A Cultural Genealogy of the Royal Court Theatre: the Renovation of a Theatre and an Ideal.

Stephen Douglas Berwind
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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In memory of
Peg and Chris Berwind
my beloved parents

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Abstract

The Royal Court Theatre's current renovation invites a reexamination of the English Stage Company (ESC). The ESC has entered a crucible of change, raising new questions concerning the Royal Court's architectural semiotics and the company's aesthetic mission as London's most acclaimed producer of new plays. This study seeks to understand the ways in which its identity has been shaped and consolidated over the last forty-two years and how the current chapter in ESC history redefines the company's identity and future achievement.

The English Stage Company took over the Royal Court in early in 1956. The ESC's marriage with the theatre appears serendipitous in retrospect, because key elements of the ESC's mission correspond to characteristic events from the building's history.

The institutionalization of the ESC/Royal Court during the late nineteen eighties and early nineteen nineties ensured that the identity of theatre company and theatre building became indistinguishable. The current rebuilding program endeavors to retain the ghosts of the building's past and the intimacy of its auditorium while transforming a late Victorian receiving house into a flexible, modern,
producing theatre capable of juxtaposing new plays against the context of the traditional proscenium stage.

Recognizing the complex cultural matrix that embeds the theatrical event, this study employs both a synchronic and diachronic approach when exploring the cultural genealogy of the Royal Court. The study begins with the sequence of events during the nineteen nineties that led the company to undertake a twenty-six million pound rebuilding program. It then traces three strands of history that entwined to become the story of the single entity known as the Royal Court: the history of the building, the independent theatre movement in England, and the English Stage Company. It takes a detailed look at the plan of the current renovation project and the image of the Royal Court it presents. The conclusion attempts to discern the future challenges of the Royal Court following its return home in the year 2000.
Introduction
"Consult the genius of the place in all."
- Alexander Pope

In the autumn of 1995 the Royal Court Theatre received notice that it would be awarded funds from the National Lottery which would enable it to address the rapidly disintegrating state of its one hundred and seven year old building. Almost forty years earlier the English Stage Company had moved into the Royal Court, cognizant of the building's inadequacies. During the intervening decades, management considered comprehensive plans to remedy the problems, as well as contemplated moving elsewhere but never managed to raise the necessary funds to accomplish either objective. For forty years, makeshift solutions enabled the Royal Court to continue functioning without solving these problems. Now, with stage and grid no longer structurally sound, the building required major repairs. In 1994 the New York Times called the Royal Court (the company) the most important theatre in Europe the same week that, in London The Times called the Royal Court (the building) "a dump."¹

The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre faced both an opportunity and a test fraught with problems. Artistic Director Stephen Daldry challenged the staff to consider the rebuilding "like the most expensive, exciting

production of our lives."² Aesthetically, any architectural changes to the building could potentially undermine its strengths. In the feasibility study for the reconstruction, a quotation from Richard Eyre delineates these strengths: "The Royal Court is the ideal size for a playhouse. It boasts perfect acoustics, humane proportions and the best physical relationship between actor and audience in London."³ Aesthetic problem solving intertwined with technical conundrums. The decaying physical fabric of the building compounded the engineering challenges which include the awkward building site, proximity to the Underground, and an adjacent sewer pipe carrying the Westbourne rivulet.

During its tenure at the Royal Court, the ESC developed a reputation as the most important English language theatre dedicated to the production of new plays. Such a reputation affects the expectations of current audiences, and the challenge of the renovation would be to retain the theatre’s special ambiance. How much can the Court be changed without losing its identity? How does the building’s architecture speak to its audience? What is the identity of the ESC? How does the ESC balance past achievements, aesthetics of theatre buildings, and the company’s need to transform a

² Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Stephen Daldry Tape 42.

³ Haworth-Tompkins/Theatre Projects 10.
nineteenth-century facility into one suitable for the twenty-first century? These questions and others have prompted an attempt to understand the complex interrelatedness of the aesthetic achievements of the ESC and the architectural messages of the Royal Court Theatre in order to evaluate the difficult balancing act the renovation requires.

While the current redevelopment of the Royal Court Theatre invites speculation about the future of the theatre in the twenty-first century, to understand the context in which the theatre first appeared requires a return to the world of the mid-nineteenth century. The current Royal Court Theatre, built in 1888, is the second theatre to have borne that name, the first Royal Court lasted from 1871 to 1887. Theatre managers built each of the two buildings during a period when the "gradual accumulation of public wealth and a new national prosperity led to a building boom in West End theatres that started in 1866 and lasted to the end of the century."4 The boom also included the building of provincial and suburban theatres, such as the Royal Court, which lie outside of the West End theatre district. The current building fits Marvin Carlson's definition of a facade theatre, which means that the brick and limestone facade harmonizes with the neighboring streetscape rather

than drawing special attention to the theatre building.5
No monumental structure, the Royal Court places itself within its community.

The production history of the theatre reveals a variety of shows from drama to farce to opera to ballet, presented on both mixed and single bills. The theatre hosted both professional and amateur productions. This experimentation with theatrical product suggests that managements searched for a niche, an artistic identity that would enable them to balance the advantage of the building’s actor-audience intimacy against the disadvantages of its meager backstage and small seating capacity. During the Harley Granville Barker-J. E. Vedrenne management of 1904 to 1907, the Royal Court achieved its first great period of prominence, producing plays by writers whose work fell outside the typical parameters of West End commercial repertory, including G. B. Shaw, Earker, and Euripides. This management achieved widespread acceptance for the first time in England for productions of what we now term the modern drama. However, the long-term viability of such a non-commercial policy necessitated some form of subsidy, a concept that had yet to gain widespread support.

Following this moment of glory, the Royal Court struggled through the teens and twenties to find an

economically stable company that could successfully express its identity. While subsequent managers attempted to imitate the success of the Barker-Vedrenne regime, neither the Royal Court nor any other branch of the art theatre movement managed to create either a stable management tradition or secure the economic subsidy such a non-commercial aesthetic requires. The economic shocks of the Great Depression forced the transformation of the Royal Court from legitimate theatre to cinema. Damage during the blitz of 1940 and the vicissitudes of World War II shuttered the theatre. Reopened in 1952, when the idea of government subsidy for the arts was creating a revolution in the economics of theatre, the Royal Court struggled for a few years, seeking to regain the identity of the Barker-Vedrenne era and scraping for money.

The English Stage Company assumed the theatre’s lease in 1955 and began to occupy the theatre in early 1956. The ESC’s marriage with the Royal Court Theatre appears in retrospect to be serendipitous, because key elements of the ESC’s mission correspond to characteristic events from the building’s history that associate the name Royal Court with new plays, opposition to censorship, fine realistic acting, education, and leftist politics. During the following decades, the ESC battled to sustain the company, while remaining dedicated to producing new plays, opposing censorship, performing in a distinctive, realistic acting
style, creating an active educational program, and keeping faith with its leftist social awareness. Those efforts eventually cemented the conflation of theatre and company. The institutionalization of the ESC at the Royal Court during the late nineteen eighties and early nineteen nineties ensured that the identity of theatre company and theatre building became indistinguishable. The current rebuilding program endeavors to retain the ghosts of the building's past and the intimacy of its auditorium while transforming a late Victorian receiving house into a flexible, modern, producing theatre capable of juxtaposing new plays against the context of the traditional proscenium stage.

The English Stage Company had entered a crucible of change, raising new questions concerning the Royal Court's architectural semiotics and the company's aesthetic mission as London's most acclaimed producer of new plays. The recent renovation bids a reexamination of the English Stage Company and the ways in which its identity has been shaped and consolidated with that of its theatre home over the last 44 years and how this current chapter in ESC history redefines the company's identity and the potential of its future achievement.

Architecture, aesthetics, urban studies, geography, and semiotics provide valuable tools for the analysis of how the
Royal Court speaks to its audience. As Marvin Carlson reminds us, it is crucial to remember that:

\[\text{the text-performance-audience interaction should not be considered in a vacuum, but rather as an event embedded in a complex matrix of social concerns and actions, all of which 'communicate' or contribute to giving the theatre experience its particular 'meaning' to its participants.'}^{*}\]

Carlson began the exploration of theatre and the semiotics of the built environment in his book *Places of Performance*. An examination of the architectural record helps determine the meaning of the built environment and the messages that environment communicates to residents of urban centers. Carlson suggests employing a dual awareness of time:

Ideally, such analysis should be not only synchronic (considering the relationship of elements at a particular time) but diachronic (considering temporal changes in elements or in the connotation of elements), since the meanings of those elements that make up a theatre structure, and sometimes the elements themselves, will change as the society that interprets them changes.\(^7\)

This analysis follows that directive by examining the history of the Chelsea district in London, the Royal Court Theatre, and the English Stage Company from the nineteenth century to the present.

In examining the urban context of Chelsea, this study utilizes the five elements of urban structure as defined by Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City*. First Lynch discusses

\(^5\)

\(^9\)
(1) paths or learned routes by which inhabitants move from one part of the city to another. Obviously, one must include the various paths for different modes of travel such as foot traffic, vehicular traffic, and mass transit. Lynch especially focuses on those places where two or more paths intersect, which he calls (2) nodes. Large urban environments such as London inevitably break down into what Lynch calls (3) districts, relatively large areas or neighborhoods which share common characteristics. Lynch's last two elements consist of (4) edges, which act as barriers to paths and as boundaries to districts, and (5) landmarks, which are striking urban elements used for orientation.

The Royal Court Theatre stands on the east side of Sloane Square in Chelsea, a few miles removed from the main London West End theatre district. The theatre's Sloane Square location places it on a transportation node within Greater London for foot traffic, automobile traffic, and both bus and underground mass transit. Several important streets feed directly into Sloane Square, including King's Road (leading west to the Thames crossing at Putney Bridge), Sloane Street (leading to Knightsbridge and Hyde Park), Lower Sloane Street (heading to the river and the Chelsea Bridge), and Eaton Square (heading to Belgravia, Mayfair and Buckingham Palace).
Most of the early development in Chelsea related to the Thames, because the river provided the fastest and easiest means for transport. Currently, the area is largely residential. After the metropolis engulfed the district during the nineteenth century, the main commercial district developed during the late Victorian era along King's Road and around Sloane Square, placing the Royal Court in the commercial center. Mass transportation paths make the Sloane Square node the obvious new gateway to the district. The location on a major transportation node undoubtedly contributed to the theatre's success because, as Carlson notes, easy access by mass transportation proves a crucial factor in predicting the success of a contemporary theatre's location.  

The Thames forms the clear southern edge to the Chelsea district. The other edges tend to be less definite as Chelsea meets and merges with Knightsbridge and Belgravia. The train tracks leading to Victoria Station create an eastern edge. Chelsea Creek forms the approximate western edge to the district. The least distinct edge of Chelsea runs along the northern part of the district beginning at Chelsea Creek and traveling east-northeast more or less along the Fulham Road and Walton Street. Basically a low-rise district, no single building provides a dominant landmark to the Chelsea skyline. Nonetheless, the Royal Court
Court and Sloane Square aside, Chelsea possesses a number of notable landmarks capable of attracting visitors. The Royal Hospital, Burton Court, and the Duke of York's Headquarters function as landmarks in providing orientation within the district. Just off the Square, the 1890 Holy Trinity Church designed by John Dando Sedding, boasts well-known stained glass windows designed by Byrne Jones and executed by the William Morris Studios. The smooth facade of the Peter Jones department store designed by William Crabtree in 1932 provides a sleek moderne contrast to much of the surrounding Victoriana. Some famous Chelsea landmarks and events include the Old Chelsea Church, Chelsea Flower Show, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea Physic Garden, the houses of Carlyle, Leigh Hunt, Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, and Whistler, restored Crosby Hall, and the oldest event in rowing, Doggett's Annual Coat and Badge Race between London Bridge and Chelsea.\textsuperscript{10}

Although Chelsea is currently considered part of the central area of Greater London, it originally developed as a village of palaces along the Thames for the Tudor aristocracy. Henry the VIII built a palace there where the future Elizabeth I lived for a number of years. Another of its early settlers, attracted to the "sweet air" of Chelsea, was Thomas More, who built his home as a country retreat from the rigors of government work in Westminster. Charles

II created the Kings Road (originally a private road) so that he could more easily visit his palaces outside the city.

The changes in modes of transportation over the centuries have played an important role in the development of Chelsea. Unquestionably, the combination of easy transport from other areas of London and Chelsea's artistic atmosphere must have made it an suitable location for the idealistic practitioners, led by George Devine, who constituted the English Stage Company. Devine's biographer, Irving Wardle, reports Devine's attitude: "It was going to be an ordinary proscenium house; it's not in the middle of London, but it's all we can get, and it's large enough, and it's for a middle-class theatre population. If any one else wants to support it, fine."¹¹

Carlson contends:

that in every historical period and in every culture the physical matrices of the theatrical event--where it takes place within the community, what sort of structure houses it, and how that structure is organized and decorated--all contribute in important ways to the cultural processing of the event and must be taken into consideration by anyone seeking an understanding of its dynamics.¹²

This invites an examination of the relationship between the Royal Court Theatre in London and its Chelsea district


¹² Carlson 204.
location. It is generally accepted that urban residents know and agree on the social semiotics of different sections of their city. Audience members clearly use their awareness of this coding of the built environment to develop their attitudes toward the locations of theaters in the cityscape.\textsuperscript{13}

The Chelsea district in London has undergone several changes since the ESC took over the management of the Royal Court. Michael Hallifax, the original stage manager for the ESC, describes Chelsea as a backwater in 1956: "It was sort of the fading fifties. There were no restaurants, no life there...It was a very barren area with no passing trade because nobody walked in Chelsea."\textsuperscript{14} Within a decade, nearby King’s Road became an important part of London’s Swinging Sixties. An increasingly trendy place to go since the nineteen eighties, the Sloane Rangers, a descriptive term given to young women of affluent backgrounds who frequent the area, have almost taken over Chelsea. The most prominent urban magnet on Sloane Square is Peter Jones, the upscale department store located on the west side of the square across from the Royal Court. In 2000, facing the square one finds a mixture of residential buildings and retail establishments including four banks, a chemist, several restaurants, a hotel, and a chain book store.

\textsuperscript{13} Carlson 205.

\textsuperscript{14} Doty/Harbin 197.
Reflecting the current lively foot traffic for businesses located on Sloane Square, the ordinary King’s Arms pub, adjacent to the Royal Court when the ESC moved in, has been transformed into a branch of the upscale bar/restaurant Oriel. Shortly after the ESC began producing at the Royal Court, the construction of a mixed use office and residential building over the Underground station, reflected the start of the surge in real estate values that transformed the area since Halifax’s report on the nineteen fifties.

Sloane Square presents what the borough planner calls an open, almost "continental" face to the community, unlike the typical, densely landscaped London square, such as nearby Eaton Square. Modest in size, the small park in the center of Sloane Square functions primarily as a place that people walk around because the bustle of traffic around the Square deters the casual visitor from crossing into the Square. Visitors who cross into the Square definitely feel like they stand on an island surrounded by pulsing streams of traffic. In the Square one finds the fountain designed by Gilbert Ledward, R.A., and erected in 1953 as a gift of the Royal Academy to the Borough of Chelsea. A replica of the statue of Sir Hans Sloane, namesake of the Square and former Chelsea resident, also graces the Square. A third

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15 McDonald, David, Personal interview, 22 July 1998.
16 Bignell 16.
piece of monumental sculpture, dedicated to the dead of the two World Wars, stands at the end closest to the theatre.

Despite these pieces of sculpture, pedestrians have no compelling reason to enter the Square, a problem that the current renovation of the Royal Court seeks to address. The theatre has received permission to tunnel under the road in front of the theatre and connect to an abandoned, below-ground restroom in the square in order to create sufficient space for a bar/restaurant. One of the unresolved items on the renovation plan remains the architect’s plan to use the staircase leading up to the Square to provide an alternate entrance to theatre and restaurant. In the warmer months, the restaurant would offer table service in Sloane Square. The current planning permission only allows this stairway into Sloane Square to function only as an emergency exit because of reservations of the landowner, the Cadogan Estate.

People have traveled to Chelsea for entertainment for centuries. Its location outside the center of London made it suitable as a ludic area from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, beyond the reach of London’s institutional hierarchy. Since at least Tudor times, Londoners sought diversion in such outlying districts. On Chelsea’s eastern edge the Ranelagh Gardens first gained renown in the seventeenth century, and the gardens served as a major attraction. The Rotunda, built in the Ranelagh
Gardens in 1742 and designed for the performance of music and public dancing, boasted an impressively grand diameter of 185 feet. Mozart played there at age eight, and composer Thomas Arne staged masquerades there among which the 1752 Chinese masquerade, painted by Canaletto, is perhaps the most famous. The 1775 Regatta Ball was a late highlight in the life of the Rotunda before changing tastes made Ranelagh Gardens obsolete.17

In the nineteenth century this ludic area migrated from the eastern edge to the western edge of Chelsea, mirroring the movement west that accompanied the expansion of the London metropolis. Located on the western edge of Chelsea, the Cremorne Pleasure Gardens began as a sport center and functioned as a nineteenth century entertainment center. It too appeared to be a site for playful, festive entertainment until complaints about disorderly crowds in what had become a residential district prompted its closure in 1877.18 The histories of the pleasure gardens in Chelsea reveal that its visitors demonstrated an impulse toward the transgressive behavior that Bakhtin has called the carnivalesque. Further, many late Victorian artists chose to work in Chelsea. The public mind identified the district with play and transgression of the social order, making Chelsea a good


18 Bignell 82.
choice for the development of a late nineteenth century theater such as the Royal Court.

Simultaneously with these changes in Chelsea, the European movement to establish an art theatre distinct from the commercial theatre, was begun in the late nineteenth century by continental pioneers such as André Antoine, Aurélien-Marie Lagné-Poë, and Otto Brahm. That movement influenced the direction of both the Barker-Vedrenne regime and the English Stage Company. That both companies chose to locate in Chelsea reinforces Carlson’s proposition that the location of the experimental theatre in an urban context stands apart from theatrical culture as a whole. Carlson’s contention about the location of experimental theatre in the post World War II period appears to apply equally well to Harley Granville Barker and J.E. Vedrenne’s 1904 choice of the Royal Court as an appropriate venue to experiment with short runs of non-commercial plays.

The basis of its audience is not the same as that of the standard commercial theatres of Broadway and the West End but rather a more specialized public often involved or strongly interested in experimentation in the other arts as well. Thus such theatres have often tended to appear not in hotel and entertainment districts, but in areas associated with contemporary artists, their studios and galleries.19

William Gaunt’s 1954 book Chelsea confirms an artistic atmosphere in Chelsea that might have been attractive to the

19 116.
ESC in the nineteen fifties.\textsuperscript{20} A location in an artistic community appears tailor-made for some of the early aims of the ESC, to revive English verse drama, to encourage novelists and poets to write for the theatre, to produce "world classics."

The Royal Court's location, away from the West End, while firmly attached to a middle class district, may have effected the ESC's ability to transform itself into an artistic institution with a sense of permanence. Unlike later fringe or off off Broadway theatres, which located themselves in rundown districts, the Royal Court, just slightly off-center, and easily accessible to the City's power sources, occupies a boheme where the middle class audience feels safe to venture. Such a location probably has a similar positive effect on the corporate and government funding organizations upon which all non-commercial late-twentieth century theatres rely for their economic survival.

Idealists such as George Devine led the English Stage Company (ESC) at the Royal Court Theatre in London, and their vision sustains the organization today. At any given time at least three Royal Courts exist. First among these is the ideal Royal Court, a principled organization led by super-heroic writers to achieve productions of the highest

artistic standards. Second is the quotidian Royal Court, constrained by budgets, fallibly human, and yet, like a mutating signifier chasing a chameleon signified, aiming for each generation's version of those same ideal standards. Finally, there is the Royal Court of legend, drawn from those occasions in the past when the quotidian Royal Court and the ideal Royal Court merged into one organization. All of these identities prove unstable. Each generation of the 44 year old organization creates its own ideals, and its own version of the legends. Periodically, the Royal Court, like a snake, must shed one skin and emerge in another. This study examines such a time, the period 1991-2000.

The first chapter, "Redefining in Order to Rebuild: 1991-2000," examines the sequence of events during the nineteen nineties that led the ESC at the Royal Court to undertake a £26m rebuilding program. The next four chapters, "Building a Theatre: 1870-1900," "Establishing an Ideal: 1901-1917," "Searching for a Format 1918-1955," "Building an Institution: 1956-1991," trace three distinct strands that entwined to become the story of the single entity known as the Royal Court by the time of the redevelopment: the history of the building, the independent theatre movement in England, and the English Stage Company. The sixth chapter, "The Renovation Plan," includes a detailed look at the current renovation project and how an architectural plan provides a snapshot of the Royal Court as
it enters the twenty-first century. The conclusion, "17 February 2000 and After," attempts to discern the future challenges of the Royal Court following the return home in February 2000.
Chapter One  

During the decade of the nineteen nineties, the ESC, which makes its home at the Royal Court Theatre, confronted the necessity of metamorphosis. Like any organization in the fast-changing world of the late twentieth century, the ESC must continually modify and update its image if it wishes to maintain its reputation as a cutting-edge institution. The Royal Court's location on Sloane Square in the nineteen nineties had become one of the most affluent, trend-setting districts in the capital, in a world where Thatcherism had apparently vanquished socialist ideals.¹ Arty Chelsea had been transformed from the dowdy backwater of 1956, when the ESC began operating at the Royal Court, into one of the most expensive and desirable areas in London. According to borough planner David McDonald, rich foreign nationals who prefer a part-time London address, most frequently choose the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.² Current Executive Director Vikki Heywood amplifies this demographic reality with her 1998 report that virtually every member of the House of Lords with a London

¹ Ironically, Mrs Thatcher herself resided in Chelsea in the years prior to her lengthy residence at Downing Street during her tenure as Prime Minister.  
² McDonald, David, Personal interview, 22 July 1998.
address maintains a residence in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.¹

Contrasting this establishment neighborhood with the often scruffy presence of the young people congregating on the Royal Court's front steps underlines a dialectic that exists on many levels in the organization. The contrast between the Royal Court's traditional-style auditorium and the often unconventional new plays presented there also operates in the geographical contrast between establishment Chelsea and the brash, outspoken and often anti-establishment nature of the theatre company based there. Heywood explains that although the Royal Court's productions frequently scandalized establishment Chelsea residents, they tolerated the company much like a parent who will tolerate behavior from her own rebellious child that she might not tolerate from a stranger's child.² Like some of the boutiques on King's Road, the Royal Court provides the establishment with a peek at the avant garde.

In 1991 a widespread consensus develops in the media: the company must transform itself if it wishes to maintain its preeminent position as the national company dedicated to nurturing new writing for the stage. Ironically, the ESC found itself in a paradoxical position. Artistic success and financial stability had characterized the previous three years.

¹ Heywood, Vikki, Personal interview, 9 July 1998.
years. Nonetheless, the ESC confronted a media perception of dullness when compared with the image of its storied past, despite individual productions of this "dull" Royal Court management receiving public and media acclaim.

With the contract of Artistic Director Max Stafford-Clark set to expire in April 1992, the Board instigates a search for a successor capable of reinvigorating the ESC's image. That search results in a conscious redefinition of the organization, begun in 1991, that realigns the image of the Royal Court with its storied past and which facilitates a massive redevelopment of its home. As a result of these developments, throughout the decade of the nineteen nineties, the English Stage Company at the Royal Court commands a preeminent position in London theatre.

Throughout 1991, stories appear in the media which discuss the desirability for change at the Royal Court. Simon Reade in the Daily Telegraph reports that "some feel as we move through the nineties there is no longer any new writing worth leading" and calls for the Royal Court as "the jewel in contemporary British playwrighting's crown to...reinvigorate itself." Michael Coveney urges a clean break, because he claims that "[t]he Court's place in the

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Coveney asserts that "[t]heatre is no longer at the top of young writers' agendas, and it is the Court's job to restore that appetite and ambition."' Coveney's leading candidates for the job include Howard Davies, Deborah Warner, Nicholas Hytner, and Kenneth Branagh. Given that the position of Royal Court artistic director combines high prestige, immense expectations, and public visibility with relatively low pay, small budgets, and a more than full-time commitment, it's not surprising that none of the established directors on Coveney's wish-list applied for the job. Consequently, Coveney expects the short list of finalists to include former and current Stafford-Clark lieutenants, Simon Curtis and Lindsay Posner as well as Jenny Killick formerly of the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh.

In the context of the overall history of the ESC, Stafford-Clark's tenure (1979-1993) provided needed stability. He transformed the artistically prestigious but economically shaky Royal Court into an institution, a national theatre for new writing, stable, if perhaps perceived as staid. Building on the company's legendary role in the revitalization of British playwrighting, Stafford-Clark accomplished this transformation through a


7 8 September 1991, 52.
combination of artistic excellence, the expanded voice given to female writers, and the ability to operate within extremely tight budget constraints. In 1980 and again in 1984 he rallied the theatre community on the Royal Court’s behalf to prevent the Arts Council from eliminating their subsidy grant. Under his stewardship, beginning in 1988, the company commenced a string of seven years of balanced budgets while simultaneously accumulating a cash reserve from the successful commercial transfers of Royal Court productions.

Stafford-Clark delegated leadership in building matters to General Manager Graham Cowley. As detailed in other chapters, a policy of delayed and incomplete maintenance historically characterized the theatre’s managements. Aware that the level of squalor in the Royal Court’s front-of-house required addressing, Cowley launched the Olivier Appeal Building Campaign in 1988 as part of a celebration of the building’s one hundredth birthday. The money raised through this fund-raising campaign enabled the company, working in partnership with the architectural firm Rod Ham and Partners, to address, through a series of manageable, piece-meal repairs, the dilapidated state of the theatre building. When these renovations, such as the cleaning of

* Lord Olivier served as honorary chairman of the campaign which bore his name. He had rejuvenated his own career with the 1959 production of The Entertainer at the Royal Court.
the theatre's front facade, the expansion and refurbishment of the front-of-house, and the new rehearsal room, reached fruition in the nineteen nineties, the Royal Court had named Stephen Daldry artistic director designate. Following decades of deferred maintenance, these much needed improvements ironically appeared to reflect the promise of a new era of Daldry rather than an accomplishment of the passing era of Stafford-Clark. Of the £390,000 reserve fund that the Royal Court had accumulated when Daldry took over as artistic director, £260,000 consisted of matching funds restricted to the building program.

While Stafford-Clark's record of artistic success combined with financial stability exceeds that of any previous Royal Court management, the media regarded his regime as failing to match the glory days of the nineteen fifties and sixties.* Despite such success, many Board members openly called for an end to the Stafford-Clark era. After twelve years at the helm, many regarded the work that Stafford-Clark presented as too predictable. Perhaps it is inevitable that when one person selects a company's plays for thirteen years, familiarity results in a type of predictability that the media reported as a sense of

* The reasons for this perception remain elusive. Stafford-clark points out that the Royal National Theatre's list of one hundred outstanding plays of the century includes more Royal Court plays from Stafford-Clark's tenure during the nineteen eighties than from the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties combined.
dullness or sameness. Many people in and around the Royal Court reported that they shared the media’s perception. Whether the media created this perception or simply reflected it cannot finally be ascertained. The media consistently called for change in leadership at the Royal Court.

The English Stage Company at the Royal Court developed the reputation of an insular organization. Despite occasional internal feuding, the Royal Court typically responded to external criticism with a unified public face. The media criticism of Stafford-Clark did not, however, engender support from Royal Court alumni. Stafford-Clark’s feuds with the icons from the early days of the ESC at the Royal Court such as Jocelyn Herbert, John Osborne, and Lindsay Anderson ensured that he would find no champions there. Many of the members of the Royal Court’s founding generation felt Stafford-Clark alienated them from what they still regarded as "their" theatre. Herbert describes the Royal Court under Stafford-Clark as "not a happy place," which she attended more from a "sense of duty" than pleasure.10 Playwright John Osborne, whose career as a writer inextricably connected him to the Royal Court, publicly criticized Stafford-Clark’s management: "There is

no talent, no flair. It is full of Time Out troglodytes who waste money.\textsuperscript{11}

Current Executive Director Vikki Heywood, reflecting the historical perspective evident beginning with the Stephen Daldry era (1993-98), offers an explanation for this generational split: "Each succeeding generation tends proprietorially to view their tenure as representing 'the real' Royal Court."\textsuperscript{12} Such an attitude contributed to clumsy transitions when leadership passed from one group to the next, ensuring that the first two generations at the Royal Court largely remain isolated from each other,

Stafford-Clark's staff, and the actors and writers with whom he worked, solidly supported him. In 1991 every full-time member of the Royal Court staff (and all but one part-timer) sign a petition which they submit to the Board in support of Stafford-Clark's reappointment as artistic

\textsuperscript{11} McAfee, Annalena. "To Catch a Fief." \textit{Evening Standard} 2 May 1991: 24. Perhaps not coincidentally at the same time that Osborne criticized Stafford-Clark, Stafford-Clark turned down the opportunity (offered by young impresario and Royal Court Board member Robert Fox) to produce Osborne's newest play \textit{Deja vu}, a look at the characters from the Royal Court's landmark drama \textit{Look Back in Anger} thirty years later. Alan Bates reportedly wanted to play the lead and Tony Richardson would again direct. When Stafford-Clark turned the play down, the press reported that \textit{Deja vu} would go to the West End directly, but now with Peter O'Toole in the leading role. Finally, Bill Kenwright produced \textit{Deja vu} with Peter Egan in the leading role and Tony Palmer directing. It opened on 10 June 1992 to tepid reviews, perhaps confirming the correctness of Stafford-Clark's decision not to produce the play at the Royal Court.

This support by staff contrasts starkly with an absence of open expressions of support from the public, the Board, or the media. Former staffers such as Bo Barton, Graham Cowley, and Mark Rubinstein, interviewed in the summer of 1998, speak warmly of him, and they express disappointment that he did not receive the kudos they believe he deserved. Exacerbating the situation, Stafford-Clark, following a Royal Court tradition, generated a disputatious relationship with the media. That relationship undoubtedly colored the frequently critical press accounts during Stafford-Clark's tenure.

His antagonistic relationship with the media reflected a tradition at the Royal Court that extended back to founder George Devine. Although typically portrayed in the media as embattled, Stafford-Clark made efforts to counter that image and to develop cordial press relations through events such as regular luncheons with the media. Through the press, Stafford-Clark rarely revealed to the public his personal charm. The public, who derived their knowledge of Stafford-Clark from the media, perceived his somewhat Puritanical, serious-minded approach to the work at the Royal Court as artistically smug and off-putting. Not a media favorite

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because of this sometimes truculent, prickly public persona, Stafford-Clark received little of the widespread recognition that his achievements warrant. Even his detractors didn’t dispute Stafford-Clark’s superior abilities as a director. The lack of appreciation for his achievements wounded Stafford-Clark and exacerbated his relationship with the media. The pressure for a change in artistic directorship became substantial.

For some 1991 observers a sense of déjà-vu surrounded this situation. In 1988 when Stafford-Clark’s contract had previously been up for renewal, Board members and the media, for similar reasons, also had called for his replacement. Despite such criticism, Stafford-Clark decided in 1988 to reapply for his job. During two grueling interviews, he convinced the Board that he embodied the best candidate and the Board renewed his contract.\footnote{Stafford-Clark, Max. *Letters to George*. (London: Nick Hern Books, 1989) 30.} Following his reappointment in 1988, Stafford-Clark produced a string of successes including the double bill of *The Recruiting Officer* and *Our Country’s Good* (1988), *The Three Sisters* (1990), *Mad Forest* (1990) and *Death and the Maiden* (1991).

While the media observes and reports, the Royal Court publicly wrestles with finding a new artistic leader. In *The Evening Standard* on 2 May 1991, former ESC Chairman Matthew Evans and Board Member Hanif Kureishi both report
that in 1988 they believed they had an understanding with Stafford-Clark, that by granting him another contract, he would complete his objectives at the Royal Court and agree to leave voluntarily in 1992.\textsuperscript{14}

Consequently, in 1991 Board members react angrily to the news that Stafford-Clark will reapply for the position of Artistic Director. Stafford-Clark tells the \textit{Evening Standard} that the artistic director position at the Royal Court represents the most important job for new theatre writing in the country, and he wants to continue in that position.\textsuperscript{17} Although Stafford-Clark’s success, reflected in attendance and budget solvency, is greater in 1991 than in 1988, the Board’s determination to replace him is similarly stronger. Unfortunately, the Board has not been able to identify a candidate who excites broad-based enthusiasm.

An insular institution, the Royal Court typically chose its artistic directors from the ranks of directors who had established a track record within the company. The absence of a consensus successor reinforced the complaint that Stafford-Clark failed to cultivate a crop of young talented directors for the company. During his tenure, Stafford-Clark held power tightly in his own hands, and some media reports suggested that he did not groom potential

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14} 2 May 1991. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{17} Reade 12.}
\end{footnotesize}
successors. Given Stafford-Clark's desire to remain at the Royal Court, it is not surprising that he didn't directly cultivate an heir-apparent. Jocelyn Herbert thought that he had driven away young directors because he held power too tightly and would not give them significant opportunities. Others felt that his assistant directors were too closely connected with Stafford-Clark's own method of working to offer much of an alternative. These views represent the opinions of outsiders; Graham Cowley contends that Stafford-Clark offered generous opportunities to his assistants. Whatever the case, to achieve change the ESC needed to abandon its preference for promoting from within and import an outsider.

Reflecting the organization's discomfort with choosing an outsider, it appeared possible that Stafford-Clark, the strongest internal candidate, might be rehired by default. Reporting in The Observer on the search for a replacement after applications for the position of Royal Court artistic

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18 That Stafford-Clark's former lieutenants were among the finalists in both in 1992 and 1998 contradicts this impression. The list of young directors who worked at the Royal Court as assistants to Stafford-Clark includes Danny Boyle, Simon Curtis, Antonia Bird, Les Waters, Roger Mitchell and Phillip Howard. These directors have excelled in theatre, film, and television.


21 Cowley, Graham, E-mail to author, 25 June 1999.
director had closed, Michael Coveney describes Stafford-
Clark as "a brilliant interviewee, an exceptionally gifted
director and a cunning operator" and laments that the Royal
Court Board "lacks the resolve to make a clean start."^{22}
It does appear as if the Royal Court will once again
experience a mishandled transition from one leadership
generation to the next.

Unhappy with the prospect of a continuation of the
Stafford-Clark tenure, Jocelyn Herbert and her colleague
from the George Devine era at the Royal Court, Lindsay
Anderson, privately approach Stephen Daldry. The name of
the young dynamic Artistic Director of London's Gate Theatre
has not appeared in any of the media speculation about
possible successors.^{23} In the two years he served as
artistic director at the Gate, Daldry transformed it into an
electrifying theatre. During that time, Herbert and
Anderson regularly attended the Gate and admired his work.

At the Gate, Daldry brought "forgotten" Continental
dramas viscerally alive through productions notable for the
important role given to visual and aural design. Daldry
also proved a savvy manipulator of public relations,
becoming a media favorite, in stark contrast with Stafford-
Clark. Daldry's ability to create public and media

^{22} 8 September 1991, 52.

^{23} Daldry and Herbert in separate interviews during the
summer of 1998 provided the same information about the
process of 'courting' Stephen Daldry.
excitement represented attributes desirable for the Royal Court's new Artistic Director. During his tenure at the Gate, Daldry attracted an audience both young and hip. The theatre had been known to turn away from its fifty-six seat house as many as three hundred would-be audience members a night.24

Despite his Gate achievements, Daldry represents something of an unknown in terms of productions of new plays, the core of the Royal Court's mission. Willing to bet that he can also succeed with new plays, Herbert and Anderson ask Daldry if he will allow them to propose him as a candidate for the position of artistic director at the Royal Court. He consents. Herbert serves on the Council's search committee, and her long association with the Royal Court, dating back to the glory days of George Devine, provides her with enormous influence on the selection process. The selection committee (considered by some in the media as too in-house), includes playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker, former ESC artistic director Stuart Burge, current ESC production manager Bo Barton, lawyer Antony C. Burton, and Stephen Evans. By anointing Stephen Daldry as their choice for artistic director, Herbert and Anderson gain for their dark-horse candidate an unanticipated position on the short-list of finalists.

Daldry's charisma, energy, and vision represent exactly the change the Board desires; but this wunderkind lacks the managerial experience desirable for the leader of an institution the size and stature of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court. The Board faces a dilemma. The critics perceive the safe choice of sticking with Stafford-Clark as boring. To choose Daldry as Artistic Director represents an exciting, if risky, alternative. The Board's solution, reached following what newspapers reported to be a very acrimonious meeting, combines both options. They name Daldry as Artistic Director Designate, while retaining Stafford-Clark for an additional two years as Artistic Director, to be followed by another eighteen months as an Associate Director to Daldry. The media roundly criticizes the decision. Several articles openly express doubt that Daldry will ever make it through the period of joint management. The Daily Mail on Sunday headlines their coverage of the story as "A brave new world is sold out at the Royal Court" and calls the compromise decision "the Great British Fudge." Neil Mackwood also hints darkly


that cronyism is destroying the creative vigor of the Royal Court. 27

The joint tenure of such different persona as Daldry and Stafford-Clark led many observers to predict that this power sharing partnership would prove disastrous. During the nineteen seventies the Royal Court experimented with the joint management of Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd, and the failure of that pair to operate as a team almost destroyed the ESC. In the nineties, Stafford-Clark and Daldry, despite the differences in their personal and directorial styles, confound those expectations and make the arrangement work. Instead of another fumbled management conversion, the transition period achieves notable artistic, popular, and financial successes for the Royal Court. Daldry and Stafford-Clark become friends as well as co-workers.

In 1992 Stafford-Clark apparently won official recognition of the Royal Court’s status as the national theatre for new writing when he successfully argued that the Royal Court’s funding ought to come from the national Arts Council and not be devolved to a regional London council. 28

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28 Originally the Arts Council slated the Royal Court for devolution. In the public turmoil that followed the preliminary announcement, either the Arts Council or the government changed its mind. The decision not to devolve the company came in an announcement in the House of Commons by then Arts Minister Peter Brooke, surprising the Royal Court. While this issue appeared to be settled in 1992, in
The idea of decentralizing arts funding, first posited by Margaret Thatcher’s conservative government, hurt London-based institutions. Provincial organizations receive money directly from the regional council and indirectly through a local governmental organization. London, unlike provincial cities, lacks a local government organization to provide a second source of income.

The long transition period enables Daldry to receive (some say as a consolation for having to wait to assume the helm) his first two opportunities to direct at the National Theatre. Daldry’s collaboration with designer Ian MacNeill for the 1992 production of the J.B. Priestley’s chestnut An Inspector Calls proves to be an extraordinary critical and popular success. It sweeps 19 major awards on both sides of the Atlantic: three Olivier Awards including Best Director, four Tony Awards including Best Director, seven Drama Desk Awards including Best Director, two Evening Standard awards including Best Director, two Critics Circle awards including Best Director and the Best Revival award from the Outer Critics Circle. Still running in the West End in 2000 (a remarkable achievement for a straight play), it continues to provide Daldry personally with a comfortable, independent financial cushion. A year later his second production at the National, Sophie Treadwell’s expressionistic Machinal, 1998 the issue of devolving the Royal Court reappeared. It now appears as though the Royal Court will be devolved to the London Arts Board.
confirms his reputation as an inventive director with an exceptionally strong visual sense. It also catapults newcomer Daldry on to the short list of candidates to replace Richard Eyre at the National Theatre. Daldry's assignments at the National as well as his first Royal Court production in the Theatre Downstairs, Arnold Wesker's The Kitchen, do not, however, establish his credentials as a director of new plays. Throughout his tenure at the Royal Court, Daldry's failure to establish himself as a successful director of new plays, represents his major weakness as Artistic Director.

During this transition period, Daldry immerses himself in discovering the history and tradition of the Royal Court. When he takes over as Artistic Director in 1994 he will seek to model his management style on that of founder George Devine himself. He ventures to empower a group of directors as assistants who will push the limits of his personal taste, as Devine had done, in order to provide a wide variety to the repertory. Daldry's decision in 1995 to premiere first plays by writers in their twenties in the Royal Court's Theatre Downstairs represents a typical effort on his part to evoke such a legacy. Traditionally, young writers graduated to the Theatre Downstairs after their

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19 Perhaps more risk adverse than the Royal Court, the National chose Trevor Nunn, a candidate with a long and distinguished record.

plays received their smaller and less costly initial production in the Theatre Upstairs. Previously only Devine, with plays such as Look Back in Anger, had risked premiering a twenty-something author's first play in the Theatre Downstairs. To underwrite such a risk, Daldry spent the £130,000 available for production expenses from Stafford-Clark's surplus.11

Stephen Daldry also endeavors to maintain a close professional relationship with the founders of the Royal Court. He considers himself to be a symbolic "grandchild" of old timers such as Jocelyn Herbert, Lindsay Anderson, and William Gaskill, and he regards his close relationship with them as a reflection of the intimacy often observed in grandparent-grandchild relationships. This family analogy also enables Daldry to explain the strained nature of Stafford-Clark's relationship with many of the same people. Stafford-Clark had been the child who needed to repudiate his parents in order to establish his own identity. Unlike his predecessor, Daldry can imitate his grandparents without threatening his own sense of self.12 Daldry's tenure represents a distinctive period in the history of the Royal Court, and no one would call him simply a Devine-imitator.

11 Daldry, Stephen, E-mail to author, 29 June 1999.

12 Daldry, Stephen, Personal Interview, 2 July 1998. Clearly, Daldry made this narrative part of the Royal Court self-identity. Numerous other staff members, during independent interviews with the author used the same analogy.
Two productions from the period of shared management stand out as signposts that reflect the public’s perception of the Royal Court in the nineteen nineties. Max Stafford-Clark chooses to direct his first Shakespeare, King Lear (1993), as one of his last productions as Artistic Director. This monumental tragedy suggests that Stafford Clark wishes to secure his legacy as Artistic Director. It is also interpreted that he identifies with the story of a king abdicating his throne. Daldry chooses to present for his first directing assignment in the Theatre Downstairs a revival of Arnold Wesker’s The Kitchen, a play closely associated with the George Devine era. Daldry’s productions at the National during 1992-93 make him one of the most talked-about directors in London prior to directing his first production in the Theatre Downstairs for the Royal Court. He transforms the proscenium theatre Royal Court into an arena theatre in order to realize a vision of the play vastly different from the look with which Jocelyn Herbert’s 1961 designs first defined the play. This transformation of play and space semiotically represents Daldry’s concerns: to embrace his role as heir to the Devine mantle and to propel the Royal Court and its audience into a visual and visceral design aesthetic he deems appropriate for the nineties.

During their collective directorship Stafford-Clark wins individual success as a director with The Queen and I
(1994), Jim Cartwright's Road (1994) and the double bill of Stephen Jeffreys' The Libertine and Etheridge's The Man of Mode (1994-95). Viewed from the perspective of critical opinion, Stafford-Clark's directorial efforts at the Royal Court outshine those of Stephen Daldry (Search and Destroy [1993] The Kitchen [1994] and The Editing Process [1994]). However, Daldry surprises audiences with the conversion of the proscenium Royal Court Theatre into a theatre in the round for The Kitchen. The production, visually and viscerally stunning, suggests a new direction in terms of design aesthetic for the Royal Court. If Daldry's directorial conception for The Editing Process fails to cohere, the production elements in Ian MacNeill's set again prove visually exciting. Moreover, Daldry's public persona scintillates compared to Stafford-Clark's during the period of joint management, and he therefore garners more praise when the Royal Court succeeds during this period.


Daldry, Stephen, Personal interview, 28 July 1998. Stephen Daldry attributed the failure of The Editing Process to his attempt to transform a comedy of manners into a play that would carry a strong statement.

Barton, Bo, Personal interview, 20 July 1998. Cowley, Graham, Personal interview, 23 July 1998. Rubinstein, Mark, Personal interview, 20 July 1998. All asserted that Daldry tended to receive credit for accomplishments they felt would more accurately have been
Nonetheless, the unequal distribution of praise fails to create a rift in the good working relationship between the two men.

Stephen Daldry's decision to direct a revival of Ron Hutchinson's *Rat in the Skull* as part of the Royal Court Classics at the Duke of York's season in 1995, and the way he chooses to conceive that production, further places his visual aesthetic in stark contrast to that of Stafford-Clark, who directed the play's 1984 premiere. Characteristically, Stafford-Clark focused his production on serving the author's text, using an almost bare stage to suggest the interrogation room the writer described. The play's timely parallel to events in Ireland and the intensity of Stafford-Clark's production ensured success both in London and New York, where it played at the New York Shakespeare Festival as part of an exchange program between the NYSF and the ESC.

Daldry chooses to revive the play when changes in northern Ireland's political situation suggest that peace between the two sides might be possible. Although the contemporary politics change, the play's portrait of how Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland form a single interwoven tapestry remains true. Furthermore, Daldry produces the play like a poem, rather than like a slice-of-life police drama. His collaboration with long-time Royal attributed to Stafford-Clark.

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Court designer William Dudley creates a startling visual metaphor drawn from an Asian theatre tradition: a stage, reached by a long ramp as in Kabuki, and at the center, a sumo wrestler's pit. Daldry's powerful visual image reinforces the play's theme that, like two sumo wrestlers, protestants and catholics in Northern Ireland define themselves by each other. The combination of visual imagery and the play's charged dramatic conflict, provides a contemporary, cutting-edge relevancy that seems new for the Royal Court.

Daldry relates that the biggest adjustment he faced after Stafford-Clark's departure is that he "missed Max."16 Stafford-Clark uses 1994-95, his last year at the Royal Court to mount co-productions between the Royal Court and his newly founded Out of Joint company. He continues to work at the Royal Court as a director, in co-productions with Out of Joint, including Sebastian Barry's The Steward of Christendom (1995), Mark Ravenhill's Shopping and Fucking (1997) and Caryl Churchill's Blue Heart (1997).17

Symbolically conceptualized productions such as Daldry's attract widespread notice and enable Daldry to garner the lion's share of the credit for revitalizing the

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17 All three of these plays also toured extensively including performances in New York City. Joint productions such as these enabled the Royal Court to tour productions more extensively in the nineteen nineties than in earlier decades.
Royal Court. Daldry uses symbolic messages to communicate with his audience outside of the theatre also. From the first media interviews following his appointment, Daldry carefully crafts himself a public image. He tells Deborah Orr that "[a]t least I’m from Sheffield, not Oxbridge. So the Oxbridge mafia is on its way out. It’s a start." As a graduate of a red brick university such as Sheffield, Daldry represents both a break with the past and a natural evolution of the social changes that Devine envisioned for the Royal Court. The Court finally eschews a public school-educated graduate from one of the "medieval" universities in favor of a candidate whose background more closely matches that of Look Back in Anger’s Jimmy Porter. Devine had sought to diversify the genre of plays, which he felt reflected the homogeneity of the English elite, then common to the West End by expanding the topics, language, and personalities of English playwrighting to better reflect the nation’s cultural diversity. Daldry recognizes that his appointment to the Royal Court represents a potent sign of the inclusiveness of English theatre, and he capitalizes on it by such comments in print.

3 Orr 34.

3 Oscar Lewenstein, Artistic Director from 1972-1975, had also not been an Oxbridge graduate. Although a founder of the English Stage Company, many Royal Court insiders regarded Lewenstein as an outsider, despite his long association with the company, in part, because he was a manager/producer, not an artist.
As events unfold during the next five years, the choice of Daldry as Royal Court leader emerges as a fortuitous one. The Royal Court enters what the media calls a new golden age, becoming unquestionably the hottest theatre in London and, by extension through its successful exportation of plays and productions, the preeminent producer of new writing for theatre in the world.  

As Royal Court Artistic Director, both Daldry and Devine faced the perceived need to rejuvenate British playwrighting. This refrain, repeated regularly during the English Stage Company's tenure at the Royal Court, reflects a media-discerned crisis resulting from a dearth of important new writers. This perception, in part, reflected Stafford-Clark's tendency to choose plays for the Theatre Downstairs from a smallish stable of established writers such as Caryl Churchill, Timberlake Wertenbaker, Howard Barker, and Howard Brenton with whom he had developed an on-going relationship as a director. But, in fact, a

40 As part of its millennium celebrations, the Royal National Theatre compiled a list of the best 100 plays of the century. More of these plays originated at the Royal Court than any other English theatre. Three plays originated in the nineteen fifties, two from the nineteen sixties, four from the nineteen seventies, eight from the nineteen eighties and two, thus far from the nineteen nineties. That clearly makes the Max Stafford-Clark tenure at the Royal Court most successful in placing plays on this list.
substantial number of writers made their Royal Court debut on the main stage during Stafford-Clark’s tenure. 41

When Daldry takes over, the Arts Council funds the Royal Court for eight productions a year, four in the Theatre Downstairs and four in the Theatre Upstairs. While Stafford-Clark made a virtue of scarcity in his operations, Daldry refused to have the Royal Court’s operations constrained by the Arts Council grant. Daldry calculated that the best way to attract more and better new plays is to make a substantial commitment to produce new work, trusting the writers to recognize and exploit the opportunities he offers. Daldry more than doubles the number of annual productions at the Royal Court from eight to nineteen. In order to finance these additional productions, Daldry aggressively pursues sponsorship arrangements including corporate subsidy and commercial and not-for-profit joint ventures all the guilt-free energy of a born post-Thatcherite entrepreneur.

Daldry also decides to raise the company’s profile by taking a lease in 1994 on the Duke of York’s Theatre on St. Martin’s Lane in the West End for a three play season of Royal Court classics, revivals of past successes. Whereas previous Royal Court Artistic Directors had occasionally

41 The list includes Jim Cartwright, Sarah Daniels, Claire McIntyre, John Guare, Andrea Dunbar, G.F. Newman, Charlotte Keatley, Larry Kramer, Robert Holman, Ariel Dorfman, Terry Johnson, Paul Kember, John Byrne, Snoo Wilson, Ron Hutchinson, Alan Bennett and Wallace Shawn.
produced classics such as Shakespeare and Chekhov alongside new plays, Daldry believes that such a mixture confuses the Royal Court’s identity as a producer of new writing. Instead, Daldry elects to revive plays first produced at the Royal Court, such as The Changing Room (1971), Rat in the Skull (1984), and Hysteria (1993), that he believes deserve classic status. To pay for these extra productions Daldry secures funding from private sources. He relates that "Rat in the Skull was paid for entirely by Howard Panter [owner of the Duke of York’s] via Turnstyle, with support from Dodger Productions in New York City, and Royal Court Theatre Productions, as were all the plays in the ‘classics’ season."

Daldry makes another change reflective of his awareness of the importance of names as symbols. He endeavors to create a single identity which encompasses both the English Stage Company and its home, the Royal Court Theatre. When Oscar Lewenstein and Ronald Duncan founded the English Stage Company in 1954, they did not envision the creation of an important resident theatre in London. Even when they hired George Devine and the company moved into the Royal Court Theatre in 1956, no one expected that theatre to become the ESC’s permanent home. To maintain its identity and its

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"Daldry, Stephen, Personal Interview, 28 July 1998. Daldry contends that productions of Shakespeare and Chekhov only confuse the public’s image of the Royal Court.

"Daldry, Stephen, E-mail to author, 29 June 1999."

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options for change, the company created the clumsy nomenclature and bifurcated identity of "The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre." Through most of its history, the ESC operated from season-to-season, not knowing if the current season would be the last. Only near the end of the Stafford-Clark era can one regard the Royal Court's institutional position as secure. Daldry views the double naming as a vestigial element from those insecure days in the past and best discarded. The Royal Court is the theatre and Royal Court is the company. Therefore, he suppresses the name English Stage Company and decrees that only the name Royal Court be used in all company publications.

Daldry doesn't limit his interest to the name Royal Court. He takes a larger and more personal interest than Max Stafford-Clark had done in the condition of the theatre building itself. Indeed, Stafford-Clark admitted in the summer of 1998 that had he remained at the helm of the Royal Court, the current renovation would never have been undertaken. "Daldry's interest in developing a distinctive visual aesthetic for the Royal Court brings the inadequacies of the building into sharp focus. Consequently in 1995, Daldry seizes the opportunity of National Lottery funding to launch a refurbishment of the Royal Court as a suitable permanent home for the company. The Royal Court

will feel the repercussions of this choice well into the twenty-first century.

In addition to the building's structural and cosmetic problems, the Royal Court's backstage required a complete overhaul. With an Artistic Director such as Stephen Daldry, eager to exploit all the recent advances in stage technology, the inadequacy of the Royal Court's neglected technical capacity, barely modernized when the ESC took possession in the nineteen fifties and only slightly improved since then, was strikingly evident. From its early days the Royal Court, under the influence of designer Jocelyn Herbert, developed a visual aesthetic which borrowed concepts from modern art and transformed British scene design. Herbert's work featured both simplicity and fine realistic detail suspended in space. This design approach enabled the Royal Court to maintain its focus on the primacy of the writer and the word. During the nineteen eighties, the ESC's limited financial resources combined with Stafford-Clark's personally spartan tastes reduced the visual element in Royal Court productions to the minimum, changing Herbert's more artistic approach.

Stafford-Clark brought with him to the Royal Court the Brechtian-derived aesthetic of the Joint Stock company, a democratic production process in which writer, director, and actors jointly created the plays. For economic as well as aesthetic reasons these Stafford-Clark productions also were
notable for doubling roles, the avoidance of star casting, and the barest of necessary scenic elements." This aesthetic, perhaps reflecting a Puritan strain in the English psyche, treats the spoken word as the most important theatrical element and distrusts strong visual productions.

In 1994 the production department, led by production manager Bo Barton, exchanges office space with the marketing and public relations department, following the departure of its successful marketing director Guy Chapman. The swap provides the production department with more office space, and that change appears to reflect a change in the Royal Court's priorities. This change of office space epitomizes one of the changes Daldry's leadership provides. The production department becomes central to the company's operation, a position it had never held under Stafford-Clark. The empowering of existing staff such as Head of Lighting Johanna Towne and the hiring of new staff such as Head of Sound Paul Arditti reinforces Daldry's aim to upgrade the Royal Court's technical capacities.

In connection with the Olivier campaign, the technical staff had conceived the changes needed to modernize their capacities. The staff named the resulting visionary

"Coveney, Michael. The Observer 8 September 1991: 52. Perhaps seeking to distance themselves from this aesthetic, two of the candidates for the position of artistic director in 1991, Simon Curtis and Lindsay Posner both derided the socialist Joint-Stock Brecht-derived-aesthetic as redundant and out-of-date following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Ironically, both were Stafford-Clark lieutenants."
proposals "pork-chop plans," because it was considered more likely that pigs would fly than that the Royal Court would be able to raise the £3m to £5m needed to transform its technical capabilities. As part of this process, in October 1994 Paul Arditti called Theatre Project's Jerry Godden to inspect the Royal Court to provide some advice on improving or replacing the theatre's grid.\footnote{Prior to assuming his position at the Royal Court, Arditti had done some free lance work for the theatre consulting firm, Theatre Projects. The need to replace the grid was first identified in 1946 during inspections designed to assess the needed work to open the building after it had been bomb damaged.} That inspection led to a further meeting between Graham Cowley, Jerry Godden, and Iain Mackintosh. After touring the theatre and recognizing that the building required more work than replacing the grid, Mackintosh recommended that the Royal Court obtain the assistance of an architect and begin a comprehensive overhaul of the facility. Cowley expressed surprise at the suggestion of an architect. The Royal Court had prepared a proposal to the Lottery for £3m in technical support. At a further meeting with Cowley and Mark Rubinstein, Mackintosh suggested that the necessary improvements would cost more than £3m.

Daldry approaches problem solving by attempting to transform it into a positive opportunity. In one of the serendipitous coincidences that characterize the history of the Royal Court in the nineteen nineties, the government had
recently decided to dedicate a portion of the profits from the new national lottery to funding capital projects for the arts. Daldry, with an uncanny ability to sense and capitalize on opportunities, leads the company to exploit the appearance of capital funds for the arts through the lottery and undertake an extraordinarily ambitious rebuilding of their home base on Sloane Square.

The Lottery scheduled the review of the first round of proposals during the summer of 1995; only groups able to move quickly can enter that round. A second impetus to speed came internally. Managing Director Graham Cowley and Chief Financial Officer Mark Rubinstein (who was the original project coordinator for the rebuilding) accepted job opportunities with commercial theatre organizations. They were scheduled to leave the Royal Court at the end of March 1995. Daldry insists on having the proposal ready to submit before their departure because of his awareness that it will be almost impossible for the new management team to get up to speed on both this project and the Royal Court's regular operations quickly enough to meet the Arts Council's deadline for the first round of lottery grants.

Over Christmas of 1994, the Royal Court assembles a series of specifications on a single sheet of A-4 paper to be given to the short list of five architectural firms to be interviewed the next year. The Royal Court chooses the architecture firm of Haworth-Tompkins by the middle of
February 1995. Consequently, only slightly more than six weeks remains during which Haworth-Tompkins, theatre consultants, Theatre Projects, and the Royal Court staff must assemble the proposal to the Arts Council.

Based on the track record from the Olivier Appeal, the Royal Court plans to limit the size of its request to between £5m and £6m, since the National Lottery requires that any organization that applies for funding raise twenty-five per cent of the cost of the total project from other sources. Additional encouragement to conceive the project on a grander scale comes from the Arts Council lottery staff. According to Graham Cowley, John Major's Tory government, aware of approaching parliamentary elections, wants to jump-start some large lottery-funded programs, so that the government can take credit for the projects prior to the election. In September when the Royal Court announces to the world the lottery commission's grant award, the rebuilding plan has grown to a projected total cost of over £21m.

The dramatic growth in the size of the project results from developments connected to negotiations to extend the theatre's lease, a requirement the Royal Court must meet to receive lottery money. Although their lease expired in

1991, the Cadogan Estate refused to grant a long-term extension until the Royal Court had completed the improvements associated with the Olivier Appeal. In 1994, the Royal Court notifies the Cadogan Estate of its intention to apply for capital funding from the lottery commission. The Royal Court receives what it considers to be a guarantee from the Cadogan Estate to contribute approximately £3m to the lottery-funded project in exchange for the planning consideration advantages the Cadogan Estate will receive for other Sloane Square properties it owns and the increased value of the theatre resulting from the planned addition of a bar/restaurant. Including this £3m in the Royal Court’s twenty-five percent share of the cost of a lottery-funded project enables the scope of the proposal to expand to one worth £21m, with £16.2 provided by the lottery.

Having secured the lottery funding, Daldry launches a comprehensive planning process that involves theatre consultant Iain Mackintosh of Theatre Projects and architect Steve Tompkins of Haworth Tompkins Associates in an extensive series of meetings with past and present Royal Court staff, Royal Court playwrights, past designers, and directors, members of the media and the theatre-community-at-large. An expanded examination of this process will be made in chapter six. The thorough approach taken by the theatre and its design team demonstrates their awareness that any changes to one part of the building will have
repercussions throughout the facility. The design team’s constant use of the term ecology reflects its view that the theatre and its resident company function as a single entity as well as the architect’s cognizance of the delicate balancing act they are undertaking.

On 22 December 1995 the Royal Court submits the planning application for the redevelopment to the Planning Department for the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Details of the plan continue to change and evolve during discussions with the planning department. This careful planning contributes to the series of decisions to expand the project to its final size, approximately £26m, of which the National Lottery funds £18.9m.

The English Stage Company regarded the Royal Court Theatre as inadequate for the spatial needs of a producing theatre company soon after assuming the theatre’s lease in 1956. Over the intervening years the ESC contemplated numerous projects for renovation of the theatre, as well as considering moving the company to a different theatre. The ESC’s financial limitations made it impossible to execute more than the most essential, minimal improvements. Those same financial limitations made impossible the move to a larger, better equipped facility. However, no one, not even George Devine himself, ever envisioned a transformation of the Royal Court Theatre of the magnitude that emerges under Daldry’s leadership.
The failure in 1963 to raise the money for George Devine’s ambitious rebuilding scheme represented the final disappointment that led him to disengage himself from the company.  

Devine’s scheme, discussed in detail in chapter five, envisioned a completely new building facade, a major change to the auditorium, creation of a flexible studio theatre, an on-site restaurant and locating a youth theatre on land behind the theatre. Although Elidir Davies’s 1965 architectural plans were believed to have been lost, the author discovered in the summer of 1998 a copy of the plans, which had been misfiled in the municipal archives. The plans for the nineteen sixties and nineteen nineties exhibit very different aims. In the nineteen sixties Devine sought to change the auditorium while making minimal changes backstage. In the nineteen nineties Daldry decides to make minimal changes to the auditorium, while changing the remainder of the building completely. Coincidentally, the general goals of the two programs demonstrate remarkable synchronicity: two theatres, a restaurant, a rehearsal room, and an adjoining facility for education/youth theatre.

The project planning initially creates a time-line in which the Royal Court will move out of the building at the end of the summer of 1996 and return for the fall of 1998. Delays in gaining planning permission during May and June

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1996 that result from scheduling conflicts related to commissioner’s vacations threaten the viability of the project’s time-line.

Before the Royal Court opens Howard Korder’s *The Lights* on 18 July 1996, the planning commission finally grants permission for the redevelopment. During that production, (in which director Ian Rickson’s concept places the audience on stage and the actors in the auditorium), in what many audience members regard as a symbolic action, one of the actors hits the theatre’s walls with a sledgehammer, knocking down the plaster. The old Royal Court soon will disappear and a greatly changed building will take its place. Beginning in September 1996, thanks to lottery funding, the company leases two West End theatres in order to continue their artistic operations during the rebuilding in Sloane Square.

The relocation to the West End presents a challenge similar to that faced by the Harley Granville Barker-J.E. Vedrenne management when they relocated from the Royal Court to the West End. In contrast with Harley Granville Barker’s alienation of his core audience following his move into the Savoy Theatre, Daldry makes a conscious (and successful) effort to retain the Royal Court’s identity during its sojourn in the West End—through renaming and redecorating the theatres in a manner atypical for the West End.
During a staff discussion concerning the risks of the move to the West End, Daldry asserts, "We must avoid looking like a West End Theatre—artistically, aesthetically, practically." Daldry worries that programming might change in subtle ways, because the Duke of York's has about 250 more seats than the Theatre Downstairs in Sloane Square. Consequently, the plan to premiere first plays by young playwrights in a West-End-Theatre-Downstairs entails huge risks. Programming at the Ambassadors proves easier; the new performing spaces created within that theatre will be similar to those in Sloane Square.

Daldry's determination to maintain the Royal Court identity while in the West End, results in alterations to the appearance of both theatres so that the interiors no longer resemble West End playhouses. Once transformed, they resemble squats, which although located in the posh West End reflect the aesthetic of their occupant, the Royal Court. He also replaces the rented theatres' names, calling the Duke of York's the Royal Court Downstairs and the Ambassadors the Royal Court Upstairs. It represents a clear attempt to align the semiotics of these theatre buildings with those of the producing company temporarily occupying

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50 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Stephen Daldry Tape 26.

51 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 26.
them. More consciously than ever before, the Royal Court endeavors to present a unified image through name, repertory, performance space, and advertising.

At the Duke of York's in 1995, Ian Rickson (who will eventually replace Daldry as Artistic Director) working in collaboration with Ultz, the designer for Mojo, paints the interior a very dark blue in order to minimize the visual impact of the late Victorian detail. They also tear out the carpeting from the lobby, exposing a much altered original mosaic tile floor, and remove the carpeting from the stairs without erasing the stains created by the old adhesive. Simple, contemporary, industrial-inspired lighting fixtures replace the crystal chandeliers. Rickson and Ultz obtain the right ambiance for Mojo, while also creating a rougher environment more fitting to the Royal Court's several year sojourn there. Allowing Rickson to supervise this transformation reflects Daldry's comfort in delegating authority to his lieutenants.

The Royal Court wants semiotically to identify the Duke's as a place of work and not a play-house. In the circle bar the company installs second-hand sofas and chairs in order to make it a more comfortable place for the audience to sit and chat before and after performances. They place similar furniture in the rear of the stalls after

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92 Interestingly, also originally designed by Walter Emden, the architect of the Royal Court.
removing several rows of seats. Tony Hudson, Project Manager for the reconstruction project, describes these changes as "pissing in the corner," a marking of the space to identify that an atypical tenant occupies this West End theatre.53

Daldry plans more substantial changes at the Ambassadors. He invites William Dudley, a scene designer with a long history of working at the Royal Court, to design a variety of multiple-use spaces without altering the surfaces of the theatre's interior. Dudley began working at the Royal Court under Jocelyn Herbert. He first assimilated his work to Herbert's design aesthetic and then consciously went on expand his design work to include alternative critical viewpoints. Dudley believes that the younger generation require a more sophisticated visual element in order to become hooked on theatre. Dudley strongly supports Daldry's efforts to balance the Royal Court traditional emphasis on the writer's words with equal importance given to a scenic design that semiotically reinforces the meaning of the play in a three-dimensional fashion.54 Although Dudley tries to create three different performance areas, the requirements of the fire code limit the final configuration to two spaces. The audience enters the larger performing space at Dress Circle level. The Royal Court

54 Dudley, William, Personal interview, 7 July 1998.
constructs new seating risers to suggest the configuration of a nineteenth century hospital operating theatre within the volume of the existing dress and upper circles. The new thrust stage, built on a floor located above the original stalls and stage, provides an excellent space for productions. The new space juxtaposes temporary plywood construction against the elaborate nineteenth century plaster decoration on the walls. Thus, the much prized dialectic of old and new evident in the Royal Court’s Sloane Square home, continues in the West End. The second performance space, located on stage, resembles a slightly larger version of the Theatre Upstairs in Sloane Square, and it proves suitable for play readings."

Almost immediately, a problem arose which causes the tight time scheme for the building project to unravel and substantially delay the scheduled completion of the project. Unexpectedly, no one can ascertain whether the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea or the Cadogan Estate owns the land under the street and in Sloane Square needed to construct the new restaurant. Almost six months pass before the resolution of the question of land ownership acknowledges the Borough’s ownership of the ladies’ toilet located under Sloane Square, while the Cadogan Estate owns the land under the street and in the square needed for the project. The

"In recognition of the success of this change, the management of the Ambassadors retained this set-up after the Royal Court gave up its lease on the theatre.
second major delay results from the building project's engineers' serious underestimate of the time required to solve what developed into one of the engineering challenges of the nineteen nineties. A building surrounded by a major sewer line, a tunnel for the Underground, a residential building, and a heavily traveled street requires keyhole surgery for its renovation. Consequently, this first delay extends the schedule for the rebuilding period until the fall of 1999, one year longer than originally planned."

Such delays create additional problems. The leases in the West End, paid for by funding from the lottery, expire in the fall of 1998. However, these initial construction delays mean that the company cannot begin producing again in Sloane Square before the fall of 1999. The Royal Court faces a period of homelessness exacerbated by later delays pushing the reopening into 2000. Without lottery funding it can't afford the leases for the West End theatres, since the lease of either one exceeds the cost of the lease of its Sloane Square home. Dependent upon a constant supply of new productions to maintain its standing in the theatre world, the Royal Court struggles to avoid a future which includes the ominous possibility of ceasing production for an entire year. The failure of contractors to adhere to this expanded

"Personal interview with Tony Hudson, 24 February 2000. Project Manager Hudson now contends that if they were to return to the beginning, the contractors would probably schedule a three and one-half year construction period because of the complexity of the project."
schedule results in additional delays in the scheduled reopening from September 1999 to February 2000.

The refurbishment project does not represent the last change the Royal Court needs to assimilate during the nineteen nineties. Stephen Daldry shocks the London theatre scene in 1997 by announcing that he will not renew his contract, even though it means that he will leave the helm of the Royal Court prior to the completion of the building program. Despite leaving the position of artistic director, Daldry remains in charge of the renovation of the building. Daldry's initial explanation for his departure, that he wishes to pursue opportunities in film, produces a flurry of conjecture about the "real" reason for his departure. Much speculation posits that the failure of his production of Meridith Oakes's new play *The Editing Process* (1994) results in the young impresario's loss of nerve.

No direct cause and effect explanation for Daldry's decision proves adequate; a number of important issues factor in the decision. Daldry provides these reasons: the offer of a very advantageous film development deal; the decision to retain the proscenium arch in the redevelopment

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"7 Morley, Sheridan. "Theatre: His Diary as a Director." *The Spectator*. 2 January 1999: . The Spectator criticized Daldry for leaving the Royal Court in the middle of the rebuilding process. The criticism appears unjustified. No one close to the project ever suggested to me that Daldry shirked his responsibilities. Daldry continues to supervise and raise money for the project.

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of the Royal Court (discussed in chapter six); the type of new plays coming to the theatre didn't offer opportunities for him to exploit his greatest directorial strengths (as evidenced by The Editing Process), and his frustration that the Royal Court's great period of success (for several seasons, the Royal Court produced more plays than the substantially better funded Royal National Theatre) failed to lead to a corresponding increase in Arts Council funding. Daldry also contends, perhaps in consideration of Stafford-Clark's experience, that two terms or ten years would be too long for any one person to run the Royal Court.68

The presence of several inside candidates to replace Daldry (resulting from his exceptionally generous attitude as a producer toward empowering other directors in the theatre) enables an extremely smooth transition of power. The Board chooses his successor, Ian Rickson, from this pool. Rickson modestly describes himself as the "safe choice," because of his established record at the Royal Court and his close involvement with the rebuilding project.69 Board Member and former Artistic Director Stuart Burge asserts that Rickson clearly represents the best candidate in the field.70 Rickson worked in several

69 Rickson, Ian, Personal interview, 24 July 1998. Rickson's involvement with the Royal Court predates Daldry's arrival.
capacities at the Royal Court including a stint as Special Projects Director for the Young People's theatre prior to being named one of Daldry's associate directors. He also demonstrated an uncanny ability to direct plays which eventually received the George Devine Award, including Adam Pernack's *Killers* (1992), Judy Upton's *Ashes and Sand* (1994), Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* (1995), and Conor McPherson's *The Weir* (1997).

A graduate of the University of Essex, Rickson also marks a continuation of the trend, begun with Daldry, to name leaders educated at red-brick universities. As a director, Rickson's work places him squarely in the Royal Court tradition of serving the writer by emphasizing the word ahead of directorial concepts and the physical elements of production. Rickson, more concerned in design than Stafford-Clark, as his productions of *The Lights* and *Mojo* reveal, expresses a "commitment to exploring and evolving the scenic possibilities for all new plays." Rickson has yet to demonstrate his ability to exploit physical design elements conceptually in the manner Daldry did in *An Inspector Calls*, *The Kitchen*, and *Rat in the Skull*. The direction of design during his tenure will become clearer when the company returns to their Sloane Square home in 2000. Time will reveal if the Daldry era's interest in expanding the importance of visual design elements becomes

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* Rickson, Ian, E-mail to author, 10 June 1999.
an anomaly in the Royal Court's history or if Daldry's
tenure fundamentally alters the company's design aesthetic.
Because he confronts a deficit rather than a surplus,
Rickson's opportunities to produce elaborate design concepts
face greater budgetary limitations than Daldry had.

Rickson takes over the reins at the Royal Court at a
time when the publically-acknowledged opportunities of a new
building threaten to be swamped by privately-acknowledged
potential crises. A deficit, incurred in 1997-1998,
potential funding shortfalls for redevelopment, and the
possibility of having no production venues for a year await
his immediate action. Rickson moves decisively to handle
the situation. The sale of the American production rights
to Conor McPherson's *The Weir* provides the cash to pay the
rent for Royal Court Theatre Upstairs productions (at the
Ambassadors) at least through the end of 1998.\(^2\) Rickson
sends one production of *The Weir* on tour while taking
another production of it to Dublin in the summer of 1998.
The Dublin production returns to the Theatre Downstairs (the
Duke of York's) in October 1998 on a standard commercial
contract rather than a Royal Court one. The company's
economic health depends upon the successful transfer of *The
Weir*, a success in its previous Theatre Upstairs and Theatre
Downstairs runs. This commercial production provides the
Royal Court with a continuing Theatre Downstairs presence

\(^2\) Rickson, Ian, Personal interview, 24 July 1998.

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since it continues beyond the company's reopening in Sloane Square in 2000.

The lag time between the August 1998 completion of the Theatre Downstairs run of David Mamet's *The Old Neighborhood* and the October opening of *The Weir* provides an opportunity to add a small-scale production with big names, David Hare and Stephen Daldry. Director Daldry collaborates with writer David Hare, in Hare's professional acting debut, in a one-man-show based on diaries Hare wrote during a 1998 trip to Israel in celebration of both his and Israel's fiftieth birthday. Both critics and the public applaud Hare's play, *Via Dolorosa*, and a successful transfer to New York develops for a limited run during the spring of 1999. *The Weir* also proves a hit, paying back its initial investment in London within six weeks.\(^3\) That success causes Rickson to arrange a replacement cast for the London run of *The Weir* when the original cast moves to Broadway in the spring of 1999, one of eight Royal Court plays running on or off Broadway during the 1998-99 season.\(^4\) Both *The Weir* and *Via Dolorosa* make *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley's list of "Ten Best" for

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\(^3\) Some of those investors included Royal Court staff members who were offered the opportunity to participate as small investors and earn some additional income since the production proved successful.

1999. Thus, the nineteen nineties continues as perhaps the most successful decade in the company's history. The decade's second change in artistic management proceeds smoothly.

Rickson faces formidable challenges. Daldry's glamorous public persona contrasts with Rickson's soft-spoken personal style. Similarly, the company's financial situation differs markedly from that Daldry inherited. The company accumulates a debt of £130,000 by the end of fiscal year 1997. The Royal Court reduced its number of productions. However, as a sign of the increased prestige and stability of the Royal Court, the Arts Council and the press ignore the deficit. That contrasts starkly with the threatened closure of the company in 1977 because of the deficit of only £40,000 incurred during the Nicholas Wright-Robert Kidd regime.

In an interview during the summer of 1998, Max Stafford-Clark views the deficit a serious problem, and he pointed out the contrast between his surplus and Daldry's deficit. "Stafford-Clark proved it possible, if difficult, to keep the Royal Court's budget in balance despite a series of Arts Council threats to eliminate funding in 1980, 1981, and 1984. Daldry considers the deficit the result of the Arts Council funding the Royal

"Stafford-Clark, Max, Personal interview, 20 July 1998. Of course Stafford-Clark also incurred deficits during his tenure but none so large as £130,000."
Court, the national theatre for new writing, at a lower level than many regional repertory companies. He also points out that a single hit show can eliminate the entire deficit."

Daldry’s charisma makes him a successful fundraiser, a necessary occupation for the Royal Court’s new artistic director if he wishes to maintain the company’s high profile. Instead of sitting passively and insisting that the Royal Court should be better funded by the Arts Council, Daldry works to secure funding from multiple sources. Daldry regards fundraising as an integral part of the job, and he claims that a large increase in sponsorship income allowed the Royal Court to increase its number of productions from eight to nineteen." Daldry also continues to participate in the on-going capital fundraising effort for the rebuilding. Meeting that goal will enable the Royal Court to replenish the building reserve fund of the Stafford-Clark era. Daldry’s practicality on the subject of funding contrasts with the philosophical and ethical objections to it often expressed by Stafford-Clark. Rickson intends to follow Daldry’s example.

The surest sign of changing attitudes towards fundraising emerges in 1998 when the Royal Court faces a


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three million pound shortfall in its fundraising for the redevelopment process. In 1996, The Royal Court believed that it had an agreement with the Cadogan Estate that would result in a £3m donation to the project. The Board and the Arts Council expressed confidence in this tentative funding agreement. This funding drove the substantial increase in the size of the project at the time of the submission of the feasibility study to the Arts Council. However, no signed agreement existed, and by 1998 it had become clear that the conditions the Cadogan Estate attached to the money made the gift unacceptable for the Royal Court. An organization with no capital assets, the Royal Court faces possible liquidation if a replacement donor cannot be found.

Aware of the potential funding shortfall, the Jerwood Foundation, a charitable foundation that had supported new play production at the Royal Court for two years, offers the Royal Court the entire £3m on a single condition, change the theatre’s name to the Jerwood Royal Court. That offer creates several difficult dilemmas for the Royal Court. The name Jerwood Royal Court will make it necessary to revert to the name English Stage Company, undermining all of Daldry’s efforts to eliminate that name and solidify the connection.

"The Estate placed a number of pre-conditions on the contribution that had not formed part of the original discussions. Two of the most objectionable were that the Estate would own and operate the new below pavement restaurant, depriving the Royal Court of a source of earned income and they wanted the Royal Court to forgo their legal right to automatically renew their lease after twenty years.
between theatre building and theatre company." The theatre asks Buckingham Palace about the protocol involved in such a name change. Rather than leaving the answer to the Home Office, reportedly Queen Elizabeth personally vetoes the placement of any corporate or foundation name before the word "royal." The Foundation accepts the monarch's decision and counters with the proposed name Royal Court Jerwood Theatre.

Word of this name crisis leaks to the press. A group of playwrights rise up in arms against it. The Guardian quotes David Hare: "We all think it is an absurdity and an abomination. The idea that a theatre that has a radical tradition, stretching back beyond the English Stage Company to Shaw and Granville Barker at the start of the century, should be renamed is preposterous." The Evening Standard editorial page also weighs in against the proposition. The Guardian further reports that a group of playwrights was preparing an alternative funding scheme. It quotes Caryl Churchill: "To have a sponsor's name on a building is the start of a very slippery slope." In the same article Stephen Daldry says, "It's a very real concern [possible liquidation of the company]. My experience of the

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* One Royal Court insider suggested that Stephen Daldry might be the source of the leak.


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writing community is that they don't back down on points of principle. It's incredibly difficult for us to change our name without their support."

The compromise solution, accepted by the company and foundation, involves renaming the two auditoria The Jerwood Theatre Downstairs and the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs. A new neon sign on the building facade will read "The Jerwood Theatres at the Royal Court." The Independent quotes former director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre Peter Hall's disapproval: "The Royal Court isn't the Jerwood theatre. It has 100 years of history and Jerwood are buying those 100 years for £3m." The Royal Court becomes the first of the large lottery-funded projects to raise its twenty-five per cent share of expenses. The Independent further reports that "Harold Pinter, Sir David Hare and Caryl Churchill took Jerwood's chief executive out to dinner at Pinter's London club and made him an offer he couldn't refuse. Well, they told him he would face unremitting hostility in the world he was joining if he caused the Royal Court name to die, and that Jerwood should have its name only on the auditoria inside."

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During the summer of 1998, the Royal Court's planning involved shutting down production for at least six months prior to the projected September 1999 opening in order to prepare for their reopening in Sloane Square. Stephen Daldry, advised by many people with experience of major renovations, had set that course, and Ian Rickson appeared content to follow the advice. But, the successes of the fall of 1998 enable Rickson to chart a different course. Determined to maintain the company's position as a prolific producer of new plays, Rickson schedules an extensive five play Theatre Upstairs season running from January 14 through April 24, 1999. Then during the summer, the Royal Court joins forces with the owners of the Ambassadors to co-produce an additional season of new plays.

In January 1999 Rickson, more assertive than in the summer of 1998 when he had been only a few months into his tenure, explains his decision: "The Royal Court needs to maintain its role as the preeminent producer of new plays and cannot subordinate that mission to the challenges of the building redevelopment." Obviously bolstered by the successes of the autumn, Rickson appears determined to establish his own stamp on the position of Artistic Director of the Royal Court. Undaunted by its problems, he anticipates a future filled with exciting opportunities.

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Rickson, Ian, Personal interview, January 1999.
During the summer of 1999 additional construction problems place the reopening behind schedule. A flood of the new undercroft bar/restaurant in August creates a ten week delay. Finally, the electrical contractor ABB Steward proves unable to complete the very complicated rewiring of the building on time despite at one point increasing the number of electricians on site to 70. Building on 12 November 1999 reports that the theatre is likely to miss its fourth deadline. It also reports on a May 1999 audit of the project which criticized construction manager Shal for "poor programming." Although the theatre denies the report in the same article, in fact the 7 January opening is pushed back to 17 February 2000.

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Chapter Two
Building a Theatre: 1870-1900

To understand the historical context which led to the building of a theatre in Chelsea in 1870 requires an understanding of the world of Victorian theatre. The theatre of the nineteenth century, like the theatre today, represented an artistic activity largely controlled by commerce and competition. The Industrial Revolution, begun in the late eighteenth century, permanently changed the demographics of England during the nineteenth century. The population of London (and the potential audience for theatre) grew rapidly during the nineteenth century from 900,000 in 1801 to 3,000,000 in 1851 and 6,000,000 in 1901. If Queen Victoria embodied the apex of this audience, the working class constituted its base, without which theatre could not survive. The working class comprised seventy-nine percent of the 1851 population. Victorian theatre regarded success as commercial success, and that required attracting a working class audience without scaring away the middle and upper classes. Since its inception in Victorian London and continuing into the present, the Royal Court Theatre’s need to balance art and commerce has remained a constant problem.

The Theatre Act of 1843 eliminated the patent theatres’ monopoly on spoken drama. Rather than leading to an expected business boom for theatres, this legislation, in part, served to weaken drama as literature. Theatre
managers, with many seats to fill, balanced a mixed bill of music, ballet, melodrama, and farce, all of which needed to be produced in the most spectacular fashion the manager could afford. This mixed bill attracted a working class audience to the gallery and pit while full length plays appealed more to the middle class audience needed to fill the boxes and stalls. Fashion frequently followed aristocratic patronage. During mid-century, the middle class followed the upper class fashion which preferred opera to theatre. The Victorian middle class, anxious about its social position, disliked associating with the working class, and especially during the middle of the century it chose very carefully when attending theatre. Successful theatre managers juggled these and other variables.

Around mid-century, change slowly emerged with commercial alternatives to the mixed bill. During the eighteen sixties, the Bancrofts created a theatrical fashion that attracted a more socially prominent clientele back to the previously very unfashionable Prince of Wales Theatre. Once in the Prince of Wales, the middle class discovered a familiar world: the relatively naturalistic dialogue and settings found in the single bill of T.W. Robertson's "cup and saucer" dramas. Around the same time Queen Victoria, among others, applauded the archeological accuracy of Charles Kean's productions of Shakespeare at the Princess
Theatre, reinforcing the call for greater scenic naturalism on stage.

The London visits of subsidized continental theatres such as the Comédie Française in 1879 and the Meiningen Troupe in 1881 reminded the English of the artistic potential of theatre realizable through subsidized, well-rehearsed, stable companies of actors. The growing international emphasis on a literary theatre penetrated the English theatre at the end of the eighteen eighties. When the middle class returned to the theatre in the second half of the nineteenth century, it tended to do so at theatres that abandoned the mixed bill in favor of a single play. The change in theatre audiences enabled smaller theatres with fewer seats to become viable, despite appealing to only a segment of the potential audience. The working class audience, which continued to prefer the mixed bill, gradually shifted its allegiance to the music hall.

Built in 1870 near the beginning of the late-century theatre building boom, the first Royal Court Theatre, located approximately fifty yards off Sloane Square on Lower George Street, occupied the shell of a building called Ranelagh Chapel, originally constructed as a chapel for dissenters. This anti-establishment character, initially present through the connection with a dissenting chapel and continuing throughout the theatre’s history, foreshadowing
the element of dissent that became an integral part of the identity of the Royal Court Theatre.

The history of the Ranelagh Chapel began in 1818, when on a site formerly occupied by a slaughterhouse, a Mr. Pinney built the chapel to plans of the architect Mr. Pocock for the pastor Mr. Shepherd. It opened on 2 July 1818. Shepherd professed the creed of a Calvinist Methodist connected to the group known as the "Lady Huntingdon Connection," a splinter group of traditional Methodists centered around the patronage of Lady Huntingdon, a prominent Methodist evangelist and Chelsea resident of the mid-eighteenth century. The anonymous author of "Reminiscences of Ranelagh" describes it as "one of the handsomest and most commodious chapels in the metropolis" accommodating 1,200 persons.¹

At the end of his life, Shepherd transferred the lease for the building to the English Presbyterian Church. Ranelagh Presbyterian Church opened on 3 August 1845. When the lease expired in 1866, the building needed repairs. The Presbyterian church attempted to extend its lease, but the landlord, the Cadogan Estate, informed the church that the lease would not be extended beyond 1887 because the Estate intended to redevelop the site when the head lease expired. Regarding it as unwise to invest money in a building that

¹ Chelsea Library. Local Collection, Royal Court Theatre Archive.
would be demolished in twenty years, the congregation moved to what became Belgrave Presbyterian Church. Ranelagh Chapel hosted its last church services on Sunday 25 March 1866.

The landlord offered the building as assembly rooms, but no regular tenant emerged for some time. While the church's long-term perspective toward time caused it to decide against investing in a building with only twenty years remaining on its lease, in 1870 a theatre management decided to risk transforming the chapel into a theatre with only seventeen years remaining on the lease. This short-term perspective may reflect the fact that the average life span of a Victorian theatre was only twenty-two years (largely due to the danger of fire) and it must have been possible to recoup the investment in transforming the building into a theatre during that time.²

The New Chelsea Theatre opened on 16 April 1870 under the management of Arthur Morgan and B. Oliver. They had made minimal changes to the building, perhaps a sign that they were less than confident of success in opening a theatre with a short lease located at a remove from the main London theatre district. Indeed, the opening night notice in *The Era* of 24 April 1870 remarked on the "incomplete

state" of the interior.¹ Prices at the new theatre were cheap, ⁴ however, which proved typical for suburban theatres which functioned economically more like provincial theatres than like West End theatres.⁵

In 1881, Percy Fitzgerald reminisced about his visits to the theatre, describing the interior:

The decorations of the theatre were rather of a homely cast--room paper garnished with bead moldings, a ready style of ornament to be noticed even in more pretentious theatres. The house contained one gallery for boxes, another overhead for the unwashed; a row of hard benches below, by an almost Eastern shape of compliment entitled the 'stalls.' The number of private boxes was amazing, the flanks, as it were, of the house being set apart for the wealthy aristocracy, who preferred, at a moderate cost, to be secure of their haughty privacy.⁶

Morgan and Oliver conservatively chose to program the New Chelsea with the traditional mixed fare consisting of comedy, drama, farce, ballet, and burlesque. Despite prices below their West End competition, the New Chelsea failed to fill enough seats, and it soon closed. A new management changed the name to The Belgravia, perhaps in the hope that an association with the nearby fashionable neighborhood would prove attractive to theatregoers. The name change

¹ Chelsea Archive.

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didn't improve box office revenue, and that theatre too closed. As in its subsequent history as the Royal Court, the theatre proved more successful when it allied itself with new trends rather than replicating more traditional West End fare.

The genesis of the Royal Court itself arises from this tale of failed attempts to establish a theatre in Chelsea. The actress-manager Marie Litton, whose experience in Brighton made her a more experienced and savvy manager, acquired the lease for the building, and commissioned the architect Walter Emden to build a proper theatre within the shell of the building. Emden eventually designed both the 1871 and 1888 Royal Court Theatres. Emden's plans of 1871, on file in the London Municipal Archives, include color renderings of the Regency-style-exterior of the original building and of the new interior.

Some biographical information about Emden bears repeating because it may provide clues to the reasons that Emden's unromantic design approach proved successful for both Royal Courts. Emden apparently derived practical knowledge of the theatre through his theatrical family. His father, W.S. Emden, worked as a playwright and sometime theatre manager. Walter's mother worked as a featured

7 Marie Litton had previously managed a theatre in Brighton. Unfortunately, little information about her career is currently known. She managed other London theatres after her tenure at the Royal Court.  

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actress at the Olympic Theatre during her husband's management regime (August 1857-September 1864). His younger brother Henry developed a career as a well-known scenic artist.

The theatre's excellent actor-audience relationship, rather than its decoration or the appearance of the facade, produced the environment within which plays thrive. Perhaps Emden's understanding of theatre, gained from his theatrical family, enabled him to create a space designed to meet the practical needs of performer and audience. The almost perfect proportions of the auditorium and proscenium of the current Royal Court have remained intact, during constant interior remodeling over its 112 year history. It is those proportions, the relationship between stage and audience, and the scale of the actor within the proscenium arch, that made this a successful theatre for the play and that the current renovation seeks to preserve.

Emden's qualifications as an architect appear slight by twentieth century standards. He studied mechanical engineering and worked as a civil engineer before beginning to study architecture with the firm of Kelley and Lawes FFRIBA in 1870. That same year, he called himself "architect" and designed, first, the reconstruction of the Globe Theatre on Newcastle Street, and then the new interior that became the 1100 seat Royal Court. Emden's brief, informal training reflects the mid-Victorian laissez-faire
attitude toward theatre architecture.’ Emden’s work has been described as "the epitome of charming architectural illiteracy." Nonetheless, in 1883 Emden wrote articles in The Architect about his ideas for theatre design.\(^{10}\)

Reflecting his engineering background, Emden derived his strength as an architect from his knowledge of building techniques as evidenced in an 1888 issue of The Architect in which Emden contributed an article about advanced safety features in the construction of theatres.\(^{11}\)

A comparison between the plans for the 1871 Royal Court and the 1888 Royal Court reveals Emden’s practical nature. The essential shape of the auditorium and its relationship to the stage remains basically the same, although the second theatre had to be shoe horned into a site with a smaller footprint than that of the first Royal Court. The difference in the interior decoration for theatres suggests that Emden matched his designs to their budgets. As an architect Emden reflected an integrally practical approach that repeated successful arrangements created for one theatre in the next one he designed.

\(^{10}\) As quoted in Leacroft, Richard. The Development of the English Playhouse. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973) 234.

Why Marie Litton chose to name the new theatre Royal Court, since she had no known connection to the court or to the royal family, remains an intriguing question not answered by the historical record. The Theatre Royals that exist in several British cities bear that title as a result of a specific charter from the monarchy. Similarly, in the twentieth century the monarchy granted the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre specific charters permitting them the use of the term royal. No record exists that the Royal Court received a special charter granting it the title. Both the 1871 and 1888 Royal Courts included a special box and retiring room for the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) who apparently attended the theatre frequently. Other theatres which did not claim the title royal also had special boxes for the Prince of Wales. Interestingly, the nineteenth century press almost universally refer to the theatre as the 'Court Theatre' ignoring the word royal altogether. Since the late nineteenth century regarded the role of the monarchy more highly than late twentieth century observers, and sensitivities to the word royal were correspondingly greater, perhaps the press's omission of the term royal results from its knowledge that the use of the word royal has been claimed rather than granted.

Given the anti-establishment attitude of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, it is interesting to consider that of the three contemporary Royal theatre
companies (Royal Shakespeare, Royal National and Royal Court), the first of these theatres, the Royal Court, cheekily claimed the title for itself. The name Royal Court proved significant during the 1996-2000 refurbishment. Queen Elizabeth II herself assisted in resolving a naming and funding conundrum, as detailed in chapter one.

Almost all contemporary knowledge of the first Royal Court’s appearance depends upon the opening notice, accompanied by an engraving of the interior in The Illustrated London News of 4 February 1871. The printed descriptions correspond with Walter Emden’s one color rendering of the interior on file with the building plans.

The Illustrated London News describes the theatre on opening night:

The Royal Court, as shown in our view of the interior, is a bright, brilliant little theatre, capable of seating comfortably 1,100 persons. It is gorgeous in gilding, profuse in ornamentation, and its hangings and box-curtains are of a pinkish-mauve satin, which has a novel and very satisfactory effect. Two huge griffins or dragons flank the proscenium boxes on each side of the house. The frescoes over the proscenium, by Mr. Gurden Dalziel, representing incidents in the life of St. George of England, are very skillfully painted.12

Although Mr. Dalziel’s fame has not endured into the present, he exemplified one of the more prominent London artists of the period. The reporter comments on the theatre’s proximity to the Sloane Square station of the Metropolitan District Railway, which made the theatre

12 4 February 1871 120-121.
convenient to all portions of London serviced by the underground.\textsuperscript{13}

The Metropolitan Railway first opened in 1863, and the inner circle was completed in 1884. Traffic congestion was a chronic problem in Victorian London, and the Metropolitan Railway made it possible to travel around the city quickly and easily. No longer did a patron need to live within walking distance of a theatre in order to attend. Combined with the suburban rail lines, the Metropolitan Railway enabled a theatre to expand the geographical range of its audience to include almost all of greater London.\textsuperscript{14}

The importance of public transit in delivering the audience to the Royal Court continues to the present. According to a 1996 audience survey, fifty per cent of the Royal Court audience continues to arrive at the theatre by Underground, still the most popular method of travel even in the era of the automobile.\textsuperscript{15} During the late twentieth century, alternative theatres such as the Royal Court have proven most successful when located near mass transit.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{13} The Illustrated London News 4 February 1871: 120-121. \\
\textsuperscript{14} Booth 15. \\
\textsuperscript{15} "Royal Court Theatre Audience Data" np 22 March 1996. \\
\end{flushleft}
The theatre's location next to the Underground stop has undoubtedly contributed to its viability.

The Builder of 6 January 1872 provides the next news of the building, a letter complaining about the alteration to the stairs leading from the street to the pit that resulted in the construction of wooden stairs on top of the stone ones required by the Building Act. Emden, who developed into something of an expert on fire safety in theatres, defended the safety of the stairs, although the writer for The Builder disagreed with him. The letter reveals a central truth; throughout the Royal Court's history the immediate need to save money often contributes to short cuts in required building alterations.

Another complaint about the theatre published in The Saturday Review of 1887 reveals how sensitivities to the social and economic distinctions of the audience often leads to awkward internal arrangements in theatres. The writer complains that the entrance to the stalls requires a substantial trek: "[T]o enter the stalls you have to first climb thirteen steps, and then two steps before you reach the dress-circle. Then there are first five steps and then nineteen more to descend and then two to ascend before you

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18 Curiously, the current refurbishment covers its concrete stairs with salvaged lumber.
reach the stalls on the Prompt side."19 This circuitous route to the stalls via the dress circle segregated the middle-class audience in the stalls from the working class audience seated on the same level in the pit. The middle class's social unease when attending the theatre dictated such a distinction. Emden may have created such an arrangement as part of a compromise between the need to acknowledge social distinctions and the need to adhere to a budget.

Marie Litton opened the Royal Court in January 1871 with a comedy by W.S. Gilbert entitled Randall's Thumb. The Illustrated London News praises a "company of more than usual merit."20 From its opening, the Royal Court proves an important venue in establishing Gilbert's reputation as a playwright, demonstrating an almost intrinsic suitability for productions of new plays. Although for posterity Gilbert's reputation rests on his collaborations on operettas with Sir Arthur Sullivan, he initially achieved success as a playwright. Indeed, some critics regard Gilbert as part of the movement to raise the level of seriousness of writing for the stage. Gilbert provided another early hit for the Royal Court with his adaptation of Le Chapeau de Paille, entitled The Wedding March (1873).

Michael Booth contends that this production helped establish

19 The Saturday Review, 2 July 1887: 15.

20 The Illustrated London News 4 February 1871: 111.
the trend toward "three act farce or 'farcical-comedy,'" which reached its height with Arthur Wing Pinero's farces at the Royal Court in the eighteen eighties.\textsuperscript{21}

In 1873, Gilbert, writing under a pseudonym L. Tomline, adapted his fairy play \textit{The Wicked World} (1873) into a biting, political satire attacking the government called \textit{The Happy Land}. This notorious production began the association in the public's mind of the Royal Court with plays which challenge and mock the establishment. Apparently, the opening night performance met with the approval of the Prince and Princess of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh, who, among others, attended in a packed house. Unaware of the plan to imitate through the actor's make-up, dress, and manner Prime Minister Gladstone and two of his Cabinet members, Lowe and Ayrton, the Lord Chamberlain licensed the play. Gilbert allegedly added some lines borrowed from contemporary political speeches after the play had been licensed. Therefore, the Royal Court attracted the nation's attention when, after three performances of \textit{The Happy Land}, the Lord Chamberlain, under pressure from the Prime Minister, rescinded the license to produce the play.\textsuperscript{22} Gladsone, not amused at being made the butt of satire, objected to the clearly identifiable depiction of himself and his cabinet members, despite Gilbert's changing of the

\textsuperscript{21} Booth 192.

\textsuperscript{22} Baker 510.
character's names. The theatre received the notice that the license had been rescinded shortly before the beginning of fourth performance and decided to present that performance in defiance of the ban.

Although they regret the delayed action, The Saturday Review approves of the censorship. The Illustrated London News of 22 March 1873 postulates, "[w]hether it is proper for the functionaries of the state to be placed personally on the stage in such ridiculous attitudes and engaged in such whimsical action, may be left to the good taste of the public." The Penny Illustrated Paper of 15 March 1873 tends to side with the Royal Court calling the Lord Chamberlain's decisions "capricious and shortsighted." Miss Litton cancelled the fifth performance but managed to reopen the next night by agreeing to alter the actor's make-up and cut a few offending lines of dialogue. The Penny Illustrated portrays the changes as slight and describes the caricatures as still recognizable. The play had a successful run of 200 performances. Thus, the first Royal Court management foreshadows both its early twentieth century descendant, the Barker-Vedrenne management, and its late twentieth century descendant, the

\[33 "The Happy Land." \textit{The Saturday Review}, 16 March 1873: 351.\]

\[34 \text{Chelsea Archive.}\]

\[35 "The Happy Land Sensation The Court Theatre." \textit{The Penny Illustrated Paper}, 15 March 1873: 170.\]
English Stage Company. The ESC's ongoing battles over censorship in the nineteen sixties contributed, in large part, to Parliament's decision to end the power of the Lord Chamberlain to censor theatre.

Several other managements succeeded Miss Litton's, most notably John Hare (1875-79), who was knighted in 1907 for his work in making theatre respectable. In 1875 Hare engaged the Kendals to join him at the Royal Court. Hare and the Kendals had worked for the Bancrofts, and together they brought T. W. Robertson's "school of natural acting" to the Court. Thus, early in its history, managements capitalized on the Royal Court's intimate stage by promoting greater realism in acting. Fine acting develops into a Royal Court characteristic during later regimes, including Barker-Vedrenne (1904-07), Barry Jackson (1922-29), and the English Stage Company (1956-present). Individually and collectively, these managements at the Royal Court changed the parameters of "good acting" on the English stage. Hare's desire for respectability also imitated the Bancrofts "when in place of the stronger drinks of the early Victorian theatre, he provided coffee and tea during the intervals."

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"William Hunter Grimston and Margaret Robertson--sister of the dramatist.


Although advanced in his notions of acting, Hare programmed his theatre conservatively. He achieved his greatest success at the Royal Court presenting the Kendals in a revival of Sardou's *A Scrap of Paper*. In 1875 Hare engaged actor John Clayton, who would take over as manager in 1881. When the Kendals departed for the St. James in 1877, Hare engaged Ellen Terry in Bulwer Lytton's *The Darnley House.*

A program book from that production dated 10 June 1877 advertises that the theatre had recently been "redecorated by Messrs Gordon and Harford," without providing any details of the work. Throughout his career, Hare, ever desirous of propriety, decorated his theatres to reflect the taste of his middle class audiences.

In 1879, for the first time, the Comédie Française performed in London. The Comédie’s repertory of plays and ensemble acting greatly impressed cultural critic Matthew Arnold, who rediscovered in their performances the potential for theatre to function as a cultural force. Arnold called for British theatre to follow this example. While Arnold’s ideas were not new, his status in Victorian society ensured

29 James, Godfrey. *London the Western Reaches.* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1950) 259. Ellen Terry’s performances at the Royal Court directly led to her engagement with Irving at the Lyceum.

10 Mander and Mitchenson Theatre Collection. New Beckenham, Kent, UK. Royal Court Theatre Programs and Photographs.
their wide dissemination. 31 Throughout the Royal Court's history, many people echo Arnold's concerns, most notably George Devine's desire in 1956 to change the nature of post-World War II English culture through the ESC at the Royal Court. Arnold also called for the return of the middle class to the theatre and the introduction of state subsidy for theatre. 32 These two issues, the composition of the audience and the need for subsidy, reappear throughout the history of the Royal Court Theatre and continue to provide challenges for present Royal Court managements.

The Royal Court also featured a foreign performer in 1879, the Polish actress Helena Modjeska, who introduced a different strain of realistic acting to the London stage. Her production of Juana featured designs by E.W. Godwin, a long-time proponent of the creation of an English national theatre. Godwin also played a central role in the creation of the aesthetic of "archeological" accuracy in plays set in historic periods. The nineteenth century movement toward increased naturalism for the stage combining stagecraft, acting, and text culminated in the new century with the Barker-Vedrenne management at the Royal Court.

31 In 1848 Effingham Wilson first proposed a National Theatre recognizably like the one which now exists. See John Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin's The History of the National Theatre.

The 1881 visit of the Meiningen troupe to London astonished the audience with its massive and brilliantly organized crowd scenes. Since the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's personal fortune enabled the detailed rehearsal time necessary to create theatre of this calibre, prominent theatre critics such as William Archer publicly expressed the hope that England similarly would develop an endowed theatre subsidized by the enlightened wealthy.\textsuperscript{33}

In response to the theatre building boom and the constant danger of theatre fires, Parliament in 1878 authorized the Metropolitan Board of Works to supervise the construction of London theatres, with special emphasis placed on the importance of fire-proofing and providing adequate exits.\textsuperscript{34} The 21 October 1882 edition of The Builder reveals how the Board of Works new authority affects the Royal Court, in its report that "considerable structural alterations are being made and a new porch erected, to this theatre, under the supervision of Mr. Alexander Peebles, architect, in order to satisfy the requirements of the Metropolitan Board of Works."\textsuperscript{35} A letter in the Archive for the Metropolitan Board of Works reveals that the Board required the portico changes to bring the Royal Court into

\textsuperscript{33} Nicoll 7.
\textsuperscript{34} Booth 68.
\textsuperscript{35} "The Court Theatre." \textit{The Builder} 21 October 1882: 542.
compliance with the Building Act Amendment Acts of 1878. The alterations were scheduled to take less than a month, and on 31 October 1882 the management invited the Municipal Works Department to inspect the completed addition. No blueprints of the changes has been found.

An interesting footnote accompanies this change. A note in the correspondence file reveals a decrease in the capacity of the house. The Royal Court opened claiming a capacity of eleven hundred, but reported a space for only seven hundred and seventy three at the time of these alterations. This reduction in capacity represented another result of the Building Act Amendment Acts of 1878. Virtually all London theatres had their capacities diminished during the decade following its enaction because of the requirement to place safety ahead of the desire to maximize seating capacity.

The first Royal Court recorded its most successful productions with new plays, notably Arthur Wing Pinero's string of English farces, The Magistrate (1885), The Schoolmistress (1886) and Dandy Dick (1887), all produced by the actor-manager John Clayton. Matilda Wood, who later became the second prominent woman-actor-manager in the Royal Court's history, also played important roles in these plays.

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34 London Metropolitan Archives. Department of Works. Blueprints and Correspondence Files. Royal Court Theatre.

37 Booth 68.

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Although Victorians considered Pinero's "problem plays" of the eighteen nineties, such as *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895), to be his greatest achievement, the Royal Court farces have proven more viable on the late twentieth century stage. Although the Royal Court hosted its share of revivals throughout its long history, productions of new plays provided the highlights.

In 1886, the Shelley Society staged a private production of *The Cenci*, in order to bypass the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain. From this production two ideas developed. William Archer calls for a theatre that caters to a discriminating minority, the 1,000s rather than the 10,0000s. Second, a tradition developed of offering private club performances of plays that could not gain approval from the Lord Chamberlain. The precedent that club performances could evade censorship proved important in the nineteen sixties during the Royal Court's battle with the Lord Chamberlain over censorship. That battle provided the major impetus in 1968 to ending censorship on the English stage.

An 1887 article in *The Saturday Review* describes the Royal Court as shabby, probably because of the combination

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of the wear-and-tear resulting from Pinero's three successive hit farces and building maintenance postponed because of the impending end of the theatre's lease. The *Saturday Review* describes the theatre as being "in a very bad state, and ... the sooner the Court is pulled down the better for everybody." That wish was accomplished soon when the Cadogan Estate redeveloped the land south of Sloane Square, demolishing the entire block. The Cadogan Estate redevelopment scheme reconfigured the existing street grid, eliminating the portion of Lower George Street on which the original Royal Court stood. One must imagine Lower George Street and the old Royal Court as running between two current streets, Sloane Gardens and Holbein Place.

Concurrent with these developments, Walter Emden designed the current Royal Court Theatre for a plot of Cadogan Estate land on the east side of the square. The first Royal Court Theatre witnessed its final performance on 22 July 1887.

Actor-manager John Clayton's decision to build a second Royal Court made sense. Clayton obviously planned to continue his successful working relationship as both actor and manager with the prominent playwright Arthur Wing Pinero. The Royal Court's record of successful productions proved that a theatre in Chelsea could attract an audience. The patronage of the Prince of Wales gave attendance at the

39 2 July 1887 15-16.
40 James 260.
Royal Court a social cachet. Clayton's father-in-law, the famous manager and playwright Dion Boucicault, provided a possible mentoring relationship for this venture. Although the nearby site offered a slightly smaller footprint, it possessed the advantage of a location right on Sloane Square adjacent to the recently opened Metropolitan District railway station. Clayton then engaged Walter Emden, designer of the first Royal Court and now a well known theatre designer. The Cadogan Estate's redevelopment of the land south of Sloane Square promised a more upscale residential neighborhood. The prospects for the theatre in 1887 appeared secure.

Additionally, Chelsea's reputation as an artistic enclave developed during the late nineteenth century when a self-consciously artistic community including Thomas Carlyle, James Whistler, Leigh Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, Walter Greaves, and George Eliot settled in Chelsea.41 The organization of the Chelsea Arts Club in 1891 provided the area something of a respectable, middle-class artistic atmosphere and in such an environment the current Royal Court Theatre arose. The migration of artists into the district continued at least into the early twentieth century, when sculptor Jacob Epstein moved his studio to Chelsea.

Much of the information on the progress of the construction of the current building can be gathered from both the plans on file at the Metropolitan Archives and the information Emden supplied The Builder. A letter from Walter Emden and Bertie Crew dated 29 July 1887 accompanied their submission of a set of drawings for the building, numbered A1 through A6. The letter reveals that they wish to open the building in January 1888 and that the plans for the 770 seat theatre resemble those for the recently completed Terry's Theatre (also designed by Emden). 42 Clayton appeared to have asked Emden to create a new theatre with approximately the same audience capacity as the old one. The Builder of 13 August 1887 reports that the Court Theatre will be pulled down to "make way for some extensive improvements on Lord Cadogan's estate," and the new theater will be almost wholly constructed of fire-resistant materials. 41 The Builder reports the proposed opening date as Christmas 1887. 44 The prominent mention of the use of fire-proof materials is not coincidental. Earlier that year, the new Theatre Royal Exeter burned with an accompanying loss of more than one hundred lives. That

42 London Metropolitan Archive.
43 "The Court Theatre, Lower George Street, Chelsea." The Builder, 13 August 1887: 256.
44 13 August 1887 256.
tragedy provoked a public outcry for improved fire safety in theatres.45

On 5 August 1887 Emden and Crewe applied for a building certificate for their theatre, and on 9 August 1887 the supervising architect, L. Blashill, in an internal memo recommended approval of the plans; however, a series of delays, detailed below, delay final approval until 9 March 1888. Another internal memo of the Works Department calls attention to a clipping from the Kensington News in which Walter Emden complained that holidays taken by members of the Board of Works held up approval of the building and that the delay will add about £1,000 in extra expenses to the project.44

On 21 September Emden writes a letter withdrawing the first set of plans due to an error in measurement of the site and on 24 September he submitted a revised set of drawings, numbered B1 through B6. An internal memo of the Board of Works dated 30 September indicates that there are problems with the plans. However, supervising architect Blashill, perhaps annoyed over Emden’s complaints in the press, waits until 20 October to notify Emden that the drawings do not comply with regulations. Rather than

45 Booth 68-69.

4 London Metropolitan Archive. (In an interesting footnote, the current building scheme also was delayed when a series of holidays by members of the Kensington-Chelsea council delayed consideration of the project for several months and almost forced major changes to the plans.)

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delineating the problems, Blashill suggests that the architects consult the building regulations in order to discover the shortcomings. Emden’s immediate reply, dated 21 October, states that he consulted the regulations and cannot identify the problems. On 27 October the Works Department replies detailing fifteen specific shortcomings, mostly minor in nature. Emden submits a set of amended drawings numbered B1 through B10 on 22 November."

A letter from Emden dated 14 December informs the Board of Works that Bertie Crewe "is no longer associated with the project."" Although the early announcements for the building credit Bertie Crew as the co-architect, the discovery of this letter in the correspondence file for the Royal Court explains why none of the reports of the completed building mention Crewe’s involvement. The letter fails to explain why Crewe and Emden parted ways. Some architectural historians assert that Emden learned much from Crewe about the principles for the interior decoration of theatre." The absence of any detailed descriptions of the interior decoration of this theatre may indicate that, if Emden learned about theatre decoration from Crewe, he did so after the Royal Court project. Back in September, Emden complained about the added costs associated with delays in

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"7 London Metropolitan Archive.
"8 London Metropolitan Archive.
"9 Mackintosh and Sell 212.
the project. Perhaps those costs contributed to a decision to simplify the interior, which eliminated the need for Crewe’s services. The Board conditionally approved the plans on 16 December, and Blashill wrote Emden to inform him that plans B2 through B10 received such approval.  

While Emden negotiated the building approval with the Board of Works, he also attempted to publicize the plan and his role as theatre architect. The Building News of 27 January 1888 contains a front elevation of the building along with a longitudinal section and plan at ground (dress circle) level supplied by Emden. An accompanying article describes the fireproof construction of the building which would be similar to, yet an improvement upon, that in the recently opened Terry’s Theatre. Two exits will be provided from each section of the auditorium, the largest number of exits yet installed in a London theatre. The fire curtain will be of asbestos, the lighting a double system of electricity and gas and the heating will be hot water. The article also reports that the auditorium will not contain any columns which might impede the audience’s view. It continues: “The front in Sloane-square is in a free, simple style and the interior will be in a treatment of the French Renaissance.”  

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50 London Metropolitan Archive.

contains essentially the same report and the same images. Both publications report that the proprietor, John Clayton, intends to open the theatre in May with a new play by Pinero. That the first Royal Court enjoyed much of its greatest success with the Pinero farces of 1885-87 explains the intention of opening with a new Pinero play.

Work on the building apparently began in January 1888, a month after the originally proposed opening date. While the initial prospects for the building suggested an easy completion for the theatre, the pattern of obstacles which delayed the preliminary approval of the building continued during the construction, resulting in additional delays. The excavation for the foundation revealed the first problem. A letter from Emden to the Board of Works requested permission to raise the building two feet because construction work revealed that the Ranelagh sewer was closer to the surface than originally thought. Emden includes a fourth and final set of drawings numbered C1 through C10 along with some working drawings that detailed the building’s cast iron skeleton. These drawings establish that, although most architectural historians credit Frank Matcham with creating the system of cantilevering balconies in order to eliminate columns in theatres, Emden’s engineering background enabled him to make a similar

improvement based on a slightly different set of engineering solutions.

On 3 February 1888 Emden again applied for the certificate enabling him to open a theatre. Blashill and Emden exchanged several more letters over the next month. On 9 March the Board decided that, providing the completed building corresponds to the plans, the certificate would be issued, and on 14 March they wrote to Emden informing him of their decision. The Board, apparently concerned about possible damage to the Ranelagh Sewer, stipulated that the back wall must be built on a base four feet wide and ten to twelve feet deep.

The sudden death of John Clayton at age forty-three while on tour in Liverpool in March 1888 must have created problems with the building scheme of the Royal Court. Clayton, whose real name was John Alfred Clayton Calthorpe, left a widow (the daughter of Dion Boucicault) and a family.¹ No information about the problems this created for the construction project have been discovered, but the postponing of the opening from May to September and the

¹ That Clayton had changed his name when he became an actor reflects the relatively low social status of a Victorian actor. A middle class person would protect his family by changing his name. His sons will work as actors under the name Calthrop.
absence of a new play by Pinero for the opening indicates the need for adjustments."

The Building News of 30 March 1888 reports on a recent visit by the Society of Architects to the building site at which time the shell of the building was nearing completion. The report says: "The great feature of the building, and the one which attracted the most attention from the visitors on Saturday, is the large use made of iron encased in concrete for construction....The seats are carried on a skeleton of iron girders encased in breeze concrete of the proportions of 4 to 1." Other notable information includes that "[t]he stage floor is as usual of wood and it was noted by the visitors as curious that the gridiron over the back of the stage for the drawing up of the cloths was of wood. Several members suggested that iron lattice work would have given greater safety, but it was explained that the stage carpenter reigned supreme here." The indication that Emden deferred to the stage carpenters in the choice of a wooden grid, represented perhaps another reflection of his theatrical background. Additionally, booth contends that throughout the nineteenth century "the

54 James 255. Godfrey James, a school friend of Clayton's son Donald Calthrop, reports that Clayton's family still had some sort of financial interest in the theatre in 1904 when William Poel presented Everyman.


56 The Building News 30 March 1888: 480.

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English theatre was highly traditional and resisted change especially in the area of technology.\textsuperscript{57} The wooden grid remained the standard in theatre construction into the next century, and some stage carpenters still prefer the flexibility of a wooden grid. The need to replace this wooden grid, still in use in the nineteen nineties, though no longer able to sustain its original load, represents one of the driving forces behind the current renovation.

The building’s site of 91 feet by 55 feet created certain difficulties. The expense of London real estate and the absence of a genuinely planned street system forced many managements during the late century building boom to choose limited and irregular sites.\textsuperscript{51} Most notable for the Royal Court was the difficulty in providing adequate underpinning to the rear wall of the stage house which immediately abuts the Ranelagh sewer. The Ranelagh sewer contains what had formerly been called the Westbourne Rivulet, the stream whose damming forms the Serpentine in Hyde Park prior to draining into the Thames. The back wall of the theatre abuts this sewer line and the wall had to be built without disturbing the sewer. The Building News reports that "[t]he wall is carried 12 feet below the sewer; the lower portion is of concrete and varies in thickness from 4 feet to six

\textsuperscript{57} Booth 79.

feet; the upper portion is of brickwork set in cement."

One of the engineering problems the current rebuilding program faces is how to further support this same wall so that it can be raised to provide sufficient headroom to allow crew persons to stand at grid height. The estimated cost of the original building is reported in The Building News to be £15,000. Perhaps Emden scheduled this visit and its report in The Building News soon after Clayton's death to help attract a new manager who would see the project to completion. The writer's mention of a completion date of the second week in May proved to be optimistic.

An interesting side bar to the building's progress concerns the problematic nature of the theatre's heating system. A memo to the Theatres Subcommittee of the Metropolitan Board of Works dated 30 April 1888 reports to have received a letter from Walter Emden dated April 25 that indicates that it was not at first intended to heat the building. Emden now proposed to heat the building with a hot water system supplied from a slow combustion boiler located at pit level with coils in cases generating the heat located in various parts of the house. The heating plans accompanied Emden's letter of 25 April, so clearly the decision for the heating system was a late one.

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° The Building News 30 March 1888: 480.
The Board of Works regarded the location of the heating system as a possible safety problem. Emden sent a follow-up letter on 15 May which sought to allay their concerns, saying, "As the stove is a small one, there will not be much heat." He also reported that the work had already been completed. After an inspection of the installation on 19 June the Board of Works deemed it satisfactory. One must wonder if they had really intended not to heat the building despite the earlier press reports which mentioned a heating system.

Inadequate heating remains a problem at the Royal Court into the nineteen nineties despite several attempts during the intervening years to completely revamp the heating system. It remains to be seen if Haworth-Tompkins and their heating contractor Max Fordham and Partners will finally provide adequate heating for the entire building.

On 3 August Emden wrote a letter to the Board of Works informing it that the construction of the building was completed, except for the installation of seats and some painting. He requested an inspection of the final work. An inspection on 10 August certified that, although incomplete, the building complied with regulations. A final survey on 12 September judged the work completed, and the Board issued Emden his building certificate on 18 September.

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1 London Metropolitan Archive.

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On 24 September 1888 the theatre opened to the public when the new joint managers, Arthur Chudleigh and Mrs. John (Matilda Charlotte) Wood, presented *Mama*, an English version of *Les Surprises du Divorce*, adapted by Sydney Grundy (1848-1914). Grundy, a prolific and popular writer whose fame has not endured, typically wrote strong drama rather than this type of light comedy. Some critics regard Grundy as perhaps one of the most significant dramatists in the twenty years which followed T. W. Robertson’s death in 1871. For this important event the Royal Court again aligned itself with progressive trends in playwrighting. Chudleigh and Wood’s eighty-year lease from the Cadogan Estate, commenced on 29 September 1887.

The most complete report about the new building can be found in *The Builder* of 29 September 1888. It reports that the plan and arrangement resemble Terry’s Theatre, as does the fire-proof construction, and praises the panic hardware on the doors and the spacious stairways. In order to preserve the social and economic separation of the audience sections, each section of the auditorium had its own entrance and individual pay area rather than a central box office. Since Emden provided no real lobby space, he crowded service areas, bars, and toilets into corridors, cramping the front of house. This type of arrangement, in which "circulation and lounging space [were] kept to a

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42 Rowell 90.
minimum," represented a solution typical for the period." Despite the limited space, the Prince of Wales received a private entrance, retiring room with WC, and a Prince’s box. These features also appeared in other theatres built in this era.

Emden chose to sink the theatre into the ground so that no part of the house required more than a single flight of stairs to reach a ground level exit. The Builder acknowledges this advantage but the reviewer doesn’t agree with the decision."

Emden anticipated a trend; within a few years J.G Buckle’s book on safety in theatre buildings recommends this arrangement as standard for new construction." In the current rebuilding project, the decision to sink the building proved fortuitous, because it allowed in the nineteen nineties for raising the flytower, the addition of a rehearsal room and an enlarged Theatre Upstairs without blocking too much light from the neighboring residential buildings.

The Builder also praises the "practical planning and construction" of the theatre. However, "[f]or the architectural characteristics of the house we fear much cannot be said." The interior decoration is called "not better than theatre decoration usually is," and although the

"3 Maguire 154.


5 Leacroft 265.
early descriptions of the proposed building mention a French Renaissance interior, no mention of that style actually having been built has been located. Perhaps budgetary constrictions caused adjustments to the budget for interior decoration which had not been started at the time of John Clayton's death.

The pre-building reports of a simple exterior proved correct; indeed, the built exterior proved to be even simpler than the first drawings, because it lacked the large statues present on the earlier rendering of the front elevation. Little wonder then that The Builder considers that the details on the facade belong to the "most commonplace order of architectural accessories." The Royal Court has never been prized for the quality of its architectural detail. The choice not to create an impressive facade proves curious. An advantage that the site for the second Royal Court holds over the first is the prominent location on Sloane Square; but Emden did not provide a facade that might have enabled the theatre to dominate the square. A shortage of money appears to be the most likely explanation.

While Victorian theatres frequently sacrificed exterior detail to interior appearance, what made the Royal Court unusual was that the theatre's lobby and auditorium, which a

"The Builder. 29 September 1888 226.

The Builder. 29 September 1888 226.
Victorian audience member would have regarded as the most important elements in the theatre, received no mention whatsoever." The writer of the article in The Builder further complains that "nothing could look more un-aesthetic and un-constructive" than the way the dome is hung in front of the gallery. Finally, the writer reproves Emden and suggests that "he endeavor to improve this method of designing the interior."** The absence of a discussion of the interior represents the most puzzling aspect of the second Royal Court. Emden designed the first Royal Court with an elaborate interior that included frescos by an important contemporary artist and carved griffins on either side of the proscenium. The pinkish-mauve color of the interior was itself novel. For the present rebuilding project, the lack of an interior deemed worthy of historic preservation proved advantageous because it permits the design team much greater freedom in deciding how to handle the interior.

The writer in The Builder also acknowledges that the constricted building site caused difficulties for the architects. These difficulties will be magnified during the current reconstruction, transforming a difficult refurbishment into a major engineering challenge. As current architect Steve Tompkins reports, "keyhole surgery"

** Maguire 154.

" The Builder. 29 September 1888 226.

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will be required to reconstruct the interior of the building while maintaining the facade of a Grade II Historic building located on a small site surrounded by a busy thoroughfare, a major sewer line, the tunnel for the Underground, and residential buildings.\textsuperscript{70}

None of the 1888 critics commented on the Royal Court's small stage, with the proscenium opening given as 21 feet, 24 feet to the rear wall, almost no wing space, and footlights lining the front edge of the stage. The limited building site did not allow for workshop space. With no room for grand scenic effects, clearly Emden conceived only painted drops as scenery. The 1888 get-in, located three meters above floor level and less than a meter wide, reinforces the idea that painted scenery was intended to predominate at the Royal Court.\textsuperscript{71} Although the transition from two dimensional to three dimensional scenery had begun by 1887, most notably in London at Henry Irving's Lyceum theatre, the managers of the Royal Court clearly intended to continue to use the older technology, perhaps for reasons of economy or because the small stagehouse and limited off-stage space would not allow for the use of bulky scenery.

The severe space limitations have challenged Royal Court designers to the present. The 1996-2000 refurbishment

\textsuperscript{70} Tompkins, Steven, Personal interview, 18 June 1998.

\textsuperscript{71} The same get-in was still in use in 1996, prior to the rebuilding which provides a modern get-in with an elevator.
makes major improvements to stage, fly, and wing space as detailed in chapter six. Emden included star traps and a grave trap, standard features of Victorian stages, as well as a small orchestra pit. According to Michael Hallifax, the first stage manager for the ESC, the traps remained functional when the ESC took possession of the theatre in 1956.72

None of Emden's original interior remained in the current Royal Court when the 1995 decision was made to renovate, and no one seriously considered an attempt to return to the "original" decor. Indeed, no detailed information about the interior decor is known to exist. In their book *The Theatres of London*, Mander and Mitchenson call the decoration Empire style. They derived that information from the unpublished manuscript of Arthur F. M. Beales, "London Playhouses," which formed the basis for their book and which remained incomplete at Beales's death in 1949. Beales writes that "the entrance hall was paneled in oak and had a fine painted ceiling. The interior was decorated in Empire style."73 Beales could have had first-hand experience attending the original Royal Court; otherwise his source remains unidentified. Notices in The

72 The working parts of these traps were removed for preservation and possible reuse in other Victorian era theatres prior to demolishing the stage for the current rebuilding of the theatre.

Builder during 1888 discussing the project state that the interior will be decorated in the style of the French Renaissance. Since both Empire and Renaissance styles have classical roots, the descriptive terms may refer to the same decor.

Elsewhere in London, productions of modern dramatists such as Ibsen began to influence dramatic texts. In 1889 Janet Achurch mounted performances of William Archer's translation of *A Doll House* at the Gaiety Theatre. By the 1891 season, six productions of five different Ibsen plays were on offer in London. Also, in 1889 André Antoine's Théâtre Libre visited London. That visit sparked discussions of Zola's theory of naturalism in the dramatic text. The idea of naturalism in stagecraft and acting preceded the acceptance of the changes in the text which only found general acceptance in the next century.

The general public identified J.T. Grein's founding of the Independent Theatre in 1891 as an effort to follow Théâtre Libre in the path of naturalism. The Independent Theatre followed the example of the Shelley Society in offering private club performances in order to evade the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain's Office. The Independent Theatre opened on 13 March 1891 at the Royalty Theatre with a production of Ibsen's *Ghosts*. The Lord Chamberlain regarded the play as obscene and carefully

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74 Stokes 116.
monitored the members-only attendance policy, since Grein had received over three thousand requests for tickets. Miss Saintley, the Royalty's licensee, refused to sublease the theatre to Grein for any subsequent performances because she feared that the wrath of the Lord Chamberlain would result in the loss of her license to operate the theatre. In the program book, Grein writes: "Thus the Independent Theatre Society, where art not money or long runs is the cry, has stepped in to free the London stage from the taint of artistic orthodoxy." The Independent Theatre's impact on English theatre belies its short history. Despite producing G.B. Shaw's first play, it folded in 1898 without establishing the reputation for any English writers. In 1899, the Stage Society assumed its role. Small play-producing societies proliferated during the next decade. Out of the membership of Stage Society developed the core membership for the Barker-Vedrenne regime at the Royal Court where English writers of the modern drama achieved the central focus.

In his book about the various societies for the development of the modern theatre John Stokes writes:

The non-commercial theatres drew not only on members of the profession but upon writers and critics, designers and painters, political revolutionaries and social reformers; men and women whose powerful


76 As quoted in Stephens 138.
engagement derived in part from the fact that in theatre they were amateurs."

These amateurs realized that change must come from outside the existing theatre community. Several of these amateur companies matured into important professional companies such as the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and the Abbey Theatre. The Barker-Vedrenne management’s and the ESC at the Royal Court’s efforts to change theatre from the outside continued this tradition of utilizing a company which included a mixture of amateurs and professionals.

The commercial management at the new Royal Court Theatre of Wood and Chudleigh, like their predecessors at the old one, experienced their greatest successes with productions of new plays, notably farces by Pinero, *The Cabinet Minister* (1890), and *The Amazons* (1893). However, neither the plays nor the management repeated the sustained success Clayton had achieved at the old Royal Court. The unanticipated death of John Clayton and the failure of his immediate successors to capitalize on his record of success represented the first important failure of a Royal Court manager to foster a transition to a succeeding management capable of building on past success. Beginning in 1893 when Mrs. Wood left the management, the theatre began to develop the reputation of a bad-luck house." Exact why the

"7" Stokes 3.

"7a Mayes, Ronald. The Romance of London Theatres. No. 40 "The Court" in Chelsea Archive.

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Royal Court struggled through these years is unknown. Theatre historian H. Barton Baker writes that "it is rather curious that at a time when the suburban theatre was becoming an institution that the prosperity of the Chelsea house should so decline.""

Perhaps the reason has something to do with the theatre's interior. The domestic drama of the eighteen nineties required stylish sets, and the interplay of auditorium, front of house space, and stage often created a unified visual effect. The absence of such a stylish interior at the Royal Court may explain why Pinero's comedies played well at that theatre, but the affluent milieu required by his "problem plays" dictated the move to a more luxurious West End theatre. The Royal Court could compete neither with the luxury of West End auditoriums nor the advanced stage effects possible in theatres with more spacious back stages. The noted Victorian writer on theatre architecture E.O. Sachs later (1896-98) advised architects to "bear in mind the social habits and conditions of the people for whom they are building."" As late as 1897 the Sketch wrote that "to the playgoer the inside is more important than the out, and the great questions are can I see well, can I hear well, shall I be comfortable, shall I

" 505.

" Maguire 155-56.
be safe, and will the decorations be agreeable."\(^1\) The Royal Court possessed good safety features and acoustics and adequate sightlines. Deficiencies appear to have existed in terms of comfort and decoration.

A notice in the Daily Telegraph of 19 March 1895 reveals a call for the sale of £75,000 in shares for the Royal Court repayable at par on 15 March 1915; one-third would be in the form of a first mortgage on the theatre, and the remainder would provide share capital. The directors for this sale include Arthur Wing Pinero, Sir Arthur Sullivan, Arthur Chudleigh, and Herbert Bennett (owner of Harrods).\(^2\) It is not known if this sale proved successful.

In 1897 John Hare, who had managed the old Court Theatre from 1875-1879, "returned to his old home with much eclat, the Prince and Princess of Wales [future Edward VII and Queen Alexandra] and the Duke of York [future George V] honoring the event with their presence."\(^3\) Hare’s choice to revive Pinero’s farce *The Hobby Horse* typified the conservative programming of his short (two productions) return to the Royal Court.

Several sources claim that the famous impresario and playwright Dion Boucicault joined Chudleigh in management in

\(^1\) As quoted in Maguire (5 May 1897) 154.

\(^2\) London Metropolitan Archives.

\(^3\) Baker 505.
1899 for one year." Since Boucicault died in 1890, perhaps they have confused the famous elder Boucicault with his son Dion G. Boucicault. The latter's name first appeared in a program for the Royal Court for The Vagabond King dated 4 November 1897. The younger Boucicault, whose sister inherited an interest in the theatre from her late husband John Clayton, may also have been involved with the redecoration that the program book describes: "The theatre has been entirely redecorated and upholstered by Messes Waring, Ltd. of Oxford Street. The architect is Mr. J. Kingwell Cole." An examination of Kingwell Cole's plans, on file in the London Metropolitan Archives, reveals several minor changes to the theatre's interior. The boxes at the upper circle level were removed and replaced with a single row of nine seats. A number of changes were made to the lobby area. The men's room in the ground floor lobby was changed by transforming the urinals at the front into a ladies cloak room, while the W.C., now located at the rear of the cloak room, was retained for staff use. The ladies' WC on this level was also removed in favor of a ladies' hat check. The manager's office was removed from the lobby as were the second set of doors that originally separated the

" James 261.
" Mander and Mitchenson Collection.
" Mander and Mitchenson Collection.

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corridor at the rear of the dress circle from the entry lobby.

Cole consolidated the several small pay booths that Emden had created into a single box office located center back at street (dress circle) level, perhaps indicating a reduction in the class consciousness or class diversity of the audience." An alternative explanation can be surmised from the comments of A. E. Woodrow in *The Builder* in 1892 that "some houses have proved failures because they have been too expensive to work, have required too many attendants, money-takers and check-takers, and have not held enough 'money' to pay the weekly salary list." Most of the changes appear to be the refurbishment a theatre needs in terms of decor about every ten years.

Pinero's *Trelawney of the Wells* opened successfully on 20 January 1898, directed by Boucicault. Allardyce Nicoll writes: "In Trelawney may be viewed a symbol of the renascent English drama. Something of the refashioned farce had gone into its making, something too of the newer sentimentalism. It is a period piece that endeavors to present a picture of the young Tom Robertson and his

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"" London Metropolitan Archive.

times."** The Royal Court ends the century with a nostalgic play that looks back to a bygone era.

A plan dated August 1898 from J. Kingwell Cole and Kenneth Wood proposed colonizing the air shaft between the theatre and the Court Lodge for a set of pass stairs from the stalls level to the dress circle. Although the plans were marked as conditionally approved and the council minutes of 25 November 1898 clearly indicate that approval was granted, no evidence has yet been found to establish if the stairs ever existed.*° Perhaps the theatre had approached the Municipal Board of Works for approval without gaining the approval of the adjacent building owner, and the failure to secure that permission doomed the proceedings.

Chudleigh remained the licensee through the various management regimes of the eighteen nineties. Little is known about Chudleigh; a curious anecdote reveals that Chudleigh created something of a stir when, from the back of the gallery, he booed a production of his which he disliked.*¹ The partnership of Chudleigh and Boucicault managed the Royal Court until February 1900. Although the Royal Court ended the century with a bad luck reputation, early in the new century it will be home to one of the most

** Nicoll 179.

*° London Metropolitan Archive.


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important theatre managements in the history of the English stage.
Chapter Three
Establishing an Ideal: 1901-1917

In England, the twentieth century essentially began with the death of Queen Victoria on 22 January 1901. The new Edwardian era reflected a confident, ostentatious society dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure and celebrating its freedom from the restrictions of Victoria's prolonged mourning for her Prince Consort. The theatre profession continued to be dominated by commerce, but an audience dissatisfied with the status quo and willing to risk attending experimental drama slowly developed in response to the work of organizations such as the Stage Society, which envisioned theatre as a force for social change and not simply diversionary entertainment.

To present the complex tale of the Royal Court Theatre and English theatre in general during the first decade of the new century, it becomes necessary to depart from a strictly chronological narrative. Events during the Harley Granville Barker and J.E. Vedrenne management deeply impressed a certain identity in the public's perception of the theatre. During the next 50 years, virtually every newspaper article that mentions the theatre associated it with this famous art theatre management. The Royal Court developed the identity of a theatre which challenged the


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status quo, celebrated new plays, represented a leftist-socialist political position, and featured especially fine realistic acting.

The theatre largely remained dark during the first years of the century because it had become unprofitable for a traditional commercial management. The Royal Court's dark status, its location outside the traditional West End, and its lower operating costs proved to be assets in attracting the seminal Barker-Vedrenne management to the Royal Court. For three years, this management capitalized on the theatre's assets and overcame its perceived weaknesses to combine the development of the English art theatre movement with the drive to create a national theatre. This management established the basis for the Royal Court's identity. The failure of the Barker-Vedrenne management after it moved from the Royal Court to the West End's Savoy theatre suggests that the theatre building itself played an important role in that management team's success. As Barker biographer Dennis Kennedy asserts: "Like many successful enterprises, the Court had acquired a mystique, vaguely defined but palpable, and the genus loci did not travel."2

Over the following half-century (1907-1956) several others tried and failed to achieve the balance necessary to operate an independent theatre at the Royal Court successfully.

Consequently, that genus loci remained largely quiescent until George Devine and Tony Richardson assumed the leadership of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court in 1956. As Devine himself said that year, "If this were easy, someone would have done it before us."\textsuperscript{3} He and his successors created a company of which Barker himself would approve.

The people and organizations that proved important to the Royal Court's future spent the first few years of the century working elsewhere, especially actor, playwright, director Harley Granville Barker. Dennis Kennedy considers him "the most versatile man of the English-speaking theatre in our time, and perhaps in history."\textsuperscript{4} Barker began as an actor and distinguished himself in plays by George Bernard Shaw. He virtually invented the role of director in English theatre, working in a variety of styles of performance and genres of writing. Dissatisfied working for others, he created two of the most important theatre managements of the century and wrote significant plays which contained adventurous aspects of both style and content.

The contemporary reader needs to be reminded of how revolutionary Barker's ideas about acting and directing appeared to Edwardians, because now they have become

\textsuperscript{1} Wardle 167.
\textsuperscript{2} 2.
quotidian. Kennedy describes the characteristics of his style and method: "absolute faithfulness to the text of the play and the discernable intention of the author; insistence on ensemble playing, unity of purpose and effect, elimination of 'stars' and solo display; the abjuring of cheap theatricality and empty histrionics in favor of a quiet intensity of acting style and the portrayal of 'inner' truth." Influenced by German director Max Behrend, Bernard Shaw, and William Poel, Barker independently developed ideas about directing similar to those of Stanislavsky. As a director, Barker, like his German contemporary Max Reinhardt, worked in diverse styles from realism, to symbolism, to Shakespeare, to expressionism, and Greek drama. He always found means of expression appropriate to the time of the text. Kennedy continues, "[f]or realist plays, his example demonstrated how careful attention to luminous detail could invest the performance with symbolic and mysterious overtones--the quality we now call Chekhovian."

During the early years of the century, Barker laid what proved to be the groundwork for his landmark management at

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5 Kennedy 35.
7 Kennedy 186.
8 Kennedy 188.
the Royal Court through the combination of his productions
with the Stage Society and his extensive experience as an
actor touring in repertory and performing in the West End.
During these years three men, William Archer, Gilbert
Murray, and George Bernard Shaw, developed mentoring
relationships with Barker that proved crucial to his years
at the Royal Court and, indeed, throughout his career.

In 1904 the British stage offered two principal styles
of acting, both holdovers from the nineteenth century. The
first can be called Irving's larger-than-life dark romantic
style, and the second a more modern mode first advocated by
T.W. Robertson at the Prince of Wales theatre. Dennis
Kennedy contends that Barker created a third, different
style that eventually eclipsed the other two and became the
standard for the English theatre. Acting characterized by
greater truthfulness than found in most commercial
productions, a Royal Court hallmark in the nineteenth
century, continued in the twentieth century with the Barker-
Vedrenne management and remained a trademark throughout the
century under J.B. Fagan, Barry Jackson, and the English
Stage Company.

At the beginning of the century, theatre critic and
Ibsen champion, William Archer assumed the mantle of
principal proponent of the dream of a British national

' Kennedy 34.
theatre. In 1900 a committee consisting of Gilbert Murray, A.C. Bradley, Hamilton Fyfe, Spencer Wilkinson, Archer, and Barker met at Wilkinson's house to consider practical steps toward the creation of a national theatre. As a result of that meeting, Archer and Barker collaborated on preparing a detailed scheme of costs and a repertory for such a theatre in hopes of interesting millionaire Andrew Carnegie in funding the idea.

Barker revealed his increasingly close relationship with William Archer in a letter dated 21 April 1903 in which he proposed the idea "to take the Court Theatre for six months or a year and to run there a stock season of the 'uncommercial drama', more or less continuing what the Stage Society had been doing, but on week-day evenings. ...Without doubt the National Theatre will come so we ought to be getting...ready...for it when it does come." Barker's plan included the concepts of subsidy and affordable ticket prices. In 1903, Barker's idea hit a dead end, but it demonstrated how carefully he considered the question of a national theatre. Finally, in 1904, Archer and Barker's report, privately printed and circulated as the "Blue Book"

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11 Kennedy 18-19.
of the national theatre, appeared. At the time of the printing, Barker had put some of its precepts into action in his management with J.E. Vedrenne at the Royal Court Theatre. Barker biographer Eric Salmon contends that the system on which Britain's two major theatres, the Royal National and the Royal Shakespeare, operate derives from the work and the principles that Barker enunciated at the Royal Court between 1904 and 1907.

At the beginning of the Edwardian era the Stage Society carried the banner of the art theatre movement in England, producing its first production near the end of 1899. Its membership, comprised of both professionals and amateurs, proved better organized than its predecessor, the Independent Theatre. A growing subscriber list enabled the Stage Society to add a second Monday evening performance to its original Sunday evening schedule. The Stage Society maintained an influential position in English theatre for more than two decades. Janet Achurch, Charles Charrington, Walter Crane, Grant Richards, and Frederick Whalen, founders of the Stage Society, also espoused Fabian socialism and regarded theatre as a powerful weapon for social change. Fabian socialism became another central component in explaining the career of Barker. Kennedy, among others,

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12 Purdom 18.
13 Salmon 104.
14 Kennedy 9.
characterizes Barker's transformation to socialism in 1901 as a defining moment in his life. Undergoing a revolutionary change, "he became profoundly imbued with the necessity of organizing the theatre, of making it a great instrumentality in the social life of our time." Fifty years later, George Devine envisioned developing the English Stage Company at the Royal Court into just such an institution. During the nineteen seventies some Royal Court members, under the leadership of Edward Bond, tried but failed to make the theatre an openly socialist theatre rather than simply a leftist one.

Many of the Stage Society's productions were English premieres of plays drawn from the new European art theatre movement. The Barker-Vedrenne management at the Royal Court, an outgrowth of the Stage Society, built upon the foundation of the European art theatre tradition, as did the original plans for the English Stage Company in the nineteen fifties. Both Royal Court managements, Barker-Vedrenne and the ESC, quickly expanded their productions beyond a repertory of revivals to sponsor new plays which spurred growth in the development of English playwrighting.  

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15 Kennedy 84; Miller The Independent Theatre in Europe 196. Barker remains very active with the Fabians, serving on the Executive from 1907-1912.

16 Barker will return to that idea many times again most notably in The Exemplary Theatre 1922.
The management of the Royal Court Theatre during the first few years of the new century appeared stuck in the Victorian era. The first two months of 1900 marked the end of Chudleigh's twelve year association with the theatre's management. After remaining dark for much of the balance of that year, in 1901 H.T. Brickwell took over the management of the theatre, and attempted to run it as a regular commercial management with well-known actors such as John Martin-Harvey in revivals of plays such as *The Cigarette Maker's Romance*.

This management instigated the first mention of the theatre building in the correspondence file of the Board of Works for the new century. In a letter dated 23 May 1901, Brickwell requested permission from the theatre sub-committee to make the barrier between the stalls and the pit a variable one. This variation enabled the management to offer 178 stalls seats and 102 pit seats or 80 stall seats and 200 of the cheaper pit seats. The supervising architect's report to the Metropolitan Board of Works of 12 June 1901 recommended approval of a moveable barrier between the seventh and tenth rows since the total capacity for the theatre will not change.

Brickwell's management apparently wanted to vary the arrangement of the house for different productions to better

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17 London Metropolitan Archives.

18 London Metropolitan Archives.
accommodate the type of audience likely to be attracted to each production. The need for more low-cost seats may provide an indication of the audience demographics. It also may indicate an attempt to recapture the nineteenth century working class audience that began abandoning theatre for the music hall at this time. Despite the changes to pit and stalls seating, Brickwell’s management scheme proved short-lived, beginning on 2 May 1901 and ending on 19 October that same year. His last production, a revival of *The Strange Adventures of Miss Brown* used olio entertainment as a curtain-raiser, a presentation more reminiscent of the Victorian than the Edwardian era.

Perhaps this uncertainty as to audience contributed to the Royal Court’s reputation as a bad luck house. Another clue to why the Royal Court remained dark and developed a reputation as a bad luck house during the start of this century is found in the correspondence file for the Department of Works. The theatre lessee consistently failed to maintain and upgrade the building as safety standards for theatre architecture became more stringent. Without a regular tenant, there was no money for repairs, and only a prosperous commercial management could undertake expensive building repairs in addition to regular expenses. The correspondence about the need to replace the fire curtain proves typical.
Although Walter Emden's original installation for the theatre included a fire curtain, an inspection on 8 August 1902 revealed that a functional fire curtain no longer existed on that date. Subsequent inspections on 29 October and 26 November revealed that no action was taken to rectify the situation. The inspectors described the theatre on 26 November as unlet and closed. During the period of closing, the management met with an inspector from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade on 24 January 1903 to review the situation. However, not until 11 August 1903 did E. Oldroyd and Company submit plans for the installation of a new fire curtain. The theatre remained dark during the fall, and Oldroyd and Company completed the installation of the new fire curtain in late October.

During the delay in repairing the fire curtain, the theatre remained dark for most of 1902 with the exception of thirteen matinee performances, beginning 30 October, of Eleanor, a dramatization by Mrs. Humphrey Ward of her own novel. William Poel and the Elizabethan Stage Society briefly leased the theatre for two weeks in May 1903 to stage a production of the medieval morality play Everyman. Godfrey James mentions seeing this production with his school chum Donald Calthrop, whose family maintained a financial interest in the theatre. Calthrop, apparently the son of John Clayton Calthorpe, the manager behind the theatre's original construction, began his acting career at
the Royal Court during the Barker-Vedrenne management. The Elizabethan Stage Society returned for seven performances of \textit{Twelfth Night} in June 1903.

The theatre's fortunes remained dismal until the end of 1903 when J.H. Leigh arrived to open a new, largely amateur, production of Shakespeare's \textit{The Tempest} on 26 October 1903, featuring both himself and his wife, Thyrza Norman. Leigh produced a dramatic shift in the theatre's fortunes.

During this production the Fire Brigade inspected the theatre and objected to the temporary wood and canvas dressing rooms created on both the mezzanine and stage basement levels to accommodate the production's large cast. Insufficient dressing room space for large cast productions perennially reappears as a problem for Royal Court managements.

On 29 November 1903, the Stage Society, always on the lookout for a venue for its limited run productions, capitalized on the Royal Court's frequent dark status to mount a production of Maxim Gorky's \textit{The Lower Depths}, then a startlingly new play. The production transferred to the Great Queen Street Theatre for its second performance on 30 November.\footnote{Wearing, J.P. \textit{The London Stage 1900-1909}. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press Inc., 1981) vol.1 258.} It would be interesting to know if building problems at the Royal Court forced this change of venue. The Royal Court, whose extended dark periods are only

briefly interrupted by short non-commercial runs, resembled a theatre hungry for tenants.

When Leigh formally became the theatre’s lessee and licensee in 1904, he must have recognized that changes to the building would be required to make the theatre operable. Leigh had no choice but to find a method to update a building not yet twenty years old. Perhaps the theatre had been built with only a planned twenty-year life span, the typical length for a Victorian theatre. The Royal Court’s role in the London theatre world also required some redefinition. That a rich amateur undertook to improve and expand the theatre building may reflect the opinion that the theatre no longer remained commercially viable. Whatever the cause, Leigh, and his successors throughout the century, rarely could afford more than patch-work repairs and new paint. Sufficient capital to modernize the theatre failed to materialize until the reconstruction project of the nineteen nineties extended the building’s useful existence.

Leigh’s arrival prompted a series of building inspections, beginning with the London County Council Engineering department on 11 March 1904, which strongly objected to the building’s heating arrangements and established the need for repairs. A follow-up inspection by the Fire Brigade listed 28 problems including many inadequacies of the building’s wiring and asserted that the
"installation throughout is in a very bad condition."\textsuperscript{20}

The Supervising Architect for the theatre section of the Municipal Board of Works compiled a list of 74 items that required immediate attention. In one of the many fortuitous coincidences that have occurred during the Royal Court's history, amateur producer J.H. Leigh hired John Eugene Vedrenne as general manager at the Royal Court because of his background and training in commerce. Vedrenne also demonstrated an interest in the art of theatre, and he balanced both perspectives as he supervised three years of building alterations.

The correspondence file records that Leigh also hired architect C. E. Lancaster Parkinson, who on 8 June 1904 began a series of negotiations about the exact nature of the changes needed to satisfy the Board's list of dilapidations. Furthermore, Parkinson's questions reveal that the Royal Court's small building site created difficulties when trying to improve the dressing room and office space accommodations of the building. Parkinson's 1904 plans indicate that the manager (Vedrenne or Leigh?) had taken over the former Prince of Wales retiring room as his office. The backstage exit was still labeled the Prince's entrance. Apparently, King Edward VII no longer regularly attended this theatre, and in the cramped backstage a room could no longer be reserved for him. Throughout the building's history, up to

\textsuperscript{20} London Metropolitan Archives.

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the present refurbishment, problems with the inadequate support facilities plagued every management.

The Builder confirms the Royal Court's first major rebuilding project on 18 June 1904 when it reports that "some extensive structural alterations will be carried out for Mr. J.H. Leigh, of the Court Theatre, with the purpose of adapting it for new uses as an amateur theatre" (656). The story reveals that "the interior is to be redecorated and rearranged so that the floor of the auditorium may readily be appropriated in its entirety for stall seats and the pit seats removed, and the front of the building will be raised by an additional story; Mr. C.E. Lancaster Parkinson was appointed as architect for the new works."21 The desire to eliminate pit seating signified the transition away from the working class patrons who sat in the nineteenth century pit in favor of the middle class patron who sat in the twentieth century stalls. During November and December of 1904 Parkinson submitted ten drawings to the Municipal Board of Works which received conditional approval. In these plans Parkinson clearly accomplished more than rectifying the 74 complaints of the engineering department and the 28 complaints of the Fire Brigade.

The most important change made at this time was the addition of a third floor to be used as a rehearsal room. In this rehearsal room, George Bernard Shaw met Ellen Terry

21 656.
for the first time during rehearsals for Captain Brassbound's Conversion. This space became Clement Freud's successful nightclub during the nineteen fifties and sixties before it became the Theatre Upstairs for the English Stage Company at the end of the nineteen sixties. At this time the front facade assumed the configuration of the Royal Court known today.

The second major element of new construction, a new annex to the side of the building, provided additional dressing room and office space. The adjacent Underground station greatly limited the area available on which this could be built. The Royal Court at this time expanded into the building footprint it would maintain until the current refurbishment project. An electrical transformer room added in one of the vaults under the sidewalk included a separate transformer for stage and auditorium. The reliability of electricity prompted the termination of the backup gas lighting system.

In the fall of 1904 the Barker-Vedrenne management debuted with matinee performances of Gilbert Murray's translation of Euripides's Hippolytus. A production of Candida, previously produced by the Stage Society, followed on 26 November with three subsequent performances, including the two first evening performances. C.B. Purdom reports that winter weather had arrived early that year and the theatre's inefficient heating system had the entire company
complaining about the lack of heat. The theatre was then closed for three weeks, during which the lessee began to make the changes associated with Lancaster Parkinson's plans.\textsuperscript{22} The time needed to complete the repairs can be gleaned from a June 1905 program which states, "The alterations have now been completed. The stage has been raised in order to give a better line of sight from the Stalls and the Pit; the hot water heating system has been overhauled and renewed and it is hoped that the Theatre will be found one of coziest and warmest in London."\textsuperscript{21}

The stage height is one element of the theatre that will be readjusted several times over the life of the Royal Court. The nineteen nineties rebuilding raised the stage level several inches. Although the 1905 announcement states that the alterations have been completed, it must specifically refer to the new building additions. The correspondence file for the theatre reveals that Vedrenne took the entire period of 1904-1907 to make the improvements which had been demanded in the original list of problems. The series of letters from the building department repeatedly calling attention to aspects of the theatre that failed to meet code provides an indication of the tenuous financial picture. Vedrenne's replies indicate that deferred maintenance represented a strategy for keeping the

\textsuperscript{22} Purdom 29-30.

\textsuperscript{21} Mander and Mitchenson Collection.
books balanced in a theatre to which they had no long term commitment. In a letter dated 8 March 1905, Vedrenne informs the Board of Works that between £6,000 and £7,000 had been spent on building improvements up to that point. Clearly Vedrenne placed a higher priority on adding more office, dressing room, and rehearsal space, in the effort to make the building profitable, than in fulfilling the Municipal Board of Works list of problems, especially when requirements such as the need to add an extra inch to aisle widths would have required major changes on the dress circle level.

Allen Wade, Barker’s personal assistant, reveals that even three years of repairs failed to meet all of the theatre’s needs:

Had it been practicable to make the Court a permanent home, the capital demanded would have been a large sum; but it was not practicable, and from Barker’s point of view was not even desirable, for in his eyes that theatre was but a makeshift, and indeed, cozy as it was in the stalls and dress circle, was a very inconvenient building.

In the era before public subsidy for the theatre, only economically profitable theatres survived. One needs to recall that English theatres, unlike continental theatres, operated like regular commercial enterprises without state subsidy. In the second half of the twentieth century, the

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24 London Metropolitan Archives.

25 Purdom 68.
English Stage Company, hampered by insufficient subsidy, made similar short-term repair choices after it moved into the Royal Court. This habit of deferred maintenance allowed the building to deteriorate so that in 1994 the stage was no longer structurally sound, the grid could handle only a fraction of its intended load, and the back wall of the theatre had begun to crumble. The building waited until the lottery finally made sufficient capital available for the theatre to move beyond makeshift repairs and alterations.

Coinciding with the Barker-Vedrenne management’s move out of the Royal Court in 1907, the Municipal Archive contains a new set of plans labeled by "GG." Clearly copied from portions of earlier drawings and not related to any particular building scheme, these plans represent the building as it existed in 1907. With the three year building program complete, a new set of baseline drawings for the theatre proved necessary. The capacity for the house, including standing room, listed as 777, documents the first in what became a series of reductions to the present capacity of 400, less than half the originally reported capacity. These plans also reveal that Vedrenne located his office in the new backstage block in the room with the curved window and the view out to Sloane Square.¹ Barker

¹ Known as the number one dressing room, George Devine, Laurence Olivier, and other luminaries who worked at the Royal Court used this as their dressing room.
located his office in the dressing room across the hall adjacent to the staircase.

Granville Barker's friendship with William Archer provided the connection that led him to the Royal Court. In April 1904 Archer introduced him to J.H. Leigh, the wealthy amateur who had taken a lease on the Royal Court. Leigh wished to produce a series of amateur Shakespearean productions, mostly for the sake of his young wife Thyrza Norman. Unhappy with the quality of the first two presentations, Leigh asked Archer's advice, and at Archer's suggestion Leigh hired Barker to direct *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Barker agreed to direct the production on the condition that he be permitted to offer matinee performances of George Bernard Shaw's *Candida* which the Stage Society had already produced and which featured Barker in the role of Marchbanks. Leigh's business manager, J. E. Vedrenne, intrigued by Barker's ideas, agreed. According to a letter Barker sent to Gilbert Murray, Leigh also expressed interest in the idea of a season of Greek drama.

In association with Gilbert Murray, Barker, had already begun to investigate the possibilities for contemporary productions of Greek plays by utilizing Murray's new translations of Euripides. Prefiguring their Royal Court management, J.E. Vedrenne served as business manager for the

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27 Kennedy 19-20.

28 Salmon 100.
matinee productions of Murray’s translation of Euripides’s Hippolytus, directed by Barker at the end of May 1904 at the Lyric Theatre, under the sponsorship of the New Century Theatre, another advanced theatre society like the Stage Society. A matinee of a revised production of Hippolytus on 18 October 1904 provided the inception of the famous Vedrenne-Barker management’s three year run at the Royal Court. Within three years, Barker, only 27 years old, and Vedrenne, ten years his senior, revolutionized the British theatre.

Not surprisingly, Harley Granville Barker garners the most attention in discussions of the Barker-Vedrenne management. Apparently only those who had business dealings with the partnership knew Vedrenne. However, all of Barker’s biographers note that his achievements at the Royal Court as actor, playwright, and producer/director might never have occurred but for the careful fiscal management of J.E. Vedrenne. C.B. Purdom, who knew both men personally,

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10 Salmon 100. Eric Salmon contends that many historians incorrectly attribute the commencement of the Barker-Vedrenne management at the Royal Court to the influence of Shaw and, directly to the April 1904 production of Candida. Although Shaw became vastly influential on Barker during these years, and though the effect of Shaw on Barker’s work and of Barker’s on Shaw can scarcely be overestimated, the beginning resulted from the direct influence of Gilbert Murray and his translations of Euripides and not from Shaw or Shaw’s plays.

11 Purdom 29.
asserts that Vedrenne represented "as unusual a business-man in the theatre as Barker was as an actor, and there is no doubt that his meticulous care for the business aspects of the partnership had much to do with maintaining it." 32

Helen Miller, in her book on the independent theatre movement in Europe, contends that "[t]here underlay the Court Theatre in a degree perhaps never surpassed a happy mingling of artistic endeavor and strong business sense." 33

The balance of art and commerce continues to challenge Royal Court managers.

Barker biographer Salmon describes Vedrenne as a sensitive and intelligent man with a genuine interest in Barker's goals. Salmon contends that the two men deeply respected each other despite frequent disagreements and friction. Though the two men never became personal friends, they each respected the talents of the other, and both recognized the unique nature of their management. 34

Bernard Shaw, the unnamed but crucial third leg of the Barker-Vedrenne management, reports that businessman Vedrenne "was fascinated by his two associates, like a man trying to ride two runaway horses simultaneously." 35 After

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32 Purdom 29.
34 Salmon 102.
35 Purdom 65.
Vedrenne's death on 12 February 1930, Barker wrote this retrospective on his former partner:

It was a precarious enterprise; and its capital, in the sense that was his chief concern, consisted almost literally of his aplomb (the French word naturally fits), his shrewd ingenuity and sense of reality in business, when all the talking was done for the moment, when he was left alone to add up the figures...He was fundamentally the most cautious of men, always knew to a shilling where he was, and every shilling he spent brought its shilling's worth--and more!"3 4

From 1904-1907 Harley Granville Barker and J.E. Vedrenne produced thirty-two plays for their famous "thousand" performances.3 7 They established a reputation for innovation through well-acted productions of new plays, especially those of George Bernard Shaw (eleven Shaw plays, six of them premieres and all directed by the author). They established their reputation for wide-ranging productions in part through revivals of Euripidean tragedy in new Gilbert Murray translations. Non-Shavian new plays which achieved artistic successes under this management included Galsworthy's The Silver Box and Granville Barker's own play The Voysey Inheritance.

Barker, writing to William Archer, describes John Masefield's The Camden Wonder, written in Gloucestershire dialect and based on a 1669 historical incident from the Cotswalds, as "the beginnings and more than the beginnings

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" Purdom 65.

7 A mild piece of hyperbole since the actual number, 988, falls 12 short of 1,000.
of good English drama of the soil. "38 This regional, realistic, play provides a connection to the ESC's successful presentation of D.H. Lawrence's plays, David Storey's plays and the presentation of numerous other regional voices in English playwrighting.

The Barker-Vedrenne management, unlike that of the Independent Stage Company, focused primarily on productions of new plays by English playwrights rather than merely championing the early masters of modern drama such as Ibsen and Strindberg. In a clear break from previous Royal Court managements, Barker-Vedrenne presented more serious and high-minded plays than standard commercial West End fare. The repertory, mixing new plays and classic plays, resembled that of the English Stage Company in the nineteen fifties.

The Barker-Vedrenne management at the Royal Court represented the fruition of the English art theatre tradition begun by J.T. Grein. It also represented the melding of that tradition with the movement to create a national theatre company. For the next fifty years almost every mention of the Royal Court Theatre identified it with the accomplishments of the Barker-Vedrenne management. Harley Granville Barker continued to advance the ideal of a national theatre during the seven years prior to the outbreak of World War I. The war effort monopolized England's resources and losses from the war radically

18 Kennedy 50-51.
altered the nation's economic and social prospects, thus dashing the hopes for a national theatre. The failure to create a national theatre, in part, prompted Harley Granville Barker (fed up before the war with West End commercialism) to move from active theatre production into the world of theatre scholar. After World War I, the national theatre banner became associated with the efforts to create a Shakespeare memorial theatre rather than a theatre dedicated to new writing.

The next major art theatre in London, the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, despite the same address, did not try to emulate the earlier management. The French art theatre tradition of Jacques Copeau through Copeau's student Michel St. Denis and the Russian tradition through Theodore Kommissarzhevsky combined to provide similar inspiration for the development of George Devine as a theatre artist. These developments will be noted in the next chapter. Although the ESC did not consciously seek to emulate the English art theatre tradition of the Barker-Vedrenne management when it took the lease for the Royal Court, many commentators, then and since, have commented on the spiritual connection between the managements. The theatre building itself developed an identity that fostered that connection.

The Barker-Vedrenne management at the Royal Court struggled to balance their production goals with their budgetary limitations. Vedrenne restrained Barker, whose
later career demonstrated a willingness to spend lavishly on production. The design approach which resulted from this need for fiscal restraint proved successful. In his history of the first season of Barker-Vedrenne at the Royal Court, Desmond McCarthy lauded a design aesthetic wherein "a few well chosen details go further to create a scene than all the usual resources of a lavish London management." Alan Wade reports that "At the Court considerations of expense had restricted the mounting of plays to what was strictly serviceable; in later years Barker once reminded me how shabby the productions at the Court must have looked." No other source described the Royal Court productions as shabby.

The reviews for Barker's production of Shaw's Don Juan in Hell sequence from Man and Superman reveal how Barker transformed the serviceable into an operative approach to design. The set for Don Juan in Hell consisted of an empty stage draped in black velvet. Barker even covered the stools the actors sat on with black velvet. Within this black void dazzling white light illuminated actors and revealed the details of the exquisite costumes (the cost of which reportedly broke Vedrenne's heart). This simplicity of approach served the play by focusing attention on the

39 Kennedy 73.

actors and Shaw's scintillating dialogue. A similar aesthetic, in which simplicity and appropriate detail combined to reinforce the work of writer and actors, characterized the design aesthetic Jocelyn Herbert developed for the Royal Court during the nineteen fifties and sixties which will be further discussed in a later chapter.

Although contemporary critics regarded the Barker-Vedrenne management as a ground-breaking endeavor, that regard failed to result in the preservation of production records or the fostering of extensive contemporary descriptions of the productions. The absence of promptbooks, the lack of a photographic record, along with very few set designs prevents the creation of informative reconstructions of Royal Court performances. The dominance of realism in production resulted in newspaper and magazine reviews that rarely provided details of the staging or the setting for a new realist play. This attitude extended to discussions of individual performances in which reviewers either praised verisimilitude or remained silent.

The achievements of the Barker-Vedrenne management, detailed in a number of books, require mention of a few highlights here. During the first Shaw play premiered at the Court, John Bull's Other Island (1905), Prime Minister A.J. Balfour enjoyed the production with its Irish subject

41 Kennedy 73.
42 Kennedy 55.
matter so much that he returned three times. He brought each of the two opposition leaders, Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith, to subsequent performances, a factor prominently mentioned in newspaper reports. Endorsements such as these helped the theatre gain public acceptance.

When Edward VII expressed a desire to see the production, a command performance had to be arranged for 11 March 1905, since the play had already completed its limited run. The King reportedly laughed so hard at Shaw's version of the Irish that he broke the chair in which he sat. Vedrenne had rented the chair specifically for the monarch and lamented the expense of replacing the broken chair. Although he frequently attended the Royal Court while he was Prince of Wales, Edward VII was not as closely connected to the Barker-Vedrenne management as he had been with earlier Royal Court managers such as John Hare. The move away from royal patronage reflected the Royal Court's efforts to attract a more independent-minded audience. The core audience at the Royal Court represented a shift away from a traditional West End audience.

The Barker-Vedrenne seasons attracted a predominately female audience, in contrast to the typically male West End audience. These women came to the theatre to see the play

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44 Kennedy 24.
rather than be seen. Their cooperation enabled the Royal Court to institute hatless matinees, since these Edwardian women cheerfully conformed to the new edict of no hats in the theatre by utilizing, at no charge, the hat room added in 1897. The presence of these women also reflected Barker’s predilection for directing plays with strong female characters and featuring such characters in the plays he wrote. Feminism developed as an important aspect of the Royal Court’s identity. Barker chose to stage the suffragette play by Elizabeth Robins, Votes for Women, because “I am so strongly prejudiced in favor of its subject.” Barker’s handling of the crowd scene in Votes for Women eclipsed the crowd scenes of Saxe-Meiningen, Irving, Tree, and Antoine. The interest in women represented a permanent trait of the Barker-Vedrenne regime and a sign of singularity during the period. The current Royal Court audience continues to be predominantly female. In the nineteen eighties, Max Stafford-Clark’s

45 Kennedy 38.
46 Chelsea Archive.
47 Kennedy 56.
46 Kennedy 56.
47 Kennedy 11.
50 "Royal Court Theatre Audience Data" np 22 March 1996.
support of women writers at the Royal Court surpassed that of Barker himself.

Barker-Vedrenne apparently didn’t realize the special nature of this audience, which they expected would follow them to the West End. On their opening night at the Savoy, the gallery chanted "no fees" because the Savoy, run like a commercial theatre, charged for programs. In contrast, the non-commercial Royal Court, with its socialist leanings, distributed programs for free. Moreover, the programs, beautifully printed on heavy paper, typically included a large notice, often printed in red, announcing "No Fees." Little wonder that the old audience—that delicate amalgam of Shavians, Fabians, feminists, lovers of the Court idea, theatrical pioneers—repudiated its leader for invading the West End, selling out his principles and charging for programs.**

Allen Wade described the Royal Court’s location on Sloane Square in Chelsea as an ideal choice for the start of the Barker-Vedrenne management. Out of the West End, yet accessible by underground railway, the theatre boasted an intimate, comfortable, and architecturally pleasing auditorium.*** Wade also acknowledged the theatre’s limitations, including the small and not very convenient stage, cramped storage space, and limited office and

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** Kennedy 30.

*** Kennedy 28.
dressing room facilities. The spacious and airy rehearsal room, at the very top of the theatre to which one had to climb many stairs, represented a valuable asset of the 1904 building campaign. Curiously, C.B. Purdom’s explanation for the Barker-Vedrenne management choosing to leave the Royal Court reflects some of the same attributes Wade praised: “After all, the Court was an out-of-town theatre, and though very handy for those who were near the Underground railway, it was two miles from the [West End].”

Financially, the Barker-Vedrenne management made a small profit at the Royal Court. Realizing the high ideals of the independent theatre while simultaneously proving the existence of an audience for advanced drama, the Royal Court blazed a path soon followed by new repertory theatres, in the same way that the pioneer experimental theatres and Sunday societies had broken ground for it. The management’s use of limited runs served as a model for the development of a genuine repertory system within the English theatre.

Hoping to increase their profit margin, Barker-Vedrenne elected to move into larger West End theatres with greater box office potential, such as the Savoy and the Haymarket.

" Wade 11.
" Purdom 69.
" Miller 196.
They largely abandoned their policy of introducing plays during matinees, moving only the successful matinee performances into the evening slots. Their attempt to transfer their operation into multiple West End theatres failed, and Shaw and Barker personally made good Vedrenne's debts. Shaw says, "Vedrenne got out with nothing but a reputation."56

Barker had thought he could move the Royal Court idea to the Savoy and build his national theatre on that foundation; but the management's previous success didn't transfer to the new theatre.57 At the dinner celebrating the three years of Barker-Vedrenne at the Royal Court, Sir Oliver Lodge stated that "after all the Court was not so much a locality as an idea--a state of the soul,--" and he predicted, wrongly, that it would survive the move.58 Barker's assistant Wade wrote, "But although it seemed that the goodwill of the public was assured, and although there seems no reason why a move to a slightly larger, a better equipped and more central theatre should have had anything but a beneficial effect, it seems that something was lost--
that impalpable thing, the 'atmosphere', had been changed." Indeed, it appears as though the idea, the locality, and the state of the soul represented idiosyncratic attributes of the Royal Court Theatre. Purdom joins the many observers who note that the regular Royal Court audience found the Savoy, the West End, and the extra three hundred seats combined to create an uncomfortable atmosphere.

One of the setbacks suffered by the Barker-Vedrenne partnership when they moved to the Savoy involved the refusal of the Lord Chamberlain to grant a license for a production of Barker's play Waste, which deals frankly with adultery and abortion. The theatre community raised a strong protest, and in 1908 the government responded by creating a parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Censorship. The committee held a series of hearings to ascertain if the censorship powers of the Lord Chamberlain needed to be changed. Barker testified that censorship checked the growth of original drama because writers, afraid of the censor, chose other forms of writing that lacked censorship, such as novels. Barker revealed that the censor suggested that if Barker would change the explicit language in his play, the censor would grant a permit to produce

59 Wade 17. The Savoy seated 986 as against 642 at the Royal Court.

60 Purdom 69.
Waste. Barker refused to change the play because he believed that "in such a play, sober speaking to be the only honest course; that innuendo would be indecent" 41 The Joint Committee recommended only minor changes to the licensing arrangements, and it would remain for the English Stage Company at the Royal Court to lead the successful move to abolish prior censorship on stage.

After the 1907 departure of Barker and Vedrenne, West End manager Otho Stuart tried to reproduce their success. He produced Somerset Maugham’s Lady Frederick at the Royal Court in 1907 and this play, Maugham’s first hit, established his reputation as a playwright. Although one paper reports that Otho Stuart assumed the lease of the theatre and that he reportedly "contemplates making a comedy house," in fact, Leigh continued to hold the head lease until 1916. 42 The success of Shaw’s comedies at the Royal Court may have prompted Stuart to regard comedy as the essential key to success at the Royal Court, but Stuart’s tenure proved short-lived.

Following Stuart’s tenure, manager and licensee, J.H. Leigh returned the Royal Court to his original intention as a theatre for amateur groups. Leigh remained involved as the theatre’s manager for most of these productions.


42 Chelsea Archive.

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including the first matinee performances of Gilbert Murray's translation of *The Bacchae*. A variety of amateur and visiting professional groups filled the Royal Court with a constant stream of short-run programs. One of the groups, the management of a Miss Mouillot, found remembrance from the legacy of several dated, but unidentified, newspaper clippings in the Chelsea collection. Barker himself returned in 1911 for a series of matinee performances featuring Lillah McCarthy in John Masefield's *The Witch* and *The Tragedy of Nan*. The decade after the departure of Barker-Vedrenne from the Royal Court, despite a diverse repertory of comedy, musical revues, touring productions, and Shakespeare revivals, proved relatively undistinguished.

The most notable productions during the period prior to the start of World War I included visits from Irish companies such as the Abbey Theatre. The current Royal Court's recent productions by Conor McPherson, and co-productions with Ireland's Druid Theatre of Martin McDonough's Lenane trilogy, continues the tradition of presenting the best new writing from Ireland in London at the Royal Court.

The development of the Abbey Theatre began in 1899 when W.B. Yeats joined with Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn to found the Irish Literary Theatre. In 1901 the Literary Theatre merged with a group of enthusiastic amateur Irish actors under the guidance of W.G. Fay and his brother Frank.
to found the Irish National Theatre Society. A one-day visit to London in 1903 established the Irish players’ reputation. As a result of this early success, they gained the patronage of Annie Horniman. Horniman, very interested in promoting advanced theatre, provided the funds which enabled the company to acquire the Abbey Theatre in 1904 and transform itself from a group of amateurs into a professional repertory theatre. In 1924, the government of the Free Irish State granted recognition and financial support to the Abbey Theatre, enabling it to claim the title first national theatre in the British Isles.

Purdom in his biography of Barker identifies analogous aims behind the 1904 founding of both the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and the Barker-Vedrenne management at the Royal Court. In this case, the Irish theatre managed to develop new writers and transform itself into a national theatre long before efforts to create a national theatre in the English theatrical capital of London succeeded. Allan Wade, Barker’s assistant at the Royal Court, serves as a direct connection between the two companies by serving as

"In 1894 Miss Horniman anonymously underwrote the expense for the first production of Shaw’s Arms and the Man at the Avenue Theatre. After contributing to the development of the Abbey Theatre, she established the Manchester Gaiety Theatre as a repertory theatre on the Barker-Vedrenne model.

"Hunt et.al. 21-22.

"Purdom 67.

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the London coordinator for the Abbey's visits to London. Wade writes: "The Abbey Theatre company had already visited London on four occasions, a flying visit on a Saturday in 1903, another for a couple days in 1904, and a whole week in 1907, the never to be forgotten occasion when The Playboy of the Western World was given at the Great Queen Street Theatre."*

In 1909, Lady Gregory asked Wade to arrange for the Abbey Theatre a more extensive tour of two to three weeks in London, as well shorter visits to the intellectual and cultural centers of Oxford and Cambridge. Wade booked the dates for Oxford and Cambridge followed by a season at the London theatre he knew best, the Royal Court."* Following its great success at the Court in 1909, the Abbey returned for a four-week season in the summer of 1910, during which Wade performed as a member of the acting ensemble."* The company returned to the Royal Court every year through 1914. Their visits ceased with the onset of World War I.

As part of the 1910 visit to London, William Butler Yeats invited an amateur theatre group from Birmingham he had seen that year to join the Irish National Theatre Society at the Royal Court for three performances of their production of his play The King's Threshold. The amateurs, "Wade 25.

"Wade 25.

"Wade 29.

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called the Pilgrim Players, performed on a double bill with the Irish players' production of *The Building Fund*. Both the Irish actors and the London press made plain the amateur group's shortcomings. Nonetheless, the visit confirmed the Pilgrim Players's convictions that they functioned as part of a national movement to improve drama.

The founding of new repertory companies around the country often developed out of groups of dedicated amateurs who began as spiritual descendants of the Barker-Vedrenne management at the Royal Court. In 1913, the Pilgrim Players, under the direction of Barry Jackson, developed into the nucleus of the Birmingham Repertory Company. After transforming the amateur Irish theatre companies into the professional Abbey Theatre, Miss Horniman returned to England and founded in 1908 the first English repertory theatre at the Manchester Gaiety. Glasgow (1909) and Liverpool (1911) joined the movement to establish repertory companies modeled on the Royal Court seasons. Like the Abbey, these English repertory companies began with a strong focus on local drama as well as supporting the work of new continental and British dramatists. The development of these theatres and their interest in local drama reflected a

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Matthews 22.

Hunt et.al. 24.

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need within provincial English culture to develop a regional identity. It also reflected public dissatisfaction with the actor-manager touring theatres. As a sign of the connection to the spirit of Barker-Vedrenne, Miss Horniman sponsored regular visits to the Royal Court by the Manchester Gaiety Theatre from 1913 through 1917. Analogously, Barry Jackson, in order to bring Birmingham Rep productions to London, leased the Royal Court for much of the nineteen twenties.

Financial problems and unresolved building problems characterize the teen years at the Royal Court. A letter in the licensing correspondence file reports that financial difficulties by the owner (presumably J.H. Leigh) during 1912 caused Otho Stuart Andreae to be named receiver for the theatre. Stuart, a West End manager who had produced several plays at the Royal Court in 1907, assumed the theatre’s lease in 1916. On 11 February 1914, James Anning wrote a letter to inform the Board of Works that a new teak stage had been laid at the Royal Court. Anning’s letter apparently represented a response to an (unrecorded) inspector’s complaint about storage under the stage. The board informed Anning that a teak stage did not provide the required fire break for below-stage storage to be permissible. The public health department visited the theatre on 8 July 1914, and it described the building’s

72 Hunt et al 25.
lavatories as inadequate while noting that the auditorium ventilation and heating system also required improvement. The need to conserve building supplies for the war effort enabled the Royal Court’s management to avoid making any of these needed improvements.

Another important theatrical event of 1913 that proved important later in the story of the Royal Court occurred in Paris: drama critic Jacques Copeau published a manifesto for a new theatre. Copeau suggested that a director’s primary task was the faithful realization of the writer’s play into the poetry of the theatre. He also stated that the actor, as the only living presence of the author, represented the only essential production element. Copeau also suggested a return to a bare platform stage. Copeau put his ideas into practice at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier. The first world war interrupted Copeau’s work; but, after the war, he came to dominate French theatre. The theory behind his approach influenced many later practitioners of the theatre in England, including J.B. Fagan, John Gielgud, and George Devine.

The war years caused a sharp decline in the number of productions at the Royal Court since the amateur theatre groups largely went on hiatus during this period. Only the visits from the Manchester Gaiety provided a reminder of the glory of the Barker-Vedrenne years.
Chapter Four
Searching for a Format: 1918-1955

As the war on the continent headed toward armistice, the Royal Court’s fortunes began to recover, and the period from the end of the war until the great depression reinforced the identity the Royal Court had established during the Barker-Vedrenne years. Unlike the previous decade, the nineteen twenties witnessed more professional productions than amateur ones at the Royal Court. Improvements to the building, on hold during the war, commenced following the return to prominence of productions at the Royal Court, part of a general post-war boom in theatrical activity.

The writer J.B. Fagan, one of the many important innovators of the British theatre to work at the Royal Court, established his credentials as a producer, director, and designer through a series of productions between 1918 and 1922. In August 1918 Fagan began his directing career at the Royal Court with a production of Eugène Brieux’s Les Avaries. Fagan’s greatest successes at the Royal Court resulted from his four productions of Shakespeare. Theatre historian Richard Foulkes maintains that Fagan “distilled the experiments of Granville-Barker and Poel into a set of principles which were to inform much of the best

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1 Despite his stature as a theatre artist, little printed information about Fagan exists.
Shakespearean work of the mid-twentieth century by directors such as Tyrone Guthrie, John Gielgud, and Glen Byam Shaw, all of whom began their careers with Fagan."

After leaving the Royal Court's management, Fagan founded the Oxford Playhouse, which he managed from 1923-1929. In Oxford Fagan produced twenty-one plays a year which norman Marshall reports were drawn from a diverse repertory "which included plays by Strindberg, Chekhov, Yeats, and O'Casey all of which were presented on the same white permanent set (consisting of an apron, inner stage, curtains and pillars), a set reminiscent of Copeau at the Vieux Columbier." Fagan taught his protegees at both the Oxford Playhouse and in two Shakespearean productions for the Oxford University Dramatic Society (OUDS). Fagan's career and professional association with Shakespeare began as an actor with Frank Benson and Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Prior to his directing career at the Royal Court, he translated several plays by French playwright Eugéne Brieux into English and wrote numerous plays of his own.

Fagan's first Shakespeare, a production of *Twelfth Night*, opened on 29 October 1918 and ran for 182 performances. Critics compared it favorably against the memory of productions by noted Shakespearean directors such


as Henry Irving, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and Harley Granville Barker. The Morning Post called it perhaps the best revival of Twelfth Night in the past forty years. Fagan next produced The School for Scandal for 63 performances and the Irish play The Lost Leader by Lennox Robinson for 68 performances. He returned to Shakespeare with a production of The Merchant of Venice, featuring Maurice Moscovitch as Shylock, which opened on 10 Oct 1919. A visit from the Department of Works inspector on 30 October 1919 reminded the management that problems with the heating, ventilation, and lavatories had still not been addressed since 1914. Fagan transferred the Merchant of Venice to the Duke of York's in March 1920 where it ran for another month, for a combined total of 182 performances. The move may have been prompted by the need to address the deficiencies of the building.

Aware that repair of the building's outstanding violations could no longer be postponed, Fagan hired the architectural firm of Burdwood and Dunt, both to address the code violations (which dated back to 1914) and to improve the theatre's production capabilities and ambiance. A letter from the architects dated 27 July 1920 proposes changes to the building in addition to meeting the Board of Works' objections. Newspaper accounts and notices in programs reveal that Fagan himself claimed credit for

* As quoted in Foulkes 116.
conceiving the changes to the building for which Burdwood and Dunt served as architects. These alterations brought the auditorium close to its present-day configuration. Fagan apparently secured financial backing from Lord Latham.⁵

The changes to the Royal Court included the first major structural changes to the interior of the auditorium. Two unidentified newspaper clippings dated 3 December 1920 report the completion of alterations to the auditorium, begun in August of that year. They further record that the theatre was to reopen the following night with a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Fagan.⁶ The news articles relate that Fagan intends to make the Royal Court into a permanent home for Shakespeare in London, and the renovation seeks to make the theatre more suitable for that repertory. Among the improvements noted in the newspaper are the removal of the footlights, a change to the orchestra pit to allow an apron stage, "a new mechanism for making rapid changes in scenery," and modernization of the stage lighting. Finally, the papers describe "a delightful orange light [which] is projected from above through dummy windows on the chrome tinted walls."⁷

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⁶ Chelsea Archive.

⁷ Chelsea Archive.
A news story in The Daily Express dated 11 October 1920 mentions "panels of golden brown set off by bunches of fruit and flowers." That comment suggests that the Grinling Gibbonsesque fruit and floral swags that adorn the tier fronts date from that redecoration effort. During the current renovation workers discovered that the builders in 1920 never adequately anchored the plaster for the new tier fronts created as part of this refurbishment. Although no accident ever occurred, an excited patron could have actually kicked the tier front loose. This nineteen twenties shortcut does mean that the plaster swags and the entire tier fronts must be replaced during the current refurbishment.'

The four sheets of plans by architects Burdwood and Dunt, stamped approved, reveal that on the upper circle the seating was cut back to allow for the building of the false windows and that, at least originally, limelight was projected through those windows. The renovation straightened the original horseshoe curve on the dress circle level and removed the boxes. On the stalls level, the final removal of the pass door between pit and stalls consolidated, for the first time, all the seating at stalls level into one section.

* Chelsea Archive.


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A second set of four sheets of plans, dated 24 November 1920, indicates that Consulting Engineers WCC Hawtayne installed electric hot water radiators, the building's third heating and ventilation system. A program dated March 1921 for Fagan's production of Henry IV Part II, featuring Basil Rathbone as Prince Hal and costumes designed by Theodore Kommissarzhevsky, carries the notice that "[t]his theatre has been re-modeled, decorated and illuminated by Hammond of Sloane Street."\(^{10}\) It is important to remember that "[t]he visual impact of an auditorium depended largely on the decorator's art and consequently an auditorium could be transformed while retaining the existing planning and structural arrangements."\(^{11}\) Something like such a transformation may have taken place here. In The Play Pictorial, a few years after this refurbishment, the author complains that the cheery color scheme of crimson and white of 1888 had been changed to a "hideous mud colour...which presumably represents some highbrow period of [the Royal Court's] existence."\(^{12}\) The mention of the brown interior suggests that unbeknownst to her, Jocelyn Herbert's 1965 decision to paint the Royal Court interior brown for the ESC

\(^{10}\) Mander and Mitchenson Collection. This production is notable also for being the first Shakespearean production viewed by Laurence Olivier.


\(^{12}\) Chelsea Archive.
harkened back to Fagan's management, an earlier period of artistic excellence.

Later in 1921, Fagan produced an Othello opening on 21 April, featuring Godfrey Tearle in the title role with costumes again designed by Kommissarzhevsky (Fagan designed the lighting and sets). Prior to emigrating from Russia to England in 1919, Theodore Kommissarzhevsky studied architecture before becoming director of the Nezlobin Theatre and the Moscow Imperial Grand Opera. As Harbin contends, Kommissarzhevsky "had a particular interest in exploring ways in which scenic and lighting elements could help communicate the truths of the play, an interest [George] Devine shared."\(^{13}\) In the nineteen nineties Stephen Daldry displayed a similar interest in the expressive possibilities of design at the Royal Court.

Given the intention to make the Royal Court into a Shakespearean theatre as reported in the newspapers in 1920, it is puzzling that Fagan stopped producing Shakespeare after this production.\(^{14}\) The desire to create a London home for Shakespeare aligned Fagan's intentions with that of the national theatre movement, because Harley Granville Barker had coupled the national theatre and Shakespearean


\(^{14}\) A future search for primary sources may provide a clearer answer to these questions.
theatre movements less than a decade earlier. This goal also placed Fagan and the Royal Court in competition with Lilian Baylis and the Old Vic.\textsuperscript{15} After revivals of Synge's \textit{Playboy of the Western World} and Shaw's \textit{John Bull's Other Island}, on 18 October 1921 Fagan directed the London premiere of Shaw's \textit{Heartbreak House}. A production of Shaw at the Royal Court seemed a natural choice, recalling \textit{John Bull's Other Island} as the first successful new Shavian play of the Barker-Vedrenne management. This production of \textit{Heartbreak House} did not duplicate the earlier success Shaw enjoyed at the Royal Court. J.C. Trewin reports, "Certainly it defeated its first audience and the critics."\textsuperscript{16}

During the run of \textit{Heartbreak House}, Theodore Kommissarzhevsky directed two matinee performances of Chekhov's \textit{Uncle Vanya} under the auspices of the Incorporated Stage Society, one of several productions he directed for this group at the Royal Court. In 1925-1926 in the London suburb of Barnes, during his single season at the helm of a theatre, Kommissarzhevsky's productions of Chekhov (including \textit{Uncle Vanya}), Gogol, and Andreyev established his reputation as "an art theatre god".\textsuperscript{17} Later in his career

\textsuperscript{15} Baylis begins this policy during World War I. The Old Vic figures prominently in schemes for a National Theatre beginning in the twenties. Eventually the National theatre is established there in 1963.


\textsuperscript{17} Wardle 27.
he influenced the young George Devine among others. Harbin contends that

[from the Moscow Art Theatre tradition, Kommissarzhevsky carried to London the concept of organic staging (which emerges from a detailed examination of the psychological elements of the text), and, from the work of Vsevelod Meyerhold, an irreverence for tradition and a bold commitment to experimentation.]

Technical expertise aside, Irving Wardle asserts that Devine learned from Kommissarzhevsky "that good work can be done by stealth inside a philistine system" and that theatre will escape philistinism only when acting schools become attached to forward-looking theatre companies.

In 1922 the young actor Leon Lion joined forces with J.T. Grein, the founder of the Independent Theatre, to produce three plays by John Galsworthy, with J.B. Fagan as director: The Pigeon, The Silver Box, and Windows. Galsworthy's playwrighting career began at the Royal Court during the Barker-Vedrenne management. Despite producing a repertory with several allusions to the iconographic status of the Barker-Vedrenne management, Fagan, working within the traditional framework of the commercial theatre, failed to establish a stable management identity at the Royal Court. The commercial theatre can originate individual productions which reflect the philosophical orientation of a national or art theatre; however, its transient nature and need to

16 Harbin "Introduction" 5.
19 Wardle 29.
adhere to a typical capitalist's bottom-line orientation makes it incompatible with a desire to establish a solid institutional theatre.\textsuperscript{20} A memo in the building files notes Fagan's departure from the Royal Court as of 22 June 1922.\textsuperscript{21} Without an explanation, he disappears from the Royal Court.

Over the next two years several managements will use the Royal Court. None of them prove durable. Perhaps that explains why the next two sets of extant building plans in the archives, marked conditionally approved, appear never to have been realized. T.C. Crossingham and M. Spencer Stowell submitted three sheets of plans dated 2 February 1923 proposing to squeeze two additional dressing rooms into the already cramped area off-stage left. The immediate impetus for this plan appears to derive from the two musical revues produced at the Royal Court during 1923. A set of two sheets of plans with no architect listed, dated 27 November 1928, demonstrates a desire to create a new storeroom backstage. From the plans one cannot determine if this application was made during or after Barry Jackson's management of the theatre (1924-1928). The 1928 plans do

\textsuperscript{20} After Fagan's departure the 1923 production of Dr. Marie Stopes's play about birth control, entitled Our Ostriches, a play more notable for its subject matter than its artistic merit, enjoyed a 91 performance run. This production represented a continuation of the Royal Court's tradition of social criticism and feminism which first gained prominence during the Barker-Vedrenne management.

\textsuperscript{21} London Metropolitan Archives.

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indicate that the dressing rooms plans of 1923 were not realized. Both of these sets of plans reveal the difficulty in improving a theatre building that functions as a receiving house with no stable management identity.

The Royal Court's situation improved when Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory theatre utilized the Royal Court as one of their London producing outlets for the four year period 1924-1928, providing a few years of regular management and a number of notable productions. The Birmingham Rep possessed two major advantages over a commercial management: the stable income provided by the Birmingham subscription audience, and the subsidy provided by Jackson's private fortune. Jackson first brought a production by his amateur group, the Pilgrim Players, to the Royal Court in 1910 as part of the Abbey Theatre season that year. G.W. Bishop summarizes Jackson's career in this way: "Sir Barry had spent most of his theatrical career giving England an idea of what a National Theatre ought to do in this country." The Birmingham Rep, founded by Jackson in 1913, continued some of the traditions of the Barker-Vedrenne management at the Royal Court. Jackson's close connection with the Royal Court, home of the Barker-Vedrenne experiment, strengthened that association. However, the national theatre model Jackson evolved, unlike that of the

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22 As quoted in Trewin The Gay Twenties 119.
1904-1907 years at the Royal Court, did not foster a major crop of English playwrights.

The decade's history revealed that an individual's personal fortune eventually proved inadequate as the main source of subsidy for the national theatre aspirations of the Birmingham Rep. The Birmingham audience did not always support Jackson's adventurous programming. The difficulty of establishing a stable audience loyal to a theatre company, rather than any individual production, remains a constant challenge to any institutional management. At the end of the twentieth century, even the subsidized theatres struggle to maintain their audience. The failure of Jackson's production of George Kaiser's *Gas* to attract an audience in Birmingham following its opening on 14 Nov 1923 prompted Jackson to consider abandoning Birmingham after ten years and to move his operation to London. Presumably, Jackson thought that the larger population base available in London might be a more adventurous audience. However, the larger expenses inherent in operating a London theatre and the greater magnitude of competition provided by the capital's commercial theatre represented the major drawback to such a London management.

With the theatre in Birmingham on a hiatus, in February 1924 Jackson transferred his Birmingham production of the complete cycle of Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* to the Royal

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21 Trewin 79.
Court for its London premiere. Despite attracting respectable houses, the five-play marathon lost money. However, on 11 March 1924 Jackson opened Eden Phillpott’s comedy The Farmer’s Wife which ran for 1,329 performances, the longest run in Royal Court history. It was Jackson’s only financial success at the Royal Court. During this long run, a number of groups performed special matinee performances. In September 1924 Parts I and V of Back to Methuselah received four additional matinee performances each.24

In April 1925 Jackson announced that he would work permanently in both London and Birmingham. Birmingham Rep historian Thomas Kemp reports that “[c]ertain Birmingham productions, likely to achieve long runs, were to be transferred from the Repertory Theatre to the Kingsway Theatre, the ‘long-run’ theatre: others, for which there would be a definite public in London, would be transferred to the Court theatre for a steady, if shorter, existence.”25 Jackson’s three-stage plan resembled proposals found in Harley Granville Barker’s updated recommendations for a national theatre contained in An

24 As an example of Jackson’s commitment to the work he produced, in March 1928, he revived the entire cycle for another nine performances at the Royal Court.


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Exemplary Theatre (1922) and revised again for A National Theatre (1930).

The long run of The Farmer’s Wife kept the Royal Court lit until February 1927. During that year Jackson subleased the theatre to several other groups such as the Bristol Opera and the Irish players who presented Sean O’Casey’s The Shadow of a Gunman, renewing the Royal Court’s association with Irish drama.

On January 9 1928 Jackson transferred from Birmingham to the Royal Court his production of Elmer Rice’s drama The Adding Machine. This production proved notable for its expressionist sets, one of the first in that style in London. Two productions transferred from the Royal Court to the Birmingham Rep. The February 1928 modern dress Macbeth moved to Birmingham despite its failure in London. During this period Jackson presented five Shakespearean productions in modern dress (three played the Royal Court), the first influential productions to produce Shakespeare with a contemporary sensibility. In April, Tennyson’s Harold received a mixed reception in London, despite a young Laurence Olivier in the title role. Jackson considered the play "a connoisseur’s piece" worth reviving in Birmingham (without Olivier). After his most successful modern dress production, Taming of the Shrew, Jackson again subleased the theatre to opera productions before officially

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26 Kemp 24.
giving up his management of the Royal Court in November 1928 after nearly four years.27 Jackson’s decision to leave the Royal Court prior to the worldwide depression of the nineteen thirties proved a smart business move. Jackson shifted his attention from London theatre to his newly-founded Malvern Theatre Festival about this time. During the 1929-30 season Jackson subleased the building to Charles Macdona whose troupe, the Macdona Players, performed a season of Shaw revivals that featured Esme Percy.28

Following the departure of Barry Jackson, the Royal Court’s operation as a theatre began to sputter to a halt. Despite the efforts of Fagan and Jackson, the development of the art theatre movement which coalesced around Harley Granville Barker provided no direct line to the founding of the English Stage Company. An survey of the development of club theatres during the twenties and thirties can yield at best a contextual strand in which an historian can discern how the efforts of these groups sustained the art theatre ideal. Against this record of individually successful productions but institutional failures, George Devine’s accomplishment with the ESC becomes even more astonishing.

The breakthrough new play of the twenties opened away from the Royal Court. Noel Coward’s The Vortex, which


28 Baker 265.
Coward calls "little more than a moral tract," exposes the ethical and emotional wasteland of Mayfair society. J.C. Trewin compares its effect on the theatre world of the nineteen twenties to the 1956 premiere of Look Back in Anger at the Royal Court on playwrighting in the fifties.\textsuperscript{29} Christopher Innes makes the same comparison in presenting an argument supporting the importance of this play.\textsuperscript{30} The Vortex opened at the Everyman in Hampstead which operated much like a club theatre, providing less expensive productions of new plays away from the West End. Much of the adventurous theatre of the next several decades occurred at such theatres. The coterie audiences developed by the club theatres prevented the theatres from exerting much effect on the culture at large.

More politically concerned theatre groups also formed clubs through which they presented their ideas. The politically progressive nature of these theatres hearkened back to Barker and forward to the ESC. The Workers' Theatre Movement began in 1926, the year of the general strike, and continued to operate until 1935. The Workers' Theatre, influenced by both developments in theatre in the Soviet Union and the work of Edwin Piscator, aspired to "conduct working class propaganda and agitation through...dramatic

\textsuperscript{29} Trewin \textit{The Gay Twenties} 62.

The English troupe known as the Group Theatre, founded in 1932, also borrowed inspiration from German expressionism. This company found its voice in productions of new plays by W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. The membership of the Group overlapped with several other club theatres, including the Poets Theatre, which produced Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and the Mercury Theatre. The Art Theatre Club proved the most enduring of these theatre movements, still operating in the nineteen fifties when it presented the London premiere of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. The club theatres provided an outlet, albeit a limited one, for art theatre type experimentation. When George Devine assumed the directorship of the English Stage Company in 1956, he purposefully established the company as a mainstream theatre, and not as a part of the club theatre movement.

A 1931 London theatrical event, located away from Sloane Square, eventually influenced theatre at the Royal Court. La Compagnie des Quinze, under the direction of Michel St. Denis and descended from his uncle Jacques Copeau’s Vieux Colombier, created a sensation with its productions of two plays written especially for the company by Andre Obey. This success prompted Bronson Albery to sponsor return visits by the Compagnie to London in 1932 and

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31 As quoted in Innes 72.
This troupe developed a loyal following among the young generation of English theatre artists intent on reform, including John Gielgud and George Devine. In 1935 St. Denis returned to England to direct Gielgud in a production of an English translation of Obey’s Noah. Irving Wardle describes St. Denis’s impact on Devine as "akin to that of a religious conversion."

In tracing the development of the ESC and George Devine, another non-Royal Court production requires a brief mention. The design team known as Motley formed in 1932 strongly influenced the visual aesthetic of the Royal Court because Devine utilized the talents of Motley when he opened at the Royal Court in the nineteen fifties. In 1932 John Gielgud, who became something of a rallying point for theatre reformers working in the West End, opened a production of Gordon Daviot’s Richard of Bordeaux in 1933. The design team known as Motley formed an alliance with Gielgud for this production and designed many of his other productions this decade. George Devine worked as a business manager for this design team and eventually married one of its members, Sophia Harris. While working in Motley’s studio, Devine expanded his knowledge of stage lighting

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32 Wardle 44-45.

50. Devine and St. Denis became partners in creating two organizations designed to further their ideals, the London Theatre School before World War II and the Old Vic Centre after it.
through a series of experiments concerning the effect of lighting on fabric.\textsuperscript{14} Motley's designs proved notable for combining historical accuracy of silhouette with unusual fabrics and textures.

On 20 January 1931 a newspaper announcement reports, apparently as part of the Cadogan Estate's attempt to market the lease for the theatre, the Estate's willingness to grant a license for the conversion of the theatre to a cinema. With no immediate takers for the lease, in May of that year, it closed. A further announcement in The Times dated 20 June 1931 confirms the willingness of the landlord, the Cadogan Estate, to grant a license for the conversion of the theatre into a cinema and that the theatre's leases expire in 1968. The Daily Telegraph contains a later announcement setting the auction for 22 July 1931. It reports that the ground rents and charges amount to £921 10 shillings per annum and that the theatre seats 641 patrons.

Building plans in the archives dated 1931 reveal the existence of a plan to convert the theatre to a cinema, an idea first considered in 1915. Three sheets of plans, dated 24 June 1931, by Clifford A. Aism propose closing off the gallery and transforming it to a projection room. Although the plans are marked approved, an internal memorandum reports that it is unlikely that the scheme will be

\textsuperscript{14} Wardle 42. Wardle provides a complete account of Devine's work with Motley.

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realized. Rather, the plans appear to have been drafted as part of an attempt to attract bidders to the auction of the property.

Also in 1931, Norris Warming proposed the installation of electric radiators in the pit and stalls, the fourth heating plan in forty-three years. The heating plans of 1931 do not include the planned alterations of either 1923 or 1928, confirming that those schemes were never built. It remains unclear if management installed this heating plan. Possibly, the management created plans to upgrade the heating along with the plan for a projection booth to entice bids for the auction of the lease.

Apparently the auction failed to attract a buyer willing to meet the expected price. Baker reports: "On 12 April 1932 the vendors, in a letter from their solicitors, said that they were willing considerably to reduce their price and would sell the unexpired term (now thirty-five years), for £15,000."

The theatre remained dark from May 1931 until Herbert Jay and Roy Limbert reopened it on 29 November 1932 with a new play, Frederick Jackson's The School for Husbands. Baker reports a redecorated interior on opening night, but

36 London Metropolitan Archives.
37 265.
he may simply mean repainted. None of the newspaper reviews (which were mostly positive) mention new decor for the theatre. A fire on stage during scene shifting on 31 December caused little damage. Nonetheless, it appears that The School for Husbands closed in February and that the management did not open another production at the Royal Court. A footnote to this venture appears in newspaper articles of November and December 1935 which report on a suit by Herbert Jay for breach of contract in connection with his attempt to purchase the lease for the Royal Court in 1932. The parties reached an out-of-court settlement. The problems with the lease explain why a follow-up production to The School for Husbands never appeared.

On 16 May 1934 an auction placed a value of £7,500 on the unexpired lease, half the asking price of two years earlier. An internal report dated 23 November 1934 in the files on the Royal Court indicates a seating capacity of 522 with standing room for 40. The next set of plans, seven sheets dated 11 December 1934, contains a design by W. Harold Jones to provide new electric wiring. Jones superimposed his design on copies of the drawings from 1907 by "GG." Given comments in the Building Archive during the nineteen forties about the deplorable condition of the

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266. Baker 266.

40 London Metropolitan Archives.

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theatre's wiring, these plans may represent another unrealized set of improvements.

A news article in the *Morning Post* of 15 January 1935 announces the purchase of the theatre's long-term lease. With Mr. Victor Luxemburg as manager, a repertory company was created to "try out" new plays for the West End.41 *The Times* of 19 February 1935 announces plans for a season of twenty-six productions, half new plays and half revivals, each to run for two weeks commencing on March 5 with a new play entitled *The Great Vandine*, "a drama of high finance by Mr. Langdon and Mr. John Quinn."42

In the program book for *The Great Vandine*, a policy statement by Howieson Culff reiterates the information printed in *The Times*. Culff hopes to retain a nucleus of "permanent artistes" of West End rank. Culff also comments on the high standard of past Royal Court managements and that his management seeks to live up to those standards.43 The program book also contains an advertisement for the formation of a group of twenty-four competent amateur players who will operate as the Court Theatre Club, under the direction of Harold Scott. This club will study and

41 Chelsea Archive.

42 Chelsea Archive. H. Barton Baker's history reports, incorrectly, on page 266 that "*The Great Van Dyn*, the illusionist" opened on 6 March 1935 but "the experiment did not last long."

43 Mander and Mitchenson collection.
produce plays from the seventeenth through nineteenth century plays as well as new plays. This is the first recorded attempt to formalize an educational component into the operation of the Royal Court. George Devine, with extensive experience as a theatre educator, later endeavored to establish an education program at the Royal Court as well. In the nineteen eighties under Elyse Dodgson, the education program at the Royal Court achieved firm footing. In 2000 it will move to the former soils lab at the rear of the Royal Court, a move first envisioned by Devine in 1963.

Stephen Williams in The Evening Standard of 6 March 1935 reports that the theatre reopened after two years inaction under the management of Howieson Culff: "It has been redecorated and reappointed, and as far as personal comfort goes, it is a very charming theatre indeed."

On 18 March 1935 the management opened a second production, a revival of Frederick Lonsdale's 1923 comedy Aren't We All? featuring Marie Lohr. A letter to the building department dated 19 March 1935 informs it that management will close the theatre on 23 March 1935. Aren't We All proved to be the last play performed at the Royal Court for more than seventeen years.

Although this Culff's management failed, it included certain goals that it shared with other Royal Court
producers. The plays were presented for a limited run (as Barker-Vedrenne had first done). Culff had planned to produce a mixture of new plays and revivals, a policy common to Barker-Vedrenne, Barry Jackson, the London Theatre Guild theatre club of 1952, and the English Stage Company. Also similar to the Barker ideal, the producers attempted to create a permanent company of actors. This group also tried to establish an educational component in the amateur study group led by Harold Scott. Culff's management appeared to eschew an art theatre format for one in which West End standards influenced the repertory. In that sense it bucks the trend at the Royal Court during the twentieth century to present plays of greater merit than that typically found in the standard commercial theatre of the West End.

On 29 May 1935 the Daily Telegraph reports that the theatre will become a repertory cinema operated by the new private company called Royal Court Cinema Limited, closely associated with former Member of Parliament, Pemberton Billing.

The architect Cecil Massey wrote to the building department on 14 May 1935 informing it of plans to create a rear projection booth for cinema, a residential flat for a manager, and a workshop in the former rehearsal hall for research on film and camera experiments. Massey trained as an architect under Bertie Crewe; consequently, his involvement suggests the possibility of some continuity with
the original architects. One wonders if Crewe ever discussed the Royal Court project with Massey. The next set of drawings, dated 16 May 1935, include Massey’s planned rear film projection booth located behind the Ranelagh sewer.

The first advertisements for the new cinema accompany a news article in the West London Press. On 4 July 1935 the Royal Court Cinema opened with the double feature of Dinner at Eight and The King’s Vacation. Mention of the reopening occurred in several newspapers. The Daily Telegraph reports that despite some changes to the seating, the theatre retains its familiar character. “Regular advertising continued in the Chelsea paper until November of 1935.” The cinema apparently never advertised regularly again. Several news accounts for the opening of the cinema attest to the completion of these plans. A building survey dated 7 October 1935 confirms the completion of the work to convert the Royal Court to a cinema. “The installation of a large, brightly-illuminated sign on the front facade advertising the featured films became the most visible sign of the building’s change of purpose.

An architect’s report to the building council, dated 20 August 1936, notes that the Royal Court’s wiring requires

" Chelsea Archive.

" Chelsea archive.

" London Metropolitan Archives.
immediate attention along with some minor building problems. Another report, dated 30 September 1936, reveals the need for a new heating system.

The next mention of the Royal Court in the building department’s files, dated 10 February 1940, reports that on 3 February a minor film fire resulted in no injury or damage to the building. A routine building department inspection of the Royal Court on 26 June 1940 discovered the premises closed. The inspector sent a letter to the licensee notifying them of the necessity of providing seven days notice should they wish to reopen. No such notice of intention to reopen appears in the licensing correspondence. It is not known at present when and why management closed the theatre.

On 12 November 1940 an EE bomb scored a direct hit on the Sloane Square tube station with collateral damage to the Royal Court. Wartime censorship prevented any mention of the bomb in the newspapers. On 13 November 1940 the building department architect inspected the building and reported that the "side of theatre next to Sloane Square station badly damaged. Main external walls show much cracking. The station was completely wrecked with a direct hit." A further survey on 19 November reports "The corner of the theatre at junction of Sloane Square and passageway between the theatre and the station has since

46 London Metropolitan Archives.
been shored up. The internal portions of the premises next to station have been considerably damaged. Troops employed in demolition work are at present in occupation of the premises. “50

Frances Faviell in her book about wartime life entitled Chelsea Concerto provides the most complete account of events on the night of the bombing. She reports that the bomb severed the gas line and that two flaming jets guarded the pit that once had been the station (a new station building having opened in July 1940). 51 Faviell continues: "The bomb had fallen as a train was leaving the station, and the rear carriage was caught directly--the remainder of the train was shot by the blast almost to South Kensington station." 52 Only the new Peter Jones building across the square escaped broken windows or other damage. She reports the number of people killed as 40 but acknowledges that the many small pieces of bodies that were collected could not be definitively identified, making an accurate count impossible. The one other eyewitness account, Wartime Diary of Miss Josephine May Oakman in the Chelsea Library, also dwells on the terrible carnage from the bomb. 53

50 London Metropolitan Archives.
52 176.
53 Chelsea Archive.
The bomb effectively silenced the Royal Court for more than a decade. Nonetheless, the theatre's identity remained clear in the public's mind: it was the theatre of W.S. Gilbert, John Hare, Arthur Wing Pinero, Harley Granville Barker, J.E. Vedrenne, Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, and Barry Jackson. Whenever the name Royal Court appeared in newspaper speculation about the prospect of reopening, the writer invariably connected the building with the names of these theatre greats.

The war cast something of a pall over the history of the bomb-damaged Royal Court in the nineteen forties. Newspapers made occasional references to attempts to reopen the theatre. The building department correspondence file at the London Metropolitan Archives discloses the only detailed information about the condition of the building. This file reveals a reinspection of the theatre on behalf of the Estate agents Stuart and Stuart on 30 October 1942. A report, dated 18 November 1942, presents a pessimistic picture describing the theatre as "much below present day requirements." On 5 October 1943 it is reported that Jay Pomeroy, "a wealthy Russian-born impresario, had bought the Royal Court." A later survey, dated 25 March 1944, and included in the correspondence file, reports that a meeting was held at the theatre with a Mr. Allen, an architect, who

* London Metropolitan Archives.
* Chelsea Archive.
reports that his client is anxious to reopen the theatre. The building department architect reports that slight additional bomb damage had occurred. Furthermore, he reports "a considerable amount of dilapidation work is necessary" before the building can be reopened.

The archive's correspondence file reveals a long series of negotiations between several operators of the Royal Court and the building department over exactly which repairs will be necessary in order to reopen the building as a public theatre. The repairs necessary to reopen as a cinema were significantly fewer than those needed to reopen it as a theatre. The Films Division of the Polish Ministry of Information proposed to make all the necessary repairs on 27 January 1945, but apparently this proposal was not realized, probably because the Polish government in exile in London never returned to power in Poland.

Finally, on 26 March 1946, the building department architect provided a detailed memo of the condition of the building and the repairs needed to bring it up to the requirements of the building code. This memo demands close inspection, since it became the center of the negotiations about what repairs were needed when the building finally reopened as a theatre in 1952. Additionally, some of the shortcomings of 1946 received only partial solutions prior to the current major rebuilding program. The memo begins

"London Metropolitan Archives."
with a list of necessary repairs to the exterior walls and roof damaged by the bomb. Second, the alley between the theatre and the underground station remained blocked by debris, and since exits from the auditorium open onto this alley, the right-of-way must be cleared. These repairs, along with upgrading of the heating and electrical system, reconditioning of the building and its equipment generally, and replacement of the safety curtain, would be sufficient to reopen the Royal Court for cinematograph exhibitions.

The main problems with the use of the theatre for stage performances relates to changes in safety codes since the theatre had been built in 1888. The memo continues: "Improvements in the site as well as extensive structural improvements in the internal arrangements are necessary before the premises would be regarded as suitable for stage performances." 57 The Building Department requires an open passageway from the building to a thoroughfare other than Sloane Square. Although there are exits on two sides of the building, ultimately in an emergency the entire audience exits onto the Square. This issue reappears in 1995, during the planning of the rebuilding project. The density of surrounding buildings and the value of the land surrounding the theatre leave this problem as one that even the current rebuilding plan can not solve.

57 London Metropolitan Archive.

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The supervising architect regarded the theatre's stage house as woefully deficient, and the memo requests modernisation of the stage portion including reconstruction of the stage basement, stage, flys, and grid in fire-resisting materials; adequate means of escape from these parts of the stage; the provision of a workshop and property store; a new stage skylight; new safety curtain; the provision of a counterweighted system of scenery suspension and sprinklers etc. *1

Insufficient funding for building rehabilitation delayed the realization of many of these improvements until the current rebuilding program.

The period after World War II proved a fertile one for the development of English playwrighting and the hopes for a national theatre. The Labour government, determined to change the class stratification of English society, supported the use of government monies to subsidize non-commercial efforts in the arts. One of the most ambitious schemes developed around the Old Vic, with the support of the newly formed Arts Council. *2 The stage success of Ralph Richardson and Laurence Olivier, working jointly with Tyrone Guthrie and John Burrell, encouraged the Vic's Board of Governors to consider an expansion. The proposed Old Vic Centre included a children's theatre to be run by George Devine, a school to be run by Glen Byam Shaw, and an experimental stage under Michel St. Denis. The scheme

* London Metropolitan Archives.

*2 Wardle 97. Wardle provides a complete account of the rise and fall of the Vic Centre.
failed for a multitude of reasons and came to an abrupt end when the three directors resigned in May 1951. However, at the Old Vic Center George Devine learned important lessons that benefited the English Stage Company after it moved into the Royal Court Theatre in 1956.

The Evening Standard of 4 February 1947 reported that Jay Pomeroy had applied to the Minister of Works for a permit to repair the bomb damage. The newspaper relates the estimated repair costs as £5,000. In an interview, dated 15 February 1947, in the Chelsea neighborhood paper SW3, Jay Pomeroy relates that the Court will be operated by the Music, Art, and Drama Society, a non-profit concern that at the time also produced opera in the West End through the New London Opera Company at the Cambridge Theatre. A postwar photograph of the Royal Court in the Chelsea archive reveals a large sign on the front of the building advertising Pomeroy’s New London Opera Company.

At the Royal Court, Pomeroy planned to open a repertory company to play in the evenings and a children’s theatre to provide matinee performances. Despite some enthusiastic testimonials from Chelsea residents supporting the project, Pomeroy managed only to make minor improvements to the building. In 1949 Pomeroy declared bankruptcy, precipitating an auction of the theatre’s lease on 7

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60 Doty and Harbin 7.

61 Mander and Mitchenson Collection.
December of that year, but the auction failed to find a buyer. On 18 January 1950 The Evening Standard reported an invitation for new tenders for the theatre to be submitted within a fortnight. However, the press announcement of a new lessee for the theatre did not appear until eight months later, on 28 September 1950.

Alfred Esdaile, a retired music-hall comedian and inventor of the microphone that comes out of the floor, announced that a company under his control secured the lease for the Royal Court. He hoped to reopen the theatre by Christmas of that year as London's largest theatre club. Every newspaper account, from the briefest to the most complete, mentioned the theatre's illustrious history.

The poor condition of the empty theatre created problems when Esdaile sought to obtain a license to operate the theatre. The first definite announcements in the media of the theatre's future appeared on 14 March 1952, when the Evening News reported the creation of an advisory committee and club council consisting of Dame Sybil Thorndyke, Sir Lewis Casson, Joyce Grenfell, Ellen Pollock, and Giles Playfair, who will also function as the artistic director for the London Theatre Guild Ltd. Casson started his career at the Royal Court under Harley Granville Barker, and his wife Sybil Thorndyke first worked at the Royal Court a few years later. Both of them worked at the first regional repertory company, the Manchester Gaiety, which Annie
Horniman founded on principles derived from the Barker-Vedrenne management. Clearly, Esdaile's awareness of the reputation of the Barker-Vedrenne era encouraged him to capitalize on its association with the Royal Court, despite more than forty years elapsing between the events.

The Guild's brochure announces that it will "carry out certain necessary restoration to the building and redecorate the interior." The club stated its objective: "[T]o provide under one roof the amenities of Theatre, Restaurant, Dancing with Club facilities and to serve as an important rendezvous for all lovers of the true Theatre." The Club Council's power consisted of control over the size of the club and the conditions for membership. The company's general administrator, Roma Macklin, in a letter to Chelsea Borough Librarian P.C. Edwards, states that the Council will "ensure membership of a selected character." The Theatre Guild planned to create a supper club, to be named the Shaw-Terry room, located within the former rehearsal room. This naming commemorated the 1906 meeting in that room between G.B. Shaw and Ellen Terry at the first rehearsal for Captain Brassbottom's Conversion, following a correspondence of 275 letters. Clearly, management wished to evoke impressive

"2 Chelsea Archive.
"3 Chelsea Archive.
"4 Chelsea Archive.
ghosts from the theatre's past to produce a cachet that might contribute to the new enterprise's success.

The London Theatre Guild staged a luncheon for members of the press at the Savoy, which featured comments by Dame Sybil Thorndyke. In light of the theatre's future history, those comments, reported in an unidentified newspaper clipping, demonstrated the London Theatre Guild's desire to revive the glory days of Barker-Vedrenne at the Royal Court. "We need revolutions and bombshells in the theatre, and the time is ripe for at least one of each," asserts Dame Sybil. She continues:

There is room for more pioneer work and it will be a wonderful thing if the Court again becomes a centre for the work of new dramatists and young players and producers. When it was at its greatest, between 1904 and 1907, so many new things were stirring in art and the social life of the country."" Thoryndyke set the standard of an art theatre for the new company, one which sought to engage and form the cultural zeitgeist rather than simply entertain an undemanding audience.

In those old days, the Court brought the glories and horrors of life to the people, and also the laughter. It is the work of the theatre to act as a microscope, turning a fierce light on life. It must deal with ideas and emotions without fear, posing problems and showing trends.""
She then identified how stage censorship in England thwarted the creativity of writers. By operating as a theatre club, the London Theatre Guild could avoid the stifling grasp of censorship under the Lord Chamberlain. Thorndyke continues:

The fact that the new Court is to be a club theatre, and so not subject to the ordinary censorship of plays, should tempt writers to turn more to the theatre. Censorship can make writers turn their back on the theatre simply because they feel a lack of freedom to write as they please."

Opposition to censorship, a Royal Court tradition since the eighteen seventies, culminated in the nineteen sixties battle to abolish the Lord Chamberlain's oversight of theatre. It remains an essential part of the Royal Court identity today.

Finally, the article reveals how Thorndyke publicly acknowledges the semiotics of the theatre building itself: "Dame Sybil believes that atmosphere clings to the walls of theatres, as 'prayers cling to the walls of churches.'" Thorndyke continues, "This is why it is so sad when a theatre of tradition falls into decay or gets into the wrong hands." Thorndyke's conclusion revealed her belief that a theatre's past created expectations that affect how an audience member views the work in the present. A similar understanding of the semiotic power of a theatre's history characterized the nineteen nineties rebuilding detailed in

"Chelsea Archive."

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chapter six. Thorndyke's comments conclude, "The Court is full of memories of wonderful plays and performances. That in itself should be an incentive to further good work there."

A newspaper article from the Manchester Evening News, dated 22 March 1952 (included in the correspondence file for the Royal Court), contains two interesting pieces of information not found elsewhere. First, "The expense of rebuilding the bombed shell as the L.C.C. wished has made it impossible to open the Royal Court as a public theatre." The correspondence in the archive corroborates this information. Esdaile convinced the London County Council architects to compromise on the required upgrading of the stage equipment and auditorium to meet the code in exchange for limiting the theatre's license to that of a private club. The London Theatre Guild opened the theatre as a private club because the cost of upgrading the building exceeded their financial limits. Many problems included in the 1946 memo about the needed changes for reopening the building must await realization from the Lottery-funded rebuilding of the nineteen nineties.

Secondly, the Evening News reports that "the theatre will be decorated in black and red as it was when Edward VII was a frequent visitor." This information, if correct, may

" Chelsea Archive.

70 London Metropolitan Archives.
provide a clue as to the original interior decoration. The *Play Pictorial*, the other known record that claims to report the original color scheme of the building, describes it as a cheery crimson and white, reinforcing the possibility that the color scheme featured red. The *Times* of 22 March 1952 states that the theatre will be decorated in the red and gold of the Edwardian period.\(^7\)

The Royal Court Theatre Club opened on Wednesday, 2 July 1952. In the souvenir program the architect Robert Cromie received credit for the repairs and renovation. Cromie, like Cecil Massey, studied under Bertie Crewe, originally one of the architects for the theatre. Cromie's daughter, Jacqueline Home, also an architect, assisted him. Many writers credit Cromie, because of his extensive experience in theatre architecture, with a major overhaul of the auditorium. The plans in the municipal archives contradict that contention, instead the plans indicate that the repairs failed to fulfill the minimum requirements of the 1946 memo. The only new plans Cromie submitted transform the old rehearsal room into the new restaurant. An article in the *Times* of 22 March 1952 reports that the restoration seeks to preserve as much of the theatre as possible, retaining the royal box and retiring room but abandoning the steep gallery seating.\(^2\) The closing of the

\(^7\) Chelsea Archive.

\(^2\) Chelsea Archive.
gallery marked the last major change to the auditorium and another in a long series of decreases in the Royal Court’s seating capacity.

An article in the *Times* of 30 June 1952 reports on the theatre’s restoration and provides a schedule for the London Theatre Guild’s first three events. The first play, based on the life of Ruskin and called *The Bride of Denmark Hill*, would open on 2 July. For 26 July the Guild programmed a special celebration of the birthday of G.B. Shaw, including a double bill of Shaw’s *Village Wooing* and a new play by H.F. Rubinstein entitled *Shaw in Heaven*. For their second production, the Guild planned *Miss Hargreaves*, a new comedy by Frank Baker, featuring Margaret Rutherford for a 29 July opening.73

The *Times* review of the opening night performance of *The Bride of Denmark Hill* describes the theatre’s interior as “elegantly intimate in crimson and gold” but does not mention any changes to the interior.74 The review appears to discuss the decoration carried out by Condecor Ltd. under the direction of Edgar Mendenhall FRSA FRB, rather than Cromie’s work. New electrical installation for the theatre was made by NEORA, Electrical Engineers and Contractors.

The *Daily Telegraph* of 3 July panned *The Bride of Denmark Hill*. It asserts: “Only one thing is needed to put

73 Chelsea Archive.
74 Chelsea Archive.
the Court Theatre on the map again: good plays. It should have been possible to find something better than this with which to open."

The Evening Standard of 4 July echoes that sentiment. The Times of 3 July offers a more encouraging mixed review. The press tepidly reviewed the Shaw birthday party performance on 26 July. The Guild's second production, Miss Hargreaves, ran for less than one week. The London Theatre Guild as originally constituted did not last long.

On 6 August 1952 several newspapers, including The Daily Mail and The Times, report the resignation of the advisory committee. Artistic director and council member Giles Playfair and general administrator Roma Macklin also resigned. The resigning council members issued a statement revealing that they possessed only advisory powers, and they contended that an arrangement which granted the council so little authority "is not a practicable method of guiding the policy of the theatre. We feel compelled, therefore, to hand back to the management, the responsibility for the future with our best wishes for the continued success of both club and theatre." The Guild committee's public attack on Esdaile probably resulted from disagreements engendered by the poor reception of the first two productions. The failure of the London Theatre Guild to

75 Chelsea Archive.
76 Chelsea Archive.
achieve what the ESC was to achieve four years later demonstrates the level of difficulty involved with operating a theatre dedicated to producing new plays.

Meanwhile, Esdaile hired Oscar Lewenstein, former general manager of the Glasgow Unity Theatre (1946-1950), to manage the Royal Court following the resignations of the London Theatre Guild.7 Over the next four years Lewenstein became a pivotal figure in both the founding of the English Stage Company and its residence at the Royal Court Theatre. He programmed the next few month’s productions. A two week run of Jean Genet’s Les Bonnes, performed in French, represented the most exciting production of the remainder of 1952.

Perhaps concerned that operating the theatre as a private club contributed to weak box office income, Alfred Esdaile wrote a letter dated 29 August 1952 to the building committee in which he inquires about the improvements needed to open the Royal Court as a public theatre rather than a club theatre. The building department reiterates the unmet conditions of the 1946 memo, but, somehow Esdaile convinced them to accept efforts that met their requirements only partially. Obviously a forceful man, Esdaile, relying largely on what in the absence of records appears to have

7 Oscar Lewenstein maintained a close relationship with the Royal Court until his death in 1997. A co-founder of the English Stage Company in 1954, Lewenstein served on the theatre’s board for many years, and as its artistic director from 1972 to 1975.
been smoke and mirrors, persuaded them that the building adequately met the safety standards for a public theatre.

As evidence of Esdaile’s success, The Times of 10 April 1953 reports that the theatre, which had been closed for several months, will reopen after 22 April as a regular public theatre under a new license granted by the London County Council (L.C.C.). During 1953 Esdaile engaged Richard Whittington and Co. Ltd. to install a new heating system in the theatre addressing the concerns of the 1946 memo, without truly solving the inadequacy of the heating system. In conjunction with opening the first public production, the L.C.C. granted permission to install a neon sign on the front facade of the theatre. Laurier Lister’s intimate revue Airs on a Shoestring, originally conceived of as a stop-gap production, proved a success, running for 772 performances.

On 5 August 1954 Queen Elizabeth II, the Queen Mother, Princess Margaret, and other members of the Royal Family attended the performance of Airs on a Shoestring and sat in the front row of the dress circle. Since the Royal Court possessed a box designated for the royal family, the implications of the decision of the Queen and Queen Mother to sit in the dress circle prove interesting. Perhaps the royal family wished to appear less separate from the rest of the audience and more a part of the nation. It was also possible that the size of the party could not be
accommodated in one box, and rather than split into two or more groups, they chose to sit to the dress circle. Whatever the reason, the Royal Court no longer required a royal box. The audience sang "Happy Birthday" to the Queen Mother before the performance began, as did a crowd gathered in Sloane Square after the show. Princess Margaret continued to attend the Royal Court in the days of the English Stage Company. This performance represented the last known occasion in which the Queen or Queen Mother attended this theatre.

Following the long run, a busy but largely unsuccessful season characterized the year 1955. Laurier Lister flopped with a musical play entitled The Burning Boat. The theatre limped along with two revues, Uncertain Joy and From Here and There, followed in the autumn by the uninspiring historical drama The Sun of York.

The Daily Telegraph of 3 February 1955 reports that Alfred Esdaile commissioned a bust of George Bernard Shaw to be displayed in the lobby of the Royal Court. A follow-up story of 15 March describes the unveiling ceremony with Edith Evans performing the honors. Esdaile continued his efforts to reinforce the association of Shaw and the Royal Court. However, his uninspired repertory failed to recall the fame of the Barker-Vedrenne management at the Royal Court.
The Times reports on the 21 of November 1955 that the English Stage Company "bought" the Royal Court, which means that it subleased the theatre from Alfred Esdaile, who remained the licensee. The paper also announces the naming of George Devine as the artistic director of the new company. It reports that the contract with the English Stage Company will not interfere with the planned January 1956 opening of a new Laurier Lister revue entitled Fresh Airs. The Royal Court witnessed two more productions before the ESC arrived in April 1956. First, Flora Robson revived the 1934 play Suspect. The Evening Standard's review summed up much of British theatre in the nineteen fifties: "It is a sad reflection on the present state of theatre when creaky melodramas like Suspect by Edward Percy and Reginald Denham are deemed worthy of revival." A year after this review appeared, BBC television broadcast an eighteen minute segment from the ESC's production of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger. That broadcast attracted a new audience to the Royal Court and transformed the play into a hit. Look Back in Anger launched a new wave of playwrights who become known as the "angry young men" whose "deliberately unglamorous depiction of everyday urban life

78 Chelsea Archive. In fact, the revue Fresh Airs opened at the Comedy on 26 January and ran for 163 performances.

79 Mander and Mitchenson Collection.
established fresh criteria for authenticity and contemporary relevance."

The coalescence of two different developments led to the arrival of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court. The friendship between theatre educator, actor, and director George Devine and the young television director Tony Richardson began in 1952. Devine admired the young man’s talent and enthusiasm. Richardson admired Devine’s craftsmanship and his vision of the potential of theatre in the largest sense. Together they created a memorandum and detailed budget for the creation of a new art theatre management. Unlike the similar theatres of the nineteen thirties, Devine and Richardson wanted to attract a mainstream audience and avoid operating as a theatre club. They negotiated with Esdaile and his manager Lewenstein for a sub-lease on the Royal Court in 1953 but lost out when Laurier Lister’s supposedly stop-gap musical revue unexpectedly became a hit.

In Devon, away from London and the Royal Court, Lewenstein and the verse playwright Ronald Duncan founded the English Stage Company to tour serious non-commercial work to theatre festivals. They invited Lord Harewood, James Edward Blacksell, and Alfred Esdaile to join them. Wealthy Manchester businessman Neville Blond accepted their

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80 Innes 98.

81 Wardle 160-161.
invitation to become the chairman of the ESC council on the condition that the group commit to creating a London-based management. Lewenstein suggested that the council offer George Devine the position of artistic director, and they did so. Devine accepted on condition that the ESC hire Tony Richardson as his associate. The consolidation of the two groups proceeded despite the philosophical disagreement between Duncan, who championed a revival of verse drama, and the Devine-Richardson team who concealed their lack of enthusiasm for such a prospect."

As general manager of the Royal Court (and a member of the ESC) Oscar Lewenstein obtained the rights to present the first London performance of Bertolt Brecht’s Threepenny Opera. He offered George Devine the opportunity to produce the first London production of the Brecht-Weill musical as part of the English Stage Company’s first season. Regarding Threepenny as too ambitious a production for the fledgling ESC, Devine passed. Lewenstein, Wolf Mankowitz, and Helen Arnold produced the play at the Royal Court on 9 February 1956. They transferred their successful production to the Aldwych on 21 March in order to free the Royal Court for the 2 April opening night of the ESC. Battered by war, inadequate maintenance, and more than sixty years of use,

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"Doty/Harbin 28. Slightly different versions of the founding of the ESC can be found in Terry Browne’s Playwrights’ Theatre, Irving Wardle’s The Theatres of George Devine, and Richard Findlater’s At the Royal Court."
the Royal Court now stood on the cusp of fame. Within a year its commonplace Victorian architectural facade became the symbol for new playwrighting and a rallying point for those seeking to change British society.
Chapter Five
Building an Institution: 1956-1991

The English Stage Company originally planned to make its home in the West End and renovate the Kingsway Theatre on Great Queen Street. Devine regarded the Kingsway's extensive bomb damage as an advantage, because it would enable him to rebuild the theatre in the stripped-down style of his dreams. Wardle's biography of Devine reveals that a moral attitude motivated Devine's thinking about the English Stage Company: "His first priority was not to deceive the audience: the second was to turn the theatrical event into a mutually shared action between actors and spectators. Seeking for some architectural expression of this relationship, he proposed a return to 'air, freedom and space' as a substitute for the picture frame."¹ Devine's ideas incorporated the audience-stage aesthetic of Jacques Copeau and what became known as the Brechtian stage (prior to Devine's actually viewing the Berliner Ensemble).² Despite the powerful influence of the continental art theatre movement on Devine, he operated the Royal Court in a pragmatic English fashion and avoided a doctrinaire approach, a pattern revealed in the ESC's search for a London theatre.³ Devine accepted the theatre he could

¹ Wardle 165.
² Wardle 166.
³ Wardle 171.
afford, the Royal Court, even though it didn’t provide the ideal environment he desired.

When the cost of repairing the Kingsway’s bomb damage tripled, Alfred Esdaile suggested in late 1955 that the ESC consider leasing the theatre of Harley Granville Barker, J.E. Vedrenne and G.B. Shaw, the Royal Court.4 George Devine reacted favorably to the idea of leasing a theatre with such an illustrious history, but after inspecting the theatre he described it as "a frightful mess, very poorly reinstalled."5 Devine possessed extensive knowledge about technical theatre and the business of theatre, so one can rely on his evaluation of the condition of the building. According to Devine, water poured through the roof, and one couldn’t touch the light board without receiving a 1,000 volt shock. Nonetheless, he described the Royal Court as perfect to ESC Chairman Neville Blond and omitted informing him how much it would cost to bring the theatre up to standard.6 Despite the limited funds typical of a new organization, Devine did get Blond to spend £3,500 on the installation of a new lighting system prior to opening in April 1956.

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4 Esdaile’s suggestion was not unconcerned. He owned the lease on both the Royal Court and the Kingsway and privately had decided to sell the Kingsway to the Masons, who owned all of the surrounding property.

5 Wardle 166.

6 Wardle 166.

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The Royal Court's Chelsea location offered advantages for the ESC. A diverse socio-economic constituency which included a group of artists, characterized late-fifties Chelsea. William Gaunt's book *Chelsea*, published in 1954, underlines the importance of a Sloane Square location: "Sloane Square becomes more distinctly than ever the entrance way into an area of London with its own separate tradition in which the arts have a special place." Chelsea offered a population capable of nurturing a developing art theatre.

Devine's desire to create "air, freedom, and space," combined with the company's financial limitations, resulted in a series of changes that altered the stage area in order to make it more responsive to the ESC's needs. First, he eliminated the dirty curtain which functioned as the house border and in so doing restored the proper proportions of the proscenium arch. Over the course of the first season the ESC removed all of the borders, exposing the lighting equipment, another step closer to Devine's goal of not deceiving the audience. Unable to afford a new stage cloth, Devine instructed Michael Hallifax, the general stage manager, to remove the old cloth and clean up the wooden

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8 Doty/Harbin 39-40. Wardle 172. These two sources provide a more complete history of the ESC's first season.
floor (probably the teak floor from 1914) which fortunately proved to be in excellent condition.

Devine's interest in creating a single space for performers and audience led him to cover the orchestra pit and create a forestage. Devine enhanced the usefulness of the forestage and the flexibility of the stage by adding what he called the assemblies, new entrances located downstage of the proscenium on both stage right and left, moving through what formerly served as the stage boxes. Devine borrowed this idea from his experience as a director for the Shakespeare theatre in Stratford-on-Avon. Devine wanted to create a permanent stage surround, and he invited Margaret Harris, called Percy, of the design team Motley to create it. Devine envisioned the fabric surround as a basic set that would enable a director to suspend the actor in a void, creating the scenic statement by lighting alone. In addition to the aesthetic advantages of a basic set, Devine conceived economic benefits for a fledgling organization.

The correspondence file on the building also substantiates Devine's judgement about the condition of the building. Esdaile had managed to reopen the building without meeting all the conditions set out in the 1946 building department memo, probably because he could argue

A more complete description of the unit set can be found in Doty/Harbin's Inside the Royal Court 176.
that the Royal Court deserved to be able to grandfather itself out of certain requirements that would effect new construction. Consequently, many problems remained unaddressed. For example, the concerns about the condition of the ceiling after the bomb damage, included in the 1946 building inspector’s report, proved prescient. Symbolically, the auditorium ceiling literally began to fall, prompting the ESC to put up scaffolding in the upper circle on 26 June 1956 to prevent any plaster from landing on audience members’ heads. The condition of the plaster matched that of the company’s finances. Michael Hallifax reports that in July he had expected the company to fold because of lack of box office income.

A letter, dated 14 September 1956, from District Surveyor E.P. Sawyer to Alfred Esdaile informed him that a preliminary inspection revealed that the ceiling plaster had not been properly keyed to the concrete superstructure and that it needed to be replaced. In correspondence dated 14 September 1956, the inspector ordered the Royal Court to replaster the ceiling. A follow-up inspection on 20 September confirmed that the ceiling and the dome must be replastered. Additionally the inspector required the ESC

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10 Chelsea Archive.

11 Doty-Harbin 46.

12 London Metropolitan Archives.

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to improve the safety curtain and complained about the lack of a plenum system of ventilation.\textsuperscript{13}

The ESC's fortunes began to improve at the end of October 1956. The broadcast by BBC television of an eighteen minute excerpt from \textit{Look Back in Anger} excited the audience and created a demand for tickets from a basically non-traditional theatre audience. However, it took the December revival of Wycherley's \textit{The Country Wife}, with its successful transfer to the West End, to ensure that the company mounted a second season.

A note in the program for \textit{The Country Wife} concluded the plastering saga: "All the while the ceiling and the dome of the auditorium were being completely renewed, and at the same time, the theatre was being redecorated. The scheme for the redecoration was devised and supervised by Alan Tagg."\textsuperscript{14} Clearly the repair work the London Theatre Guild had done in 1952 had not held up very well. Michael Hallifax recalls the necessity of the painting.\textsuperscript{15} Hallifax reports that the ESC originally intended to hire a prominent interior designer for this purpose, but lack of funds led it to ask Tagg, who also designed \textit{Look Back in Anger}, to

\textsuperscript{13} Another complaint dating back to 1946. The ventilation plenum will finally be installed in the current refurbishment.

\textsuperscript{14} Mander and Mitchenson Collection.

\textsuperscript{15} Hallifax, Michael, Personal interview, 27 July 1997.
supervise the work. The redecoration basically consisted of repainting the interior. For two months the ESC produced plays at the Royal Court without being able to sell seats in the upper circle because of the plastering work.

Clearly, the condition of the building confronted Devine with a set of obstacles which compounded the difficulties of establishing the new company.

Despite their diverse problems, as Wardle points out, within a year of opening, the ESC at the Royal Court achieved a symbolic importance in English society that exceeded the company's importance based solely on its theatrical achievements. The semiotic message attached to the Royal Court suggested a world that can be described as new, youthful, and ready for change. Like the Barker-Vedrenne management fifty years earlier, the Royal Court became the rallying point for a youth protest movement. That message remains potent as the Royal Court returns home to its renovated premises in 2000.

The current critical debate about the status of Look Back in Anger as revolutionary marker in English playwrighting overlooks the play's social impact by focusing on the text itself. A hopeful message about the possibility

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18 191.

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for change represented the real importance of the angry young men inspired by this play. The Royal Court embodies this sign. During several visits to London in the late nineteen nineties researching this book, the author had several random opportunities socially to meet people in their sixties with no occupational connection to the Royal Court. Each time, without prompting, they enthusiastically described their personal remembrance of attending Look Back in Anger after I revealed that I was writing about the Royal Court. The informants in this informal sampling all recounted that Look Back in Anger and other productions at the Royal Court during the late nineteen fifties provided them with an exciting sense of change within British society. This sense of change reflects George Devine’s aim to use the Royal Court to spark societal reforms.¹⁹

During the late nineteen fifties, certain sociological and demographic changes to English society contributed to the spirit of innovation and risk-taking that came to define the Royal Court. On the company’s tenth anniversary it published a retrospective, Ten Years at the Royal Court 1956-1966, which included American sociologist George Goetschius’ examination of the Royal Court in its social context. A friend of George Devine who shared a flat in Devine’s house on Lower Mall with Tony Richardson, Goetschius attended the informal planning and inquest

¹⁹ Wardle 245-47.
sessions that were important to the development of the intellectual life at the Court.\textsuperscript{20}

Goetschius asserts that during the nineteen fifties there existed in England a fairly large group of persons for whom it was necessary to create a new place within the class structure of British society. He identifies three elements:

Firstly upper working class children of skilled artisans who were attempting to leave behind working class allegiances but who either did not want to move into the middle class or who were not welcome there; secondly lower middle-class elements who were in the process of achieving professional status both in the older professions and in a host of newer ones (advertising, public and personnel relations, industry, research etc.) but who were not acceptable as equals to the older professional groups, and thirdly a smaller number of the middle and upper-middle class who felt the need to break away from the pre-war patterns (sons and daughters of colonial administrators/army officers from India).\textsuperscript{21}

Goetschius contends that middle-class life changed in response to the common needs of these groups, enabling them to create the psychological space necessary to establish their new identity. Concomitantly, these groups questioned the old identities and the paraphernalia which surrounded middle class life.\textsuperscript{22} The plays at the Royal Court addressed these issues, echoing the concerns of the audience. The synergy of forces that nurtured the Royal


\textsuperscript{21} Goetschius 33.

\textsuperscript{22} Goetschius 33.
Court’s success included the right place (Chelsea), right theatre (the Royal Court), right company of artists (English Stage Company), right material (the plays), and right demographic shifts (changes to the class system). Having stabilized the condition of the building with the replastering, the Royal Court focused its attention on the artistic message which solidified its identity. Under the leadership of George Devine and Tony Richardson, the Royal Court began its development into the national theatre for new writing. Two and one half years elapsed before the next recorded change to the building. On 29 June 1959 the Royal Court managers requested permission to remove the non-structural wood and plaster portions of the proscenium columns; permission to do so was granted on 22 July 1959. It represented one of many changes to the building that removed decorative elements while enhancing the fundamental structure and proportions of the building.

The architect Rod Ham began his association with the Royal Court at this time through a friendship with George Devine. Ham drew a few new plans of the theatre in 1959.

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23 Goetschius, George, Personal interview, 27 July 1998. Goetschius contends that "the Royal Court played a minor part in changing some of the thinking and behavior of the London bourgeoisie." "The Royal Court understood the predicament of the young, that and the battle against censorship are its major impacts."

24 Ham’s firm will handle building alterations beginning in nineteen eighty and continuing until the current rebuilding project.

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Concurrently, he made some inquiries at the board of works about the possibility of reopening the auditorium's gallery (which had been closed off by Cromie) in order to increase the seating capacity and potential box office revenue for the theatre. An internal memo in the correspondence file at the Municipal Archives, dated 6 November 1959, describes the conversation between Rod Ham and the staff. The staff informally tells him that the very steep nature of the gallery makes it unlikely that permission to reopen the gallery seating will be granted. They also inform him that if reopened, the gallery could only offer bench seating. A later memo, dated 16 November, confirms this preliminary decision and officially informs Ham that it would be "most improbable that the council would agree with any increase of the gallery (upper circle) accommodation." This reaffirms a position first established during the nineteen forties when the theatre was evaluated for reopening following its closing due to bomb damage.

Drainage problems represent a perennial building problem at the Royal Court, dating back at least to the Barker-Vedrenne regime and continuing into the nineteen nineties. On 7 August 1960 the drains flooded the stalls causing the cancellation of the Sunday evening performance of *The Keep.*

25 London Metropolitan Archives.

26 Chelsea archive; also in Wardle 209.
Perhaps reflecting a confidence gained from five years operation, the Royal Court began to make some building improvements in the early sixties, despite the deterioration in George Devine's health which resulted from his herculean struggles to keep the company operating. At the same time the first wave of new writers had begun to recede and the second had yet to appear. The sixties witnessed the building of a number of new theatres in England, and Devine wanted to capitalize on the "edifice complex" and make changes to the Royal Court, which would bring the physical space closer to the spatial aesthetic he envisioned. Small changes started the process. The Royal Court received permission from the building department to convert from a coal to an oil heating system in a 23 January 1962 letter. On 13 November 1962 the Royal Court submitted a request to the building department to replace the wooden forestage created in 1956 with one made of tubular steel. The steel structure would make it easier to change between either a forestage or an orchestra pit as required. The board granted approval on 14 December 1962, and the Royal Court effected the change the next year as part of the much

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27 This problem reappears in a variety of ways during the Company's 44 year history and solving it represents one of the crucial needs for sustaining the Royal Court.

28 Wardle 243.

29 London Metropolitan Archives.
larger scheme Devine developed with architect Elidir Davies.\textsuperscript{10} Davies designed the new Mermaid Theatre, and the regular audience attracted by that theatre impressed Devine. He asked Davies to design the changes for the Royal Court.\textsuperscript{11}

An internal building department memo dated 15 November 1962 indicates that the staff had recently held preliminary discussions with the architect Elidir Davies about the possibility for a major reconstruction project at the Royal Court. A follow-up memo sent to Davies and dated 23 November 1962 informs him that major changes to the auditorium would require the installation of a plenum on stalls level.\textsuperscript{12} This request reveals the department’s awareness of the previous memo of 1946 and that major changes to the building would result in the Royal Court being held to current code requirements.

Public mention of this project appears in the program for *Naked*, dated 4 April 1963:

Plans are also in hand to offer more and better facilities to those visiting the theatre. As a first step a snack bar will shortly be opened on the top floor for the convenience of visitors before and during the performance, and the present bar facilities will be improved. Later this year, the stage is to be refloored and raised to give better visibility from the back seats, technical improvements made and an adaptable forestage installed. Plans are also in hand

\textsuperscript{10} London Metropolitan Archives.

\textsuperscript{11} Wardle 247.

\textsuperscript{12} London Metropolitan Archives.
for remodeling the auditorium, enlarging the foyer and providing better cloak room and bookstall facilities."

A letter from Elidir Davies to the building department dated 1 May 1963 formalized the commencement of George Devine's plan to transform the Royal Court into a facility more suitable for the ESC's needs: "We have been asked to prepare a firm scheme of alterations to the Royal Court Theatre on the basis of our scheme A, which is in principle the more straightforward of the two schemes we discussed some weeks ago." Davies enclosed a preliminary set of drawings for comment identified as 704.1-7, 704.27-32, and Sections 1, 2, and 4 which are extant in the London Metropolitan Archives.

In a note printed in the program for Kelly's Eye, dated 12 June 1963, the Royal Court alerts the audience that it intends to include a new studio theatre and rehearsal room in the building plans. It continues:

This new building is part of an ambitious redevelopment scheme to fit the work of the ESC into the new pattern developing on the theatrical scene. The present theatre is to be completely re-designed and re-built. This year the first part of the plan will commence. The stage is to be raised and an adaptable apron stage that can be raised or lowered to form an orchestra pit is to be installed. Whilst this is going on, improvements to bar facilities will be made as a first step towards giving a better service to the public. Eventually this will result in a new and bigger foyer with improved cloakroom accommodation, a

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33 Mander and Mitchenson Collection.
34 London Metropolitan Archives.

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permanent bookstall and much improved entrances and exits.\textsuperscript{15}

As part of this process, the London Fire Brigade inspected the theatre and on 18 July 1963 provided the building department with its list of changes required for the rebuilding program to proceed. The correspondence file also contains an undated internal memo that reports on discussions between Davies and the department staff on the possible use of the 1904 rehearsal room, then operating as a nightclub, as a theatre. The staff informed him that such a theatre could seat a maximum audience of one hundred, but improvements to the size of the fire exits might expand the seating capacity to one hundred and fifty.\textsuperscript{16} Although Clement Freud's nightclub lost its lease at the end of 1963, the Royal Court failed to realize the conversion of this space to the Theatre Upstairs until 1969.

A report from the council architect dated 21 August 1963 along with Davies's drawings, provides a summary of the proposed changes.\textsuperscript{17} The most noticeable and radical change would have been to eliminate the Royal Court's front facade and replace it with a nineteen-sixties-contemporary, rectilinear brick facade. This new facade would have

\textsuperscript{15} London Metropolitan Archives.

\textsuperscript{16} London Metropolitan Archives.

\textsuperscript{17} The following description and all other details about the plans may be found in the London Metropolitan Archives.
increased the height of the building by three feet six inches. The borough council, on 31 October 1963, decided that it "raises no objection to the proposed rebuilding of the facade." Inside the building, major changes drastically reconfigure the auditorium from a three level Victorian horseshoe into a more democratic one featuring two large seating areas." The stalls seating remains approximately the same. On the stalls level new construction includes a new stalls bar and toilets, and reconstruction of the staircases to the lobby. Additional floor space emerges on the street level because all of the former dress circle seating would be removed. The back of the former dress circle (now tucked under the new balcony) provides space for a ticket office, cloakroom, and bookstall. The rake of the original upper circle is extended toward the stage. The curved tier front is replaced by a straight one. Seating on the new balcony level is divided in two large blocks broken horizontally by a central aisle. This change eliminates the correspondence between the three level Victorian auditorium of Walter Emden and the British class system. Three new exits, including new stairwells would have been built to serve the circle

1 Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Microfiche of correspondence file, Building Department.

3 Irving Wardle's book (243-244) describes a single sweep of seats but the blueprints in the archive make clear that the plan includes two sweeps of seats.
level. The new auditorium’s seating accommodates 264 at stalls level, 200 at circle level, and standing room for 68 divided between the two levels.

The plans include the construction of a 720 square foot bar/restaurant accommodating 72 persons on a new level to be constructed between the circle and the clubroom (1904 rehearsal room). This new level, created in the space of the original gallery, includes the new restaurant, bar, and kitchen plus 260 square feet of office space. A rehearsal and plant room, located within the existing clubroom offers 1,180 square feet which would have been equipped to function as a flexible studio theatre. Davies includes several potential modular seating configurations. As he refined and developed the plans, Davies submitted revised drawings 704.200-206, sections 704.207-210, elevations 704.211-212 on 3 October 1963. Again on 2 December 1963 Davies filed more revised drawings (704.200-209).

The correspondence file includes a simple letter from Elidir Davies to the building department, dated 23 December 1963, stating that the "clients have decided to abandon scheme. Please withdraw the application." Simply put, the funding scheme, dependant on an intricate series of

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40 The decision to include a restaurant in the nineteen nineties renovation represents the most criticized aspect of the recent rebuilding plan.

41 London Metropolitan Archives.

42 London Metropolitan Archives.

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matching contributions, unraveled, and Devine's grands plans were shelved in favor of a basic redecoration with some small practical changes to the building.

The correspondence file reveals that Davies met with the department on 31 December 1963 and 6 January 1964 to discuss a more limited renovation plan. A letter from Elidir Davies dated 10 Jan 1964 states: "Enclosed are drawings number 704.300-306 related to the scheme discussed." The drawings are in the Municipal Archive. An internal memo dated 19 February 1964 mentions two additional meetings with Davies on 23 January and 12 February to discuss a new bar and minor alterations to the stalls and foyer. Another letter from Elidir Davies dated 26 February 1964 accompanied the amended drawings No.704.501-509. Wardle describes the back-up plan: "No shred remained of the original dream. There would be virtually no change to the existing building, but it would be in less danger of falling down." Wardle describes the back-up plan: "No shred remained of the original dream. There would be virtually no change to the existing building, but it would be in less danger of falling down."

The program book for the non-ESC-produced, visiting production of Spoon River Anthology carries this message: "The Royal Court Theatre will be closed for alteration and

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43 London Metropolitan Archives.
44 London Metropolitan Archives.
45 255.

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re-decoration (architect Elidir Davies) in mid-March and reopen in September."

A few more details emerge from the correspondence file. The Royal Court sent a letter requesting permission to add some five or six permanent counterweights to the grid system which had been approved on 21 April 1964. A plan for the grid as it existed in 1964 is on file. A report to the borough council by its staff architect about the Royal Court's application of 26 February 1964 (applicable drawings 1386 1-9) reveals another reduction in seating capacity on stalls level from the then existing 270 seats plus 52 standing room positions (for a total of 322) to a new configuration of 259 seats plus 26 places for standing room (for a total of 285). As part of these modifications, the level of the stalls floor also changed."

On Monday 31 August 1964 the Royal Court invited the press to have a look round. The building survey on 8 September 1964 found the completed work satisfactory. On 11 September 1964 Elidir Davies submitted plans 704.501-504 which delineate the theatre as it existed after the alterations. Davies' assistant on this project was J. Kimber.

On 9 September 1964, the theatre reopened with a production of John Osborne's *Inadmissible Evidence*. The

"Mander and Mitchenson Collection.

"London Metropolitan Archives.
program credits the architectural work to Elidir Davies, Marshall Andrews as the builder, the stage grid by Hall and Dixon, stage lighting by Strand Electric, carpets by the Rank Organization, curtains by Hall and Dixon. Gifts listed include the auditorium carpet by the Nylon Spinners, the stage curtain by Cumberland Silk Mills, lighting fixtures by Altas Lighting Co., decorative mirrors by Robin Fox and Greville Poke, decorative lighting fittings by Jocelyn Herbert and George Devine. The auditorium color scheme was devised by Jocelyn Herbert. Neville Coppel provided advice on the Bars layout, William Green consulted about the adaptable grid, and Eric Baker conferred on the lighting layout.

Disappointed and ailing, Devine wanted out of the Royal Court, and he told the ESC Council in the autumn of 1964 that he intended to step down in a year. Perhaps because Jocelyn Herbert relates that after leaving the Royal Court Devine felt that he had failed to change English theatre or society, several achievements of George Devine deserve emphasizing. At the Royal Court Devine created the most enduring art theatre in history. His willingness to allow the writers (John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, N. F. Simpson, Ann Jellicoe) to establish the subject matter for the plays sparked a creative explosion in English playwrighting that continues to the present. Each subsequent artistic director


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has endeavored to recapture Devine's ability to foster an environment which nurtures writers.

Additionally, Devine launched the careers of five exceptional young directors: Tony Richardson, William Gaskill, John Dexter, Lindsay Anderson, and Anthony Page. Through the scenery design work of Jocelyn Herbert, the Royal Court's visual aesthetic revolutionized scenography in England, infusing it with ideas drawn from modern art, and thus bringing it into the twentieth century.

The substantial number of Royal Court theatre artists who had joined Laurence Olivier at the National Theatre played a crucial role in the successful establishment of that company. Almost forty years after his death, Devine continues to influence theatre artists, making him the seminal figure of twentieth century English theatre.

Devine's retirement, publically announced at Neville Blond's annual critics's luncheon at the Savoy in early January 1965, left the question of succession unresolved. He had nurtured the careers of a number of young directors, but at this point they were all otherwise engaged. Lindsay Anderson's impromptu panegyric in honor of Devine at the Savoy luncheon spurred William Gaskill to leave his position at the National Theatre and return to the Royal Court and carry on George Devine's dream.

Devine's tenure had achieved its first success with a play by John Osborne and his decade at the theatre reached
its completion with Osborne's *A Patriot for Me*, which the ESC presented as a club performance in order to evade the Lord Chamberlain's efforts to eviscerate the play. The battle to break the censorship powers of the Lord Chamberlain would dominate the first years of Gaskill's term as artistic director.

Gaskill's return provided the combination of continuity and risk-taking necessary for the Royal Court to move beyond its initial success. Gaskill's tenure represents a second golden era, characterized by the introduction of important new plays, writers, and the triumph of Jocelyn Herbert's visual aesthetic. In his memoir of his years at the Royal Court, *A Sense of Direction*, Gaskill identifies the productions which successfully combined writers, directors, and designers as the best work at the Royal Court. Gaskill enumerates the Arnold Wesker plays directed by John Dexter and designed by Jocelyn Herbert; Peter Gill's D.H. Lawrence trilogy, produced in collaboration with designers John Gunter and Deirdre Clancy; Lindsay Anderson's productions of Storey's plays with designs by Gunter and Herbert. Lighting designer Andrew Phillips, who functioned like a house designer, also made an important contribution to these

" Doty/Harbin 203. "The Court style, if it's anything, is open space with the imagery very precisely defined."

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productions. During this period, the Royal Court presented a very unified visual aesthetic.

The program book for Ann Jellicoe’s *Shelley* (18 October 1965) during William Gaskill’s first season contains a prominent notice that “[t]his is not a Club Theatre.” The confusion for audiences perhaps resulted from several factors. The London Theatre Guild had operated the Royal Court as a club theatre, and when the ESC offered plays that had been refused permission by the Lord Chamberlain, it did so by temporarily converting the theatre into a club theatre during the run of those plays. The Royal Court had just used the club theatre option to avoid censorship of *A Patriot for Me*. The Royal Court’s insular attitude, well developed by this time, may also have contributed to the perception of the house as a club theatre.

The correspondence file reveals a number of small alterations to the building during the Gaskill era. A letter from Wm Green, dated 26 January 1965, describes minor changes made to the box office. The Royal Court continued to operate a restaurant in the club room after the departure of Clement Freud. A letter of 9 August 1966 proposes minor changes to the club room which received approval on 21 September 1966. Strand Electric installed a new lighting


51 Mander and Mitchenson Collection.

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board to the specifications of a plan submitted on 14 February 1967.  

On 30 June 1967, at approximately 2:45 a.m., a passerby discovered and reported a fire in the club room, which rendered it unusable. An investigation determined that the fire originated in a recently installed enclosed bar which had been constructed of unapproved materials. The final report, submitted on 4 July 1967 concluded that the careless disposal of lighted cigarettes caused the fire. Peter Sibley wrote a letter on behalf of the ESC dated 21 March 1968 that proposed reconstructing the club room to the original specifications. The letter informs the building department that the Royal Court's current plan envisions continued use of the bar but not the kitchen.

In the late nineteen sixties the Royal Court began to become a victim of its own success. Anthony Page's directorial relationship with John Osborne, Lindsay Anderson's with David Storey, Gaskill's with Edward Bond, Robert Kidd's with Christopher Hampton, and Peter Gill's championing of D.H. Lawrence left little room in the theatre for new writers. The opening of the Theatre Upstairs in

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52 London Metropolitan Archives.
53 London Metropolitan Archives.
54 London Metropolitan Archives.
55 David Hare's essay "A Time of Unease" in the Findlater At The Royal Court provides an eloquent description of this time.
1969 under the direction of Nicholas Wright provided the only venue for new writers to gain entry to the Royal Court.

The correspondence file records that on 5 November 1968 the Royal Court first discussed with the building department the possibility of transforming the club room into what would become the Theatre Upstairs. The plan intended to operate this new space as a club theatre because it only conformed to the lower safety code standards of a club theatre. The Royal Court informed the building department that construction would begin on 8 November. A follow-up letter from the Royal Court dated 20 November informs the building department that Strand Electric had been engaged to install the lighting system and that H.J. Glew would do the actual construction work. On 8 January 1969 Nicholas Wright sent a letter requesting written confirmation that a license would not be necessary to present club plays in the Theatre Upstairs. The reply dated 13 January 1969 confirms that since only club members can attend performances, no license for the presentation of public plays will be needed. On 24 January 1969, the building department granted final approval of conversion to the Theatre Upstairs.

An unannounced visit by the building department on 2 April 1969 discovered the Theatre Upstairs in use despite

"The development of the Theatre Upstairs as a club recalls Alfred Esdaile's 1952 decision to open the main theatre as a club theatre."
the Royal Court's failure to complete all the required elements of the construction. A follow-up letter of 22 April again reminds the Royal Court that the alterations remain unfinished. An inspection on 6 June finally concluded that the alteration has met the standards for a club theatre. The new space initially proved a mixed blessing. Billy J. Harbin asserts:

Though the Theatre Upstairs was historically important as the first alternative stage established in a major theatre, it fostered divisiveness in the temptation it offered to relegate experimental work to its space, with the main stage saved for more accessible plays.\textsuperscript{57}

Initially the Royal Court relegated its young writers to the Theatre Upstairs, and that separation fostered a generational split that would haunt the company throughout the seventies.

On 22 January 1969 architects Devereux Mitchell, Price Davies, and Bertram Carter request permission for an extension on the fourth floor (roof) level to provide approximately 680 square feet of additional office space for the theatre. At a meeting on 27 February 1969 the building department granted conditional approval, and on 19 March 1969 consented to the project. For reasons not entirely clear the alteration didn't occur until the nineteen eighties when Rod Ham and Partners submitted a similar

\textsuperscript{57} Harbin "Introduction" 11.
A letter to the building department dated 11 June 1969 informs them of the intention to reinstate an office in the area of the circle bar. This may represent a less expensive alternative to the plans of Devereux Mitchell, Price Davies, and Bertram Carter.

Gaskill, keenly aware of the generational split within the Royal Court, attempted to provide access to younger groups in 1970 by removing the stalls seating and opening the main theatre for a festival of new work. He explains, "I made one last despairing effort to reconcile the outburst of experimental theatre with the main line in a vast festival in 1970, Come Together....The theatre and I were approaching schizophrenia, [and] my inability to reconcile what I felt to be equally vital but different elements in the theatre eventually meant that I had to leave." What Gaskill described as "schizophrenia" constituted two sometimes contradictory demands on a Royal Court artistic director: 1) continued support for the writers the theatre established, and 2) the need constantly to develop a new crop of writers. When the production demands from those two groups exceeded the number of opportunities the Royal Court

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* London Metropolitan Archives.

could offer, the under-represented group (in this case the young writers) became disgruntled.\textsuperscript{61}

In November 1971 a notice about plans for the building appears in the program book for \textit{The Changing Room}: "We are happy to announce that the Royal Court will be closed when \textit{The Changing Room} ends its run in mid-December till the opening of \textit{Alpha Beta} in mid-January to enable us to install a much needed air conditioning system as well as to make certain other structural alterations. We will also take this opportunity to carry out as much redecoration as we can afford." Once again the Royal Court lacks the funds needed to make necessary improvements. This continual funding shortfall typically prevents the company from achieving more than cosmetic improvements.

Gaskill's departure marked a difficult transition. emotionally worn out by his tenure, Gaskill was ready to leave, but neither Lindsay Anderson nor Anthony Page, as his assistant directors the logical candidates for his successor, were willing to assume the position of Artistic Director. Oscar Lewenstein proposed that he step down from the ESC Council into the position of artistic director, with Page and Anderson as his assistants. Lewenstein offered Gaskill the opportunity to join this triumvirate, but he refused. Gaskill then made an about face and tried to talk

\textsuperscript{61} David Hare provides an eloquent description in his essay "A Time of Unease" in Findlater, 139.

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the ESC Council into extending his tenure; however, the council decided to stick with the option of Lewenstein. Lewenstein, a co-founder of the company and long-term council member, guaranteed a continuity that permitted many of the vital partnerships between writers and directors to continue.

Lewenstein’s tenure (1972-75) witnessed a number of successes, especially the South African season featuring the work of Athol Fugard. Unfortunately, the generational split within the Royal Court deepened, causing many of the new generation of English writers to find stages for their work away from the Royal Court. The rapid growth of the fringe theatre movement provided numerous alternative outlets for new playwrights and forced the Royal Court to compete for writers.

In 1974 the program for the Beckett-Fugard double bill of *Not I* and *Statements Taken After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act* mentions an urgent need to raise money to replace the theatre’s roof. Typically, the Royal Court lurches into another crisis because of a failure to perform routine maintenance:

The roof of this theatre is in urgent need of repair and an emergency fund has been opened to raise the cash. The Emergency Funds Committee under the directorship of Albert Finney [one of the triumvirate of three directors who work under artistic director Oscar Lewenstein] have organized three concerts by George Melly, Nicol Williamson, and Dave Allen, all of whom have generously donated their fees toward the fund. At least £15,000 is required and has to be
raised quickly in order to keep costs down and further deterioration at bay.\footnote{2}

The first concert, scheduled for Saturday 8 February as a Midnight Matinee featured George Melly and the Feetwarmers. The next night, Sunday 8 March, Nicol Williamson and the musical group Parachute were scheduled. Tickets for these concerts were priced at £1, £3, £5, and £10.

On 23 August 1974 plans were conditionally approved for the enlargement of the rear extension in order to house a stand-by generator. This work was dated completed on 20 August 1975.

During his last year at the Royal Court, Gaskill had developed a friendship with the young director Max Stafford-Clark, who had run the Traverse Theatre and directed a few plays in the Theatre Upstairs. From that beginning, Gaskill, Stafford-Clark, David Hare, and David Auklin founded the Joint Stock Company. Edward Bond called the Joint Stock the "Royal Court in exile," and that appellation contains more than a little truth. Away from the Royal Court, Gaskill groomed the heir apparent that he failed to groom during his tenure as artistic director. Stafford-Clark would assume the artistic director's position in 1979, and he imported the Joint Stock working methods into the Royal Court. During their years at the Joint Stock, Gaskill exposed Stafford-Clark to the ideals that he had inherited

\footnote{2 Mander and Mitchenson Collection.}

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from George Devine. It would take almost a decade and occur away from Sloane Square, but Gaskill's mentoring of Stafford-Clark provided the continuity which facilitated the generational changing of the guard in the Royal Court's artistic leadership.

In the mean time, the Royal Court suffered through a period of internal dissention when confronted with Oscar Lewenstein's decision to step down at the end of his three-year contract as artistic director. Lewenstein recommended that Lindsay Anderson succeed him. Anderson declined. The council advertised for the position and received 49 applications. After interviewing eight finalists, the two most favored candidates, Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd, at their own suggestion, received a joint appointment. When they assumed the position, the Royal Court already was running a deficit. Despite an impressive line-up of productions, they experienced a run of bad luck exacerbated by an economic downturn and the failure to earn any money from transfers to the West End. A crisis of confidence ensued. First the Arts Council and then the ESC Council expressed doubts about the Royal Court's ability to continue to operate. Wright has said, "I think we lost our nerve." Kidd's resignation in December 1977 brought their term to an end since their contracts were linked. Newspaper stories spoke ominously about the imminent demise

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" Doty/Harbin 62.

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of the company. The rise of the fringe movement forced the Royal Court to compete for new plays; furthermore, the fringe produced new plays in ad-hoc spaces at a much lower cost than the Royal Court could do in its proscenium theatre. Looking to save money, the Arts Council threatened to eliminate the Royal Court’s grant entirely. The strong support of the press and other theatre artists persuaded the Arts Council that the Royal Court performed a valuable service to new playwrighting that the fringe could not duplicate. Consequently, the Arts Council backed down from its threat to close the theatre.

Faced with the need to reorganize and reestablish the Royal Court’s mission and reason to exist, the ESC Council’s decision in 1977 to turn to the proven leadership of Stuart Burge made sense because of the touchstone of George Devine. Although Burge developed his career away from the world of the Royal Court, he had studied under Devine decades earlier and shared Devine’s philosophy toward theatre. Burge turned down the security of the National Theatre’s offer to let him manage the Cottesloe in order to assume the embattled position at the Royal Court. Burge explains: “There was a feeling that the Royal Court’s usefulness had come to an end. I didn’t agree with that.” Burge possessed the managerial achievement of turning around the previously struggling Nottingham Playhouse. That record inspired a

"Doty/Harbin 64.

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confidence in both the Arts Council and ESC Council that the Wright-Kidd regime never attained. Burge also effected changes that revitalized the ESC Council itself.

Throughout the history of the ESC at the Royal Court, money earned from transfers of plays to the West End provided an important source of income. The successful transfer of *The Country Wife* in 1956 saved the ESC from bankruptcy at the end of its first year of operations. George Devine had worked as a director for several of the big West End managements prior to assuming the leadership of the ESC, and he capitalized on those connections. After Oscar Lewenstein’s term as artistic director ended in 1975, none of the succeeding Royal Court staff had also developed personal connections with commercial theatre managers. Loss of those personal contacts combined with the recession of the mid-nineteen seventies temporarily ended transfers, and loss of income contributed to the serious debt problems that truncated the Nicholas Wright-Robert Kidd (1975-1977) regime. Wright has said that they took over the first year that the "West End income failed." Their successor, Stuart Burge, produced a play commissioned by the Royal Court, the somewhat atypical *Once a Catholic* (1977) by Mary O’Malley. The successful commercial transfer of that play helped pull the ESC out of debt. By the autumn of 1979, Burge had wiped out the deficit.

*Doty/Harbin 61.*
At the same time, Burge took a six month leave of absence, during which time Max Stafford-Clark assumed his post. When Burge's television commitment made it impossible for him to return, the Council needed to choose a new leader formally. Despite an attempt by Jocelyn Herbert to bring back one of Devine's original lieutenants, John Dexter, a generational shift occurred, and Stafford-Clark succeeded Burge in 1980. "In a 1998 interview, Burge revealed that when he left in the autumn of 1979, he had no intention of returning to the Royal Court. Burge initially called his departure a leave of absence in order to smooth the transition to Max Stafford-Clark."

The program for *The Gorky Brigade* dated 5 September 1979 discusses a planned redecoration of the auditorium and replacement of the seats. The theatre's patrons were encouraged to contribute £75 for the purchase of a new seat for the stalls and dress circle or £50 for an upper circle seat. "All donations would be accepted since in September the theatre only had £14,000 in hand of the £47,000 needed to complete the work." This redecoration was done under the direction of Rod Ham and Partners, an architectural firm.

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"The current rebuilding charged £1,000 per seat.

"Mander and Mitchenson Collection.

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that would design several projects for the Royal Court over the next fifteen years. Ham reported in the summer of 1998 that his attempts to highlight the detail of the theatre’s interior did not gain the approval of Jocelyn Herbert, who requested that more of the interior be painted with the brown color paint she had first selected in 1964.70

As Artistic Director, Max Stafford-Clark focused on his work as a director. For the ESC at the Royal Court, the inadequacy of its Arts Council subsidy created perennial budgetary difficulties. The anti-establishment tone of many Royal Court plays inevitably antagonized its establishment funding source, compounding the inherent risks of producing new work. Under the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher the Arts Council, annoyed that the Royal Court constantly bit the governmental hand that fed it, threatened to eliminate the Royal Court’s subsidy in 1980, 1981 and 1984. The financial insecurity engendered by the Arts Council’s threats, combined with longest period in ESC history (1979-1986) without the extra income derived from transferring a production to a commercially viable venue, forced the Royal Court to curtail production during the nineteen eighties.71

70 Ham, Rod, Personal interview, 14 July 1998.

71 Seven years elapsed between the transfer of Bent on 4 July 1979 near the end of Stuart Burge’s tenure and Max Stafford-Clark’s first transfer, The Normal Heart (1986).
Within the Royal Court an embattled mentality developed which believed that the government should provide an adequate subsidy so that the Royal Court need not sully itself with the pandering to the lowest-common-denominator associated with the commercial world of the West End. While fond of the building, Stafford-Clark demonstrated no particular personal concern with it. The lack of financial stability denied the Royal Court the resources needed to undertake building improvements until late in the eighties. At that time fiscal stability and issues related to extending the company's lease prompted Stafford-Clark to direct General Manager Cowley's attention toward the building.

The one major blot on Stafford-Clark's long tenure occurred in 1987 when he publicly undermined one of the central tenets of the Royal Court's self-identity, unswerving opposition to censorship. On 24 January 1987, Stafford-Clark canceled the production of Jim Allen's *Perdition*. Many Jewish and Zionist groups had publicly attacked the play, which alleges that Hungarian Zionists collaborated with the Nazis to advance their own agenda of re-establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Based on media accounts, it is difficult to determine whether Stafford-Clark erred in scheduling a play that he knew in advance contained factual errors, or in cancelling the production two days before opening in what appeared to be a
response to outside pressure. Stafford-Clark lost faith in the writer and director's claim that the play presented a truthful account of events. He denied that he acted in response to outside pressure and took full responsibility for his decision. In protest of this decision, William Gaskill, previously Stafford-Clark's main ally among Royal Court old-timers, resigned from the theatre's board. Questions of historical accuracy and censorship characterized the publication of the play in 1987 as well.

The Royal Court's fight against censorship in the nineteen fifties and sixties succeeded in abolishing the right of the Lord Chamberlain's office to control the content of stage plays. The association of the Royal Court with an anti-censorship position dates back to The Happy Land, a satirical production from the eighteen seventies. In this situation, Stafford-Clark appeared to have aligned the Royal Court with censorship. In The Guardian Stuart Hood wrote, "By refusing to stage a play which honestly and compassionately examines a terrible moment in human history, the Royal Court was guilty of failure of nerve, of civil courage. By giving way to powerful lobbying it has


73 Brown, Paul. "Censored Perdition Finally Published" The Guardian 7 July 1987: 5. The publisher, Ithaca Press, excised certain references to living people such as Nathan Dror, to avoid charges of libel.

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reinforced an indefensible political taboo." However, the record of integrity and opposition to censorship of both Stafford-Clark and the Royal Court, before and after this event, prevented the turmoil surrounding Perdition from damaging either their individual or collective reputations.

The financial solvency of the Royal Court continued to depend upon a careful balancing of art and commerce, a pattern dating back more than a century to its founding by manager Marie Litton. In 1986 theatre critic and George Devine biographer Irving Wardle welcomed the transfer of The Normal Heart in an article for The Times. Wardle credited general manager Jo Beddoe and ESC Council Chairman Matthew Evans with reducing the Royal Court’s dependence on Arts Council funding expanding the company’s funding base and changing the Royal Court’s “siege mentality” by transferring The Normal Heart to the West End.

In 1987 Graham Cowley joined the staff as General Manager, and soon after that event Caryl Churchill’s Serious Money proved to be a major popular and critical hit. At this time, several commercial managements courted the Royal

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76 One of the great ironies of Serious Money was that the workers in the City’s stock market, who were satirized on stage, loved the show, sometimes buying out the entire house.
Court because they wanted to transfer the play to the West End. Former artistic director Stuart Burge, now a Board member, suggested that they capitalize on the for-profit corporation Royal Court Productions created in the late nineteen seventies and dormant since then. Taking this advice, the ESC hired an experienced company manager to supervise Royal Court Productions' transfer of Serious Money. Graham Cowley and the Royal Court staff closely observed all of the details of handling this transfer rather than turning control of the project to an outside commercial management. The Serious Money experience taught the Royal Court staff an important lesson: a commercial producer's first responsibility is to maximize profits for the investors. A commercial transfer required a different type of thinking and planning than was usual for a not-for-profit organization." The Royal Court handled all aspects of future transfers made by Royal Court Productions, maximizing their return by functioning as their own company manager."

Hiring Graham Cowley proved to be one of Max Stafford-Clark's shrewdest decisions. Cowley assembled a first-rate staff, including finance officer Mark Rubinstein and Marketing Director Guy Chapman, who made important contributions to professionalizing the Royal Court's business operations. These staff members facilitated the


Royal Court’s ability to capitalize on artistic successes and transform them into financial ones. Cowley also began a more concerted effort to find sources for contributed income in the form of sponsorships. The Royal Court’s left-wing political stance had made it feel uncomfortable about soliciting large commercial concerns for funds. Playwright and Council member Caryl Churchill typified a faction within the Royal Court that opposed seeking and accepting commercial sponsorship because it diluted the company’s artistic vision.” These earned and contributed income success stories enabled the Royal Court to thrive despite low levels of funding from the Arts Council.

As a company that produced new plays, transferred some to the West End, and took others on national and international tours, the ESC struggled to find adequate space in the cramped backstage of the Royal Court Theatre, built as a Victorian era receiving house for touring productions. The ESC initially perceived the Royal Court as a temporary home, but more than thirty years of productions had consolidated the company’s identity with its theatre home. The ESC had learned to prize the dialectic between past and present achieved by the presentation of contemporary writing in an intimate Victorian-era proscenium auditorium. The semiotic messages were intentionally mixed. This rundown Victorian playhouse had become the home of the


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most important producer of new plays in the world. The work frequently confronted, or at the least tweaked, the complacency of the establishment neighborhood in which the theatre maintained a presence not unlike that of a squat. Indeed, the architects of the current renovation used the image of a squat as one guide in their approach to the project.

Stafford-Clark delegated leadership in building matters to General Manager Graham Cowley. As detailed in other chapters, a policy of delayed and incomplete maintenance historically characterized the theatre's managements, and after almost a century of piecemeal alterations, little of its original Victorian appearance remained. The need to renew the lease in 1988 literally forced the company to put its house in order. Aware that the level of squalor in the Royal Court's front-of-house had to be addressed, Cowley launched the Olivier Appeal Building Campaign in 1988 as part of a celebration of the building's one hundredth birthday. The money raised through this appeal enabled the company, working in partnership with Stephen Brandes of the architectural firm Rod Ham and Partners, to address the dilapidated state of the theatre building through a series of manageable piece-meal repairs. When these renovations,

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80 Lord Olivier served as honorary chairman of the campaign which bore his name. He had rejuvenated his own career with the 1959 production of The Entertainer at the Royal Court.

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such as the cleaning of the theatre’s front facade and the expansion and refurbishment of the front-of-house, reached fruition in the nineteen nineties, the Royal Court had named Stephen Daldry artistic director designate. Following decades of deferred maintenance, these much-needed improvements ironically appeared to reflect the promise of a new era of Daldry rather than an accomplishment of the passing era of Stafford-Clark.

Reflecting the peculiarities of English real estate law, The Royal Court Theatre was built on land it didn’t own and theoretically, the landlord, the Cadogan Estate, could refuse to renew the lease when it expired and tear the building down. Additionally, the English Stage Company had sub-leased the building and didn’t hold the head (or first) lease on the Royal Court Theatre. When the English Stage Company first took up residence at the Royal Court, Alfred Esdaile held the theatre’s head lease and was the licensee. According to Graham Cowley, the holders of the head lease pressured the Royal Court to buy the lease for £100,000 beginning in 1987. The holders of the lease wished to capitalize on their investment by trying to force the Royal Court to buy out their interest in the building. They exerted pressure on the English Stage Company to address the

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*1 Current law does limit the landlord, but in 1887 the Cadogan Estate demolished the original Royal Court Theatre in order to redevelop the land more profitably as upscale housing.

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building's dilapidated state with the implication that they would not again grant the sub-lease to the Royal Court if the improvements were not made.

The asking price for the head lease was beyond the means of the ESC. After the Royal Court declined to meet their terms, the head lease for the building was sold for £90,000 to UK Land. UK Land soon realized that it had purchased an essentially worthless lease. However, as a public company, it could not be seen as giving the lease to the Royal Court since that would have required UK Land to show a substantial loss. Cowley negotiated a deal whereby the Royal Court received sponsorship money from UK Land and a fee for helping UK Land publicize their activities at the Elephant and Castle Shopping Center. The Royal Court used the sponsorship money and the fee to purchase the lease for a fraction of the original asking price."

The Cadogan Estate, which derives its income primarily from its large London land holding, had seen its income begin to fall in the nineteen eighties, and, to reverse that trend, it needed to pursue commercial real estate from a more aggressive business perspective. The Cadogan Estate's predicament resulted from a change in real estate law unrelated in any way to the particular situation of the Royal Court. The Leasehold Reform Act of 1967 enabled

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longtime lessees of residential property to purchase the freeholds for the land under their homes. That change drastically reduced the long-term economic advantages of residential leases for large land owners such as the Cadogan Estate. The Estate hired Stuart Corbyn with the institutional objective of augmenting the Estate’s income through commercial development. One of his goals became expanding the Estate’s return on the valuable Sloane Square real estate occupied by the Royal Court Theatre.

During negotiations with the ESC to renew its lease, the Cadogan Estate proposed that the ESC allow the Estate to redevelop the site by knocking down the theatre, retaining only its facade, and putting in commercial shops at street level. The substantial income stream from the shops would enable the Cadogan Estate to build the ESC a new theatre on top of these shops. Wishing to keep their home, the Royal Court refused that offer.*3

The Cadogan Estate then proposed raising the rent for the new lease to a level comparable to other commercial rents in the area. The cost of such a rent would make it impossibly expensive for the ESC to operate the theatre. The ESC convinced the Cadogan Estate that only a commercial

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*3 A variety of problems that became evident during the redevelopment process, including historic preservation and right of neighboring residential flats to daylight, suggest that had the Royal Court agreed to this scheme, planning permission for this project would have been almost impossible to obtain.
management could afford such a rent and no commercial theatre management would be interested in the Royal Court because the theatre’s small 400 seat capacity eliminated its commercial viability. The ESC reminded the Cadogan Estate that the master plan for the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea publically committed the borough to maintaining the Royal Court as a legitimate theatre. Given that commitment, the ESC convinced the Cadogan Estate that any potential tenant was likely to be a not-for profit organization resembling the ESC. Given their lack of redevelopment options, the Cadogan Estate began to pressure the ESC to address a list of building dilapidations if the company wished to renew its lease. To obtain a new long-term lease, the ESC needed to rectify the Royal Court’s problems to the satisfaction of the Cadogan Estate, meaning that the Estate would play a significant role in any refurbishment plans.

Despite the substantial successes of the late nineteen eighties, the Royal Court’s Arts Council grant for 1990 failed to provide adequate funding for the theatre to operate both the Theatre Upstairs and the Theatre Downstairs. In an effort to confront the Arts Council about serious implications of the Royal Court’s underfunding, management closed the Theatre Upstairs, the venue where young writers typically received a first production. The confrontation backfired to some extent because the closing

of the Theatre Upstairs contributed to the perception of a crisis in new writing for which the media blamed Stafford-Clark and the Royal Court. Graham Cowley relates that having the Theatre Upstairs closed proved a miserable experience for the entire building. "The success of the productions in the Theatre Downstairs enabled the Royal Court to reopen the Theatre Upstairs after a six month closure rather than the originally planned one year closure.

The story of four productions transferred to the West End during the Stafford-Clark and Daldry period of joint artistic management demonstrates how the business acumen of Cowley's staff contributed to making this a very successful period financially for the Royal Court. With these productions, the Royal Court managers proved to be prescient predictors of successful transfer prospects. The commercial producers who transferred plays the Royal Court chose not to transfer lost substantial sums of money. "The two profitable efforts proved to be Royal Court-sponsored West End transfers of new plays by established American writers, John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* (1992) directed by Phyllida Lloyd and David Mamet's *Oleanna* (1993) directed by Harold Pinter. In contrast, the Royal Court decided not to use Royal Court Productions to sponsor the transfer to the

"Cowley, Graham, E-mail to author, 25 June 1999.

"It is probably more a comment on the economics of the West End that established writers turned a profit while the new writers did not.

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West End of either Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *Our Country’s Good* (1988) or Sue Townsend’s *The Queen and I* (1994), both directed by Max Stafford-Clark. Both of those transfers lost money.

Some current staff members criticize the Olivier Appeal renovations of lobbies and rehearsal room. Correspondence between the Royal Court and the architects reveals a constant pressure to cut the budget without sacrificing any parts of the alterations. Concerned about the wiring changes, the ESC electrician Johanna Towne asked to be included in the planning. In the summer of 1998 she stated that she believes that the architects’ desire to please the Royal Court management caused them to cut corners for budgetary reasons. Those cuts resulted in poor workmanship. The 1996 demolition of the 1993 rehearsal hall revealed that structural problems were already developing, only three years after construction. Additionally, an error by Brandes in the placement of an air conditioning unit on the roof during this same alteration prompted the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to threaten the Royal Court with closure (a threat that remained in effect until the completion of rebuilding in 2000.

Iain Mackintosh, theatre consultant for the rebuilding, describes the redecorated lobby space of 1990 as naff, a

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British term meaning naive or unsophisticated. This comment illuminates the difference in sensitivity to spatial semiotics evident between the changes of the early nineteen nineties and the lottery funded rebuilding. The Stafford-Clark era viewed the blandly modern decor of 1990 as a substantial improvement over the shabby state of the lobby. Apparently neither client nor architect seriously considered the semiotic implications of their decorating scheme. The planning for the Daldry era rebuilding resulted in an approach that demanded the decor communicate the essential character of the Royal Court.

Perhaps nothing expresses the different attitudes about the building so well as an e-mail that Graham Cowley sent in 1999 in reaction to reading an early draft of the first chapter of this study. Cowley wrote, "To say that without repair the building would need to be demolished is wild exaggeration. It was perfectly sound--it needed bits doing to it."<sup>39</sup> Technically, Cowley may be correct. However, to not acknowledge the many serious unaddressed building problems (the grid, the stage, the plenum, the shortage of workshop and office space, heating and electrical shortcomings, the inadequate lobby space) represents the type of short-term thinking that has characterized the building's history. The rebuilding program seeks to solve and eliminate those problems. This narrative, while perhaps

<sup>39</sup> Cowley, Graham, E-mail to author, 25 June 1999.
not establishing the imminent collapse of the Royal Court in 1994, has established that much more than bits needed to be done to assure the continued useful life of the building. The Olivier Appeal changes bring the narrative back to 1991 and the search for a new artistic director detailed in the first chapter. The historical survey complete, a detailed examination of the plan for the rebuilding of 1996-2000 remains to be completed.
Chapter Six
The Renovation Plan

From its inception, the English Stage Company at the Royal Court sought to make itself accessible to all segments of the community. In the nineteen nineties the condition of the theatre building limited the audience's access to the theatre company in several ways. After more than 100 years of frequent alteration and inadequate maintenance, the building's shortcomings for audience, production, and staff demanded attention. As part of the 1988 commemoration of the building's one hundredth birthday, Max Stafford-Clark and Graham Cowley initiated the Olivier Campaign to fund much-needed building improvements, including changes to the lobby, a cleaning of the front facade, and creation of a new rehearsal room. As detailed in the previous chapter, barely adequate funding ensured that these improvements ultimately resembled the type of piecemeal, band-aid repairs which plagued the theatre's history.

This pattern of inadequate building maintenance began to change in the late fall of 1994. A coalescence of circumstance and personalities produced the formation of a committee to inaugurate what became the nineteen nineties rebuilding of the Royal Court. The causal events include the need for a major building overhaul, the possibility of substantial funding through the new national lottery, the existence of staff-generated "pork-chop" plans for change
created during the Stafford-Clark era, and Stephen Daldry, a new, ambitious, visionary leader. Two major problems provided the plan's impetus: the decaying physical fabric of the Royal Court Theatre and the spatial inadequacies of the building as a producing theatre for the English Stage Company. The reconstruction program aimed to provide three types of accessibility: disabled access, economic access, and an easy-to-use, friendly environment. The initial specifications for the project fit on a single A-4 sheet of paper.

The reconstruction planning revealed an awareness that the present building represented a single moment in a narrative of the development of English theatre. The story of the English art theatre movement began more than one hundred years earlier, and it could easily continue for an additional one hundred years or more. The plan avoids creating a building which celebrates the present moment by attempting to make a monumental statement within the context of a modest building. Thus, the present moment in this discourse assumes a dialogic position with the theatre's past and future.

The architects conceived the plan as a palimpsest, one expression of which can be found in the view of the building down the side alley. This perspective can be read either synchronically (considering the relationship of elements at the present time) or diachronically (considering temporal
changes in elements and the connotation of those elements). Synchronically, the viewer begins with the past, the Victorian brick facade (wounded and repaired during World War II) and juxtaposes it with the present, the contemporary cor-ten steel of the new annex. Diachronically, the viewer combines the 1888 original, the remembered ghost of the 1904 annex, the violence of the blitz, the scarcity of the post-war repair and the powerful confidence of the new steel skin. This building facade reveals a mutable theatre company that paradoxically is always arriving, but never arrives. Steve Tompkins borrows the words of Jean Pierre Vincent in explaining the rationale for this dynamic approach: "Dogmatism is be to avoided at all costs. Architectural solutions are never definitive, because the theatre - like language or continents - is slowly but perpetually moving."¹

Having acknowledged the need for change, the Royal Court asked theatre consultant Iain Mackintosh in late 1994 to suggest a list of potential architectural firms capable of handling the project. Mackintosh's list of candidates included Rod Ham Associates, whose history with the Royal Court extended back to the George Devine era and who handled the architectural work paid for with the proceeds from the Olivier Appeal. Axel Burrough, a member of the Levitt-

¹ Tompkins, Stephen, address, Institute of British Architects, London, May 1996.
Bernstein architectural team, who together with stage designer Richard Negri, designed the Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester in 1976, and Tim Foster, chairman of the ABBT planning committee and designer of the Tricycle Theatre, possessed successful track records in theatre renovations. The remaining two candidates, Steve Tompkins of Haworth-Tompkins and Keith Williams of Pawson-Williams, represented young, promising firms likely to approach the project without preconceptions. The deadline for the first round of lottery grants compelled an accelerated search process. The committee chosen to interview the architectural candidates, also suggested by Mackintosh, included Mackintosh, Daldry, Graham Cowley, Production Manager Bo Barton, Finance Officer and then coordinator for the rebuilding Mark Rubinstein, and attorney and Board member Antony Burton. The Committee also invited Vikki Heywood, already selected to replace Cowley in April, to sit-in on the interviews.

One event during the process of choosing the architectural firm for the rebuilding project deserves discussion because it reveals the humility that underlay the abundant public confidence Stephen Daldry exuded during the entire process. On the BBC documentary on the rebuilding, Daldry asserted that the Arts Council "will do what I tell them to do," a comment which symbolized the confidence of
the young impresario. However, on the morning of the interviews with the architectural firms, Daldry called and reported himself too ill to attend. After a delay, the interviews proceeded without him. Recalling the 1995 interview process during the summer of 1998, several individuals reported that the Haworth-Tompkins presentation remained most memorable. Following deliberation, the committee reduced the field to two finalists, Levitt-Bernstein and Haworth-Tompkins. The committee chose to leave the final choice between the experienced firm and the impressive newcomers to Daldry, who would conduct a round of one-on-one interviews with the finalists.

After the meeting, Daldry, seriously hung-over from a night on the town, appeared and confessed to the committee that he had arrived halfway through the interviews and had listened to the proceedings from Graham Cowley’s office over the intercom. Daldry’s incapacitation appears to reveal his apprehension that if the project did not turn out well, he would be blamed for destroying the Royal Court. His frequent comment during the planning sessions, that the "Barbican contributed to the decline of one of the great

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2 Lan, David, dir., Omnibus: Royal Court Diaries, BBC1 25 October 1997.

theatres of the world," revealed his awareness of the risks involved when a company changes its theatre building.  

The Haworth-Tompkins presentation generated the most excitement among committee members. Although he described their presentation as "wacky," Graham Cowley reported that the quality of the ideas Haworth-Tompkins presented out-weighed their lack of a track record in theatre work.  

Mark Rubinstein recalls that their presentation was the "funniest" and that they were "obviously fired-up." Describing them as "exciting," Bo Barton was impressed with the process Haworth-Tompkins wanted to use in creating the project. She felt they placed a top priority on the function, tradition, and background of the Royal Court. They appeared ready to ask what the Royal Court wanted rather than tell the Royal Court what it would get.  

Daldry subsequently interviewed the two finalists. Several factors contributed to his final choice. Haworth-Tompkins's lack of preconceptions about how to renovate a theatre coupled with lead architect Tompkins's generally open-minded approach weighed in their favor. A Chelsea resident, Steve Tompkins regards the Royal Court as his

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4  Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 42.  
7  Barton, Bo, Personal interview, 20 July 1998.
neighborhood theatre and this personal affection with the building and company, outside of any official connection, proved attractive. The personal rapport between Daldry and Steve Tompkins also reinforced Daldry’s choice of the firm of Haworth-Tompkins.

Once the architects had been selected, a period of only slightly more than six weeks remained to create a feasibility study, a necessary component of the application to the Lottery Commission. The study was financed out of building reserve funds raised through the Olivier Appeal.

Working within this narrow time constraint, the team of architects, theatre consultant, and staff assembled a detailed look at the mechanics of the renovation plan. Stephen Daldry articulated two guidelines during the planning process: the need to "think expansively. What would we do if we could do whatever we wanted," and a preference to "hold on to what is valuable, then reinvent it." The "fear that we will drive out the ghosts" restrained the impulse to demolish everything and begin with a clean slate. The ghosts represent the many positive

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2 The original Lottery procedure involved feasibility study and application in one stage was infinitely quicker than the ponderous three stage process introduced soon after.

10 Lan, David, dir., Omnibus: Royal Court Diaries, BBC1 25 October 1997.
associations with the Royal Court’s outstanding history evoked by the tangible elements of the present building. Dame Sybil Thorndyke, quoted in chapter five, spoke eloquently about how the spirit of a theatre’s past productions clung, "like prayers" to the walls of the building. The plan consistently sought to strike a balance reflective of the radical tradition which constitutes a core element in the Royal Court’s identity.

The feasibility study sought to accomplish the following extensive list of improvements: to make the building structurally sound; provide modern fly equipment; increase wing space; improve get-in and scenery handling facilities; provide a flexible stage space which can be adjusted during performances; reinstate the forestage area to improve flexibility; renovate and redecorate the auditorium and replace all seating; increase floor area and ceiling height of Theatre Upstairs; enlarge the front of house areas and make the layout more sensible; improve catering facilities; improve sense of orientation to theatre for arriving audience members; provide additional office and dressing room space; improve connections between management department’s office space; provide a green room and meeting room; improve the acoustic separation between performance space and the outside; renew and upgrade all lighting, sound and wiring systems; upgrade heating and ventilation; improve energy efficiency; make the entire building wheelchair
accessible; provide facilities for disabled staff and patrons, and increase and modernize public toilet facilities. The final plan addresses all of the items on the list with the exception of the green room.

Theatre consultant Iain Mackintosh contends that "the quality of the eventual project was due to a large part of the urgency and freshness of the quick study. Subsequent lottery projects have been often dulled to death by second and third thoughts. The accountants and cost consultants took over: not at the Court!'\textsuperscript{11} The design team wanted a building that reflected the identity of the company, and the Royal Court allowed design decisions to drive the plan rather than money concerns.

With the promise of Lottery funding secured in the fall of 1995, the planning committee began a schematic design of the building, its history, and the needs of the future. Some of the problems delineated in the feasibility study had been identified early in the century. Many serious problems listed on the architect's report from 1946, such as the lack of a plenum under the stalls for air circulation, the need to replace both the grid and the entire stage structure, and to improve the heating and electric wiring, remained largely unaddressed. Despite the passage of almost fifty years, the Royal Court had failed to perform the list of improvements that should have been remedied prior to reopening after the

\textsuperscript{11} Mackintosh, Iain, E-mail to author, 6 February 2000.
bomb damage of World War II. To solve these problems, much of the building needed to be demolished and replaced. As a balance against the choice of razing everything but the facade, the Royal Court desired to retain as much its old character as possible, forcing the team to make hundreds of individual decisions about how much and where the building could be altered without sacrificing its intrinsic character. The videotaping of the reconstruction planning meetings enables the author to audit and examine the rationale behind important decisions.

The planning team for the reconstruction of the Royal Court confronted the problem that had stymied every attempt to build or rebuild a theatre on this site: a small, tightly constricted lot and no adjacent site onto which the theatre could expand. The Royal Court needed to devise a method to expand the building’s useable space. Apparently limited on all sides, the architects explored options for both building up and down within the limitations of current building codes. Issues of right-to-light for Court Lodge and Sloane Square House, the residential buildings on either side of the Royal Court, affected all the decisions on building height, including the fly tower, the raised roof of the theatre upstairs and the rehearsal room suspended over the dome. To gain Borough approval for their plan, the
Royal Court sought to avoid a backlash from residents.\textsuperscript{12} Architect Steve Tompkins reported on the need to practically shave layers of paint off the roof in order to provide adequate height to the building and simultaneously keep the building low enough to meet the necessary standards of daylight to reach the residential flats on both sides of the building.\textsuperscript{13}

The building program faced a diverse set of challenges. Despite the site limitations, more space for front-of-house and backstage needed to be found. To optimize use of existing space, rational order needed to be imposed on the piecemeal additions and alterations the building received over more than one hundred years. Shortcomings to the building's infrastructure and mechanical systems needed to be remedied. Regarding the chance to "sort out problems," Stephen Daldry related: "This is a strange and rather fantastic time in our history."\textsuperscript{14}

Although the Royal Court's audience-stage relationship consistently has won praise, most other aspects of the building have drawn condemnation. The lobby space, cramped

\textsuperscript{12} Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 50.

\textsuperscript{13} Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 26.

\textsuperscript{14} Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Stephen Daldry Tape 6.
and disorienting, could no longer compete with many fringe venues. On current ancillary space standards, the theatre contained about half the recommended provision of office space, dressing rooms, workshop space, and toilets. Wheelchair users lacked access to most of the building. The building's mechanical systems, ventilation, wiring, and heating were outdated and deficient. The stage technology lagged decades behind industry standards. The substandard nature of many past changes reflected an historic pattern: repairs inevitably lacked sufficient financial resources. For the first time in the building's history, the current rebuilding project provides adequate funding for building improvements; indeed, the generous funding from the "lottery enables poetic solutions to be affordable," according to Steve Tompkins.\footnote{Tompkins, Stephen, address, Royal Institute of British Architects, London, May 1996. Also Lan Tape 42.}

During 1991-1992, throughout all the discussions about the qualifications required of a new artistic director, the issue of the building received no attention. Nonetheless, the Royal Court's new leader almost immediately faced the challenge of raising an unprecedented sum to pay for capital improvements. Without question, Stephen Daldry represented the right man at the right time to lead the Royal Court during the most ambitious rebuilding project of its history. Daldry promoted the concept of what he called a "design
which celebrates the theatre’s identity as a contemporary crucible of radical ideas."¹⁶ Lead architect Steve Tompkins delineated the challenging balancing act of past and future necessary to realize such a plan: "[W]e need to draw a line between respect and sentimentality, for unless the weight of history is borne with a certain insouciance it can smother interesting possibilities at birth."¹⁷

Daldry steered the planning process for rebuilding the Royal Court through an extensive series of consultations between the design staff and both past and present Royal Court staff. Daldry relied on all of these people to function as sounding boards, whose responses to Daldry’s often radical ideas helped him to arrive at his final decisions. Daldry especially appreciated the intellectual rigor that his Oxford-educated lieutenant James Macdonald brought to the schematic design sequence. At the end of the process, Daldry commented: "Working in close collaboration with the artistic, technical, and management teams at the theatre, Haworth-Tompkins Architects developed a simple, resilient architectural language, preserving evidence of previous history and introducing unmistakably new

¹⁶ Daldry, Stephen, Unidentified document about the rebuilding scheme, up nd.

¹⁷ Tompkins, Stephen, address, Royal Institute of British Architects, London, May 1996. Also Lan Tape 42.
He praised the architects for digesting the theatrical tradition of the Royal Court through the period of consultation. The architect's sensitivity to how the staff used the building and how the building semiotically represented the company reflected a process and resulted in a plan likely to serve as a model for future theatre renovation.

Architect Steve Tompkins's desire to create a palimpsest in the current rebuilding project reinforces the idea of a narrative, of a theatre building and company revealed through a history of accretion. Tompkins explains, "What's important about the Royal Court is not so much bricks and mortar as a sort of narrative continuity. We are trying to plug into that narrative sense: what's the theatre's story, what is the line of history, what is the story onto which one can write the next chapter."

During the planning process Daldry posed an important philosophical question: "Is the theatre appropriating the

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18 Daldry, Stephen, Unidentified document about the rebuilding scheme, un dated.

19 Daldry, Stephen, address, Royal Institute of British Architects, London, May 1996. Also Lan Tape 42.

20 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 13.

company or the company appropriating the building?"22
Later in the planning process, he provided his answer: "We want a sense that the company is marking the building--this is us and we're changing this Victorian theatre."23
Throughout the videotaped planning process, Daldry, working in tandem with Steve Tompkins, combined theoretical vision with careful attention to physical details. As Tompkins observes, the operation involved more than the vision of its leaders: "I would be wary of describing the whole process as some meeting of two great minds--it doesn't work that way at all. I am simply the spokesperson for some twenty very talented designers working on the project." The rebuilding process reflects the valuable contributions of a team of theatre staff, architects, consultants, engineers, and builders.

Tompkins consistently articulates the architectural firm's mission in collaborative terms, describing a collective effort to identify and articulate the "magic ingredient" of the Royal Court.24 The architects began by taking a fresh view of the entire theatre and its surroundings. Utilizing a process which required detailed

22 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 39.

23 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 39.

consultation, ingenious planning, lateral thinking, and a realistic attitude to achieve compromise between conflicting demands, they created a design that embodied a narrative idea of the theatre which informed every level of decision making from big moves down to the last door hinge.\textsuperscript{2}

Steve Tompkins discovered a kinship with Stephen Daldry; both energetically confronted obstacles, pushing as hard as possible to surmount them. Tompkins explains: "When you push that hard, you don't always overcome the obstacle--it might mean a retraction, it might mean a redesign--but it usually leads to somewhere interesting... Stephen, being a theatre person, isn't aware of the more banal constraints under which most architects work...and that's very liberating as well, because it forces [the architect] to reexamine certain design orthodoxies."\textsuperscript{2}

The input of theatre consultant Iain Mackintosh proved crucial to the success of the design team. Steve Tompkins described it like this, "What's nice about Iain Mackintosh is that he is extremely knowledgeable about precedents, about the history of theatre, and he's able to draw on a vast body of previous knowledge, very little of which I share. So he's able to put ideas into context, and comment on their effectiveness. And he's done it all before, so

\textsuperscript{2} Tompkins, Stephen, telephone interview with Wendy Lesser, unpublished transcript, 24 July 1996.

\textsuperscript{2} Tompkins, Stephen, telephone interview with Wendy Lesser, unpublished transcript, 24 July 1996.

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he's a perfect foil to our advantages of not having done it before.27 Mackintosh's experience helped them avoid neophyte-type mistakes.

Although Daldry and Tompkins provided the engine behind the project, they shared the actual decision making with the entire team. Daldry made some decisions, others he delegated to architects or engineers. The need to gain approval from the Borough planning board dictated other choices. Most decisions reflected a consensus achieved during the period of consultantcy. The consensus appears to reflect a genuine shared vision rather than one achieved through a series of compromises that enable all committee members to secure their pet projects. An examination of the rationale behind the choices made in the design process provides important clues to understanding how the Royal Court of the nineteen nineties seeks to present itself to the world.

During the schematic design phase, acousticians conducted extensive testing to determine the degree to which sound penetrated the theatre from the outside. They also conducted tests to determine how best to keep the noise generated in office space and rehearsal space from intruding on performances. The architects believed that they solved this problem by separating the structural elements of these

parts of the building with gaps that muffle sound. The adjacent London Underground track provides a regular sound problem, although audiences tend to notice it only during quiet moments on stage. The acousticians decided that the best solution to neutralizing track noise will be to convince London Underground to pad and weld the sections of track when it comes to time to replace them, thus treating the problem at its source.\footnote{Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 33.} The auditorium’s excellent acoustics required no changes or improvements.

The plan called for the demolition and replacement of everything upstage of the proscenium as well as the adjacent building annex added in 1904 and the rehearsal room added in 1993 (in order to retain the texture of the original brick wall, the back wall of the theatre was repaired and supported without demolition). The desire to preserve the traditional actor-audience relationship contributed to the rejection of the radical option to remove the proscenium arch (it was demolished but rebuilt to provide greater structural support to both the rehearsal room and the raised flytower); therefore, the auditorium retains the most palpable sense of the pre-renovation building. The new building adds levels below the original basement in the area of the stage house, as well as raising the fly tower so that it becomes possible to stand when working on the grid. The
under-the-road addition enabled the architects to maximize the size and orientation of front-of-house space by moving necessary services into the new space.

Front-of-House

The primary problem with the front-of-house at the Royal Court resulted from a simple lack of space. Emden never included a real lobby. Instead he crammed toilets, bars, and box office into a series of corridors and stairways. The lobbies and staircases couldn't accommodate the audience comfortably. Historically, the building's first changes occurred in the lobby, a site of many subsequent changes. The Royal Court provided its patrons with an inadequate number of toilets that offered notably sub-standard conveniences. Additionally, first-time audience members found it difficult to establish a spatial orientation within the theatre. During the nineteen nineties the bars had been given a new look and improved to provide better service, but some audience members still found it a challenge to buy a drink at intermission because the bars were too small for the audience capacity. Until the early part of this decade, shabbiness characterized the Royal Court's lobby, and the architects regarded it as an area capable of undergoing major changes without a loss of identity to the building.

While examining drawings of municipal services located under the street in front of the building when preparing the
feasibility study, Steve Tompkins detected that very few services ran under the street because of the adjacent underground tunnel. Consequently, the Royal Court could colonize space under the roadway at a reasonable cost. Moreover, across the street and under Sloane Square, Tompkins discovered a redundant public ladies toilet. The Royal Court had colonized the vaults under the sidewalk already, and the opportunity to tunnel under the street and combine with the space in the ladies toilet accomplished two central objectives. First, it would make the building appear more accessible, because the Royal Court could finally expand beyond the confines of its building lot and, through the proposed glass structure in Sloane Square, extend welcoming arms to the Chelsea community outside its door. Secondly, the opportunity of operating a restaurant in the space rewarded the Royal Court with a new business capable of generating additional income.

Building under the road provided an opportunity to connect the Royal Court’s front-of-house to Sloane Square, generating the project’s central image: the Royal Court reaching out to welcome the city." During the ESC’s tenure in the building, staff, artists, and audience congregated on the steps and pavement of the theatre, a circumstance alluded to in numerous newspaper articles. The

"Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Anne Griffin Tape 5.
plan tangibly acknowledges that the Royal Court's true front-of-house extends beyond the building's brick facade onto the pavement. Capitalizing on the space beyond the facade promotes the exchange of energy between the city and the front-of-house, allowing each to become more permeable to the other. Consequently, the design facilitates a dialogue between the city and front-of-house which permits the building to breathe and expand. Tompkins believes that the ambiguous boundary between the theatre and the city provides the building with both a boost in energy and a sense of enigma.

The architects reinforced the permeability of the theatre and city in several ways, such as increasing the transparency between front-of-house and street by furnishing new glass front doors that maximize the pedestrian's ability to see into the building and reinstating windows in the facade that had been bricked in. The new building extends the public realm around the corner of the facade. A new door located on the alley provides direct access to the staircase leading into the bar/restaurant. On the second floor, the architects pierced the front brick facade, transforming a window into french doors, which enable

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31 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 4.
patrons to step out onto a balcony overlooking the square. Tompkins asserts that lowering the window sills on the second floor to allow for the balcony produced a secondary benefit of improving the verticality of the facade.  
Tompkins convinced the preservationists at English Heritage, whose approval was required due to the building’s historic listing, to overcome their original reluctance and agree to the change in the windows. The combination of the underground addition, the glass doors, the balcony, and the reinstatement of windows enables the Royal Court to extend a more welcoming message to the public.

The new design maximizes the available square footage for lobby space by moving the main toilet and bar facilities under the street. Coupled with increased transparency to the outside, the audience's perception of the lobby's size will be greater than the additional square footage might warrant. The new openness of the lobby area enables it to function like a three story foyer facilitating the audience's ability to relate to the three levels of the auditorium. The glass enclosed elevator and the new staircases provide points of reference that orient the audience to their location in the building.  

\[1\] Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 15.

\[2\] Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Anne Griffin Tape 6.
installation of elevators in the building make it accessible in both front and back-of-house to either staff members or patrons in wheelchairs. Nonetheless, Tompkins contends that "the eccentricity of the rooms [which make up the front-of-house] has not been completely designed out." For example, the cast iron supports for the dome cut through and define part of the staff office space, an arrangement unlikely to be found in new construction.

Despite the permeability of the facade, the plan seeks to create a sense of compression as the audience passes through the entrance vestibule, in order to generate a contrasting sense of release when they attain the auditorium. Similarly, while making improvements to the box office, the architects (in part following the advice of Peter Brook) desire to retain the perception of a pre-performance scrum at the ticket office. During a visit by the design team to Brook's Paris theatre, Brook told them that he believed that a crowd at the ticket office helped energize the audience prior to the start of a performance.

An example of the architect's concept of creating a palimpsest will be evident on the floor of the entry lobby.

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34 Tompkins, Steven, address, Royal Institute of British Architects, London, May 1996. Also Lan Tape 42.
35 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 15.

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The original tile floor, uncovered during demolition, bore scars from earlier changes to the lobby. The new floor, presenting neither a blandly new face nor a perfectly restored one, will incorporate old and new flooring so as to reveal the lobby floor's history of change and accretion.

The need for not-for-profit organizations to find other alternatives to government subsidies as a source of income represents a legacy of arts funding dating from the Thatcher era, and it is unlikely to be altered under the present Labour government. Chronically under-funded by the Arts Council, the Royal Court must increase earned income in order to optimize the future use of the lottery funded building improvements. The under-street space facilitates that goal.

Additionally, transferring bar and toilets to the space under the road provides, for the first time in the building's history, adequate toilet facilities for the audience while simultaneously increasing the formerly meager amount of space in the lobby. This win-win option both increased the size of the bar, the lobby, and the toilets and created an engine to generate earned income.

The relatively generous size of the lottery grant also made it possible for the restaurant space to be wired for lights and sound so that it can provide a third, cabaret-type performance space within the building. The first six productions in the reopened theatre do not include a
production in the restaurant area, and only time will tell how and if this option proves useful.

Judging by comment in the press, the Chelsea community's primary concern about the rebuilding focused on the restaurant addition and its potential effect on Sloane Square. Newspaper articles mention community member's fears that the Royal Court will try to turn the square into a Covent Garden-type space. Since at least the early nineteen sixties, several proposals have been made to allow some form of food and beverage service in the square, but without success. Current planning permission forbids the theatre from offering tables with waiter service within the square. Future changes which grant expansion of the restaurant into the square are likely to occur incrementally. The idea of offering some sort of food service in Sloane Square has appeared and reappeared several times over the past thirty years. Steve Tompkins's description of the restaurant's presence in the square indicates a modest effect: "The glass top that opens onto the square functions like a glorified piece of street furniture. It's not a piece of architecture at all." Permission to build this structure has yet to be granted by the borough of Kensington and Chelsea, in large part because of the Cadogan estate's fears.
that the theatre will attract undesirables to Sloane Square (owned by the estate).

The designers envision that audience members will regard the new lobbies as a transition space between city and theatre. Steve Tompkins asserts that, "[t]he real threshold between the world of the city and the magical world of the theatre is, in fact, upon entering the auditorium itself. So we have established a formal geometry for the drum wall through all three floors and emphasized its significance with bright color and texture," by inviting artist Antoni Malinowski to paint it. Simple, natural materials characterize other surfaces within the front of house, creating an understated atmosphere that Steve Tompkins describes as "comfortably astringent like a good public bar rather than a padded parlor." That sensible approach corresponds with the historic character of the theatre. It avoids the jarring collision of overly fussy decoration stuffed into a modest space, such as that which marred the most recent renovation of the Old Vic.

Auditorium

While the front-of-house demanded change, the auditorium of the Royal Court challenged the architects to make improvements while in Tompkins’s words, "protect[ing]

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the delicate ecology of the Royal Court." The auditorium and the front facade represent the most powerful visual images of the theatre. The subtle changes to the facade may pass unnoticed, and the ecology of the auditorium requires much subtlety in order to make needed changes while maintaining the atmosphere of a "knackered Victorian building that does new cutting edge work."

A comment by Steve Tompkins about the auditorium dome demonstrates his awareness of the dangers inherent in trying to improve or fix the original architecture: "The hanging of the dome is ugly, part of the daftness of the auditorium, but also part of its charm. We don’t want to lose the poetics of the space." While the surface elements of the auditorium lack individual value—bad textures, indifferent moldings, drab decoration—the sum remains iconographically potent. Audiences have become comfortable with the eccentricity of the space, and the design seeks to make changes without disturbing that snug idiosyncracy.

Consensus emerged that much of the value of the Royal Court’s auditorium derived from its status as a sacred

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38 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 42.

39 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 28.

40 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 10.
space. Historically the Greek and medieval eras conceived of sacrality as a necessary element of a theatre, and Stephen Daldry’s explanation of this concept in a newspaper interview could equally apply to theatre or church: "You intuitively know, when you walk into an auditorium, if its yielding, if its a sacred space--in which something extraordinary can happen--or if it is a dead space."41 The success of the Royal Court renovation may finally be judged on how well it maintains the sense of a hallowed universe which welcomes and fosters the creation of wondrous experiences. Consequently, little apart from finishes, better seating, and tweaked sightlines will be visibly changed forward of the forestage.

Sitting in the auditorium during a planning session, former artistic director William Gaskill observed a principal strength for a company such as the Royal Court: "Because it had a lot of the old-fashioned theatre in it, the plays were seen as being measurable against the greatest work of the past and it gave a certain authority [to the work]. The plays that are done here are important plays and not some sort of fringe work."42 In the Doty-Harbin book documenting the first quarter century of the ESC at the

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42 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, William Gaskill Tape 6.
Royal Court, Irving Wardle makes a similar observation.\textsuperscript{4} Gaskill's statement carried great weight in all discussions about how radically to change the audience-stage relationship.

Stephen Daldry made clear that economic considerations demanded that changes in the seating could not reduce the income the theatre earned from a full house.\textsuperscript{4} Also affecting decisions concerning seating was the desire to offer a wide range in ticket prices, ensuring that the Royal Court wouldn't exclude audience members economically. They chose to maintain the current house size because a larger house might alter the programming. They wanted to preserve the intimacy and fine acoustics that Richard Eyre praised in the feasibility study. As an example of the thoroughness of the process, Theatre Projects provided more than 19 alternative seating plans for the stalls before the planners reached a final decision.

The old Royal Court provided a comfortable audience-stage relationship but a somewhat uncomfortable situation in terms of seating and legroom. Audience comfort, while important, ranked lower on the list of priorities than other factors previously mentioned. Theatre consultant Iain Mackintosh and Stephen Daldry agreed that too much comfort

\textsuperscript{4} Doty/Harbin 41.

\textsuperscript{4} Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Stephen Daldry Tape 24.

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for the audience fosters a lethargic audience, which sits back and passively observes the production, making it difficult for the performers to engage the audience in the theatrical event. For economic and philosophic reasons, they rejected the idea of instituting democratic seating that rewards each member of the audience with perfect sightlines. Daldry's desire to include cheap seats resulted in the decision not to eliminate all of the sightline problems in the house. Given its imperfect view of the stage, obstructed vision seats can be offered at a lower price ensuring that the Royal Court remains accessible to a broad economic cross-section of British society.

Stephen Daldry's image of the ideal audience situation finds expression in Sickert's paintings of London music halls where the crowd virtually cascades from the galleries. These capacity audiences reveal socio-economic diversity in the auditorium with the audience leaning in slightly toward the stage. The palpable energy and excitement in these paintings demonstrate the importance of maintaining and enhancing an environment which nurtures the exchange of energy between audience and performers.

A resulting philosophical debate concerned the choice between benches and individual seats. Daldry and Mackintosh believe that the thigh-to-thigh seating of benches promotes

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"Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 13."
a more energized audience, while acknowledging that surveys reveal contemporary audience preference for individual seats. The final solution involved a custom-designed seat in which the arms could be folded up so that the seating appears to be benches. Audience members can choose whether or not to transform their individual seats. The seats themselves would be covered in leather, a comfortable, sturdy and sensual choice that seemed to reflect the nature of the Royal Court’s work. Since the leather will mark, the audience will be aware of both the evidence of those who previously used that seat and any marks they themselves leave. In that manner, the audience becomes an active participant in creating the future signs of the Royal Court’s palimpsest.

The decision to reinstate the curved back wall of the auditorium suggests that curved rows would fit more harmoniously into the stalls level of the auditorium than straight ones, even though straight rows give a larger seating capacity. Similarly, staggered seating improves sightlines but decreases capacity. Iain Mackintosh contends that straight rows increase the sense of tension in the auditorium in a positive fashion. A decision balancing these factors includes straight rows and staggered seating.

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"Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 46.

Mackintosh, Iain, E-mail to author, 6 February 2000."
Since Walter Emden originally provided straight rows in the stalls, that choice reflects the building’s history as well. The last row in the stalls, designed as a fixed bench within the curving back wall, functions in Steve Tompkins words "like the back seat of a bus." This becomes another aspect of the building’s eccentric identity.

The expansion of aisle width in the Dress Circle, a code requirement first raised during the 1904 alterations, resulted in a reduction in seating capacity on that level. The slips (the one row arms of the U) on the dress circle level remain. The new design offers additional flexibility in seating by providing for the possible reinstatement of slips on the upper circle level. Consequently, when the theatre is converted into an arena the audience will surround the entire performance area because the slips can be connected to the reconfigured assembly area. Panels on the walls behind the slips (which in 1920 became the source of amber light) now can be opened or closed to adjust the sense of enclosure within the auditorium.

The decision to maintain the basic structure of the 1888 auditorium did not preclude numerous minor alterations intended to improve individual aspects of the auditorium, such as increased legroom. The creation of a plenum under the

"Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 46."

"Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 46."
the stalls to improve air circulation enabled a change to the rake of the stalls floor, raising the back of the stalls and lowering the front. In the upper circle, an increase in the rake and an accompanying lowering of the tier fronts provided better sightlines. An adjustment to the basic stage height (the most recent in a series of historic changes of the height of the stage) also seeks to improve visibility.

The architects provide an interesting image for the decoration within the auditorium: "We describe it as an unmade-up face, so that the theatricality of each production can actually change the psychological chemistry of the space." The designers sought to allow the lobby and the auditorium to remain mutable, inviting designers and directors to include them in the world of individual productions by painting the "unmade-up face." That paint can then be washed away, restoring the face’s basic structure. While such changes had occasionally been made in the past, the current plan creates a system to facilitate such alterations. The architects and staff reached a consensus that the time had arrived to alter the brown paint chosen by Jocelyn Herbert thirty years before. The new color, variously described as vermillion, dark ox blood, or Venetian red achieves a sense of depth of surface because it

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includes three or four different layers of tonality. It also provides (unintentionally) a connection to the red which may have been one of the original interior colors.

The most difficult decision of the entire process appears to have been whether or not to retain the proscenium arch. Stephen Daldry championed removing the proscenium and turning the theatre into one large room. Irving Wardle's biography of George Devine reports that Devine also sought to create a one-room experience for the Royal Court emphasizing the new forestage through the creation of the assemblies (the entrances downstage of the proscenium moving through the former stage boxes). Daldry asserted that "[t]he logical extension of the work of the last forty years is the radical option [removal of the proscenium]. Juxtapose the theatre and the work. I would like the stage to respond in a radical way to the radical work. It's not an actor or writer's stage. This is a director's theatre." The writer David Lan made a similar comment after observing a meeting that brought together many Royal Court veterans: "The whole notion of writer's theatre is brilliant P.R. I wonder how deep that goes. The directors

51 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 46.

52 165.

53 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Stephen Daldry Tape 7.
are [the] most passionate about the theatre.\textsuperscript{54} The chronicle revealed in the videotaped meetings appears to support the contention that directors spoke most passionately about the theatre. The writers advocated a very conservative course. Many of the young writers wanted no changes to the building whatsoever, and they advised management to return the lottery funding altogether. They wanted their future plays to appear in the same theatre that witnessed the plays of previous Royal Court writers such as John Osborne, Caryl Churchill, and Edward Bond.

The strongest advocates for retaining the proscenium at a November 1995 meeting appear to have been William Gaskill, Bill Bryden, and Peter Gill. Gaskill (quoted earlier) and Gill both began their association with the Royal Court in the early days of the George Devine era. Gill asserted: "I am frightened of qualities that have made the theatre work very well, disappearing. The very intimate nature of the theatre, you hear the text very intimately, almost like film acting."\textsuperscript{55} Bryden spoke eloquently about the desirability of maintaining the excellent proportions of the human figure within the size of the proscenium opening.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, David Lan Tape 7.

\textsuperscript{55} Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Peter Gill Tape 7.

\textsuperscript{56} Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 6.
When at a later meeting Daldry and the architects exhibited a model of the theatre without a proscenium arch, the veterans quickly recognized the exciting possibilities of such a space, despite their reservations about choosing such an option. Clearly excited by the space, Jocelyn Herbert exclaimed, "Yes. This could work." During the meeting when the final decision was reached, Daldry appeared to convince everyone present that removing the proscenium represented the natural evolution of the Royal Court, both space and company. Daldry's desire to fashion the theatre within a single room also harkens back to the ideas of Jacques Copeau, whose ideas represented an important influence on George Devine's thinking at the time he assumed the role of artistic director for the English Stage Company.

When Daldry announced at the end of the meeting that a decision had been reached, the videotape reveals a visible increase in the participants' anxiety. Daldry then announced that he had decided to retain a permanent yet flexible proscenium. The palpable sense of relief on the meeting participants' faces confirms that most of them regarded the radical alternative as more frightening than exciting. In an interview during the summer of 1998, Daldry revealed that while aware that he convinced people intellectually of the feasibility of the radical option, he also knew that emotionally most of the participants were not ready for such a radical change.

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A hallmark of the new building will be the balance between continuity and change. A continuation of the old Royal Court, not a radically new one, opened in February 2000. Semiotically, that seems the most appropriate message for the Royal Court, a theatre which seeks to expand and improve British theatre, not to sever ties with the past and create one sui generis.

The building will feature a new proscenium arch, structurally stronger than the original in order to better support the increased weight of the taller stagehouse, the dome, and the new rehearsal room with its improved sound separation. The stronger yet smaller structural columns expand the proscenium opening by six inches on each side of the stage. The horizontal cross piece of the proscenium, made in two separate pieces that can be removed individually or together, provides flexibility that improves lighting angles and sight-lines in a production staged in the round, such as Daldry’s version of The Kitchen.

The decision to retain the proscenium focused the planners's attention to the area of the forestage that Royal Court insiders describe as the assemblies. One of the first changes George Devine made in 1956 involved removing the fronts of the stage boxes in order to gain an entrance downstage of the proscenium something like the historical

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7 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 46.

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proscenium doors. The term assemblies refers to this downstage entrance. Devine borrowed the terminology from his experience at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-on-Avon. That theatre possesses such a downstage entrance capable of moving large groups of actors quickly on stage. Devine’s directing experience there convinced him that such an entrance increased the usefulness of the forestage area. Forty years later, Devine’s makeshift assemblies remained an unresolved mess, because to use them actors needed to squeeze through a small door and negotiate both down and up stairs immediately prior to making their entrance. Such a clumsy situation made the assembly area problematic for large groups of actors to negotiate quickly. Devine’s perception concerning the additional flexibility achieved by the downstage entrance continues to be accurate, but the assemblies, prior to the rebuilding, remain distinctly awkward to use.

The philosophical choice to make both the stage house and auditorium available for colonization by designers provided an increased incentive to solving the problem of the forestage and the assembly’s entrance. A part of resolving the problem of this entrance involved rebuilding the area of the proscenium boxes. The refurbishment created a more specific, transparent structure with a flexibility to enable designers and directors to operate the forestage zone either as part of the set, as lighting positions, as
audience boxes, or as part of the galleries for productions in the round. Resolving the problem of the assemblies area required several additional changes including expanding the opening through the proscenium from back stage and equalizing the floor level from backstage to forestage making the assemblies easier for actors to negotiate.

The need for flexibility provides a key explanation for the choice to reconstruct the boxes and the extension up to the level of the upper circle galleries as simple metal platforms. The new material, not original but of the same architectural language as the stagehouse, generates an armature for designers to transform. Therefore, the boundary between the auditorium and stage can be weakened when needed or reinforced for more conventional staging. Haworth-Tompkins and Theatre Projects spent a year negotiating with the fire safety inspectors prior to convincing them that the new exhaust system in the stagehouse eliminated the need for a separate fire curtain. Many directors and designers had lamented that the awkward location of the fire curtain limited the placement of scenic elements.

Even after deciding to retain the proscenium, it remained desirable to offer an option that disengaged from a nineteenth century actor-audience relationship toward a more encompassing experience when needed, without sacrificing the specificity the proscenium provides. The solution proved to
be a system of hinged panels within the proscenium wall. Thus the space operates as a traditional proscenium theatre or it can be opened to provide a wider scope of vision that virtually extends from wall to wall. This configuration represents the closest the theatre comes to realizing the one room model sought by Daldry and advocated (in a different context) by Devine and Copeau.

The area behind the proscenium offers new high tech flexibility, and the slight increase in proscenium width improves sightlines. This area best expresses Daldry's desire to "keep and cherish the sensuality of the old while seeking the flexibility of the new." Since the fixed flat stage limits the versatility of the space, the new stage features long travel hydraulic lifts capable of easy shifts during a performance. The stage house and fly system are now much more sophisticated, and actual wing space was added stage left, the first wing space in the theatre's history. The new get-in (the backstage entrance for scenic elements) for the theatre will be at stage level and large enough to handle substantial pieces of scenery. The get-in area in the alley is enclosed so that late night changeovers will be less noisy to the neighbors and be protected from the weather.

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"Daldry, Stephen, address, Royal Institute of British Architects, London, May 1996. Also Lan Tape 42"
The technical options built into the stage house will enable the company to expand its stage design horizons. In part, all the new technology reflects the particular interest of Stephen Daldry in developing an expressive visual and aural design language. Given Daldry’s departure from the Royal Court’s management, the future development of a Royal Court design aesthetic becomes an open question.

During interviews with sound designer Paul Arditti and lighting designer Jo Towne, the author asked if they wanted the Royal Court to choose a play that could showcase the new technical capacities. Their response demonstrated that their loyalty to the Royal Court exceeded their desire to experiment with their new toys. Both thought the idea of choosing a play to display the technology "daft." They agreed that the needs of the plays will dictate when the technology gets utilized. If that means waiting a few years, so be it.” The Royal Court’s traditional first loyalty to the writer appears certain to continue after the February 2000 reopening.

The process of sorting out the technical arrangements backstage did create one serious instance of conflict between the Royal Court technical staff and theatre consultant, Theatre Projects. In the close-knit world of

"Arditti, Paul, Personal Interview, 21 July 1998. Towne, Johanna, Personal interview, 21 July 1998. In a separate interview Stephen Daldry also used the term daft to describe the idea that the theatre’s technical capacity might influence its play selection.
theater technicians, stories reporting problems with the technical set-ups that Theatre Projects created for the earlier renovations of the Savoy and Glynbourne theatres filtered down to the Royal Court staff.°° Jo Towne and Paul Arditti, who functioned as technical consultants on the rebuilding in addition to their regular staff production responsibilities, expressed a strong concern about whether or not Theatre Projects possessed a sufficiently current knowledge of technical standards to create the technical set-up the Royal Court desired. Towne and Arditti's concern with getting the details correct reflects Steve Tompkins's comment about the detailed technical involvement of the staff: "I think the Royal Court are probably unique, as a client, in the rigor and the knowledge that they display on the technical level."°¹ Theatre Projects addressed the technicians' concerns and resolved potential conflicts over the technical installation by adding Andy Hayles, whose knowledge of state-of-the-art technology complimented the experience of director Jerry Godden.°²

°° Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 16.

°¹ Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 46.

°² Interviews with several staff people, including Simon Harper, Paul Arditti and Johanna Towne conducted independently, provided the information and confirmation of this story.
A major improvement has been made in the dressing room, workshop, and office space located back stage. Demolishing the 1904 annex and building over the Ranelagh sewer enabled the architects to create a larger, more rational and space-effective layout for this part of the building. Haworth-Tompkins viewed these areas as a "home" for staff and actors; the domestic scale of the interior rooms they created invites the staff to personalize the area, literally transforming it into their back-of-house. The Royal Court’s dressing rooms no longer will be, in the words of Laurence Olivier, "slightly worse than Blackpool in '33." The famous backstage staircase, fondly evoked in many actor and staff reminiscences, has been reproduced in the new annex.

In terms of the semiotic messages the building gives the public, the details of this backstage space are largely unimportant to this study. To the public, the backstage areas of the building makes its strongest statement on the outside. Steve Tompkins explains, "One thing that has changed a lot is that the external form of the annex in the alleyway is much more cogent...the idea is, that we express that as a series of terraces down the alleyway, getting less formal as we work from the classically Victorian brick front towards the industrial back...finishing with an untreated


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red cedar. "The cor-ten steel which functions as the skin of the annex will rust to a patina. The skin manifests three technical functions: beginning as a mesh shuttered sunshade, it also functions as a sponge to deaden sound into and out of the building, and furthermore, the contemporary form of the annex functions as an architectural device to distinguish clearly the new parts of the building from the old ones."

Theatre Upstairs

Constructed during the Barker-Vedrenne era as a rehearsal room, the Theatre Upstairs presented a different set of challenges from those in the Theatre Downstairs because the space was not originally intended to function as a theatre. Over time it has functioned in several different capacities, including as a workshop during the building's period as a cinema. In 1952 the London Theatre Guild had Robert Cromie refurbish the room so that it served as a supper club for Guild members. After the departure of the Guild, Clement Freud operated the supper club successfully and independently of the English Stage Company until 1963. Nicholas Wright spearheaded its transformation into a studio theatre. Since the space had never been intended to

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"Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 15."
function as a theatre, it presented several intractable difficulties for designers, directors, and technicians. For most productions, the ceiling of the Theatre Upstairs was too low. The space was further constrained by columns and changes of floor level. Moving props and scenery into the space presented another problem because its get-in was by block and tackle from the street.

The design team sought to retain the unique identity of the Theatre Upstairs reflected in its position at the top of the building. The team wanted to reinforce "a sense of climbing up the stairs and arriving directly into an attic room, which must work as a room." Therefore, the designers envisioned the Theatre Upstairs as a domestic room in which the technology for a studio theatre comfortably fit. Haworth-Tompkins endeavored to use the fabric of the building to provide an environment for the Theatre Upstairs in order to avoid creating a big, neutral black box.*7 As they achieved in the Theatre Downstairs, the designers expressed the theatre's decorative manifestation through the interesting part of the technology of the room, such as the wood and brick surfaces, the beams and the pitch of the roof. Current artistic director Ian Rickson, who actively

* Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 14.

*7 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Steve Tompkins Tape 14.
participated in the design process when he served as a Daldry lieutenant, described the ideal environment as expressing a "feel neither rural nor industrial, a little warehousey, a little lofty."*

The solution to the problems of the Theatre Upstairs involved a change to the roof line into one more like a hip roof to maximize the room's cubic footage. Here, as elsewhere in the building, the architects largely eliminated shifts in floor height through a new rationalized floor plan. A special elevator located on the outside of the building moves scenery from the street up to the level of this attic room, a marked improvement over the block and tackle previously used.

The Royal Court's decisions in this rebuilding project incorporate architectural signs that reveal a desire for both permeability and mutability in the building on Sloane Square. The glass doors, reinstated windows of the facade, and acknowledgement of the front steps as lobby space lure the public to enter and join the adventure inside. The under-road restaurant with its glass reach into Sloane Square represents the theatre's embrace of the city and the culture-at-large within which the Royal Court functions. This openness becomes both an invitation and a challenge.

In Stephen Daldry's words it represents "a design which

*Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Ian Rickson Tape 31.

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celebrates the theatre's identity as a contemporary crucible of radical ideas. Entering that crucible, the audience also risks transformation.

In the auditorium, the new steel construction in the assembly area invites transformation as well as provides an opportunity to either erase or reinforce the proscenium arch's division of auditorium and stage. In its neutral state, this modern steel, like the exposed Victorian cast iron that supports the balconies, provides a muscular heft to this work place. The message that the Royal Court functions as a home to workers juxtaposes the theatre with the luxurious residences of its Chelsea neighbors. Surrounded by symbols of capital success and excess, the Royal Court reminds its visitors that labor produces capital and that theatre derives its value, its capital, from its workers: the writers, actors, designers, directors, and technicians. The building is a work-place. By implication the refurbished Royal Court suggests that audiences seeking mere entertainment should look to a West End playhouse.

After substantial delays, the Royal Court reopened on 17 February 2000 with a production of a new play by Conor McPherson entitled Dublin Carol. A through evaluation of any rebuilding program requires a three to five year period of study. However, the immediate reaction will be described

"Daldry, Stephen, Unidentified document about the rebuilding scheme, up nd."

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and some prospects for the future of the company will be envisioned in the conclusion.
Conclusion
17 February 2000 and After

It needs to be stressed that the entire project for the rebuilding of the Royal Court involved tremendous risks that all the care taken during the design process could not negate. The design, outlined in the previous chapter, ventured to maximize change without losing the building's "Royal Courtness." Much of what was the home to the most successful art theatre in history disappeared. No prototype existed for the radical rebuilding that emerged in 2000. In 1888, several experienced architects existed who specialized in theatres (such as Walter Emden, who was certainly not the best of these), and the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods witnessed the building of many exceptional theatres. By contrast, no architects currently specialize in purpose-built theatres, and only a few have had more than limited experience in the historical restoration of theatres. Most theatres built over the last 50 years have proven to be disappointing, mediocre pieces of architecture that have rarely created the "sacred space" that Stephen Daldry desired. Given the soulless quality of most post-World War II theatres, the odds favored the failure of the rebuilding program; yet, the rebuilding succeeded. How did it happen?

The Royal Court redevelopment project boasted crucial assets. The National Lottery provided a brief occasion for groups to receive funding of a magnitude that could not
previously have been imagined. Since the Royal Court received its gift, politically pressured changes in the Lottery process virtually guarantee that future projects will not receive such largesse.

The supervisory team proved to be exceptional. Project leader Stephen Daldry offered a sophisticated visual aesthetic grounded in both a practical and theoretical understanding of the stage. A visionary risk-taker, Daldry's participation spanned the entire process from grand design concepts to minute details of decor and construction. In Stephen Tompkins (and all of the architects of Haworth Tompkins), the Royal Court found a complementary group of equally visionary architects. They willingly wrestled with a practical, aesthetic, and theoretical discussion of theatre in the abstract and of the Royal Court in particular. In Iain Mackintosh, the project profited from a theatre consultant with experience running a theatre and an extensive historical and practical understanding of theatre architecture.

Finally, the Royal Court managed the construction process effectively, in large share because of the decision to hire Tony Hudson as project manager. An architect capable of sensitive participation in the intellectual debate, he also exhibited a pragmatic understanding of construction issues. Joining him was a former theatre production manager, Simon Harper, who demanded that the
functional needs of theatre technicians be factored into the decision-making process. The design process also featured extensive consultations with technical experts, combined with careful attention to the input of past and present users of the facility, insuring that expertise served sensible goals.

The Royal Court staff moved back to Sloane Square between 4 and 9 February 2000. Simultaneously, the production staff mastered the new technical system and prepared for the opening performances. On 17 February 2000 the Royal Court witnessed the first preview of *Dublin Carol* by Conor McPherson in the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs and on 21 February 2000 Kia Corthron's *Breath, Boom* received its first preview in the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs. The major national daily newspapers greeted the reopening with almost unqualified praise. Old timers such as Jocelyn Herbert, William Gaskill, and Max Stafford-Clark also praised the new building.1 The Royal Court's audience enthusiastically endorsed the rebuilding. Artistic Director Ian Rickson commented that "[t]he process of moving-in has been empowering."2 Euphoria sustained the staff through the

1 Cowley, Graham, Personal interview, 22 February 2000. Cowley, while admiring the new facility, admitted feeling sentimental about the loss of the number one dressing room and the changes to what had once been the rehearsal room where Shaw met Ellen Terry.

final weeks of eighteen-hour days necessary to meet the
much-postponed opening night.

Initially, the plan appears to have realized all of its
goals, an amazing achievement. The environment offers a
welcome home for the ghosts of Royal Court past, a work
place for Royal Court present, and the option for change by
Royal Court future. Using the architectural concept of a
palimpsest that blends elements from several periods in the
building's history, the present Royal Court locates itself
as a single point in a continuum of expansion and change.
It is neither wholly new nor reconstructed and old. The
building offers future users the opportunity to change the
space as its use requires. The flexible technical
installation will permit performances in virtually any part
of the building (subject of course to meeting safety
requirements). The future will reveal if the public's
immediate embrace of the new building continues. Through
its glass doors, the new Royal Court beckons the audience to
come inside from the street. New bars and food service
tempt them to stay and spend money. Will such amenities
provide the anticipated boost to the company's bottom line?

Hugh Pearman in The Sunday Times praises Steve Tompkins
and Haworth Tompkins's approach to the building: "Their work
is part of a growing architectural movement that might be
described as New Austerity. The trick is restraint: to
achieve your effects by stealth rather than showmanship.

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This is high architecture, serious stuff, in the crafts-based tradition of, among others, the celebrated post-war Italian architect Carlo Scarpa. Paul Taylor expresses the strongest reservations about the building: "I worry that some of the contradictory qualities of the unrefurbished Court (radical theatre camouflaged as a conventional Victorian playhouse) will be lost in a venue that now seems almost too curatorially post-modern and knowing about its identity." Taylor apparently worries that the building's palimpsest may undercut the dialectic of a radical company in a conventional building. Not everyone agrees. Pearman, in contrast writes that he finds a greater sense of tension between building and company, "[i]t feels surprisingly provisional and edgy, where it used to feel just down at heel."

Viewing the Royal Court from Sloane Square, the building's facade looks much the same, but somehow presents extra strength. The front entrance gains emphasis from a short, central flight of steps directing the public to the glass doors. Flanking the stairs, a platform about 18


inches high (ideal for sitting) stretches to both edges of the building, inviting the public to lounge in front of the building. Therefore, the new entrance offers a subtle suggestion that the front of house begins on the pavement.

The removal of the entrance canopy, coupled with the change to the first floor windows that converted them into doors that open onto the small balcony, does improve the building’s verticality, as Tompkins predicted. The neon signage rightly emphasizes the individual production and the name Royal Court. The modest neon sign that announces the Jerwood Theatres at the Royal Court ought to assuage any remaining misgivings that the Jerwood Foundation’s three million pounds in sponsorship money purchased the Royal Court’s identity. The height added to the roof of the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, while noticeable, remains largely unobtrusive. Around the corner of the building on the alley between the theatre and the Underground station, a neon sign, "bar," tempts patrons to utilize the side glass entrance doors and to travel either down to the bar or up a few stairs into the lobby. Looking through the new iron

*I don’t intend to enumerate the first night glitches, though truly they were few in number, especially considering the tight schedule. But ironically, this writer’s theatre managed to light all of the neon signage except the section with playwright Conor McPherson’s name.

Not only theatre patrons. On opening night I enjoyed a conversation with two women who saw the sign for the bar, and were sufficiently intrigued to enter the building. They were pleasantly surprised to discover themselves in the midst of the opening night party.
gate that limits access down the alley, the steel cladding clearly delineates the new additions from the original brick facade, without jarring the eye.

After crossing the street to enter the theatre, patrons are greeted by the red drum wall, painted by Antoni Malinowski, as they pass through the doors and into the lobby. It frames the open wooden counter that serves as the box office, creating some tension by juxtaposing a curve (the wall) and a straight line (the box office). The variety of textures—mosaic tile, brick, wood, glass, steel, and plaster—generates a lively environment. Signs on either side of the curved red wall identify the doors leading to the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs’s circle. The glass-clad elevator shaft hugs the wall to the right. Behind the five-level glass and steel tube, a larger staircase with exposed brick walls travels up to the balcony level and then continues up to the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs.

Standing to the immediate left inside the front doors, a staircase, with plaster walls bearing ghostly reminders of past painting, turns a corner and disappears. Traveling up that stairway, one curls around into the intimate, but not cramped, balcony bar. The red drum wall (similar but not identical to the one downstairs) orients the patron to the entrance to the auditorium on balcony level. Doors on the front of the building provide access to the new outdoor balcony, maintaining a sense of the facade’s permeability to

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the outside. At the far end of the balcony bar, one can look over the parapet on to patrons entering the side door and negotiating the stairs to the stalls and main bar/restaurant.

Returning to the pavement entrance, patron’s turning right rather than left travel down stairs to the stalls level. The space above this staircase extends up to the ceiling of the balcony lobby. To the right, Malinowski’s third variation on the red drum wall provides orientation for the entrance to the stalls. The coat check room stands to the immediate right. To the left, one chooses between either a small bar or descending a further set of stairs, bringing the patron face-to-face with the bookstall. Turning right first brings one to the main bar and a room filled with tables, and then, against the far wall, the entrance to the main toilets. This underground room suggests the airy crypt under a contemporary church. Above the bar area, glass paving blocks filter a shifting pattern of light and shadow, reminders of the world on the pavement outside.

Returning again to the pavement entrance and following the curve of the red drum wall around to the right leads to both the elevator and a set of stairs which travel up to the balcony bar. Continuing up this staircases’ series of switch backs, the stairs narrow, and the warm brick walls
change to wood painted black. This darker, narrow stairway travels up to the attic-room Jerwood Theatre Upstairs.

Entering the auditorium on any level, the deep red walls (darker and less vibrant than Malinowski’s drum wall) provide an enveloping, almost womb-like, experience, and the curves of the circle and balcony stand tensely juxtaposed to the soldier-straight rows of the stalls seating. The new leather seats offer both comfort and firm support. The new steel assemblies, in the area of the former stage boxes, blend in with the neighboring proscenium and offer opportunities for mutability. The hub of the auditorium remains the stage. The new tier fronts contain ghosts of the Grinling Gibbonsesque swags that adorned the previous tier fronts. Casts taken from the walls and ceiling before demolition enabled duplication of all of the remaining plaster work. When the house lights dim, the auditorium disappears, focusing the patrons’s attention on the stage, an ideal situation for a theatre company dedicated to serving the writer.

In an end-of-year article, Michael Billington remarks on how the Royal Court’s previous year of virtual homelessness served to reinforce its importance: "But 1999 revealed how much our theatre depends on the Royal Court. With the building awaiting completion and the exiled company doing a relatively brief West End season, there was a huge
gap in the new play market."* Maintaining its focus on its fundamental objective, to produce the best new plays available, remains the greatest challenge facing the Royal Court. Rickson’s choice to reopen with a relatively low key homecoming rather than a gala event suggests that the Royal Court’s focus remains on its mission.

Amidst a society whose faith in words has been confronted by the technological innovations that accompany the move into expanding cyberspace, the Royal Court’s mission to keep playwrighting in the center of the cultural debate and continue to provide an attractive forum for a broad range of writers presents enormous difficulty. Conor McPherson’s poetic Dublin Carol, a sometimes painful exploration of alcoholism, challenges the audience and surmounts such a test. In a recent interview in The Guardian, Rickson enunciates his goals "to present plays that are politically exploratory and formally inventive."

The Royal Court allows the writers to set the debate by following their interests, and if recent plays have not been overtly political, Rickson notes that "we’re living in times that are preoccupied with interiority."*

The two changes of management during the nineties proceeded very smoothly, perhaps a sign that the Royal Court


truly has achieved institutional status. One of the potential pitfalls for the future can be found in the past record. When the Royal Court has developed and sustained successful partnerships with several writers simultaneously, it often reduces the number of opportunities for new writers to get a production, especially in the Theatre Downstairs. Such a situation occurred in the late sixties and early seventies, a period when young writers felt locked out of the Royal Court. To a lesser extent at the end of the Stafford-Clark era, limited production opportunities also marginalized the work of new writers. The current Royal Court management apparently faces a different problem. In a November 1999 interview, Timberlake Wertenbaker, who established her writing career at the Royal Court during the nineteen eighties, complains about her current feelings of estrangement from the theatre, "I now feel absolutely homeless. I am currently writing a play for the Court, and Ian Rickson has been very good about keeping touch, but I don't have the sense of a guaranteed production that I did with Max."\(^\text{10}\) If the Royal Court guarantees productions of plays by established writers (as Wertenbaker clearly would like), it compounds the difficulties of new writers and risks passing up a good play by a new writer for a possibly

inferior play by an established Royal Court writer.\textsuperscript{11} What loyalty does each side owe the other? Ian Rickson makes this comment, "It needn’t be dichotomous. We have plays by Caryl Churchill and David Hare that we are planning to produce. I want to achieve a mix, not in a democratic bland way, but in a creative way."\textsuperscript{12}

The second major challenge of the next few years remains the difficulty of obtaining sufficient financial resources to sustain the Royal Court. The company must complete redevelopment fundraising and refocus on regular operations within its rebuilt home. The Royal Court faces three distinct strands in its funding problem. First, they must cover the cost overruns that accompanied the final set of delays to the building project. Although the Royal Court met its original Lottery mandated 25 per cent funding target (approximately £7m), the postponements created additional costs. Most of the money to pay for the expenses associated with the first three delays has been raised through a second round of solicitations from previous donors. The final reckoning will require a third round of fundraising likely to be hampered by a profound sense of donor fatigue compounded by the failure of many Lottery-funded projects,

\textsuperscript{11} An example from the past would be the Wright-Kidd regime’s decision to program David Storey’s Mother’s Day because they thought an established writer would guarantee box office success. The production flopped and undercut confidence in their judgement.

\textsuperscript{12} Rickson, Ian, Personal interview, 25 February 2000.
such as the Royal Opera House and Sadler’s Wells, to raise their 25 per cent share. The result is too many groups chasing the same few donors.

Secondly, the Arts Council encourages English arts organizations to seek non-governmental funding sources; however, England lacks the tax incentives for donors that propels the American system of private and corporate support. Furthermore, fundraising efforts aimed at corporations continue to draw criticism from many people associated with the Royal Court. Timberlake Wertenbaker told The Guardian late in 1999, "I also resigned from the Royal Court board because I was deeply unhappy. It was partially because of the increasing encroachment of private sponsorships, which I passionately believe is dangerous for new writing--partly because of seemingly trivial things like the new leather seats. Every time I took up a cause, it was lost; and I began to feel like Don Quixote still talking about the age of chivalry...I began to feel anachronistic." Wertenbaker’s comments suggest that she (and perhaps others from her generation) feels alienated from the current Royal Court in a similar way to the alienation that Jocelyn Herbert, Lindsay Anderson, and

13 The Labour government is considering changes to the tax code that would encourage such charitable giving.

others felt during Max Stafford-Clark's era. Generational change is never easy.

The third funding problem concerns the chronic underfunding of the Royal Court by the Arts Council. While the media and most of the theatre community recognize the Royal Court's enormous role in promoting new writing for the theatre, the Arts Council funds the company like a regional theatre. Ian Rickson registers this complaint with Michael Billington in The Guardian: "We're subsidized to do eight shows a year when in reality we do double that number. Our grant of £980,150 is actually lower than that of many regional reps. We're also delegated to the LAB [London Arts Board] at a time when we're an international theatre." 15 For more than a decade, the Royal Court has maintained the profile of the most exciting theatre in London, but it has yet to persuade the Arts Council to provide the cash to match its achievements. New head of the Arts Council, and former Royal Court council member Gerry Robinson has asked for large increases in the national budget for arts funding. It remains to be seen if the new Labour government provides additional subsidies.16


16 When the Arts Council gave the building campaign a supplemental grant of 2.5 million pounds, the Royal Court and Robinson were accused (probably unfairly) of cronyism, so Robinson will need to be careful of appearing to favor the Royal Court.
One form of subsidy must be reduced: the subsidy by staff and artists who work for wages at the low end of the industry pay scale. The salaries paid to employees involved with the redevelopment project, because they reflected the standards of the building trade, greatly exceeded those paid to regular Royal Court staffers. Stephen Daldry addressed this issue in a staff meeting during the rebuilding: "We are operating like a national theatre but paying wages on a fringe theatre basis." This disparity created some genuine unhappiness among the staff, and Ian Rickson will need to address the unresolved issue of the need for substantial increases in salaries and benefits if the Royal Court is to attract and keep the high calibre staff it needs.

As one of the most technically complex theatres in London, the Royal Court now will need to attract and pay more sophisticated technicians; otherwise, it will never be able to capitalize on the new options the rebuilding has supplied. The sea change in technical capabilities from a simply functional facility to an extremely sophisticated one will place increased demands on staff members Jo Towne in lighting and Paul Arditti in sound. The building has been wired to provide great technical flexibility regardless of the individual stage-audience relationship or where in the

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17 Lan, David, Raw Footage of Planning Meetings for Royal Court Theatre, no day or date stamp, Tape 19.

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building the performance occurs. Stephen Daldry told The Independent, "There seems to be a very nice space under the main stage. You could have a great little 200-seat courtyard theatre down there. Just make it a rough space - some chairs, hang a few lights." Exploiting such a performance space poses a much greater challenge than simply mounting another production in one of the existing theatres. Maintaining such equipment presents the staff with an additional challenge. Daldry identifies a potential pitfall for large lottery-funded projects: "[We must] avoid creating great kitchens with no food to cook." The importance of the rebuilt theatre will be greatly diminished if the Royal Court doesn't receive sufficient funding for its productions and staff salaries.

Technical finesse represents both an opportunity and a trap. Will there be pressure on the company to justify the wisdom of spending twenty-six million pounds on fewer than five hundred theatre seats (a cost of more than fifty thousand pounds per seat)? If the technical capabilities drive the artistic decision making, then the focus on new writing could waver. The current technical staff's whole-hearted commitment to meeting the needs of the play-text first, exploring the technical capabilities of the building

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19 Daldry, Stephen, address, Royal Institute of British Architects, London, May 1996. Also Lan Tape 42.
only on an as-needed basis, demonstrates a pledge to the company’s ideals that is both admirable and noteworthy. Paul Arditti’s hope that it might be years before a play arrived that would require the new hydraulic stage, and Stephen Daldry’s assertion that it would be "daft" to allow the desire to utilize the technical capabilities to encourage the company to change its traditional design aesthetic for a more technically flashy one is reassuring because it suggests that serving the writer remains the theatre’s number one priority.

The design work on the first two productions in the renovated building proved disappointing. One theatre person told me that he had initially thought, because of budget constraints one had designed Dublin Carol. Rae Smith’s design made an ugly green carpet the central focus of a largely illogical room. Excessive realistic set dressing suggested that the play was a slice-of-life drama, detracting from the effectiveness of the actors’ work and the play’s poetic nature and contributing nothing to the success of the production. The design for Breath, Boom also failed to support the play. Many staff members privately lamented the mediocre design concepts of the new productions. The absence of a reliable visual aesthetic cannot be disguised as budgetary limitations.

Artistic Director Ian Rickson finds inspiration in terms of a visual aesthetic from the Jocelyn Herbert period.
of the Royal Court (1956-1975) and he believes "[t]hat simple, elegant language is the best sort for new plays."\(^{20}\) Rickson describes Rae Smith, designer of Dublin Carol, as "a contemporary Jocelyn Herbert."\(^{21}\) Based on that set, such a comment appears so wrong-headed as to call into question both Rickson's understanding of Jocelyn Herbert's design work and his understanding of the expressive possibilities of scenic design. The Royal Court need not recreate Herbert's aesthetic, but it must find a governing point-of-view about design. As a company, the Royal Court risks failing its writers if it fails to improve its design savvy substantially.

Whether the bar/restaurant ever successfully functions as a cabaret theatre space, providing an exciting new facet to the company's identity, may depend on the Royal Court assuming direct control over the bar/restaurant rather than leasing the operation to an outside operator as it does currently. Stephen Daldry says that he is "most worried about the consequences of having a hybrid franchise situation in the bar." He strongly believes that the Royal Court needs to manage the bar/restaurant directly.\(^{22}\) While the Royal Court would need to master a different business,


\(^{22}\) Daldry, Stephen, Personal interview, 22 February 2000.
failure to do so would make the expenditure on technical infrastructure a waste of funds. Here again no definite plan exists to capitalize on the building’s technical capabilities.

Stephen Daldry was an exceptionally charismatic public leader for the Royal Court; his cordial press relations stand in marked contrast with those of most Royal Court artistic directors. That successful relationship contributed substantially to the company’s success during the nineteen ninties. Daldry’s willingness to exploit design technology also contributed to an additional sense of excitement for Royal Court productions. Although Ian Rickson has the advantage of being a more typical Royal Court artistic director, (a director whose work serves the writer and doesn’t draw attention to itself), such a low key approach does not create media excitement. Without the enhancement of personal charisma, will he be able to turn an unlikely event such as the opening night of The Chairs into an occasion for both theatrical cogniscenti and A-list members of London society, in the way that Daldry did? Thus far he has continued Daldry’s good press relations, but will he maintain that cordial relationship when the pressures of fundraising, and the disappointment over bad notices (which inevitably will come) combine to create an antagonistic attitude toward the press such as the Royal Court has had since George Devine?
A final statement from Ian Rickson suggests that the Royal Court will continue to operate as a transgressive organization. While relaxing over a beer before a performance, Rickson made this prescient comment: "The warmth with which the building has been greeted and the consensual quality of the last week is all wonderful, but is it too safe? Is the approval something to be kicking against? It's too easy to sit here and enjoy the Royal Court's legacy." I cannot imagine any other theatre's artistic director complaining about receiving too much positive feedback. Rickson's comments create a delicious sense of anticipation for the Royal Court's next transgressive explosion.

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Stephen Berwind was born in Rockville Centre, New York, on 30 January 1952, to J. Christopher Berwind and Virginia Latta Berwind. The youngest of six children, he has four sisters, Joanne, Diane, Judy, and Christine, and a brother John. He grew up in Lynbrook and West Islip, New York, before he was graduated from West Islip High School in 1970 with a New York Regents diploma.

Berwind holds a bachelor of arts degree from Wake Forest University (1974) where he was elected to membership in Phi Beta Kappa, Omicron Delta Kappa and Lambda Alpha, and a master of fine arts degree in directing from the University of Washington (1977).

For almost twenty years prior to entering the doctoral program at Louisiana State University, Stephen Berwind worked as both artist and administrator in the theater. In New York he served as the Producing Director for Theatre at St. Clement’s where he produced three seasons of new American plays off off Broadway. At St. Clement’s he directed Chainsaws and The Guitarron. He worked with writers on new plays at New Dramatists, the American Renaissance Theater and St. Clement’s. He directed for the Depot Theater in Westport, New York.

He worked on the administrative staff of the Pittsburgh Public Theater, Pittsburgh Symphony Society and the
Pittsburgh Center for the Arts. While living in Pittsburgh he spent two and one-half years writing theatre reviews and feature articles for the Greensberg Tribune-Review as a stringer. In Pittsburgh he was co-founder and producer for the Portable Theater Co. For the Bach Choir of Pittsburgh he directed the actors in the performance of Passion with Tropes by Don Freund and for the Pittsburgh Symphony he created the script and directed the actors in a concert entitled Tchaikovsky in Love which was based on the composer’s relationship through correspondence with his patron Nadia von Meck.

Most recently he directed Jeffrey M. Jones's 70 Scene of Halloween for the theatre department at Louisiana State University.

He has read papers at the Mid-America Theatre Conference in 1998 and 1999, and at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education in 1998, 1999, and 2000. He has also read papers for the Pacific Coast Conference on British Studies in 2000 and the Comparative Drama Conference in 2000.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate:  Stephen D. Berwind

Major Field:  Theatre

Title of Dissertation:  A Cultural Genealogy of the Royal Court Theatre: The Renovation of a Building and an Ideal

Approved:  

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:  

March 20, 2000