

Richmond's Georgian Theatre as restored (nearer side of auditorium omitted for clarity). Drawing by Richard Southern.

showed the marks of having been originally panelled in.

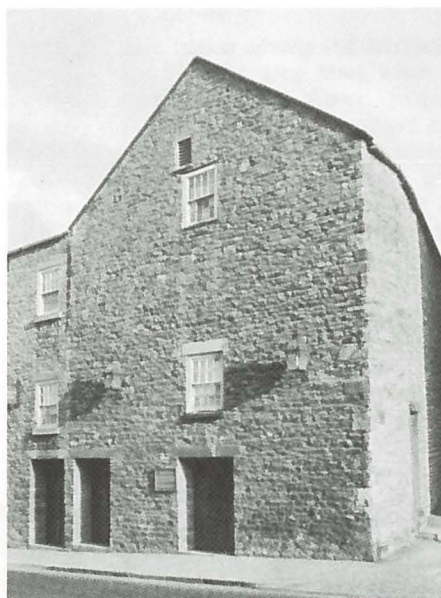
All this encouraged the removal of the wine cellars and it was discovered that the whole of this cellar had been built *inside* the walls of the theatre, leaving a narrow cavity of only a few inches between. Once the cellar had been removed, all sorts of clues were revealed including signs of steps leading down to the understage dressing rooms, a cross-wall dividing a machine room from the rest of the theatre, a door from that machine room into a one-time orchestra pit, more evidence of the pit passage *and finally, signs for the reconstruction of a sloping floor in the auditorium, turning the building into a proper, orthodox Georgian theatre with a sunk pit and – consequently – a raised stage.*

The way was now clear to proceed with the full restoration that is photographically documented in the museum, culminating with the 1963 reopening performance when Edith Evans spoke the prologue and Sybil Thorndike the epilogue. Their scripts are, of course, included in the display.

The final section of the exhibition is a series of model theatres, viewed through peepholes, of various theatre forms from the Greek theatre until today – with the purpose of showing the place of the Georgian stage in this evolution.

Then one waits in a green room with walls bearing photographs of royal visits and a collage of actors and musicians who have appeared since the reopening. Here one awaits the climax of one's visit: a conducted tour of the theatre itself.

I am continually surprised by the way in which the auditorium of any theatre seems smaller when viewed from the stage. Richmond feels particularly domestic in scale.



An outside view which gives little indication of the pleasures within.

This domesticity is somehow reinforced by the rectangular form. The pillars supporting the second tier of boxes are the only curves. They relieve and yet stress the right angles of the auditorium shape and its panelling. The architecture acknowledges the format of the major metropolitan theatres – for this is a *proper* theatre with pit, boxes, gallery, doors of entrance and a trapped stage – but the builder has absorbed the requirements of a theatre into a vernacular style that owes much to both breakfast room and chapel.

The lighting, presumably in the interests of tourist health and safety, is augmented during museum opening hours by some

rather rough working light. So the Richmond tourist misses the lighting ambience that the theatre can create at performances with its electrified candles. In earlier articles in this series, I have indicated my emotional response to performance lighting conditions in Drottningholm and rehearsal lighting in Copenhagen. Perhaps it was good for me to experience Richmond under conditions more likely to induce objective standards of judgement.

Yet I cannot remain emotionally detached from things like onstage fireplace and gallery kicking boards. I cannot but thrill to walk past a pay box and along a pit passage. Or to sit in a centre box from where a narrowing of the eyes fills the stage with perspective scenery. Or hang on a side wall like a Rowlands or Cruikshank.

All despite my own frame being out of scale: for as Ivor Brown reminds us in the little official guide book whose authorship he shares with Richard Southern

The Georgian playgoers were quite ready to sit cramped in narrow, backless seats, even in the boxes, with very small divisions between the rows. They looked on shoulder to shoulder, and knee to shoulder too. An important point is that people were on the whole smaller than they are now, and that there was length of leg for which to find leg-room: but there was corpulence and a very fat neighbour must have been unpopular.

Before leaving I enjoy one last look from the top of the gallery stairs. I am a Georgian theatre manager (administrators are a ghost of theatre yet to come). The overture has started – lots of continuo and much uncertain sight reading, yet robust and rhythmic. I pat my corpulence for tonight my *pit overfloweth*.