

Date: June 2007

Client: Cairnduff Developments

Project Code: ATG07

**Old Athenaeum Theatre, 179 Buchanan Street, Glasgow
Recording of Raked Seating and hat-check**

Candy Hatherley

PROJECT SUMMARY SHEET (ATG07)

Client	Cairnduff Developments
National Grid Reference	NS 5903 6556
NMRS Number	NS 56 NE 230
Listed Building Status	Category A (HB No. 33004)
Project Manager	Tim Holden
Text	Candy Hatherley
Illustrations	Tom Small
Fieldwork	Candy Hatherley Caroline Norrman
Schedule	
Fieldwork	27 th April and 7 th May 2007
Report	June 2007

SUMMARY

Headland Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by Cairnduff Developments to undertake a programme of historic building recording at the Old Athenaeum Theatre, 179 Buchanan Street, Glasgow. This work was requested by the Planning and Conservation Officer of Glasgow City Council prior to the refurbishment of the Category A listed building.

The proposed redevelopment of the theatre into a retail unit requires the removal of the gallery area of the former auditorium located at ground floor level and the relocation of the hat-check area located at entresol level. Two separate visits were undertaken to record the raked flooring and hat-check area, prior to and during their removal. A plan and cross-section of the raked flooring were produced and a photographic survey undertaken. In addition, details of the construction and phasing of the raked floor were noted and a full written description produced. An elevation drawing of the counter area of the hat-check was also produced, supported by a photographic survey.

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INTRODUCTION

Cairnduff Developments commissioned Headland Archaeology Ltd to undertake a programme of historic building recording at the Old Athenaeum Theatre, 179 Buchanan Street, Glasgow, to satisfy a planning condition set by Glasgow City Council. This programme comprised the recording of the raked floor of the balcony area within the auditorium prior to its removal and the recording of the hat-check area prior to its relocation.

The former Athenaeum Theatre is a Category A listed building which is now undergoing refurbishment to convert the structure into retail use. A planning condition has been attached by Glasgow City Council to the Listed Building Consent for the removal of the raked floor within the main theatre area and the relocation of the hat-check at entresol level. A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced prior to the undertaken of the programme of historic building recording and approved by the Planning Officer and Conservation Officer of Glasgow City Council.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Athenaeum Theatre was built by the noted Glasgow practice of John Burnet, Son & Campbell between 1891-3. The five-storey sandstone building was constructed on the footprint of a Georgian house and was therefore built high to accommodate the narrow site. Originally the building incorporated an auditorium with a horseshoe shaped balcony on the ground floor with dining rooms, billiard rooms, classrooms and a gymnasium on the floors above. The Athenaeum was to function as a recreational and educational facility within the city centre.

The auditorium was principally used for concerts, recitals, plays and operas, notably in its later years by the Royal College of Music and Drama. It was purchased by the Scottish Youth Theatre in 1989 who remained in residence until 1998, forced to leave when cost of the upkeep of the historic building proved to be too much. Due to the narrow site the building has always suffered from cramped facilities throughout and, in more recent times, the noise and vibrations from the underground railway immediately adjacent to the building. This, coupled with the high cost of maintaining a historic building, has meant the Athenaeum Theatre has remained empty since the late 1990's.

The building was given Category A listing in 1966 and sits within the Glasgow Central Outstanding Conservation Area. Internally the building has been considerably altered, with interior decoration only surviving within the auditorium space.

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

Aims and objectives

The objectives of the historic building recording within the Athenaeum Theatre was to: -

- Record the raked floor located in the balcony prior to removal. The production of a plan of the floor and a cross-section through the floor from stage to rear at 1:100 and a photographic survey of the raked floor, including general shots and specifics of the structure and materials.

- Record the hat-check area located at entresol level prior to its relocation. The production of an elevation of the counter area of the hat-check at 1:100.
- Produce a written description of the raked floor, its construction and materials, its dating and phasing and its relationship to the building.

Methods

The building survey utilised the general standards set out by the RCHME (1996) and English Heritage (2006) and the techniques and practice promoted by the AAIS (Andrews *et al.* 1995), Historic Scotland (Dallas 2003), English Heritage (2003) and the RCAHMS (2004). The historic building survey undertaken is equal to a Level 2/3 survey, as referred to English Heritage's guidelines (2006).

The metric survey of the building was undertaken using a Laser Disto and hand tapes. Photographs were taken using a digital camera and a 35mm camera loaded with colour slide film.

The auditorium of the Athenaeum theatre comprises a stage and seating/bar area on the basement floor and a horseshoe shaped balcony located at ground floor level. The balcony was the upper seating area for the theatre, formed by a raked and stepped wooden floor.

Within the ground floor level, beneath the raked floor of the balcony is an entresol level containing a hat-check area entered from the main stairwell of the theatre. The hat-check comprised a wooden counter in front of three shelving units for the safe disposal of hats during performances. Two further zones are located beyond the hat-check, built into the space between the floors of the ground floor.

Two visits to the Athenaeum Theatre were made. On the first visit an elevation and photographic survey of the hat-check area was undertaken prior to its removal. The raked floor of the balcony was also recorded in plan and section with a supporting photographic survey. A second visit was undertaken after the removal of the raked floor, primarily made to identify and record the timber structure of the balcony. On this visit elements of an earlier raked flooring was identified, located beneath the later raked floor recorded during the first visit. Due to the working conditions in the balcony area on the second visit, it was considered too dangerous to undertake a full-scale drawing of the earlier raked floor. A photographic survey and detailed notes were taken.

Results (Figure 1)

The earlier raked floor (Plates 3 – 6)

The earlier raked floor was only seen *in-situ* at the rear and sides of the balcony area (Plates 4 & 6). It was constructed from wooden planking and appeared to be contemporary with the construction of the Athenaeum in c. early 1890's. Although the majority of the earlier floor had been removed by the second visit, it was clear that it had formerly extended over the entire balcony area in a similar configuration to the later floor which overlay it. The probable location of the earlier floor has been drawn onto the cross-section (Figure 1).

The earlier floor was tiered, constructed onto stepped and angled timber beams which ran from the rear wall to the front rail of the balcony (Plate 7 - 12). These sloping floor beams rested onto two semi-circular wooden beams located close to the rear and front of the balcony space. Each semi-

circular beam ran the width and length of the balcony area, following the curve of the seating above and tied into both the side walls of the theatre and a horizontal steel beam located on the underside edge of the horseshoe shaped balcony.

The later raked floor

The later raked floor was constructed from wooden planking and formed a 13-stepped floor area (Plates 1 & 2). The front two rows of seating located behind the balcony rail followed the curve of the horseshoe shaped balcony, terminating at each side with a door leading into a cupboard space (not fully accessed). The remainder of the raked seating behind the front two rows continued to follow the curve of the balcony, terminating at the walls of the theatre or the banister of the two stairwells.

The flooring was tiered so as to allow a view of the stage below from all areas of the balcony and had been constructed onto a softwood frame over the earlier floor below (Plate 3 & 5). It is probable that the later floor had been constructed to increase the seating capacity of the balcony area.

At the rear of the balcony area one wider seating area ran the width of the balcony, with a gap allowing access to a door located at the rear wall. Two further steps were located on top of this seating area, at each corner of the balcony area. The rear wall was constructed of wooden boards and was contemporary with the later raked seating. It appeared to be constructed immediately behind the original wall, which had been demolished, potentially to allow for more space and further seating to be built into the balcony area.

Modifications to the later floor were identified. Steps had been inserted into the seating leading from the entrance to the stairwells to the balcony rails. Handrails identified in earlier photographs taken by the architect had been removed.

Although the date of the construction of the later flooring is unknown it is highly likely that it was constructed after c. 1960 when a major modification programme was undertaken by the Royal College of Music and Drama. This later floor was fully recorded during the first visit to the theatre during its removal.

The hat-check (Plates 13 – 18)

The hat-check was located at entresol level and consisted of a wooden counter and three shelved compartments for the storage of hats (Plates 13 – 17). Due to the location of the hat-check beneath the raked floor of the balcony area, the ceiling was sloped steeply, decreasing in height from the entrance to the room to the hat compartments on the rear wall. The counter area and hat compartments were access by a panelled door located to one side of the counter (Plate 18). On the rear wall behind the counter was one shelved unit, with the other two units running along each of the adjoining walls. Due to the sloping ceiling the upper compartments of each unit were angled. The remaining compartments were all of approximately similar sizes.

The hat-check has now been carefully removed and labelled. It will be relocated within the finished building.

SUMMARY

The programme of historic building recording undertaken within the Athenaeum Theatre in Glasgow has identified two phases of raked floor within the balcony area of the auditorium. The earliest raked floor appeared to be contemporary with the construction of the theatre in the 1890's. The later floor may have been built during major modifications in the 1960's and was associated with the removal and replacement of the rear wall of the balcony area. The later flooring was constructed immediately above the original floor and may have been built to increase the seating capacity of the theatre.

No evidence was identified on the surface of either floor for fittings or fixtures associated with seating for the balcony area. It is assumed that the original cast iron seating was bolted into a rail system attached to the floor.

The hat-check at entresol level was a distinctive and original feature of the theatre. The elevation and photographic survey prior to its removal and relocation have recorded this feature within its original setting.

SOURCES

Print references

Andrews, D, Blake, B, Clowes, M and Wilson, K 1995 *The Survey and Recording of Historic Buildings*, Association of Archaeological Illustrators and Surveyors, Technical Paper No. 12, Oxford.

Dallas, R 2003 *Measured Survey and Building Recording*, Historic Scotland, Guide for Practitioners 4, Edinburgh

English Heritage 2003 *Measured and Drawn. Techniques and practice for the metric survey of historic buildings*, English Heritage, Swindon.

English Heritage 2006 *Understanding Historic Buildings. A guide to good recording practice*, English Heritage, Swindon.

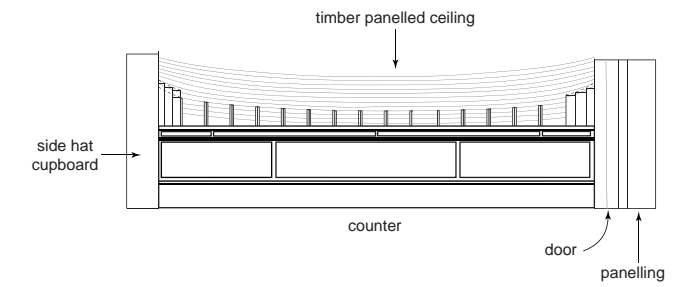
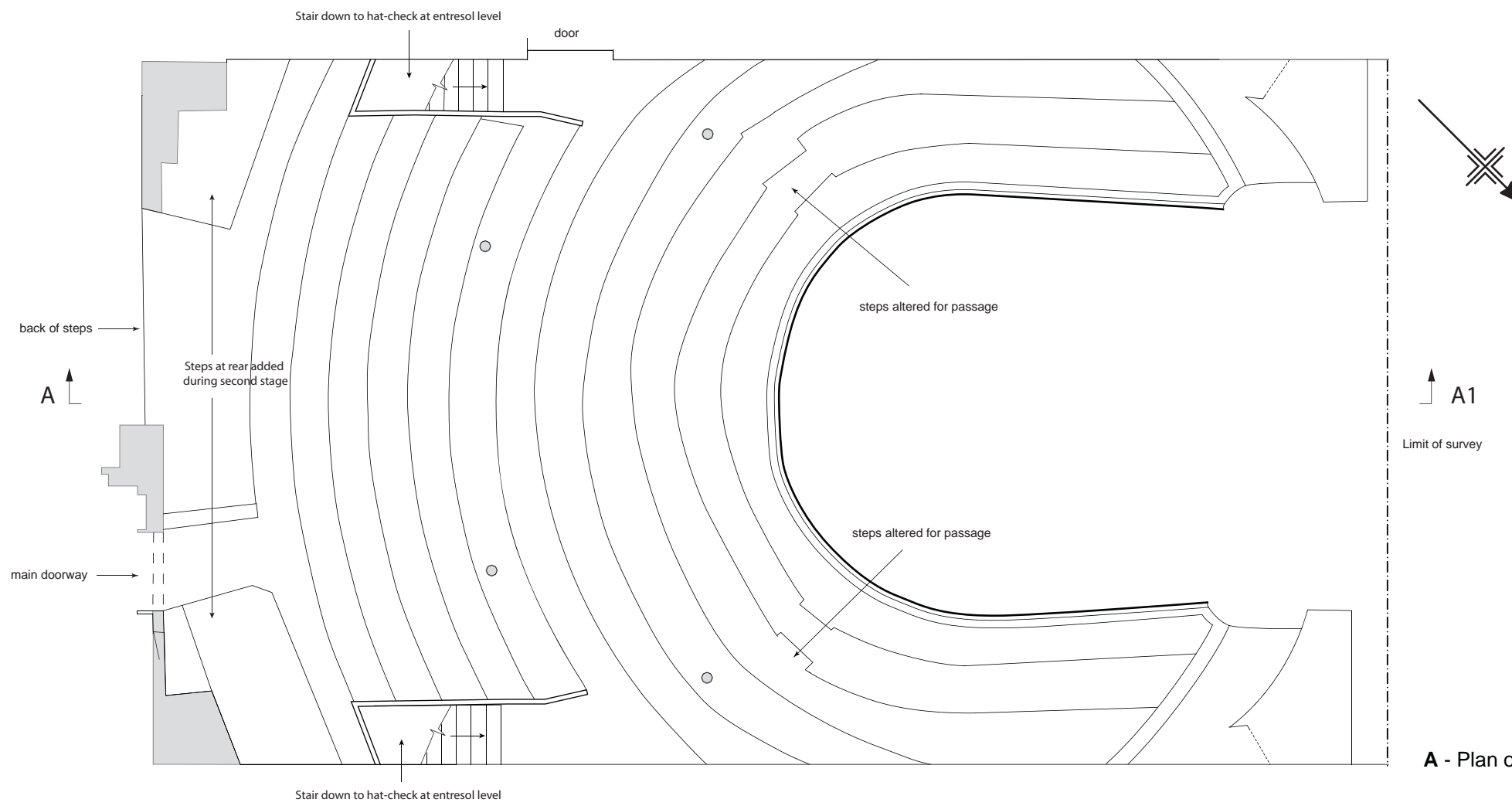
Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001 *Standards and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings and structures* (revised edition)

RCHME 1996 *Recording Historic Buildings – A Descriptive Specification* (3rd Edition), Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, Swindon.

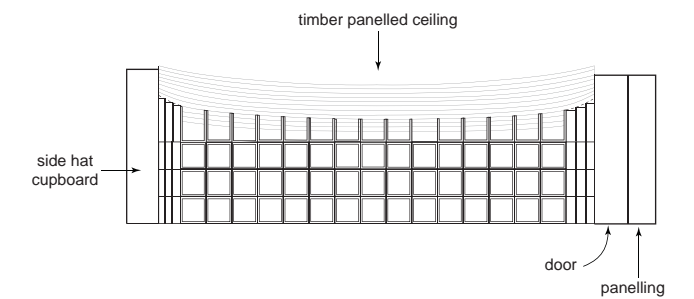
RCAHMS 1997 *Survey and Recording Policy*, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

APPENDIX A**Photo Register****Colour Slide and Digital**

SHOT NO	DESCRIPTION
1	ID Shot
2	General shot of hat-check area
3	Detail of hat compartments
4	Detail of counter area with hat compartments behind
5	Detail of counter area showing panelling
6	Detail of counter door and panelling
7	General shot of horseshoe shaped balcony from stage
8	General view of the later raked seating
9	Detail of panelling
10	Detail of stairwell
11	General view of later raked floor
12	Detail of later raked flooring with earlier flooring seen below
13	View of ground floor of the auditorium
14	Detail of balcony
15	View of earlier raked floor
16	General view of timber floor beams
17	Detail of earlier seating in front of stair well
18	General view of timber floor beams from below
19	Detail of timber floor beams
20	Entresol level after the removal of the hat-check
21	Detail of timber floor beams
22	Detail of steel balcony beam
23	View of timber floor beams with column from below
24	Detail of earlier raked floor
25	General view of the balcony area during removal of the flooring
26	Detail of timber beams from below
27	General view of earlier raked floor



C1 - SE Elevation of counter in hat-check



C2 - SE Elevation of hat boxes in hat-check

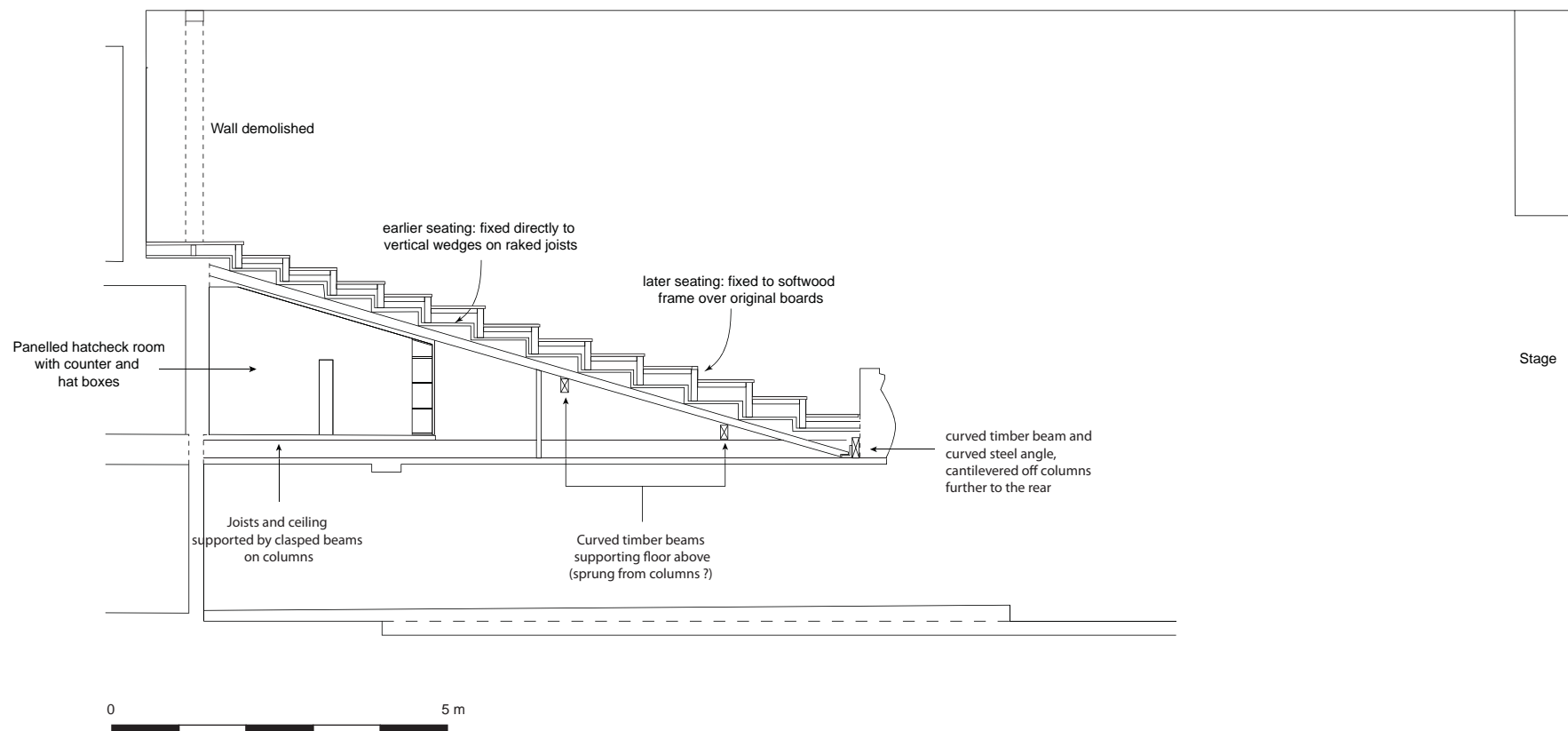


Figure 1: ATG07 - Plan, section and elevation.



Plate 1: General view of later raked floor. Looking south.



Plate 2: General view of later raked floor. Looking east.



Plate 3: Detail of later raked floor with earlier floor seen below. Looking south-east.



Plate 4: Detail of earlier raked floor leading to stairwell. Looking east.



Plate 5: Detail of the construction of the later raked floor overlying earlier floor. Looking south-west.

Plate 6: Earlier raked floor. Looking south-west.





Plate 7 & 8: Timber floor beams after the removal of the early raked floor. Right - Looking south. Left - Looking west.



Plate 9: Timber floor beams after the removal of the early raked floor. Looking north-west.



Plate 10: Entresol level after the removal of the hatchcheck showing details of the floor construction above. Looking west.



Plate 11: Detail of the timber floor beams of balcony from below. Looking towards ceiling of auditorium.



Plate 12: Detail of the timber floor beams with column. Looking north-west.



Plate 13: General view of hatcheck area showing door and panelling



Plate 14: General view of hatcheck area



Plate 15: Detail of bar area with hat compartments behind



Plate 16: Detail of bar area with hat compartments behind



Plate 17: Detail of hat compartments

Plate 18: View of hatcheck door and panelling

