

None of these survive as theatres although their remains provide a happy weekend for any theatre archaeologist armed with car and camera. Garages, show-rooms, municipal offices and sometimes just *Theatre Road* remain. Whereas the Victorian/Edwardian theatre archaeologist watches the horizon for fly towers, the

THEATRE, WELLS.

On MONDAY, JUNE 20th, 1836,

By Desire of the Committee and Members of the

Walsingham

HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Will be performed (for the first time here,) Garrick and Colman's celebrated Comedy of The

CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE.

Lord Ogleby, Mr. C. FISHER—Sir John Melvil, Mr. BELFOUR
Sierling, Mr. YARNOLD—Lavewell, Mr. LEMMON
Canton, Mr. TWIDDY—Brash, Mr. FISHER
Seymour Flower, Mr. J. FISHER
Mrs. Heidelberg, Mrs. HODGSON—Miss Sierling, Mrs. FISHER
Fanny, Miss C. ATKINSON—Betty, Miss COPPIN

A SONG, by Mr. YARNOLD.

A DANCE BY MISS COPPIN.

After which, (never acted here,) the new laughable Farce of

PLEASANT DREAMS;

Or, The MODERN WHITTINGTON.

Porridge, Landlord of the Crown Inn, Mr. YARNOLD
Peter, his Son, Mr. BELFOUR—Banguish, Mr. C. FISHER
Biggs, his Uncle, Mr. TWIDDY—Doop, Mr. J. FISHER
Walter, Mr. HOLLIDAY—Oatlers, &c.
Mrs. Porridge, Mrs. HODGSON—Sally, Mrs. FISHER

The Theatre will close for the Season on Monday, June 27th

Doors to open at 6, and Performances to commence at half-past 7.

Places to be taken of Mr. GEORGE, at the Theatre, from 11 o'clock 'till 2.

Boxes, 2s—Upper Boxes 1s. 6d.—Pit 3s.—Gallery 1s.
Second Price, Boxes 2s—Upper Boxes 1s. 6d.—Gallery 6d.
Children under Ten, Boxes 3s—Pit 1s. 6d.

NEVILLE, PRINTER, WELLS.

Fisher hunter seeks a steep roof pitched from high gallery down to flyless stage. *The* guide book to East Anglian theatre history is Elizabeth Grice's *Rogues and Vagabonds* (1977, Terence Dalton) replacing the earlier (1928) Burley's *Playhouses and Players of East Anglia* which although less accurate is still worth reading because its author was historically closer to the scene and can describe a visit to East Dereham *I found the stage curtain hanging, and there was still some scenery about . . . The stage seemed a trifle insecure, but the pit seats were all right, and so were the circle and gallery. A general air of what may be called unreadiness . . .*

The playhouses were built in towns with a theatre tradition which the Fishers could develop or revive by playing in an extemporised barn theatre for a couple of seasons to build an audience prior to opening their own 'proper' theatre. They were 'proper' theatres in that they had two tiers of boxes plus gallery and proscenium doors. The stages were of uniform size to take the company's touring scenery. *Certain scenes and equipment were left in each theatre, but special scenery for the current repertoire, stage properties and costumes, were conveyed in three wagons, each holding six tons of goods and pulled by teams of six horses.* This quotation comes from an excellent summary (two A/4 pages) produced by the curator, Moira Field, as a Fisher summary for visitors to the museum.

When visiting theatre museums for pleasure, it is my policy to act the role of innocent tourist and not disclose any specialist or journalist interests. My CUE role is to discover what is on display for the casual visitor and my personal pleasure is to wander unorganised among evocative artifacts that create something of the ambience of performances long past. In Wells, however, the enthusiasm of the Curator is part of the museum — and it must take such driving enthusiasm to get a theatre museum going anywhere, let alone a specialist one located on a coastal extremity. Moira Field is full of anecdote about the items on display and the detective work by which they have been acquired and linked with each other to build up the Fisher picture.

Let Moira Field's notes describe life on the circuit of this incredible family who at their height could fill nine parts in one evening, having been in the pit to play the overture with top coats over their costumes. *It took about two years to make the complete round, with a season of some two months in each town, preferably coinciding with assizes, fairs, races, or other crowd-pulling events. They played only four nights a week, but each performance lasted from 6.30 until nearly midnight, and consisted of a double or triple bill, with songs and dances as well. As many as 40 different pieces might be played in the season, at least a dozen 'never given here before', and only a handful performed more than once. 'Bespeak' performances 'by desire of' the local lord, gentry, bowling club, stewards of the races, Odd Fellows Lodges, or other patrons would ensure a good lump sum in the takings and attract others to these gala nights.*

The family home was built adjacent to the East Dereham theatre where the actors could walk from the drawing room straight on to the stage!

The collection includes playbills, notebooks, account books, portraits etc — not only from the Norfolk and Suffolk circuit but from other activities of family members such as David III's 1870 lease of Edinburgh Theatre Royal and Charles II's conquest of New York.

I like every museum to stimulate a direction that I feel bound to pursue. In this case it is a sketch of the interior of the Sudbury Theatre (converted 1817/demolished 1848) based on an old drawing in the Ipswich Record office. With high stage, one balcony and no proscenium doors, this represents an aspect of minor Georgian theatre architecture of which I would like to examine original documentation.

The Fisher items are filled out with a background of stock items to help set the period — costume prints penny plain/tuppence coloured actors, and that lovely classic of the Macbeth witches in a barn theatre.

All in all a lovely (and developing) evocation of a theatre that perhaps had a more direct contact with its audience than the sophisticated metropolitan playhouses which are so often the subjects of theatre research. A blessed era when a town of 3,500 souls could support a theatre season.

A Dream and a Reality

DOROTHY TENHAM

When, some seventeen years ago, I said that one day I would come to live in Pitlochry, two questions were asked with monotonous regularity. 'Where is it?' and 'Why there?' These were not original questions which baffled my friends. Long before I had to produce the answers, the questions must have bored the pants off one John Stewart. Not only did he plan to live there, but he also had the absolute intention of opening a theatre there. What a crazy notion it must have seemed to be. Let me try to offer an answer or, maybe, even both answers and then let you know how dreams come true.

Pitlochry is in Perthshire, which — for the benefit of my friends who still believe that you 'drop off the edge' halfway up the Barnet by-pass — is in the central highlands of Tayside, Scotland. At the last count it had a population of just under 2,500 residents — half village, half small town. Geographically it is only two miles from the centre of Scotland. Already I can hear the theatre statisticians' computer-brains working overtime. 'Who, in their right mind, would plan to build a theatre there?' Answer — John Stewart. And — even more baffling to those down south who work with a daily vocabulary of 'population' and 'catchment area' and 'accessibility of public transport' — I don't have to prove John Stewart's point because the theatre IS. Indeed it pays my wages as Box Office Manager! This year, in May, the new, permanent home of the Festival Theatre Society opened its doors to the paying public in its 31st season of plays and concerts. Not bad going, eh!

To work for the theatre in Pitlochry is quite an experience. Because the 'small town' is so very small, the people who work there are known to each other and to the rest of the villagers in a way that doesn't happen in 90% of theatres in England — even in the provinces. There is a feeling of kinship amongst the staff and a great, enthusiastic surge of goodwill for the theatre's success that simply can't happen in a less personal atmosphere. The only way we, the staff, can get to work is either by car, if we are fortunate enough to own one, or by walking. We know each other and enjoy our sense of 'belonging'. The new theatre is something we've all been promised in the village for many years and we've all believed it would happen. We have watched it grow and so we feel part of it. Indeed, after only 2½ months of working inside it, we feel it has been there for ages. The fact that it actually opened on time with the bills paid and the workmen off the site is a great achievement and the credit goes to the man who inherited the John Stewart dream — Dr. Kenneth Ireland. As 'births' go, this one was comparatively painless. Like all births though, the problems don't end there — the 'child'