

DCTD16



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Historic Building Recording

planning application ref: 16/00065/LBC

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DARLINGTON CIVIC THEATRE

Historic Building Recording

Headland Archaeology was commissioned by The Environment Partnership (TEP) to undertake a programme of historic building recording at Darlington Civic Theatre in advance of a major programme of refurbishment, enhancement and extension. The purpose of the survey was to create a visual and descriptive record of the internal fabric of the original theatre prior to the refurbishment works. The survey captured the rich history of the structure, including many original features as well as very substantial modifications to both structure, layout and décor.

1 INTRODUCTION

Headland Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by The Environment Partnership (TEP), on behalf of Willmott Dixon for Darlington Borough Council to undertake a programme of historic building recording at Darlington Civic Theatre, Darlington. The theatre is undergoing a major programme of refurbishment, enhancement and extension and will include elements of adjacent buildings, including former shops and restaurants and a former fire station.

Planning permission for the development was granted by Darlington Borough Council (16/00065/LBC) subject to a number of conditions, including one relating to archaeological works:

17 During the course of the development a full record and interpretation of the existing and original dress circle tiering shall be made, together with the front of house areas to be demolished (changing rooms and Signor Pepi's flat), the "Pepiscope" projector and any other areas of demolished historic fabric.

REASON - In the interests of the proper recording of the history of the buildings.

In order to fulfil this condition, a Level 2 building survey (Historic England, 2016) was commissioned by The Environment Partnership. This comprises a visual and descriptive record of the building based on a programme of photographic survey. This report presents the results of this work.

2 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

Darlington Civic Theatre is located on the eastern edge of Darlington town centre (NGR: NZ 29318 14457; Illus 1). The site is bounded by Parkgate to the south, Borough Road to the east, Tannery Yard to the west and a substantial boundary wall to the North. The present development incorporates the original theatre building from 1907 (with modifications in the 1930s, 1960s and 1980s); the box office (incorporated in 1978) and two adjacent restaurants/shops at 77-87 Parkgate; a 1980s/1990s extension to the theatre on Borough Road and the former fire station adjacent (Illus 2).

A detailed history of these buildings has been provided in a previous Heritage Statement (Space Architects, 2016).



Illus 2 – General view of Darlington Civic Theatre from the south-west. The Parkgate shops can be seen in the foreground, with the box office between these and the main theatre building. The rear of the former fire station can be seen to the far left of the image.

3 METHODOLOGY

Using the general standards set out by Historic England (2016), a Level 2 historic building survey was undertaken. This aims to provide a descriptive record of the building to meet the planning requirements of Darlington Borough Council.

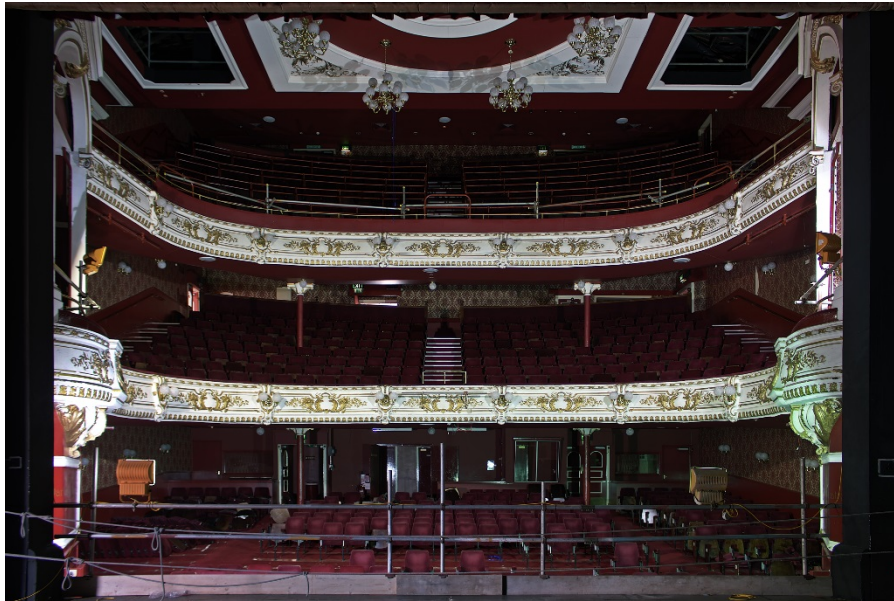
A photographic and descriptive survey was undertaken on the 27th and 28th of June, and a second visit on the 24th August by the authors. Demolition work on peripheral buildings was already underway and the site had been fully hoarded. The survey was focused on the internal spaces of the original theatre building (Illus 3), with a view to capturing detail of any original fabric and creating a record prior to any major demolition.

Access was made available to nearly the entire building, with the following exceptions:

- The basement/under-stage areas were not surveyed due to the potential for asbestos.
- Only the left stage technical access areas were visited, to avoid potentially dangerous working at heights and ladder access. For the same reason, none of the roof spaces were included in the survey.
- A small number of rooms were locked at the time of the initial survey, including the kiosks behind the Dress Circle and Upper Circle, and the former projector room behind the Upper Circle. These were recorded on a second visit.

The latter has been converted into a plant room for the ventilation system. It is unlikely to be the original location of the 'Pepiscope' projector as the room was only constructed in 1932 for more modern projection equipment. No further reference to the location of the 'Pepiscope' could be found.

The complete project archive will be deposited with Bowes Museum, Durham and a record of the work lodged with OASIS.



Illus 3 – General view of auditorium from the stage.

4 RESULTS

The results of the survey are presented below. They have been organised into a photographic gazetteer, divided by floor and logical groupings of spaces in the theatre (see Illus 4, 5 and 6 for locations of these groupings). Descriptions are prefixed with the group number and relevant photo numbers (e.g G01-001). There are three principle floors, roughly equating to the Stalls, Dress Circle and Upper Circle in the auditorium, but in fact the vertical organisation of spaces is more complex. This is partly a result of the sloping floors in the auditorium, and the need to provide access to these at several points, but also because of the different requirements for space between the public areas and back-stage. The ‘chicken coop’ of changing rooms facing the Parkgate are physically much lower than the public circulation spaces to the south-east and east. This leads to interesting anomalies such as the lower room of Signor Pepi’s flat, which is squeezed vertically between the original foyer kiosk on the ground floor and a dressing room on the first floor, and acts as a transition between the lowest part of the Dress Circle and the first floor dressing rooms.

4.1 Ground Floor (Illus 4)

G01: Auditorium – General

The auditorium space spans the three principal floors of the theatre – for details specific to each level, please see the sections on stalls, Dress Circle, circle boxes and Upper Circle below.

G01-001 – General view of the auditorium. Rich red colour used for woodwork, carpets, upholstery and ceiling not original and probably dates to the most recent renovation. Lavishly decorated plasterwork screen wrapping around both circles and the circle boxes on the first floor. White paint with gold detailing clearly part of the most recent renovation, though it is not clear if the colour scheme has been carried over from earlier. Globe light fittings are modern.

G01-002 – Upper part of proscenium. Deep cornice mouldings evident to front of auditorium above circle boxes and stage – not certain if original. Large decorative crest over stage flanked by rectangular panels on either side. These may be a later addition and can also be seen on blinker walls and elsewhere. They look awkward in places. Stage framed with featuring twisted relief decoration pinned by elaborate mouldings at the upper corners.

G01-003 – Left circle box and blinker wall. Circle box framed by elaborate detailing – continuation of decorative screen below, supported on bulbous base. The latter may be partly obscured by the later blinker walls. Corinthian-esque pillars supporting broad arch and broken pediment. It is unclear if the technical access areas above the boxes have been inserted or modified – the ceilings in the boxes align poorly with the decorative framing.

G01-004 – Right circle box and blinker wall. Mirror of left circle box.

G01-005 – Auditorium ceiling. Large square panel with circular cutouts and rinceau detailing in corners. Central hole for lighting. Suspended globe chandeliers modern. Flanking panels with technical access for stage lighting.

G01-006 - Detail of column capital. Modest size, and Corinthian-esque decoration on plain iron/steel columns. Two columns supporting Dress Circle and two supporting Upper Circle.

G01-007 - Detail of fire hydrant. Brass wheel and outlet valve in recess, likely an original feature. Present on each floor.

G01: Auditorium - Stalls

G01-008-012 - Concrete floor on gentle incline, with straight rows of seats. The seats are steel-framed and were installed as part of the 1990s renovations. Many have been removed and stored against the north wall. Side walls red painted plaster to dado, red and white patterned wallpaper above not original. Modern globe light fittings. Modern ventilation vents in ceiling.

G01: Auditorium - Blinker walls and front steps

G01-013-015 – Left blinker wall and left front-steps. The steps provide access to the Dress Circle and would originally have been exposed. The addition of blinker walls was presumably intended to reduce visual distraction, but obscure the view from front seats near the side walls. Externally painted with the message 'Welcome to Darlington Civic Theatre'. A door adjacent to the steps provides access to plant rooms in the basement level. A further door in the side wall provides direct access to the foyer.

G01-016-017 – Right blinker wall and right front-steps. As above, although steps provide access to lift and right stage access door. Access to Dress Circle via adjacent 1989 extension. A door adjacent to the steps provides access to a modern lift.

G01: Auditorium - Rear wall

The rear wall at this level has been moved forwards (most likely during the 1960s renovation) to provide additional facilities and circulation.

G01-018 – Right accessible box. Provided for audience members with reduced mobility. Level floor and low wall dividing area off from main stalls seating.

G01-019 – Right stalls doorway. Provides access to rear circulation area – replica doors.

G01-020 – Control box. Double doors and working space and connections for A/V control.

G01-021 – Audio describing booth. Enclosed room with raked viewing windows, accessed from rear circulation area.

G01-022-023 – Left accessible box. As above.

G01-024 – View of stage from left accessible box.

G01-025 – View south-west from north-east of auditorium showing original support frame for first floor auditorium tier.

G02: Stage – Main stage

The large 'box' housing the stage and fly grid was constructed of brick, with long iron I-beams supporting technical areas, lifting mechanisms and timber rafters. All walls finished in black, with the exception of the ceiling and the upper part of the rear wall, which is high enough not to be visible from the auditorium.

Note: since the temporary work lighting for the auditorium faced out from the edge of the stage area, only oblique photography of the stage itself was possible.

G02-001 – Stage floor. Modern surface.

G02-002-003 – Dividing wall and main curtain.

G02-004-006 – Left stage wall, showing high-level technical access, electrical systems, curtain counterweights and left stage door. Access door to the left front steps in the auditorium can be seen left of the ladder. Three original round external windows visible at high level, blocked on the outside by second floor dressing rooms.

G02-007-008 – Right stage wall. Extra-tall scenery door direct to yard outside and right stage access door to auditorium. Technical access balcony at first floor level. Three 12-pane sash and case windows with broad arched lintels at high level. These mirror the round windows described above, although it is unclear why they are of a different form.

G02-009-011 – Rear stage wall. Extra-tall access to get-in/scene dock behind and technical access at first floor level. Modern ventilation ducting.

G02: Stage – Get-in/scene dock

G02-012-018 – Get-in/scene dock. Probably an original feature, the get-in/scene dock has the same brick construction as the main stage 'box'. Currently houses a lot of modern ventilation equipment, but still some full-height room available for scenery. Access door to crew room in left wall is a modern insertion.

G03: Eastern circulation areas – Main corridor

The main corridor was created during the 1990s renovation to provide access from the foyer in the new northern extension to the auditorium and other facilities. The eastern wall would originally have been the rear wall of the auditorium. The walls, woodwork and floors are finished in the same shade of red seen in the auditorium. Plain white ceilings.

G03-001 – Northern end of the main corridor. The doors to the auditorium, technical booths and viewing boxes are on the right. On the left, access to a store, the stairwell and staff room.

G03-002 – Access to fire escape. The stairwell is hidden behind the corner on the left-hand side. The date of the patterned wallpaper, plain cornicing and wallpapered ceiling are uncertain – they are not original, but are also not seen in spaces constructed as part of the 1989 renovation.

G03-003 – View of northern end of main corridor. The modern double doors lead through to the 1989 extension.

G03-004 – Southern end of the main corridor.

G03-005 – Doors leading to original foyer. Modern double doors.

G03-006 – Corner adjacent to foyer doors. Small high-level window with two stained-glass panels, most likely original. Access hatch in ceiling.

G03-007 – Stairs to basement plant areas. The concrete stair structure above appears relatively modern and may have been replaced.

G03-008-012 – Access doors to auditorium, technical booths and accessible boxes. All modern doors.

G03: Eastern circulation areas – Storage and staff room

G03-013 – Storage room below stairs at north end of main corridor.

G03-014-019 – Staff room and storage. Few original features. Dumb waiter/goods lift inserted into south wall of staff room. External window mostly painted over and was originally much taller – the ceiling here has clearly been lowered, perhaps to accommodate services. A tall doorway visible on the outside has been completely hidden internally.

G03: Eastern circulation areas – Bathrooms

G03-020-025 – Bathrooms. External windows are the only significant sign of original fabric. On the southern wall, a small window with stained glass panels mirrors the one at the south end of the main corridor. On the west wall, two small 3x6 pane windows set in arched recesses, partly blocked.

G04: Original Foyer

This space formed the original main foyer prior to the 1990s renovation, when it moved to the new extension to the north of the auditorium.

G04-001-002 – East side of foyer. The doors on the left lead to the main corridor. Stairs up to Dress Circle level – may have been replaced (see G03-007 above). Two large panels in upper wall bounded by gilded plaster detailing and filled with red and cream patterned wallpaper. Broad cornicing visible – original?

G04-003-004 – North side of foyer. Decorative wooden panelling on lower half of wall, with carved detailing and large central mirror. Projected box below mirror has a different finish and may be a repair or alteration. Three large panels in upper wall in same style as on east wall, separated by two smaller panels with gilded decoration.

G04-005 – West side of foyer. Original doorway leads down steps to the front left of the auditorium. Door framed by timber pilasters and semi-circular glazed fanlight. Decorative panels at high level as above. Small shop with rolling shutter does not appear to be original.

G04-006 – South side of foyer, showing entrance from Parkgate. Mostly rebuilt to include automatic sliding doors and modern ventilation/heating systems.

G04-007-011 – Detail of shop, showing shelving and some indications of products sold.

G04-012-013 – Detail of stairway to auditorium. Original glazed and panelled doors can be seen leaning against the wall. Wallpapered in same pattern as insets in panels in foyer. Ceiling wallpapered and deep cornicing as per foyer.

G05: Dressing rooms

Ground floor access to these rooms is only possible directly from the stage – access from first floor by main staircase at western end. The internal divisions in this area are likely to be original.

G05-001 – View of corridor from west. The stage door is visible immediately to the left.

G05-002 – Stage door. Modern door inserted into arched doorway.

G05-003 – Door leading to box office and other backstage areas. This was formed when the box office was moved into the adjacent building in 1978.

G05-004 – Vertical circulation leading to first floor.

G05-005 – External Stage door to Parkgate.

G05-006-008 – Changing room doors, some labelled with names of the last performers.

G05-009-012 – Details of Changing Room 1. The windows of the changing rooms on this floor appear to be original, although probably re-glazed.

G05-013-016 – Details of changing rooms 2-4.

G05-017-018 – Details of Toilet.

4.2 First Floor (Illus 5)

F01: Auditorium – Dress Circle

F01-001-006 – General views of Dress Circle seating. The seating, decoration and fixtures match those of the stalls, albeit with more steeply raked seating rows accessed by three sets of steps. Small brass railing at base of central steps. Two columns aligned with those in the stalls.

F01-007-008 – Circulation space. Separated from seating by simple timber balustrade. Provides access to two stairwells to south-east and north-east, and the 1989 function room/bar to the north. The severe rake of the Upper Circle seating is visible in the steeply sloping ceiling.

F01-009 – Small kiosk at south-eastern corner. The door was locked at time of survey.

F01-010 – Access to south-eastern stairwell, bar and toilets. The doors are original.

F01-011 – Access to the north-eastern stairwell, also with original doors.

F01-012 – Access to 1989 extension through modern doors.

F01-022 – Shot facing north from south-east of auditorium showing original support frame for upper tier of auditorium.

F01-023 – Shot facing south east showing original support frame for upper tier of auditorium.

F01: Auditorium – Circle boxes

F01-013 – Access to circle left box from Dress Circle.

F01-014 – Steps down to stalls. Door to stage visible.

F01-015-017 – Views from circle left box. Brass railing to match those at base of stalls steps.

F01-018 – Access to circle right box from Dress Circle.

F01-019 – Plant room and storage adjacent to circle right box.

F01-020 – Interior of circle right box.

F01-021 – View of stalls from circle right box.

F02: Circulation

F02-001 – North-eastern stairwell.

F02-002 – Detail of patterned wallpaper. Most likely dating to 1989 refurbishment.

F02-003 – Bathroom accessed from north-eastern stairwell. Windows are original.

F02-004-006 – South-eastern stairwell. This would have acted as the primary vertical circulation from the original foyer to the upper floors. Two large semi-circular eight-paned stained glass windows. Balustrade on landing

comprising dark wood newel posts and handrails with painted decorative iron spindles. Modern spherical light fittings.

F02-007 – Detail of stained glass.

F02-008-009 – Detail of decorative painting on plaster revealed beneath present wallpaper. The date is uncertain.

F02-010 – Stairwell from landing to Upper Circle.

F02-011 – Detail of original panelled door.

F02-012 – Bathroom off south-eastern stairwell.

F02-013 – Small kiosk at south-eastern corner. Interior has been stripped of its original wallpaper. Boiler visible through main window.

F03: Bar

F01-001-002 – General views of bar. Wallpaper above dado patterned as per stairwells but painted cream rather than red. Modern brass and glass floral light fittings.

F01-003-004 – Detail of large six-pane stained glass window. Matches style of those in south-eastern stairwell.

F04: Signor Pepi's flat

F04-001 – Private access from lower left Dress Circle.

F04-002 – Under-stair storage.

F04-003-004 – Lower room of Signor Pepi's flat. This room is on a lower level from the circulation areas on the eastern side of the first floor, being accessed from the lower part of the Dress Circle. It is located above the original foyer shop and provides indirect access to the first-floor dressing rooms (also at a lower level). Walls of white-painted brick with circular pattern around window.

F04-005 – Detail of circular stained glass window (in same style as other stained glass on this floor).

F04-006 – Detail of postcard hanging on wall of lower room.

F04-007 – Access from lower room to upper room of Signor Pepi's flat.

F04-008-011 – Detail of upper room of Signor Pepi's flat. Most recently used as an office space. Large semi-circular window with different pattern of glazing to semi-circular stained glass windows on south-eastern stairwell to allow for central stone pilaster on external façade. The exact layout of this room and those adjacent (see F05 below) is likely to have been altered with more modern partition walls.

F05: Dressing Rooms

F05-001-002 – Dressing room corridor.

F05-003 – South-western stairwell to ground floor.

F05-004-006 – Dressing rooms and bathroom. A large semi-circular window (as in F04, above) is now split between two dressing rooms.

F05-007 – Access from dressing room corridor to bar and kitchen.

F05-008-009 – Travelling company's kitchen. Original window with half-round top. Raised floor in south-west corner to accommodate steps between the two rooms of Signor Pepi's flat below.

4.3 Second Floor (Illus 6)

S01: Auditorium – Upper Circle

S01-001-003 – General views of Upper Circle. Steeply raked seating with three sets of steps for access. Intrusive modern steel barriers on all but the highest levels. Brass railing on front row with additional steel at base of central steps. Decorated as per Dress Circle and Stalls.

S01-004-006 – Rear circulation area, providing access to south-eastern and north-eastern stairwells. Doors to both are not original. Small kiosk hatch (room locked) with timber panelling below, and access hatch to roof space at southern end. Modern door to southern extension, and another to access roof of 1980s building on northern side.

S01-007 – Steps down south wall to left technical viewing area.

S01-008 – Approach to right technical viewing area.

S01-009-010 – Detail of right technical viewing area, including detail of graffiti and view of stage.

S01-011 – Plant room off right technical viewing area.

S02: Technical Access Areas

S02-001-004 – Technical access above circle left box. Detail of graffiti and ladder access to roof space.

S01-005-008 – General views of stage left technical access. Four motors for scenery winches are still in place (manufactured by A.S Green & Co, Haydock Merseyside). These are likely to date to the 1980s refurbishment. The pulley weights for the curtains are visible behind the wire mesh adjacent to the access door.

S01-009 – General view of stage rear and right technical access. Ladder access to the roof space.

S01-010 – The main curtain in raised position.

S03: Circulation

S03-001 – General view of top of south-east stairwell. The door to the left leads to the Upper Circle kiosk; the one to the right to the projection room (both were locked at the time of the survey).

S03-002 – General view of north-eastern stairwell. Two original circular windows.

S03-003 – General view east, north-east of small kiosk from south-east of auditorium. Existing door on the left of photo leads to the projector room. A small recess of the kiosk is visible at the right of the photo.

S03-004 – Shot of small kiosk interior showing original location of south-eastern stairwell later blocked. Red paint on the wall may be original.

S03-005 – Shot from top of stairs inside small kiosk. Shows where the original staircase was blocked off and levelled to allow kiosk floor to be constructed.

S03-006 – Shot of recess area of small kiosk.

S03-007 – View south east of circular window in recess area of small kiosk.

S03-008 – Shot of open door to projection room at top of south-eastern stairwell showing modern lift.

S03-009 – Shot of open door to projector room from north-eastern stairwell showing scaffolding preventing full access to room. This section of the projector room was un-roofed.

S04: Dressing Rooms

S04-001 – Top of south-western stairwell. The addition of an extra floor here is evident from the modern high-level window.

S04-002 – Dressing room corridor, looking east.

S04-003-007 – Bathroom and three dressing rooms. All in modern addition. The decorative stone pediments above the first-floor semi-circular windows are visible immediately outside the modern windows on this floor.

S04-008-009 – Stairs and landing leading to upper level above first floor bar.

S04-010-011 – Laundry room with modern roof light. Somewhat lower floor level than adjacent cleaning cupboard.

S04-012 – Cleaning cupboard/store room adjacent to laundry.

S04-013 – Public circulation area providing access to bathrooms from rear of Upper Circle.

S04-014-015 – General view of female bathroom. Large semi-circular window at peak of parkgate

S04-016-017 – General view of male bathroom. Large modern roof light as per laundry room. Somewhat lower floor level, as per laundry room.

5 DISCUSSION

In true theatrical style, the many alterations made to the building have been thoroughly incorporated into the most recent decorative scheme (dating to the 1989-90 refurbishment) of deep red paint and several heavily textured or patterned wallpapers. In this regard, little historic fabric has been left in its original condition and visual distinction between old and new was blurred. However, the visual and descriptive record presented in this report complements and strengthens the earlier desk-based work (Space Architects, 2016), and can be used as an additional reference, as well as providing a lasting record of the internal spaces prior to the remodelling work.

6 REFERENCES

Historic England 2016 *Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice*, Historic England.

Space Architects 2016 *Darlington Civic Theatre and the Hullaballoon – Heritage Statement*, unpublished client report.