

# I

## THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE THEATRES ROYAL, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

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NEWCASTLE HAS enjoyed a purpose-built theatre for more than two hundred and thirty years, first in the Bigg Market theatre from 1748, then in the two theatres royal, in Mosley Street from 1788 and from 1837 to the present day in Grey Street.<sup>1</sup> Since both these patent theatres were built in periods of expansion as part of programmes of modernization, it is tempting to think of them as emblems of affluence and success. Indeed, contemporary accounts of Newcastle, like Mackenzie's *Descriptive and Historical Account* (1827) or Thomas Oliver's *New Picture of Newcastle* (1831), encourage the belief that the theatre of the time was the thriving resort of the fashionable. Harder facts might also seem to suggest a success story. In order to acquire the Mosley Street theatre to make way for the development that became Grey Street Richard Grainger had to agree to erect a new and grander theatre. The old theatre had been built at a cost of around £6,500.<sup>2</sup> In 1836 it was valued at almost £10,300. Grainger paid over in compensation the Grey Street theatre and a sum approaching £700.<sup>3</sup> The proprietors' ability to command such a bargain had more to do with the prime site of their theatre relative to Grainger's plans, however, than it had to do with the Theatre's viability. Only eight years earlier the proprietors had seriously considered selling out because the Theatre had become such an uneconomic property.<sup>4</sup> And it was not long before the new theatre brought with it difficulties that made it almost as problematic as Mosley Street had been. The fact is that the theatre in Newcastle went into a period of decline towards the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century, a decline that even the attraction of a splendid new theatre could do no more than temporarily arrest. This paper will chart the birth of the two patent theatres and their life during this period of decline. Since the records for Newcastle theatre are unusually full, it is possible to give a detailed picture.

The first Theatre Royal formed an important part of "the first big scheme of deliberate town-planning, in the middle eighties". Its position at the heart of the redevelopment contributed to its early success. One of the most urgent needs of growing Newcastle was a convenient North-South and East-West route through the city. The main North-South road, Pilgrim Street, petered out short of the river, and the East-West route was even less well-defined. The new development did not solve all the difficulties, especially for those wishing to travel across the city, but it did mark a major advance. The theatre stood at its centre, a symbol of Newcastle's economic strength and taste. First Mosley Street and then Dean Street provided better access: both were broad modern streets flagged on both sides for pedestrians, and the theatre

was built at their junction, on the north side of Mosley Street, at the heart of the central business district of its day. To its east along Mosley Street a new Post Office was opened in 1789; to its north was the Flesh Market, and to its west it was separated by Drury Lane from a row of properties which included the Central News Room (entered via Drury Lane). By 1801 two of the Banks had moved their premises to Mosley Street, one to the opposite corner of Drury Lane. To contemporaries the area around the theatre appeared both grand and fashionable. In the words of one contemporary, the shops were “of the attractively appointed type with display windows . . . generally considered by visitors to be excellent as any outside London”.<sup>5</sup>

The first intimation that a new theatre might be included in the Mosley Street plans came with the announcement of a meeting to be held on 11 December 1784. The meeting estimated that capital of £2,000 would be required to erect a theatre.<sup>6</sup> The estimate was based on the cost of the new Manchester theatre nine years earlier which had been managed in 1781 and 1782 by the managers of the Bigg Market theatre, Austin and Whitlock, who were to become the first managers of Mosley Street.<sup>7</sup> There appears to have been considerable enthusiasm for the venture because within a month of the initial meeting subscriptions amounting to £1,125 had been promised.<sup>8</sup> Six months later (11 July) the site and plans were agreed.<sup>9</sup> By the time that the first share subscriptions were paid on 6 August 1785 it had become clear that the theatre would require a good deal more than £2,000. The land alone was to cost almost £1,000 and in keeping with the new development no expense was to be spared on the shell or its fittings. 130 shares were issued at £25 each, but costs continued to escalate. By the spring of 1787 it became necessary to ask each subscriber for an additional £5 per share.<sup>10</sup> The subscribers were predominantly merchants and gentry. They had the strong support of the Corporation. Such backing is not surprising given the place of the theatre in the new development and the fact that half the members of the Corporation of 1788 were also subscribers. The Corporation itself not only sold part of the land for the theatre to the proprietors but became the second largest shareholder with eight shares.<sup>11</sup> Several leading figures in the Corporation were also prominent in the affairs of the theatre. The Committee of Proprietors which oversaw the building and financing was chaired by James Rudman, Mayor in 1784, whilst the eventual patentee was John Erasmus Blackett, thrice Mayor (1772, 1780 and 1790). Perhaps the most significant figure is Nathaniel Clayton who acted as Treasurer to the Proprietors. As indefatigable Town Clerk he had prodded forward the redevelopment in general, in co-operation with the architect and builder David Stephenson who was engaged to design the theatre.

The expenses incurred by the proprietors in the building of the theatre continued to exceed their estimates. In September 1788 it became necessary to borrow £2,500 to meet the final cost of £6,474.7.6.<sup>12</sup> The financial risk that they ran is obvious and was to prove a difficult burden in the years that followed; but carried forward by their sense of playing their part in the new plans, they were more anxious at this stage about securing Letters Patent for the theatre. The first attempt to win a licence was made through the Corporation in 1786 when the Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council petitioned the House of Commons for a Bill to cover widening and cleansing the streets and control over traffic within the city. Included in the petition was a

request for Letters Patent. The petition was introduced 3 March and referred to a committee on which sat Sir Matthew Ridley, M.P. for Newcastle and a subscriber to the theatre. David Stephenson and Nathaniel Clayton travelled to London to appear before the committee. When Sir Matthew reported to the House on 6 April 1786 all mention of the theatre had been dropped.<sup>13</sup> It was probably felt that the inclusion of a petition for Letters Patent might retard the progress of the Bill, or perhaps it was hoped that the petition would have a stronger chance once the theatre was completed. Whatever the case, when they petitioned again the proprietors were worried that a licence might not be granted in time for the opening of the theatre. There was even a fear that the petition might be unsuccessful. One of the proprietors, a Newcastle lawyer, Ralph Heron, went to London to attend to the interests of the subscribers. He had the help of two M.P.s, Sir Matthew White Ridley and John Brandling, another fellow subscriber. They introduced the petition on 1 March 1787 and were nominated to the committee which began to sit the next day. Ralph Heron kept the Committee of Proprietors informed of the progress, but he warned them, too, of possible difficulties ahead. He was anxious that though "we have nothing to fear for the Bill in the Commons . . . our Danger is from the Chancellor of the Bench of Bishops".<sup>14</sup> In the event the Lords proved no barrier; but it is not surprising that the proprietors might have suffered some misgivings. Not only was Heron on the spot and well able to judge the temperature of the proceedings but the case of the Birmingham theatre probably loomed large in their minds, if only because David Stephenson had had them purchase plans for the Birmingham theatre as an aid to his designs for Newcastle.<sup>15</sup> Built in 1774 the Birmingham theatre had been without a patent for thirteen years (and was not to receive parliamentary blessing until 1807) despite the support of local magistrates. In this case the Commons had proved a major obstacle. Reservations were expressed about the theatre in manufacturing towns.<sup>16</sup> Although the Newcastle proprietors feared the Lords rather than Commons, the Birmingham experience was everything but reassuring. The petitioners and their M.P.s were careful to emphasize the respectability of their venture, that "a great number of people of fortune and consequence reside [in Newcastle] and in the neighbourhood; the principal part of whom have by voluntary subscription at great expense erected buildings".<sup>17</sup> Performances would no doubt have gone ahead without a patent, just as they had at the Big Market theatre, but the Letters Patent, granted 3 July 1787,<sup>18</sup> put a seal of approval on both the theatre and the new streets. If the reception by the local press was rather cool, the first managers harnessed a good deal of civic pride when they announced themselves for their first season in the theatre as "His Majesty's Servants".

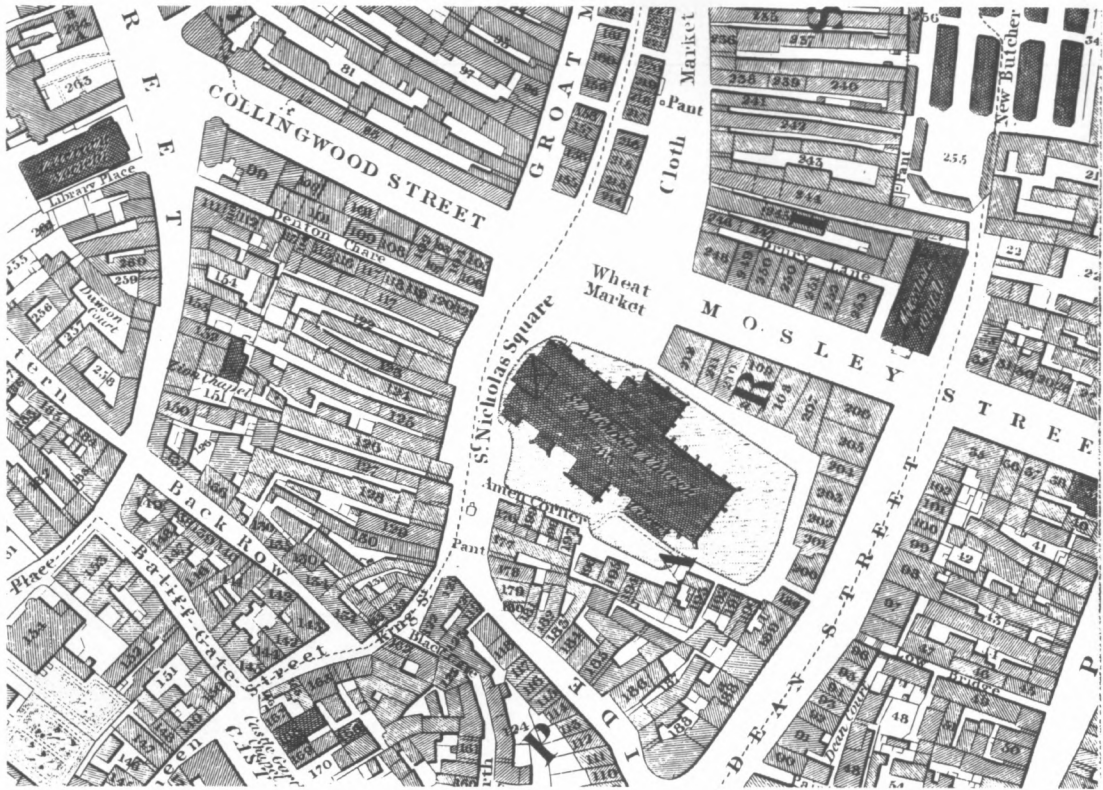
No plans for the theatre have survived but the shape of its ground plan is shown in Thomas Oliver's 1830 map of Newcastle and again in his 1834 plan to illustrate the line of the projected street (later Grey Street) for which the theatre was demolished in 1836 (plate Ia).<sup>19</sup> In the demolition the west and south walls were left standing.<sup>20</sup> Incorporated into new buildings, they are still *in situ* in Drury Lane. Their measurements together with the measurements given by Elias Mackenzie in 1827 allow us to be fairly accurate about the theatre's dimensions. Stephenson stayed close to his Birmingham model. The Mosley Street theatre's front was 54 feet wide and it was 120 feet deep on its east side. 64 feet back on the west side, down Drury Lane, on

a level with the front of the stage, the building projected west 24 feet. The west wall of this extension was 48 feet deep.<sup>21</sup>

Four independent views of the theatre show, in the words of a contemporary, "a neat brick edifice, the front of which was ornamented with a piazza adorned with festoons and dramatic emblems" (plate Ib).<sup>22</sup> The view in Mackenzie gives some impression of the sloping ground on which the theatre was built. Anyone who cares to inspect the remaining walls on Drury Lane will find that they confirm the positions of the door and windows on the west wall, facing on to Drury Lane, in Mackenzie's prospect. The south wall of the extension has been so much cut into and altered, however, that it tells us less. But it does show that access to the extension was by a door in the south wall where it meets the main west wall. Within the extension was the necessary accommodation for the manager and players.

Access to the various parts of the auditorium was gained by separate doors at different points of the building. Those taking seats in the boxes had the privilege of entering via the main door on Mosley Street, whilst the pit and gallery were approached by doors altogether less imposing, the one at the rear of the theatre, the other opposite the Post Office on the east side. By today's standards the capacity of Mosley Street might seem large for a repertory theatre in a provincial city, but by contemporary standards it was of only moderate size. The auditorium could hold 1,350: 350 in the boxes which occupied the first and both sides of the second level of seating above the pit, 200 in the pit and 800 in the gallery which took up the whole of the third and top tier of accommodation and the front of the second. At normal prices of 3/- boxes, 2/- pit and 1/- gallery the takings for a full house were in theory £112.10s, but it was possible to pack the audience in to such an extent that as much as £130 could be realized. In practice the takings were likely to be rather less even for a packed house because the proprietors enjoyed a free ticket to any part of the theatre. In normal circumstances no more than 10 proprietors were likely to be present on any one night, most of whom would use the proprietors' box.<sup>23</sup> Once inside the theatre those heading for the pit would take their tickets and follow the stairs and passages to two doors, one on either side of the stage at pit level; and those bound for the gallery would make their way up a narrow staircase, past two barriers designed to limit their flow. At the first of these barriers, half-way up the stairs, they took a ticket which they then produced at the second barrier, at the top of the stairs. The more fortunate who enjoyed the comfort of the boxes found themselves on entry to the theatre in a vestibule opening off which was an oval box lobby with a room for attendants on the right and on the left the pay-box and stairs to the upper boxes.<sup>24</sup> There was a distinct contrast between the comfort of the access to the boxes and the relative discomfort of entry to the gallery (and to a lesser extent the pit). And there was a similar contrast between the safety of the boxes and gallery in the case of an emergency, as was to be made painfully clear when a very minor fire provoked disastrous panic in 1823. The contrast reflects a class distinction that was to play an important part in the theatre's problems.

The Mosley Street theatre was, then, well placed to be a success. It could draw on an established pattern of theatre-going, in Austin and Whitlock it had managers with experience of Newcastle management, and it was centrally located in the city's



a) The Theatre on Oliver's map of 1834.



b) *The Theatric Tourist*, 1804, reprinted in Oswald.

redevelopment. The first season's average takings of about £65 per night were significantly higher than the £36 average in the last three years of the Bigg Market theatre,<sup>25</sup> though since there is no record of the relative running costs of the two venues it is impossible to tell how well the increase compensates for what must have been greater overheads. When Stephen Kemble assumed the mantle of manager in 1791 there began a period of greater prosperity. Although he was not the first Kemble to serve the Newcastle theatre,<sup>26</sup> the city was flattered to have a Kemble as manager. Kemble in turn provided good stock companies, more visits from London performers (including John Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons), and an altogether fashionable air. If he had occasional problems, if there was some falling off towards the end of his management, by his departure in 1806 he had nevertheless provided a solid foundation for his successor William McCready Snr.<sup>27</sup> One near contemporary claimed that McCready's companies played to an "overflowing" theatre.<sup>28</sup> This is no doubt an exaggeration; but it does seem that in general he played to good average houses despite enormous financial difficulties. McCready reigned until 1818. It was a reign both successful and unstable.

The success (and incipient difficulties) of the theatre in its first thirty years are mirrored in the history of alterations to the interior of the theatre and its decorations during that period. The alterations point especially to the energy and drive of Kemble's management and to the commitment of the proprietors to keeping the theatre fashionable and abreast of developments in the contemporary London theatre. Perhaps the most interesting information about the interior has to do with changes to its stage. The stage itself was, like its model in Birmingham, 48 feet deep from its front to the standing place for scenes at the rear. Off its west side projected the part of the building which housed the green room, the dressing rooms and so on. Behind the stage were a common staircase, a wardrobe, a stage-keeper's room and a lumber place.<sup>29</sup> In 1792 Kemble requested a number of alterations. Room for scenery storage was created adjoining the green room in the extension. It was presumably intended to relieve some of the pressure on space at the back of the stage, but it proved inadequate for Kemble's purposes. By 1799 he was pushing for a deeper stage. The proprietors investigated the possibility of purchasing land to the rear of the theatre with a view to extending the building. In the event no extension took place, but some of the rooms behind the stage were removed to make a recess at the rear of the stage into which a window was let.<sup>30</sup> According to Mackenzie, the extra depth allowed more scope for spectacles.<sup>31</sup>

Scenic spectacle requires appropriate machinery. The proprietors had installed a conventional groove system for flats and wings. Given their lavish expenditure on building and equipping the theatre, it is odd that this stage machinery should have been inadequate. But so it seems to have been, at least for Kemble's purposes, for as part of the alterations which he requested permission from the proprietors to undertake in 1792, the machinery was improved "so as to have [the scenes] moveable forwards and backwards as occasions may require".<sup>32</sup> This must have been a reasonably large-scale improvement for Kemble to have raised it with the proprietors. Other and smaller developments would have been made from time to time as particular productions demanded. We can catch a glimpse of the groove system at

work in late 1792 (7 December) when Kemble advertised the scenic effects for Act V of *Cymon, or No Magic Like Virtue*: "A tremendous rock which opens and discovers the Black Tower: the whole instantly disappears, and a magnificent palace fills the chasm".

To be appreciated fully the improvements to the stage and its machinery needed an auditorium with good sight lines. There were some initial problems because the seating in the lower boxes was not raked. Ladies wearing hats could obscure the stage for those sitting behind them. It was easy enough in this case to ban hats in this part of the theatre;<sup>33</sup> but this did not solve the difficulties encountered in the boxes next to the stage. In 1790 the seats here had to be raised and the angle of the proscenium was cut. This was the first in a series of evolutionary phases in the development of the proscenium. There were no stage boxes in David Stephenson's design, but shortly after his acceptance as manager Stephen Kemble asked to modify the stage in much the same way that Rich had modified Drury Lane almost a century earlier. Kemble requested that two stage boxes should be created in place of the stage doors with two balcony boxes over them. He likened the proposed boxes to those in the Edinburgh theatre, the management of which he had taken over in 1791. The proprietors agreed initially, but after a delay in executing the work they changed their minds. The alterations were eventually completed by (probably for) the 1804-5 season. The addition of stage boxes had the effect of narrowing and throwing back the stage opening. The stage doors were moved back into the proscenium sides at an angle to the audience. When in 1806 McCready succeeded Kemble, the proprietors were prevailed upon to make further changes, designed this time to widen the stage opening. McCready wanted to see the proscenium sides removed but he had to be content with their angle being further cut.<sup>34</sup> This is how they stayed until the end of his reign in 1818. In the winter of 1818 more extensive alterations took place initiated by the new manager, Vincent De Camp. The stage doors were pushed back into line with the front of the boxes, further widening the proscenium opening (much as McCready had wanted), and an arch was thrown over the front of the stage. The effect was to render the whole proscenium "an exact imitation of that of Covent Garden".<sup>35</sup> As part of the same redesign the depth of the forestage was reduced and the orchestra which was made shallower and wider, was brought nearer to the proscenium.<sup>36</sup> There were to be no further alterations of note to the proscenium.

The gradual evolution of the Mosley Street proscenium is best understood as part of a movement away from a fundamentally Georgian conception of an intimate relationship between the stage and the audience within a theatre in which the actors performed on the forestage. The auditorium at Newcastle as elsewhere comes to be regarded as a vantage point from which to observe the illusionist spectacle presented on stage and less as "a room into which the players come to bring their entertainment to you".<sup>37</sup> The decisive shift from a square to curved auditorium in the 1818 alterations underlines the nature of the changed conception. So does the introduction of gas lighting earlier in the same year, for it lent itself to the gathering demand for illusion on stage. In the judgment of the *Newcastle Courant*, commenting on the first night on which gas lighting was used at Mosley Street, "the instantaneous darkening, and re-illumination of the stage, by a turn of the prompter's key, [had] almost a magic air".<sup>38</sup>

For one commentator at least the 1818 redesign of the interior was long overdue. The *Newcastle Chronicle* felt that “it would be difficult to find an instance of another Theatre which [had] not been new modelled” during the thirty years that the Mosley Street theatre had been open.<sup>39</sup> The fact is that although the proprietors kept faith with their theatre through McCready’s era, they did not have the money to initiate significant changes. For if McCready was able to attract audiences he was nevertheless in severe financial difficulties throughout his tenure of the theatre. In consequence after his first year at Newcastle he was constantly and badly in arrears with his rent and failed to honour the terms of his contract under which he was responsible for the internal decorations (excluding the upholstery) of the theatre and small repairs to its fabric.<sup>40</sup> When he assumed the management in 1806 the theatre had only recently been extensively refurbished. It was not until 1815 that he was to redecorate, and even then only the front of the auditorium ceiling received attention. His fortunes were at their lowest ebb in 1809 and inevitably had an adverse effect on the quality of his management. So much so that in January a group of proprietors complained that amongst other things McCready had appointed a deputy manager, that his company was of an inadequate size and that the scenery was “in a most ruinous and shabby state”. By November McCready was conducting his correspondence with the proprietors from debtor’s prison in Lancaster. His arrears for the Newcastle theatre amounted at this stage to £682.11.0.<sup>41</sup> Despite this, or perhaps because the proprietors thought that the best way to ensure the payment of arrears was to retain McCready, he stayed. It is a remarkable tribute to the success of his management that despite continued sporadic complaints from the proprietors about the adequacy of his company and musicians (and about the physical state of the theatre) within six years he should have reduced the debt to £42; but by the autumn of 1817 it had risen again to £160.8.0. It had become so difficult to extract a regular annual rent from McCready that in his final year as lessee the proprietors insisted that he should pay weekly.<sup>42</sup> It is clear that they had decided that the time had come for a change of manager. Both the face-lift of late 1817, in which John Dobson redesigned the entrances to the theatre and the boxes, and the modernization of the auditorium in 1818 represent an attempt to make a fresh start, despite the proprietors’ poor finances. They had never succeeded in paying off completely the debts that they had incurred in building the theatre, still owing £650 to the Banks in 1817. To help pay for the alterations they had to contribute three guineas each and to borrow a further £400.<sup>43</sup>

The source of McCready’s misfortunes lay largely outside Newcastle. He had overstretched himself in his management of Birmingham and Manchester before bidding for and securing the Newcastle theatre at the very steep rent of £450 p.a.<sup>44</sup> As the *Newcastle Chronicle* put it, the true cause of his difficulties was “his eagerness to monopolize theatrical property”.<sup>45</sup> When the proprietors appointed a fresh manager, Vincent De Camp, it was someone who was theatrically well-connected, being related through marriage to the Kembles,<sup>46</sup> but someone who was to commit himself wholly to Newcastle. In a letter to the proprietors dated 2 June 1818 De Camp promised “to make Newcastle the centre of [his] affections”.<sup>47</sup> The proprietors were exercising understandable caution but their caution brought with it theatrical and managerial inexperience, inexperience which could be ill-afforded at the still high rent of £425 p.a.<sup>48</sup>



Although in the expert hands of Kemble and McCready the Mosley Street theatre could be made viable, it was not an easy theatre to manage, at least if we believe Kemble. When in early 1804 he found himself in dispute with the proprietors about a fair rent for a further lease of three years, he defended his offer of £300 p.a. by contrasting the cost of managing the Newcastle theatre with that of other provincial theatres. Edinburgh, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham was each, he claimed, a better economic proposition, whether because it was larger, because its admission prices were higher, or because it could open for more nights. The receipts for one year of either Birmingham or Liverpool would exceed, he estimated, the combined receipts of any three years at Mosley Street.<sup>49</sup> He might well have been exaggerating, but it is true that the proprietors' steadfast opposition to playing more than three days in a normal week and to any rise in prices, even for the occasional visits of London stars, did pose problems. A London star might be paid as much as £50 per night with a free benefit, leaving very little room for error, especially when the proprietors' right to free entry was taken into account. It was a right that worried succeeding managers; but seen from the proprietors' point-of-view the free access was "all they . . . ever received for their share".<sup>50</sup> Paying a rent of £250 p.a., even Kemble had the occasional difficulty in Newcastle. In both December 1793 and November 1797 he asked for and was granted a reduction in his rent to compensate for "lapses . . . in the former Season".<sup>51</sup> Later in his tenure he found himself in dispute with the proprietors because he was expected to bear the cost of interior decoration and small repairs on top of his rent. Kemble thought the additional financial burden too great. But he had offset some of the difficulties that came with Mosley Street by managing it as part of a circuit of theatres. The theatre would prove so much more difficult for De Camp at a much greater rent, without the support of a circuit, and against the background of the financial instability that McCready had bequeathed him, even though the proprietors had tried in the refurbishment and alterations of 1817 and 1818 (and with the introduction of gas lighting) to restore its fashionable status. From 1818, under De Camp and his successors, the Theatre Royal went into steady artistic and physical decline.

Although there is no doubt that Kemble's innovative years as manager and McCready's managerial experience were not matched by their successors, it was not uncommon for a patent theatre to experience hard times in the 1820s and 1830s. Newcastle did not escape the difficulties felt by the legitimate theatre in general. Competing entertainments, for example, became an increasing problem. Several venues in Newcastle, including the old theatre in the Bigg Market, actively promoted occasional entertainments, but they mainly did so out of season. The major threat came from the circuses, music hall and minor theatre, all of which cut into the theatre's audience. Competition from the circus was felt to be a threat to the Theatre Royal as early as 1792 when the proprietors had their attention drawn to the dangers of allowing the Equestrian Circus to compete with the theatre in Race Week.<sup>52</sup> Since the theatre and the Circus had many proprietors in common at that time it was easy enough to safeguard the theatre; but in 1816 the proprietors were less able to defend themselves and had to appeal to the circus's manager, Mr. Mayor, to restrict his performances.<sup>53</sup> In 1824 the New Olympic Circus opened in Blakett Street in

mid-November for a season which overlapped significantly with the theatrical season, despite objections from the proprietors.<sup>54</sup> By January 1830 *The Northern John Bull* reported that “our theatre has for some time been on the wane, and for these last few nights has actually been closed by the establishment of the Circus”.<sup>55</sup> In March 1833 when Cooke’s Equestrian Circus coincided with the theatre’s main season, Sampson Penley was moved to take the abnormal step of attending a meeting of the Committee of the Proprietors to complain of “the difficulty of his situation occasioned by the opening of the Circus which had totally destroyed his best efforts”.<sup>56</sup> The circus was not the only rival to the theatre. Seven months earlier Penley and the proprietors had tried to prevent a group of ex-Theatre Royal actors, headed by Mr. Dale, from presenting rival theatrical entertainment at the Music Hall which Richard Grainger had “handsomely fitted up” in Blakett Street in 1830.<sup>57</sup> The Music Hall was to become an increasing problem: so too was minor theatre. The proprietors frequently attempted to protect themselves against the threat from the minor theatres. In 1826 when Billy Purvis played melodrama from his booth theatre on the Parade Ground after Race Week for “the lads and lasses of Northumberland and Percy Street and the City of Sandgate”, Purvis was, they claimed, in breach of their monopoly.<sup>58</sup> But like his fellow itinerant entertainers Purvis was indomitable. When in 1830 he operated from his booth theatre in Newcastle, he performed *Tom and Jerry*, a firm favourite at the Theatre Royal from Kemble’s time when Purvis had worked there. And, to rub salt into the legitimate theatre’s wounds, he boasted a company almost the size of Penley’s depleted company at Mosley Street.<sup>59</sup> As patent theatre declined, Purvis and the minor theatre flourished, encroaching more and more on the traditional territory of the “respectable” theatre. In 1832, for example, Purvis played some of the circuit (Stockton, Northallerton and Alnwick) that Kemble had once used so successfully. And with equal initiative in 1834 he took over the Whitehaven and Carlisle theatres for a season.<sup>60</sup> In 1835 when Mosley Street was at its weakest he unveiled his Victoria theatre, a remarkably lavish booth theatre, ninety feet long and thirty feet wide, its decorations and drop scene copied from Mosley Street, which according to contemporary reports rivalled the Theatre Royal at half its prices. There was once again an attempt to suppress Purvis; once again it failed.<sup>61</sup>

The rise in these alternative entertainments goes hand in hand with changing audience demands which were affecting theatres nationally. Under Kemble and to a lesser extent McCready the box, pit, and gallery patrons alike enjoyed the same eclectic programmes characteristic of the period. Shakespeare, tight-rope walking, pantomime and scenic display coexisted peacefully. But in the later years at the first Theatre Royal the tastes of the boxes and the gallery began to polarize. It is a familiar story: the respectable box patrons required more respectability and the gallery audience demanded more spectacle and a different form of acting, so much so that the *North-Shields Dramatic Censor* for 29 December 1827 could remark of the Newcastle theatre that if the gallery was full the boxes were almost empty and vice versa.<sup>62</sup> Sometimes the uneasy relationship of the boxes and gallery could erupt into violence. In 1834 at an evening under the patronage of the Gentlemen Subscribers to the Bachelors Ball members of the gallery audience shouted for the Keel Row. Seeing their demands ignored, they threw pieces of stone and iron into the orchestra.<sup>63</sup>

Generally speaking, theatres were keener to meet the gallery's needs than Mosley Street was on this occasion. Galleries grew in size and where this was not possible managers still attempted to devise popular programmes. The changes brought resentment from the box patrons. Local Newcastle critics, who were very much representatives of the respectable, were quick to spot and castigate any tendency in an actor to veer from the path of decency in pursuit of the regard of the gallery. One complained of a performance which "reminded us too much of the melo-dramatic hero of the Surry and Coburg . . . 'splitting the ears of the groundlings' [with] too much of the inexplicable noise and dumb show to please other than a gallery audience".<sup>64</sup> Another was perturbed by the style of Holland, one of the stock company in 1824:

Even in his comic singing he cannot refrain from overstepping the limits of decency. His practice is unceasing of rendering his physiognomy (not the most beautiful at any time) as ugly as he possibly can by contortions and of courting approbation by other vulgar and unseemly actions. . . . In spite of all his faults, Mr Holland is a decided favourite with many of the occupants of the gallery, seldom appearing upon the stage without being greeted by some testimonial of their applause. But these are merely the plaudits of persons who judge of the volume looking upon the frontispiece. The praises of ignorance can be delightful only to the uninformed.<sup>65</sup>

Explicitly and implicitly both these critics defend the traditions of the patent house against incursions from the minor theatres; but it is clear that managers had begun to introduce styles associated with the minor theatre into Mosley Street. Times were changing and managers must change with them. This seems to be the message that lies beneath Montague Penley's choice of a play for his first night as manager of the old Theatre Royal (19 December 1835). He chose John Thomas Haines's *My Poll and My Partner Joe* which had been premiered at the Surrey Theatre earlier that year.

Although the "uninformed" have left no record of how Mosley Street struck them, neither managers nor proprietors could afford to neglect them. In the 1818 alterations care was taken to increase the comfort of the "gods of the gallery". Up to that time the gallery ceiling had been so low that it was not possible to stand upright. In the alterations the ceiling was raised several feet and coved at the back. Several ventilators were incorporated to reduce the heat which built up in that part of the auditorium.<sup>66</sup> There were also improvements to the entrances to the gallery to lessen "the difficulty or danger in passing in or out". The new arrangements still left the entrances and exits far from safe.<sup>67</sup> When in 1823, at a performance of *Tom and Jerry* with an estimated five hundred in the gallery, the gallery audience stampeded in panic believing the theatre to be on fire, 7 people were killed in the crush. After the accident De Camp created extra emergency exits.<sup>68</sup> Pit patrons, too, benefitted from the 1818 redesign. The pit entrances were moved and the old entrances formed into boxes at pit level. These new boxes promised to protect the territory of the pit-goers, "to do away with the practice which has often been complained of, of laying, on extraordinary occasions, part of the pit into boxes".<sup>69</sup> But perhaps the major improvement for the pit audience was the increased space it enjoyed as a result of changes to the orchestra and forestage. By 1804 the pit capacity had increased from 200 to 260 without any additional space. In 1818 the pit held 250 in a larger area. At

the same time the proprietors had to ensure that the box patrons did not feel neglected. In addition to creating the new boxes which brought a considerable increase in capacity, the proprietors tried to protect the privacy of those in the upper boxes by erecting screens to “hide them from the view of the gallery”. The screens were not a success because they interfered with the sight-lines from the gallery (and because they offered cover for prostitutes);<sup>70</sup> but the fact that they were ever thought necessary emphasizes both the class divisions that plagued the theatre and the proprietors’ determination to maintain the Theatre Royal’s respectability. It is perhaps this determination that made the Mosley Street theatre curiously conservative in one noteworthy respect. Whereas the general trend in contemporary theatre was towards increasing the capacity of the pit and the gallery, especially the latter, in the 1818 alterations it is the box accommodation that increases whilst the capacity of the pit and gallery shrinks. The improvement of the gallery in a theatre still oriented towards the respectable boxes expresses well the dilemma that the Mosley Street theatre, along with many others, found itself in.

These general factors do not any more than Chartist activities or economic depression in themselves explain the decline: they are only contributory. Dealing with another contributory factor, Methodism, *The Northern John Bull* pointed out that “if we look back to Mr. McCready’s management we will find that at that time the Methodists were as numerous and more rigid in their morals than they are now, yet that manager had in general overflowing houses”.<sup>71</sup> It is worth adding that at only a little distance, in North Shields, a theatre once part of the same circuit as Newcastle thrived whilst Mosley Street waned.<sup>72</sup> *The Northern John Bull* found the answer to Newcastle theatre’s decline in “the gradual falling off both of the actors and the audience”,<sup>73</sup> but to find the true roots we need to take a step further back, to weak management and lack of vision amongst the proprietors. De Camp represents the first clear case of the falling off of the managers.

De Camp set out with the best of intentions. He produced a season full of variety and attraction, interspersing standard programmes with musical performances, with masquerades, and with fresh scenic spectacles, as well as bringing in London performers in the shape of Farrell, Lucius Junius Booth and Liston. But his initiative was in advance of his economic sense. Whereas Kemble had dealt with his stock companies like a shrewd business-man, De Camp was capable of putting the financial well-being of his actors before his own or the proprietors’. In 1820, for example, after the theatre had been closed for a while as a result of the deaths of the Duke of Kent and George III he allowed his company to take a free benefit,<sup>74</sup> and in 1822 the proprietors advised him that he was permitting his actors to take benefits too frequently.<sup>75</sup> By the end of the 1819–20 season De Camp was already in difficulties. The dramatic critic of *The Newcastle Magazine* complained that the manager had begun to take upon himself too many parts, too indiscriminately, and the playbills of the time bear out a further complaint that having prepared a “splendid melodrama” he had to present it many times to cover, or attempt to cover, the capital outlay.<sup>76</sup> Playing many parts was a form of retrenchment. When in the next season (1820–21) he yielded to the advice of *The Newcastle Magazine* and enlarged his stock company (though even then the company lacked a first tragic lady), he ran into debt.<sup>77</sup> Granted

a second contract for three years at the reduced rent of £350 p.a. in March 1821, by the following November his rent was £315 in arrears.<sup>78</sup> It was agreed in February 1822 that he would pay £15 per week off his arrears, but this only made him less likely to succeed.<sup>79</sup> He was never to recover. In 1824 Mrs De Camp, who was acting as manager in her husband's absence, was prevailed upon by the proprietors "to strengthen the vocal department which is more than usually deficient",<sup>80</sup> a requirement which emphasizes the fall away from the musical offerings of De Camp's first season. His audiences fell away, so much so that on 5 August 1824 there were too few people to open the theatre. De Camp was an accomplished actor with a fine singing voice,<sup>81</sup> and he was alert to changing taste, producing, for example, a series of dramatizations of Scott novels in 1822; but he lacked that capacity to combine acting with management which had brought Stephen Kemble such success at Mosley Street.

To say that the next manager, Samuel Wall Nicholson was to De Camp as the latter had been to McCready should give some idea of the depths of managerial incompetence to which Mosley Street was now sinking. The proprietors were becoming more cautious and less able to land a good manager. Whereas in 1818 they had tried to interest prospective lessees by extensive alterations and redecoration, their only preparation for the 1824 reletting was to recover the seats in the stage boxes and the two adjoining boxes "as cheaply as possible".<sup>82</sup> Set beside the proprietors' instructions in 1815 to cover the box cushions with crimson moreen and fasten them with a rim of brass,<sup>83</sup> this perfunctory refurbishing underlines their waning interest in what was fast becoming a burdensome property. They were now not only in debt to the Banks but had, in 1820, been driven to borrow a further £1,000 from Nathaniel Clayton.<sup>84</sup> It seems that their faith in their lessees was diminishing fast. In 1818 they had voted against asking rent in advance from De Camp, but in December 1822 they had demanded £50 before he could open for the 1822-23 season.<sup>85</sup> Now, justifiably suspicious of their new manager's ability to succeed, they required Nicholson to pay an advance of £100 on his rent of £300 p.a. Nicholson complied, but he inauspiciously sought permission to move his family into the theatre as their home.<sup>86</sup> He did try to make a success of his management, so much so that for three years he kept the theatre on an even keel; but his managerial skills were meagre. He invested in new scenery, but its effect was dissipated, if we are to believe contemporary report, because "the scenes were always joinered disagreeably together". And for all that his actors were not without talent they came under attack for "their want of propriety, their glaring indecency, their listless apathy and general want of attention; one actor was often seen painfully walking about the stage waiting for another; . . . and it was not infrequent to see performers very much intoxicated".<sup>87</sup> The proprietors were understandably anxious about the quality of Nicholson's company. When they renewed his contract for a further three years in 1827 they took steps to ensure some improvement, increasing the rent to £350 with £50 returnable should Nicholson provide a satisfactory company.<sup>88</sup> The money was not returned. The season was a failure, as was the summer season. Nicholson tried to get himself out of his increasing difficulties by importing London stars, but the effect was satiation. According to *The Northern John Bull* "his houses were so thin that he was obliged, time after time, to draw down star after star, until at length the half-priced gods of the Newcastle gallery

became as well familiarized to the first performers of the kingdom, as the frequenters of Drury Lane or Covent Garden".<sup>89</sup> A year later after renewing Nicholson's contract the proprietors considered selling the theatre. No sooner had they decided not to sell than their manager announced that he was unable to pay his rent because of bad houses. By March 1829 his arrears stood at £300 and thanks to another bad season they were still mounting. In the following March Nicholson was threatened with liquidation, owing the proprietors £400. Still owing £380 in June he asked for a further lease and was refused. After one last and unhappy attempt to make Mosley Street pay by bringing Miss D'Ject the Siamese elephant to Newcastle in August, he had to quit. Thereby ended another sad chapter in the decline of the Mosley Street theatre. It is little surprise that the proprietors should record in 1830 that their finances were in a weak state.<sup>90</sup>

With the termination of Nicholson's contract the theatre was unlikely to attract a top-class manager. Not only had audiences dropped away, but like De Camp Nicholson had failed to maintain the interior of the theatre satisfactorily. Civic pride seems to have got the better of accuracy when Mackenzie wrote in 1827 that "the whole of the interior is painted and decorated with great taste".<sup>91</sup> Although there had been some refurbishment that year, it was not extensive.<sup>92</sup> It is perhaps significant that Mackenzie should dwell most on the royal arms above the drop curtain for these had been executed back in 1815. The larger-scale redecorations in the following year were half-hearted. *The Dramatic Register* for 1828 suggests that they represented more of a welcome change than an improvement:

The fanciful ornaments, which so long appeared on the roof, have given place to a representation of open sky, with a few light and fleecy clouds, which, if not altogether an improvement, must certainly be considered as an agreeable variation from the sameness of former seasons. A new "drapery curtain" was exhibited, which, though a gawdy display of blue and gold, leaves no very deep impression of the abilities of the artist: it is cumbrous and heavy, and the formal folds, were, by some unpractised eyes, mistaken for so many pillars.<sup>93</sup>

If the proprietors' funds were low in 1828, Nicholson's finances were even worse. The proprietors had to pay for the redecoration.<sup>94</sup> With their funds at rock-bottom in 1830 the preparation of the theatre for the first season of the new manager, Sampson Penley, was perfunctory. The ceiling and some other parts of the auditorium were painted to a design by John Dobson,<sup>95</sup> but the effect did not impress contemporaries. *The Northern John Bull* gives an uncompromising description of the refurbishment: "the seats in the pit were covered with crimson cloth, the front parts of the gallery and boxes lightly but gaudily daubed—the ceiling very prettily slabdashed, and the chandelier apparently had received some considerable alterations".<sup>96</sup> At the very outset of Penley's tenure the theatre was in a shabby condition and far from being ready for another fresh start. The overhaul of 1817–18 had been the last major work to be undertaken. Penley came to a theatre which was not only in poor decorative order but in a weak physical state. Part of the stage was unsafe, much of the gas piping introduced in 1818 needed replacing and the chandelier which had been incorporated in the same year was very insecure, its parts corroded.<sup>97</sup> Penley's management did nothing to put the proprietors in a better position to cope with the necessary repairs.

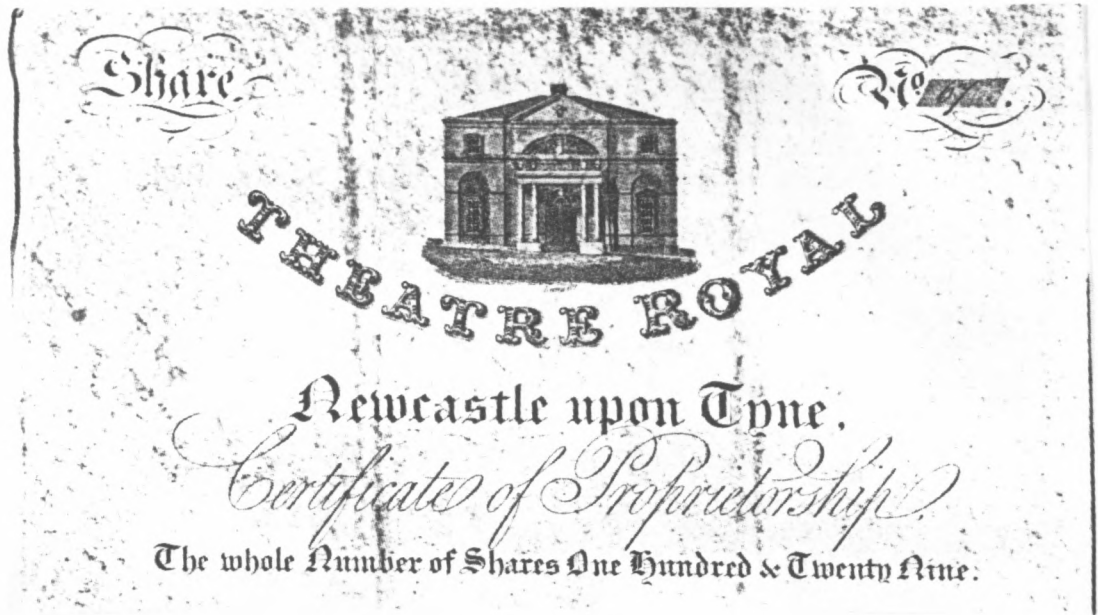
Unlike Nicholson he provided very few new scenes and his company was, according to contemporary reports, inadequate in both size and quality. *The Northern John Bull* computed that the theatre needed a company of about twenty men and seven or eight women: Penley had seven men, fewer ladies, and five supernumeraries.<sup>98</sup> Their acting style, in stark contrast to Nicholson's company, was starchy and passionless, but their regularity was initially a welcome change, so that early in their first season the house was respectably filled.<sup>99</sup> It was not long, however, before the regularity palled. Nicholson's company had ability but no discipline: Penley's was all discipline. "The watch-words of the theatre" were for Penley "respectability and attention; . . . he was determined that the good conduct of the actors should give a zest to their abilities".<sup>100</sup> To *The Northern John Bull* of January 1831 it seemed that those watchwords sapped the theatre's vitality: "the theatre . . . has now become as tasteless as the pious harmony of a conventicle of Puritans [with such] rigid attention to propriety . . . that the very children themselves are not altogether satisfied".<sup>101</sup> A few months later, when the company was further depleted, doubling exceeded all reasonable bounds. A contemporary summed up their pitiful state when he judged them "for dresses, scenery, number and talent . . . not a whit superior to the ragged squad who figure at races, fairs and other regular country feasts".<sup>102</sup> Penley had lost interest and the proprietors in their turn lost patience. Penley opened less frequently than his predecessors, often using the slightest pretext to remain closed. When he failed to open for the beginning of an already late season in January 1832, the proprietors took the unprecedented step of extending their patronage to an evening's entertainment at the rival Music Hall in Blakett Street.<sup>103</sup> If they intended to make Penley mend his ways, they succeeded only in giving him an opportunity to ask to terminate his contract. He was persuaded to continue, but appointed a sub-manager for the theatre's summer openings.<sup>104</sup> By the end of his first three-year lease he was £250 in arrears, yet despite their obvious irritation the proprietors renewed his contract. He had taken the theatre at £300 p.a.: the rent was now dropped to £250 with the proviso that the arrears were to be paid off at regular intervals over the next year.<sup>105</sup> The theatre was now in severe difficulties. On 7 July 1834 the proprietors met to consider a report on necessary repairs. The roof was in a bad state, and there was an increasing fire risk. On 9 July Penley announced that he could not open for Assize Week. It must have been a relief that two months later the proprietors were meeting again, this time with Richard Grainger to consider his proposals "to erect a new theatre in such substantial manner, and according to such plan, as shall be approved by the proprietors, and to convey the new theatre to the proprietors in exchange for the old one". Penley hung on for one more season before handing over to his brother, Montague, who had stood as one of his guarantors.<sup>106</sup>

Although the proprietors of the Mosley Street theatre must have been relieved to find that Grainger's proposed development offered fresh life to theatre in Newcastle, events moved slowly. Benjamin and John Green were appointed architects in September 1834, but it was eighteen months before they presented plans. It is not clear why there was such a delay—the plans for the old theatre had been drawn up in six months—but in that time something happened to make Grainger revise his proposal to the proprietors. Whereas in 1834 he had stated his willingness to pay over

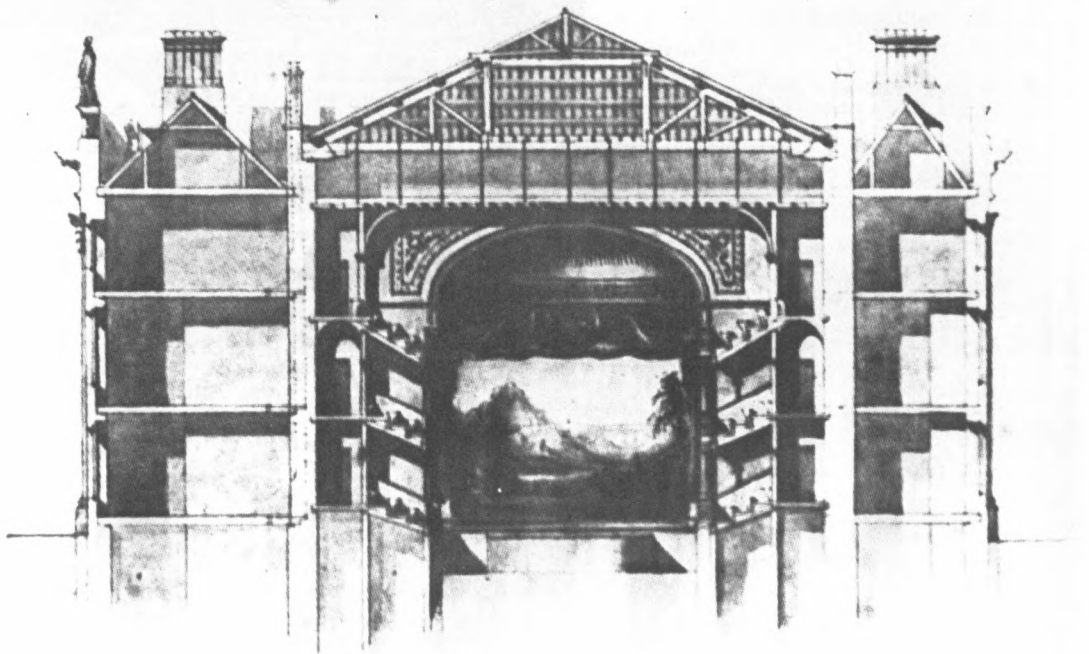
the difference between the cost of the new theatre and the estimated value of the old in addition to providing the new building, he now offered nothing more than the new theatre. Knowing that Grainger was in a great hurry to demolish the Mosley Street theatre, and that the city had as yet no powers of compulsory purchase, the proprietors insisted that Grainger must abide by his initial proposal.<sup>107</sup> This instance of manoeuvring set the tone for relations between Grainger and the proprietors. Between May and November 1837 there was considerable jockeying for position between them. Even when Grainger had accepted the valuation of the theatre and undertaken to pay an additional £674.5.7 in compensation, the proprietors were anxious that he might be keener to demolish the old than to erect the new theatre. Three weeks later they inserted a penalty clause in the contracts with Grainger. Their fears were not altogether ill-founded. In October Grainger had to admit that he could not complete the building by the promised date of 1 December because of unfavourable weather and a strike of his workmen. He would need a further two months. It was not until 4 November that the release was signed to allow him to begin demolition; and still the proprietors would not convey the Mosley Street property to him. That had to wait until work on the new theatre was finished.<sup>108</sup> Throughout the building the proprietors were suspicious of Grainger. Work had started on the foundations in July, but they seem to have feared that once the release had been signed he might keep to the plans less scrupulously. On 10 November they issued an injunction that Grainger must not deviate in the slightest from the architects' drawings without prior consent. At the same meeting they resolved to accept £226.13.0 from Grainger to take over the decoration of the theatre in the belief that "the Theatre should be painted and decorated in a stile superior to what could be expected from Mr. Grainger".<sup>109</sup> In the end Grainger was so late completing the building that he almost fell foul of the penalty clause.<sup>110</sup> The new season did not get under way until 20 February 1837.

Physically, the new theatre had all the elegance of the old theatre in its heyday and a good deal more grandeur. Only a little wider (57 feet) than Mosley Street it was a good deal deeper (170 feet); and its stage was even more suited to the modern presentation of spectacle.<sup>111</sup> The evolution that has been traced in the Mosley Street auditorium and stage was taken a step further. The theatre plans show a spacious horseshoe-shaped auditorium looking on to a stage from which the proscenium doors had finally disappeared (plate IIb). The actors now entered not through the proscenium on to the forestage, but through scenery into a naturalistic set.<sup>112</sup> The new building made it possible to enlarge the gallery whose gods had, as we have seen, grown in importance. The seating accommodation in the pit and boxes altered very little, but in the gallery it now increased from 800 to 1,200. If this change is not surprising, it is surprising perhaps that the architects should have clung on to an essentially Georgian conception of boxes. The development that had taken place at the Sans Pareil theatre in London twenty years earlier, in which the lower boxes had been removed to increase the size of the pit, was ripe for exploitation in a theatre like Newcastle;<sup>113</sup> but the architects were in this respect conservative. Nevertheless the new theatre represented the last stage of the evolution to a theatre geared to naturalistic illusion.





a) Share Certificate, 1824 (reduced).



b) John and Benjamin Green's plan for the proscenium of the Theatre Royal, 1837.

Although the opening of a new theatre was bound to attract fresh interest in the theatre, bound to make it once more the resort of the fashionable; the Grey Street theatre suffered from many of the problems that had dogged Mosley Street. The finances of the proprietors were, for example, still weak. The proprietors had struck what seemed to be a hard bargain with Grainger, but it did not alter the fact that Mosley Street had drained their resources. What is more, the deal with Grainger did not yield enough money to cover the cost of the new theatre. The proprietors ended up having to pay out more than £1,000 for work on scenery, machinery and other necessary effects. They had to borrow again.<sup>114</sup> The outlay continued once they were in possession of the theatre. There were lighting difficulties to overcome; the sight-lines from the gallery needed improving, the pit and orchestra had to be raised; there was damp to cure, and within a short time there were structural defects to right.<sup>115</sup> And to make matters worse there was protracted wrangling with Grainger, with claim and counter-claim, which culminated in the proprietors paying him £230 on 10 December, 1839.<sup>116</sup> Only eight months after the opening the proprietors were dismayed by “the impoverished state” of their funds. In the following spring their debts stood at almost £550. There was no option but to increase their borrowing. Then in July, still impoverished, they were warned that unless work was carried out quickly, their theatre was likely to become structurally dangerous. Poor ventilation had allowed wood-rot to attack the timbers, especially in the under-stage area.<sup>117</sup>

As if such unexpected expenses were not enough, the proprietors were as anxious as ever about competition. They had good reason to be. The months of delay in the opening of the Grey Street theatre in the winter of 1836–7 show the readiness of the circus and minor theatres in particular to mop up the theatre’s audience. Billy Purvis opened his Victoria booth theatre on 21 November 1836 and played to packed houses through to the opening of the theatre.<sup>118</sup> A little over a fortnight later Ducrow opened his new circus arena. It was described as “very handsome” by the *Newcastle Chronicle* which records that it attracted overflowing audiences.<sup>119</sup> At least one of the proprietors of the Theatre Royal saw the dangers and tried to put a stop to the minor theatre before the season opened. He was unsuccessful.<sup>120</sup> Three weeks after the opening Purvis was still active and the proprietors were forced to take legal steps to close him.<sup>121</sup> But Purvis and the minor theatres were as irrepressible as they had been during the life of the Mosley Street theatre. In the following September he approached the proprietors for permission to open outside their season and they adopted a new policy towards him. Instead of conflict they sought compromise, agreeing to his request providing that he gave a written assurance that he would close before the start of the Theatre Royal season. The spirit of compromise did not last long. The proprietors were more generally concerned that the theatre’s patent might be weakened by a clause in the Town Improvement Act which allowed Justices to “license certain places of public Entertainment”. They took steps through their solicitors to protect their existing rights.<sup>122</sup> One such place of entertainment was the new Music Hall which Grainger built in 1838 on Nelson Street as part of the town improvement. Purvis was to play there in 1845–6.<sup>123</sup>

Such competition called for vigorous and imaginative management, but the proprietors were as ill-served by their managers at Grey Street as they had been

latterly at Mosley Street. It was not long before the novelty of the new building wore thin. Montague Penley's management was uninspired. Whereas in the old theatre he had attempted to appeal to a popular audience, he now presented programmes that had a decidedly tired look about them, though he did use local artists imaginatively to stage scenic spectacle. Within two years he was unable to pay his rent and relinquished the theatre, like other impecunious managers before him selling his properties to the proprietors to offset part of his debt to them.<sup>124</sup> The pattern continued with the next three managers, Thomas Lawless Ternan (1839–42), Henry Hall (1842–3) and James Munro (1843–6), none of whom lasted beyond a single lease. Ternan left with his rent half a year in arrears; Hall scarcely established himself before lapsing hopelessly into difficulties, and a copy of Munro's receipts for his first season shows that he lost £435.<sup>125</sup> It is not surprising that he should have decided to give up the theatre when his lease expired. Although they failed, the appointments of Hall and Munro mark a discernible shift in the proprietors' thinking. Whereas Ternan's experience was in the provincial theatre, Hall came to Newcastle from London. More particularly he came from the Strand Theatre which had begun in 1832 as an unlicensed theatre and after considerable litigation had gained a licence as a minor theatre in 1836.<sup>126</sup> Hall's experience was, that is, in the sort of theatre that was drawing audiences away from the patent houses. No doubt the proprietors hoped to gain from that experience. Ternan had tried to attract audiences back to the theatre in 1839 by hiring the Ducrow family for 6 nights; but Hall promised more. When Hall quit they turned in Munro to another popularizing manager who had enjoyed success in Birmingham, a provincial theatre whose recent history was similar to Mosley Street's. Relatively prosperous in McCready's time as manager, its more recent managers had been as unsuccessful and become as debt-ridden as Newcastle's. In partnership with Mercer Simpson, Munro had put Birmingham back on its feet with a policy of popular entertainments which included menagery spectacles.<sup>127</sup> If he did not transfer his success to Newcastle, it is nevertheless clear that the proprietors were intent on finding a manager who might be able to please its increased gallery.

The Theatre Royal did have its artistic successes and London stars in this period. Hall, for example, produced a highly acclaimed *Tempest* and amongst other stars Charles Kean (who was hissed by a knowledgeable Newcastle audience for cutting lines when playing Hamlet), Helen Faucit and Madame Vestris all visited Newcastle more than once. But neither the odd spectacle nor London stars guaranteed the artistic and financial well-being of the provincial theatre. It required good stock companies performing well-balanced and up-to-date programmes. Several contemporaries make this point. Amongst them was Munro's successor, Edward Dean Davis. Davis had little pedigree as a manager, but he did have plenty of managerial good-sense. He brought up stars (including Jenny Lind), but he relied increasingly on taking "more than ordinary care in the selection of his *corps dramatique* as it must be evident that the efforts of a good general company are better than any one individual indifferently supported".<sup>128</sup> It was very much Stephen Kemble's policy. Its wisdom can be judged by comparing Munro's receipts for the 1833–4 season with Davis's for 1851. Where Munro lost badly, Davis made a profit of £152; and where the former laid out £482 on salaries to stars, they cost the latter only £159.<sup>129</sup> But it was not easy

to create a programme that could appeal to both boxes and gallery, especially when the gallery audience in particular was being attracted away by other entertainments. Davis felt this particularly when in addition to the circus, the minor theatre and the music hall he found that he had to cope with the lure of "the saloons at various inns where the lower classes are supplied with amusement".<sup>130</sup> It was not unusual for the boxes to be reasonably well occupied whilst the rest of the auditorium was only sparsely filled. But where his predecessors had found the competition impossible, he became increasingly successful. In contrast to his predecessors at the new Theatre Royal, he was to remain its manager for twenty four years, founding a new era in Newcastle theatre.<sup>131</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a general history of Newcastle theatre, see Harold Oswald, *The Theatres Royal in Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1936).

<sup>2</sup> See the account given in *List of Subscribers to the Theatre Royal, Newcastle* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1789). Full details of the costs for the building of the Theatre are extant in the accounts of the subscribers, Tyne and Wear Archives 155/1/4.

<sup>3</sup> See the Committee Books of the Proprietors, Tyne and Wear Archives 155/1/5 (2, 13 and 16 May 1836).

<sup>4</sup> 155/1/5 (5 February, 1828).

<sup>5</sup> S. Middlebrook *Newcastle upon Tyne: Its Growth and Achievement* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1950), pp. 145–6.

<sup>6</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 24 and 31 December 1784.

<sup>7</sup> J. L. Hodgkinson and Rex Pogson, *The Early Manchester Theatre* (London, 1960), p. 75.

<sup>8</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 8, 15, 29 January and 5 February 1785.

<sup>9</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 16 July 1785.

<sup>10</sup> 155/1/4.

<sup>11</sup> Tyne and Wear Archives 155/1/6.

<sup>12</sup> 155/1/4; *List of Subscribers . . . 1789*.

<sup>13</sup> *Journal of the House of Commons*, XLI, 281, 544–5, 547–8, 586, 763, 775, 833; Tyne and Wear Archives 155/7/1.

<sup>14</sup> *Journal of the House of Commons*, XLII, 413–14, 718, 858; Tyne and Wear Archives, 155/7/2.

<sup>15</sup> 155/1/4.

<sup>16</sup> See Cecil Price, *Theatre in the Age of Garrick* (Oxford, 1973), p. 187.

<sup>17</sup> *Journal of the House of Commons*, XLII, 718.

<sup>18</sup> 155/8/2; *Chronological Table of Statutes* (London, 1965), p. 171.

<sup>19</sup> For Oliver's plan, see T. Wilson's scrapbook *Collections relating to the History of Newcastle*, vol. 2 in Newcastle Public Library (NwP).

<sup>20</sup> John Latimer, *Local Records: or a Historical Register of Remarkable Events 1832–1857* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1857), p. 59.

<sup>21</sup> Eneas Mackenzie, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Town and County of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1827), p. 229.

<sup>22</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 19 January 1788.

<sup>23</sup> Mackenzie, p. 229. For the arrangements for proprietors see 155/1/5 (31 January 1804).

<sup>24</sup> *John Bell's scrapbook, An Account of the Accident* (1823) in NwP; Mackenzie, pp. 230–231.

<sup>25</sup> These figures are based on takings recorded on playbills in NwP and on *The Newcastle Courant*, 3 May 1788.

<sup>26</sup> Whitlock had married Stephen's sister, Elizabeth, who played at the Bigg Market.

<sup>27</sup> For Kemble's management of Newcastle, see K. E. Robinson, "Stephen Kemble's Management of the Theatre Royal, Newcastle upon Tyne," in *The Eighteenth-Century English Stage*, ed. Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson (London, 1972), pp. 137–48.

<sup>28</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, September 1829, p. 70.

<sup>29</sup> Mackenzie, p. 230.

<sup>30</sup> 155/1/5 (28 March, 29 May, 5 July 1792 and 11 December 1799).

<sup>31</sup> Mackenzie, p. 230.

<sup>32</sup> 155/1/5 (8 August 1792).

<sup>33</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 2 February 1788.

<sup>34</sup> 155/1/5 (1 October 1806); Mackenzie, p. 230.

<sup>35</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 2 January 1819.

<sup>36</sup> Mackenzie, p. 230; *Newcastle Courant*, 28 March 1818.

<sup>37</sup> Michael R. Booth et al., *The Revels History of Drama in English, VI: 1750–1880* (London, 1975), p. 84.

<sup>38</sup> *Newcastle Courant*, 28 March 1818.

<sup>39</sup> Scrapbook, *A Collection of Tracts relating to the Theatre Royal in NwP*.

<sup>40</sup> The terms of the contract are laid out in 155/1/5 (1 October 1806).

<sup>41</sup> 155/1/5 (5 January; 5, 11 April; 4, 11, 20 November; 18 December 1809).

<sup>42</sup> 155/1/5 (29 November 1813; 8 November, 1 December 1814; 25 January, 9 May 1815; 9 October, 20 November 1817).

<sup>43</sup> 155/1/5 (16 October, 27 November 1817).

<sup>44</sup> 155/1/5 (4 August, 1806).

<sup>45</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 9 March 1811.

<sup>46</sup> De Camp's sister, Marie Therese, had married Charles Kemble in 1806.

<sup>47</sup> The letter is copied into 155/1/5 (29 June 1818).

<sup>48</sup> 155/1/5 (2 June 1818).

<sup>49</sup> 155/1/5 (30 January 1804).

<sup>50</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 9 March 1811.

<sup>51</sup> 155/1/5 (10 December 1793; 28 November 1797).

<sup>52</sup> See *The Newcastle Advertiser*, 30 June 1792.

<sup>53</sup> 155/1/5 (15 June 1816).

<sup>54</sup> 155/1/5 (21 November 1824) and playbills in NwP.

<sup>55</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, January 1830, p. 153.

<sup>56</sup> 155/1/5 (25 March 1833).

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Oliver, *A New Picture of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1831), p. 94. The position of the Music Hall is shown in Thomas Sopwith, *The Stranger's Pocket-Guide to Newcastle upon Tyne and its Environs* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1838).

<sup>58</sup> Joseph P. Robson, *The Life and Adventures of Billy Purvis*, 3rd ed. (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1854), p. 151. For an account of Purvis's career in general, see David Mayer, "Billy Purvis, Travelling Showman," *THQ*, I (1971), 27–34.

<sup>59</sup> Robson, pp. 158–9.

<sup>60</sup> Robson, pp. 171–2, 177, 179.

<sup>61</sup> Robson, pp. 183–4. For a contemporary description of Purvis's theatre, see *Newcastle Chronicle*, 26 November 1836.

<sup>62</sup> *North Shields Dramatic Censor*, 29 December 1827, p. 39.

<sup>63</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 21 February 1834.

<sup>64</sup> *North Shields Dramatic Censor*, 5 January 1828, p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> *The Newcastle Theatrical Observer*, 14

February 1824.

<sup>66</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 2 January 1819; 155/1/5 (esp. 18 November 1818); and Mackenzie, p. 230.

<sup>67</sup> Mackenzie, p. 230.

<sup>68</sup> 155/1/5 (20 and 25 February 1823).

<sup>69</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 2 January 1819.

<sup>70</sup> *Newcastle Courant* and *Newcastle Chronicle*, 2 January 1819.

<sup>71</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, September 1829, p. 70.

<sup>72</sup> For the North Shields theatre see Robert King, *North Shields Theatres* (Gateshead, 1948).

<sup>73</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, September 1829, p. 70.

<sup>74</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 14 February 1820.

<sup>75</sup> 155/1/5 (1 May 1822).

<sup>76</sup> *The Newcastle Magazine*, November 1820, p. 218.

<sup>77</sup> *The Newcastle Magazine*, March 1821; *Newcastle Chronicle*, 2 January 1821.

<sup>78</sup> 155/1/5 (13 March and 15 November 1821).

<sup>79</sup> 155/1/5 (14 February 1822).

<sup>80</sup> 155/1/5 (13 February 1824).

<sup>81</sup> *The Newcastle Magazine*, September 1820, p. 218.

<sup>82</sup> 155/1/5 (26 December 1823).

<sup>83</sup> 155/1/5 (29 November 1815).

<sup>84</sup> 155/1/5 (31 January, 13 April 1820).

<sup>85</sup> 155/1/5 (2 June 1818 and 30 December 1822).

<sup>86</sup> 155/1/5 (23 October and 29 December 1824).

<sup>87</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, January 1831, p. 156 and April 1831, p. 256.

<sup>88</sup> 155/1/5 (27 February 1827).

<sup>89</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, January 1831, p. 154.

<sup>90</sup> 155/1/5 (5 and 12 February 1828; 11 March 1829; 20 January, 9 March, 28 June, 26 and 31 August 1830). For an account of Miss D'Ject, see M. A. Richardson, *The Local Historian's Table Book* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1844), IV, 60.

<sup>91</sup> Mackenzie, p. 230.

<sup>92</sup> 155/1/5 (20 November 1827).

<sup>93</sup> *The Dramatic Register*, 27 December 1828.

<sup>94</sup> 155/1/5 (16 December 1828).

<sup>95</sup> *Newcastle Courant*, 11 December 1830.

<sup>96</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, December 1830, p. 138.

<sup>97</sup> 155/1/5 (27 November 1830).

<sup>98</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, December 1830, p. 138.

<sup>99</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, March 1831, p. 196.

<sup>100</sup> *Newcastle Courant*, 11 December 1830.

- <sup>101</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, January 1831, p. 155.
- <sup>102</sup> *The Northern John Bull*, April 1831, p. 256.
- <sup>103</sup> 155/1/5 (2 January 1832).
- <sup>104</sup> 155/1/5 (3 February, 28 March, 19 May and 11 July 1832).
- <sup>105</sup> 155/1/5 (16 September 1833).
- <sup>106</sup> 155/1/5 (4, 7 and 9 July and 12 September 1834).
- <sup>107</sup> 155/1/5 (12 September 1834; 2, 3, 13 and 16 May 1836).
- <sup>108</sup> 155/1/5 (1 and 25 July, 13 and 21 October, 4 November 1836).
- <sup>109</sup> 155/1/5 (10 November 1836).
- <sup>110</sup> 155/1/5 (28 and 31 January 1837).
- <sup>111</sup> Oswald, pp. 86–7.
- <sup>112</sup> For a similar interpretation of the Grey Street theatre plans, see Richard Southern, *The Georgian Playhouse* (London, 1952), p. x.
- <sup>113</sup> Booth, *The Revels History VI*, p. 82.
- <sup>114</sup> The exact expenditure was £1,158 (155/1/5 [12 January 1837]). For the proprietors' borrowing, see 155/1/5 (5 May 1837; 12 March 1838).
- <sup>115</sup> 155/1/5 (21 December 1837); *Newcastle Chronicle*, 25 February 1837.
- <sup>116</sup> 155/1/5 (14 and 31 March, 21 April, 5 May, 19 May 1837; 10 December 1839).
- <sup>117</sup> 155/1/5 (20 October 1837; 27 July 1838).
- <sup>118</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 26 November 1836; playbills NwP.
- <sup>119</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 17 and 24 December 1836.
- <sup>120</sup> 155/1/5 (3 February 1837).
- <sup>121</sup> 155/1/5 (14 March 1837).
- <sup>122</sup> 155/1/5 (5 May, 15 September 1837); 155/1/8 (19 July 1838).
- <sup>123</sup> The Nelson Street Music Hall is described in Thomas Oliver, *A Plan of the Borough of Newcastle* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1844).
- <sup>124</sup> Tyne and Wear Archives 155/1/8 (2 and 16 May, 3 June 1839).
- <sup>125</sup> 155/1/8 (11 April, 3 May, 6 June, 18 August 1842; 12 June 1844).
- <sup>126</sup> For the Strand see Booth, *The Revels History VI*, pp. lx–lxi.
- <sup>127</sup> J. E. Cunningham, *The Theatre Royal Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1956), pp. 20–33.
- <sup>128</sup> 155/1/8 (12 June 1846). See also the playbill for 19 November 1849 (in NwP) and cf. Sopwith, *The Stranger's Pocket-Guide*, p. 76.
- <sup>129</sup> 155/1/8 (12 June 1844; 3 July 1851).
- <sup>130</sup> 155/1/8 (9 March 1849).
- <sup>131</sup> For Davis and his context, see Kathleen Barker, "The Performing Arts in Newcastle upon Tyne, 1840–70," in *Leisure in Britain 1780–1939*, ed. J. K. Walton (London, 1983), pp. 54–70.