

## APPENDIX A

### Sir Alfred Butt (1878-1962)

- A1 Alfred Butt was a key figure in the variety theatre movement. The son of a builder, he trained as an accountant but moved very early into the variety management world where he made rapid progress. As a very young man he was taken on by the grand old man of music hall, Charles Morton, at the Palace Theatre of Varieties. There he became company secretary before his twentieth birthday and then manager, on Morton's death in 1904. From 1906 to 1920 he was managing director.
- A2 He was a worthy successor to Morton, whose eleven-year tenure had made the Palace a byword for quality in variety entertainment. Under Butt's unerring management the Palace prospered, and so did he. He strengthened his hold on the variety industry by acquiring the Tom Barrasford circuit in 1910 and by entering into partnership with Walter de Frece to found the Variety Theatres Controlling Company. At various times, Butt also owned or managed the Globe (Gielgud), Queen's, Empire, Gaiety and Adelphi theatres and he was managing director of Drury Lane Theatre Royal from 1919 to 1931. He also built two new theatres, the one that is at the centre of my evidence today and, in 1912, Glasgow Alhambra.
- A3 Butt was knighted in 1918 in recognition of his wartime charitable work and his role in the food ministry, where he introduced rationing. He was active in the Unionist party, was elected Member of Parliament for Balham and Tooting in 1922 and awarded a baronetcy in 1929.
- A4 By this time, he had disposed of many of his variety interests in order to become a full-time politician, but a scandal over an accusation that he had profited from a budget leak led to his resignation in 1936. Thereafter, he pursued another of his absorbing interests. As a young

man he had been a gambler at tables and he was a lifelong devotee of horse-racing. In the last years of his life he became a successful owner, racer and breeder of thoroughbreds.

**APPENDIX B****FRANK MATCHAM (1854-1920)****The Architect and his Work**

- B1 Matcham was the most prolific, efficient and imaginative theatre architect of his time (arguably of any time), responsible for the design or complete redesign of at least 120 theatres and variety palaces between 1879 and 1912. - and this figure takes no account of hundreds of improvement works which were less than total reconstructions. The full extent of Frank Matcham's output will probably never be established with certainty, but new research continues to add to the number of his known works.
- B2 Matcham, a West countryman, moved to London in the mid 1870s to join the practice of Jethro T Robinson. The leading theatre architects at that time were Robinson and C J Phipps. Phipps built many more theatres than his rival, but Robinson, as architectural consultant to the Lord Chamberlain (the theatre licensing authority), had a considerable reputation as a national authority on theatre design and audience safety.
- B3 Matcham married Robinson's daughter in 1877 and took over the practice after his father-in-law's death in 1878. This was the year in which the first effective system of theatre regulation was enacted and it also heralded the beginning of a surge in theatre building throughout the kingdom that continued for more than thirty years. Matcham quickly established himself as a completely reliable architect in meeting the new safety requirements and as a master in the planning of efficient, comfortable theatres with excellent sightlines in all parts of the house. He became popular with theatre proprietors and speculators as a man who could fit the best capacity theatre on to the

most unforgiving of sites and, most importantly, one who could deliver on budget and on time. His output, in terms of new or totally transformed theatres, between 1879 and 1912, may never be known with certainty, but it hugely exceeded that of any other architect.

B4 Matcham's mastery of three-dimensional design was unequalled in his field. It was coupled with an extraordinary fluency in taking and mingling details and motifs from many different sources, producing from them a coherent and satisfying architecture. His collaborative relationship with accomplished and trusted decorators and furnishers enabled him to realise his wonderfully elaborate interiors in fibrous plaster, allegorical painting, gold leaf and rich fabric and to do it with remarkable speed.

B5 His extreme eclecticism, ignoring current architectural movements was anathema to the architectural establishment, who thought nothing of Matcham and his kind, viewing them as commercial providers of vulgar buildings for clients who knew no better. Today, Matcham and his contemporaries are seen as creators of unique works of theatrical magic.

B6 Three broad periods are discernible in his work:

B6.1 Early Matcham theatres, c.1879 to 1889) are now practically non-existent and such drawings and illustrations as exist are sparse and generally uninformative. From the evidence seen, they were rather like those of his mentor and father-in-law, J T Robinson, but showing clear promise of wilder excitements to come.

B6.2 Middle period Matcham, say from 1890 to about 1902 is better represented. By this time he had become established as the unchallenged leader in his field, with commissions all over the country, frequently having five, even ten or more theatres

simultaneously under construction. During these years, the introduction of steel structural beams that could span wide spaces released architects from the limitations imposed by iron columns and short-span iron or timber beams. Matcham was particularly successful in exploiting the new possibilities. He was already making free use of design elements from every historical period (except Gothic) combining motifs with complete assurance in visually fantastic (and theatrically highly effective) interiors. He was happy to mix oriental with European historical precedents or to add touches of Art Nouveau when the mood took him. 'Eclectic' is the usual descriptor applied to his work, but it seems inadequate when applied to these gorgeous inventions.

This phase reached its high point with theatres like the London Hippodrome and Douglas Gaiety, 1900 and Hackney Empire, 1901.

B6.3 Finally, late Matcham: The huge London Coliseum of 1904 may be seen as the clearest marker of a change of direction. Matcham's later manner was already evident in Buxton Opera House, 1903, but he had designed nothing quite like the Coliseum before. All the evidence points to its single-minded Roman grandeur having been largely dictated by Stoll, who toured the latest American theatres with his architect and had firm ideas as to the manner in which his ambitions were to be given architectural expression. I would not go so far as to say that the London Coliseum experience influenced all of Matcham's later designs, but 'Late Matcham' tended to be less fantastically eclectic and more determinedly baroque in character. This was, however, *Matcham's own* baroque, with his characteristic cheerful disregard for architectural niceties. The

creation of intense theatrical atmosphere had always been, and remained, his unflinching aim.

- B7 The Victoria Palace was one of his last theatres. It is notable that Frank Matcham produced nothing of significance after 1912. Although then at the height of his powers, he simply retired from the firm. I have little doubt that the architect who had towered over the late Victorian and Edwardian theatre building boom saw all too clearly that the game he had delighted in was over. The future lay with picture houses.
- B8 By 1975, around 85% of *all* the theatres which had existed in Britain before the Great War, were destroyed or mutilated beyond recall, most of the destruction having occurred from 1950 onward. Frank Matcham was just one (albeit the most important) of the theatre architects whose work was callously scythed down at this time. Only 24 of his entertainment houses now remain in more or less complete condition but these few are still regarded - in modern terms - as being amongst the best theatres we have.

## **MATCHAM'S SURVIVING WORKS**

- B9 Of the 24 remaining theatres, variety palaces and other entertainment buildings wholly designed or substantially remodelled by Frank Matcham, some have had a series of different names during their lives. In the following list an asterisk indicates a building still working as a theatre or in some form of live entertainment use.

1891 Cheltenham	*Everyman Theatre
1894 Blackpool	*Grand Theatre
1894 Wakefield	*Theatre Royal and Opera House
1894 Blackpool	*Tower Circus

1895 Belfast	*Grand Opera House
1897 & 1909 Aberdeen	Tivoli (Matcham remodelled auditorium)
1899 London	*Richmond Theatre
1900 Douglas IoM	*Gaiety
1900 Portsmouth	*Theatre Royal (Matcham remodelled auditorium)
1901 Brighton	Hippodrome
1901 Newcastle upon Tyne	*Theatre Royal (Matcham designed new auditorium)
1901 London	*Hackney Empire
1903 Buxton	*Opera House
1903 Eastbourne	*Devonshire Park (Matcham remodelled auditorium)
1903 Harrogate	*Royal Hall
1904 Glasgow	*King's Theatre
1904 London	*London Coliseum
1905 Liverpool	Olympia
1906 Aberdeen	*His Majesty's Theatre
1907 Southsea	*King's Theatre
1910 London	*London Palladium

1911 London                      \*Victoria Palace

1912 Bristol                      \*Hippodrome

One further building, which was actually demolished in 1972, but convincingly recreated seven years later within a modern building, can be added to this list:

1895 London                      \*Hammersmith Lyric Theatre

The following extant works are also worthy of note. Some are non-theatre buildings which, nevertheless, have a strong theatrical character. Others are varyingly altered theatres in which the hand of the architect is still obvious

1896 London                      Stratford Borough Theatre (part of Matcham's exterior can still be seen)

1897 Nottingham                \*Theatre Royal (Matcham auditorium; altered)

1898 Leeds                        Empire Palace and County Arcade (the theatre was demolished in 1961, but the magnificent arcade remains within a commercial development by Matcham)

1899 Blackpool                    Tower Ballroom (reinstated after fire 1956)

1900 London                      London Hippodrome (now gutted)

1902 London                      \*Stratford Theatre Royal (extent of Matcham's work uncertain)



1903 London	*Shepherd's Bush Empire (altered, but exterior and a substantial part of interior remain)
1912 London	Wood Green Empire (altered facade only remains)

This list does not include Matcham's non-entertainment buildings, or other surviving theatres which have been so altered or (like St Helen's Theatre Royal) architecturally mutilated, inside and out, as to be unrecognisable as examples of his work.

If it can be established with certainty that Matcham altered Phipps's \*Dublin Gaiety Theatre in 1887, this would be the earliest of his surviving works.

## APPENDIX C

### LISTING DESCRIPTION 1972

IoE number: 207421

Location: VICTORIA PALACE VARIETY THEATRE  
VICTORIA STREET SW1 (north side)  
WESTMINSTER, CITY OF WESTMINSTER,  
GREATER LONDON

Date listed: 28 June 1972

Date of last amendment: 28 June 1972

Grade: II

TQ 2879 SW

#### 28.6.72 Victoria Palace Variety Theatre GV II

Theatre. 1911. Frank Matcham. White glazed faience. Roof not visible. Baroque style. 4 main storeys, 3 main bays (channelling throughout). Central entrance with original glazed doors having curved glazing bars. Cantilevered canopy at least partly C20. Central bay projects slightly with great niche rising through to first and second floors (blocked). Open loggia with Ionic columns to third floor; pediment over. Square headed windows, paired to first and second floors; oval to third being surmounted by cherubs' head keystones and flanked by Ionic columns. Rich modillion cornice. Parapet. Crowning Ionic cupola. Interior relatively little altered; restrained treatment to foyer and Dress Circle Bar with coupled Doric columns, marble balustrade to staircase; auditorium Baroque treatment, etc.

*[See] Curtains!!! Editors Ian Mackintosh and Michael Sell.*

## APPENDIX D

### The Variety Business

- D1 The Victoria Palace was the last of the great variety houses to be built in the West End and it represents the final stage in the development of a building type whose evolution can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth-century.
- D2 All the main elements of music hall had been present in the vocal entertainments associated with pubs, supper rooms and pleasure gardens, before Victoria came to the throne. In the 1840s and 50s a new generation of giant concert rooms or 'grand music halls' began to appear. They were still attached to pubs and still relied for their profits on drink being sold to a partly seated, partly promenading audience, but the new halls were of an artistic professionalism and an architectural ambition never previously seen. The second Canterbury Hall of 1856, in Lambeth, is generally accepted as having set a pattern that was to be rapidly copied by others.
- D3 By the early 1860s the new music halls were invading the West End. The London Pavilion may claim to have led the way, but that one was, at first, a rather pasted-together affair. The Alhambra and the Oxford, however, were big, architecturally impressive dining and drinking halls, ablaze with light and as attractive to men about town as they were to those lower in the social scale. Their first-rate entertainments and socially relaxed atmosphere represented a lively threat to the straight theatres.
- D4 In 1884 the Empire in Leicester Square set a new standard, combining the easygoing manners of the music halls with what can only be described as operatic magnificence. Eight years later, the conversion of the failed Royal English Opera House to the Palace Theatre of Varieties

confirmed, if any confirmation was needed, that the public appetite for this style of entertainment was unflagging.

- D5 By the 1890s the character of the halls had changed significantly. Audience tastes had a little - but very little - to do with it. A regulatory regime to remove the risk of death by fire (or, even more to the point, death by being crushed in a rush for the exits) had led to the demolition of the majority of the old backland halls. At the same time, determined political and morality-driven campaigns to separate drinking from entertainment and to eliminate promenades, sounded the death knell of even the safest flat-floored drinking hall. Music hall programme content (mainly vocal comic turns, interspersed with 'speciality acts') changed hardly at all, but a new type of building that was barely distinguishable from a drama theatre, came into existence. The public continued to call them music halls, right up to the second world war, but these were variety theatres, fully seated, opulently decorated, safe, comfortable and with no drinking whatever in the auditorium. The new variety theatres were designed to be 'respectable' places, attractive to a family audience and not solely to its drinking members.
- D6 The insatiable appetite of the great urban centres for undemanding entertainment was met by well-capitalised syndicates working with a new generation of specialist theatre architects to produce a new generation of theatres on prime sites in every town and city in Britain. Variety, in particular, became a hugely profitable industry. Where the builders of the first halls had been licensed victuallers, providing entertainment as a lively aid to their trade, the new builders were entrepreneurial businessmen like Edward Moss, Oswald Stoll, Walter Gibbons, the Broadheads, Tom Barrasford and Alfred Butt, leaders of a highly organised nationwide entertainment industry. They were often

socially and politically ambitious, with a variety of external business interests.

- D7 The four great West End variety theatres that are mentioned again and again in this work, mark both the high point and the end of an era. Although there were only twelve years between the first and the last of them, they covered three reigns, from the end of the Victorian era, through the Edwardian decade to the coronation of George V. They were thus the products of the period that has been called 'the long summer', a time of seemingly rock-solid social and political stability that was to be overturned by the shock of the Great War.
- D8 Considered in purely theatrical terms these theatres represent the last great surge of energy of the music hall tradition. When the Hippodrome was built, theatre in all its manifestations was triumphant, as it had been for the previous two or three decades. Building a theatre on a prime site in the West End was still seen as a sure-fire way of making money. The erosion of this happy state of affairs was at first almost imperceptible and it had little or nothing to do with the move toward war. Moving pictures that had, at first, been nothing more than a music hall novelty, turned into cuckoos in the nest, demanding their own space. By 1911, when the Victoria Palace was built, purpose-built cinemas had appeared in the heart of Theatreland and were beginning to seduce theatre and (in this context, more significantly) music hall audiences.