

LISTED BUILDINGS IN THE HIGHLAND REGION

TITLE Ness Walk, Eden Court Theatre including Sculpture		DISTRICT Inverness
MAP REFERENCE NH 66315 44731	PARISH Inverness Burgh	PHOTOGRAPHED
Item No 219A		CATEGORY A

Date of Listing 27.07.04

1973-1976. Architect: Graham Law, Law & Dunbar-Nasmith (LDN), Theatre Consultant: John Wyckham, Main Contractors: Crudens Ltd. Scene dock addition, Hector Macdonald Associates, 1981; 1990s auditorium refurbishment, LDN. Visually stunning 3-tiered new theatre complex consisting of stage, auditorium, restaurant, bar and foyer spaces linked to pre-existing 19th century Bishop's Palace to N. Public area facing riverfront steps back in 2 tiers. Bottom tier (housing largest main foyer, restaurant and bar) consists of 6 hexagonal glazed projections with slated hexagonal pitched roofs. 2nd tier (housing smaller 1st, 2nd and upper circle foyers) consists of 6 projecting glass walls with pitched slate roofs. Foyer and staircases, suspended from the cantilevered plant-room above, are encased within hexagonal glass walls and create complex of arresting internal spaces which provide dramatic views of River Ness. 3rd tier, enclosing upper part of horse-shoe shaped auditorium, rises dramatically above slated roofs. In contrast to bottom tiers, this section has no glazing (except small windows which light upper circle foyer) and is steel clad. Escape stairs and toilet towers to N and S, built of flint-aggregate blocks with small paired windows to floors and full-height narrow glazed strips, link 'front of house' areas to faceted fly-tower to W, clad in the same material, broken only by scene-dock door and 1980s scene-dock. Theatre entrance to S with paved area which continues inside. Small free-standing hexagonal-plan generator shed to SW of theatre.

Foyer: entrance and ground floor foyer wraps around lower level of auditorium below suspended cantilever (part-supported on plain white columns) to create paved 'street' incorporating ticket office (sited opposite entrance doors), cloakroom, toilets etc. to left, restaurant and bar to right within hexagons. To N, foyer space breaks out into further hexagonal pavilion containing main stair. Stairs (concrete with glazed panels and plain timber handrail) wrap around foyer edge at angles and lead to 3 upper foyers, creating an open space with internal balconies. Hexagonal pattern repeated again in upper foyer timber clad ceiling and in ground floor brickwork. Pyramidal and pitched roofs are timber clad internally providing warmth and texture and also space for bars and seating. Clustered glass bauble lighting and bench seats.

REFERENCES Building Design (19 March 1976). South China Morning Post (8 September 1976). Architectural Review, Vol CLX, No 956 (Oct 1976). P Willis, New Architecture in Scotland (1977) pp80-83. F Sinclair, Scotstyle, 150 Years of Scottish Architecture (1984), pp114-115. J Love, Prize Possession, The Story of Eden Court Theatre, Inverness (2001). Additional information courtesy of Law & Dunbar-Nasmith; Eden Court Director, Colin Marr and RCAHMS (2003).

NO 35560059

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Auditorium: Proscenium theatre, thrust stage. Scene dock to S. Orchestra pit. Horse-shoe plan auditorium with over 800 seats; cantilevered circle and upper circle. 3 tiers of boxes (2 rows deep) at stalls, dress circle and upper circle enclose all 3 walls and abut stage. Splayed fire curtain advanced to orchestra rail. Large up-lit recessed hexagonal-plan ceiling painted white and lighting gallery. Simple detailing to auditorium; plain white boxes supported on white columns. Blue (formerly red) upholstery to seats and walls, timber doors.

SCULPTURE: commissioned by Scottish Arts Council for Eden Court in 1977. Sculptor Gavin Scobie. Corten steel sculpture representing Ben Wyvis viewed from Tarvie, Ross-shire. Currently (2003) sited on lawn to E of Eden Court, near Ness Walk.

A-Group with Ness Walk, Eden Court (Former Bishop's Palace) (see separate listing). This complex is especially important as it is one of the first high status, large, modernist buildings in the Highlands and survives essentially intact (2003). At the time of its completion, it was also the first completely new, full-scale theatre complex to have been built in Scotland within approximately 50 years.

The idea of creating a civic complex for the Highlands for drama, music and conferences had been mooted by Inverness Town Council since the mid 1960s, indeed in 1967 the Council commissioned leading theatre consultant John Wyckham, to undertake a feasibility study for an arts complex. Eden Court was built amidst much public opposition, firstly to the idea of a theatre (especially as it sits upon consecrated ground), later to the design and then to the escalating costs. St Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral (see separate listing) stands nearby to the N and the adjacent Bishop's Palace which was built for Robert Eden, the Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness provided the name for Eden Court. The economic climate was also difficult; inflation was rising to 26%, Britain was experiencing the 3-day week and steel was difficult to buy. However, with persistent support, especially from Cllr Rev Douglas Baxter and Provost William Smith and with funds raised from grants, loans and public donations, the building opened in April 1976 and continues to operate as intended (2003). Eden Court received the 1977 Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Award.

REFERENCES

Building Design (19 March 1976). South China Morning Post (8 September 1976). Architectural Review, Vol CLX, No 956 (Oct 1976). P Willis, New Architecture in Scotland (1977) pp80-83. F Sinclair, Scotstyle, 150 Years of Scottish Architecture (1984), pp114-115. J Love, Prize Possession, The Story of Eden Court Theatre, Inverness (2001). Additional information courtesy of Law & Dunbar-Nasmith; Eden Court Director, Colin Marr and RCAHMS (2003).

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Built as a centre of performing arts, the theatre was designed to accommodate orchestral and chamber concerts, opera, ballet, drama, conferences, dances and films. The theatre successfully achieved its remit of flexibility and multiuse. John Wyckam invited Iain Mackintosh to advise on the form of the auditorium, resulting in the 3-tiered horse-shoe which has proved the key to the theatre's success. It was significant in re-awakening interest in this traditional form and its innate flexibility in use. Iain Mackintosh developed it subsequently in the internationally-acclaimed auditorium at Glyndebourne. Examples of the auditorium's adaptability are that it is large enough to take touring companies, (the sliding stage extends forwards to cover the orchestra pit which can hold 50 musicians and the front of the stalls can be raised to stage level with temporary decking to provide a flat floor as far as the crossover gangway), whilst maintaining a feeling of intimacy when only the stalls are occupied due to the horse-shoe plan and the effect of 'papering the walls with people'. Extra lighting was provided than is usual in a theatre to cater for conference use. During 1995-1998, the auditorium was refurbished and disabled access improved by LDN. It is interesting to note that LDN initially intended the design of Eden Court Theatre to include an hexagonal-plan studio theatre to the SW of the building, complete with own rehearsal room, bar and entrance. This was to be added at a later date (dependent on funding). Again in 1994, LDN produced plans for a second auditorium and rehearsal room. Neither designs were realised, however, currently there are new proposals to modernise the building further (2003).

The setting of Eden Court is of importance. Not only did it determine the unusual plan and inspired the use of hexagonal shapes, but also in terms of its visual setting and its accessibility as a civic building. LDN chose to utilise the Bishop's Palace as a Green Room and offices, this required the stage in the new building to be sited close by. In order to avoid building directly in front of the Palace, LDN decided on the site between the Palace and the road (Bishop's Walk). This relatively small site and the angle of the road set limitations on the size and shape of the new building, indeed, the hexagonal forms arose naturally from the shape of the site. The stepped design evolved from the need to provide a greater movement area in the ground floor whilst requiring less space in the upper foyers. This design cleverly and effectively minimises the building's mass, making it appear deceptively smaller than it is. The rear (W) elevation indicates the real size of the building and aerial views confirm its huge scale when compared to the Palace. For a building of such a size, it is unusual that there is no steel frame (other than that which holds the pitched roofs to the E), only load bearing concrete blocks. This is a public building, designed to be seen; the open lawn to the E allows clear undisturbed views from Ness Bank and in turn, the large glazed panels frame views to the River Ness whilst creating a feeling of greater space from within the foyers.

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