in France.

The admission charge will be 50p for adults and 25p for bonafide students, school parties, children under twelve accompanied by an adult, and old age pensioners. To allow the maximum number of visitors the chance to see the treasures, the exhibition will remain open six and a half days a week, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily including Saturdays and mid-day to 6 p.m. on Sundays.

As between 1½ and 1½ million people are expected to visit it, special steps are being taken to control and keep interested the waiting crowds—the exhibition will only hold 1,000 people and it is envisaged that the average time spent looking at the exhibits will be an hour. A catalogue containing 16 plates in colour and 40,000 words will be on sale for 75p; there will also be a checklist available for 10p. Because of the crowds it is only going to be possible to arrange special visits for the British Museum Society and two other societies.

After deducting exhibition expenses the sponsors, namely the British Museum, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*, will give the proceeds to the U.N.E.S.C.O. administered fund to save the temples on the island of Philae, which are to be removed to higher ground owing to the ever changing level of the Nile.



The King harpooning from his boat (height 29½ ins.)  
(Photo: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum)