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Building Theatres/Theatre Buildings: Reinventing Mull Theatre

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MA(Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in Theatre Studies

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Abstract

Mull Theatre is a professional touring theatre company based on a small island off the west coast of Scotland. In 2008 the company relocated from a small converted cow byre which seated 42 people to a new purpose-built venue - Druimfin - on a different part of the island. The move was made possible through a grant from the Scottish Arts Council in 2006, which was awarded on the expectation that the new building would be a 'production centre' as opposed to a theatre. That is to say the emphasis in the design of the new space was to be placed on the production rather than the reception of the theatrical event. This stands in contrast to the expectation of many theatre attendees that the new space would continue as it had been - as a place to go and see a theatre production - but that it would do so out of a much larger, more comfortable and better equipped venue.

Building Theatres/Theatre Buildings stems from a three year Collaborative Doctoral Award between Mull Theatre and the University of Glasgow, which was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Using the partnership that emerged from this award, the thesis explores what was potentially lost and gained in the move in order to draw conclusions about the wider relationship between spaces of performance and the creation of theatrical meaning in relation to small and medium scale touring theatre. It also uses the company's dual identity as a touring company with its own permanent building to extend the discussion and to examine the wide range of venues which currently form the rural touring circuit in Scotland. By bringing together primary fieldwork from a pivotal moment in the company's identity alongside current dialogues regarding theatre space and touring theatre, this research provides new knowledge about this often overlooked theatre company, its buildings and its role within contemporary Scottish theatre and small scale rural touring.

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Thanks must also go to the photographers who have let me use their images throughout this thesis. Each individual and company has been acknowledged accordingly below the photographs and maps they have provided. Those without acknowledgements underneath were taken by me during the course of the project.

And finally, special thanks must go to each of the participants who have taken the time to speak with me. Whether named or anonymous, I thank you all equally.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

For 40 years, Mull Theatre's perceived identity was largely predicated on the unique characteristics which stemmed from its building and location. Once entered into the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the world's smallest theatre,¹ Mull Little Theatre - the company's previous name - had a seating capacity of just 42 and a limited space both on and off stage. In addition to this its location within a small village on an island has led to repeated surprise that so many different shows could be both produced and performed within the space. This view has become evident through various conversations with the current Artistic Director, Alasdair McCrone, and his ardent desire to move away from what he perceives as the 'often patronising and parochial connotations' associated with this theatre.² Indeed one of the first things he did when he assumed the role of Artistic Director was to delete the word 'little' from the company's name.³ The suggestion being that the small size of the company and its building was contributing to expectations of inferiority with regards to the type of work being produced and its quality: by not referencing the size in the name, perhaps it would cease to be such an important feature in people's minds.

In 2008, McCrone was able to continue with his aim to distance the company from the 'little' associations in a more literal way when the theatre relocated from the Little Theatre in Dervaig to a new, purpose built venue on a different part of the island. Now located on the Salen road - one of the few roads with two lanes on the island - the new venue, Druimfin, is both larger and more

¹ This information is cited on Mull Theatre's website as well as being proudly mentioned in a number of the interviews I conducted with staff members of Mull Theatre:
http://www.mulltheatre.com/theatre_history.htm The accolade has now been given Vada Kärnöl in Austria which has a seating capacity of eight.
<http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/1000/smallest-regularly-operated-theatre-seat-capacity> [last accessed 4/7/2012]

² Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (31/03/09)

³ This is evident from the first theatre newsletter which was circulated after Alasdair McCrone took over as Artistic Director. Rather than being the newsletter of Mull Little Theatre, it simply states 'Mull Theatre' at the top of the page and has a new logo highlighting an attempted re-branding of the company from the very start. Mull Theatre, 'Newsletter,' unpublished document (Autumn 1997)

physically accessible to the majority of attendees.⁴ Nonetheless, the fact that Mull Theatre is still located on an island may serve to have as much influence on external perceptions of the company as did the venue it occupied. In an article for *Scotland on Sunday* in 2004, one critic referred to Mull Theatre as ‘Scotland’s most unexpected theatre company.’⁵ The article suggests that the reason it is so ‘unexpected’ is because it is located on an island where one would expect the ‘live evening entertainment [...] to consist of a few bands playing in pubs [or] the odd outbreak of stand-up comedy.’⁶ In this critic’s view, an island is not the place where one would expect live theatre of a high standard to be performed each night in a venue equipped for such productions. This dissertation describes more of these expectations and the company’s efforts to counter them.

Whilst the company has left behind one facet of its previous identity - the building - another element still remains and that is its continued island location. Thus, despite a change of name and location it is unclear as to whether McCrone could ever truly detach the company from the continual surprise he feels is largely associated with the building. For theatre scholar, Ric Knowles the performance event and the meanings created are bound up within the social and material conditions of the day. Indeed, he asserts that ‘to shift physical and/or social space is to shift meaning.’⁷ This supports the view posited throughout this thesis that meaning and identity are not concepts which are fixed and static but that, on the contrary, they are continuously and actively being produced. Numerous elements are bound up within the creation of identity including, as this thesis will highlight, the geographical location and physical building.

This thesis will explore the impact that Mull Theatre’s relocation has had on the perceived identity of the company from within the organisation as well as in the eyes of attendees both on and off the island. Through a mixture of primary fieldwork and archival research it will explore some of the ways in which the

⁴ The following chapter will also provide a more detailed overview to the history of Mull (Little) Theatre and the island on which it is based.

⁵ Unattributed, ‘The Island of Delights,’ *Scotland on Sunday* (14/7/2004). Available online: http://www.scotsman.com/scotland-on-sunday/scotland/the_island_of_delights_1_540338 [last accessed 1/10/12]

⁶ Unattributed, ‘The Island of Delights’

⁷ Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.63

company's buildings - both past and present - have impacted on the company based there. By speaking directly to attendees and key stakeholders the project aims to investigate the complex relationship between buildings used for performance and the creation of theatrical identity. As previously noted, this is not a new area of study. On the contrary, there have been numerous attempts to examine the relationships between space, place and theatre; several centred on conventional theatre spaces.⁸ Where the focus has been shifted away from purpose-built theatre buildings, as is the case with practitioners such as Peter Brook and Mike Pearson, the onus is largely on site-specific work and 'found' spaces, where a building is adopted to house performances but in a way which is sympathetic to its roots.⁹

By using Mull Theatre as a case study, this project will contribute to, and seek to further, current debates surrounding performance spaces and the creation of identity within performance in relation to Mull Theatre and small-scale touring theatre in Scotland. Very little has been written about this particular theatre company to date and as neither of its buildings conforms to the prototypical idea of what a theatre is it offers a useful way to interrogate some of the existing critical discussions in this area. The company's relocation certainly adds to this because it allows me to examine closely two buildings as well as providing the opportunity to document the immediate impact that the move has on perceptions of, and relationships to, the company. There is, however, a further element to this move which makes Mull Theatre such a useful case for this analysis: its unique position within contemporary Scottish theatre as the only publically funded touring theatre company with its own permanent performance space and home venue.

The dichotomy between Mull Theatre as a resident company on the Isle of Mull and Mull Theatre as a theatre company with a remit to tour throughout Scotland is, in my analysis, embodied in the building of Drumfin. Largely

⁸ Key texts in this area include, Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Iain Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). For a full list of references please refer to the bibliography at the end of this thesis.

⁹ A critique of the secondary literature will be presented in chapter three and the varied degrees of responsiveness to the site of performance will be discussed.

funded through a lottery grant from the Scottish Arts Council, Druimfin was designed to be a 'production centre' and not a theatre. That is to say the emphasis was to be placed on the production rather than the reception of the theatrical event.¹⁰ Indeed, the company is not funded to put on any productions within its own venue and can only do so if the performances form part of a larger tour.¹¹ By examining what was lost and gained in the move, as well as exploring some of the key tensions inherent within the new venue, this thesis will use this largely overlooked theatre company as a means by which to illustrate and explore some of the issues involved in touring theatre, particularly within a rural context, contributing to wider debates regarding theatre space and architecture.

Methodologies

This thesis has stemmed from a Collaborative Doctoral Award between Mull Theatre and the University of Glasgow, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The initial design brief was to examine what was lost and gained in terms of the company's identity during its relocation. The final thesis, therefore, has remained true to the original idea but has sought to broaden the focus by also looking at Mull Theatre within a wider rural theatre framework. The collaborative nature of the research has been integral in shaping the questions asked and the methodologies employed. The AHRC's website explains that, alongside the final academic thesis:

The studentships also encourage and establish links that can have long-term benefits for both collaborating partners, providing access to resources and materials, knowledge and expertise that may not otherwise have been available and also provide social, cultural and economic benefits to wider society.¹²

¹⁰ Interview with Moray Royles (30/3/10)

¹¹ Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (1/4/09)

¹² Arts and Humanities Research Council, <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Pages/Collaborative-Doctoral-Awards.aspx> [last accessed 12/11/11]

This notion of there being ‘collaborating partners’ is central to this type of award and brings with it a number of benefits and challenges. In this instance I was given unprecedented access to Mull Theatre - to its archives, its offices and to its rehearsal process - and so was able to develop a greater understanding of the way the company operates. During 2010, for instance, I conducted a number of residencies with the company which included attending the board development day and following the company on tour. The only other person during this time who had equal access to the operations of the board, the core staff and the production staff was the current Artistic Director. This has clearly been invaluable in collating data for this thesis.

Nonetheless, despite the obvious benefits of this access, there are also potential dangers inherent in trying to navigate the ‘collaborative’ relationship between the academic and the non-academic partners. There is still a popular perception that the world of academic research is somehow removed from the world it is examining. This has become evident throughout the research process with various participants questioning why I would choose to write about the theatre when I could be making theatre instead.¹³ There was also an apparent scepticism about how this research would impact on the theatre-makers’ lives and work: what was the point of it? As mentioned above, one of the purposes of a Collaborative Doctoral Award is to capitalise on a link between the academic and the non-academic partners: it must produce research which will provide an original contribution to academic debates as well as providing evidence and analysis which will have a real impact for the industry or sector from which it is drawn. It should aspire to have tangible and sustainable impact for the non-academic partner.

Throughout the research process I have remained aware of this dual purpose of the project and the potentially conflicting expectations of both collaborating partners and, consequently, the thesis, *Building Theatres/Theatre Buildings* is just one of the outputs of the project. Alongside this I have also presented some of my findings to the board of Mull Theatre and given the company full access to

¹³ This was reiterated on numerous occasions when I initially talked about the project with participants and attendees.

almost all of my research materials including all of the questionnaires.¹⁴ Some of the data I have collected was also used by Theatrical Solutions Ltd. when its consultants were employed to investigate possible ways in which An Tobar and Mull Theatre could combine to work under one umbrella organisation.¹⁵ Thus Mull Theatre has been able to benefit from my findings at various points along the way through arguably more beneficial and accessible ways than the thesis alone.

This desire to produce research which will benefit both the academic and the non-academic partners has played a central role in determining which methodologies would be employed. Desk-based research has been important in determining the critical framework of the thesis as well as providing a context to Mull (Little) Theatre through archival work. Nonetheless it was also important to conduct primary fieldwork. This enabled me to examine fully what was lost and gained in the company's relocation as well as fulfilling one of the aims of the thesis which is to help write Mull (Little) Theatre into the landscape of Scottish theatre.

Taking the 'naturalistic' approach described by Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, the data collected for this thesis has been largely obtained through observation and in depth interviews.¹⁶ This approach has been combined with textual analysis of productions and archival work to situate Mull Theatre within a wider contextual framework. As such, throughout the thesis, I examine the outputs of the company while also exploring people's perceptions of, and relationships to it. There is also a further aim underpinning this research and that is to write Mull (Little) Theatre into histories of Scottish theatre. As such, I

¹⁴ It is important to note here that my research materials have only been shared with Mull Theatre where they did not impinge on any ethical implications of the fieldwork. For example, transcriptions of interviews have only been given to Mull Theatre with the prior consent of the participant in question and where they have chosen anonymity the transcripts have been edited accordingly.

¹⁵ This was done at the behest of Creative Scotland which advised the two arts organisations that, due to a decrease in the amount of funding it can offer nationally, it would be unlikely to continue to fund two groups of such close proximity in a rural area to the same level that it had been. Consequently, in March 2012, Comar was established: a new organisation formed out of a partnership between An Tobar and Mull Theatre. For more information on this please see the press release on Mull Theatre's website: http://www.mulltheatre.com/press_comar.html [last accessed 6/1/13]

¹⁶ Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: the Art of Hearing Data* (London: Sage Publications, 2005) p.2

have turned to additional disciplines in order to develop a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. There is no definitive guide to this methodological approach and so even within my own interviews, the techniques used varied according to the ultimate aim of the encounter.

When collating stories and memories of experiences at Mull (Little) Theatre I turned to oral history as this is the approach through which, ‘the researcher constructs past history.’¹⁷ Although oral history interviews are formalised conversations which are framed within certain ethical frameworks and are often recorded using audio equipment or detailed note-taking, the approach prioritises the participant and asks them to lead the conversation. As Alessandro Portelli states, the researcher must:

‘accept’ the informant and give priority to what she or he wishes to tell rather than what the researcher wants to hear, saving any unanswered questions for another interview.¹⁸

That is not to say that the researcher stays silent throughout the interview. On the contrary, Portelli goes on to suggest that in transcriptions of oral history interviews, ‘when the researcher’s voice is cut out, the narrator’s voice is distorted.’¹⁹ This goes some way to showing the active role that the researcher still plays in this type of in-depth interview, even though the outcomes are not pre-determined. With this in mind, when carrying out these types of interviews with attendees of Mull (Little) Theatre, I did not just refer to pre-planned questions but instead referred to themes I wished to explore such as ‘journey to the theatre’ ‘performances’ ‘auditorium’ and ‘participation’ for instance. I then let the participants’ own recollections guide the conversation.

A slightly different approach was taken to the interviews I conducted with the Mull Theatre staff, stakeholders in the company and other practitioners and

¹⁷ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, p.7

¹⁸ Alessandro Portelli, ‘What Makes Oral History Different,’ in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (Routledge: London and New York, 2006) p.30

¹⁹ Portelli, ‘What Makes Oral History Different,’ in Perks and Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, p. 39

stakeholders within Scottish theatre more generally.²⁰ As well as documenting stories and memories of this largely overlooked company, these interactions were designed to look specifically at what was lost and gained in the relocation in terms of perceived identity, theatrical outputs and relationship to the island community and its touring audiences. These meetings also took a semi-structured approach in so much as I remained flexible to adopting new lines of enquiry within the interview if participants raised something I had not foreseen or previously considered. I did, however, also have a list of questions or ideas which I wanted to examine with the participant and endeavoured to ensure that these points were covered. In this way the interviews can again be seen as formalised conversations which were contained within slightly tighter boundaries than those collecting oral history.

These interviews were rooted in a more ethnographic approach, defined as a process through which the researcher attempts to ‘sketch an overall cultural setting, such as that shared by ethnic group, a village, or a neighbourhood.’²¹ Defined by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz as presenting ‘thick description,’ ethnographical studies examine not just the actions but the cultural meaning assigned to them.²² One of the criticisms levelled at this type of research is the degree of subjectivity in the evaluation. Qualitative research hinges on individual perceptions; both those of the participants and those of the researcher. Kathryn Anderson and Diana C. Jack highlight this when they assert that, ‘the researcher is an active participant in qualitative research.’²³ Not only are they the ones responsible for analysing and evaluating the information collected through the interview but, moreover, they are also responsible for eliciting the information in the first place.

Interviews are essentially formalised conversations with varying degrees of structure attached to them. With at least two people interacting within any conversation it seems obvious that what information is shared will result as much

²⁰ For a full list of participants please see appendix one.

²¹ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, p.7

²² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) p.6

²³ Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, ‘Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses,’ in Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, p.136

from the relationship created between the participant and researcher as it will from the questions being asked. This is demonstrated through a 2012 article in *Qualitative Research* in which the effects that three separate researchers have on the 'conversational space' created through their separate interviews is analysed.²⁴ The article highlights how each of the individual personality traits of the researchers, alongside the way they approach the interview - the level of empathy they show towards the participants, for example - all interact to produce different responses from those being interviewed. This has led them to describe 'the embodiment of the unique researcher as the instrument for qualitative data collection [...with] the potential to influence the collection of empirical materials.'²⁵ This is not to say that the data collected will be a fictional creation of the researcher's own imagination and perception. On the contrary in recognising the level of subjectivity which can infiltrate this type of approach, most researchers will adopt a degree of self-reflexivity and monitoring throughout the process in order to ensure that an appropriate measure of academic rigour is maintained. Throughout my own interviews I remained conscious of this and so, alongside the written transcripts of each interview I also took detailed notes of the location, the seating arrangements and other environmental factors which may have impacted on the exchange of information. When analysing the information I also worked primarily from the recording rather than the written notes so that the tone of voice could be considered along with the words being said.

This requirement for self-evaluation is similarly true for periods of participant observation in which the researcher may be seen as an equally active component in the collection and interpretation of the data. This was a crucial methodology of this project as it was through residencies with Mull Theatre that I was afforded a distinctive insight into the daily interactions of the staff, the company's relationship to the island on which it is located and the buildings it inhabits. One of the key difficulties which can arise with observational methods of data collection - particularly with participant observation as opposed to 'fly-

²⁴ Anne E. Pezalla, Jonathan Pettigrew and Michelle Miller-Day, 'Researching the Researcher-as-Instrument: an Exercise in Interviewer Self-Reflexivity,' in *Qualitative Research* 12(2), 2012, p. 166

²⁵ Pezalla, Pettigrew and Miller-Day, 'Researching the Researcher-as-Instrument,' p.166, original emphasis

on-the-wall' observation²⁶ - is the tension which may arise between the self as participant and the self as detached observer. As McAuley observes, it is about finding the right 'balance between sympathetic involvement and disciplined detachment.'²⁷ This is particularly significant within my thesis due to its collaborative nature and is one of the other potential difficulties of pursuing research via a Collaborative Doctoral Award, which is supported and partly funded by the organisation that is the object of study.

The collaborative framework gave me unprecedented access to Mull Theatre's archives, rehearsals and the venue and meant that I was able to develop both professional and personal relationships with members of staff. Within this, however, it was also important to maintain a distance, enabling me to reflect critically on the activities taking place around me, to fulfil the dual demand for an ethnographer to 'see with the eyes of an outsider as well as the eyes of an insider.'²⁸ To this end I kept a detailed journal of my residencies, actions and observations. This not only allowed me to look back on productions three years after the event but also gave me the opportunity to monitor myself and to ensure I was maintaining the necessary partiality.

This notion of managing the dual role of both an insider and outsider is particularly pertinent when one considers that during participant observation the line between researcher and the object of study becomes even more blurred. During the rehearsals for *Laurel and Hardy* there was an initial scepticism and clear discomfort at my presence.²⁹ As I played no role in the physical or creative development of the show I was understandably viewed as an outsider and moreover, one who many of the cast and crew thought would be sitting in judgement of everything that was said in the rehearsal room and

²⁶ David Deacon, Michael Pickering, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock, *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2007) p. 250

²⁷ Gay McAuley, 'Towards an Ethnography of Rehearsal,' *New Theatre Quarterly*, 14 (1998) p.75

²⁸ Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock, 'Introduction: Awkward Spaces, Productive Places,' in Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock (eds.), *Anthropologists in the Field* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) p.xi

²⁹ Whilst I observed a number of Mull Theatre rehearsals and productions throughout this research period, I am particularly referring to the Spring 2010 touring production of *Laurel and Hardy* as I observed the entire process for this show from initial production meetings, through to the final touring performance.

beyond. Once I started to take a more active role in the process however - assisting with the get-ins, get-outs and setting up the props prior to performances - the company members seemed to feel a bit more comfortable in my presence, as though my place on the tour had been legitimised. Not only did being accepted as part of the team, to some degree at least, make the experience much more pleasurable, it also gave me a much greater insight into the nuances of the tour which I may not have got from the outside looking in. When writing up the tour, however, I have continued to use the pronoun 'they' rather than 'we' as, despite my contributions to the tour, I did not consider myself to be a fully integrated member of the production crew. Instead I continued to acknowledge my primary role as that of researcher.

Within this, however, there needs to be a recognition that my very presence as outside researcher would have undoubtedly impacted on the activities which I was observing: I am certain that there would have been certain behavioural traits and conversations which were altered, to some extent, by the presence of me and my notebook. Although I did try to keep the intrusion of my presence to a minimum, ethnographer Kirsten Hastrup has noted that 'knowledge produced is doubly mediated by our own presence and the informant's response to that.'³⁰ The findings produced within this thesis have thus been mediated by my own presence as participant observer. This idea of mediation and reconstruction within the research process is a recurring theme and will be explored again in chapter four where a kind of 'guided tour' of Mull Theatre's venues is presented to the reader. It will be argued that, rather than being a weakness of this thesis, it is a natural consequence of the focus of study and its negotiation of individual and collective understandings of a space and a company. The 'subjective' approach which has been adopted throughout this thesis acknowledges the multiplicity of 'histories' of the spaces in question. No two interpretations will be the same and so the mediation of perception is happening at every stage; from the participants' initial experience through to their sharing it with me and my subsequent analysis. It has been suggested that 'oral testimony

³⁰ Kirsten Hastrup, 'Writing Ethnography: the state of the art,' in Judith Oakley and Helen Galloway (eds.), *Anthropology and Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 1992) p.121

[...] is never the same twice'³¹ which goes some way to highlighting that there is always an element of interpretation at each re-telling from both the participant and the researcher.

As a result of the human aspect of such research, there are no strict instructions which one can follow in order to develop the interview process or periods of observation: each one must be tailor-made according to the type of data being collected, the ultimate aims of the research and the personality traits of the interviewer themselves. As such, in order to design appropriate methodologies various sources were utilised, including critical literature from the social sciences alongside courses held at the University of Glasgow within the department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies, the Centre for Cultural Policy Research (CCPR), and the Graduate School of Arts. Assistance was also sought from individuals with experience of using such methodologies in order to ensure that my research maintained sufficient academic rigour and was able to contribute to the overarching questions being posed by the study.³²

It should also be noted that the research was conducted within the ethical guidelines of the University of Glasgow.³³ Prior to each interview participants were provided with an information sheet which offered an overview to the project and how his or her contribution would be used.³⁴ At the start of each interview people were asked to sign a consent form confirming that they understood what was entailed in the interview process and stating whether or not they wished to be named. A brief look at the list of contributors (located in the appendices) shows that the majority did choose to retain anonymity. The result of this was that a number of early chapter drafts were withheld from

³¹ Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different,' in Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, p.39

³² Melanie Selfe ran the research methodologies module for CCPR which I attended in 2009 and also offered support throughout the project and Dr Sandra McNeill who worked on the 'Pantomime in Scotland' research project at the University of Glasgow also helped in the production of the focus group publicity. For more information on the Pantomime in Scotland project, please visit the website:
<http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/research/theatrefilmandtelevision/projectsandnetworks/pantomimeinscotland/pantomimedvd/>

³³ A copy of the ethics policy can be accessed at:
<http://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/arts/research/ethics/ethicspolics>

³⁴ A copy of the information sheet can be found in appendix two of this thesis.

McCrone, despite his role as non-academic supervisor to this thesis, as some participants were unsure at the start whether they wanted to be anonymous or not. It also meant that, when on the island, I would often be unable to tell the Mull Theatre staff where I was going as they might have been able to identify contributors from their location.

Some may suggest that the number of anonymous interviews quoted within this thesis dilutes the evidence being presented as a number of the views are not attached to a specific person, profession or age group. Indeed, once anonymity was chosen anything which could be used to identify the person - location of interview or gender, for instance - was removed from the thesis. Nonetheless I would argue that the conclusions of this thesis are not dependent on names or jobs being assigned to the anecdotes recorded here. The overarching aim of the thesis is to explore changing perceptions of Mull (Little) Theatre and this can be done equally well by presenting a group of unidentified voices from the island as it can from publishing named individuals.

I discovered that one of the key reasons for the large number of anonymous contributions was a fear of 'retribution' stemming from many participants living on an island on which everybody knows everyone else: I also propose that this is one of the key reasons as to why the attempted focus groups failed to attract participants.³⁵ I had hoped to run focus groups across the island in order to ascertain how responses to the theatre company and its buildings may change according to where participants lived. I also felt that it would be advantageous to see some collective perceptions of Mull Theatre which would be elicited through group discussions. These would then be used to supplement the one to one interviews which were being held. Each venue was carefully considered following discussions with staff at Mull Theatre so that they would provide ease of access to as many inhabitants on Mull and Iona as possible.³⁶ In order to advertise the sessions, posters were put up across the island in a variety of

³⁵ It should be noted here that although the focus groups failed to get any participants at the designated times the advertising did result in two people contacting me separately to get involved in the project. Although they did not feel comfortable meeting in a group situation they did wish to contribute but did so separately and anonymously.

³⁶ Iona is a small island just off the south west coast of Mull. It can be seen in the bottom left hand corner of figure one below.

places - from village halls to petrol stations and pubs - and an editorial and advert were also included in the two local publications, *Am Muileach* and *Round and About* respectively.³⁷ Both of these papers are available across the island and are read widely by the local population and visitors alike. Despite this pre-publicity only two people turned up to the focus group sessions and both did so accidentally: one was a lady who was waiting for the arrival of the mobile library; and the second was a policeman who was concerned at seeing the door to the village hall propped open.



Figure 1 - Map of focus groups

Reproduced with permission of Lonely Planet. © Lonely Planet, 2011

(1) Creich Village Hall, (2) Craignure Village Hall, (3) Aros Hall, Tobermory, (4) Dervaig Village Hall, (5) Aros Hall, Tobermory

Initially I was concerned that perhaps the publicity had failed in its style and content and that people on the island were simply not aware of, or were not engaging with, the project. Throughout the residency, however, numerous people asked me how the focus groups had been going and none of them seemed

³⁷ For a copy of the editorial please refer to appendix four in this thesis.

surprised by the lack of attendance. This would suggest that there was an awareness of the ongoing research but that many had made a conscious decision not to contribute in this way. Having discussed my methodologies with a number of other researchers it would seem that focus groups are notoriously difficult to hold in small communities, largely because many are nervous about expressing their own personal opinions in a public forum. This is particularly true of rural areas where the catchment area is smaller so people are more likely to know the other participants, making it almost impossible to preserve anonymity.

I would suggest, however, that the apparent failure of the focus groups went deeper than a fear of expressing one's thoughts and opinions in the public domain. Instead, I would suggest that it is also indicative of Mull Theatre's relationship with the local community. Once people were engaged in conversations about Mull Theatre and its buildings they were often very forthcoming with their opinions and many had a lot to say on the matter. However, on first hearing that this research is being conducted there was often a look of surprise and a quizzical 'why Mull Theatre?' This does not apply to everyone I have spoken to throughout the project although it did happen often enough to suggest an underlying perception of Mull Theatre as being of little importance in a wider context. This is equally true of participants on and off the island. The idea that this company may not be consciously valued was supported by one islander I interviewed suggested that although many locals 'take it for granted but they would be sad to see it go.'³⁸

In contrast to the lack of attendance for the focus groups I hoped to hold a large number of people turned out for a meeting at Craignure Village Hall in March (just a few days after my own event) in order to discuss the planned closure of the Mull Car Rally.³⁹ This is an annual event on Mull which attracts people from across the world, both as participants and observers, and which results in most of the accommodation on the island being booked up (sometimes a year in advance) for the duration of the event. We can see then that when the issue at stake is something which really resonates with the locals and has a

³⁸ Interview with Participant M (6/5/10)

³⁹ Although I did not attend this meeting it was talked about for many days after by locals in Tobermory and verbal reports suggest that about 40 people were in attendance.

tangible and obvious economic impact, people are willing to show up to demonstrate solidarity. Although no concrete findings could be drawn from these sessions then, the lack of participants has still resulted in important conclusions being drawn about the company and its role on the island.



**DO YOU HAVE A MEMORY
– GOOD OR BAD –
OF MULL THEATRE?**

If you have an opinion to express or a story to tell please come along to one of the following focus groups:

**CREICH VILLAGE HALL, 8th March
(3-4pm/4-5pm)**

**CRAIGNURE VILLAGE HALL, 9th March
(2-3pm/3-4pm)**

**AROS HALL, 10th March
(3-4pm/4-5pm)**

**DERVAIG VILLAGE HALL, 11th March
(2-3pm/3-4pm)**

**AROS HALL, 13th March
(3-4pm/4-5pm)**

(Refreshments provided)

For more information please email Cassy at c.rutherford.1@research.gla.ac.uk

University of Glasgow
Arts & Humanities Research Council

Figure 2 - focus groups flyer

During this research there was also a need to reach a larger number of attendees at Mull Theatre productions than one-to-one interviews alone would afford. As such, questionnaires were handed out at every performance on the *Laurel and Hardy* tour as well as at a selection of Mull Theatre's performances at its own venue over the summer of 2010.⁴⁰ The aim of this was to get an understanding of the prior relationship that people may or may not have had with the company before coming to see the show so that an assessment could be made about Mull Theatre's role within the wider theatrical landscape. Questionnaires can be problematic in that they can present the participant with leading questions and, where there are multiple choice questions, may categorise the answers in ways that the respondent may not if they were in conversation.

It should also be noted that whilst I tried to ensure that my role of researcher was seen as being independent of Mull Theatre by those I spoke to, the questionnaires produced were done so with the Mull Theatre logo in the top right hand corner of the page. This is because Mull Theatre was required to produce its own questionnaire to support future funding applications and so - demonstrating collaboration - the questionnaire was designed to meet the needs of this thesis and Mull Theatre's own research. This may have impacted on some of the answers being produced as people may be more positive in their responses if they thought that the research was being held by and for the company. In order to mitigate this each of the questionnaires was anonymous and, where possible, during informal discussions with attendees I discussed the purpose of the research and explained my role as an outside researcher. In total 643 questionnaires were returned: 498 from the tour; and 145 from the summer residency at Druimfin. The questionnaires were designed so that one could be filled in for each party and, on average, approximately 50 percent of spectators were accounted for. Given the high response rate I would argue that the questionnaires are representative enough to allow strong - albeit general - conclusions to be drawn from the evidence, particularly when they are

⁴⁰ Please refer to appendix three for a copy of the questionnaire handed out during the *Laurel and Hardy* tour.

supplemented with the information gathered through interviews and observation.

As this section has demonstrated, the majority of data collected throughout this research process was qualitative. This ensured that the main aim of the thesis - examining the perceptions of the company following its recent relocation - was met but has resulted in much of the evidence being anecdotal. Jacky Bratton highlights the significance of anecdotal evidence in her analysis of British theatre in the nineteenth century. Throughout her study she considers how these histories came to be written and presents alternative ways of reading and understanding the stories. One of the methods she employs is the use of anecdotal evidence which she uses to present a new reading of theatrical developments in the 1830s. She asserts that whereas anecdotes and memoirs have previously been 'trawled for "factual" information that can be extracted and corroborated from other documentary sources' there is instead an inherent value within them which goes beyond a process of external verification.⁴¹ Indeed she believes that there is 'a world of historical meaning in what they say about themselves, whether or not we have tangible proof of its truth.'⁴² It must be noted that she is not suggesting that every anecdote be accepted in its entirety but that instead it be understood as part of the multiplicity of stories and understandings which can co-exist at a single moment in time. By using anecdotal evidence within a contextual framework which recognises the potential subjectivity of those voices, a richer and more diverse history of British theatre can be developed.

By writing Mull Theatre into a new narrative of Scottish theatre, this thesis cannot rely solely on established texts but must instead utilise new sources of evidence. Just as Bratton argues for the value of anecdotes used in collaboration with other methods, this thesis also uses the memories of individuals alongside publicity materials, newsletters and personal letters in order to develop an understanding of Mull Theatre's relationship to the island on which it is based and the wider Scottish rural theatre infrastructure. In addition

⁴¹ Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 95

⁴² Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* p.95

to this it should also be recognised that perceptions of, and relationships to, Mull (Little) Theatre will be subjective by their very nature and will undoubtedly shift over time. As such the thesis was never intended to only produce hard, quantifiable statistics but instead to capture and use individuals' voices and ideas. By using multiple methodologies together as well as ensuring that academic rigour was maintained throughout, however, this research will serve to extend our understanding of this largely overlooked company as well as contributing to the discussions regarding theatre space and place, particularly in respect of rural theatre and small-scale touring.

Structure

This thesis examines what was potentially lost and gained in Mull Theatre's relocation and, by extension, explores the relationship between (non-) performance spaces in a rural Scottish theatre context. By this I mean venues which were not designed specifically to house productions and for which live performances form part of a wider programme of non-artistic events or activities, for example pubs, converted churches, village halls and community centres. In doing so each chapter focuses on a different facet of the company's buildings and uses this to interrogate the connections between theatre space and place and small-scale touring. Although this project is heavily rooted in the primary fieldwork conducted throughout the research process it is important to acknowledge that it does not exist in isolation. It has been previously suggested that Mull (Little) Theatre has been largely overlooked because it does not fit into the preferred narratives of Scottish theatre which are largely centred on politically motivated theatre and new-writing. One of the key aims of this thesis is to re-address this and to write the company back into a new story of theatre in Scotland.

In order to do this it first seems apposite to provide an overview to the history of Mull (Little) Theatre and to some of the key developments in the company's evolution. This is the purpose of chapter two. The chapter will offer a history of the development of the company, its management and its programming. This is particularly pertinent as the only other detailed study of this company is the book, *Taking Off: the Story of Mull Theatre*. Not only is this a heavily partial

and subjective account which was written by one of the founding members as a tribute to his late wife and their legacy together but, moreover, the story it tells stops in 1984 when the family left the island.⁴³ This chapter will fill in some of the gaps. Nevertheless, it is important to note that I do not offer a fully comprehensive history to Mull (Little) Theatre. Not only would this be difficult given the space constraints of the thesis but it is potentially impossible due to the large gaps which exist in the current archives. What it does is present the reader with are some of the defining moments in the company's development in order to situate the current examination within a historical context.

Although the central case study is Mull Theatre, this thesis also aims to situate the company within a wider framework and so chapter three seeks to critique some of the literature surrounding Scottish theatre as well as some of the current dialogues around space, place and theatre architecture. One of the central propositions of this project is that understandings of spaces of performance must take into account the uses of the space and the way in which the users relate to and understand the building. Echoing Mackintosh's belief that 'theatre architecture is more than a frame to a picture' this thesis will present the idea that physical theatre space is a vital component of the theatrical experience and interpretation.⁴⁴ Mull Theatre's identity, for instance, is largely based around the qualities which were imbued within the Little Theatre by attendees, both consciously and subconsciously: the building and its geographical location have been central to the creation of meaning.

The chapter takes as its foundation an understanding of theatre buildings as dynamic. A theatre is not being understood as a fixed and static entity but something which is continually 'in process', its unresolved multiple uses and buildings are products of individual and collective experiences, memories and interpretations.⁴⁵ It will bring together theories from theatre studies, human

⁴³ Barrie Hesketh, *Taking Off: The Story of Mull Little Theatre* (Inverness: The New Iona Press, 1997)

⁴⁴ Iain Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) p.1

⁴⁵ This echoes the human geographer, Doreen Massey's, notion that space in general should be viewed as a 'process' rather than an end point. Rather than having a fixed and stable identity it is instead continuously under construction by each of its users; past, present and perhaps even future. Any attempt to interrogate a fixed space should thus be viewed as a

geography and architecture in order to explore the active relationship between human beings and their physical surroundings, be they 'natural' or man-made. It will suggest that despite extensive research on theatre space, there remains a gap in current academic studies regarding an interrogation of (non-) performance spaces such as village halls and community centres, particularly within a rural context. It is this gap which this thesis aims to fill.

Having situated this research project within existing debates surrounding space, place and performance, specifically in the context of rural theatre and touring, the next chapter will present an analysis of Mull Theatre's buildings, past and present. Chapter four will present a 'guided tour' of sorts to the reader.⁴⁶ Rather than simply describing the architectural features of the two venues it will examine the ways in which they have been used and experienced by practitioners and audiences alike. It will consider the exterior, the geographical location as well as the front and backstage areas in order to evaluate the impact that the spaces have had on perceptions of the company based there, both internally from Mull Theatre itself and externally from attendees on and off the island.

In Gay McAuley's analysis of space and performance, she asserts that:

carefully documented, empirical studies of specific performances, not elevated to some universal status [...] but acknowledged as local, contingent and partial [...] are a valid basis for theoretical generalisations.⁴⁷

This is a view that is carried through this thesis. Mull Little Theatre and Druimfin are not presented as examples with universal relevance to the relationship between the space and performance, nor do they embody all of the

single point on the multiple trajectories which cross over in that space and time. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005) p.45

⁴⁶ This is a notion which is presented by numerous spatial theorists including Yi-Fu Tuan who simply states that, 'culture and experience strongly influence the interpretation of the environment.' Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007) p.55

⁴⁷ Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in Theatre* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) p.11-12

issues inherent within rural touring theatre in Scotland. Instead they are being used as a means to continue and extend some of the existing discussions. McAuley's belief is that such case studies should also be presented as 'local, contingent and partial' and this will be reiterated throughout chapter four. In analysing the two spaces and the way they are potentially received and understood, the chapter will draw on both my own experiences alongside anecdotes recorded from practitioners and attendees of both venues. It will acknowledge that the 'tours' of the buildings being offered to the reader are taken at a fixed moment in time and thus may not reflect the state of the buildings at a future point. This is particularly pertinent with regards to Druimfin which is in evident transition.

With so many of Mull Theatre's perceived characteristics stemming from its original, 'little' building, it seems apparent that the relocation to a new purpose-built venue will have repercussions on understandings of the company. Although Mull (Little) Theatre has always toured as part of its annual programme of events, while the company was resident at the Little Theatre its repertory season over the summer months also formed an integral part of its output. One of the key features of Druimfin, however, is that it has been labelled a 'production centre' rather than a theatre. Not only was phase one of building construction focused on the production rather than the reception of the theatrical event but, moreover, Mull Theatre receives funding from Creative Scotland for touring its shows and not for staging them in its own venue. In this way, touring productions off the island has become the primary remit of the company rather than being something which bookends the repertory season. This has resulted in tension emerging between Mull Theatre as a touring company and Mull Theatre as a resident company on its home island; a tension which is apparent for both the company itself and the island attendees.⁴⁸ Chapters five and six will address these two facets of the company's identity in turn, with the first looking at a specific tour and the second looking at its potentially shifting relationship with its local, island audiences.

⁴⁸ This is something which has emerged through interviews and discussions held with various people during the research process and will be explored throughout the thesis.

Mull Theatre's relationship with different spaces of performance is a complex one as, despite having its own venue in which to rehearse and perform, each production is created with the primary purpose of being toured to predominantly rural areas of Scotland. Thus its choice of programming and the stage, sound and lighting designs are largely determined by the other spaces it will be presented in. With this in mind chapter five will draw on my own primary fieldwork regarding Mull Theatre's 2010 Spring Production of *Laurel and Hardy*. By looking at the same production in a range of venues, from small village halls to large purpose-built performance spaces, it will analyse the impact of space on the physical elements of performance, such as the blocking and set design as well as on the audiences' relationship to the event.

By considering each of the venues to which the production toured I will also provide an overview of the diversity of spaces which are currently being utilised on the rural theatre touring network in Scotland. As well as providing an insight into the physical impact of the space on a performance, the chapter will serve to raise awareness about the range of spaces which currently make up the rural touring circuit in Scotland. Little has been written about the (non-) performance spaces which contribute to the circuit and so it is hoped that the presentation of the tour diary I kept during this residency will offer an insight into the diversity of spaces available and the impact that they had on the production in question.

Chapter six will then further the ideas being presented through my tour diary and will examine some of the ways in which Mull Theatre's relocation has impacted on the company's relationship with its island attendees. It is important to reiterate that the research for this thesis was conducted at a fixed moment in time and that when the project was completed the Druimfin building still remained unfinished: phase one of the construction was almost complete but at least three further phases were still waiting for funding. Nonetheless, the section draws on primary fieldwork to explore some of the ways in which the move from the Little Theatre to Druimfin has impacted on emotional perceptions of the company alongside the physical implications it has on programming possibilities and audience numbers. On hearing about the move it seems that a number of attendees expected Druimfin to provide a more state-of-the-art

theatrical experience but have instead been offered one which is reminiscent of the previous building, just in a larger space. By studying this in more depth it is hoped that this chapter will help to further the conversation about the impact of space on audiences in a wider rural context.

With Mull Theatre still in a state of transition, coupled with having both buildings available for analysis during the research period of this project, the company and its venues provide an interesting case study through which to examine the relationship between theatre space and small-scale rural touring. It is important to recognise, however, that it does not exist in isolation. Despite its unique position as a touring company with its own building and its geographical location on the periphery of Scottish theatre, Mull Theatre plays a crucial role within the wider framework of rural theatre, as a promoter, as a receiving building and as a producing company. With this in mind, the focus of this section will broaden out to examine the role played by Mull Theatre within the cultural life of its region, Argyll and Bute, and for rural Scotland more generally. Although the central focus will remain on the company, this chapter will also draw on organisations such as North East Arts Touring (NEAT) and Promoters Arts Network (PAN) - recently renamed 'The Touring Network' - in order to interrogate some of the ideological assumptions and practicalities which are embedded in the development of a rural theatre touring network.

The final chapter will draw together the findings from each of the previous sections concluding that, rather than being a reinvention of Mull Theatre, the relocation has simply resulted in a re-branding of the company. Its previous home is still being held up by several stakeholders as the marker against which new decisions are being measured and compared and so, although there have been shifts in the way attendees perceive the company, its identity is still largely being understood through a filter of the Little Theatre. This is in part due to the sentimentality attached to the small venue and partly due to the continuation of having an island base. For Mull Theatre, the building it occupied for 40 years not only shaped its identity whilst it was in use but seemingly still does so, four years after its doors were closed. With Druimfin in current use, but still standing largely incomplete, the full implications of this new space remain to be seen.

In terms of lessons which can be learnt for theatre in rural Scotland more generally, there needs to be a re-evaluation of how we understand the range of spaces currently utilised for performance within rural Scotland. It will assert that Mull Theatre has been largely overlooked in previous studies because it does not fit into the preferred narratives of Scottish theatre: its choice in programming does not reflect the favoured view of (non-) performance spaces as sites of political debate and questioning. It will also highlight that there is a perception of quality bound up within certain spaces (something which was explored in chapters four and five) but that this is not necessarily an accurate representation of audience experiences. Instead, it will conclude that there is a spectrum of performance spaces available to practitioners working within Scotland and that each of these has their benefits. Thus, the focus of building based theatrical studies should be widened to incorporate non-traditional performance spaces and to show the significance of these within the current landscape of Scottish theatre.

Chapter 2 - Mull (Little) Theatre: A Brief History

Mull Theatre occupies a unique position within contemporary Scottish theatre as the only publically funded touring company with its own permanent rehearsal and performance space. Despite this, the company has been largely overlooked by theatre scholars with few even referring to the company, let alone examining it in any depth. One of the reasons for this could be that Mull (Little) Theatre has not followed the favoured narratives of Scottish theatre, for example as a theatre that is urban and predicated on new writing and political theatre forms. Typically, Donald Smith draws heavily on urban theatres such as Dundee Repertory Theatre, the Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh and the Citizens' Theatre in Glasgow although he does acknowledge, 'the extent to which Scottish theatre had come to depend for its development on the touring companies.'⁴⁹ Nonetheless, in order to illustrate this point further he mentions 7:84 Scotland: a touring theatre company created to perform political messages to the wider population who might not otherwise be served by what its founder, John McGrath, understood as the bourgeois theatre of the established, mainstream venues.⁵⁰

Although Mull Theatre has been cited as having the 'monopoly on touring theatre' in rural Scotland, it does not even feature as a footnote in David Hutchison's edited collection, *A History of Scottish Theatre*.⁵¹ The only two publications which mention Mull (Little) Theatre in any depth are Hesketh's *Taking Off: The Story of Mull Theatre* and a report written by Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion on rural touring theatre in Scotland.⁵² The former was written by one of the founders of the company in question in what appears to be a tribute to his late wife and the latter looks at the rural touring theatre circuit in Scotland, within which Mull Theatre is a key player. Despite its consistency in touring widely and regularly throughout Scotland, then, the island-based

⁴⁹ Donald Smith, '1950 to 1995,' in David Hutchison (ed.), *A History of Scottish Theatre* (Polygon: Edinburgh, 1998) p.297

⁵⁰ John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996) p.3

⁵¹ Interview with Participant V (25/2/11)

⁵² Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion, *The Same But Different, Rural Arts Touring in Scotland: The Case of Theatre* (Stroud: Comedia, 2004) p.12

company has perhaps been overlooked because of its position on the periphery of Scottish theatre; both geographically and metaphorically.

As so little has previously been recorded about Mull Theatre - in the public domain at least- it seems apposite to present the reader with a brief overview of its history in order to contextualise the ensuing explorations of its current state. It is important to note, however, that this chapter aims to provide a 'brief overview' of Mull (Little) Theatre rather than presenting a detailed history. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, this thesis uses the 2008 relocation to examine the role played by the buildings in the perceived identity of the company. In doing so it takes a largely synchronic approach to the research: using primary fieldwork to analyse the company at a fixed moment in time. With a limited word count I have not prioritised a step-by-account of the company's developments. In addition to this - and perhaps even more importantly - creating a detailed and uninterrupted history of this company is unlikely, if not impossible, due to physical gaps in the archives at Druimfin. The archive, as it currently stands, is approximately five large cardboard boxes filled with an assortment of publicity from past productions, minutes taken from board meetings, personal letters sent to board and staff members and a blue folder containing acting notes from a first year student at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.⁵³ Within this there are large gaps in the documents which have survived the years and so a history of Mull Theatre which is collated solely from the archival evidence will be fragmented at best. This is evident in the list of previous productions which has been included in appendix five, for reference. A brief glance will show that some years, such as 1989 for example, have a number of performances documented whilst the entire decade from 1968 to 1978 has been omitted, mislaid or otherwise removed.

There are a number of reasons as to why this should be the case. The Little Theatre was renowned for flooding during the winter months which will have undoubtedly damaged certain documents. Moreover, there was limited space in the converted byre, with additional staff members working out of various spaces across the island including a port-a-cabin in a school playground and a small shop

⁵³ This was previously the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD)

front on Tobermory Main Street. Thus, filing and preserving paperwork for future use was not seen as a priority and many items will have been disposed of if there was no place to put them.

There are also ethical considerations which must be taken into account. Some of the documents in the archive are personal letters for which I could not obtain the necessary permissions for incorporation in this thesis. Given the array of other items which have accumulated in the boxes over the years I could not be certain that the writers or recipients had willingly given the letters to the company and so the ideas contained therein could not be used for this project. Some of the archival gaps have also been discussed with participants but not all of them provided information on the record and so, again, there are some pieces of information in my own private notebooks which cannot be recorded here. Consequently this chapter will provide a general overview to the company, its buildings and key developments within its evolution. In doing so it will identify some of the other elements which may have impacted on the way it is perceived and will provide the foundations upon which the following chapters can be built.

The Isle of Mull

Mull Theatre has been referred to as ‘Scotland’s most unexpected professional theatre company’ partly due to the size and nature of the Little Theatre in Dervaig and partly due to the company’s island location.⁵⁴ McCrone has often expressed resentment at the apparent surprise voiced by many critics and attendees regarding the professional quality of work being produced by the company.⁵⁵ Due to its position on the geographical periphery of Scottish theatre there is an expectation that the Isle of Mull will provide a base for amateur and perhaps insular performances and not those which would be rated highly by critics or urban audiences. Indeed, one participant reported that attendees of

⁵⁴ Unattributed, 'Plenty to Mull Over in an All-Embracing New Cultural Chapter,' *The Scotsman on Sunday* (June 25, 2006). http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/music/album-reviews/plenty_to_mull_over_in_all_embracing_new_cultural_chapter_1_1412958 [last accessed 1/10/11]

⁵⁵ Informal conversations with Alasdair McCrone (3/3/09 and 12/4/10)

the Little Theatre often expressed shock because they did not anticipate seeing a production of ‘London standard’ in a small, rural theatre.⁵⁶



Figure 3 - Map of Scotland
 Reproduced with permission of Lonely Planet. © Lonely Planet, 2011

The physicality of the building would have undoubtedly played a part in this view of Mull Little Theatre not being a ‘theatre’ in the conventional sense. Indeed, although it maintained the widely recognised end-on configuration between the actor and audience, the venue did not conform in any other way to the prototypical image of a theatre, as chapter four will demonstrate. Consequently there was frequent amazement that professional, text-based performances could be staged there. Nonetheless, I would suggest that its location on an island - and its specific location on that island - has had an equally significant impact on perceptions of the company and its productions.

In an article for *The Scotsman on Sunday*, Sarah Jones asserted that:

⁵⁶ Interview with Participant AA (18/08/09)

the idea of a professional theatre on a Hebridean island producing work to a national standard seems odd - not because a remotely located theatre shouldn't produce such work, but because remoteness, rightly or wrongly, implies parochialism.⁵⁷

These embedded notions of parochialism have seemingly become intertwined with external perceptions of Mull Theatre and its activities. That is not to say that Mull (Little) Theatre itself is seen as parochial. In contrast, one of the recurring views being reiterated throughout the research process was astonishment at what the company could achieve in terms of the scale and scope of its repertoire. Thus it is the fact that it was, and arguably still is, overturning the parochial and insular assumptions which are frequently held with regards to rural arts and theatre that singles it out for such awe.

Mull Theatre, despite widespread perceptions of its remoteness and surprise about the quality of its output, does not exist in isolation, either in Scotland or on the island on which it is located. The Isle of Mull is the third largest island in the Scottish Hebrides, behind the Isle of Lewis and Skye, with an area of 216,939 acres⁵⁸ and a population of 2,667, according to the 2001 census.⁵⁹ This resident population dramatically increases over the summer months with a large number of tourists visiting the island. Visitors are attracted to the island for a variety of reasons including the wildlife - it is home to the largest eagle population in the UK - the history and the landscape.⁶⁰ The colourful houses on Tobermory's harbour front have also formed the backdrop to the popular BBC children's

⁵⁷ Sarah Jones, 'Big Plans to Mull Over,' *The Scotsman on Sunday* (June 29, 2003). http://www.scotsman.com/scotland-on-sunday/scotland/big_plans_to_mull_over_1_1291060 [last accessed 1/10/11]

⁵⁸ Hamish Haswell-Smith, *The Scottish Islands: The Bestselling Guide to every Scottish Island*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2008) p.87

⁵⁹ At the time of writing, only phases 1a and 1b of the 2011 Census results for Scotland had been published and so estimates of populations were only provided for the 32 council areas and not for specific locations within them. As such, the thesis is largely having to rely on the statistics collated through the 2001 national Census.

⁶⁰ For an overview to some of the attractions of the island please see its own website which was designed to promote tourism: <http://www.isle-of-mull.net/> [last accessed 10/09/12]

television show *Balamory* which has led to an increase in the number of families visiting the town.⁶¹



Figure 4 - The coloured house fronts of Main Street, Tobermory (2009)

Alongside the topography and natural attractions which one might expect to exist in a rural holiday destination, the Isle of Mull is also a culturally vibrant location with various activities taking place throughout the year. Perhaps surprisingly - given the relatively small resident population - it has two arts organisations which were funded by Creative Scotland: Mull Theatre and An Tobar, an art gallery and music venue located in Tobermory.⁶² In recognition of Felix Mendelssohn's trip to the neighbouring, uninhabited isle of Staffa and his subsequent overture, *The Hebrides*, there is an annual music festival called, 'Mendelssohn on Mull' which tours to different venues across the island and onto Iona. There is also a thriving tradition of amateur dramatics on the island and a proposal for Mull, led by resident and Mull Theatre designer Lee Hendrick, was

⁶¹ There is now a shop on Main Street which is dedicated to *Balamory* merchandise and many of the islanders I spoke to were frustrated at the amount of people who now photograph the houses that the fictional characters 'live in.'

⁶² An Tobar's website is: <http://www.antobar.co.uk/> [last accessed 11/10/12]

shortlisted for Channel Four's 'Big Art' project.⁶³ This has led one journalist to assert that whilst:

this Hebridean idyll is not where you might expect to find the nation's artistic energy [...] if only for a few weeks a year [...] becomes Scotland's cultural hub.⁶⁴

The notion of Mull as a 'cultural hub' is perhaps slightly over-exaggerated given how frequently it is overlooked by non-attendees and theatrical scholars, but there is an element of truth in the amount of creative activity on the island.

Rather than being culturally and artistically isolated from the mainland, Mull is a hive of creative activity with enough spectators and practitioners to support a range of activities. In addition to this, despite its separation from the mainland by a strip of water, the island is still fairly accessible with frequent ferry crossings to three different locations and only a two hour drive from Glasgow to Oban (the main ferry terminal to the Hebrides).⁶⁵ Indeed many of the locals in Tobermory travel to Oban and even Glasgow for a day to carry out general shopping. Haswell-Smith has even gone so far as to suggest that 'it would be easy to forget that it is an island.'⁶⁶ The accuracy of this statement is called into question when one considers a number of occasions during the gales of winter 2010/11 during which Mull was completely cut off: with power lines blown over and ferries unable to sail due to the high winds the islanders may have felt fairly exposed and vulnerable.

In these instances one is reminded of the delicate connection existing between the Scottish islands and the mainland. Nonetheless Haswell-Smith does highlight that that, during fair weather at least, Mull is not completely insular

⁶³ This was a competition in which seven sites across the UK were chosen to receive funding for a public art commission.
http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/B/bigart/sites_1.html#mull [last accessed 15/10/11]

⁶⁴ Unknown, 'Plenty to Mull Over in an All-Embracing New Cultural Chapter,' *The Scotsman on Sunday* (June 25, 2006)

⁶⁵ This is the collective name given to the islands off the west coast of Scotland. Within this the isle of Mull is located in the Inner Hebrides and, along with Skye and Islay, is one of the three largest.

⁶⁶ Haswell-Smith, *The Scottish Islands*, p.80

but instead maintains strong communication links with the mainland with easy transport links making travel to and from the island a relatively common activity. This is important to acknowledge as, despite the often parochial connotations associated with the company as a result of its island location, Mull itself is not completely detached from the world around it, despite the physical separation.

Mull (Little) Theatre

One couple who did see the island as being largely detached from the rest of the world were the Heskeths. Barrie and Marianne were actors who chose to relocate to Mull with their young family to escape what they felt to be the potential threat of nuclear war.⁶⁷ The couple opened a guesthouse in Dervaig - a small village on the island - and subsequently founded 'the Thursday Theatre' in 1966 as a means of supplementing their income and providing some evening entertainment for their guests. Initially guests were invited to take their chairs from the guesthouse across the lawn after dinner and into the converted cow-byre where they would watch a selection of scenes which were adapted and performed by the two professionally trained actors. Soon, however, the venue began to grow in popularity and the Little Theatre was opened on a Tuesday night before eventually opening every night during the summer. Some islanders also began to offer a free shuttle service from Tobermory to Dervaig on some nights so that those staying outside of Druimard House could also attend.⁶⁸

In his book *Taking Off: the Story of Mull Little Theatre*, Barrie Hesketh notes that 'as the news spread about our venture, friends began donating things.'⁶⁹ He refers, for instance, to hanging red velvet curtains around the stage. In this action, carried out in the early stages of the theatre's development, there is a sense that despite its size and lack of financial backing Mull Little Theatre was modelling itself on conventional conceptions of a theatre building. After all, velvet curtains are one of the prototypical features of a 'proper' theatre which

⁶⁷ Barrie Hesketh, *Taking Off: The story of Mull Little Theatre* (Inverness: the New Iona Press, 1997) p.32

⁶⁸ Mull Theatre Newsletter (1969), unpublished

⁶⁹ Hesketh, *Taking Off*, p. 36

has been frequently referred to by participants in this research. Nonetheless, there were many key elements which served to distinguish the Little Theatre from many of its urban counterparts. There was no stage manager in the early years, for instance, and so the lights were turned on and off by the actors from the stage: they would simply reach across and flick the switch.⁷⁰ Similarly, there was no foyer or circulation space. Instead a local resident, Zelda Sawyer, would sit outside the venue and cross out the names of spectators in a jotter notebook when they arrived.⁷¹ This formed the box office. There are, therefore, some discrepancies emerging in its early years between Mull Theatre's professional aspirations and the rather makeshift, amateur feel of some aspects of the organisation. The fondness with which the building is referred to in Barrie Hesketh's book, however, suggests that this was more a source of endearment than frustration in terms of how the couple related to the building.

The tone of Hesketh's book is just one indicator of the type of close personal relationship he and Marianne appear to have had with their venture. For example, a number of newsletters sent from the Mull Little Theatre, read like family round-robins and include a considerable amount of personal material. In 1978, for instance, the first two and a half pages of the four page newsletter describes the wedding of one of the Heskeths' sons and a subsequent newsletter documents Marianne's cancer diagnosis and treatment alongside information of the theatre.⁷² Thus the relationship between theatre building and the artistic directors was more overtly personal than is perhaps the case with other more conventional spaces. The sense of ownership felt by the Heskeths, enhanced by the location of the Little Theatre quite literally in Barrie and Marianne's garden and reflected in their custom of giving a welcoming speech prior to each performance, suggest a dynamic different from that between most theatre buildings and their management.

⁷⁰ This has been mentioned in a number of interviews which I have conducted for this project suggesting that it was a pervasive image for people recollecting the building and the performances staged there.

⁷¹ Interview with Zelda Sawyer (6/3/10)

⁷² Mull Little Theatre Newsletter (September 1978) and Mull Little Theatre Newsletter (Christmas 1982), both unpublished

During the 18 years that Barrie and Marianne Hesketh ran the theatre with the help of their sons, the company was predominantly based on the island over the summer months. Due to water ingress over the winter the building was usually uninhabitable from October to March and so the Heskeths took this opportunity to tour productions in England, Scotland and Europe more widely. Given the expense of touring it seems likely that any additional revenue from this activity would have been limited. Alongside the costs of staging a theatre production including salaries, venue hire, design materials etc. a tour will also involve a living allowance for cast and crew, accommodation costs and travel. With increased outgoings it becomes apparent that a tour must be a box office hit if it is to make a profit. David Pitman reinforced this when he confirmed in one newsletter that the tour of 1988 had a number of poorly attended performances. From then, he asserted, the company would concentrate on ‘the really great and the pre-paid’ in order to assist the financial position of Mull Little Theatre.⁷³

Nonetheless, by getting exposure off the island the company was able to develop a more international profile which would have undoubtedly helped with funding applications to both the Scottish Arts Council and to Argyll and Bute Council. This is evident in a personal letter written by Marianne Hesketh to a Board Member in which she asserts that the Chair of the Board was advocating touring more widely as a means to heighten awareness of both the island and the theatre company based there.⁷⁴ In addition to this, the Scottish Arts Council gave the Heskeths a grant of £300 in order to travel off the island and research other theatres around Scotland.⁷⁵ It is clear then that both the Heskeths and the funders had visions for this theatre to exist as part of a wider theatrical framework in Scotland and not to remain as a resident company on the island which was solely focused on the local community.

This outward looking ethos of the company can also be seen through a proposal to relocate the theatre for which the Heskeths began fundraising in

⁷³ Mull Little Theatre Newsletter (4/11/89) p.1, unpublished

⁷⁴ Unpublished letter from Marianne Hesketh (11/8/82)

⁷⁵ Internal document from Mull Theatre’s archive, unpublished

1979.⁷⁶ At that time they had obtained permission from Torosay Castle to convert one of the barns in its grounds into a new arts centre and had commissioned architectural drawings. The aim was to develop Mull Theatre's cultural output, as well as its position within the creative landscape on the island, by building a larger venue located in a more easily accessible part of the island. The new venue - the Square Centre - was to have facilities for film, theatre, dance and music as well as having actors' accommodation, office space and a place where attendees of the theatre could dine with the founders prior to a performance.⁷⁷ As Marianne's cancer developed in the 1980s, however, the relocation plan for the Square Centre was put on hold and when the requisite amount of money could not be raised the castle trustees withdrew the offer.⁷⁸

This shows a marked difference between the way in which the first and current artistic directors wish to present their theatre to spectators. During rehearsals, McCrone has been keen to maintain an air of privacy around each of the shows and will not allow people into the building unless they have been invited. He also develops pre-sets for his productions so that people are not facing an empty stage on entering the auditorium; instead they are immediately being drawn into the world of the play with ambient sounds and lighting. In contrast the Heskeths spoke before their performances and planned to dine and converse with spectators before appearing on stage. Whilst they were ambitious in their plans for the future of their theatre, then, it was always very overtly *their* theatre.

In 1984, Marianne Hesketh passed away and her body was laid out in the foyer of Mull Little Theatre so that islanders and attendees could pay their respects.⁷⁹ The walls of the foyer were also covered with memorabilia and images from the shows in which she had been involved. This arguably helped to cement the external perception of the Heskeths' close association with the building. Even now very few people I have spoken to have failed to mention the previous

⁷⁶ Mull Little Theatre Newsletter (September 1978) and Dervaig Arts Theatre Ltd.: Square Centre Appeal (1980), both unpublished

⁷⁷ Mull Little Theatre, 'Torosay Theatre and Arts Centre: A Report by the Design Team' (October 1978), unpublished

⁷⁸ Letter from Torosay Castle (19/3/82)

⁷⁹ Letter from Jill Galbreith to myself (5/1/10)

owners. In many ways it appears that the founding pair has become inextricably bound up with current perceptions of, and associations with the company and its buildings. Indeed a number of participants consulted during the research mentioned that the Little Theatre was haunted and that this was believed to be the ghost of Marianne. This highlights the ongoing, almost mythological status given to the Heskeths more than 15 years after they left the theatre and the island.⁸⁰

Following the death of Marianne, Barrie Hesketh and their eldest son, Nick, continued to run the venue and the summer season although by this time the venue was encountering large financial problems. Internal correspondence between board members at this time shows that, following the Heskeths decision to sell Druimard House and return to the mainland, the option to close the theatre entirely was seriously considered. David Pitman - a local shop owner - sat on the board at this time and, having taken a real sense of pride in the venue and seeing its benefits to the island, he asked to be considered as the new Artistic Director.⁸¹ He was given permission and so, in 1986, he ran an 'emergency season' which consisted of one play, *Movie Time*, and was performed by some members of the amateur dramatic society on the island.⁸²

Pitman subsequently took charge of the theatre for ten years in total and programmed a mixture of professional and amateur work throughout each summer. One resident on the island has stated that:

Whilst the cast was rehearsing [*Movie Time*], David [Pitman] got anyone who was remotely suitable to do their party piece... [He also] culled suitable plays from the [amateur] Mull Drama Festival to put on at a vastly reduced price of course.⁸³

⁸⁰ Interviews with Zelda Sawyer (6/3/10) and Chris Baker (6/3/10)

⁸¹ Interview with David Pitman (8/8/09)

⁸² Letter from Jill Galbreith to myself (5/1/10)

⁸³ Letter from Jill Galbreith to myself (5/1/10). The Mull Drama Festival is an annual event in which amateur groups and school classes perform short plays before a judging panel. The event is usually held in Aros Hall, the community centre in Tobermory, and is well attended and popular amongst local inhabitants.

In the minutes from a board meeting in 1986 one voice is recorded as stressing that 'it is important to say its [sic] amateur: in aid of MLT.'⁸⁴ There was evidently a concern that by drawing on the amateur resources of the island the company may be perceived externally as undergoing a drop in quality unless it was accurately advertised. This is potentially a point which still impacts on Mull Theatre as a result of the synonymy which has emerged for Mull Theatre the company and the building which it occupies: Druimfin is frequently referred to as Mull Theatre by attendees and non-attendees alike.⁸⁵ Thus the quality of visiting companies' performances in the venue may affect how attendees view the Mull Theatre as it seems that anything performed within its four walls is attributed to it.

It is worth noting that box office records from the time show that amateur performances tended to sell more tickets than professional ones. This was particularly true at the start of the season when the professional performances only sold an average of eleven tickets. This number did increase with more visitors to the island in July and August but even these shows were not sold out as regularly as the local, amateur performances; one of which had 47 seats sold for one show. This was a capacity of 109 percent.⁸⁶ There are a number of reasons as to why this might have been the case. Each of the amateur performances was different and performed only once whilst the professional shows were often put into repertory with each other and so people could stagger when they attended it. Nonetheless it may also be indicative of a deeper relationship with Mull (Little) Theatre. When islanders had friends and family performing on stage they were more inclined to show their support; when professional actors were employed there was more of a detachment from the local community and so their interest waned.

Although seemingly popular with the locals, by staging a number of amateur events at Mull Little Theatre it could be argued that the company in turn became less professional during this period. Records in the archive, for

⁸⁴ Mull Little Theatre, 'Directors Board Meeting' (21/2/86), unpublished document

⁸⁵ Interviews with Alan Ceserano (3/3/10), Zelda Sawyer (6/3/10), Chris Baker (6/3/10) and Participant AA (18/8/09)

⁸⁶ Internal box office records, unpublished

instance, suggest that Pitman did not see the benefits of having a company cheque book leading Barrie Hesketh to believe that ‘there [was] no future for the theatre.’⁸⁷ Moreover, as a local shop-keeper with no previous professional theatrical experience, there are some who felt that the company lost some of its professionalism and creative innovation during this period.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, it was under Pitman’s direction that professional actors and stage managers from the mainland were first employed. Equity rates were also given to each member of staff and Pitman even joked that they put up a sign saying ‘stage door’ on the backstage entrance of the theatre so that ‘it would look more proper.’⁸⁹ As such, although he may not have had the resources or experience to help Mull Little Theatre to establish itself as a significant company off the island he did make a number of attempts to develop the company and to ensure its continued survival and professionalism.



Figure 5 - Mull Little Theatre stage door
Photograph reprinted with permission of Mull Theatre; photographer and date unknown

⁸⁷ Letter from Barrie Hesketh (14/3/86)

⁸⁸ Informal conversation with Participant AF (4/8/10)

⁸⁹ Interview with David Pitman (8/8/09)

In 1995 Alasdair McCrone was appointed to be Artistic Director following the Scottish Arts Council's assertion that they would cease to fund Mull Theatre unless a replacement was found for Pitman. Much of this decision seems to have been based on Pitman's lack of theatrical or artistic contacts within the professional industry. Indeed, it was the professional theatre experience and established network of contacts which were contributing factors in the appointment of McCrone.⁹⁰ A degree of tension appears to remain reading the dismissal of Pitman and the employment of McCrone amongst local stakeholders and attendees. Without Pitman's intervention it seems highly probable that the theatre would have ceased to function and yet it was clearly not felt - by the board or the Scottish Arts Council - that he would be able to lead the company forward in the desired way.

An early decision made by McCrone as Artistic Director was to drop the word 'little' from the company name as he felt that it was patronising and encouraged parochial connotations to develop in association with the company. Certainly it is notably absent from the first company newsletter which was circulated a matter of months after his appointment in 1997.⁹¹ Despite this, even McCrone continues to refer to the Little Theatre in regard to the venue and, due to the similarity in titles and the impact of the building on the company's identity, a number of people I have spoken to continue to refer to Mull Theatre as Mull Little Theatre.

In trying to break away from what he saw as patronising attitudes towards the company, McCrone also began to look into the possibility of relocating. Prior to 2008, rehearsals usually took place in the Scout hut in Tobermory and the sets had to be built outside the Little Theatre and then moved on to the stage to be assembled. There was also no office space so McCrone and Lesley Hastie, the office administrator, had to work out of a port-a-cabin in the nearby school before moving to a small shop front on Tobermory main street. With limited resources and the project staff and core staff of two all scattered around the island, communication was more difficult and a number of working hours would

⁹⁰ Interview with Participant Y (30/7/10)

⁹¹ Mull Theatre Newsletter, (1997), unpublished

have been lost travelling between each group of staff.⁹² In 2006 the lease for the Little Theatre expired and it was unlikely that it would be renewed by the new owners of Druimard House, who had no association with the theatre. This provided further impetus to McCrone to seek a new location for Mull Theatre.

Throughout the proposed relocation consultation process a number of other venues and options were looked at as possibilities for the company. One was the possibility of joining with the primary school in Dervaig and developing shared premises for the two to use. This was deemed untenable as it would not rectify the accessibility issues of having the theatre located in a small village ten miles outside of the main centre of population, and only reachable via some very narrow, winding roads. Torosay Castle was also considered - as it had been by the Heskeths previously - although again accessibility became an issue as did the question of who the venue would be for. Ultimately, by locating the new building near the centre of the island it could be argued that it would be easier to reach for everyone living on Mull. There is, however, a limited local population in this area and it hosts the main ferry terminus for the island. As a result the theatre would perhaps have become more of a tourist attraction than a source of pride of the Muileachs. This desire to not be seen as overtly serving the tourist industry is perhaps ironic given that over the summer months the majority of attendees at Druimfin are visitors to the island.⁹³ In a similar desire to not be seen as 'Tobermory's Theatre' either, the company decided against converting an old church on Tobermory Main Street (figure six). This would have placed the theatre between the village hall and post office, in the main centre of Mull's population: a central location.

Nonetheless, when the Forestry Commission approached Mull Theatre with the possibility of leasing some land with permission to convert an old steading on the land into a new venue, it was felt that this was a much more acceptable option. Not only would it prevent Mull Theatre and its venue from being seen as belonging primarily to one community over another but, by locating the new

⁹² Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (29/10/09)

⁹³ This became clear from the questionnaires I handed out in July and August 2010 through which I was able to observe that for three different performances of *Laurel and Hardy* in August, one hundred percent of the audience was made up of visitors to the island.

building in Aros Park, the rural identity of the company would not be undermined in the same way as if it had moved into the island's largest town. Thus we can see that despite its funded, touring remit, McCrone was still very keen to maintain and promote the island location and identity of the company; while wishing to lose the potentially negative connotations attached to that.



Figure 6 - The converted church on Main Street (2010)
This building was considered as a possibility for Mull Theatre's relocation.

Throughout its 46 years in existence, Mull Theatre has only had three Artistic Directors - Barrie Hesketh, David Pitman and Alasdair McCrone - and whilst there have been a number of shifts in its development, the type and amount of programming has remained largely consistent. In an interview, Participant V commented on the huge breadth of work produced by Mull Theatre over the years, particularly under the leadership of McCrone.⁹⁴ I would suggest, however, that this range of work has always been central to Mull Theatre. Although the Heskeths only performed plays requiring two actors for many years, they did so

⁹⁴ Interview with Participant V (25/2/11)

by adapting a number of plays for larger casts such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, cutting out characters, and using puppetry or pre-recorded dialogue for some of the characters who would not appear on stage.⁹⁵ Pitman then decided to extend the possible repertoire by looking for plays which involved three cast members, 'which is incredibly different!'⁹⁶ He was also not restricted by looking solely for texts with one male and one female character. With increased financial support from the funding bodies, McCrone now has even broader casting options.⁹⁷

Included as appendix five of this thesis is a full a list of past productions as could be collated. Whilst there are still gaps within it, it does demonstrate that there has always been a range of work produced throughout Mull Theatre's life. This was perhaps initiated through the Heskeths programming of a summer season which alternated three or four different types of shows throughout the week to encourage islanders and visitors to frequent the building more than once in a seven day period. This approach continues to McCrone's artistic directorship where he aims to produce 'a funny play, a serious play and one which falls in the middle.'⁹⁸ Despite the breadth of programming, however, Mull Theatre has always retained a fairly traditional approach to its repertoire with an emphasis on conventional text-based productions. This creates an interesting relationship which has emerged between Mull Theatre and its non-traditional performance spaces.

Critic Mark Fisher has suggested that non-mainstream productions are usually to be found in non-mainstream venues whilst traditional forms will be found in traditional venues. In order to support this he highlights the difference in programming between the main stage and the studio space of many urban theatres: the more experimental pieces will usually be performed in the more

⁹⁵ Hesketh, *Taking Off*, p.51. This was also mentioned in the interview I conducted with David Pitman (8/8/09)

⁹⁶ David Pitman, Mull Theatre Newsletter (1988), unpublished

⁹⁷ The main funder for Mull Theatre are Creative Scotland although it also repeatedly gets project funding from Hi-Arts, Argyll and Bute Council and the Esmee Fairburn Foundation.

⁹⁸ Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (1/3/09)

intimate setting of the studio.⁹⁹ Mull Theatre, on the other hand, takes performances which conform to mainstream dramatic techniques to a number of non-mainstream venues. This not only has potential implications for analysing the social and cultural role of theatre in Scotland today but also raises interesting questions regarding the politics of rural theatre touring and the politics of non-performance spaces; these will be discussed in the following chapters.

Conclusion

With so little having been written about Mull Theatre previously, this chapter has tried to provide a brief overview of some of its key developments. Drawing primarily on unpublished newsletters and documents found within the archive it has furthered the history recorded by Barrie Hesketh by documenting the period after his departure of the island as well as presenting a different view of the Hesketh era. The history of Mull (Little) Theatre can be largely divided into three main periods; each one correlating to a different artistic director. Under the Heskeths (1966 to 1984), the building was used as a unique selling point for the company and it enabled them to think creatively about what they could stage and how they could stage it with limited space and resources. It was very much a family run business which was located in the back garden of the family home and had Barrie and Marianne playing a central role in every activity. Few external crew members were hired in for productions and, even after the company was formalised with a board of directors and company finances, once Barrie Hesketh and his sons declared that they would be leaving the island there were serious questions being asked as to the viability of the venture without them.

David Pitman (1985 to 1996) then took up the reigns and there is no doubt that without his perseverance the company would have folded. Despite this very few records from this period remain accessible and during the interviews conducted it became apparent that even on the island people genuinely seem to know little about it. It seems that some tensions emerged following the

⁹⁹ Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace, *Scottish Theatre since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996) p.52

appointment of McCrone as a replacement for Pitman and it may be that these have never fully been resolved. What is interesting to note, however, is that it was during this time that the company was most closely connected to the community within which it was located with the local amateur dramatic societies being pivotal in keeping the company afloat.

McCrone, in contrast, has worked hard to detach the company from what he sees as perceived parochialism being attributed to the company as a result of its location and size. Since his appointment in 1997 he has always employed professional cast and crew who are predominantly resident in the central belt and he is keen to promote Druimfin as a 'hub' of creative activity and as an important landmark in the theatrical landscape of Scottish theatre. The company has evolved from a small performance venue, open one night a week, into a publically funded touring company with a monopoly of the rural theatre circuit in Scotland. Nonetheless, there are still some qualities which can be seen as running throughout its history.

One of these is the programming. Although McCrone and the Heskeths have tried to use the limited space imaginatively in their performances the programming of the company is still very much text-based and largely naturalistic. This creates an interesting dichotomy between the non-traditional space being used and the broadly naturalistic shows being staged there. In addition to this, notions of ownership and its relationship to the island on which it is based have also been significant in shaping people's perceptions of the company; both internally and externally. By providing a general overview to the company and its artistic directors the thesis can now begin to explore some of the ways in which the building itself may have impacted on perceptions of the company as well as looking at what was potentially lost and gained in the move.

Chapter 3 - Space, Place and Buildings: A Critical Review

The impact of the site of performance on the production and reception of the overall theatrical event has been subject to extensive scholarly attention.¹⁰⁰ It is generally accepted that the place of performance is an active agent in the creation of meaning rather than merely being a backdrop to the experience. The focus of this thesis is on the particular spaces and places which have contributed to and influenced the theatrical production(s) of Mull Theatre: Mull Little Theatre, Druimfin and the diverse range of village halls, community centres and theatre venues in which the company has performed. In focusing on these spaces and places, my intention is to gain insight into aspects of theatre space that pertain particularly to small-scale touring. These include issues of access and ownership, questions regarding repertoire and production values and the different qualities of experience (both audiences' and performers') encountered in a spectrum of venues from purpose-built theatre spaces, to performance venues in converted buildings, such as churches or schools, to village halls and community centres.

Although almost any space can be used to house performances, evidenced through the wide range of performance spaces utilised during the Edinburgh Festivals, for instance, there still remains a dominant idea of what makes a space a 'theatre.' The Theatre Trust, for instance, suggests that a theatre is:

made up of many elements. These include dedicated spaces for its many functions, both front of house and backstage. They need to be carefully planned to ensure smooth presentation of a production. Storage areas are also essential [...] and conveniences for all its staff and performers.

Theatres contain vast amounts of equipment [...] which needs to be

¹⁰⁰ For instance, scholars such as Marvin Carlson, David Wiles and Iain Mackintosh have produced influential monographs exploring the relationship between buildings and meaning within a theatrical context whilst others such as Mike Pearson are primarily concerned with site-specific performances which take place out with the established stock of theatre spaces. For the full references of these studies please refer to the bibliography.

safely accommodated and operated without interfering with the audiences' enjoyment.¹⁰¹

In this conception the emphasis is on the theatre building having the correct facilities and resources to house a high quality performance. Indeed, under the front of house areas, the Trust only notes those aspects which are relevant to the auditorium such as the control box, the seating and an orchestra pit. It does not mention other spaces such as the box office, foyer or bar which are described by Mackintosh as 'essentially secondary spaces.'¹⁰²

The image of a theatre as comprising an end-on stage with a proscenium arch, which is posited by The Theatre Trust, has also been repeated by various participants I spoke to throughout the research process. Without fail, anyone who was asked to explain what they understood as being the key components of a theatre instinctively mentioned the auditorium first, describing the actor-audience configuration, curtains around the stage and comfortable seats. Each one then appears to have been visualising the same prototypical image of a space primarily used to stage text-based performances to seated spectators in a darkened auditorium.¹⁰³ It seems that, despite the diversity of other spaces used for live performance, the prototypical image of the proscenium arch theatre lingers in the popular imagination.

A brief look at the rural theatre touring circuit in Scotland today, shows that the prototypical image of a theatre is far from being the only type of venue in which theatrical productions are regularly staged. Mull Theatre's *Laurel and Hardy* tour encompassed a full range of venues from village halls to studio theatres to main stage proscenium arch theatres, the latter being far less prevalent than any other type of venue.¹⁰⁴ In addition to this, the nomenclature of 'production centre' for Mull Theatre's new purpose-built venue, despite its

¹⁰¹ The Theatre Trust website: <http://www.theatretrust.org.uk/resources/exploring-theatres/what-makes-a-theatre> [last accessed 15/4/12]

¹⁰² Iain Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) p.3

¹⁰³ Interviews with Barbara Weir and Elizabeth Maclver (24/2/09), Participant F (2/3/10), Gordon Cooper (30/4/10), David Pitman (18/8/09), Kevin Hill (5/8/10) and Participant AE (30/10/09)

¹⁰⁴ A full list of these venues can be found in appendix eight of this thesis.

repeated use to stage live performances for a paying audience, also highlights that the term 'theatre' could be considered to embrace a range of spaces and qualities: arguably any space which can host a performance could be called a theatre for the time in which it is used as such.

For Bernard Tschumi there are three valid approaches in architecture regarding the relationship of what he calls 'concept' and 'content.' There is 'indifference' in which the two elements co-exist but do not overlap; there is 'reciprocity' in which context and concept interrelate; and 'conflict' in which the two components are purposefully designed to clash with each other.¹⁰⁵ Within a theatrical context, these different approaches could perhaps be illustrated by performing in a village hall (indifference), in a conventional theatre (reciprocity) and outdoors (conflict). Whilst only one of these is designed primarily to house performance and to work with a symbiotic relationship between event and design, a brief look at the cultural venues of most cities will demonstrate that each of the above approaches are continuously being utilised and exploited within the performing arts.¹⁰⁶

For Mull Theatre, and rural theatre touring in Scotland more generally, Tschumi's assertion raises some interesting questions regarding the space of performance. Writing about theatre space Iain Mackintosh argues that architectural form largely determines function.¹⁰⁷ This could, by extension, lead one to believe that naturalistic, text-based theatre performances must take place in a prototypical end-on theatre space, designed primarily for that purpose: the dominant theatrical form being restricted to the dominant architectural form. The apparent disbelief that Mull Theatre could successfully

¹⁰⁵ Bernard Tschumi, *Event-Cities 3: Concept vs. Context vs. Content* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004) p.11

¹⁰⁶ In an interview with Alan Ceserano - a regular employee for Mull Theatre's productions - he noted that the only place a theatre production cannot be staged is on the beach as 'the environment is too wild. It cannot be tamed.' In this location the conflict between the show and the surroundings becomes too great and the clash cannot create anything new. In other outdoor performances the 'conflict' may be used to draw the audience's attention to certain themes or ideas by placing the site as a central feature in the show. Interview with Alan Ceserano (3/3/10)

¹⁰⁷ Iain Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) p.11

produce work of this type in a small atypical theatre venue does imply that perhaps there is a persistent, underlying belief in this connection.

Much site-specific practice aims to critique dominant theatre traditions and theatre buildings,¹⁰⁸ choosing to engage with the notion of space as an active agent in the creation of meaning, rather than seeing it as a mere bystander. For Pearson, 'performance occasions reinterpretation,' and so a dynamic relationship between site and performance can offer a re-articulation or re-imagination of the site.¹⁰⁹ In this idea space might be viewed as a palimpsest. This does not just apply to the spaces of site-specific work, however; it can also be applied to understandings of theatre buildings. As such, it can be used to critique a lingering popular sense that the meanings and uses of established theatre venues are fixed and stable; a view that has remained despite arguments from scholars such as Marvin Carlson and David Wiles who acknowledge the multitude of meanings which are created through the design, layout and geographical location of such buildings. Similarly, practitioners such as Peter Brook have challenged this perception of spatial meaning as permanent. His approach to theatre space, for instance, foregrounds the past uses and histories of his 'found' spaces.¹¹⁰

Seeking out new venues has also been a central aim of many overtly left-wing theatre companies which use this as a means to seek out a new audience; companies such as Red Ladder and 7:84 (Scotland). This has led theatre critic Mark Fisher to assert that, since the 1970s, 'theatrical energy had been deflected towards alternative spaces.'¹¹¹ My study of Mull Theatre, a company who do not claim to be, nor could easily be described as radical or left wing, critiques this association of alternative spaces with radical, alternative theatre.

¹⁰⁸ Fiona Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain: a Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain,' *New Theatre Quarterly* 18:2 (2002b) p.143

¹⁰⁹ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) p.159

¹¹⁰ This can be seen through his own theatrical venue in Paris, Bouffes du Nord which is described in Andrew Todd and Jean-Guy Lecat, *The Open Circle: Peter Brook's Theatrical Environments* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003) various pages

¹¹¹ Mark Fisher, 'From Traverse to Tramway,' in Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace (eds.), *Scottish Theatre Since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996) p.51

Meaning in space

Gay McAuley observes that, 'the location of the theatre building necessarily makes some statement about the way theatre is perceived by society more generally and by its practitioners.'¹¹² For her, the concentration of London's West End theatres on Shaftesbury Avenue suggests certain ambivalence towards the position of theatre making in England. This is due to what she describes as the 'glamour and activity' of Shaftesbury Avenue backing on to the more dangerous area of Soho which has been renowned in the past for prostitution and striptease clubs.¹¹³ In the case of Mull Theatre, its island location has certainly played an important role in external understandings of the company. This is highlighted through the fact that its geographical location and the small size of its previous building are mentioned in numerous critical production reviews, often prior to the performance under scrutiny.¹¹⁴ In addition to this, the new building location on the island was a source of much discussion as it was felt that by placing it in Tobermory, for instance, the venue and company might be seen as belonging to that town and not be perceived as part of the island as a whole.

In her examination of the relationship between space and meaning in performance, Gay McAuley also turns her attention to the backstage areas which are often neglected in theoretical studies of theatre and its buildings. Whilst these are often viewed as marginal spaces, and consequently as less important, her study centres on the belief that each space within the theatre is as vital a component in the creation of meaning within the theatrical event. She cites the case of Belvoir Street in which there are two dressing rooms, one for men and one for women: one, however, can only be accessed through the other. She suggests that, 'while such a lack of privacy can be stressful, it can also provide a sense of community, and the energy that this generates can be palpable in

¹¹² Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in Theatre* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) p.46

¹¹³ McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p.45

¹¹⁴ For example, Thelma Good's review of *The Designated Mourner* (2003), http://www.edinburghguide.com/aande/theatre/reviews/d/designated_mourner_mulltheatre.shtml (accessed 24th July 2011) and Onstage Scotland's review of *Macbeth* (2008) in which reference is made to 'the tiny stage of Mull Little Theatre,' http://www.onstagescotland.co.uk/reviews/macbeth_mull_theatre/

subsequent performances.¹¹⁵ This notion is further emphasised by Ric Knowles who argues that much of the meaning created in performance is produced by intersections between the performance text, the conditions of production and the conditions of reception.¹¹⁶ In the case of Mull Theatre the intersections between the conditions of production and reception are perhaps more overt than for other companies, given Druimfin's design as a 'production centre.' With more emphasis being placed on the production than the reception of the event, spaces which would ordinarily be hidden from the spectators' view - the stage door, for instance - are instead located at the front of the building. Similarly, the backstage kitchen is adjacent to the main entrance and often results in patrons overhearing voices of the cast and crew as they prepare for the start of a show.

For John McGrath, the site of performance is a significant component of the 'language of theatre.'¹¹⁷ He asserts that:

There are elements in the language of the theatre beyond the text, even beyond the production, which are often more decisive, more central to one's experience of the event than the text or the production [...] notably the choice of venue, audience, performers, and the relationship between performer and audience.¹¹⁸

McGrath suggests that the creation of meaning within the theatrical event is made up by a number of interrelating components and thus, in order to significantly change the overall meaning of the event, each element has to be examined. He fervently advocated the creation of a working class theatre and, in searching for a new audience; he produced plays which were to be performed in non-traditional spaces such as local clubs and village halls. By seeking out spaces in which working-class audiences might feel a greater sense of ownership

¹¹⁵ McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p.65

¹¹⁶ Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.100-01

¹¹⁷ John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996) p.5

¹¹⁸ John McGrath, *The Cheviot, the Stage and the Black, Black Oil* (London: Methuen Drama, 1993) p.7

he felt that live performances would be more able to encourage political activism. Mull Theatre also utilises this type of (non-) performance space but it does so with different intentions. It is a rural company which creates performances primarily for rural Scottish audiences but the productions are usually naturalistic in their form, designed for entertainment above all else. Whilst on tour with *Laurel and Hardy*, a number of spectators I spoke to in village halls and community centres expressed a sense of pride that the company regularly tours to 'their' venues, many of whom would not have seen the show if it was only performed in an urban centre. As such, Mull Theatre is utilising these venues as a means of increasing accessibility to this art form. It is also using the sense of ownership in its places of performance to evoke a sense of ownership in the company which will extend beyond the physical boundaries of the island on which it is based.

In addressing issues of social accessibility David Hutchison has asserted that:

As long as [theatres] give the impression by their general atmosphere that there is something superior about [them], then ordinary people will continue to be put off and stay away.¹¹⁹

This sense of elitism and exclusion seems to have largely stemmed from the hierarchical structure of the seating and audience entrances in nineteenth century theatre buildings which were originally designed to reflect and promote the social stratification of the day. Coupled with the perception of 'high class' culture which was being showcased in such venues, the suggestion is that minority groups and the working classes felt, and arguably still do feel, unwelcome in such spaces. As such, Richard Seyd, co-founder of Red Ladder, noted in 1975 that, 'we aim to put our shows on in a context and venue where those present are the ones that the play is designed for, and where the context does not exert alienating cultural pressures.'¹²⁰ This thesis does not focus on the evolution of alternative theatre spaces in the 1960s and 1970s. What is of relevance though is Mull Theatre's use of buildings which were not designed primarily to house performances, such as community centres and village halls.

¹¹⁹ Hutchison, *The Modern Scottish Theatre* (Glasgow: Molendinar, 1977) p.109

¹²⁰ Richard Seyd, 'The Theatre of Red Ladder,' *New Edinburgh Review* 30 (75) p.37

Mull Theatre is not motivated by radical politics but, as the evidence in chapter five suggests, issues of access and ownership play out in the venues they inhabit.

Michael Elliot warned against ‘not building for posterity’¹²¹ and it seems that the National Theatres of Wales and Scotland have taken this to heart, both choosing to remain peripatetic and to eschew the creation of their own buildings in which to perform. Elliot suggests that if we continue to build venues according to the requirements of the time, we run the risk of lumbering future generations with our mistakes. Certainly Fisher has questioned whether the stock of buildings available to a nation will influence that nation’s literary repertoire.¹²² If he is correct in concluding that the two are related then there is a worry that creating too many theatrical venues will inadvertently cause the art form to stagnate: creative thoughts will be restricted by the practical and conceptual limitations of the available venues.

There are clearly practical implications for a national theatre deciding against creating its own venue but there are also ideological implications underpinning such decisions. When Mull Theatre considered relocating it noted that by moving to Tobermory, to the main centre of population on the island, there was a chance that it would be understood as Tobermory’s venue and not as one belonging to the island.¹²³ In this way we can infer that each building has a certain symbolic status and that, certainly for a national theatre, it will act as a type of icon. The danger with this is that it may then cease to represent the nation, or region, as a whole.

By creating a permanent venue, one is also potentially fixing the identity of that nation. Theatre academic Anwen Jones highlights this when she notes that there was an emerging ‘definition of the national theatre as a ‘place’ - a designated space for the articulation and interrogation of matters of national

¹²¹ Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, *Making Space for Theatre: British Architecture and Theatre Since 1958* (Stratford-Upon-Avon: Mulryne and Shewring, 1995)

¹²² Fisher, ‘From Traverse to Tramway,’ p.49-56

¹²³ This is a notion which has been reiterated in various conversations with McCrone throughout my residencies on the island.

interest and importance.¹²⁴ By rooting it to a particular place, however, one is presenting a certain representation of that nation. Jen Harvie, however, asserts that, 'national identities are neither biologically nor territorially given; rather they are creatively produced or staged.'¹²⁵ This is reinforced by Trish Reid's suggestion that having an ostensibly homeless national theatre of Scotland, coupled with its inaugural *Home* productions which took place in ten non-performance venues across Scotland, presents Scotland as 'confidently heterogeneous.'¹²⁶ Whilst this thesis will not be examining ideas of nationhood, it does highlight some pertinent questions which exist between space, place and identity and show that there certain ideological implications embedded within each venue and its location.

Performing spaces

Whilst scholars and practitioners alike have recognised the dynamic relationship which exists between buildings and performances, it seems that the buildings themselves are still seen in a fairly fixed and homogenous way. Tschumi has suggested that, 'the history of architecture is a very static history [...] one that is about structure, solidity, stillness, etc.'¹²⁷ In contrast to the ephemeral nature of the performances, the buildings which house them are fixed and maintain a degree of permanence. This has perhaps led to the pervasive image of a theatre as being that of the proscenium, end-on theatre constructions which dominated mainstream performing arts until the latter half of the twentieth century. Fisher has argued that as late as the 1990s mainstream productions were contained within mainstream venues whilst more experimental performances and new writing were restricted to non-mainstream spaces such as studio theatres.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Anwen Jones, *National Theatres in Context: France, Germany, England and Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007) p.117

¹²⁵ Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) p.21

¹²⁶ Trish Reid, "'From Scenes like these Old Scotia's Grandeur Springs': The New National Theatre of Scotland," *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 17.2 (2007) p.198

¹²⁷ Omar Kahn and Hannah Dorrita, 'Performance/Architecture: An Interview with Bernard Tschumi,' *Journal of Architectural Education* 61.4 (08) p.52

¹²⁸ Fisher, 'From Traverse to Tramway,' p.52-3

As theatre practices have moved away from the proscenium arch, scholars have increasingly turned to other theoretical frameworks in order to explain and understand the relationships which exist between the place and the event of the performance. Henri Lefebvre's key axiom that '(social) space is a (social) product'¹²⁹ has been hugely influential and has led to an understanding of space as always in flux. Rather than being seen as a fixed and stable entity then, it is instead to be viewed as an active process. For spatial geographer, Doreen Massey, this is central to her key proposition that, 'we recognise space as always under construction.'¹³⁰ Space is never complete but is instead subject to multiple relationships and experiences each becoming an integral part of the meaning it produces.

This clear link between space and time can also be seen in the work of Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks and their development of 'theatre/archaeology.' Through this interaction of two apparently diverse disciplines, Pearson and Shanks present space as a heterogeneous concept in which, 'meaning comes from making connections and exploring contexts.'¹³¹ Rather than being presented as a linear construct then it is instead seen as multi-layered with multiple meanings and interpretations being created all of the time. Both archaeology and performance are seen 'as constituting a kind of *stratigraphy*;' a myriad of elements which are open to numerous reconstructions and reinterpretations.

This understanding of space stands in firm contrast to Yi-Fu Tuan's notion that, 'place is essentially a static concept.'¹³² Whilst he suggests that space 'is an abstract term for a complex set of ideas,'¹³³ places are 'centres of felt value.'¹³⁴ He thus echoes Edward S. Casey's suggestion that, 'generality [...]

¹²⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1991) p.26

¹³⁰ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005) p.1

¹³¹ Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) p.157

¹³² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007) p.179

¹³³ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p.34

¹³⁴ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p.4

belongs to space; particularity [...] belongs to place.’¹³⁵ In these terms space is being construed as a complex yet relatively abstract concept. It is through the division of space into places - ‘centres of value’ which have meaning and importance attributed to them by their users - that space accrues its own identity. For Tuan, this meaning comes about through a halt in temporality; if there were constant movement, meaning would not be attached and users would struggle to achieve a sense of place. Accordingly, Tuan defines place as ‘a pause in movement.’¹³⁶

This belief that space is movement but place is a pause can be seen as potentially underpinning understandings of architecture, giving credence to Tschumi’s previous quote that, ‘the history of architecture is a very static one.’¹³⁷ Whilst the practice of theatre is ephemeral in its very nature, the stock of buildings which it produces is fixed and permanent. Moreover, Casey observes that, ‘a building condenses a culture in one place’ and thus it can be seen as reflecting a specific moment in time.¹³⁸ Nonetheless, buildings are not static entities which remain constant and immovable throughout time; at least in terms of the numerous refurbishments and upgrades which they can and do undergo. Lefebvre has acknowledged that the ‘past leaves its traces on space;’¹³⁹ both metaphorically - through associations one makes - and physically. This is exemplified through Brook’s home venue, the Bouffes du Nord in which ‘the theatre’s passage through history is etched on the walls.’¹⁴⁰ As we shall see with Mull Theatre’s venues, the past has had a significant impact on present perceptions of the company and its buildings; they are not static and neutral containers.

¹³⁵ Edward S. Casey, ‘How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena,’ in Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (eds.), *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1996) p.15

¹³⁶ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p.138

¹³⁷ Khan and Dorrita, ‘Performance/Architecture,’ p.52

¹³⁸ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) p.32

¹³⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.137

¹⁴⁰ Todd and Lecat, *The Open Circle*, p.9

Casey's and Tuan's distinction between the terms 'space' and 'place' do not just serve to highlight some of the discrepancies between understandings of space, place and buildings, they also suggest some of the energy which has gone into examining, understanding and defining these terms. There has been a rigorous interrogation into the taxonomy surrounding performances which engage pro-actively with the spaces in which they occur and yet little has been done to mirror this with regards to buildings designed to house live performances.

In her study into the range of site-specific companies in the UK, Fiona Wilkie observes that although the term 'site-specific' only really gained currency in the late 1980s, it is now a contested term.¹⁴¹ Indeed, acknowledging the diversity of results that she obtained through questionnaires, Wilkie concludes that, 'the only generalisation that can be drawn [...] to define site-specific performance is that it is concerned with issues of place and the real spaces of performance.'¹⁴² There is a clear difficulty in obtaining an overarching term for classification. As such she includes a spectrum posited by the company Wrights and Sites in which there are five labels: 'in theatre'; 'outside theatre'; 'site sympathetic'; 'site generic'; and 'site specific.'¹⁴³ Each of these categories relates to a different level of engagement with the site in question. What is important to note is the opposition inherent between 'site specific' at one end of the spectrum and 'in theatre' at the other, with little interrogation as to what 'in theatre' means. Whilst the place of performance is being seen as an active agent within site-specific productions - as a performer in its own right - the notion of a theatre being presented here is one in which the performance does not overtly utilise the space as an active component in the creation of meaning to the same degree.

In his analysis of site-specific performances, Pearson makes a similar distinction between the fluidity of site and fixed understandings of the stage-auditorium relationship. He asserts that:

¹⁴¹ Fiona Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain: A Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain,' *New Theatre Quarterly* 18.70 (02) p.141

¹⁴² Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain,' p.148

¹⁴³ Wilkie, 'Mapping the Terrain,' p.150

whilst 'that undertaken in non-theatrical spaces' is now barely adequate, the auditorium might yet provide a *control*, an abstracted set of conditions, against which to extrapolate the particularities of site work.¹⁴⁴

This 'control', however, is problematic in that it presents a very static view of the relationship between auditorium and performance which does not necessarily reflect the range of buildings which are continuously being utilised in the contemporary theatrical landscape. In this 'control', 'the auditorium is cloistered [...] the auditorium is dark and quiet [and] in the auditorium, artifice is disguised.'¹⁴⁵ These are certainly characteristics of naturalistic productions which take place in conventional theatre buildings and yet it negates numerous spaces which are used to house performance on a regular basis but which were not designed primarily to do so; venues such as village halls

Just as Wilkie has presented a spectrum for performances which actively and overtly utilise non-theatrical spaces as an integral part of the process and product, I would suggest that a similar spectrum may be a more useful way of considering the buildings of theatre. This is particularly true when one takes into account the range of venues which currently constitutes the rural touring circuit in Scotland. My study of Mull Theatre who stage broadly naturalistic theatre in different types of venues aims to consider the relationship between site and performance in work that would not be designated 'site-specific.'

Conclusion

A number of scholars and practitioners have examined the impact that the site of performance has on the production and reception of the overall theatrical event. From the academic studies of Carlson, Wiles and McAuley, amongst others, to the practical explorations of Pearson and Brook through their own performances, it is widely accepted that the space is an active ingredient in the creation of meaning. Nonetheless, as this chapter has highlighted, there is a gap within the existing literature regarding the presentation of largely naturalistic,

¹⁴⁴ Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p.17

¹⁴⁵ Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* p.17

text-based performances in 'alternative' venues such as village halls and community centres; something which this thesis will address.

Any space can be used for performance. Peter Brook demonstrates this through his regular use of 'found' spaces, including the old transport museum in Glasgow which he used for the premiere of his 1988 production *The Mahabharata* and which has since become an established arts centre for experimental and international performances. Nonetheless, the dominant image of a theatre which pervades popular imagination is still that of a proscenium arch theatre. This is perhaps in part to do with associations which have been developed between (non-) performance venues and non-mainstream performances. During the 1960s and 1970s a number of left-wing politically motivated companies and practitioners actively sought out new working-class audiences by performing in 'non-theatre' venues. Mull Theatre also regularly uses these spaces, including village halls and community centres, but it does so without overtly political aims. Instead, this company tours broadly naturalistic theatre which is designed primarily to entertain the audience and increase accessibility to the arts.

Issues around access to and social and metaphorical ownership of (non-) performance spaces have largely been contained within a political framework; focusing on the development of a predominantly working class theatre. Nonetheless, these venues form the majority of spaces available to performers and companies on the rural touring circuit in Scotland. By focusing on the spectrum of venues which have contributed to and influenced the production(s) of Mull Theatre, this thesis will seek to broaden the existing dialogues regarding space, place and theatre. In particular it will suggest that current ideas relating to site-specificity can also be applied to broadly naturalistic, text-based productions which use established theatrical conventions - set, stage and lighting, for instance - but within a range of theatre and non-theatre venues alike.

Chapter 4 - Mull Theatre's Buildings

It has been argued that whilst the space of performance may be fundamental in shaping the overall theatrical event, spectators will often have a subconscious relationship with the building they are in. Fisher, for instance, highlights this in a 1996 essay on contemporary Scottish theatre. He observes that:

Theatre architecture is something we take for granted. We go to the theatre to see a particular play, not because we like the building. It's not that people don't appreciate buildings and not that they don't build up a loyalty to them: a Perth Theatre subscriber once sat next to me and only minutes before curtain up, peered down at his programme to find out what he was there to see. But I doubt if even that gentleman would have stopped to articulate what it was about the ambience of Perth Theatre - or more probably the ambience created by the company in that space - that kept him coming back. Even if he tried, he would probably have talked about his liking for the repertoire in general, long before he tried to explain what it was about the design of the building that made him feel comfortable.¹⁴⁶

Whilst this may be the case for some venues and audiences, this notion that our relationship with theatre spaces is largely subconscious and secondary to the performance is challenged through loyal attendees' conscious relationship to the building of Mull Little Theatre. Having been informed about the research questions of this thesis, those that engaged with the project will undoubtedly have been thinking about the venue but each was able to provide numerous and enthusiastic stories relating to the physicality of the space. Specific productions were then drawn upon to illustrate the point but frequently the names of these were forgotten. What was relevant was that the sound of sheep bleating could once be heard during a show set in the New York Bronx, or that somebody almost tripped up an actor because they were in the front row and their feet were on the stage. Moreover, one participant asserted that they would also

¹⁴⁶ Mark Fisher, 'From Traverse to Tramway,' in Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace (eds.), *Scottish Theatre Since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996) p.50

recommend Mull Little Theatre to visitors to the island because of the overall experience; it would not be a specific performance they were recommending.¹⁴⁷

In contrast, questionnaire respondents on the *Laurel and Hardy* tour were less likely to provide information on the venue they were in.¹⁴⁸ Out of the 498 questionnaires returned, 214 had included an additional comment (43 percent) but only 33 of those explicitly mentioned the space in which the performance had taken place (seven percent). These varied from general statements such as, 'Great show! Great venue! Great stuff!' (Victory Hall, Benderloch) to more specific observations including, 'venue is lovely, loved all the art on the walls. Wish I lived nearer!' at the CatStrand, New Galloway and 'venue excellent: nice intimate auditorium' (Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh).

It should also be noted that a number of the responses which I have included as relating to the venue did not mention the building directly but instead referred to the use of the set or props. One example is a response from the Eastgate Theatre in Peebles where one spectator noted that they had, 'thoroughly enjoyed the show. Set very good: a magic use of the small stage that we have here.' As the following chapter will demonstrate, the space of performance has a strong impact on the show being staged there by not only creating certain expectations within the audience but, moreover, by imposing practical limitations on the staging. As such it seemed apposite to include references to the physicality of the production as a reference to the physicality of the building too.

Although the return rate for the questionnaires on tour was relatively good - on average about 60 percent of each audience was accounted for at each performance - the small percentage which included comments about the space does support Fisher's assertion that, in the majority of cases, the relationship between space and spectator is largely a subconscious one. This is despite the prominent belief that meaning in space is created through our bodies and our physical relationship to that space. Indeed the human geographer, Casey asserts

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Participant Z (30/7/10)

¹⁴⁸ A copy of the questionnaire has been included in appendix three of this thesis for reference.

that 'my lived body is the locator agent of lived places.'¹⁴⁹ He thus places the human body at the centre of lived experience; it is through our bodies that we experience and make sense of the world around us. This idea is echoed in Tim Ingold's statement that, 'it is through being inhabited [...] that the world becomes a meaningful environment.'¹⁵⁰ Space is not an abstract concept onto which meaning is assigned but it is instead created, shaped and understood by each of its users simultaneously. As Massey argues, it is the product of 'interrelations.'¹⁵¹

Linguistically we can see the important relationship between space and the body when we consider various measurements. As Lefebvre highlights, examples such as thumb's breadth, foot, palms and so on, suggest that there was a certain significance placed on the relationship between the body and the world in which it existed.¹⁵² While some of these measurements have remained in the English language, it seems that, largely due to the Cartesian duality between perception and experience, much of this significance was either lost or ignored. In recent decades, however, there has been a resurgence regarding the dynamic relationship which exists between humans and their lived environment. Lefebvre, for instance, suggests that space is, "'lived" rather than conceived.'¹⁵³ It is not a tabula rasa upon which meaning is projected but it is instead a concept which is always '*in process*.'¹⁵⁴

In recognition of the fact that the users of the space contribute to the ongoing layers of meaning as much if not more than the architectural design, this chapter will present a dual approach to Mull Theatre's two buildings. Part of the exploration will be concerned with the physicality of the venues: for example, the location, the materials used and the size. Alongside this the chapter will also present a more qualitative and experiential account of the

¹⁴⁹ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) p.105

¹⁵⁰ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) p.173

¹⁵¹ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005) p.9

¹⁵² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991) p.110

¹⁵³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.236

¹⁵⁴ Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, *Thinking Space* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) p.4

buildings utilising memories, personal experiences and collective stories. This will further enhance the view being presented in this thesis that the creation of meaning within these venues - and the implications for Mull Theatre's identity more generally - is as much a product of the people interpreting the space as it is the space itself.

Prior to an analysis of the two buildings it is perhaps important to note that my first experience of the Mull Little Theatre building in Dervaig was in March 2009 after it had ceased to be used as a theatre. By this point the old coach house had been virtually gutted in the hope of aiding a potential sale of Druimard House.¹⁵⁵ Left open to the elements - the archway downstage had not been sealed up and the door was left partially open - the building was certainly looking more dilapidated than it did previously; most of it having succumbed to the damp.

This is evident when one compares figures seven and eight below. The first appears on the Scottish Arts Council touring directory and shows how audiences would have seen the building.¹⁵⁶ The second is a photograph I took on my first visit to the island when I was given a tour around the, now nearly derelict, building by McCrone. Inside the building, in what had been the auditorium, all that remained were the steps showing where the raked seating had once been and a few bars and cables overhead, suggesting a basic lighting rig. Not only did I never see the Little Theatre as it stood before it was gutted then, but, moreover, I never experienced it as a working theatre building: I never got to see productions there, or to witness how the building might have been experienced by those who used it. It is arguable that, instead, the venue as I first saw it was perhaps closer to how the Heskeths perceived it when they first looked out across their garden and decided to turn the outhouse into a

¹⁵⁵ The previous owner had apparently felt that having a theatre in the back garden would hinder a potential sale and so they chose to dismantle the wooden extension in order to create more space in the garden. Not long after, however, the property was seized by the bank and the outhouse fell into a state of disrepair. Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (11/3/09)

¹⁵⁶ The Scottish Arts Council, Touring Venues, (archived website)
<http://www.scottishartstouring.com/venues/details.asp?k=Mull&v=&prom=&SWMax=0&SDMax=0&FWMax=0&FDMax=0&SFMax=0&SSMax=0&p=1&r=0&ven=1212> [last accessed 19/10/09]

'playbox'.¹⁵⁷ This is particularly true regarding the exterior: the building having been stripped back to its original shape and size. Nonetheless, despite the backstage and circulation spaces no longer existing, there was still evidence of them having been there as the grass had stopped growing at the edge of the extension and so the area was still clearly marked out in the ground. Inside, there were also remnants of the building being used as a public performance space, from the no-smoking sign next to the door to paint on the walls left from *Macbeth* (2007).¹⁵⁸ Thus the building as I saw it was neither completely as the Hesketh's found it, nor as it looked when the curtain fell for the final time.



Figure 7 - Mull Little Theatre
Exact date unknown but taken in the late 1990s or early 2000s. © Mull Theatre

¹⁵⁷ Barrie Hesketh, *Taking Off: The Story of Mull Theatre* (Inverness: The New Iona Press, 1997) p.34

¹⁵⁸ This was the final performance to take place at the Little Theatre and had involved the three walls surrounding the stage being painted dark brown as part of the set design. This contrasted with the white paint of the auditorium and is just one example through which the building can be seen as more than just a 'frame' to the event and instead becomes an intrinsic part of the performance.

I am, therefore, attempting to reconstruct - and to some degree re-imagine - the Little Theatre by using photographs, plans and first-hand accounts which will then be superimposed onto my own experiences of the bare bones of the building. I use the term 're-imagine' to highlight that a complete reconstruction in the strictest sense could never be achieved and that instead, by piecing together different perspectives and stories, this thesis is creating a new narrative for the building which is nonetheless deeply rooted in actual events and experiences; it is not re-imagined in a fictional sense. When developing his idea for a joint approach between the disciplines of theatre and archaeology, Pearson collaborated with the scholar Julian Thomas and argued that:

The meaning of archaeological evidence is not fixed - it is polysemic. This is why what archaeologists create is never a 'reconstruction' in the full sense but a 'recontextualisation'.¹⁵⁹

With no single meaning being created within a space the notion of reconstructing a space through the form of the 'guided tours' being presented below is thus impossible and so the approach being taken here is to recontextualise, or re-imagine, the building.

In analysing the venue, this places me in a different position to someone who experienced it as an active theatre but, I would argue, this does not necessarily mean a weaker position. Indeed, as this thesis will suggest, there remains a huge amount of affection towards the Little Theatre. Participants I have interviewed have all, without exception, spoken very highly of the experience of the building and its intimacy. Moreover, a number of people I encountered on tour with Mull Theatre spoke highly of the building, regaling me with memories and anecdotes which focused more on the four walls than the productions taking place within them. By not having this emotional attachment to the space, coupled with an understanding of how it may have stood at the start and end of its life, arguably provides me with a stronger framework from which to inhabit and understand how the building would have been used at various point throughout its life.

¹⁵⁹ Mike Pearson and Julian Thomas, 'Theatre/Archaeology,' *The Drama Review*, vol. 38:4 (winter 1994) p. 141



Figure 8 - The exposed cow byre (2009)

Thus I would suggest that the ensuing analysis of the buildings is in no way hindered by this reconstructive element. Highlighting the active relationship between time and space, Massey has referred to space as 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far.'¹⁶⁰ Rather than being seen as fixed and homogenous, space here is being posited as in flux; it is constantly being shaped by its users and their stories and experiences. Consequently, it could be argued that any description of a building is a reimagining of sorts. Each account will be selective in which narrative(s) are being prioritised and each user of a space will bring with them their own perceptions, shaped by their own cultural and individual experiences. With regards to audiences, for instance, Helen Freshwater has asserted the importance of seeing the audience both as a collective and a group of individuals. Moreover, within the individuals she observes the potential for 'responding to a production in a number of different - and potentially conflicting

¹⁶⁰ Massey, *For Space*, p.9

- ways.'¹⁶¹ This is not just true of audiences observing performances but also of attendees observing and experiencing the spaces of performances.

In addition to understanding the buildings differently according to when you go and who you are, the building will also change according to the context of your visit: are you there as an audience member? Are you visiting a friend? Are you there as a participant, or a performer? Each of these will not only potentially affect how you read the space you are in but, on a more basic level, they may also affect how you move around it. This is clear when we acknowledge the two distinct areas within a traditional theatre building: backstage and front-of-house; or the practitioners' space and the audience's space. Many regular theatre-goers will never see the backstage area of a theatre, unless they have a specific reason for going there. McAuley even notes that while the Sydney Opera House offers guided tours of the building, patrons are not allowed access to the dressing room.¹⁶² It is apparent then that your role within the theatre building (spectator, performer etc.) will dictate the way in which you experience it in a fundamental way.

In order to give as full an understanding as possible of Mull Theatre's two main buildings, the following 'virtual tours' will not stick to any single perspective - to that of the practitioner or the spectator - and will thus be able to incorporate all areas of the buildings and the different ways in which they would have been/are experienced. Those who have been both onstage and seated in an auditorium will know that the perspective you have of that space can differ hugely depending on which side you are on. Consequently these 'tours' will also offer approaches to the shared areas (most notably the auditorium and stage space) from the two main perspectives of theatre maker and theatre consumer. They will also make reference to the buildings at different points in their history and can thus be viewed as tours through both time and space.

¹⁶¹ Helen Freshwater, *Theatre and Audience* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p.6

¹⁶² Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in Theatre* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) p.63

Mull Little Theatre

Crossing over the cattle grid and heading up the narrow, winding driveway which led to the Little Theatre you can almost feel as though you are trespassing on private property. Neither the house nor the theatre can be seen from the road and, as the car manoeuvred around the gravel path, I found that Druimard House held a more commanding position in the area due, in part, to its larger size. This feeling of trespassing would perhaps have been lessened if you were on your way to see a production there. This would have resulted in a number of vehicles vying for limited parking spaces along the driveway and, on a pleasant evening, a number of people would have gathered outside the venue as the foyer



Figure 9 - The path leading to the Little Theatre (2009)



Figure 10 - Druimard House (2009)

was too small to accommodate the full capacity of 42 spectators.¹⁶³ Thus there would have been a sense of occasion and legitimacy granted to being there. Nonetheless, considering the close proximity of Druimard House to the theatre it seems reasonable that there would always be some sense of intruding on personal property.

The potential tension between private and public space is particularly significant when we take note of the change of ownership regarding the guesthouse. Following the death of Marianne, Barrie Hesketh left the island and sold off Druimard House. Whilst the new owners continued to run it as a guesthouse and did not object to having a theatre in their front garden, they were in no way involved in the running or organisation of the theatre. This responsibility was passed to a board of directors which was led by David Pitman, the proprietor of a small coffee and bookshop elsewhere in the village. While its location would suggest that it was closely linked to the guesthouse, as time went

¹⁶³ Interviews with Patricia Haworth (29/10/09), Zelda Sawyer (6/3/10) and Chris Baker (6/3/10)

on it became an increasingly independent enterprise, thus heightening the possible sense of imposing on someone else's land.

Figure 11 below shows the layout of the Little Theatre as it stood in 2002 (four years before it closed). The thick, heavy lines show the walls of the original cow byre, as seen in figure eight before, while the additional sections correlate to the wooden extension which was built by the Heskeths in 1969 (figure seven). The theatre building itself is a very modest and unassuming building, made out of white-washed stone with a slate roof, giving the building a strong agricultural feeling. Originally one would have entered through a small door straight into the auditorium, marked on the plan below as 'theatre main door'. After a few years, however, a grant from the Michael Marks Charitable Trust provided funds for a wooden extension to be built.¹⁶⁴ This was then used as a small foyer for the audience to mingle in before the show and during the interval. From the outside, the now wooden front made the building look more modern, shielding the original painted stone from sight, and yet the building still did not look like a conventional theatre.

Nonetheless, this addition of a foyer would have perhaps made it feel more like a traditional theatre experience to the audience. Certainly McAuley has suggested that by following the ritual of the box office, foyer and ushers, the spectator is, 'further removed from the world outside, permitted to move further and further into the world within.'¹⁶⁵ For her the theatre building does possess a framing function as it serves to mark out the events happening in the fictional world being created on stage as separate to reality; as entering the realm of 'denegation.'¹⁶⁶ Thus it is arguably an important feature of what makes a space a theatre and what signifies the transition of this building from inhabited cow byre to a theatre.

¹⁶⁴ Hesketh, *Taking Off*, p.36

¹⁶⁵ McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p.23

¹⁶⁶ McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p.42

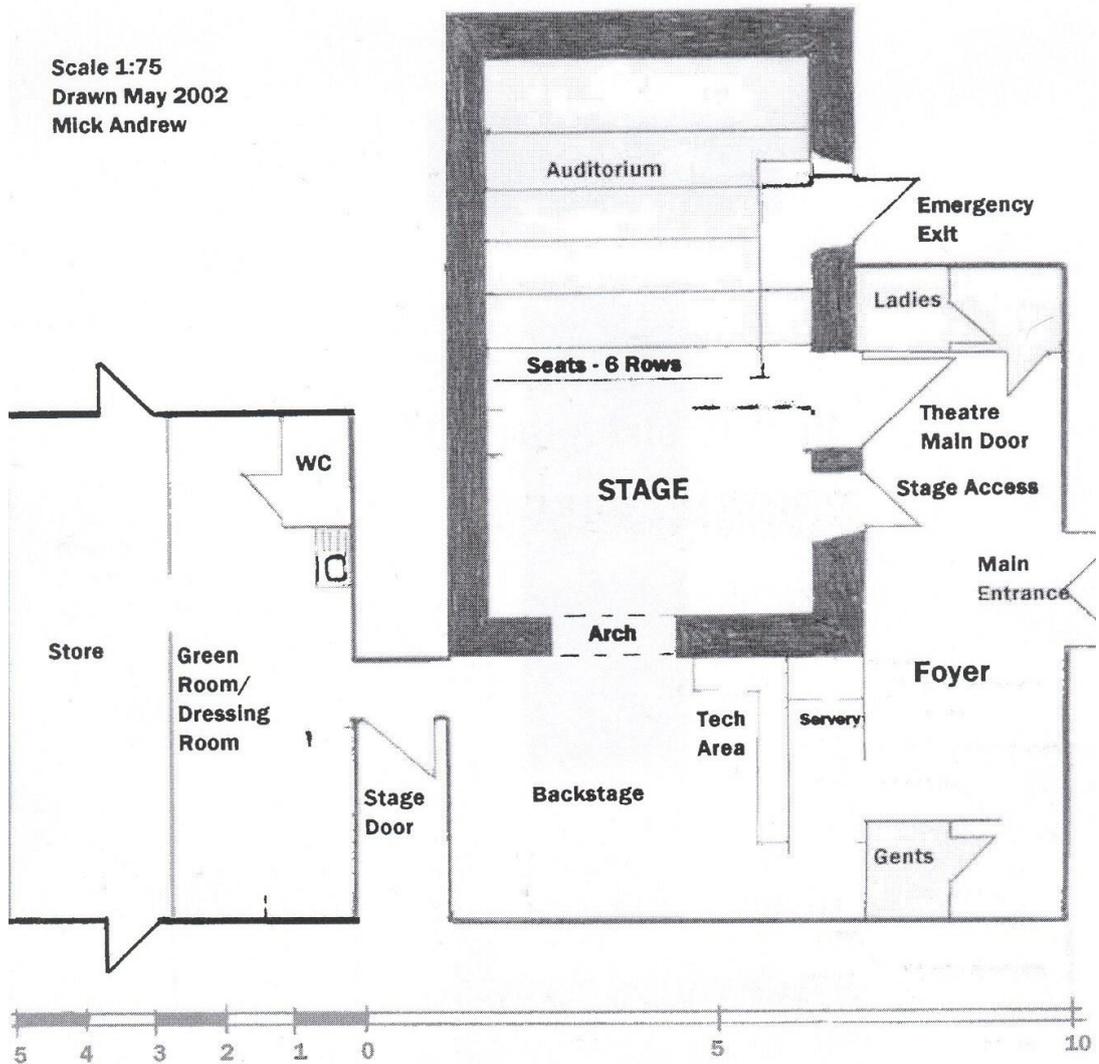


Figure 11 - Plan of Mull Little Theatre
© Mick Andrew

For the first two seasons at Mull Little Theatre, or the Thursday Theatre as it was first known, the audience would have mainly consisted of people staying at the adjoining guesthouse and so the absence of a traditional box office or foyer would have simply added to the slightly rough and ready feel of this private venture. As its popularity began to grow however, the need for a sheltered holding area became more pressing. With temperamental weather and notorious west coast problem of midges over the summer months, forcing attendees to stand outside may have had a negative impact on audience numbers.¹⁶⁷ Thus,

¹⁶⁷ One newspaper article, written in response to the company's purchase of a gas-powered midge repellent, claimed that, 'visitors to the tiny Hebridean island were being eaten alive when they ventured outdoors during at performance intervals.' "Midge-Summer Night Scream for Mull Stage," *Scotsman* (July 20, 2003). <http://www.scotsman.com/news/scottish->

through the addition of a foyer, we can start to infer that increasingly commercial decisions were being taken by the Heskeths in order to expand their newly established theatre company and venue. What had started out as a small enterprise to entertain guests at Druimard House one night a week was starting to develop bigger ambitions: the Thursday Theatre was evolving into the Mull Little Theatre.

Whereas previously the Heskeths sons had handed out refreshments (including homemade cakes to the seated spectators)¹⁶⁸ the creation of the foyer offered a new area for interval refreshments. There was no licensed bar but a long table along the wall facing the entrance held flasks of tea and coffee, cartons of juice and biscuits. This was self-service with a dish for money (50 pence for a carton of juice) although there would have been at least one member of staff there to help out.¹⁶⁹ Again, this would perhaps have served to highlight this venture as becoming more professional in its outlook.

The inside of the foyer was painted white and no attempt had been made to cover up the walls of the original building. In many ways then, despite this modern addition to the building, the history of the space was embraced and highlighted. Wiles has asserted that, 'it is a feature of successful performance spaces that a sense of the past is inscribed in the present.'¹⁷⁰ Physically embodying the layers of history, meaning and experiences which are built up over time are seen as being crucial to the reception of the space and performances. Peter Brook appears to have echoed this view in his own choice of venue, the Bouffes du Nord where he has consciously maintained a sense of the past through his choice of decor and furnishings.¹⁷¹ It is asserted that these traces do not mark out any singular or significant events but that instead, the

news/top-stories/midge-summer-night-scream-for-mull-stage-1-1291774 [last accessed 10/10/10]

¹⁶⁸This is referenced in Barrie Hesketh's book in which he refers to these cakes as quite an institution. So much so that he includes the recipe in the footnotes. Hesketh, *Taking Off*, p.41

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Gordon Cooper (30/4/10)

¹⁷⁰ David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.60

¹⁷¹ Andrew Todd and Jean-Guy Lecat, *The Open Circle: Peter Brook's Theatre Environments* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003) p.9

sense of history contained within the building simply serves to enhance the overall character of the space.¹⁷² Rather than appearing to be empty then, a space which highlights its history becomes imbued with its own textures and qualities in a very overt way.

Mull Little Theatre did this in a number of ways. Not only did keep the original stone work and wooden beams on the roof exposed but it also chose to highlight its theatrical history through performance memorabilia and promotional material. In the last few years before the theatre closed its doors the walls were papered with past production posters, reviews, photographs and articles about the theatre.¹⁷³ It became a collage almost of the theatre's history so that audience members could see the journey that the company and the building had undergone in its 40 years. Although this decoration was largely created during the 1990s,¹⁷⁴ following Marianne Hesketh's death in 1984, her open coffin was laid out in the foyer of the Little Theatre prior to her burial at the nearby Calgary Bay. As one islander put it, 'the coffin was open and Marianne looked as though she had only to open her eyes to be with us again.'¹⁷⁵ The walls surrounding the coffin were also covered with publicity images from performances the husband and wife had staged together at their performance venue.

¹⁷² Todd and Lecat, *The Open Circle*, p.9

¹⁷³ Interview with Participant Q (3/9/10)

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Patricia Haworth (29/10/09)

¹⁷⁵ Letter from Jill Galbreith (5/1/10)



Figure 12 - Interior of Mull Little Theatre (2009)

This temporary shrine to one of the original founders would have undoubtedly left its mark in the memory of those who went to pay their respects and ensured that, to some degree at least, Mull Little Theatre's past would be forever embedded within its future. In addition to this, a number of people I have spoken to about the Little Theatre have made reference to the fact that both the old byre and Druimard House were/are haunted by the ghost of Marianne and that while this small theatre may seem friendly and welcoming when filled with people, few wanted to be the last one left alone in the building.¹⁷⁶ Carlson has observed that, 'any long established theatre has tales of its resident ghosts.'¹⁷⁷ He believes that this is because the 'relationships between theatre and cultural memory are deep and complex,' as there is a notion of reusing,

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Zelda Sawyer (6/3/10)

¹⁷⁷ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003) p.2

recycling and ghosting which takes place in all areas of the theatre from what happens on stage to the building itself.¹⁷⁸

In the case of Mull Little Theatre I would suggest that it is in part due to this complex relationship between memories and theatres but that it is also indicative of the individual personalities on the development of the company. This was noted in the overview to Mull (Little) Theatre's history in chapter two and is evidenced through the fact that, despite having left the island 28 years ago, the Heskeths were still regularly mentioned in every interview I held on the island. The memory of the founding family is still deeply ingrained within perceptions and understandings of the space.

The auditorium was situated in the original cow byre and had a conventional end-on configuration between the actors and the audience. The stage was on the same level as the entrance and then there were six long steps upon which the audience's raked seating was placed. Apparently this layout was chosen as Marianne Hesketh believed that, 'the audience must be higher than the actors. Audiences like to look down on their gods!'¹⁷⁹ There would also have been practical considerations, however. Where performance spaces have raised stages it has usually been designed as such in order to allow as many different sight lines as possible. Due to the small capacity of the Little Theatre this would not have been a requirement and, moreover, given the close physical proximity of the spectators to the performers having a raised stage for the actors would have resulted in limited visibility and severe neck ache for many attending the show. The seating in the venue was originally chairs from the guesthouse which people would have brought over when they headed to the theatre after their evening meal. This was soon replaced by long benches and then later still 42 cinema chairs were installed in the space. The benches in particular would have potentially heightened a sense of community amongst audience members as they would have all been aware of each others' presence; pressed up against each other as they often were to fit in more people.

¹⁷⁸ Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, p.2

¹⁷⁹ Hesketh, *Taking Off*, p. 34

One participant I spoke to described an interesting dichotomy between the sense of intimacy which was created and the simultaneous anonymity which could be achieved due to the relatively steep rake. Thus, in post-show discussions, spectators felt willing and able to ask questions and present their opinions as few other members of the audience would be able to see who was speaking at the time.¹⁸⁰ This feeling of unity within an audience is something which many theatre practitioners strive to achieve and which was clearly created at the Little Theatre. Brook, for example, has placed 'intimacy' as one of the key qualities to marking out a space as a 'good' space.¹⁸¹ For him, it is important to create a relationship between the actor and the spectator; for the audience to be more than simply passive receptors of the production and the meanings it creates.

The close proximity between the stage space and the audience seating, coupled with the continuation of the stone walls throughout the entire space would also have served to unite the worlds of the actors and the audience. In the prototypical image of a theatre there is usually a demarcation between the two spaces which is initially created by the proscenium arch which visibly separates the two areas. It is then maintained through different designs on the surrounding walls: those within the auditorium are often ornate and highly decorated; whilst those around the stage will often be painted black in order to provide the perceived 'empty' space onto which the illusionary world of the show can be projected. For Mull Little Theatre it is arguably this synthesis between the two contiguous spaces which served to enhance the sense of intimacy being created. Nonetheless the size of the venue undoubtedly played a role here too. David Pitman recalled one performance where a tall gentleman sitting in the front row had his knees protrude some way onto the stage.¹⁸² It is these two elements working in tandem which served to remind people that they were all operating within the same space.

It is worth noting that this blurring of boundaries between the two spaces - and the two worlds being created - was not restricted solely to the auditorium.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Participant B (28/10/09)

¹⁸¹ Todd and Lecat, *The Open Circle*, p.25-6

¹⁸² Interview with David Pitman (18/9/09)

In a conversation with McCrone on my first visit to the island he reminisced about a production he had been in at the theatre during which his female co-star had gone to the ladies toilet during the show. Both actors had come off stage through the archway (figure 13 below), as scripted, and were then required to walk through the building and to re-enter the auditorium through the audience's main entrance. Once off stage, however, the female performer realised that she needed the toilet and so delivered some of her lines from the cubicle whilst McCrone walked onto the stage. Because of the size of the building she was still clearly audible to those inside the auditorium.¹⁸³ Although the audience would have been unaware of the actress' location at this moment, it does serve to highlight the sense of intimacy being created and the blurring of the boundaries between the illusionary world being created on the stage and the real world of the audience.

This is significant when we consider the framing role played by theatre venues which is described by McAuley. She argues that through the ritual of the box office and ushers, the ticket holder moves further and further away from reality and towards the world of illusion being created on stage. This allows them to engage in the required suspension of disbelief and to accept the death of a character onstage, for instance, as pretence. Should the same event take place in the street, she suggests that it would be met with very different reactions.¹⁸⁴ In the Dervaig venue, this framing could not have been achieved by the same means. Not only did the spectator not have far to travel between the real world and the fictional world but, moreover, sounds from the outside often penetrated the auditorium. Rain and wind could often be heard during productions, as could the neighbouring sheep. Many people I have spoken to have related that during one production, set in the New York Bronx, sheep could be heard bleating in the field next door.¹⁸⁵ In many ways this quirkiness regarding the building and its relationship with the outside world is part of what served to make it so unique.

¹⁸³ Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (11/3/09)

¹⁸⁴ McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p.39

¹⁸⁵ Interviews with David Pitman (18/8/09), Barbara Weir (24/2/09) and Gordon Cooper (3/4/10)

The stage was a little over four metres wide and two metres deep with an archway upstage centre which led out to the backstage area and the stage manager's desk. The backstage area measured just over three metres and was sometimes used in productions to add depth to the stage. One production, for example, had the bottom half of a painting, showing the legs of Bonny Prince Charlie, hung on the back wall of this area so that it was visible from the audience.¹⁸⁶ This was done to give to the illusion of height to the small theatre. The technical area was a small desk which was not visible from the stage. Although this meant that the audience could not see the technician, it also meant that the technician could not see the actors. As a result, all stage and lighting cues were relayed through closed circuit television, shown on a small monitor.



Figure 13 - Mull Little Theatre's stage entrance (2009)
From the front of the stage looking through to the backstage

One participant noted that this was satisfactory most of the time, unless the stage lights were dimmed and then it was difficult to see where the actors

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Participant N (18/8/09)

were.¹⁸⁷ Most lighting cues were, therefore, timed beforehand. It is also worthwhile to note here that the white paint from the auditorium walls, and indeed the original exterior of the Little Theatre, was continued into the backstage area.



Figure 14 - the archway from 'backstage' (2009)

This is evident in the image above which shows the archway as approached from backstage: the technical desk would have been located on the right hand side of the wall. There was, therefore, a clear through-line between the front and backstage design. Whilst this would have not been significant from an audience perspective - they are unlikely to have been backstage during or after a performance - in many ways it may have served to unite the building for the actors linking, as it did, the audience and actors' spaces.

As the actors came off stage, being careful not to hit their heads on the low arch, they would turn left to enter the dressing room/green room: a long, thin room of similar size to the foyer, which often smelt of damp. This was a

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Participant A (11/2/09)

consequence of the building's tendency to flood during the winter months which is why Mull Little Theatre only performed on the island during the summer months: the building was not reliable enough to be used over the winter.¹⁸⁸ Flooding was not just restricted to the winter, however, and nor was it solely confined to the backstage areas. One attendee recalled an evening when the show was delayed and the audience was asked to wait outside the venue while the staff cleared away leaves and water from the flooded foyer.¹⁸⁹ There was a small toilet off the dressing room although this was described as 'not fully accessible' in the Scottish Arts Council touring directory.¹⁹⁰ This meant that the actors were more likely to use the same toilets as the audience members, further enhancing the notion of this building as a shared space between actor and audience.

There was also a long thin store room which ran parallel to the dressing room. When the theatre was in repertory season, the sets not being used would be stacked away in this room. A brief glance at the building plan in figure 11, however, shows that there is no clear route for these sets to travel in order to get to the stage. As the archway between front and back stage was so low, the only way for the set to be moved on stage was for it to be carried through the dressing room, out through the stage door, around the building, back in through the main entrance and then into the auditorium through the theatre main door - the largest entrance in the venue. In many ways then, the traditional demarcation that you find in more conventional theatres between the audience and actor spaces were virtually non-existent here if a production was not on. This 'stage door' was also the source of much humour, particularly after David Pitman put a sign above it highlighting it as such.¹⁹¹ This was notably true for

¹⁸⁸ Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (11/3/09)

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Participant AC (6/4/11)

¹⁹⁰ This was a database of venues on the Scottish touring circuit which included images, dimensions and useful information regarding get-ins and technical specifications of each building. The idea behind it was to produce a comprehensive list so that anyone hoping to tour a show could select the venues which would best suit its requirements. Due to money, however, the list was never completed and it is now only available through the archived Scottish Arts Council website. Through its own extensive tours Mull Theatre has its own list but this has not been made public because of limited resources.
<http://www.scottishartstouring.com/venues/details.asp?k=&v=Mull+theatre&prom=&SWMax=0&SDMax=0&FWMax=0&FDMax=0&SFMax=0&SSMax=0&r=0&p=1&ven=1212> [last accessed 14/12/09]

¹⁹¹ Interview with David Pitman, (18/8/09)

actors who were visiting the theatre for the first time and were not used to the small size and limited facilities which would greet them on the other side.

Druimfin

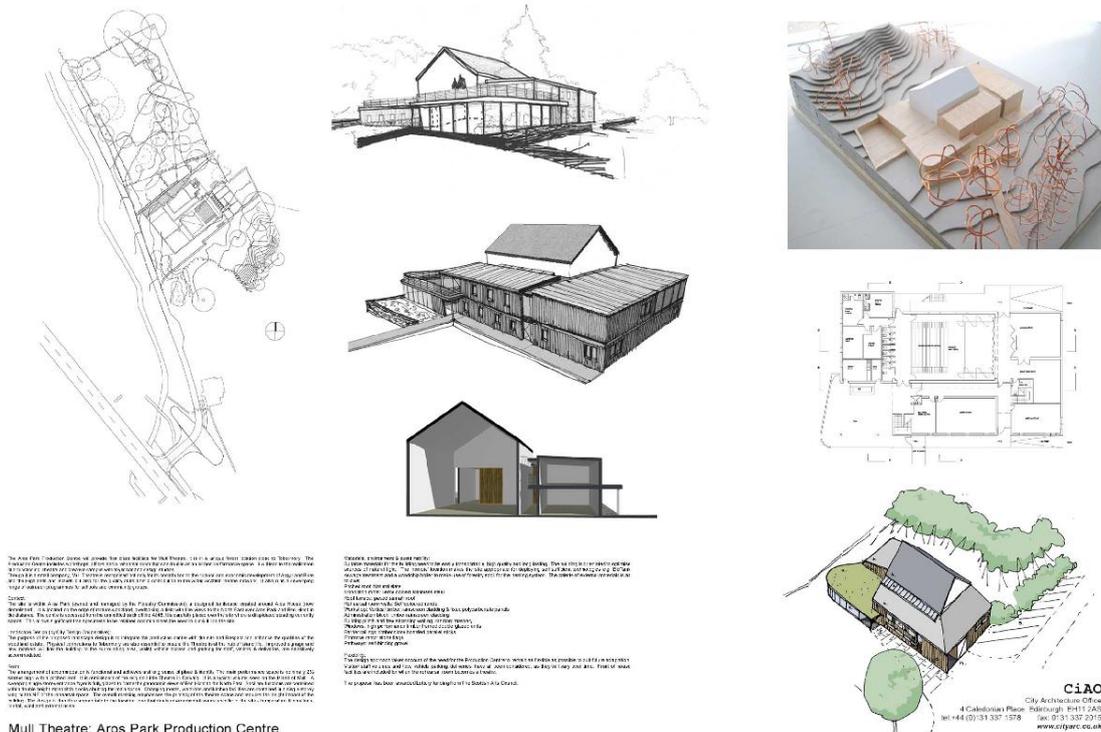


Figure 15 - Design plans for Druimfin
 Courtesy of City Architects' Office (CiAO), Edinburgh

Once you turn off the main Salen road into the entrance for Druimfin, the two-lane road - one of the few on the island - changes into a narrow gravel path which leads down into Aros Park; an area of public woodland which is owned by the forestry commission. On the right hand side there is a small white house which is currently being used as offices by the staff but which is intended to become actors' accommodation at a later date.¹⁹² Although there are some small signs, printed on A4 pieces of paper which show that this building is the box office, when I have been working there I have observed a number of people wanting to book tickets who have hesitantly put their head around the door.

¹⁹² This has been listed in the building proposal for Druimfin however it should be noted that this proposal lists four phases of which phase one is apparently complete. The work which has been done does not fully correlate to that listed in the document and it has been suggested that there will now be more phases to the construction than were originally proposed. Thus, it is unclear when the conversion of these offices into accommodation will be completed.

This is in part due to the fact that the internal doors are often closed in order to keep the heat in as the building is largely shaded from the sun and is not very well insulated. As a result, when entering the building patrons are often faced with a small hallway, a narrow staircase ahead and two closed doors on either side. Again, on the door on the left is an A4 sign stating 'box office' but with the desk located behind the door the use of the room it is not visible until one has fully entered the space.

Little has been done to this building since it was a private residence and so it in no way resembles the traditional expectation of what a box office should be or where it should be placed. Indeed, in the prototypical image of a theatre the box office and foyer are usually located within the building itself; acting as a holding area of sorts for the spectators waiting to enter the auditorium. With Mull (Little) Theatre the box office has never been embedded within the venue in this conventional way. At first the box office was a jotter book maintained by Zelda Sawyer and then bookings could be made through the post office in Tobermory and Coffee and Books in Dervaig. Eventually a shop front was leased on Tobermory Main Street and this became the box office for tourists and locals alike. Part of the attraction of building a larger venue was to finally have all of the operational staff working in the same location and the ultimate plan is still to have the performance space, staff offices and the box office all under one roof. For the time being, however, Druimfin continues to physically stand apart from the company based there by only providing a space for performances and rehearsals and not for any of the administration or planning which is needed to run a touring company with a home base.

Along with a distinct lack of signage marking out Druimfin as the performance venue of Mull Theatre, it is also barely visible from the main road. As figure 16 shows, there is a large amount of foliage sheltering it from the main road and when the 60 mile per hour speed limit is taken into account, it is no wonder that a number of people approaching the building wonder whether they are in the right place. This goes some way to suggesting why the architect himself has referred to the building, in its currently unfinished state, as a 'stealth

bomber'.¹⁹³ Not only does the building almost creep up on you but, moreover, its size, shape and dark colour is reminiscent of the military aircraft.



Figure 16 - Druimfin (2009)
View from the Salen Road

Whilst the Little Theatre sat in harmony with its natural surroundings, in many ways Druimfin conflicts with the wooded landscape in which it is located. The venue in Dervaig was in keeping with the style of traditional, agricultural buildings of the time and the wooden extension utilised natural materials which echoed its rural location. In the case of Druimfin, however, stone cladding had originally been intended for use but this was deemed to be too expensive when it came to costing the venture. As the architect, Moray Royles noted:

cost wise that would be very prohibitive and it didn't suit the adaptability of the building technically - what they wanted to do to it as a performance space [...] So going through various materials we settled upon the profiled cement board which is very much an agricultural

¹⁹³ Interview with Moray Royles (30/3/10)

material but the advantage - specifically on Mull - is that we learned that the metal - even the stainless steel roof - has a high susceptibility to corrosion because Mull is very much a marine environment. It's just like a big, like a super tanker in the middle of the sea.¹⁹⁴

Thus we can see that financial and practical considerations have played a vital role in the building as it currently stands.

Although it is sheltered from the road and is only accessible down a narrow path, once the venue of Druimfin is reached there are open fields to the right and a large gravel car park in front of the building. One of the faults which has been mentioned with regards to the Little Theatre is the lack of parking and the difficulty in manoeuvring vehicles around the narrow path.¹⁹⁵ As the new venue occupies a much larger area and has no nearby neighbours, a car park has been built which is for the sole use of theatre patrons. Rather than having the sense of trespassing, then, this is an area which is solely dedicated to the theatre company and its attendees. During the day it provides a secluded area in which the practitioners can work - a regular stage manager with Mull Theatre has posited this as one of the key strengths of the building's location¹⁹⁶ - and for spectators going to see a performance it creates a sense of occasion. As Richard Schechner has noted, 'in all cultures, people "go to" the theatre: they make special times and places for it.'¹⁹⁷ In this case a sense of occasion is created by the ten minute journey out of Tobermory to the venue. Everybody around the building has travelled there with the sole purpose of going to see the show and there will often be a large convoy of vehicles heading back towards town at the end of the night.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Moray Royles (30/3/10)

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Elizabeth McIver (24/2/09)

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Kevin Hill (5/8/10)

¹⁹⁷ Richard Schechner, *Essays on Performance Theory: 1970 - 1976* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977) p.122



Figure 17 - The front of Druimfin (2010)

On arriving in the car park, Druimfin starts to look very imposing. Having been sheltered from the main road by a line of trees, it stands at odds to its surroundings, in part because the trees which have been planted around it have not yet started to grow. Thus the building stands in a large opening, not looking like it fully belongs. Following the paved path from the car park to the building, one is faced with two entrances into the building: a set of double, glass doors to the left; and a single glass door to the right. The first is the main entrance into the foyer and the second is the stage entrance which leads directly backstage. This is an interesting design feature as it calls into question the traditional demarcation between front and backstage.

McAuley has suggested that the stage door 'is the physical manifestation of the demarcation between the world at large and the "secret kingdom" of the theatre practitioners.'¹⁹⁸ This assertion has led her to conclude that glass stage doors - and her example again of the Sydney Opera House - demystify this 'secret kingdom' by allowing the audience a glimpse into the hidden world

¹⁹⁸ McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p.67

backstage: a world that they rarely see in West End theatres, for instance, where the stage door is hidden out of sight, usually down an alternative street. Thus the production centre arguably serves to demystify this private world as areas which are usually hidden from sight are here positioned in full view of the patron approaching the building. This is further reinforced when one considers that the patrons drive past the loading bay to the stage before they reach the car park (which is shared by practitioners and audience alike).

Again, this area is usually hidden from sight and is often located at the back of the building and removed from the spectator's experience of the performance event. In all of the conventional performance spaces toured to with *Laurel and Hardy* the loading bay was always located around the side or the back of the building. Undoubtedly this is largely to do with practical considerations: carrying a set from a van can often be an arduous task and so it is preferable to have as short a distance to travel as possible. As the audience is usually required to enter the building through a different door before being allowed into the auditorium, it is apparent that the practitioners loading bay would be in a separate part of the building to the spectators' entrance. Nonetheless, by removing this process from the experience of the performance event itself the design of such buildings is serving to frame the event as being in a fictional world which is somehow separate to reality. With Druimfin, however, the world of the practitioner is often visible to the audience before they enter the building. This also highlights the priorities of the building as it currently stands: the first entrance reached is that of the loading bay, leading directly into the backstage areas and the second entrance is for the audience leading to the foyer and then onto the auditorium.

Once inside, the space feels very modern and clean with sharp edges and neutral coloured paint on the walls and ceiling, predominantly white and cream. The glass doors leading to the outside also make the space feel very light and fresh; something which is welcomed prior to the start of a performance when the queue to collect tickets can make the area very cramped. At the time of writing, the foyer is barely larger than that at the Little Theatre and is not really a traditional audience space as one might envisage it. During productions the chairs are removed and the table is pushed back up against the wall. This serves

as the stand for the self-service interval refreshments of tea, coffee and juice while an additional table for beer and wine is put up against the opposite wall. This is the same set-up that existed at the previous venue despite the fact Druimfin as a whole has a much larger footprint.

The black table with a glass top in figure 18 below is used as the box office desk with one of the ushers sitting behind it and ticking names off the list as people come through the door. This is very reminiscent of Zelda Sawyer's makeshift box office with her famous jotter notebook.¹⁹⁹ Whilst the outside of the building stands in firm contrast to that of Mull Theatre's previous venue, inside its ways of operating coupled with the size of the circulation spaces remains much the same.

Whilst all of the participants I have spoken to seem to have accepted these facilities as appropriate for the Little Theatre, a number have expressed discontent with regards to them at Druimfin. In many ways this supports Carlson's suggestion that we should:

Look not only at the traditional elements of stage and auditorium but at every distinct element of the theatre complex for what it might reveal about the meanings of this building for its society.²⁰⁰

In the case of Mull Little Theatre and Druimfin the wider context of the buildings has led to shifting understandings of the spaces which go beyond the 'traditional elements of stage and auditorium.' As chapter six will demonstrate, the move to a larger venue with similar audience facilities has resulted in some spectators feeling as though the company based there is no longer taking such an active role in the island on which it is based. Thus, by taking into account the full design of the two buildings and their geographical locations we can start to uncover some of the meanings created by this company within its local community and society more generally.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Zelda Sawyer (6/3/10)

²⁰⁰ Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993) p.9



Figure 18 - Druimfin box office and foyer (2009)

With Druimfin being much larger and purpose-built by the company, there seems to have been an expectation amongst attendees that it would offer a better quality experience or, at the very least, a more traditional experience. Barbara Weir and Elizabeth McIver, for example, both asserted that whilst they knew it was largely due to the funders' criteria, Mull Theatre had not been able to provide the islanders with the 'theatre' they had anticipated.²⁰¹ Thus, whilst Mull Little Theatre was being understood as a small and quirky venue, Druimfin

²⁰¹ Interview with Barbara Weir and Elizabeth McIver (24/2/09)

is being judged against pre-conceived notions that were determined by the company's decision to move to a better appointed space and the building's comparatively large exterior. As such, elements such as the small foyer and lack of seating are being seen as negatives, rather than being endearing as they largely were within the previous space.²⁰²

Within the auditorium there is a similar issue. The initial feasibility study written by Mull Theatre suggested that this main space:

Should be flexible but retain much of the charm and intimacy of the original Mull Little Theatre. [...] There should be a moveable seating bank, for use in traverse productions or for reverse angle use of the stage area. Down both sides there should be the possibility of at least one row of seating, possibly even raised boxes, or some imaginative use of the space, to enable use of the space in the round.²⁰³

This document was intended to be used as a point of discussion between the company, the architects and the stakeholders and so it embodies the initial 'wish-list' for Druimfin. Whilst it does not show any firm or final plans for the venue, then, what does become apparent is that, from the outset, Mull Theatre intended its new space to be experienced by audiences and practitioners alike. For the company the new purpose-built venue was to be for the benefit of both the production *and* the reception of live theatrical performances.

As the Scottish Arts Council already had a large number of theatre buildings on its books and, as Mull Theatre was funded to be a peripatetic company, it disagreed that there was a need for this new theatre. As such Druimfin was funded with the primary purpose of being a production centre. This tension between the funded use of Druimfin as a production centre and its regular use as a performance venue is arguably epitomised through the incorporation of windows within the rehearsal room/auditorium and the lack of moveable blinds covering them. Windows are not an uncommon feature within modern studio

²⁰² This has come through in a number of interviews with participants, all of whom wished to remain anonymous. This, it seems was due to a fear of repercussions if they were associated with negative comments regarding the building or company.

²⁰³ Mull Theatre, Terms of Reference for Feasibility Study (1/11/02), unpublished document

theatres as there is a demand for natural daylight during daytime rehearsals. One practitioner I spoke to, for instance, observed that all day rehearsals tended to be more productive when there was access to natural light as opposed to the cast and crew being cocooned within a darkened auditorium.²⁰⁴ During performances however there is often a preference for a darkened auditorium with the possibility of a blackout as this enables the stage lighting to be seen more fully. In addition to this the dimming of the lights in a traditional auditorium is also seen as a clear sign to the audience that the performance is about to begin. With this in mind a number of black box studio theatres incorporate large windows into their design but use heavy, black curtains to cover these up when a show is on. Thus the outside world is kept hidden from the illusionary world being created on stage. This can be seen in the studios at Gilmorehill G12 in Glasgow and the Byre Theatre in St Andrews, for instance.

Along the top of the interior walls in Druimfin there is a series of small windows. The frame surrounding them is painted light green and looking through them makes it seem as though you were looking at a series of rural landscape paintings; some portrait and some landscape. This not only allows natural light to infiltrate the space but it also serves to remind the user where they are: it literally frames the outside world and makes it clearly visible to those on the inside. This is an idea which is continuously and consciously promoted throughout the production centre so that the geographical location is never forgotten but instead remains a central focus of the space.

The ability to ensure that the rehearsal room would benefit from natural light during the day was seen as a priority by McCrone when considering initial designs for the venue.²⁰⁵ Due to funding limitations, however, Mull Theatre did not have the money to secure blinds for these windows when the building first opened in 2008. Prior to their installation in September 2011, the windows had to be permanently covered with bin bags and duct tape as it would have been too time consuming to cover them in the evening for performances and then uncover them for rehearsals. In many ways this highlights the insistence of the company - in contrast to the main funders - that the building is to be used for the

²⁰⁴ Interview with Participant M (6/5/10)

²⁰⁵ Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (6/3/10)

reception of theatre as much as for its production. Certainly, in this case the needs of the spectator to have a darkened auditorium during performances were prioritised over those of the resident practitioners who preferred natural light during the day. In this way the tension between Druimfin as production centre and Druimfin as performance space is evident; the space is unable to be all things to all people.

Whilst the windows may have been covered to create a more traditional theatre-going experience, one of the central elements lacking from the auditorium when it first opened was that of the raked seating. Nearly all of the participants I spoke to regarding the unfinished building mentioned the seating as the key source of resentment. This was subsequently addressed with new raked, cushioned seating being installed in the venue towards the end of the 2010 summer season. The two year delay between opening the venue and purchasing the seating meant that McCrone was able to consider what he wanted for his venue indeed he took particular interest in the seats at some of the more conventional performance spaces on the *Laurel and Hardy* tour earlier in the summer as he regarded different colours and styles. Nonetheless, it also resulted in some discontent amongst local attendees. The source of contention was in part to do with limited sight lines and partly down to the lack of comfort. One lady was so dissatisfied with the available choice that she brought her own high stools into the building during one afternoon's rehearsals. She then placed these at the back of the room so that she would be able to see the stage regardless of when she arrived at the venue.²⁰⁶ This was subsequently addressed with new raked, cushioned seating being installed in the venue towards the end of the 2010 summer season.

What should be noted is that although the attendees regularly complained about the seating in Druimfin, only one participant mentioned the discomfort associated with the seating at the Little Theatre. They observed that although

²⁰⁶ This happened during a rehearsal for *Laurel and Hardy* and was a source of bemusement for the cast and crew who removed her personal seating from the space prior to that evening's performance. The fact that she had walked into the venue and entered the auditorium without prior permission suggests a different sense of ownership with the space than might have otherwise existed with in a more traditional venue. This is something which will be explored in more depth in the next chapter with regards to a range of venues on the rural touring circuit.

the seats were hard and close together, making it very hard to move and thus resulting in frequent leg cramps, this did not matter because, 'the space was special enough to take you somewhere else.'²⁰⁷ This suggestion that the quiriness and intimacy of the Little Theatre served to almost over-write any of the potentially negative aspects has been reiterated through the research for this thesis. When discussing the frequent winter flooding or the need for spectators to stand outside the venue prior to the start of a performance due to limited space inside, many did so with a smile and a degree of fondness. It appears as though this added to the perceived rustic charm of the building and served to endear it to the audience. For Druimfin, this is not the case and within the unfinished building the attendees appear to be very much aware of where they are and of the uncomfortable seating. Thus the framing device referred to by McAuley, which psychologically distances the spectator from their everyday life is seemingly present at the Little Theatre in a greater way than at Druimfin. This suggests that there is more to this device than design features such as the box office and foyer.

It has previously been mentioned that the repeated design of windows throughout the ground floor serve to reinforce the location of the building and was a way of bringing the outside in. This is an idea which has also been suggested through the choice of colour in the venue: the same dark blue has been selected for the interior of the auditorium as was used to paint the whole exterior. Thus there is a clear continuation for the spectator entering the space between the exterior and interior. Painting the interior dark blue, as opposed to black, was a conscious decision by McCrone as he asserted that it is, 'less oppressive for the audience.'²⁰⁸ This has been echoed by Mackintosh who cites an experiment from the 1970s during which electrodes were attached to the heads of spectators so as to determine the rate of arousal within different spaces. It concluded that those sitting in the apparently black box studio were slower to respond to stimuli than those in an ornately decorated space.²⁰⁹ In

²⁰⁷ Interview with Participant B (28/2/10)

²⁰⁸ Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (16/5/10)

²⁰⁹ Iain Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) p.81

contrast to the favoured black-box studio of the 1960s contemporary buildings often have

different colours within the auditorium: blue in Dundee Repertory Theatre; purple in Eastwood Park Theatre; and red in An Lanntair, Stornoway. Druimfin is thus reflecting the preferred approach of the time in which it was built, maintaining a plain and dark interior but not one which was black.



Figure 19 - the audience seating at Druimfin (2009)

This photograph was taken approximately 18 months before the raked seating bank was installed.

On the back wall of the auditorium is a single door which leads out to the spectators' toilets (male, female and disabled) as well as one of the emergency exits. During warm evenings this used to be propped open enabling patrons to step out onto a small paved path which surrounds the entire building. This serves to set the production centre apart from many urban theatres which tend to encourage spectators to see the front of the building. In the case of Carlson's facade theatres, for instance:

the major function of [the facade]...went beyond identifying a building as a theatre. Their primary purpose was rather to reinforce a certain desired public image.²¹⁰

Often this facade does not carry through to the rest of the building with the loading areas being far plainer in their design. This can be seen at Dundee Repertory Theatre, for example, where the attractive front is used to draw people in off the street but the back of the building is just simple brickwork. In contrast, the exterior of Druimfin is the same all the way around and with an unbroken paved path circulating the building people are almost being encouraged to walk around it and to experience the building in situ. This not only helps to break down some of the barriers between the front of house and backstage areas but also serves to further highlight the rural location of the building.

It is worth noting that, at the time of writing, the building was far from being complete. This can be seen through figure 19 which shows a ladder leading up to the mezzanine level of the performance space. At the time the photograph was taken this level housed the lighting desk and some lighting cables. Initially the lighting desk was placed directly behind the audience meaning that they could regularly hear the clicking of buttons being pressed and the pages of the script being turned. This made the experience of those sitting at the back of the fixed level seating more akin to that of a village hall than a traditional theatrical experience. Although the sound and lighting desks were then moved, they could only be accessed by a ladder highlighting that there is still some way to go before this building is completed.

The exposed beams on the ceiling are also worth mentioning. Eventually the plan is that these will be covered with a permanent lighting rig but are, at the moment, clearly visible to anyone in the auditorium, especially as lights are now pointed upwards towards them highlighting them during the pre-show and interval. In many ways this is reminiscent of the Little Theatres exposed wooden beams. This was an intentional design feature as the Edinburgh architects who

²¹⁰ Carlson, *Places of Performance*, p.120

were commissioned for this project were keen to reflect some of the traits of the Little Theatre within Druimfin.²¹¹ While the beams do not denote any sense of history for the building then (they are very light in colour and are clearly new support beams), having them does in some way remind one of the original theatre building.

Looking through the open double doors at the back of the photograph in figure 20 you can see the scene dock and the loading bay. The intention was that during the day the large wooden doors would be pulled open to let in natural light from the glass entrance to the loading bay. This would also have the effect of almost bringing the outside in - constantly reminding people of where they are - which was clearly one of the aims of the repeated portrait and landscape windows throughout the building. However, due to the dust and noise produced from the workshop when sets are being built these doors remain closed thus limiting the amount of natural light which can enter the space. When interviewing practitioners who had used the space, this was repeatedly cited as one of the key flaws particularly when you note that, due to the sound travelling from the workshop through to the rehearsal room/auditorium during the day, set construction has to cease during some rehearsals or the actors cannot hear their lines. Thus the effectiveness of Druimfin as a production centre is called into question.

²¹¹ Interview with Moray Royles (30/3/10)



Figure 20 - the stage at Druimfin (2009)

The double doors at the back are open to reveal the scene dock and workshop but during performances these would be closed with curtains covering them.

When Druimfin first opened its doors, a Mull-based theatre practitioner and previous employee of Mull Theatre, Alasdair Satchel, used the venue during rehearsals for his own one-man show, *One Man Rant*. During this time he observed that the kitchen was his preferred space to rehearse in (over the large rehearsal room which had been created for this purpose) due to the amount of natural light and the views across the Sound of Mull.²¹² Although this room was still unfinished it was fully fitted with a fridge, freezer, cooker and microwave and so provided all of the amenities required by a cast and crew during the rehearsal process.

²¹² Interview with Alasdair Satchel (7/2/09)



Figure 21 - The kitchen at Druimfin (2009)

Moreover, due to the incorporation of large windows in this room along with the continuation of the neutral colour scheme which unites the front-of-house and backstage areas, it may be that this space feels more connected to the outside world. Particularly with the smaller windows in the main rehearsal room covered up. This is certainly how I felt when moving around the venue during my residencies. Due to the dark colours of the rehearsal room/auditorium,

coupled with the lack of natural light for the first few years, you almost feel cocooned within the venue. Although this might be desirable during performances it is clearly not the preferred option for rehearsals.

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, neither of Mull Theatre's two venues represents the prototypical image of a 'theatre:' Mull Little Theatre subverted this image through its size and location; whilst Druimfin has done it largely through the prioritisation of the practitioners experience within the design. Nonetheless, as we shall see in the following chapters both have been received and experienced by various attendees with regards to their similarities and differences to more conventional performance spaces. In addition to this we can also see that island attendees have seemingly understood Druimfin through the ways in which it differs from and mirrors the previous Little Theatre. Indeed, during interviews, assertions about the production centre would often be qualified with a reference to the Little Theatre.

In the design of Druimfin one of the central considerations was to highlight its island location throughout the building. This can be seen through the use of landscape and portrait windows in the backstage and office areas and the large glass front of the box office. The island location has always played a crucial role in the way people perceive the company and its buildings - both on and off Mull - and it is something that McCrone wanted to reinforce in the move. Rather than being a reinvention of Mull Theatre then, the 2008 relocation can be seen more as a rebranding with the aim being to assist the development of the company rather than to create a new one. One of the unique selling points of the company is its physical location on the geographical periphery of Scottish Theatre and this is something which it is keen to promote and utilise.

Throughout the two buildings there are clearly a number of differences; as one would expect between a traditional found space converted for performance and a new purpose-built venue designed primarily for production. Nonetheless there are also some similarities which go beyond the shared island location. Not only has the architect chosen to carry some features across including the

exposed beams in the auditorium and the use of traditional architectural materials but, moreover, there are also some similarities in the spectators' experiences of the two spaces, particularly with regards to the seating and the limited circulation space. Whilst this was accepted in the Little Theatre because of the perceived quirkiness of the space, for Druimfin it has been the source of some tension. This would suggest that the way that the performance spaces are being received varies according to the context in which it is being experienced and that there are various factors at play in our relationship to performance spaces which goes beyond the simple architectural design. This is something which will be examined in more depth in the following chapters.

By presenting the reader with an analysis of the materiality of Mull Theatre's two buildings, this chapter has offered an insight into how they might be experienced and understood. This is particularly significant for those who may not have seen one or both of the spaces as it will help to anchor the ensuing explorations of Mull Theatre's tours and its role within a wider Scottish framework. The following chapter will expand on the findings presented here and will use them to explore the potential relationship between space, spectator and performance by presenting the reader with an insight into Mull Theatre's 2010 spring tour of *Laurel and Hardy*.

Chapter 5 - Building Performances

Mull Theatre occupies a unique position within contemporary Scottish theatre in that it is the only professional touring company with its own permanent rehearsal and performance space. As a result, when considering the relationship between the company's perceived identity and its buildings, one must also consider the impact of its funded remit to tour nationally. Whilst chapter four presented a guided tour of the two venues owned and managed by Mull (Little) Theatre, this chapter will focus on the other facet of Mull Theatre's identity and will analyse the relationship between space and performance on its 2010 spring tour: *Laurel and Hardy* by Tom McGrath.²¹³

Published in 2005 the play is a biography of the comedy duo and incorporates dramatised scenes from their lives along with reconstructions of some of their famous film sequences including the pair attempting to carry a music box up a number of flights of stairs,²¹⁴ the dance sequence to 'Commence to Dancing' from *Way Out West* (1937) and the popular vaudeville song 'Shine on Harvest Moon' which was included in their 1939 film *The Flying Deuces*. Through conversations with McCrone it became apparent that this play was selected for two main reasons. The first was that touring theatre is an expensive activity and so this play was specifically chosen due to the potential income which it could produce. Due to the commercial value of the namesakes it was anticipated that large audience numbers would be attracted to see the show. Moreover, with only two actors there were fewer salary costs to pay than if the cast were

²¹³ A short promotional clip of the production was made for its revival at the Citizens' Theatre in Spring 2011. This can be accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ovb0kB3JRn0> [last accessed 1/10/11]

²¹⁴ This is a famous scene from the 1932 film *The Music Box*.

larger.²¹⁵ In addition to this Tom McGrath had died in the previous year and McCrone considered it to be a fitting tribute to him.²¹⁶



Figure 22 - *Laurel and Hardy* tour locations

This map shows the geographical spread of the tour, highlighting the range of places visited. Image reproduced with permission of Lonely Planet. © Lonely Planet, 2011

The tour itself ran from 20 March 2010 to 1 May 2010 and encompassed a range of venues from conventional, purpose-built performance spaces, such as Dundee Repertory Theatre, to village halls.²¹⁷ As a result of this, coupled with its timing - it occurred halfway through the research process - it was considered to be the most suitable production case study for this thesis. Later in 2010 Mull

²¹⁵ In total there were five salaried staff on the tour: Barrie Hunter (Oliver Hardy); Alasdair McCrone (Stanley Laurel); Kevin Hill (stage manager); Alan Ceserano (sound operator); and Clare McNeill (lighting operator). In addition to this there were also two students on unpaid work placements (Holly Hodgart from the Royal Conservatoire and Ruth Wells from the University of Glasgow) and during the rehearsal period there was a set designer (Alicia Hendrick), a sound designer (Martin Low), a lighting designer (George Tarbuck) a scenic artist (Alan Melvin) and his assistant (Mark Nairn).

²¹⁶ The reasoning behind the choice of play is also evidenced in an interview McCrone did for the Inverness Courier prior to the performance at Eden Court. The article can be accessed through: <http://www.inverness-courier.co.uk/Home/Another-fine-mess-for-Alasdair-5723557.htm> [last accessed 16/4/12]

²¹⁷ For a full list of tour dates and venues visited please refer to appendix eight.

Theatre undertook a shorter tour of Conor McPherson's 1997 play, *The Weir*, which visited many of the smaller islands in Argyll and Bute, including Eigg and Muck.²¹⁸ Not only would this have been more difficult to observe due to limited accommodation on the islands and transport issues for larger cast and crew numbers but, it was also focused on a more specific type of venue: rural village halls and community centres. The strength of the *Laurel and Hardy* tour in terms of analysis was that one night the performance would be in a rural hall with no previous experience of hosting a touring performance and the next day it would be in a more conventional performance space, designed primarily for that purpose. By observing the same performance in different spaces it was possible to understand the logistics of rural theatre touring as well as identifying some of the effects that the venue has on specific shows.

The word 'specific' is crucial here because the analysis below is focused on this tour alone. Although the conclusions will then be used to feed into and develop wider hypotheses made regarding space, place and theatre architecture, the chapter does not pretend to provide a definitive answer as to the exact effects of any space on any performance. Instead this chapter, as with the majority of the thesis, focuses the study to look at specific productions and specific buildings in order to contribute to existing dialogues regarding space, place and touring theatre. McAuley suggests that it is necessary to look at the specific in order to understand the general:

In order to deal with the dynamic functioning of space in performance, it seems to me essential to deal with actual performances and with the work practices of actual theatre practitioners and spectators.²¹⁹

Thus it is only through precise and detailed analyses that the 'pluralism' of spatial understandings can be fully understood.²²⁰

²¹⁸ The latter has a resident population of just 38 people and is about two miles long in length. For more information please visit the island's website: <http://www.isleofmuck.com/> [last accessed 16/4/12]

²¹⁹ Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in Theatre* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) p.10

²²⁰ This notion of pluralism in people's relationships to space is discussed by a number of spatial theorists with scholars such as Fuchs and Chadhuri asserting that it is both individual and

With this in mind, the following chapter has been drawn from the tour diary which I kept for the duration of the *Laurel and Hardy* production. This daily account of the travel, performance, venue and audience not only enabled me to analyse the tour effectively after the event but, moreover, it allowed me to monitor myself. I chose to record not just the elements of the tour which were overtly related to the transport and presentation of the production but also the non-theatrical elements such as amount of sleep and meal-times. In doing so I tried to ensure that I maintained my role as critical observer by acknowledging factors which may have had an effect on my mood and, moreover, on the mood of the cast and crew around me, as I was working the same hours that they were. Whilst some of this information has been included here the diary has undergone a process of selection as space constraints prevent it from being included in its entirety.

McAuley notes that 'documentation of any sort necessarily involves selection and is, therefore, already in itself a form of analysis or even interpretation.'²²¹ Nonetheless, she also observes that, 'analysis...involves a much more intrusive kind of interpretation, a far more obvious ordering and shaping of the material.'²²² Despite being an account of the individual performances and venues visited this chapter must also be recognised as a mediation of the actual events. Degrees of selection have taken place both in translating the information from the stage to the page and then again in reproducing it from the fieldwork notes to this final thesis. In many ways this echoes the reconstruction and reimagining of Mull Theatre's buildings described in chapter four and, as was the case then, it is a fact which should be recognised but which in no way undermines the accuracy or legitimacy of the account. Indeed, 'understanding is an ongoing, always incomplete process'²²³ and thus, each of us makes sense of the world around us through the perspective of our own experiences and backgrounds. This is true of researcher and reader alike: there is no such thing as a truly objective human being.

cultural responses which play a part. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chadhuri, *Land/Scape/Theatre* (The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2002) p.14

²²¹ Gay McAuley, 'Towards an Ethnography of Rehearsal,' *New Theatre Quarterly* 14 (98) p.76

²²² McAuley, 'Towards an Ethnography of Rehearsal,' p.77

²²³ McAuley, 'Towards an Ethnography of Rehearsal,' p.80

Despite the element of selection which has gone into the presentation of the tour diary it is important to note that the format of the chapter still takes the style of the diary: working through the tour day by day, venue by venue.²²⁴ The thesis has argued that village halls and other (non-) performance spaces have been largely ignored in theatrical studies despite the fundamental part they play in maintaining the rural touring circuit. By detailing each venue visited then, this chapter will also offer the reader an insight into some of the buildings regularly used for performance which may not have received the degree of attention devoted to more conventional performance spaces.

The Tour

Prior to beginning an analysis of each of the performances on tour, it first seems apposite to mention the rehearsal process as this is undoubtedly a central component of the final production. My residency with Mull Theatre began on the first day of rehearsals and so, although there had been pre-production meetings and discussions between the director and the designers which I was not present at, I was able to observe the majority of activities and conversations which formed the rehearsal period. This was important as the primary purpose of the residency was to examine the impact of the space on the performance and this would necessarily include looking at the rehearsal space as well as the venues toured to. Indeed, Knowles has claimed that:

The rehearsal hall, where the company works full days for what usually amounts to more than 80 percent of the creative process of maintaining a production, is among the most formative of practitioners' spaces in shaping meaning in the theatre. It is also the space least frequently under the control of the creative team, or at least taken into account 'as' creative space in the design of the show.²²⁵

²²⁴ It should be noted that this has also resulted in shifting tenses being used throughout the section. I recorded notes throughout each day, at different stages in the process and so some sections were written during the get-in, some during the interval and some after the show. Because some observations were therefore made before each performance and some after it was considered important to maintain the shifting tenses to highlight where hindsight has been used.

²²⁵ Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.67

Moreover, for this thesis, it is considered particularly significant given the current dichotomy embodied by Druimfin as both a production centre and a performance space.

The performers' rehearsals ran for one month and always took place within Druimfin, as did the construction of the set. Operating out of a shared space meant that individual set pieces could be brought on to the stage and utilised as soon as they were ready. In some instances items were even used before they were completed as was the case with both of the scenic flats used: each of these was brought out before they were painted so that the cast could get a sense of how they would be incorporated into the blocking. In contrast, at the Little Theatre the cast would have rehearsed on one part of the island while the set was built elsewhere and the two components would not be brought together until the final dress and technical rehearsals.

The main benefit of working in the performance space with the set for the duration of the process is that the relationships between each section are then able to grow organically. Reminiscing about rehearsals for Brook's performance of *The Cherry Orchard* in 1981, Natasha Perry, who played Lyubov, claimed that:

We started using the whole theatre for improvisations - all of the balconies, the windows, the stairs. The whole building became a living thing for us, and I think this familiarity helped to communicate a certain domestic spirit during the performances.²²⁶

For them, 'the theatre *became* the house' and was, therefore, much more than a blank canvas onto which the performance was projected.²²⁷ McCrone does not prioritise the significance of the space to nearly the same extent as Brook and so the effect of using Druimfin throughout rehearsals for *Laurel and Hardy* did not result in it becoming an integral part of the production per se. What it did do, however, was to ensure that the set was an active part of the show and that each aspect worked with the blocking, sound and other elements to create

²²⁶ Andrew Todd and Jean-Guy Lecat, *The Open Circle: Peter Brook's Theatre Environments* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003) p.79

²²⁷ Todd and Lecat, *The Open Circle*, p.78-9

meaning within the performance. Arguably this is more important for a touring performance where the performance space will change almost daily but the set will remain ostensibly the same throughout the run.

By working with the set early on in the process, the company was also able to practise different blocking for scenes according to the space constraints imposed by the various venues on the tour. Due to its funding remit, Mull Theatre regularly performs in (non-) performance venues throughout the length and breadth of Scotland and it frequently does so with the same crew members. As a result it has developed a significant amount of knowledge regarding each of the venues with only one building on the *Laurel and Hardy* tour having never been visited before. One interviewee even went so far as to suggest that due to its extensive knowledge in this area, Mull Theatre has the resources to develop its own directory of almost every (non-) performance space on the touring circuit.²²⁸

Although there was an initiative to create such a database through the Scottish Arts Council's website, there were a number of gaps in the information and it was not the valuable resource it could have been. The Federation of Scottish Theatres has since created its own website specifically to produce a touring directory but, again, there are a number of venues which are not mentioned and it does not include important information regarding technical specifications, accessibility or distance from local amenities such as ATMs.²²⁹ Mull Theatre already has this information and so could ensure that different versions of each scene had been rehearsed and could be adopted accordingly.

One example of a production choice that developed from the staff's knowledge of the tour venues is a scene where Stan Laurel, played by McCrone, has a fictional conversation with his wife, played by Hunter. One of the side flats had a section in the middle which could be dropped down to reveal a bed upon which the characters discussed the adoption of the stage name, Laurel.²³⁰

²²⁸ Interview with Participant A (11/2/09)

²²⁹ This website can be accessed through the following link:
<http://www.scottishtheatres.com/touring/index.php> [last accessed 19/11/11]

²³⁰ This flat can be seen on the left hand side of figure 23 below.

In a number of venues this part of the set could not be used as there was not enough depth for it to be fixed securely enough. As such, the actors sometimes had to perform it downstage centre, seated on a wicker hamper with a blanket pulled over their knees. These two variants, along with the links to the preceding and following scenes, were both practised thoroughly until the actors were equally confident with each.



Figure 23 - The 'bed flat'

Combining the company's knowledge along with the benefits of its new production centre meant that by the time the production was taken onto the road almost every eventuality with regards to blocking had been explored and rehearsed. In addition to this, having the ability to work as much with the large version of the set as it did with the reduced set also meant that there was some forethought regarding the implications that this would have for the different lighting states. Whilst every performance is subtly different, for a professional troupe there should not be marked differences from one night to the next as each piece of the production needs to fit tightly together in order to produce a coherent whole. With touring theatre it is slightly different, however, as each

space visited will impact on the performance in its own way, imposing unique restrictions or creating opportunities which might not be available elsewhere. This is highlighted through the following section wherein I describe some of the key venues of the tour.

Victory Hall, Benderloch (23/3/10)

The outside is reminiscent of an old war bunker and appears to be made of dark, corrugated iron with rounded corners. Inside the hall is very long and thin with seven windows high up on the walls although there are no curtains for these. During the summer months this would make a blackout in the space almost impossible as it does not get completely dark until almost eleven o'clock at night. This will undoubtedly impact on the lighting of productions which tour here at that time.

The building's heating and electricity works on a meter so the company has to ensure that it has enough pound coins to last the show. The space is also very cold as it is, understandably, not heated when not in use. There is a stage at the end of the room although it is unusually high and could create some visibility issues for those sitting right at the front. It does ensure, however, that spectators at the back can see. Due to the height of the *Laurel and Hardy* set the company is assembling it in front of the permanent stage. The curtains will then be drawn across the front of the permanent stage and this will be used as the actors' dressing room before the performance and during the interval.

The whole of the set is being used tonight although the edges of the floor cloth have been folded in so there is a slightly smaller surface area for the actors to perform on. About one metre has been taken off the depth and width so that there is room for the lighting stands. This has implications for the blocking, particularly the dance sequences which will have to happen on more of a diagonal line now.

During the get-in, one of the ladies from the hall committee brought her daughter into the hall to watch the company at work. This highlights a sense of ownership over the space and a different relationship with the production: in a

‘conventional’ theatre this part of the process is usually hidden from the patrons. Certainly, in Druimfin the only people outside of the cast and crew who were allowed to observe any of the pre-performance process were the core staff and members of Mull Youth Theatre who were invited in to see the dress rehearsal.



Figure 24 - Interior of Victory Hall, Benderloch
The set was constructed on the green floor cloth in placed in front of the permanent stage.

The audience response was much louder in terms of laughter tonight than it was during the opening night at Druimfin and when Oliver Hardy called, ‘Is there anyone out there?’ someone responded with ‘yes’ whilst another spectator waved at the actors. During the interval there were also a number of people who came over to look at the sound and lighting desks, something which is not as common in more conventional performance spaces. This is potentially to do with a greater sense of ownership in the space although it could equally be because some of the barriers which usually exist within conventional theatres have been broken down. Indeed, aside from the floor cloth and a small line of floor lights at the front of the performance area there is little demarcation between the actor and audience areas. Moreover, with no proper blackout

within the space much of the audience is in light and so attendees may be able to see each other almost as clearly as they can see the actors.

The corridor outside of the hall is very narrow making the get-in and get-out fairly difficult. There are also no lights outside of the venue and no power supply. The company did not have its own large torch and so the get-out had to be carried out with only two head-torches to light the way. Coupled with the fact that the cast and crew are still uncertain as to how each of the components fit together in the van the get-out didn't finish until 1:15 am meaning that this was a 16 hour working day.

Innellan Village Hall (23/3/10)

The van pulled up alongside the fire exit of the hall and the set and lights then had to be passed over a low wall in order to enter the hall. The entrance used was to the right hand corner of the above image and so the set was easily transported into the performance space. The get-in still took about six hours to complete although this was largely to do with discussions about how best to lay out the stage. As the crew get more accustomed to assembling the parts and working out how the set fits into different spaces this time should be cut down slightly. It should also be noted that despite the length of time taken to assemble the set, none of the heavy flats could be used in this performance due to the size of the space: they not only need enough width in the stage to contain them but also enough depth to ensure that they are standing securely. This is not available at Innellan Village Hall.

Again, there is a raised stage in the hall but this could not be used as it would not provide enough height for the set pieces. The audience's entrance into the hall is down stage left and so putting the floor cloth here, as with Benderloch Victory Hall, would result in blocking the main entrance for spectators. As a result the actors had to go outside of the building in order to get from their dressing room (a small committee room next to the kitchen) to the stage. Due to the rain outside this was less than ideal. McNeill, the lighting operator, was also concerned about the lights because they had to be placed much closer to the stage than they were at Druimfin. This created some difficulties with

focusing as they were lighting up the majority of the stage instead of just the section they were originally intended for. Coupled with the white curved ceiling reflecting the light back this meant that, from my position at the back of the audience, I could see most of the room during the performance.



Figure 25 - Interior of Innellan Village Hall

During the second half of the play a mobile telephone rang and the owner got up and walked out to answer the call. She then returned to her seat a few minutes later which meant disturbing the rest of the row twice. It is possible that this was just one individual as opposed to being reflective of any broader implications of the space, although the ladies serving tea in the interval also left the room to prepare the refreshments ten minutes before the end of the half and returned to their seats about ten minutes into the second half. In addition to this they talked loudly in the kitchen as they tidied up and could be clearly heard in the main hall. This does suggest a different relationship between spectator, space and production and, with the company feeling unable to tell the committee what they could and could not do there is also a different

relationship between company, space and audience than one might expect from a more conventional performance space.

Cove Burgh Hall, Helensburgh (25/3/10)

Described as 'the vibrant hub of activities in Cove and Kilcreggan'²³¹ this building is fairly accessible from the surrounding area with a large car park and a bus stop on the main road which runs alongside it. This is essential as the venue incorporates a large hall which hosts various activities including weekly fair-trade coffee mornings as well as housing the public library. Due to its multi-purpose use one could be forgiven for viewing it as maintaining a similar position to a village hall or community centre within its local community. Nonetheless, it should be noticed that the website refers to it as a 'village hall' in inverted commas, thus suggesting that it is not viewed as completely fitting into this category.²³²

The get-in was relatively straight-forward here as the vans could pull up right next to the main entrance. Once inside there was a corner to navigate and a few stairs to climb but each of the components easily fitted through each of the doors. The hall space was also very large - both wide and deep - meaning that all of the set and lights could be laid out on the floor. This meant that each member of the crew could see everything clearly and could go about their tasks as and when they wanted to, without fear of getting in each other's way. The set was fully assembled by 5.30pm - two hours earlier than on previous nights - and the mood was far more relaxed as a result. The actors were also able to check into the bed and breakfast during the afternoon. Not only did this give them time to relax but it also meant that fewer people were trying to move around within the hall which undoubtedly had a positive impact on the atmosphere. This is not because people were not getting along but because everyone appeared to appreciate a little bit of time by themselves to get on with their work.

²³¹ Cove Burgh Hall website: <http://www.coveburghhall.org.uk/> [last accessed 1/10/11]

²³² Cove Burgh Hall website: <http://www.coveburghhall.org.uk/?q=content/about-hall> [last accessed 1/10/11]



Figure 26 - Exterior of Cove Burgh Hall

There was a slightly strange dynamic at the start of the day though with one member of the committee offering suggestions about how best to place the set within the space. Whilst he clearly understands *his* building more than the company and is aware of acoustic and sight-line issues, the company knows its set and the show better. As a result there emerged some underlying tension between the two as a result of conflicting senses of ownership. The committee members were also present in the space during the day as they were responsible for setting out a table for the box office and laying out the bar at the back of the room. Although the cast and crew were still working in the space and using the kitchen to make meals there was a sense that they did not want to get in the way of the committee, furthering the notion that this is their venue and their space. This was mirrored in some of the spectators' behaviour when one man, for example, moved both his seat and one of the lamp stands in order to get a better view of the stage.

As the audience entered the hall it became clear that most of them knew each other: there was a huge amount of greeting; people stood in the aisles to

talk and went over to where others were sitting; and lots of photos were taken of each other. Whilst one might suppose that this would lead to a greater sense of a shared experience on behalf of the audience overall they seemed to be much quieter in terms of responding to the show. There were, however, a number of people who were talking through the performance (including the ladies on the committee who were standing at the back throughout) and a number of drinks glasses and bottles were knocked over as well. This was attributed, at least in part, to the raffle at the interval and an introductory speech where one of the committee members welcomed Mull Theatre to the hall.²³³ Whilst McCrone had worked with the Martin Low (sound designer) and George Tarbuck (lighting designer) to create a pre-set sound and lighting state which would draw people into the fictional world being created on stage it was felt that the welcome speech had interrupted the illusion. By repeatedly reminding the audience of where they were and of their outside lives, the spectators were perhaps responding differently to the show than if they had been observing it in a darkened auditorium where the overall event would be designed to draw the audience into the stage world.

Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh (26/3/10 and 27/3/10)

This is the first conventional performance space visited on the tour and there were two performances booked on consecutive nights. This meant that there would be no get-out on the first night as the set could remain in the space until the end of the second show and resulted in a much brighter mood amongst the cast and crew. In fact, as soon as everything from the vans had been laid out in the space (with the help of two technical staff employed at the Brunton), the cast and crew went to the in-house cafe for a cup of tea and a slice of cake.

²³³ This emerged in an informal discussion with some of the cast and crew following the performance.



Figure 27 - Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh

The raked seating in this venue is very steep and so the audience might feel as though they are almost on top of the stage, regardless of how far back they are sitting.²³⁴ It also results in good sight lines being achieved from every seat in the auditorium. I know: I tried. The image above was taken about three quarters of the way up the seating bank and highlights the sense of intimacy being created in the venue, despite the capacity of over 200. This is then enhanced by the way seats are allocated by the box office. Rather than filling up the middle section first, some spectators were also placed at the side of the auditorium and seats were filled from the front row first with gaps left between groups. Thus, even in shows which do not sell very well there is still the sense that the auditorium is fuller than it is.

The performance venue is located within Brunton Hall which houses a restaurant, cafe and some of the council buildings. Whilst some conventional theatre buildings are thought to evoke feelings of elitism, this is perhaps not the

²³⁴ This idea was further evidenced through conversations I had with a couple of members of the cast and crew who all identified this as one of the central components in the Brunton Theatre's identity.

case here with a number of people entering the front doors for a variety of reasons.²³⁵ Nonetheless, to reach the theatre bar and auditorium you have to travel through two sets of double doors and these are closed unless there is a show on. As a result some of the distinction between 'public hall' and 'theatre' is still maintained.

Not only does this venue largely meet the criteria of a prototypical performance space but it is also the closest that the tour gets to performing in Edinburgh or Glasgow. As such it was over these nights that the majority of critics came to review the production. This, along with the heightened exposure afforded by a larger seating capacity, goes some way to suggesting why Tarbuck chose to oversee the rigging and focusing of the lights at this venue rather than the previous halls. I would also assert that it is indicative of an underlying assumption which exists between the space and quality of the performance: a conventional performance space results in a better performance and one which requires more care and attention.

The audience seemed to really enjoy the show with lots of laughter and clapping throughout both of the performances. There did seem to be a lot of people talking during the play although I could not always make out what they were saying. Those closer to me were usually pre-empting lines from scenes which imitated a film or discussing a memory or experience they had in relation to Laurel and Hardy. This suggests that the audience is made up largely of pre-existing fans of the namesake comedy performers and thus they may have slightly different expectations regarding what they are seeing. This is reinforced by the large number of questionnaires which have been returned stating that the spectator(s) have never seen a theatre production before.²³⁶

It should also be noted that there were a number of strange occurrences during these two performances including one man who kept playing with a plastic bag and another, in the front row, who started to clean his ears with his keys during Hardy's death scene. This highlights the fact that generalisations

²³⁵ David Hutchison, *The Modern Scottish Theatre* (Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1977) p.109

²³⁶ 47 percent of questionnaire respondents claimed that they had never seen a theatre production before in contrast to an average of 14 percent across the whole tour.

about audience behaviour are essentially problematic in that the search for the 'collective' response often means that the individual response is overlooked. Thus, although this chapter and the one following explore some of the general trends for theatre audiences in a range of venues this is in no way an attempt to homogenise the overall experience.

CatStrand, New Galloway (2/4/10)

This is a recently constructed venue which has been described as 'Dumfries and Galloway's newest arts and community venue' suggesting that it is not to be understood as a 'theatre' in the traditional sense.²³⁷ It is a small space with a seating capacity of 80. This is similar to Druimfin and yet the footprint of the building on Mull is much larger resulting in a different sense of intimacy being created. For a small venue it is well equipped with lighting bars, raked, padded seating and numbers on each of the chairs (although seating is not reserved in advance). Nonetheless, there are no dressing rooms and so the actors must use one of the board rooms. In contrast to Druimfin, then, it appears as though the attention was placed primarily on the audiences' experience as opposed to that of the cast and crew.

The get-in was fairly straight forward with a large space outside to pull up the van and then two sets of double doors to manoeuvre through. There was a corner to negotiate but this was quite wide and so not too problematic. It was also made easier because of the size of the stage meaning that only three rostra were used, instead of the usual four, and the two heavy side flats were replaced by two black flats. The height and depth of the stage also meant that the lift could not be used and because the front row of the audience is so close there was not space for the birdies at the front of the stage.²³⁸ As a result, some of the afternoon was spend re-blocking certain sequences in order to factor in missing set and lights.

²³⁷ CatStrand Website: <http://www.catstrand.com/> [last accessed 1/10/10]

²³⁸ This is a miniature lantern that, due to its size, is often hidden within parts of the set or placed along the edges of the stage.



Figure 28 - CatStrand, New Galloway

This was the promotional banner which toured with the show and was placed front of house at each venue.

There were also a few members of staff moving around the space who stayed out of the way but were on hand should their assistance be required: finding out how to operate the skylight shutters, for example. This was a very different feel to a traditional village hall in which you can sometimes feel like you are trespassing in somebody else's home.²³⁹

McCrone noted that, despite this venue being double the capacity of the Little Theatre it is very reminiscent of it, both in terms of feel and design. Those in the front row would often move their feet if the actors stepped forwards, suggesting that they are always conscious of where they were and the relationship and proximity between themselves and the stage. This is something that can be potentially lost in larger venues which have more of an overt actor-audience divide. Overall though the audience behaved as one would expect in a

²³⁹ This view is supported through Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion's study into rural theatre touring in Scotland: *The Same but Different, Rural Arts Touring in Scotland: The Case of Theatre* (Stroud: Comedia, 2004) p.70

conventional theatre: a number stayed seated during the interval and there was little talking during the performance. From this we can infer that it is not just the physicality of the space which impacts on the audience's behaviour but that there are also additional factors at play. Indeed, the expectations of how an audience will behave at a naturalistic text-based drama in a conventional space will differ to that of a pantomime in the same space. Similarly the behaviour of an audience of a village hall may be as much determined by their pre-conceived ideas of the production as much as through their relationship with the space.

Howden Park Centre, Livingston (3/4/10)

This is a new purpose-built venue and there is a clear demarcation between the contiguous spaces of stage and auditorium.



Figure 29 - Seating at Howden Park Centre

Black has been chosen for the walls and ceiling around the stage and up to the lighting box in order to provide the desired 'neutrality' of playing space but the spectators' sections are red, providing a clear contrast. Prior to the start of the

performance this bright colour made the room feel more energised than had the whole room been painted black.²⁴⁰ The dimming of the lights and a reduction in the brightness of the surrounding space also meant that there was a clear divide between the outside world and the world being created on stage

The front row of seats is positioned slightly below the front of the stage. These are probably the worst seats in the house in terms of sight lines and so, with the auditorium only filled to about a third of its full capacity, they had not been allocated. The result was that there was quite a large gap between the actors and audience which McCrone and Hunter had to work across. When speaking to the actors afterwards it became apparent that this required more energy on their part as they were effectively performing across a dead space between the stage and the audience.

Resolis Memorial Hall, Resolis (5/4/10)

This is a traditional community hall with a strong emphasis on programming cultural and creative events. There is a funded arts committee, made up of six people, who book approximately ten shows a year. These tend to fall between September and April as the surrounding area relies heavily on agriculture and so most of the potential audience will be busy working on the land during the summer.²⁴¹ Inside, the hall fits into the conventions of a typical community venue: there is a badminton court marked on the floor, a hull shaped roof, windows high up along the walls and a very high stage at one end.²⁴² Again, the *Laurel and Hardy* set will be built in front of the stage and one of the committee rooms will be used as a dressing room.

²⁴⁰ Although this was my own personal perception and was not discussed with any of the other attendees in the space, it does go some way to supporting the experiment held by Richard Küller during the 1970s, and cited in chapter four, in which it was identified that audiences were slower to physically respond to stimulus on stage in a room devoid of decoration or colour. Iain Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) p.81

²⁴¹ This became evident through conversations with the voluntary promoter who oversaw the company getting into the space and through posters and adverts on the communal notice board.

²⁴² The presence of a badminton court painted on to the floor is one of the key features that Alan Ceserano attributed to any village hall in rural Scotland (3/3/10)



Figure 30 - Resolis Memorial Hall, side entrance

The audience members were dressed quite smartly and there was a real sense of occasion as they all entered. Many of them knew each other and so there was a feeling that this was an important social occasion to which people came to catch up with each other as much as they did to see the show. Indeed the interval overran by 15 minutes and there was no lull in the personal conversations taking place during this time. The second half did not begin until one of the committee members had ‘dimmed the lights’ which consisted of turning off the coloured bulbs which ran the length of the hall and then made an announcement that everyone should take their seats. It should also be noted that for this to occur, Hilly, the stage manager, first had to ask one of the committee members if the performance could be re-started. In a more conventional performance space this power would have been his alone. This is reminiscent of the conflicting senses of ownership which were present in Cove Burgh Hall; between those who metaphorically own the production and those who metaphorically own the host venue.

Lyth Arts Centre, Lyth (6/4/10)

William Wilson is the owner, manager and promoter of this venue and there is an interesting mix between it being a conventional theatre space and a local, community venue. Within the auditorium there is raked seating, rigged lights and blackout material on the walls and yet its location in rural Caithness is not where one might first expect to find an established arts centre.²⁴³ Wilson opened this venue because he was passionate about the arts and he regularly books theatre and music companies to perform here, offering accommodation across from the venue to help with ease of access. He also provides a hot meal for visiting companies so the worry about where to get food from is alleviated. This is something which some companies have come to expect on rural tours but which was only provided at three of the venues visited during this tour: Lyth Arts Centre; Resolis Memorial Hall; and Crathes Village Hall.²⁴⁴ It was greatly appreciated by the cast and crew and served to break down some of the barriers between the company and the venue's committee.

The walls of the auditorium have been painted white and are then covered with black fabric. This creates the effect of a black box but is arguably less oppressive as you can see the folds of the material rather than just a solid block of colour. It would also presumably mean that the room could be made lighter should it be used for other purposes during the day. The floor is wooden and slightly uneven meaning the actors have to be careful with some of their movements to avoid tripping. The performance area is also demarcated by a large mat which serves to absorb some of the sound (as does the material on the walls). Mull Theatre had to remove this mat as it interfered with the rostra - causing them to become unbalanced - but the floor cloth which was included in

²⁴³ Lyth is near John O'Groats in the top northern tip of the Scottish mainland. This is shown in figure three on page 36 of this thesis.

²⁴⁴ This was mentioned during the NEAT Networking Day at Haddo House, at which one volunteer promoter stated that some companies had arrived at the venue expecting a meal, without being advised that there would be one, and some have tried to write it into their contracts that it will be provided. Although many of the promoters agreed that they would enjoy the opportunity to dine and converse with the visiting companies, each had a number of other responsibilities which meant that it was not always possible either financially or in terms of timing (25/9/10)

the set design served this purpose to some extent. Other companies visiting the venue may find this problematic, however.



Figure 31 - Assembling the set, Lyth Arts Centre

The loading bay and backstage entrance to the performers' dressing rooms is on the same side of the building as the audience's entrance. There is also a shared car park. This is a similar layout to Druimfin and in some ways serves to break down the barriers which have been traditionally favoured between the front stage and backstage worlds. It should be noted, however, that the dressing room entrance is largely concealed from the main entrance by a turret and so it is not completely exposed. Some spectators did walk past the entrance during the interval though and as the actors caught snatches of their conversations one can only assume that these audience members were equally aware of the performers' presence.

Throughout the get-in Wilson continually appeared and offered advice to the actors on how to get the best out of the space whilst also informing the stage manager about when he would like the performance to begin. Whilst the space

itself contains many of the established conventions, Wilson's relationship to it and the visiting companies is more akin to the committee members at Resolis Memorial Hall and Cove Burgh Hall, for instance. In these spaces the resident committee had a firm idea of how the night would operate and it is the responsibility of the company to work around that; in conventional spaces there is more flexibility with the venue usually meeting the requirements of the company. This idea is furthered by Wilson's assertion that the arts centre is like having a 'theatre in his living room.' This is certainly the impression that you get as he walks around the building during the interval; appearing both in the front-of-house areas and backstage. This is reminiscent of the relationship the Heskeths appear to have had with their 'playbox'²⁴⁵ theatre on Mull and so we can see that Mull Little Theatre was not completely unique in terms of the relationships which existed between the proprietor, space and audience.

An Lanntair, Stornoway (8/4/10)

Yesterday was a travel day from Lyth to Stornoway and so involved a large number of miles being covered by sea and land. Although technically it was a day off from the production it was nevertheless very tiring. Ordinarily the company has to travel to each venue on the morning of the performance and so waking up in Stornoway meant that there was a much more relaxed start to the day. In addition to this, although the crew could not get into the venue until 11am, the construction of the set was able to begin a little earlier than on some previous days. The actors also arrived at the venue at the same time as the crew as although they do not help with the building of the set it enabled them to discuss the specificities of this space and any implications which it may have for the performance.

²⁴⁵ Barrie Hesketh, *Taking Off: The Story of Mull Little Theatre* (Inverness: New Iona Press, 1997) p.34



Figure 32 - An Lanntair, Stornoway
Hilly, the Stage Manager, assembling the set

On the website An Lanntair looks like its name - a lantern - shining out across the harbour although during the day it looks like a fairly non-descript, salmon-pink building, set back from the road and with limited signage.²⁴⁶ Inside the venue the front of house areas are full of natural light with floor to ceiling windows and it incorporates a gift shop, the box office, a bar and an exhibition space. This is evidently a multi-purpose space which brings people in through the front door for a variety of reasons.

For the cast and crew the loading bay is located right next to the main entrance to the building but it is slightly set back from the road. Once all of the equipment had been removed from the vans the large doors to the theatre were closed so that no passers-by could see in, thus maintaining a distinction between the fictional world being created in the auditorium and the world of reality outside. Within the space the element which excited the crew most was the presence of a 'magic carpet:' a mechanised platform which can be raised and

²⁴⁶ An Lanntair website: www.lanntair.com [last accessed 1/11/11]

lowered allowing individuals to reach the lighting grid with greater ease and security. In addition to this the lighting bars could also be lowered to the stage level meaning that most of the lights could be rigged from the stage. As such the get-in was completed in a matter of hours and with less exertion of energy than usual.

Inside the auditorium the front row of seats consists of blue, cushioned, stackable chairs whilst the other rows are the more conventional, folding, theatre seats. The show was not sold out and no seat in the front two rows had been allocated but nor had the seats been removed. This meant that again there was a large void which the actors had to perform across. There were also large gaps between different groups of spectators and so, coupled with the gap from the stage, it felt very much like a number of individuals watching the performance as opposed to the temporary collective which I felt more strongly in venues such as Lyth Arts Centre and CatStrand.

It should be noted that this venue, alongside hosting touring theatre productions, is also used as the local cinema. This may explain some of the design features of the space including the decision to have all of the seating positioned at a ninety degree angle to the stage rather than have it wrap around as was the case in the Brunton Theatre. Certainly a cinema audience would not be able to see the screen if they were seated at an angle to it. This suggests that the primary purpose of the building might have been seen as a community cinema and that the qualities necessary for live performances were considered secondary.²⁴⁷

Macphail Centre, Ullapool (9/4/10)

This morning the company were up at 5.30am having completed the get-out at 11.30pm last night. The early start was dictated by the required ferry crossing at 7.30am: the next one was not until the afternoon and would not have left enough time to build the set in advance of the evening's performance. On

²⁴⁷ Through subsequent conversations with actors who have been in this space it has become apparent that many feel it is less enjoyable than other performance spaces. This has been attributed to the acoustics but also other qualities which they have been unable to articulate.

reaching Ullapool the vans drove straight to the venue where they were unloaded and cups of tea and coffee were had. Hunter and McCrone then went to their accommodation - a place which most of the company have stayed at before and to which they were very excited about returning.²⁴⁸

The Macphail Centre is a Lottery funded arts centre in the middle of Ullapool High School and so the get-in was hindered slightly by all of the gym equipment which is stored in the corridor: the hall is also used for sports by the school. As it was the school holidays they were allowed free access to the building including both the kitchen and the toilets. During term-time, however, this could be more difficult as one would have to consider necessary safeguarding procedures for the pupils, again creating a different relationship between space and company.

The show tonight only had 25 pre-booked tickets although the venue promoter informed me that this was very good because theatre audiences are notoriously small here. She asserted that stand-up comedy was much more likely to sell and so that was where she focused her attention with regards to publicity. McCrone commented later, however, that he remembered a time when playing in Ullapool would mean having a large audience and he seemed disappointed by the small ticket sales. He suggested that there was quite a defeatist attitude within the venue and that little was being done to counteract the view that theatre is a minority interest in the area; more time and money is being spent advertising the productions which will be popular amongst the local audiences rather than trying to push those people may not automatically be drawn to.

²⁴⁸ All of the cast and crew were staying at The Ceilidh Place which was established in 1920 by actor, Robert Urquhart. This is a place which has always actively welcomed artists and was the main base for the annual PAN networking forum in 2010 and the lodgings of choice for most companies touring here. For more information on The Ceilidh Place please refer to its website: www.theceilidhplace.com [last accessed 1/2/11]



Figure 33 - Inside the Macphail Centre

This image shows the cast and crew discussing any adjustments which will need to be made to the performance.

On entering the auditorium prior to the start of the performance, the audience spoke with hushed tones and were subdued in their responses throughout the performance. Arguably, although this is not a conventional theatre, the spectators seemed to behave as though it were and did not interact with each other in the same way as I have observed in other rural halls. It should also be noted that this is the first non-traditional performance space which had printed tickets; it was a piece of red card with a bowler hat, the price of the ticket and the date on it. In Resolis and Cove they handed out raffle tickets as make-shift tickets but elsewhere they simply ticked names off a list. Perhaps then, the audience's behaviour is as much determined by the framing devices employed from the moment one enters the building as it is to the performance itself?

Eden Court, Inverness (11/4/10)

In 2008 a lottery grant of £2,305,000 was given to the refurbishment of Eden Court, Inverness.²⁴⁹ In contrast, Mull Theatre received £250,000 from the same funding programme in order to build its purpose-built venue. This dramatic difference in cost is as much reflective of the geographical location as it is of the intended purpose of the building - Eden Court is a multi-purpose arts venue and Druimfin is a production centre. Nonetheless it does go some way to suggesting the contrasting priorities which have been assigned to each venue.²⁵⁰

In reference to architectural awards won by the redesign Eden Court in 2008, Jim Tough, the Chief Executive of the Scottish Arts Council, noted that:

The benefits of high quality building design are not just aesthetic, good design can improve an audience's experience and stimulate a wider appetite for the arts and this in turn can increase participation in the arts, one of the Scottish Arts Council's key aims.²⁵¹

The suggestion here is that the space of performance plays an integral role both in the overall experiences of the theatrical event and, moreover, that it can serve to increase interest and participation in the arts more generally. Inverness is the administrative centre of the Highland Council and is the main centre of population for that region. Thus, financing the construction of a venue which will improve participation in the arts for that area is seen as a worthwhile venture. Considering the geographical location of Mull Theatre, providing a 'theatre' for the island and its audience may not seem so important. With this

²⁴⁹ Scottish Arts Council, *More Gongs for Inverness Theatre* (21/11/08) Scottish Arts Council Website (now archived): <http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/latestnews/1005973.aspx> [last accessed 1/10/11]

²⁵⁰ According to the 2001 Scottish census the resident population of Inverness is 40,949 and, as it is often considered the 'gateway to the Highlands' (Interview with Nick Fearn, 25/2/11), Eden Court is clearly catering for a large and varied demographic. The population of Tobermory, in contrast, is only 980. The gap in the amount of public funds spent towards these two buildings can clearly be accounted for in the number of attendees expected to use the space then. The statistics have been taken from <http://www.scrol.gov.uk/scrol/common/home.jsp> [last accessed 1/10/10]

²⁵¹ Scottish Arts Council, *More Gongs for Inverness Theatre* (21/11/08) Scottish Arts Council Website (now archived): <http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/latestnews/1005973.aspx> [last accessed 1/10/11]

in mind we can infer that the gap in funding given to the refurbishment of Eden Court and the construction of an entirely new venue for Mull Theatre, coupled with the difference in nomenclature - Eden Court is formally referred to as a 'theatre', Druimfin a 'production centre' - highlights a disparity in the way the spaces are perceived externally.



Figure 34 - Exterior of Eden Court, Inverness

Despite this there are certain similarities which can be seen between the two venues. Both use a large amount of glass in their design and sharp lines are employed throughout. The audience also behaves as one would expect from a more conventional performance space with much quieter responses during the course of the show. This is not to say that they did not sing along to the songs they knew or speak the lines from the films before the characters on stage did; they simply did it more quietly than in some of the village halls.

For the show itself the stage had been raised so that the front few rows looked like they were in an orchestra pit. When I saw *Island Nights' Entertainment* here in 2009 the stage had been lowered so that it was on the

same level as the front row. This was for ease of access during the ceilidh.²⁵² Coupled with the fact that the first lighting bar is quite far back, it made it seem as though the set of *Island Nights*' were actually a ship marooned out at sea. There was far less of a gap between the set and the audience tonight and so the production looked much more at home here: it was designed for venues such as this after all.²⁵³

Glengarry Village Hall (12/4/10)

This is the first venue visited on the tour which has production stills stuck up in one of the rooms. There was some concern that this venue would not be able to accommodate the lift. This would not be the first time that this element of the set could not be used - it did not fit at the CatStrand in New Galloway, for instance - and so there is a second blocking option for the first entrance of Stan Laurel to the stage. Nonetheless, one of the photographs which had been used to advertise the production showed the lift in use and, having read about it in one of the critical reviews of the show, the promoter for this venue stated that both he and his audience were excited to see it in action. In an increasingly globalised society then, the use of a reduced set in certain venues may become problematic as audiences are increasingly aware of what is happening elsewhere and what they may be missing out on. Although there are perceptions of quality embedded within different performance spaces it is arguable that this will become less significant due to increased use of technology. This means that audiences in rural village halls will have access to production information before and after they see the show and so if they are being offered a 'lesser experience' in terms of set and lighting they will be aware of that fact. As it was, the space could fit the lift and so the audience were able to experience the full set which they had been expecting.

²⁵² *Island Nights' Entertainment* ended with the cast playing approximately six known ceilidh dances and the audience being invited to join in. Although only a few people participated in the village halls I observed the performance in, not one person danced at Eden Court - the most conventional performance space that I saw it in.

²⁵³ Although the rehearsal process was used to explore different blocking on the full and reduced sets, it is undoubtedly the case that the production was primarily designed for the larger venues as this was where the majority of critical reviews were produced and where the majority of people would see the performance (in terms of spectator numbers, not the number of performances).

The venue appears to be continually in use with the travelling chiroprapist using what will become the actors' dressing room until 5pm, a cafe and meeting room, a heritage centre and a picnic area and shinty pitch outside. The local community does appear to be fairly scattered but there are a number of houses and a school nearby and a number of people have passed through the hall for various reasons.



Figure 35 - Interior Glengarry Village Hall

Inside the hall looks very modern but in keeping with the design of a traditional village hall which usually incorporates a hull-shaped ceiling and a badminton court marked out on the floor. There are deep pink blinds which cover the windows running along the wall but the skylights (which can be seen in the top right-hand corner of figure 35 above) did not have any form of blackout material. As a result the lights in the first half of the show were not seen to the full effect as they were largely counteracted by the natural light which still entered the room. This is particularly true because the light paint which has been chosen for the walls reflects both the natural daylight and the stage lighting. Although the lights proved to be a slight problem, acoustically this

venue was one of the best. This was largely due to a red board which had been placed on the back wall to refract the sound waves. This was pointed to us by the promoter when, during the sound check, the actors claimed that it sounded as though they were singing into microphones.

Each year the venue hosts about six shows funded by the Scottish Arts Council but it also puts on other events such as a Burns' Night Supper which is very popular. Mull Theatre is a frequent visitor here and prior to the performance starting there seemed to be real excitement from the audience about what they were going to see. On the questionnaires they were asked to complete there is a section asking what previous Mull Theatre shows the participant has seen.²⁵⁴ Most people have accurately written down the names and some even came up and asked me to name the show that they were describing. It seems that there is a very loyal following for Mull Theatre here.

Falkirk FTH, Falkirk (15/4/10)

Like the Brunton Theatre, this is a municipally owned theatre in the same complex as the Sheriff's Court and the Council offices. It is a very unassuming, 1970's concrete and glass building and all of the signs from the main road refer to the Council activities which take place in the venue and not the theatre space. The loading bay for the stage is located at the back of the building and so the company unloading the van is hidden from the view of those using the complex during the day. Not only does this help to maintain the illusion of the theatrical world being created on stage in the evening but, moreover, it also ensures that there is nothing blocking the car park and other buildings in the locale.

²⁵⁴ For a copy of the questionnaire please refer to appendix three.



Figure 36 - Interior Falkirk FTH

Once inside the auditorium the space felt more like a collage than a unified auditorium. There were, for instance, different coloured seats for the stalls and gallery and cream coloured walls with a wooden dado rail at about waist height and shabby, red, velvet curtains hanging down from the ceiling. There was also a large gap between the stage and the front row of the audience and the sides of the seating bank and the walls.

There were a number of Laurel and Hardy fans in the house tonight who offered a running commentary on each of the film sequences, joined in with the singing and often pre-empted the spoken lines. This was not popular amongst all of the spectators however and from my back row position I could see people visibly relaxing when the autobiographical scenes began and no one was able to quote them. There were also two people in different parts of the auditorium who were filming certain sections on their phones, one of whom was quietly reprimanded by the usher during the show.

While the foyer was light and airy the backstage areas felt a little sterile and had equally dated decor. There were however welcome trays in each of the five dressing rooms and so there was plenty of space for the cast and crew to separate in the afternoon and to spend some time on their own if they desired. The venue has clearly been designed to accommodate much larger performances but for this touring troupe it meant that nobody was getting in anyone else's way.

Eastwood Park Theatre, Giffnock (16/4/10)

This is another municipal theatre within a Council campus. Within the complex there are several buildings housing, amongst other things, a leisure centre, a registry office, a high school, a carers centre and offices for Age Concern. As a result the cafe downstairs was busy throughout the day with people coming and going for a variety of reasons and purposes. The lower backstage corridors also lead out onto this cafe and have glass panels in the door so that patrons can catch glimpses of the cast and crew moving around.

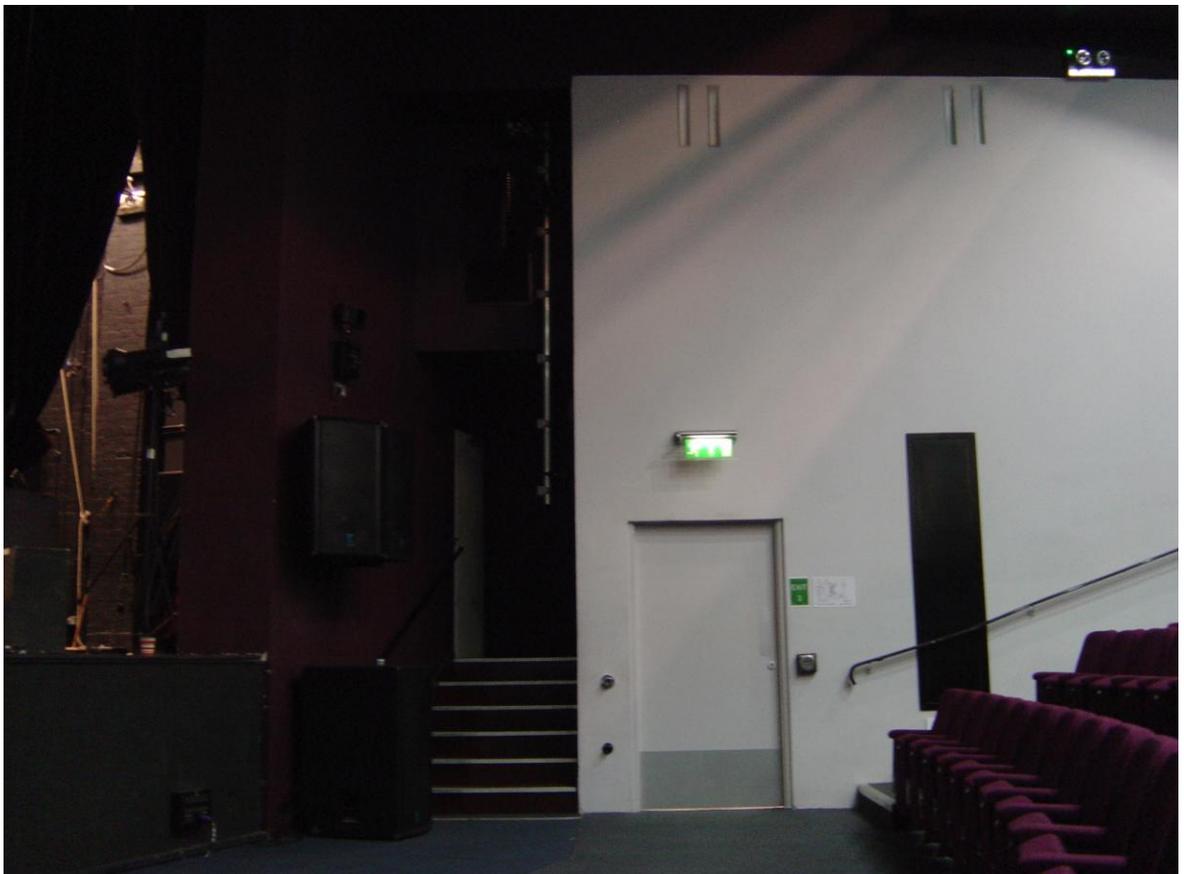


Figure 37 - Interior Eastwood Park Theatre

The get-in was not ideal here as although the van could be pulled up alongside the backstage door and parked on the curb, this did not leave enough space for the large flats which Mull Theatre is using to be manoeuvred into the space. Consequently, the crew opted to instead park in a nearby disabled parking space and to carry the set and lights across the road. This was possible because the school is currently closed for the holiday. If the show were being performed during term-time however, the complex would be busier and presumably, carrying a large number of set pieces across the car park could prove to be more difficult.

Inside the auditorium there is an interesting colour scheme in which the walls around the stage have been painted black but the outward facing proscenium arch is a deep purple. On the walls throughout the auditorium off-white has been chosen. This reflects the light back and I have not encountered any other 'conventional' theatre space with such light walls. Usually they tend towards darker colours so as to allow the preferred option of a darkened auditorium from which the spectator can view the action.

The show was almost completely sold out and there was a real sense that the audience were responding as a collective entity rather than as separate individuals. Indeed, from the lighting box McNeill noted that she almost began to feel motion sickness at points because the audience felt like it was 'moving as one.'²⁵⁵ This may have been in part because this was the venue closest to Glasgow and so there were a number of Hunter's friends and family although I would suggest that perhaps it was also to do with the layout of seating: with no aisles down the middle and few gaps between spectators people would have been able to feed off each others' responses.

Roths Hall, Glenrothes (17/4/10)

Two of the three vehicles got lost trying to find the stage entrance at the back of the building as the main entrance to Roths Hall is in a shopping centre

²⁵⁵ She mentioned this during the get-out when we were discussing how the show had been from our different perspectives.

and so finding the exact location to unload the van proved fairly difficult. Once inside the stage had not been cleaned after the night before and so the cast and crew went to a cafe for breakfast whilst venue staff tidied up. This apparent lack of communication within the venue - the technical staff was apparently unaware that Mull Theatre was coming - resulted in the venue appearing to be more inefficient than many of the other purpose-built venues.



Figure 38 - Interior Glenrothes Hall

Inside the auditorium it was very reminiscent of the Macphail Centre and Falkirk FTH with vast gaps around the moveable seating bank creating a distance between the audience and performers. The light wooden floors, breeze block walls and mismatching colours also made the space feel disjointed and incoherent.

The get-in was fairly straightforward with a wide corridor to manoeuvre down and a very wide stage in which to lay out all of the set and lights. I was initially concerned that the set might get lost considering the size of the stage however, once assembled, the eye was very much drawn to the playing space. It has been

designed to work in a number of spaces and so appears to be very self-contained. This is true of all of the Mull Theatre productions I have seen and is a conscious attempt to create as similar an experience as possible in a variety of venues.

During the performance the audience seemed to largely respond as individuals and not as one collective. By this I mean that instead of laughter throughout the auditorium during the comedy sequences, for instance, there seemed to be much more sniggering. This may have been to do with the small numbers and the allocation of seats; there were large gaps between each group. I was also very aware that there was a lot of unused space around the seating bank and the stage making it feel like there was a greater distance between the actors and the audience. Having said this, the audience did seem to grow in confidence as the show progressed. When Oliver Hardy first asks the audience, 'it was me you came to see, wasn't it?' a couple of people responded very quietly, almost under their breath, but then replied more vocally the second time. When Stan Laurel left the stage waving, one man waved back and said 'bye' loudly. It was almost as though each verbal response gave permission for the next time.

Dundee Rep Theatre, Dundee (20/4/10 and 21/4/10)

The parking for the vans backstage at this venue is not ideal, especially considering the number of vehicles that Mull Theatre is travelling with.²⁵⁶ The Luton van, carrying the set, had to drive down a narrow alleyway in order to get close to the loading bay. This meant that anybody working at the theatre that had arrived before the company was blocked in until the get-in was complete. Due to space limitations in the alleyway, the people carrier then had to be parked in a ticketed car park around the corner. This had a restricted one-hour stay policy and so it had to be repeatedly checked on throughout the day. For such a busy venue this is not ideal and yet its city location means that space is limited and more has, understandably, been given to the footprint of the building itself.

²⁵⁶ There are three in total: a people carrier with the actors, myself, the student placement and the suitcases; the Luton van carrying the set; and a third van with the sound and lighting equipment.

Inside the building there is a real energy as the whole venue is constantly in use. There is a bar/cafe and a restaurant in the front-of-house areas and elsewhere there are ongoing rehearsals for the Dundee Rep Ensemble, the dance company, community groups and a youth theatre. There is also a steady stream of visiting companies. The venue thus feels very active, much like the 'hub of creative opportunity' that McCrone envisages for Druimfin.



Figure 39 - Interior Dundee Rep Theatre

On first arrival the stage was vast with no masking at the sides and the back was completely open all the way to the vans. This had made the get-in far easier but then made the set seem much smaller. Once the side tabs were back in place the stage felt far more manageable.

Prior to the show there were a huge amount of people in the bar and restaurant but not all of them were there to see the show. Clearly then this is a venue which people like to visit for a variety of purposes. The audience seemed quite restrained and polite in their responses and when no one responded to the questions from the stage, I did not get the sense that people wanted to and

were just holding back. This was the same on the second night as well when the audience was slightly larger. Despite this there were two curtain calls and the audience seemed very appreciative of the performance at the end with loud applause. As was seen in Resolis then, a quiet audience does not necessarily mean a disengaged audience.

The Lemon Tree, Aberdeen (22/4/10)

Again, parking was quite difficult for this venue. This was particularly true as there is currently a construction site next door and so a number of work vehicles were blocking the narrow lane which Mull Theatre had to park on in order to pull up alongside the venue. The set and lights then had to be carried around a corner and into the narrow staircase which led up to the stage. This is shown in figure 40 below.

Once up the stairs a number of the cast and crew complained that the backstage area was ingrained with dirt as though it had not been swept in years. With the performance starting at 7pm - so that it would be finished by the time the gig downstairs started - the company was far more rushed and clearly enjoyed the venue and day less than some of the others. The space is also a typical black box studio with no natural light during the day which may have also impacted on the mood slightly.

During the performance there were a number of disruptions including latecomers and one lady getting up and walking in front of the stage to go to the toilet although these did not seem to have a lasting effect the actors' performances or the other spectators' engagement with the piece. Nobody replied to the questions from the stage although tonight there was some laughter at these points. It was as though people were acknowledging that their role was to passively observe the show and found the temporary blurring of the boundaries between stage and audience to be amusing.

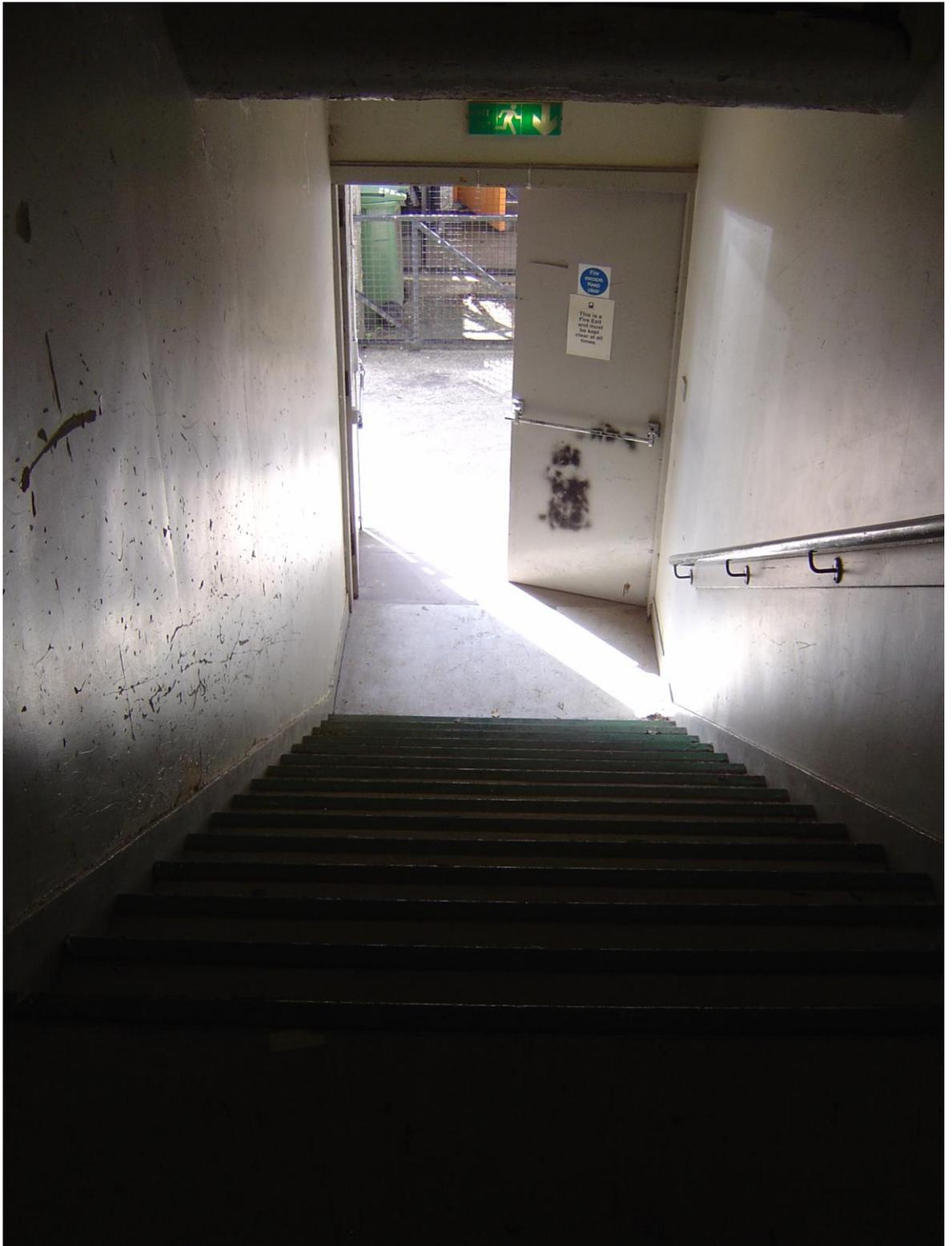


Figure 40 - Backstage stairwell, Lemon Tree

Edenvillie Village Hall (23/4/10)

Figure 41 - Interior Edinville Village Hall

This was a replacement venue as Kemnay Village Hall was double booked and so NEAT found an alternative.²⁵⁷ Whilst the original booking would have meant the company would spend four nights in the same accommodation, this new venue meant that tonight would have to be spent elsewhere. The proprietors' of the bed and breakfasts in Aberdeen agreed that their bags could be left there so everyone was travelling lighter today but it did create a slight resentment towards Edinville Village Hall before the company had even got there. It was also the only venue on the tour which no one had been to before and so the uncertainty of what to expect made everyone seem a little anxious.

The journey to the venue was quite difficult and involved a number of narrow, single-track roads and tight corners. Whilst each of the drivers has

²⁵⁷ North East Arts Touring: this is the rural arts touring network for the north east of Scotland which ensures continued support to companies and volunteer promoters as well as increasing accessibility to live theatre performances in the area. Its role will be examined in more detail in chapter seven.

experience of such roads - they have all driven the company vehicles around Mull - it is something which other touring productions may not be so prepared for.

This is the first performance that the hall has ever programmed and so the two promoters were very enthusiastic and keen to see what was going on. They had already laid out all of the seats prior to Mull Theatre arriving and seemed very nervous that the company insisted on moving them all so that they could assemble the set. The promoters then stayed in the venue and photographed the crew at work for their website.

During the performance a number of people were singing along, tapping their feet and talking to each other. It should be noted that all of the conversations I overheard were related to Laurel and Hardy: either general trivia or something to do with the specific scene on stage. Thus there was still an engagement with the performance through the private conversations. During the interval almost everyone got out of their seats and moved around the space resulting in lights at the front and side of the stage being knocked on more than one occasion. Although McNeill tried to move them back as best she could it did mean that some of the lights in the second half were not as well as focused as they had been during the lighting check in the afternoon. Nobody except for the crew seemed to notice this, however.

Crathes Village Hall (24/5/10)

This venue posed some logistical difficulties in terms of the interior of the hall and its impact on the set and so the cast and crew spent some time discussing this before they agreed which set pieces could be used in this performance. In previous village halls the set has often been constructed in front of the existing stage but this was made impossible here due the fact that the audiences' entrance to the hall was positioned on the same wall. Indeed, if the *Laurel and Hardy* set had been built here, the audience would have entered the auditorium behind the stage and so would have seen the mechanics of the production; something which McCrone is keen to avoid in every venue. There was also the practical consideration of where the power supply is located in the building as this often determines where the sound and lighting equipment can be placed.

As a result the set had to be located at the opposite end of the room to the in-built stage. Not only did this mean that the actors had to walk outside in order to move between the dressing rooms and the stage (as in Innellan Village Hall) but it also meant that the set interfered with a number of paintings which were hanging on the wall. One of these had to be temporarily taken down whilst another was covered with some excess black fabric Mull Theatre had travelled with.

This black fabric also proved useful when it came to focusing the lights during the afternoon. Like many of the other village halls, Crathes does not have any blackout coverings on the window and so the venue was partially lit by natural daylight until half-way through the second half. The result is that when it came to focusing the lights during the afternoon, McNeill could not always see where the lights were landing on the stage. Holly Hodgart, the student placement from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, was asked to cover the windows with a piece of black fabric while I stood in for the actors on stage. Thus three people were required to carry out this job where it is usually just two.

There was also some anxiety on behalf of the committee when the stage manager asked how to switch off the smoke alarm so that a smoke machine could be used at the end of the show. The promoters were reluctant to do this, however, as, should anything go wrong during the course of the night their insurance claim would be potentially void if they had purposefully turned it off.²⁵⁸ Through this we can see an additional example of the tension appears sometimes between the needs of the professional company and the expectations of the promoters.

Turning off the smoke alarm has not been raised as an issue in any of the more conventional performance spaces as they are usually able to isolate certain parts of the building and so can keep active smoke and fire alarms in all of the front of house areas but not around the stage during a performance, for

²⁵⁸ This was reiterated during the NEAT networking day at which there was an opportunity for promoters to have a conversation with an English touring theatre company - Angel Exit Theatre Company - in which one promoter expressed annoyance at how often visiting companies expect the promoter to contravene their insurance agreements. (Haddo House, near Ellon, 25/9/10)

instance. In village halls, on the other hand, volunteers often have to learn about licensing, health and safety regulations, marketing, staging requirements and programming with very little prior experience. For many this can result in them feeling out of their depth and nervous about forgetting something important.²⁵⁹

Dalrymple Hall, Fraserburgh (26/4/10)

This was generally accepted by the company to be one of the most difficult venues on the tour. A number of factors contributed to this but by far the most significant one was the get-in. This involved climbing up two flights of stairs, around a corner and through two very narrow doors. Although there is a lift this will not move unless the doors on both floors are closed, meaning that somebody has to be waiting on the ground floor and somebody on the first. It was also too small for most of the panels which made up the *Laurel and Hardy* set.

Inside the space, the permanent stage (on which Mull Theatre performed) is very high and also steeply raked. The audience area is divided into two levels: there is a gallery with raked seating; and the ground floor level on which the venue lays out stackable chairs. As the seating on the ground level is flat the raked stage serves to improve sight lines for the spectators but also created some blocking problems for this show, particularly in the music box sequence when Hardy is dragged down a ramp after the instrument. In fact, during the performance the floor cloth was ripped as a result of the momentum of this fall. This is something which was considered and discussed during the rehearsals at Druimfin as the ramp had to be built on a steep enough incline to produce a downward momentum on a flat playing surface but not so steep that it would become dangerous on the raked stage in this venue.

²⁵⁹ This was again discussed at the NEAT Networking Day at Haddo House (referenced in footnote 291) and has resulted in the Scottish Arts Council publishing a guide for rural arts promoters to advise on the various elements of using their local venues for performances. Duncan MacInnes, *Don't Panic Guide* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Arts Council, 2002), accessed through the Scottish Arts Council's archived website: <http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/information/publications/1000370.aspx> [last accessed 11/12/12]

Because of the height of the stage there is also a large gap between the actors and the audience although neither of the cast members seemed too bothered about this. Nonetheless I felt like there was a division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ during the play and when Hunter performed Hardy’s death sequence he did not get as choked up as he had on previous nights. Throughout the run the degree of emotion the actor has shown at this point has largely correlated with the relationship between stage and auditorium: the closer the audience is to the stage the more tearful he becomes. This goes some way to suggesting the subtle impact that a space can have on the performance, beyond the physical implications.



Figure 42 - Exterior Dalrymple Hall

Lonach Hall, Strathdon (27/4/10)

On first glance the hall seems to be in the middle of nowhere as the vans passed very few houses on the way to the venue. Nonetheless, there is a hotel and bar located right next door and during the performance it became clear that there was a real sense of community amongst the audience. One lady, for

instance, was unable to attend the performance herself but dropped off her young son who was a keen theatre goer and he was then looked after by a number of other spectators who all knew the family. The fact that the cast and crew will be sleeping in the hotel next door to the venue has also served to lift spirits of the cast and crew after yesterday as it not only means they can relax in their rooms prior to the show but it also means that they will be far more relaxed after the get-out as they do not have a long distance to travel afterwards.



Figure 43 - Interior of Lonach Hall, Strathdon

Inside the venue is very long and wide and has two stages: one is located behind the set in the above image and one can just be seen on the right hand side. The decor of the space, with tartan and stuffed animal heads gives it a lot of character and suggests that is used more for social gatherings than live arts performances. Although I had anticipated that this may impact on the relationship that the audience had to the event it did not seem to detract attention at all. Perhaps because they are familiar with this space the decor falls into the background and is usurped by the touring set. Moreover, as Mull

Theatre is used to designing for touring performances it does create sets which focus the eye into a clearly defined stage when there might not be one physically in place in the venue. This too may have led to less attention being paid towards the other decorations.

Overall the audience was very responsive and gave a hearty applause when the chairman of the committee introduced the performance. There also seemed to be a real sense of occasion and unity amongst the spectators and when I observed them in the bar before the show started and during the interval it was clear that most of them knew each other. This was as much about the social side aspect of the evening as it was about the show being seen.

Eastgate Theatre, Peebles (29/4/10)

The building is constantly in use for a variety of reasons and it houses a theatre, a cinema, exhibitions in the cafe, drama and technical classes, and there is also a mother and toddler group taking place in the downstairs studio during the afternoon. This space is clearly not just seen as a 'theatre' then but is also a focus for the local community.

Initially this venue looked like quite a good, intimate space however on closer inspection there are a number of ways in which it can be seen to be lacking in terms of the audiences' experience. Although the seats are comfortable there is an issue of sightlines, particularly if you are sitting in one of the side galleries as there are a number of positions up here from which you cannot see the stage at all. The lady at the box office said that they tend not to allocate this at theatre performance, unless it is fully booked, although they are used during music concerts in which hearing the music is arguably more important than seeing the band. The main body of seats also runs parallel to the stage and straight up making it feel quite regimented and not as enveloping as was the case in Musselburgh and Dundee, for instance. The lift which dramatically aids the get-ins - the stage being located on the first floor of the building - also encroaches on the stage meaning that there is not as much space to use as I had originally thought.

There was loud laughter and recognition of the film scenes throughout the play and some spectators responded to the questions from the stage. There was also one lady who ducked and swore when the golf club was swung on stage as though she were about to be hit. This suggests a real connection between the stage and audience - or the front rows at least - as physical and vocal responses to this moment have previously only happened in much smaller venues.



Figure 44 - Exterior Eastgate Theatre

After the show one man asked to go backstage so that Hunter and McCrone could sign some of the original Laurel and Hardy memorabilia which he had brought in especially. He also wanted to have his photo taken with them, in character, in the foyer. Whilst this tour diary has been considering how some of the audiences' responses may be attributed in part to the physicality of, and prior relationships to, the space of performance, it must also acknowledge that some of those attending the performance were not a traditional theatre-going audience and were primarily there as a result of the show's silver screen contents. Certainly, at An Lanntair, one of the ushers advised me that she worked at most of the theatre events and usually recognised the majority of spectators but that it was not the case for this production. She could not think of any event which would have brought in a large number of visitors to the island and so she could only conclude that many of the people watching the show normally frequented the building as the cinema audience. This is supported by the 20 questionnaires which were returned for this venue of which 90 percent were from local residents and 85 percent stated that they had never seen a Mull Theatre production before. Of the 12 that wrote whether or not they had seen a theatre production before, 30 percent claimed that this was their first time. Similarly 78 percent of respondents at Eastgate Theatre had never seen a Mull Theatre production before with 16 percent having not seen a live theatre performance before. Consequently, it could be argued that the audiences' relationship to the event is as much to do with their previous experiences of theatre performances and the expected behaviour therein as it is to do with the space in which they are seated.

Arts Guild Theatre, Greenock (30/4/10)

Built in a converted swimming pool, this venue was dark and musty and the faded seats made it feel very dated. There are plans to relocate to a new arts centre in Greenock and so it seems that all of the funding and attention is going on that.²⁶⁰ The dressing rooms were located down a very steep staircase and had no natural light making them rather unpleasant. The box office was also

²⁶⁰ The Beacon Arts Centre was officially opened in January 2013 and is a purpose-built arts centre overlooking the River Clyde estuary. More information can be found through its website: www.beaconartscentre.co.uk [last accessed 1/3/13]

enclosed behind a glass screen making the venue appear unwelcoming and formal. There was also only one small food shop nearby with limited options. As some of the cast and crew had forgotten to bring food with them it was not an overly enthusiastic company. Indeed this was perhaps the weakest of the shows with one of the key props missing from the stage in the first half and a number of lines being missed or said incorrectly.



Figure 45 - Interior of Arts Guild Theatre, Greenock

This is the first venue in which a safety curtain has been drawn during the interval. Coupled with an announcement over the public address system to say that the performance would be starting in five minutes, the building appeared to fit the prototypical image of a traditional theatre in many ways. Nonetheless the design of the foyer, equipped with various vending machines for sweets and soft drinks, stood at odds with this perception. Indeed much of the interior felt more like a school corridor than a theatre.

During the performance I was sitting at the end of one of the rows and there were a number of moments happening stage right which I could not see, such as

the bed scene for instance. Overall though the audience seemed to respond warmly to it and applauded, laughed and responded to the rhetorical questions being spoken on stage. During the second half this interaction lessened slightly and the audience began to fidget a lot and rattle sweet papers. It is unclear how much of this was to do with the venue and how much was the show itself as overall it lacked some of the pace it has previously had.

Cumbernauld Theatre, Cumbernauld (1/5/10)

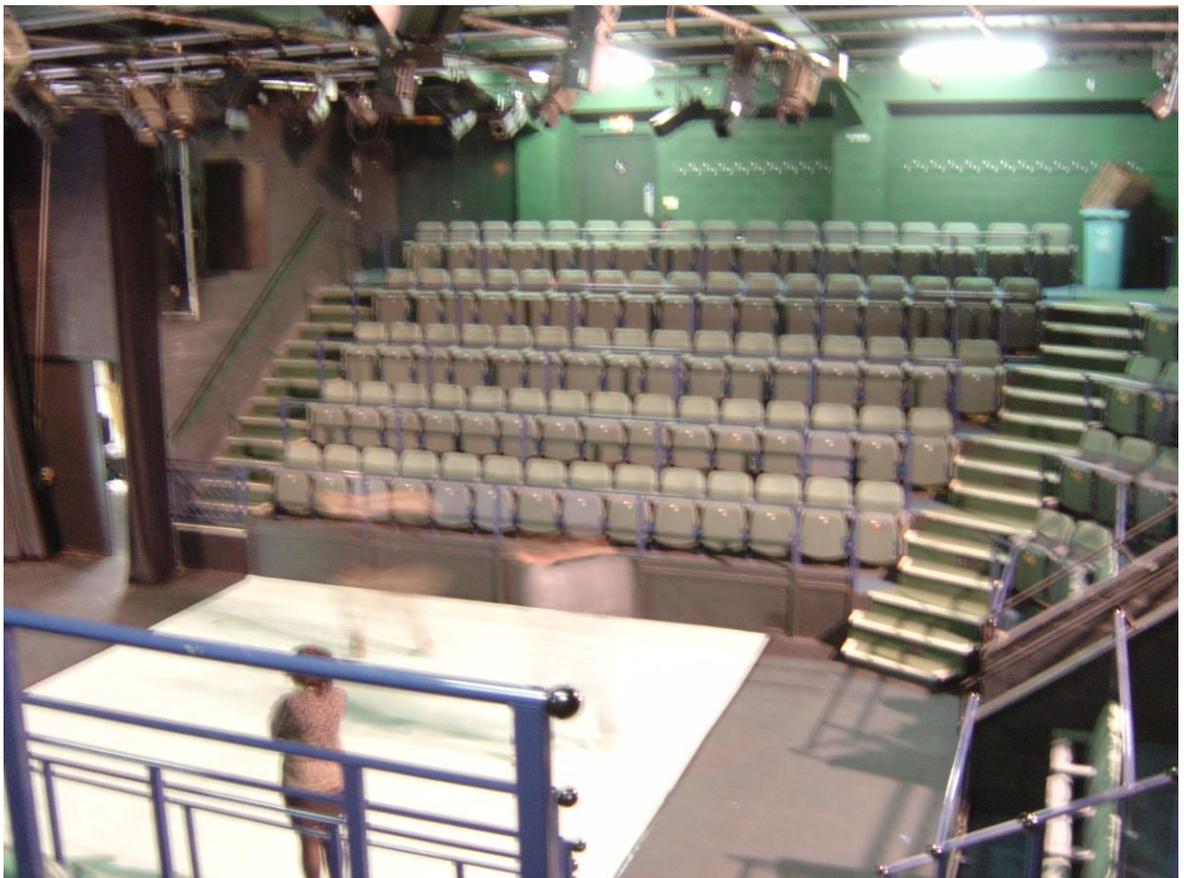


Figure 46 - Interior of Cumbernauld Theatre

This was the final venue on the tour and the one which had been making the crew most anxious as it was the only venue with the audience on three sides of the stage. As a result the bed flat could not be used and so that scene took place on the ramp, as it has done in some of the other smaller venues. In other venues around Glasgow the actors have tended to make their own way there during the afternoon but because of necessary rehearsals involving new blocking, today they arrived with the rest of the crew. During the performance I was

seated at one of the sides and although I could see most of what happened it was clear that the blocking was predominantly aimed at an end-on audience.

From the audience I could see a number of other spectators sitting across from me and it looked as though people were really enjoying it. The auditorium was very full and the spectators seemed to feed off that energy with the level of laughter increasing as the show went on. There was, however, a real issue with cameras during this performance and I saw at least three people taking videos and photographs of the actors. I am unsure as to whether that is simply a growing problem in the theatre as camera phones become more accessible or whether it was to do with the content of the play: with some people dressing up as Laurel and Hardy and others asking for autographs there appears to have been a blurring of lines between the show as a theatre production and the show as a tribute performance to Laurel and Hardy.

Conclusion

One of the key aims of this chapter has been to offer an insight into some of the (non-) performance venues which form the rural touring circuit in Scotland. Chapter three argued that there has been an apparent distinction made between mainstream and non-mainstream venues and the performances staged in each. Nonetheless, due to the diverse topography of Scotland, conventional text-based performances are frequently performed in non-conventional performance spaces in order to ensure that live performances are accessible to everyone, regardless of where they live. Despite the importance of such venues on the touring circuit they are still largely overlooked. By providing an overview to each of the (non-) performance spaces which constituted Mull Theatre's tour of *Laurel and Hardy*, it is hoped that they will be written into the theatrical landscape of Scotland as an essential component of the rural theatre infrastructure.

By focusing on one specific tour in a variety of spaces, it has also highlighted some of the effects that the space of performance will have on individual shows. Due to space constraints it has not been possible to include all of the nuances of each performance on this run as they fill three large notebooks in their entirety. Nonetheless I have tried to present some of the key observations made regarding

the relationship between the space, the physicality of the performance and the audiences' response to the event. McAuley argues for the primacy of spatial considerations within the dramatic arts when she states that, 'it is movement rather than mimesis that is the characteristic feature of theatre.'²⁶¹ For her the meaning-making process is largely determined by the spatial representations made by the actors and so is, by extension, created as much by the space itself as it is by the play text. Whilst this section has not attempted to assume that it can derive a definitive list of how the space will impact on any production, it has demonstrated some of the ways in which the space has influenced this tour specifically.

One of the key impacts was to do with the physicality of the set itself. Mull Theatre rehearsed the show with variants of certain scenes so that it could respond to the specific requirements of each space and to use either the full or reduced set as necessary. One scenic piece which was not used in every venue, for instance, was that of the lift. Generally the opening sequence in which it was used got a large number of laughs from the audience and many would speak about it with great admiration during the interval and after the show - particularly in smaller halls. Whilst a similar scene was created for the reduced set version it did not appear to capture the imagination of those watching it to the same extent, perhaps because it was considered to be a more predictable use of space than the incorporation of a 'working' lift into a production.

Although the use of a reduced set did not serve to overtly change the meanings being produced on stage, it may have impacted on the way the attendees related to the overall event. In Benderloch Victory Hall, for instance, there was amazement that such a large set had been fitted into the hall and one attendee exclaimed that the set had 'transformed the space.'²⁶² Village halls are frequently used for a range of activities and so the attendees will often have experience and expectations of the venue outside of the performance they are seeing. As such, it may be that there is a different relationship with the

²⁶¹ Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in Theatre* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) p.92

²⁶² This was stated during an informal conversation with a group of attendees during the interval.

theatrical world that that which takes place in conventional performance spaces.

Certainly, throughout this tour I observed a number of differences in the behaviour of the audiences in rural village halls and those in more conventional spaces. Not only were those in (non-) performance spaces more likely to move freely around the space during the interval they also appeared to be more inclined to talk louder to each other and the actors during the performance itself. This may be in part attributed to a greater sense of ownership over the space felt by rural audiences towards their local venue which may result in an increased confidence within the space. Coupled with the fact that the spectators are more likely to know each other it results in a different kind of relationship being created between the stage and audience.

One theatre director who was cited in a 2004 report into rural touring theatre, for instance, asserts that, 'you feel more connected to the audience, partly because the architecture of the theatre is more immediate.'²⁶³ Moreover, there is a notion that the multi-purpose use of these venues may result in a different engagement with the space and performance. David Greig's 2002 production of *Outlying Islands* was toured throughout rural Scotland, following a successful run at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. One venue which regularly programmed the Traverse Theatre's Highland tour did not take this production because it contained some nudity and for those that did book it, the audience was specifically made aware of this scene before they bought tickets. Rather than being due to rural audiences being more easily shocked than Edinburgh audiences, this has been largely attributed to the multi-faceted use of venues in these areas. One performer, for example, suggested that a village hall is 'not a neutral space like a theatre.'²⁶⁴ Instead it creates a different dynamic between actor and audience with the latter as host and the former as guest; a contrast to more conventional performance spaces.

²⁶³ Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion, *The Same, But Different: Rural Arts Touring in Scotland: The Case of Theatre* (Stroud: Comedia, 2004) p.61

²⁶⁴ Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion, 'Picture it if You Will: Theatre and Theatregoing in Rural Scotland,' *New Theatre Quarterly*, 21:1 (February 2005) p.72

These differences do not necessarily correlate to quality, however. Indeed spectators were largely positive in their feedback of the performance and this was consistent throughout the tour. It is also worth noting that the ticket prices were also regular throughout the run, regardless of where the performance was staged.²⁶⁵ This production was intended to be fairly profitable in order to produce enough reserves for Mull Theatre to stage productions in its own venue. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that audiences will agree to pay the same price for tickets in two venues if the quality is notably poorer in one of them. This suggests then, that whilst there may be an underlying perception of quality in relation to (non-) performance venues from practitioners and critics, this does not necessarily correspond to the experience that local audiences are having in *their* venues.

Questionnaire respondents in rural venues were also more likely to correctly cite previous Mull Theatre productions which they had seen but it is uncertain as to whether this is because audiences in these areas have fewer live performances available to them or whether it is because they have a different relationship with Mull Theatre; it being the dominant theatre company on the rural touring circuit. What is clear, however, is that whilst the space of performance has had physical implications for the production being staged there - in terms of the blocking, the stage and the audience's relationship to the event, amongst other elements - these impacts do not necessarily impact on the quality of the overall event. Instead, as the *Laurel and Hardy* tour shows, the same production can be performed in a range of spaces and that there are both the audiences and the venues for more commercial productions across the whole of Scotland and not only in the more heavily populated areas.

²⁶⁵ This can be seen in appendix eight of this thesis which details the performance time and ticket price at each venue.

Chapter 6 - Building Audiences

Chapter four presented the reader with an examination of the materiality of Mull (Little) Theatre's buildings; looking at their physical layout and design. In doing so however it also made continual reference to the practitioners and spectators who use the space. Space, after all, is not an abstract concept but is central to human, lived experience; it shapes its users as much as they shape it. Indeed, Lefebvre asserts that space is "lived" rather than conceived,' thus highlighting the interaction which exists between people and their environment.²⁶⁶ Similarly, Pearson suggests that 'site may be produced *through* and *in* interaction,'²⁶⁷ whilst Ingold has referred to landscape as a 'taskscape:' as a work in progress and not a finished product.²⁶⁸ Although each of these scholars is referring to a different notion of spatiality - whether it be Ingold's exploration of the physical world or Pearson's analysis of the site in performance - it is clear that the human involvement is an integral component of each.

Just as space cannot be understood outwith the society in which it is constructed, buildings can also not be seen as existing outside temporality, both in terms of their physicality and the meanings they produce. Not only do the materials used in construction show evidence of ageing but, moreover, Pallasmaa argues that, 'an architectural work is not experienced as a series of retinal pictures, but in its fully integrated, material, embodied and spiritual essence.'²⁶⁹ Echoing Wylie's vision of landscape as being embodied rather than observed, Pallasmaa is presenting the building as a sensory experience which impacts on one's perceptions of the world around them. In this way, meaning is being mediated through the experiences and associations of individuals and so is as much a product of the time in which it is being experienced as it is of the architect's original intentions. This integration of space, the user and each of their senses reinforces the argument that there is no fixed and permanent

²⁶⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1991) p.236

²⁶⁷ Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) p. 13

²⁶⁸ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) p. 219

²⁶⁹ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2005) p.12

meaning built into bricks and mortar but that, instead, it is through the way the space is perceived and understood that the meaning is created.

Nadine Holdsworth discusses the decision of John McGrath, founder of 7:84 (Scotland), to utilise 'alternative cultural venues' for his productions.²⁷⁰ McGrath was heavily concerned with socialist politics. Indeed the name 7:84 was taken from the oft-cited statistic in *The Economist* that seven percent of the population owned 84 percent of the wealth. As such, he wished to develop a truly working class theatre which would not only represent the working class population on the stage but, moreover, would be written for working class audiences. He believed that the way to achieve this was as much through the choice of venue as through the programming. Thus he felt that the working class theatre of Joe Orton, which formed a significant part of the Royal Court Theatre's repertory in the late 1960s for instance, was not truly inclusive because it was still being performed within the confines of an ostensibly middle-class venue.²⁷¹

Rather than creating a truly working class theatre, then, what the Royal Court had managed to achieve was, 'a method of translating some areas of non-middle-class life in Britain into a form of entertainment that could be sold to the middle classes.'²⁷² The solution, as seen by McGrath and other political practitioners of the time, was to take theatre outside of the conventional spaces of the day: to engage with the politics of space as well as the politics of programming. By utilising the spaces regularly used by working class audiences - venues such as factories, village halls and working men's clubs - McGrath was able to create and promote a form of theatre which acknowledged its audience through the venue as much as the through the content of the performance. As Holdsworth argues:

The audience did not have to enter a traditional theatre building whose use it associated with the alienating, cultural inclinations of the middle

²⁷⁰ Nadine Holdsworth, 'Good Nights Out: Activating the audience with 7:84 (England),' *New Theatre Quarterly*, 13: 49, p.30

²⁷¹ John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form* (London: Nick Hern Books Ltd., 1996) p.9-10

²⁷² McGrath, *A Good Night Out*, p.9

class, and did not have to negotiate a social ritual with whose conventions it was unfamiliar.²⁷³

The implication here is that intertwined with a certain architectural form is a cultural ideology and set of behaviours which one is expected to adhere to. By overturning the 'social ritual' through the use of different venues and associations, there is an idea that the minority interest of theatre can be extended to have broader appeal and impact.

It should be noted that at the time of writing, behaviours and expectations of conventional performance venues may have changed slightly from those McGrath was noting. The tendency to get dressed up for the theatre has seemingly lessened when I compare my parent's generation to my peer group, for instance. Nonetheless, the suggestion that the building will affect behaviour still resonates when one considers the hushed silence that usually falls when one enters an art gallery or an auditorium. McAuley has noted that whilst the space of performance is more than just a frame to the event, there still remains an important framing element as the space clearly marks out the activities taking place within it as being separate to everyday life.²⁷⁴

This notion is called into question by the number of contemporary productions which are now staged in the spaces of the everyday; in parks, in pubs, in factories. Nonetheless there is still the potential that the chosen space of performance will instigate certain behaviours from the spectators. Wilkie highlights this in her article on the rules of spatial behaviour in site-specific performances in which she focuses on a specific case study - Bore Place. Through this she asserts that the place in question 'might be said already to be being performed in a number of significant ways.'²⁷⁵ It is not just the site of site-specific theatre which can be understood as being performed, however: every place, be it natural or man-made, will be experienced by its users both emotionally and physically and will elicit certain responses. Whether it is signs

²⁷³ Holdsworth, 'Good Nights Out,' p.31

²⁷⁴ Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in Theatre* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) p.42-43

²⁷⁵ Fiona Wilkie, 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place: Site Specific Performance and the Rules of Spatial Behaviour,' *New Theatre Quarterly* 18.70 (2002) p. 243

or barriers preventing access to certain areas or learnt conduct which dictates that we do not (or at least should not) sing loudly in a library, each space is performed by its users.

With this in mind, this chapter will seek to investigate the different ways in which attendees at Druimfin engage with the space and different relationships which have emerged - or are potentially emerging - between the company and its island audience. This will in turn help to further the examination of what was lost and gained in the 2008 relocation. The study will not just be restricted to Mull (Little) Theatre and its buildings however. On the contrary, given its island location and the fact that neither of its buildings - past or present - comply with the prototypical image of what a 'theatre' is, it has been recognised that the case study of Mull Theatre can contribute to wider discussions regarding rural theatre, small scale touring and its venues. As such the chapter will also refer to some of the venues which were included on Mull Theatre's tour of *Laurel and Hardy* in 2010 in order to ascertain some of the ways in which the space of performance can impact on the audience's behaviour during a performance.²⁷⁶

Through this exploration of the relationship between the space and audience I aim to locate the case study of Mull Theatre within a broader theatrical landscape. Although it may operate on the geographical periphery of Scottish theatre, this thesis strives to write this frequently over-looked company into the theatrical landscape and to demonstrate its significance within a rural touring framework. Using this chapter to look at the relationship between the audience and (non-) performance spaces, it will challenge the apparent politicisation of village halls and other non-conventional performance spaces. Instead it will highlight that these venues now form the backbone of the rural touring circuit and that the way an audience perceives and behaves within an event is as much to do with the choice of programming as it is to do with the venue.

²⁷⁶ For a full list of venues visited on this tour please refer to appendix eight. A more detailed analysis of the specific venues and performances on tour can be found in the previous chapter.

Increasing Accessibility to the Arts

Within conventional theatre buildings - ones which adhere to the popular design criteria of raked seating and proscenium arch stage - there has been an established tradition of placing the spectator in a darkened auditorium as a disconnected observer. For David Wiles, this retreat behind the proscenium arch reflected the rise of the Cartesian duality in philosophy which prioritised the detached gaze over the embodied experience.²⁷⁷ In the latter half of the twentieth century there was greater attention being placed on the role of the spectator with practitioners such as Bertolt Brecht, Joan Littlewood and Antonin Artaud seeing them as more than just passive consumers of the theatrical event.²⁷⁸

These attempts to break down the fourth wall are highlighted in the rise in popularity of the black box studios. So called because of their usually cube-shaped interior and the tendency to paint them black in an attempt to make them neutral, these spaces were seen as being empty and places in which 'anything was possible.'²⁷⁹ Any fictional world could be created as there would be no distractions for the audience through ornate decorations conflicting with the style of the play. Although the popular view was to imagine these spaces as 'neutral,' subsequent analyses have demonstrated that they have an equally significant impact on the users of the space and on the meanings continually being produced. Indeed Wiles asserts that:

There is nothing neutral about blackness. The black box makes a historically specific architectural statement just as forcefully as Shakespeare's Globe.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.4

²⁷⁸ Introductions to the work of Artaud and Brecht can be found in: Bertolt Brecht, 'Short Description of a New Technique in Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect,' in Michael Huxley and Noel Witts (eds.), *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p.93-105

²⁷⁹ Iain Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) p.120

²⁸⁰ Wiles, *A Short History*, p.254-5

This type of performance space can be situated within a specific time and place and thus any neutrality is diminished through both the cultural values embedded within it and the clear physiological link it has with the spectators' response rate.

Stimulating the senses with colours, textures and images prior to the performance serves to elicit more immediate reactions to the events unfolding onstage. This perhaps goes some way to suggesting why decorated venues like these maintain such a prominent position in the minds of many British spectators: increasing the arousal rate, and thus the immediacy experienced between the spectator and the performer, will cause them to remain in the forefront of people's minds. In addition to this physical impact of the space on the audiences' reactions to the performance itself, there is also a sense that the building can and will play a part in attendees' overall relationship to the event. It will not just affect the way in which they perceive and relate to the performance but instead they will understand it as part of the whole theatrical experience and not as an isolated component.

This was recognised by a number of the political, left-leaning theatre companies of the 1960s and 1970s who fought against the established conventions of the day and actively sought to engage with a wider part of society than they felt was being served at that time. In seeking out new audiences, these companies did not turn to the proliferation of black box studios - the apparently flexible and versatile performance spaces. Instead they actively engaged with the spaces seen as *belonging* to the disenfranchised audience they were trying to speak with.²⁸¹

Baz Kershaw reinforces this when he observes that:

Alternative theatre was created (initially, at least) outside established buildings. Hence every aspect of performance had to be constructed in

²⁸¹ This idea is presented in a number of studies of British political and alternative theatre of the late twentieth century and is the central point in John McGrath's paper, 'Behind the Clichés of Contemporary Theatre,' through which he reiterates his belief that the language of theatre goes beyond the play text and embraces various other elements such as the ticket price and location. McGrath, *A Good Night Out*, p.1-17

contexts that were largely foreign to theatre, thus making it easier to perceive the ideological nature of particular projects.²⁸²

Even the increasingly common black box studios were seen as being associated with the cultural ideologies that theatre practitioners with an active political agenda were seeking to counteract. Different relationships with existing spaces were thus being used to make the event more accessible and appealing to groups who may have otherwise felt excluded from the predominantly white, middle class audiences of the day. The choice to use venues which featured heavily in the everyday lives of people clearly had implications beyond the physical performance then and also extended to the overall understanding of the event itself.

By highlighting a relationship between non-performance events and non-mainstream audiences, practitioners such as John McGrath have arguably created a polarisation between mainstream and non-mainstream venues and their audiences. Hamilton and Scullion's 2004 report into rural touring theatre in Scotland argues that:

Most of the activity we saw - and still the dominant image of rural arts touring - is the troupe of players drawing up outside a village hall, unloading a set, performing in the hall, staying overnight and then moving on to the next village hall the next night. No report on rural touring in Scotland can ignore or underestimate the significance of this type of production context.²⁸³

Nonetheless, few academic studies acknowledge (non-) performance venues as a key part of the cultural landscape. One of the aims of this thesis is to locate such venues within the theatrical mainstream and to recognise the vital role that they play within contemporary rural theatre in Scotland. Far from being used solely for non-mainstream performances or for those actively seeking out a new

²⁸² Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) p.17

²⁸³ Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion, *The Same, But Different: Rural Arts Touring in Scotland: The Case of Theatre* (Stroud: Comedia, 2004) p.52

type of audience, venues such as village halls are as equally important in forming the touring theatre network of Scotland.

This is particularly significant when we consider the construction of Druimfin as a production centre rather than a performance venue. Although the ultimate intention was always for the space to house live performances, this is not the remit as defined by the funders and as a result there are a number of tensions inherent within the design - or at least the current incarnation - of the building.²⁸⁴ These were explored in some detail in chapter four and challenge the resident company's apparent belief that 'one size fits all' with regards to building and their purposes. Certainly, during its first year, Druimfin did not fully meet the expectations of either practitioners or audience members: the latter were unsatisfied with the lack of seating; and one company member I spoke to argued that the kitchen was the best rehearsal space in the building because of the lack of natural light in the main rehearsal room.²⁸⁵

For many years it has been a key aim of the policy makers in Scotland to increase participation in, and accessibility to, the arts across Scotland.²⁸⁶ Indeed, in a paper delivered at the University of Glasgow, Femi Folorunso - one of the Development Officers at Creative Scotland - explained that touring theatre was one of the key priorities of his organisation.²⁸⁷ This is at least in part due to the topographical diversity of Scotland and the need for theatre productions to travel in order to ensure that audiences have access to live performances, regardless of where they live. A number of people in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland feel that there is an urban centric focus within the nation and, with the majority of the population living in the central belt that it is this region specifically which receives the largest amount of attention.²⁸⁸ In order to counteract this it becomes understandable that one of the key priorities

²⁸⁴ Interview with Moray Royles (30/3/10)

²⁸⁵ Participant B (28/2/10)

²⁸⁶ In 2006 the Scottish Arts Council commissioned a large survey into attendance and participation in the arts, suggesting that an understanding of this area was of importance to the organisation. Scottish Arts Council, *Taking Part: Arts Attendance, Participation and Attitudes: Full Report*, (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 2006)

²⁸⁷ Unpublished paper presented at the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies' and CCPR's Postgraduate Symposium (May 2011)

²⁸⁸ Interview with Participant AB (15/3/11)

for the main funder and policy maker within the arts would be for theatre productions which travel across the length and breadth of the country as opposed to those which are resident within one venue.

Nonetheless there has also been recognition that fixed and permanent buildings also have a role to play in increasing accessibility to the arts. Indeed, Jim Tough, Chief Executive of the Scottish Arts Council, observed that a well-designed performance building 'can increase participation in the arts, one of the Scottish Arts Council's key aims.'²⁸⁹ Within many conventional venues, however, there does seem to be an underlying sense that embedded within the bricks and mortar of theatre buildings is a sense of elitism, of exclusivity, which serves to keep the majority away. There is perhaps some truth in this. The prototypical image of a theatre appears to be of a fixed design style which was initially created to maintain and promote the hierarchical structure of society at that time through the seating and different entrances, for instance.²⁹⁰ No participant who was spoken to as part of this project described a new space with 'democratic' seating when they were asked what they recognised as a 'theatre building.' In addition to this theatre is an interest of a minority and, as the work of John McGrath has demonstrated, where practitioners have actively sought out new audiences they have also consciously turned away from the conventional, urban performance spaces.

In recognition of the perceived elitism within more conventional performance spaces, a number of architects and practitioners have sought out new designs and formats to reflect and serve the wider community they are trying to attract. From the apparent neutrality of black box studios to contemporary multi-purpose arts centres there is an emphasis on appealing to the wider population and to broadening the appeal of this art form. Certainly, Casey has noted that 'buildings condense the cultural values of a society:' they both serve and reflect the society in which they exist.²⁹¹ In this way we can observe some aspects of

²⁸⁹ Scottish Arts Council, 'More Gongs for Inverness Theatre' (21/11/08) Scottish Arts Council Website (now archived): <http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/latestnews/1005973.aspx> [last accessed 1/10/11]

²⁹⁰ One such example would be the Kings' Theatre in Glasgow.

²⁹¹ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) p.32

the relationship between theatre and society through the buildings it erects for this art form. This has been supported by Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring who explicitly state that:

It is an apt extension of making space for theatre for architects and designers to concern themselves [...] not merely with stages and auditoria, but with the whole complex of the theatre building in its two-way traffic with its community. Theatre is situated in its community [...] in a fashion that goes well beyond mere physical location.²⁹²

Thus, the audience and the building are seen as existing in a symbiotic relationship with each one influencing the other.

Wiles has claimed that his 'short history' of various performance spaces, 'is not a history of contexts for dramatic literature but the history of an activity rooted in bodies and environments.'²⁹³ In this way he is reinforcing the importance which he places on the embodied experience of the spectators and on the role that this has in the overall performance. The space of performance is more than just a stage for the show and instead contributes to the general atmosphere and expectations being created. Mackintosh has furthered this when he challenges the traditionally functional understanding of theatre architecture and instead asserts that, 'the sense of danger, of community and of shared experience felt at a successful theatrical occasion is what distinguishes live theatre from cinema.'²⁹⁴ Thus a 'successful' performance space is seen as involving more than just clear sight-lines and acoustics and is instead being recognised through the relationships it creates with the spectators.

In his seminal text on audiences, Herbert Blau argues that:

[The audience] does not exist before the play but is 'initiated' or 'precipitated' by it; it is not an entity to begin with but a consciousness constructed. The audience is what 'happens' when performing the signs

²⁹² Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (eds.), *Making Space for Theatre: British Architecture and Theatre Since 1958* (Stratford-Upon-Avon: Mulryne and Shewring, 1995) p.14

²⁹³ Wiles, *A Short History*, foreword

²⁹⁴ Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience*, p.2

and passwords of a play, something postulates itself and unfolds in response.²⁹⁵

Through this understanding, the individual spectators are being differentiated from the concept of an audience as a single entity; as a community with shared experiences. In a chapter for Mulryne and Shewring's collection of essays on theatre spaces, the theatre director Bill Alexander observes that, 'to talk admiringly about theatre as a 'community' event is another fashionable convention.'²⁹⁶ The term 'community' has become increasingly used despite its complex and often contested meanings and highlights a change in the way in which the spectator's role is being interpreted. Following the advent of the proscenium arch the spectator was seen as a passive observer to the action but there has been a relatively recent shift in perceptions: in contemporary Western theatre at least there is now more of an emphasis being placed on the spectators' active engagement with the performance.

Alongside the importance of the actor-audience relationship then, the relationship between spectator-spectator is now being seen as fundamental to the overall experience. As the social function of theatre has become more widely recognised more emphasis has been placed on the audience and the meaning that it can bring to the event. Indeed, as Brook notes:

Following an initial suspicion in the 1960s that things were badly wrong - that something was clogged up and preventing a healthy exchange with the audience - a vast field of surprises and discoveries opened itself up as soon as we sincerely faced the question, 'what should a theatre be?'²⁹⁷

From site-specific performances to the political activism of practitioners such as Littlewood, McGrath and Brecht, the relationship which emerges between spectators and the event has become an important consideration within Western theatre.

²⁹⁵ Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Maryland, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990) p.25

²⁹⁶ Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (eds.), *Making Space for Theatre*, p.82

²⁹⁷ Andrew Todd and Jean-Guy Lecat, *The Open Circle: Peter Brook's Theatre Environments* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003) p.34

The temporary nature of this unity between individuals is important as it highlights the fact that the 'community' of the audience is being brought together through the shared experience of the performance but will largely disperse at the end of the event. For Blau, the audience does not exist before the event and presumably does not exist after it either as it develops purely in response to the actions taking place before it. This raises an interesting dichotomy between performances where the audience does not feel a sense of community before the event and those where it does. Susan Bennett asserts that:

Audiences outside the mainstream, whether urban or rural, do not have the same experience of theatre attendance. But these audiences are often drawn from the local community, and thus find the playing space an environment which is familiar and in that way comfortable.²⁹⁸

The idea being presented here is that the ideological coding which is embedded within spaces and buildings will translate to the overall theatrical event and will create a different experience accordingly.

Throughout my various residencies with Mull Theatre it has become clear that there are differences in the way the audience behaves before and after a performance according to their prior relationship with the venue. As the previous chapter highlighted, these are not always extreme differences with regards to how the spectators behave during the performance itself. Indeed, overall the behaviour was largely the same with certain rules of behaviour - applause at the interval and the end, for example - being obeyed regardless of the chosen space. Where these were transgressed it appears to have been the result of individuals rather than the venue in question. Nonetheless, during the *Laurel and Hardy* tour at least, there were instances where the audience appeared to be more confident when watching the show in a village hall than in a more conventional space such as Eden Court: not only were verbal responses to the actors' rhetorical questions said with more conviction but there were also

²⁹⁸ Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) p.126

louder conversations between individuals in contrast to the hushed silence which was prevalent in the traditional auditoriums.

This raises questions of ownership over the space and its impact on the audience's relationship to, and subsequent behaviour throughout, the event. With so many areas being sealed off from the public, there is a sense that when entering a conventional theatre space it is the domain of the practitioners and that the audience are guests. In village halls the opposite is generally true. These venues are often the centre of the community and will host a variety of activities from mother and toddler groups, book groups, ceilidhs, birthday parties, funerals and sports sessions. The Aros Hall in Tobermory, for instance had a different weekly event on every day during my months residency in spring 2010. These were a mixture of events run by the managing committee and some organised by other residents in Tobermory and the surrounding areas. During the day, the front door was often unlocked regardless of whether a specific event was on and people were able to walk in off the street and wander round the hall. Moreover, with young school children having launched a campaign to raise money to keep the hall going while older members of the community use it for a lunch club, there is a sense that this space embraces all levels of the local geographical community, irrespective of age. Theatres, on the other hand, have been largely seen as appealing to a specific stratum of society, something practitioners such as McGrath sought to break away from.

In a report into re-evaluating the significance of rural Scotland, Colonsay Village Hall is presented as a case study through which to highlight the Local Capital Grants Scheme, promoted by the Scottish Executive. It shows that a £363,000 grant was awarded to convert the dilapidated, 'old wooden hut' into a new hall which, 'will be used by a variety of community groups and will host all types of events [...] giving Colonsay a viable and valuable community facility.'²⁹⁹ The idea here is that the hall will be a space the locals can be proud of and one which will cater to a variety of needs.

²⁹⁹ Scottish Executive, *Rural Scotland: A New Approach*, (Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2002) p.49

It is worth noting at this point that McCrone similarly referred to Druimfin as a community resource when he presented an opening speech in the space before the opening of Mull Youth Theatre's debut performance.³⁰⁰ The sum of money provided by funders for the construction of Druimfin was also more akin to that granted to Colonsay Village Hall than Eden Court.³⁰¹ There are a number of practical reasons as to why the two rural venues should receive less than the building in the 'gateway to the Highlands'³⁰² but it is perhaps also indicative of the way the buildings are being seen more generally: Druimfin is not a theatre but is instead intended to be a rehearsal space with set-building facilities.

Having said that, and despite McCrone using the same terminology for Druimfin as the Scottish Executive have used for Colonsay Village Hall, there are clear differences between the two venues: notably with regards to ownership. Although McCrone asserted that he wanted Druimfin to be a 'resource' the term he used is potentially misleading. Resource suggests that the space would play a key role in surrounding locale and that it would be accessible to all. Druimfin, however, is not. The sign specifying 'no entry except for performers' which is permanently stuck on the door which separates the small foyer from the back stage corridor clearly guides people's movement around the space. In addition to this, the door to the auditorium is closed at least 40 minutes before a performance to prevent any patrons from getting a glimpse of the stage and performers prior to the opening of the show. This is so that 'they don't ruin the magic.'³⁰³ Thus, it has become clear that whilst he wants the building to become a valued and central part of the community it must also maintain its identity as a professional theatre.

Druimfin and its Island Community

As a result of its dual role as both a touring company with its own permanent building, a number of tensions have started to emerge both with regards to

³⁰⁰ Alasdair McCrone, Introductory speech to *Works of Shakespeare Abridged* (5/3/10)

³⁰¹ £250,000 was given to Mull Theatre from various sources while Eden Court received £2,305,000.

³⁰² Interview with Nick Fearnie, Arts Development Officer at Moray Council (25/2/11)

³⁰³ Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (9/3/10)

external understandings of its identity and within the construction of Druimfin itself. The above section has provided an overview to some of the theoretical understandings surrounding the relationship between space and audiences' and these will now be explored in more depth through the specific case study of Mull (Little) Theatre and Druimfin. Before beginning, however, it first seems apposite to interrogate the term 'community' in order to fully understand how the notion of community can be used in relation to that of the audience.

This term is subject to a variety of definitions but in recent years there has been a fundamental shift in the way communities are understood:

In the 1950s and 1960s 'community' was most often viewed as a static, utopian ideal of neighbourliness and locality, and its absence was mourned.³⁰⁴

Much like the notion of space, then, the last 40 years has seen a change from communities being seen as fixed and static entities to fluid entities which are constantly being renegotiated. One basic principle which most scholars agree on however, is that for a community to exist there must be something shared. Indeed, Young asserts that 'the ideal community privileges unity over difference.'³⁰⁵

Reinforcing the recognition of communities as fluid rather than fixed the Philosophy scholar, Raymond Plant, warns against the:

very common error [of thinking] that if a word is meaningful then it should have a fixed and wholly determinate meaning and, further, that its meaning should be in just one mode...All communities on such view, must then share a common factor and the presence of this factor secures

³⁰⁴ Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) p.130

³⁰⁵ Iris Marion Young, 'The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference' in Linda J. Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) p.300

the meaning of 'community' when it is ascribed to a particular form of social life.³⁰⁶

In order to support this argument against searching for a singular and intrinsic meaning assignable to this term, he draws on Wittgenstein's analysis of the word 'game'. Board games, card games, sports games, fair-ground games all carry the same word and yet looking at what each of them means will highlight the fact that the way we use words in everyday life does not relate to a fixed meaning. Indeed, he notes that, 'if you look at [different games] you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.'³⁰⁷ Thus, by turning away from attempting to find a singular definition for the term 'community' we should instead be looking at the way it is employed in reality as this alone will enable us to embrace the multifarious meanings assigned to it.

Throughout the interviews I conducted on Mull it became apparent that there was no consensus as to what formed a community on Mull. With a diversity of backgrounds, employments and interests being represented, it depended on who I was speaking to as to whether the view of community being presented was that of a geographic community or a community of interest. For instance, one participant who contributed to the research process stated that the notion of community on Mull could be defined as anyone who lives on the island.³⁰⁸ For them, living within the clearly defined boundaries of the island is enough to produce a sense of shared experience and commonality. Another participant also presented this as the overarching understanding of community and asserts that as one of the key strengths of Mull Theatre: it is 'an island community and an island company.'³⁰⁹ Nonetheless this participant also suggested that within that there were additional notions of community: Muileachs, being those who were born and raised on the island; incomers who have moved to the island at

³⁰⁶ Raymond Plant, *Community and Ideology: An Essay in Applied Social Philosophy* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) p.8

³⁰⁷ Wittgenstein, cited in Raymond Plant, *Community and Ideology*, p.9

³⁰⁸ Interview with Participant P (3/9/10)

³⁰⁹ Interview with Participant F (2/3/10)

various stages in their life; artists who either practice or enjoy the arts; and the fishermen and farmers on the island.³¹⁰

The flexible definitions of community on the island are important if we are to consider the role played by the company within that community. Mull (Little) Theatre has always had a complex relationship with the island on which it was based and it should be noted that it was initially established to provide evening entertainment for visitors to the island and not for the permanent inhabitants of the island. Moreover, in his monograph, Hesketh argues that for him and his wife:

The nature of our work isolated us from the community, even though the community was very willing to reach out to us and be friendly. We had chosen to stand slightly aside so as to maintain objectivity that - rightly or wrongly - we believed necessary to the craft of acting and the art of theatre.³¹¹

Through informal discussions with one island resident who wished to only speak off the record, it has become apparent that this was a source of contention amongst many. Nonetheless, during the late 1980s when threat of closure for the theatre was imminent the local amateur dramatic society was vital in contributing to the summer season programming. In this way the local community became integral to its continuation. This relationship has shifted slightly and there is less demand on the island residents to actively engage in the programming of the company.

Until the relocation in 2008, Mull (Little) Theatre was resident on the island over the summer months and would frequently perform professional productions six nights a week.³¹² For the some of the Muileachs at least this has created a sense that Mull Theatre is *their* company, a feeling which has declined in many

³¹⁰ Interview with Participant F (2/3/10)

³¹¹ Barrie Hesketh, *Taking Off: The Story of the Mull Little Theatre* (Inverness: The New Iona Press, 1997) p. 55

³¹² This is evident through the various box office records which are held at Mull Theatre. Whilst hard copies of the records are fairly sporadic in terms of what years they cover they do provide an overview from which generalisations can be drawn. This is particularly true when they are supplemented with anecdotal evidence.

ways as a result of the move. One participant, for instance, asked, 'I wonder, do they care much about us anymore?'³¹³ By having a building which is frequently dark when the resident company is away on tour, the idea being conveyed to the Muileachs is simply that Mull Theatre is absent. The local attendees cannot see the impact of the tours, nor the relationship that Mull Theatre has developed with geographical communities off the island. Instead, all they see is an empty building on the periphery of the established geographical communities on the island.

It was anticipated that this would be rectified slightly through the 2010 summer season in which *Laurel and Hardy*, *Opium Eater* and *The Weir* were to be performed on alternating nights so that visitors to the island would have a choice as to what to see.³¹⁴ A full breakdown of the summer season on Mull 2010 is included in appendix seven and, as it highlights, despite having three productions performed a number of times, it was far from being the same frequency as was the case at Mull Little Theatre. Indeed, over 11 months in 2010 there were a total of 53 events performed with the majority taking place between July and August. Only 57 percent of these were Mull Theatre's own productions. This stands in firm contrast to 1988 when there were 68 performances in just over 13 weeks.³¹⁵ Nonetheless, this attempt to replicate the previous summer seasons at the Little Theatre do show an apparent desire from the company to provide professional theatre for its island attendees in a more sustained manner than simply opening a show there before it goes out on tour.

Although Druimfin is not primarily intended to be a performance space for the islanders, Mull Theatre was very keen that its new building would be located on the island on which it was historically based. With the emphasis on touring it might have been more practical for the company to create a base on the mainland as this would reduce the additional cost of always having to transport its sets on and off the island. Discussions with various members of the company

³¹³ Interview with Participant B (28/2/10)

³¹⁴ Interview with Participant F (2/3/10)

³¹⁵ These statistics have been compiled from box office records and promotional materials which can be found in the Mull Theatre Archive.

have confirmed that this was never an option: Mull Theatre was always going to be resident on the island from which it took its name. Through a feasibility study in 2003, a range of venues were considered including the conversion of a Victorian Church on the waterfront in Tobermory. McCrone has asserted that this was rejected as an option because of the fear that the company would then be seen as belonging to the main town on the island rather than to the island as a whole.³¹⁶ Similarly, there was the possibility for the new home for Mull Theatre to be in Dervaig as it had been previously. This was also overlooked due to concerns over accessibility which had plagued the Little Theatre and resulted in a new location being considered even before the expiration of the lease made it a necessity.

Having spoken to a number of attendees on the island it is questionable as to what extent Mull Theatre is thought of as belonging to the whole island, despite the conscious decision not to attach it to a specific town or village. As chapter two noted there is a clear social and geographical divide across the island, with young children being sent to different secondary schools depending on what part of the island they live on: in the north of the island they attend Tobermory High School whilst those in the south board at Oban High School. Thus, with the company being based in the north, it is possible that the sense of ownership felt by the islanders towards the company may be lesser in the south of the island. This has been highlighted by one attendee I spoke to at a performance of *Pierrot Lunaire* by the Hebrides Ensemble in March 2010. The lady had recently moved to the island and claimed that she was very excited when she saw posters across the island for this performance because it was very much to her tastes. Had it not been for a production which specifically interested her, however, she noted that she would have been unlikely to travel the hour and a half round trip. As such we can infer that it was an interest in the specific performance rather than an innate pride in the company which drew her to the venue.

It is not just through the resident summer programme and its geographical location in the village of Dervaig that the company can be seen as being linked to the island: the building also provides tangible links. As has been previously

³¹⁶ This has been reiterated in various conversations with McCrone throughout the research process.

noted, Wiles believes that the most successful performance spaces all maintain a sense of the past within them.³¹⁷ Whether it is through the materiality or cultural associations made with the space, it is important to remember that theatre does not exist in a vacuum and so its buildings and the art form itself must acknowledge what has gone before; it is an 'architectural memoryscape.'³¹⁸ This idea has been incorporated into the design of the new building with exposed trusses inside the main auditorium/rehearsal room recalling the original interior of the Little Theatre. Alongside this, traditional agricultural materials have also been used in order to situate it within the architectural history of the area.³¹⁹

In the case of the Little Theatre, however, it was not just that the building reflected the past but, moreover, that it represented the present. Its tendency to flood during the winter, the jotter book box office, the small size and the frequent interruptions of sounds from the outside entering the fictional world on stage, all served to endear the venue more in the eyes of the many of the islanders. When questioned about life on Mull, Sarah Darling, the proprietor of a bed and breakfast and a previous employee of Mull Theatre, asserted that, 'it's hard! Life on an island can be hard.'³²⁰ This is particularly due to financial considerations and transport links. The Little Theatre can in many ways be seen as mirroring the hardships experienced by the locals. This has arguably been lessened by the construction of the new building in which everything currently works efficiently and the difficulties of island living have been negated. In trying to create a beacon and a centre of pride for the island and its inhabitants, Mull Theatre has inadvertently detached itself somewhat from its surroundings.

This is not to say that the move has resulted in losses for the company's identity with nothing positive coming out of it. On the contrary, a number of benefits can also be identified through the larger space now afforded by Druimfin. In the Little Theatre the small auditorium meant that external spaces had to be used for rehearsals and the set construction with each element of a

³¹⁷ David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.60

³¹⁸ Laura Horston-Hanks, 'Island Identities: The Pier Arts Centre Orkney,' *Architecture Research Quarterly* 14:3 (2010) p.236

³¹⁹ Interview with Moray Royles (30/3/10)

³²⁰ Interview with Sarah Darling (5/9/10)

production coming together in the venue right at the end of the rehearsal process. Consequently, there were no opportunities for the space to be used by any of the amateur dramatic groups on the island or for the company to use it for education and outreach events. In contrast, Druimfin has been designed to represent all of the potential stages Mull Theatre might tour to and so has the width of the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh: the widest proscenium arch stage in Scotland.³²¹ This has not only meant that the company can hold its own rehearsals within the building but, moreover, that additional community groups can now use the venue for their own purposes. In this way it is potentially able to become the 'community resource' which McCrone anticipates.

The research process for this thesis has identified a long tradition of amateur dramatics on the island. Indeed, Barrie Hesketh first visited the island as a judge for the local drama festival.³²² The NOMADS (the North of Mull Amateur Dramatic Society) have been in operation for many years but, following the opening of Druimfin, there is now a regular opportunity for young people on the island to participate in drama with the founding of Mull Youth Theatre. In addition to this there are also weekly storytelling and dance classes for people of different ages.³²³ It should also be noted that many of these were initiated by Andi Stevens, a retired professional choreographer and dancer who now runs a guest house on the island. Rather than being created by the resident company, then, these classes have grown organically from one person's interests and abilities; Mull Theatre has provided the venue and advertising and Stevens has done the rest.

To outside eyes, however, most of what happens in Druimfin is attributed to Mull Theatre. Certainly, a number of returned questionnaires from performances at Druimfin listed a number of productions which had been staged in the venue by visiting companies. Again, this goes some way to suggesting that Druimfin and Mull Theatre have become largely synonymous, as the company was with the Little Theatre. Even though McCrone deleted the word 'little'

³²¹ Interview with Alasdair McCrone (28/10/09)

³²² Hesketh, *Taking Off*, p.18

³²³ For a list of the classes, please refer to the Mull Theatre website:
<http://www.mulltheatre.com/education.htm> [last accessed 1/11/11]

from the company's name in 1997, out of the 152 questionnaires which were returned after performances at Druimfin, 12 percent of respondents listed the place of performance as 'Mull Little Theatre.' Whilst this is by no means a majority it is still a significant amount considering the 15 years which have passed and the recent relocation.

In addition to this, one questionnaire was returned by a Dutch couple who ticked that this was their first time at a Mull Theatre performance. Nonetheless they also wrote the venue in which they saw the performance as 'Mull Little Theatre.' Inside the foyer of Druimfin there is a bookcase with souvenir programmes from the last season of Mull Little Theatre and so there is a possibility that this is where they drew the name from; certainly there is no signage on the front of the building which marks out its name as Druimfin. Nonetheless, it does at least suggest the possibility that other islanders are persistently referring to it as the Little Theatre and that this is being perpetuated by visitors.

Having acknowledged this, McCrone remains wary of what he stages in his building as poor productions could impact negatively on the identity of the company, regardless of whether it had produced them or not. In trying to break away from the parochial connotations often associated with Mull (Little) Theatre and its island base, McCrone's main focus is to firmly establish the touring company as a producer of consistently high quality work.³²⁴ There is clearly a gap which emerges then between the building as a resource for the community and as the base for a professional company.

Whilst locals have suggested uses for the building and been allowed to run their own classes and workshops, Druimfin is clearly not a resource in the same way that a village hall or community centre is. It is not openly accessible in that islanders are unable to hire out the venue regularly for their own purposes and, for the majority of people the backstage areas have never been seen. Those

³²⁴ Immediately after the relocation there were a number of 'rebranding questions' put up in the Mull Theatre office for each of the core staff to consider and to feed back to the board about which ideas they thought were, or should be, central to the ethos of Mull Theatre. During my interviews with them I also drew on these questions (copies of which have been included in appendix six) and this was consistently posited as the main crux of what the company is now and what it should continue to be.

participants who are permitted to move backstage during the workshops are limited to the front of house areas during productions. Whilst some of the perceived exclusivity may be lessened slightly through the regular education and outreach sessions, during performances it is firmly maintained. Even during outreach, however, there is still a sense that they are guests in the space; that they have to be invited in by the owners of the space - the resident company. In village halls there is a sense that it is the touring company who is the guest and the spectators who are the owners. During the technical rehearsal for *Laurel and Hardy*, for instance, the participants of Mull Youth Theatre were invited in to observe so that they could, 'see how it works in a professional theatre.'³²⁵ In some of the village halls the production toured to, the volunteer promoters invited themselves into the space and sat and watched; the company feeling unable to always ask them to leave.³²⁶

In *The Same but Different*, Hamilton and Scullion cite a musician who frequently tours England and Wales. In an interview he asserts that in village halls:

People have come to be entertained in their space. This is the point. They use this space all the time in a rural community. We [the touring companies] don't. So we are very much coming into their space, quite a different feel. It is almost like walking into somebody's front room.³²⁷

With this statement the musician is highlighting an increased sense of metaphorical ownership experienced by rural audiences towards village halls. These multi-purpose spaces will often provide a focal point for the local community and so the audience and promoters will have a different relationship with them in contrast to those in urban, purpose-built venues for instance. Associating a village hall with a living room is perhaps insinuating that the relationship is slightly too familiar; it is, after all, still a public place. Nonetheless, the differing senses of ownership experienced within different

³²⁵ Informal conversation with Andi Stevens (16/3/10)

³²⁶ Interview with Participant A (11/2/09)

³²⁷ Hamilton and Scullion, *The Same but Different*, p.70 (my own emphasis)

venues were reinforced through my own experiences of a rural theatre tour which were presented in the previous chapter. From spectators moving their chairs to get a better view of the stage to promoters publically thanking the company for going to the venue and introducing the performance, the dynamic between spectator, practitioner and event are different in a community venue setting to those in a conventional theatre.

Nonetheless, one must be wary of over idealising this sense of ownership. During the NEAT networking day it became apparent that one of the attendees felt removed from their local village hall as they worked full time in Aberdeen; about forty minutes away. Although they observed that they felt a great sense of pride in the space and would like to see more performances within it, they also noted that it was not central to their everyday life.³²⁸ Although many of the spectators will feel, and demonstrate, an increased sense of ownership then, even this is far from being clear cut with regards to defining the space. Not all of the local community will feel a sense of ownership in their rural village hall, whilst those that attend classes in an established performance venue may feel a heightened sense of ownership and belonging in the space in question.

This sense of increased ownership in a village hall, for instance, could go some way to explaining why audiences' responses to *Laurel and Hardy* had marked differences depending on where the performance was taking place. A 'traditional' theatre building is seemingly designed to demarcate this space as separate to reality, thus eliciting certain responses from the spectator.³²⁹ A village hall, on the other hand, is very much located within the everyday reality of many people in the audience. As Scullion and Hamilton observe, the village hall will be used for a variety of events and activities throughout the week: the performance will only play a small part in the programming of the venue.³³⁰ Indeed, at Glengarry Village Hall, the room which would become the actors' dressing room was being used until 4pm that day by the travelling NHS podiatrist and chiropodist who tried to visit the local area monthly if required. Thus some of the people who came to visit the show in the evening would have been

³²⁸ NEAT networking day, Haddo House, near Ellon (25/9/10)

³²⁹ McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p.45

³³⁰ Hamilton and Scullion, *The Same but Different*, p.70-71

'backstage' earlier that day in a very different context, creating a very different relationship with the venue and performance.

Throughout the *Laurel and Hardy* tour I observed the ways in which audiences interacted with each other prior to and after the show and how they responded during the performance. Coupled with questions of differing ownership, Wilkie's belief that there are rules and ideas embedded within spaces - both overt and covert - which dictate behaviour and movement in space, would suggest that audience responses would differ according to what type of venue they were in. This is then reinforced by McGrath's argument that in order to truly engage working class and other disenfranchised audiences, the practitioner must not only take shows to *their* venues but should also employ theatrical techniques which appeal to the group in question.³³¹ This is why 7:84's seminal tour of *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* employed popular techniques such as direct address, song, multiple characterisations and why it ended with a ceilidh involving spectators and performers.³³² *Island Nights Entertainment*, Mull Theatre's autumn 2009 touring production, also ended with a ceilidh and yet of the performances I saw - in a mixture of village halls and conventional spaces - the audience were often slow to participate. This suggests that there are other factors at work, more than just the location which serves to inform the behaviour of the audience.

Regardless of where Mull Theatre is performing, it still uses the same framing techniques which are prevalent in more conventional spaces. Knowles, amongst others, has highlighted the importance of recognising various interacting factors in creating the overall event of which the audience are a part.³³³ By placing its publicity banner in the hallway of every non-traditional performance space, the company tried to mark this activity out as separate to everyday life and to initiate certain behaviours regardless of the spectators' prior relationship to the space. Some of the village halls then furthered this by printing and issuing tickets which were akin to those you would present to the usher in a more

³³¹ McGrath, *A Good Night Out*, p.27

³³² John McGrath, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (London: Methuen Drama, 1993)

³³³ Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.100-101

conventional space. Coupled with the traditional text-based approach to its programming and its relatively naturalistic sets, Mull Theatre's productions are clearly being understood in a certain way and thus perhaps it is the performance as much as the venue which serves to elicit certain responses.

Having observed a number of performances in Druimfin, it has become apparent that the audience behaviour is largely dependent on the type of show being presented and the layout of the stage. In *Island Nights Entertainment* at Druimfin, for instance, the audience were positioned at angles to each other, so that they mirrored the bow of the ship which formed the basis of the set design.



Figure 47 - *Island Nights' Entertainment* at Duart Castle

During the interval, I saw a number of spectators walk over the stage to reach their friends and many more manoeuvred their chairs so that they could speak to each other more easily. In 2010, however, I saw a visiting production of *The Government Inspector* in which not one person stepped foot on the stage and, instead, there seemed to be a conscious effort being made to avoid it. *Island Nights* was staged in the first year of Druimfin and so it may be that the

individual spectators had yet to build up a relationship with it and yet I would suggest that there were other factors at play here. The fact that it was a Mull Theatre production may have created a greater sense of ownership over the event than was felt towards the visiting company and the theatrical techniques employed may also have been significant.

Whilst *The Government Inspector* is an established text which maintains the 'fourth' wall, *Island Nights*' was a piece of new writing which drew together various elements of previous Mull Theatre shows. Described by McCrone as, 'a bit of fluff,' it drew on many of the popular techniques employed in *The Cheviot* including the incorporation of well-known songs for the audience to join in with.³³⁴ As such, it required a different sense of engagement to occur between the spectator and the performance and thus, these nuances in the conduct of the audience may be as much determined by the performances style as the venue.

Regardless of in which venue *Laurel and Hardy* was being seen, the overall behaviour of the audience was much as one would expect from a conventional performance space. There was applause at the end and generally there was stillness during the performance itself. There was, however, one key distinction between rural village halls and conventional performance spaces. In the penultimate scene Barrie Hunter, who played Oliver Hardy climbed into a hamper in order to signify the death of his character. In most of the purpose-built venues this seemed to be accepted and was usually accompanied by stillness within the auditorium. In all of the non purpose-built venues - predominantly village halls and community centres - there was at the very least a snigger from the audience seating, and often loud laughter with one spectator even speaking out, 'he's still in the hamper.' Through this we can infer that there is a different engagement taking place with the performance. I would suggest that this is to do with a different relationship with the stage world, as was observed in the previous chapter, but a more detailed analysis would need to be conducted around this specific relationship between stage and spectator to prove that conclusively.

³³⁴ Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (11/4/10)

Whilst this was a distinction which was maintained for the entire duration of the tour, it should be noted that there were also individual examples of spectators transgressing the norms of behaviour in the space. In the Brunton Theatre in Musselburgh, for instance, one man in the front row used his keys to clean his ears during the aforementioned death scene and so disrupted the quietness of the auditorium with loud rattling. Herbert Blau has suggested that, 'if the audience is not altogether an absence, it is by no means a reliable presence.'³³⁵

Conclusion

Theatre scholars such as McAuley and Ric Knowles have hypothesised about the role played by space on the physical performance both offstage and onstage. Knowles, for instance, suggests that, 'space exerts its influence, silently inscribing or disrupting specific (and ideologically coded) ways of working, for practitioners, and seeing and understanding, for audiences.'³³⁶ In this way we can see that it is not only the space(s) used in the final performance(s) which are significant for the creation of meaning but that, moreover, they play an essential role throughout the entire process of creating and staging a performance.

This is highlighted through the work of various left-wing theatre groups and practitioners such as 7:84 (Scotland), Joan Littlewood and Red Ladder which actively sought out new audiences by performing in the spaces of their everyday lives. By identifying, and performing in, venues which were regularly used by those they wanted to engage with, the underlying assumption was that the perceptions of theatre as elitist and middle-class were attached to the building and not the art-form itself: changing buildings meant that people's engagement with the art form would also be changed. There are certain truths within this. Carlson has referred to the complex layering of cultural memories which are intertwined with the physicality of the performance space and the more one

³³⁵ Blau, *The Audience*, p.1

³³⁶ Knowles, *Reading the Material Stage*, p.62-3

considers theatre as a social event, the harder it becomes to disengage the material implications of the venue from the ideological ones.³³⁷

Matthew Reason also highlights the conflicting emotions he observed in the high-school participants for his project. On one level they were excited about the grandeur of the conventional theatre space, repeatedly referring to the ornate chandelier, for instance, but on the other hand there was a, 'lack of a sense of entitlement, a lack of a sense of ownership of both the theatre as a physical entity and of theatre-going as an activity.'³³⁸ It was this lack of ownership in mainstream venues which practitioners such as McGrath sought to exploit in their search of new audiences and spaces. Nonetheless, my own research has suggested that this apparent dichotomy between mainstream and non-mainstream audiences and venues is not as great as popular perceptions may suppose.

To date, the focus of most studies relating to (non-) performance spaces has been restricted to those which have been utilised for a primarily theatrical rather than practical purpose; that is to say where the decision to use them has been a conscious programming choice and not just because it happens to be the best available space for continuing a tour. Where their significance in contributing to the current theatrical landscape is acknowledged it is usually a fleeting mention with little focus placed on it due to the limitations of the scope of the study in question.³³⁹ This goes some way to suggesting why Mull (Little) Theatre has been so frequently overlooked. After all, it tours frequently to these spaces but does so with broadly naturalistic, text-based productions which are largely produced to entertain and not to challenge the conventions of contemporary theatre.

³³⁷ Marvin Carlson, 'The Haunted Stage: Recycling and Reception in the Theatre,' in *American Society for Theatre Research* 35:1 (1994) p.13

³³⁸ Matthew Reason, 'Young Audiences and Live Theatre, Part 2: Methods, Participation and Memory in Audience Research,' *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 26:3 (2006), p.230

³³⁹ One such example is Bennett who highlights the limitations of her study by not looking at non-western performances, children's theatre or rituals, for instance. Instead she focuses on more conventional performances in the hope that a method for audience studies can be developed and then modified according to the type of performance being looked at. Bennett, *The Audience*, p.212

By examining some of the ways in which attendees have reacted to specific performances in different venues, this chapter has highlighted that although there are some nuances in the way they behave, overall the responses are largely the same. There are understandably different notions of ownership within the spaces but overall the same rules of reception are determined by the type of production being presented as much as the space in which it is taking place. Through observation of and discussion with various spectators it has become apparent that these rural venues form the mainstream of the rural touring network and that they are, therefore, more than just venues on the periphery of modern Scottish theatre.

Mull Theatre provides a useful case study through which to explore these notions regarding space and audience as it frequently tours across the length and breadth of Scotland incorporating village halls and more conventional performance spaces. In addition to this, through the ability to compare both buildings - past and present - we are able to use this company to examine the wider relationship between space and place and small-scale rural theatre touring in Scotland. Following the move to Druimfin, Mull Theatre has in many ways been able to provide more effectively for the local community. The resident summer season has been diminished - the emphasis now being on the local and national tours - but the company has been able to bring a wider range of productions to the island. For instance the Hebrides Ensemble would have been unable to fit its orchestral ensemble in the space. Nonetheless, during my interviews with island attendees everyone mentioned the loss of the summer season and only one noted the additional classes. This suggests that, in the first few years at least, Mull Theatre is being considered in terms of what was lost rather than what was gained for the local audiences.

What complicates the matter is that whereas the company was previously seen as a resident company on the island which also toured, with larger outgoing costs as a result of the new building, Mull Theatre actively has to seek out new sources of income. In addition to this, with a larger venue there is now the opportunity to provide access to a wider range of performances and so it is possible that Druimfin will mark a shift from the resident company as being the touring company with the 'monopoly' on rural Scottish theatre to one which

plays a more active role in the wider promotion and distribution of theatre across the country. This is something which will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 7 - Building Rural Touring Networks

Randall Stevenson has credited McGrath with ‘initiating’ the village hall, rural theatre touring circuit and this is an idea which is perpetuated in many contemporary understandings of Scottish rural theatre.³⁴⁰ By repeatedly associating companies with a non-conventional agenda with non-performance venues, such as village halls and community centres, I would suggest that it has led to a politicisation of such venues. By this I mean that they are generally regarded as existing on the periphery of Scottish theatre and are only really noted in scholarly research in association with political theatre.³⁴¹ The Scottish Arts Council report, *Taking Part*, however, found that 74 percent of residents in rural areas had attended at least one cultural event in the past 12 months in comparison to 77 percent of all Scottish adults.³⁴² Although the report does not specify where these cultural events were seen, the similar percentages do suggest a similar degree of accessibility.

Due to the topographical diversity of Scotland it is easy to suppose that not all of these spectators will have travelled the distances necessary to see live performances in more traditional venues.³⁴³ This goes some way to suggesting the importance of (non-) performance venues in the creation of a rural touring circuit in Scotland. Rural areas face their own specific difficulties including accessibility issues and a higher cost of living and so, if accessibility to the arts is

³⁴⁰ Randall Stevenson, ‘Border Warranty: John McGrath and Scotland,’ in David Bradby and Susanna Capon (eds.) *Freedom’s Pioneer: John McGrath’s Work in Theatre, Film and Television Studies* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005) p.82. Participant AD also expressed resentment that 7:84 are still posited as being central to rural touring theatre: ‘everybody mentions them, everyone knows them, but they weren’t the first.’ Interview with Participant AD (6/4/10)

³⁴¹ One notable exception is Hamilton and Scullion’s 2004 report, *The Same but Different*, in which they examine the state of rural theatre touring in Scotland. As village halls play such an important role in the touring circuit they are studied as venues for performance in their own right and not just included as an afterthought. Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion, *The Same But Different, Rural Arts Touring in Scotland: The Case of Theatre* (Stroud: Comedia, 2004) p.52-55

³⁴² Scottish Arts Council, *Taking Part: Arts Attendance, Participation and Attitudes: Full Report* (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 2006) p.43

³⁴³ Both Harvie and Carlson make reference to the urban location of theatres and Harvie even uses the word ‘urban’ as almost interchangeable with ‘theatre.’ Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) and Marvin Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990)

to be increased across the nation, the emphasis needs to be on touring outwith the urban centres.

Mull Theatre has been frequently posited as a producer of consistently high work and regularly tours to highland island venues which are often overlooked by other companies.³⁴⁴ As a result of this it is understandable that the company will have developed an expert insight into rural touring from a company's perspective. This is not only true regarding the requirements of touring sets, lights and people but, moreover, it has developed an unprecedented knowledge of the different venues which constitute this network. Out of the 26 venues toured to with *Laurel and Hardy* there was only one venue which the company had never visited before and this was a replacement village hall which had never hosted a performance before.³⁴⁵ The company also regularly uses the same crew members for its productions and so there is a level of experience which is perhaps absent from other companies who tour less frequently.

Due to its unique position within Scottish theatre as a touring theatre company with a permanent rehearsal and performance space, Mull Theatre offers an interesting case study through which explore the provision of arts in rural Scotland. In its unpublished, 2009 Business Plan, Mull Theatre presented its vision for the future. In it Druimfin is repeatedly referred to as a 'hub of creative opportunity' and a 'centre of excellence.'³⁴⁶ Its primary purpose as a production centre is foregrounded not only for its own productions but also for other visiting companies to conduct residencies on the island. Rather than just being seen as a local theatre venue then, Mull Theatre envisages its newly built production centre as a beacon within Argyll and Bute and in Scotland more generally.

Its different uses as a rehearsal space available for hire, as a production space for Mull Theatre and other companies, and as a 'resource' for the local

³⁴⁴ Hamilton and Scullion, *The Same But Different*, p.78

³⁴⁵ Originally the tour was going to visit a community centre on the outskirts of Aberdeen but the promoters had accidentally double booked the space with a local event and this was favoured of the Mull Theatre performance. As a result NEAT identified another village hall in the area - Edinvillie Hall - which was keen to host a performance and so the venue was amended.

³⁴⁶ Mull Theatre, Business Plan (2009), unpublished

community, mean that in many ways this building is trying to be everything to everyone.³⁴⁷ All the while the tension grows amongst local attendees who persist in seeing Mull Theatre as *their* company despite the fact that its funding requires it to be off the island more than on it. Certainly, since its move to Druimfin, one participant commented that the company should change its name to 'The Puffin Theatre Company,' as it seemed to have no connection with the island on which it is based and from which it draws its name. This argument has stemmed largely from the dramatic reduction in the regular summer seasons since its location at the Little Theatre.

Following the construction of Druimfin, however, Mull Theatre is potentially more than a professional touring company as it now manages a building which can host other touring companies. Although it was possible to have visiting companies at the Little Theatre the options available were clearly limited as the auditorium was one of the smallest on the circuit. Thus, productions with large set pieces or a large cast would not have been able to use the 12-foot by eight-foot stage. In contrast, Druimfin has been consciously designed so that its width matches that of the Royal Lyceum in Edinburgh; the widest proscenium arch stage in Scotland. This was to ensure that the new building could host touring productions designed for large, medium and small venues alike. This has proved beneficial as it has enabled the National Theatre of Scotland to open its touring productions of *My Teacher's a Troll* and *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* on the island which it would otherwise not have been able to. It has also resulted in island attendees having access to a wider range of performances including an orchestral event by the Hebrides Ensemble and a one-woman show designed for smaller village halls.³⁴⁸

This chapter will examine some of these conflicting identities which are intertwined with the materiality of the space in order to further examine the role of Mull Theatre within a rural context and how this position may shift following the relocation. In particular, it will look at Mull Theatre's

³⁴⁷ This is how Alasdair McCrone referred to the building in his opening speech for Mull Youth Theatre's inaugural production, *Works of Shakespeare Abridged* (5/5/10)

³⁴⁸ Both of these performances - *Pierrot Lunaire* and *MSFITS* - were performed over the summer season in 2010. A full list of the productions staged at Druimfin over this period is included in appendix seven.

relationships with Argyll and Bute and the island on which it finds itself in order to interrogate how the formal label of production centre sits in contrast to the understanding local attendees have of the space as a theatre. It will also present an overview to the current rural touring networks which are in operation throughout Scotland in order to locate Mull Theatre within a wider strategic framework.

The Island Hub

The practical implications regarding the cost and availability of suitable performance and rehearsal venues was clearly a contributing factor in the Scottish Arts Council's decision to part-fund the construction of Druimfin. However, as Mull Theatre's funded remit is to be that of a touring theatre company, with a particular emphasis on the Highlands and Islands, the decision was reached that this would be a venue built specifically for producing and not performing theatre shows. Mull Theatre on the other hand has always anticipated that it would eventually become a 'hub of creative opportunity.'³⁴⁹ It is expected to eventually become the venue in which practitioners conduct residencies, locals attend classes, performances are experienced and a space in which inhabitants of Argyll and Bute can turn their attention and be proud. Thus the creative opportunities being envisaged relate to the production, reception and participation of and in the performing arts.

With regards to his initial brief, the architect has noted that:

It's clear that we had to be very careful: the building is a production centre but clearly it can be...the goal is to adapt it into a proper auditorium theatre with a foyer and further facilities which we had to plan for when designing further phases.³⁵⁰

There are some concerns within the sector regarding this decision to develop a purpose-built venue despite its remit to largely tour to the non-performance

³⁴⁹ This is referred to in Mull Theatre's internal Business Plan (2009) and through various internal conversations with Alasdair McCrone.

³⁵⁰ Interview with Moray Royles (30/3/10)

spaces which dominate the rural circuit. One participant I spoke to, who wishes to remain anonymous, noted that there was an emerging resentment towards Mull Theatre following its decision to relocate to a new purpose-built venue.³⁵¹ They suggested that this has been further increased by the position the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) as a peripatetic, touring company with no permanent performance venue of its own.³⁵² This choice was made after extensive discussions regarding the role of a national theatre and the fear that having a fixed and permanent venue would result in the company being seen as belonging to one city or town and not to the nation as a whole. In Dublin, for instance, Fintan O'Toole has argued that whilst the Abbey Theatre was supposed to be the Ireland's national theatre it was in fact, 'a Dublin theatre, whose towering figures were Dubliners and whose audience was metropolitan.'³⁵³ Similarly, Denis Agnew has asserted that the majority of the audience for the Southbank comes from London and the surrounding area, suggesting that this is a local more than a national theatre.³⁵⁴

Trish Reid has applauded the creation of a peripatetic touring and producing company as Scotland's national theatre because of its increasing 'flexibility as a virtual company.'³⁵⁵ By not having a fixed location it is believed that the national theatre will be better able to serve the geographical diversity of Scotland and will be able to respond to the needs of the nation and to adapt to changing circumstance with a more fluid identity. As Mull Theatre has a primary remit to provide live performances out with the central belt, the argument being levied by Participant Z is that the company should have adopted the flexibility of the national theatre and not restricted itself with a purpose-built venue. Although there are a range of venues already on the island which Mull Theatre could arguably utilise, the company has chosen to commission its own purpose-built space instead. This is seen to be presenting the (non-) performance venues

³⁵¹ Interview with Participant Z (30/7/10)

³⁵² Interview with Participant Z (30/7/10)

³⁵³ Fintan O'Toole, 'In a State,' in Neil Wallace (ed.) 'Thoughts and Fragments about Theatres and Nations,' *The Guardian*, 1991

³⁵⁴ Denis Agnew, *Contexts and Concepts of a Scottish National Theatre* (Queen Margaret University College, 2000) p.204

³⁵⁵ Trish Reid, 'From Scenes like these Old Scotia's Grandeur Springs: the New National Theatre of Scotland,' *Contemporary Theatre Review* 17(2), p.197

as being of a lower quality to more conventional spaces as they were not considered to be good enough for the island company. The question being posed by the participant is why should Mull Theatre need its own venue with a range of facilities such as raked seating when these are not found in the majority of spaces it performs in? 'Why can't they [sic] just use the Aros Hall? That's more like what they perform in.'³⁵⁶

Mull Theatre's unpublished business plan for 2011-2013 states that:

The hallmark of Mull Theatre productions is that they are ambitious, theatrical, stylish and hugely varied. They are not governed by subject, origin, scale or our geographical location. The company tries to show the same production whether it be in the smallest village hall or the largest theatre.³⁵⁷

Although it does frequently take its productions to small venues with limited facilities, then, it by no means does so exclusively. Indeed, as we shall see there is a necessity for the company to frequently visit the central belt in order to get the critical reviews it needs to raise its profile for funders and audiences alike. A random sample of tours which I have analysed show that the highest concentration of Mull Theatre performances on tour is in the south west of Scotland around Dumfries, in Argyll and Bute where the Isle of Mull is located, and in the north east, where NEAT operates.³⁵⁸ This organisation has improved the amount of support promoters and practitioners get, making it more accessible to tour this region.

One interviewee I spoke to expressed a sense of pride in Druimfin because finally, 'the people on the island can see the productions as they were meant to

³⁵⁶ Interview with Participant Z (30/7/10)

³⁵⁷ Mull Theatre, 'Business Plan 2011-2013,' (2010) p.1, unpublished document

³⁵⁸ The productions were selected due to the availability of information on their tour dates in the archive and provide a sample of tours from both the Hesketh era and McCrone's time at the helm. The productions were, *The Owl and the Pussycat* (Spring 1979), *Consider the Lilies* and *The Woodturner* (a joint tour from May to June 1999), *Cyprus* (Spring 2007), *Brightwater* (Autumn 2007), *Katie Morag* (Spring 2008), *Accidental Death of an Accordionist* (July to September 2008), *Macbeth* (Autumn 2008), *Island Nights' Entertainment* (Summer 2009), *Laurel and Hardy* (Spring 2010) and *The Weir* (Autumn 2010).

be.³⁵⁹ This argument stems from the fact that Mull Theatre usually tours at least two versions of its sets - a full and reduced version - which are then selected according to the space available in each venue. For *Cyprus* (2007), however, the set builders had to construct two entirely different sets as, following the opening at Mull Little Theatre as the production moved to the main stage in the Citizens' Theatre (Glasgow) which is much larger in width, depth and height than the theatre in Dervaig. The different sizes in these venues would mean that the design would have been dwarfed. It has also been noted by a number of practitioners I have spoken to during the course of this research that rural touring frequently involves sawing off parts of the set in order to ensure that it fits in to certain spaces. Even with Mull Theatre's knowledge of the venues it is visiting this is still a very realistic outcome for the majority of its shows.

There are clearly practical implications in Mull Theatre's decision to have its own space within which to create its productions, rehearse them and stage them including the ability to schedule rehearsal times. If the company was to use the Aros Hall, as previously suggested by Participant AD, it would be in competition with a variety of other groups and activities and so organising full day rehearsals would be essentially problematic. This is, after all, one of the key reasons that the company wanted to relocate in the first place. Nonetheless, by observing that a larger, better equipped venue will result in audiences being able to see the shows as they were intended, Participant W has, perhaps unintentionally, prioritised the more traditional experience as the better one: Mull Theatre shows are designed to be seen in conventional spaces over the (non-) performance spaces they also frequent.

It is not just Mull Theatre which foregrounds the urban, traditional experience. Within contemporary Scottish theatre there is an emphasis from the policy makers on increasing the accessibility to the arts in rural areas as it has been previously overlooked. Creative Scotland's Corporate Plan, for example, acknowledges that, 'although our work touches the entire geography of Scotland

³⁵⁹ Interview with Participant W (2/9/10)

there are places which have yet to realise their full potential.’³⁶⁰ As a result increasing accessibility to the arts is one of the central focuses of the recently developed funding body. Moreover, in the last decade, Local Capital Grants Scheme funded by the National Lottery awarded a total of £1.16 million to 31 village halls for their improvement.³⁶¹ Although these improvements were not necessarily directly related to performances, facilities such as central heating, curtains and good toilets are important at improving the comfort of these venues and making them more appealing for spectators and companies alike.

Nonetheless, there remains a highly centralised focus in Scotland with the populated central belt being placed above the rural Highlands and Islands in terms of notions of quality of performance, whether that be conscious or not. Both NTS and Mull Theatre seem to prioritise the experience of central belt audiences as being ‘better’. With NTS this is apparent through its ‘touring capsule’ and its apparent attempt to impose a fixed experience on the audience, for the duration of the show at least.³⁶² For Mull Theatre it is visible not just through some of its set designs but also through its own venue and its rejection of building a venue which was in keeping with the village halls on the touring circuit.

Through the construction of its own purpose-built performance and production centre, Mull Theatre, under the direction of Alasdair McCrone, has tried to break away from the parochial connotations previously held in association with the Little Theatre. In removing the word ‘little’ from the company’s name in 1997, McCrone believed that these associations would be deleted. Through this research project it has become apparent that the surprise directed towards the ability of this company to produce such a high volume of enjoyable productions stems from a combination of factors including its name,

³⁶⁰ Creative Scotland, *Investing in Scotland’s Creative Future: Corporate Plan 2011-2014* (Edinburgh: Creative Scotland, 2011) p.10

³⁶¹ Steven Hope and Simon Anderson and Becki Sawyer, *The Quality of Services in Rural Scotland*, (Edinburgh: The Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, 2000) p.49

³⁶² The touring capsule contains staging, a lighting rig and raked seating which can, in theory, be placed into any venue and will contribute to creating as uniform a production as possible across the different spaces.

its building and its geographical location. By being firmly rooted on an island it has led to certain expectations developing amongst both islanders and outsiders.

One participant, for instance, expressed annoyance at what they understand to be an increased commercialisation of the company since its relocation in 2008. They commented that attendees are now expected to leave credit card details when reserving seats by telephone whereas previously a name would have sufficed: 'you'd expect it from a city theatre but on an island? That's not how we do things round here. It separates them from us.'³⁶³ Patricia Haworth who worked at Mull Theatre for a number of years, in contrast, has acknowledged that this new booking system is necessary due to the larger seating capacity: 'we need to make sure the seats will be paid for if people don't turn up, especially with more group bookings now.'³⁶⁴

During the Mull Theatre Board development day at Druimfin in 2010 it was observed that in the last decade there had been a move from 'amateur(ish) to increased professionalisation' within Mull Theatre.³⁶⁵ Thus, perhaps the new ticket system is simply a welcome sign of increased professionalisation. Nonetheless, Participant B's discontentment suggests that this is not appropriate behaviour for an island theatre; different rules apply according to where the building is located.

Ideology and practicalities are clearly intertwined within the creation of meaning within Druimfin; actively contributing to a construction of Mull Little Theatre's and Druimfin's identity, both realised and perceived. Knowles' incorporation of materialist semiotics into his study of the 'material stage,' highlights this as he evaluates the physical frameworks of funding, policy and architecture and their role in producing the cultural output of a society.³⁶⁶ For the chosen case study of this project, there are a number of framing factors but two of the key ones are its location on an island and the layering of associations

³⁶³ Interview with Participant B (28/2/10)

³⁶⁴ Interview with Patricia Haworth (29/10/09)

³⁶⁵ Mull Theatre Board Development Day (October 2010)

³⁶⁶ Knowles, *Reading the Material Stage*, throughout

which have developed as a result of various experiences and memories of the Little Theatre.

In its previous building, Mull Theatre company was largely resident on the island. In its new building it is far more absent. It is true that the number of Mull Theatre's own shows which take place on Mull has dropped dramatically in the last three seasons following the move but that is not to say that it is entirely missing. In 2010 it performed 58 shows but, due to limited finances, the number of shows being performed at Druimfin dropped to 31 in 2011 with only two performances in the busy tourist month of August.³⁶⁷ Nonetheless the number of visiting performances has increased and, when we consider potential audience numbers on the island it is understandable that as the capacity increases, the required number of performances will decrease.

In the 2001 census, Wick in Caithness (where Lyth Arts Centre is located) had a recorded population of 7,333, whilst the surrounding population for Rothesay Pavilion on the Isle of Bute was recorded as 5,017.³⁶⁸ In comparison, Mull had a recorded population of a little over 2,000. Perhaps this goes some way to suggesting why the funders were so reluctant to produce a theatre here: there is a seeming lack of a permanent audience. Indeed, once spectators have seen a show they are unlikely to see it again. Thus, with a seating capacity of twice the size of the previous venue it would make sense that Mull Theatre would now require half the number of performances. A Hi-Arts report into audience numbers has observed that the tourist market makes up a large percentage of attendance in rural venues.³⁶⁹ This has been echoed by one interviewee who has mentioned that if Mull Theatre relied solely on local patrons, it 'definitely wouldn't be here anymore.'³⁷⁰

Mull Theatre's relationship to the island on which it is located is clearly a complex one: the islanders both see it as 'their' theatre but also one which is

³⁶⁷ 'What's On?' Mull Theatre website: <http://www.mulltheatre.com> [last accessed 12/11/11]

³⁶⁸ Statistics taken from the 2001 Scottish Census: <http://www.scroll.gov.uk> [last accessed 15/4/11]

³⁶⁹ Sian Jamieson, *Hi-Arts Audience Development Survey 2010: June 2010 Report* (Inverness: Hi-Arts, 2010)

³⁷⁰ Interview with Participant F (2/3/10)

there to serve the incoming visitors. In addition to this, the dual identity of touring with a permanent rehearsal and performance space creates a potential conflict between the perceived roles and responsibilities of both the company and the building. Unlike the Citizens' Theatre in Glasgow, for instance, which has a specific geographical remit - to provide accessible theatre to those living in the surrounding Gorbals area - Mull Theatre and its building do not have such an obvious remit.³⁷¹ Furthermore, it appears that in many ways the two roles are in conflict: whilst Druimfin is a permanent structure with an arguable geographical responsibility, Mull Theatre is required to tour and to take theatre outwith the area in which is made, and the island on which it is based.

The Isle of Mull falls within the council boundaries of Argyll and Bute which encompasses a wide variety of islands as well as part of the mainland on the west coast of Scotland. As the map below illustrates, Argyll and Bute is not an easy region to navigate due to the various islands, lochs and inlets of water across it. Moreover it is very sparsely populated with only two percent of the Scottish population recorded as living there in the 2001 census in comparison to four percent in the Highlands and 11 percent in Glasgow City.³⁷² Due to its geographical diversity and its small population, this region is often overlooked by touring theatre companies. As McCrone has noted, while Mull Theatre frequently tours regularly to 38 venues in Argyll and Bute, many other companies only think that there are about three or four.³⁷³ With this in mind, the role of Mull Theatre as a touring company becomes hugely significant in catering for an area which is so often overlooked by others.

³⁷¹ The Citizens' Theatre aims and objectives can be largely seen its name but are also highlighted by the issuing of 'The Gorbals Discount Card' which offers discounted ticket prices to anyone with a G5 postcode. http://citz.co.uk/about/the_gorbals_card [last accessed 3/2/11]

³⁷² Statistics taken from the 2001 Scottish Census: <http://www.scroll.gov.uk>

³⁷³ Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (12/4/10)

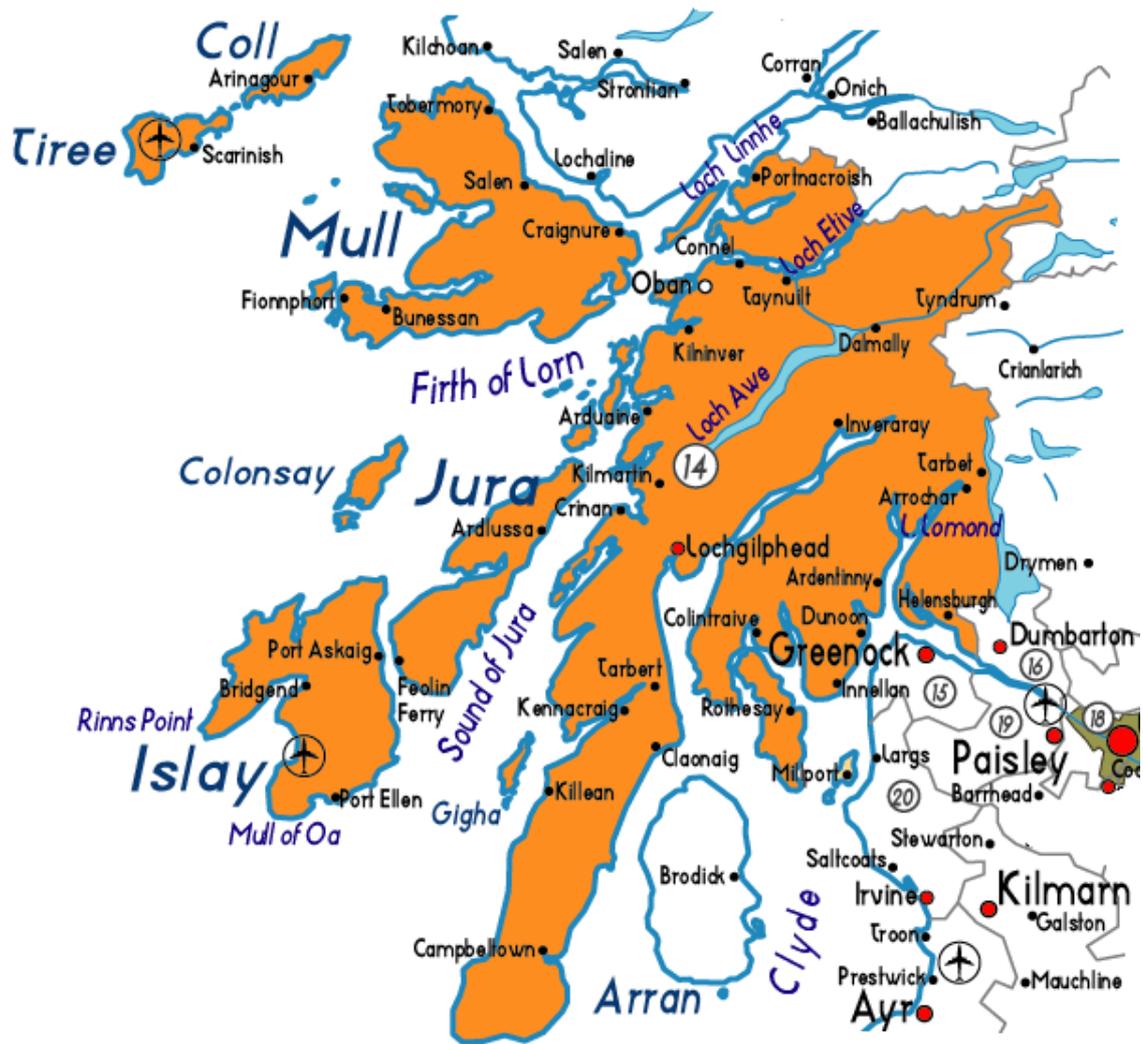


Figure 48 - Argyll and Bute
(copyright GEOATLAS®.com)

There are also very few other arts companies based in this region resulting in people feeling a real sense of pride towards Mull Theatre: ‘people feel proud that there’s a theatre company from Argyll...Their heart is in Argyll.’³⁷⁴ Stray Theatre Company, also based in Argyll and Bute, disbanded at the turn of the century and the only other notable company operating in this region now is Ballet West, operating in Taynuilt. Unfortunately, whilst many people recognise Ballet West as an excellent dance school few realise that it has also has a touring company which frequently takes productions across Scotland and overseas.³⁷⁵ As a result, the profile of the artistic output within this area is often overlooked. With so few companies being based in this region and with few

³⁷⁴ Interview with Participant AB (15/3/11)

³⁷⁵ Interview with Participant AB (15/3/11)

others frequently touring to the area, Mull Theatre's role as a touring company in Argyll and Bute can be seen as one of some importance.

When applying for funding for the creation of the new venue, McCrone proposed that it would eventually become a centre for the promotion of all the arts. He had hoped there would be projector installed so that Druimfin could show films and perhaps double as an almost cinema on the island. In addition to this the size of the performance area would mean that Druimfin would also be able to host music and dance events, not just theatre. There are other venues on the island which can host music and theatre events. An Tobar frequently stages live folk music gigs whilst KT Tunstall (amongst others) has performed at the Aros Hall. Nonetheless, these venues are either not formally equipped for such events or they do not have the capacity that McCrone envisaged for his new venue. In addition to this, within Argyll and Bute there is a lack of venues which have a bona fide dance space. Participant AB noted that Ballet West has sometimes used the Corran Halls but that problems with sight lines in this space make it less than perfect.³⁷⁶ Druimfin does appear to be filling a gap here, then, but its island location means that it cannot be relied upon as the sole dance space in the Argyll and Bute. With the added cost of ferry travel coupled with there being no late-night ferries off the island, Mull becomes unsuitable as the 'hub' McCrone had anticipated.

Audiences will frequently travel in a 25 mile radius, within Argyll and Bute, to see certain theatre productions and companies, Mull Theatre included.³⁷⁷ There was, for instance, a waiting list to see Mull Theatre's *The Accidental Death of an Accordionist* (2008) with so many people aware of Mull Theatre's reputation of providing high-quality work. As one participant has noted:

If [the audiences] don't get a fun night out - like with *The Accidental Death of an Accordionist* (that was completely ridiculous!) then they will get an excellent theatrical piece.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Interview with Participant AB (15/3/11)

³⁷⁷ Interview with Participant AB 15/3/11) and Participant Z (30/7/10)

³⁷⁸ Interview with Participant AB (15/3/11)

Mull Theatre's repeated touring and its consistent provision of either a good night out or a more challenging piece of high-quality theatre has meant that it has a loyal following in almost every place it frequently tours to. This was evident through the large number of questionnaires I received back on tour with *Laurel and Hardy*. Not only did the majority of rural audiences write that they had been to see at least one Mull Theatre production before but, moreover, they were also able to name almost all of them accurately. A notable exception was *Brightwater* (2007) which was repeatedly referred to as 'Ring of Brightwater' after the Gavin Maxwell book on which it was based.³⁷⁹ The similarity between the two names is undeniable though and shows that the respondents were familiar with the piece and that all were referring to the same tour. Audiences in urban venues, however, were largely unable to name Mull Theatre productions which they had seen. In addition to this, many listed productions which had perhaps been seen in the venue but were not by the company in question. Although this may be partially attributable to different volumes in the amount of work available to rural and urban audiences, it does also suggest a certain loyalty from the rural patrons.

Mull Theatre as a touring company, then, clearly plays a vital role within the overall theatrical provision of Scotland; as participant AD asserts, through its breadth of programming and frequent tours, the company almost holds 'a monopoly over the rural touring circuit.'³⁸⁰ The idea of its home base as a feasible 'hub,' however, is questionable. One of the ways in which this was to be achieved was through the promotion of Druimfin as a retreat for companies and individuals wanting to develop their own work. The idea was that, in exchange for a performance and perhaps some workshops, companies would be able to hire out Druimfin and use it as a tranquil rehearsal venue, away from the hustle and bustle of the city.³⁸¹

To date, however, the information on how to hire Druimfin is still listed as 'to come' and it seems that the building cannot really be hired out until adequate

³⁷⁹ Mull Theatre website: http://www.mulltheatre.com/archive_brightwatertour.htm [last accessed 15/11/11]

³⁸⁰ Interview with Participant AD (6/4/12)

³⁸¹ Interview with Alasdair McCrone (7/7/10)

accommodation can be provided.³⁸² The plan is to move the Mull Theatre offices into Druimfin and to convert the house currently being used into actors' accommodation. Until this is finalised, the added cost for companies travelling to and staying on the island in order to produce work makes it unfeasible for many and was listed as one of the many reasons why Druimfin was described as having 'potentially irreconcilable problems' from the outset, by one participant.³⁸³ Moving the offices of the core staff is wholly dependent on sourcing additional funding which, due to the current economic climate, may be difficult for the company. Current building regulations state that if the offices are to be located on the first floor of the building then a lift must be put in alongside the stairs; otherwise it would not meet its obligations as an employer with equal opportunities for those with disabilities.³⁸⁴ Whilst the company might be able to afford the stairs, lifts are far more expensive and so the money needs to be sourced from elsewhere.³⁸⁵

In one of the interviews I conducted for this project it was noted that Argyll and Bute does need a creative centre:

one centre that covers all the arts, somewhere in the mull. It could be Oban if redeveloped or perhaps Lochgilphead...the Pavilion could be something but I've got a question about what that will be. Druimfin can't be it though. It is, after all, on an island.³⁸⁶

The idea is that there should be one building which can showcase all of the arts, one which provides a point of focus across the area and, more importantly, one which can increase participation and accessibility to the arts. The Scottish Arts Council Audience Strategy of 2004 saw touring theatre as the main way of achieving this. As such it stated that one of its central focuses would be to, 'support relationships between organisations and specified geographical

³⁸² Mull Theatre website: http://www.mulltheatre.com/centre_hiring.htm [last accessed 1/10/11]

³⁸³ Interview with Participant AC (6/4/11)

³⁸⁴ Interview with Moray Royles (30/3/10)

³⁸⁵ Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (3/3/09)

³⁸⁶ Interview with Participant AB (15/3/11)

areas.³⁸⁷ This goes some way to suggesting why the funding emphasis for Mull Theatre remained on it being a touring company and not as a building-based theatre company. The practicalities of locating suitable rehearsal spaces were recognised and so the idea of a 'production centre' was created.

In many ways Eden Court in Inverness is the Highlands' answer to this artistic centre. Within its walls, attendees will find a café, a restaurant, workshops and outreach classes, a cinema and two theatre auditoriums. It is, therefore, not just a venue in which a variety of productions and art forms can be performed but, by providing a number of other reasons for which someone might be entering the building - eating and drinking, for instance - it may serve to break down some of the perceived elitism of theatre as an art form. Hutchison has suggested that theatre remains a minority art form because of the associations of high culture and exclusivity which are so embedded within the building:³⁸⁸ associations which practitioners such as John McGrath and Joan Littlewood have actively sought to fight against. Ultimately, this notion of a truly multi-purpose building which becomes a centre for the arts and leisure is how McCrone would like his new production centre to be seen.

There is, however, one key difference between Eden Court and Druimfin: the geographical location. Much more money was given to the redevelopment of Eden Court because it is in many ways in the geographical heart of the highlands, both in terms of transport links and its population numbers. Situated in the most populated town, it is easily accessible for many people living in the surrounding rural areas. Druimfin, on the other hand, is located on an island which brings with it undeniable transport issues.³⁸⁹

In trying to move away from the often parochial connotations which McCrone saw as being attached to the word 'little', he may have been a little too ambitious in regards to what he thought the new venue would be able to offer.

³⁸⁷ Scottish Arts Council, *Audience Development Strategy: 2004-7* (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 2004) p.4

³⁸⁸ David Hutchison, *The Modern Scottish Theatre* (Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1977) p.109

³⁸⁹ In an unpublished study in to culture in the Hebridean Islands, limited transport was overwhelmingly viewed as the key obstacle to developing closer links between the islands and the mainland. Deirdre MacMahon, *Nah Eileanaich Ealanta - Creative Islands: Culture and Creativity in the Hebrides: a research study* (2002) p.8

This is not to say that the building of Druimfin has been completely negative. On the contrary, the provision of a permanent rehearsal and set-building space has been invaluable to the company based there and has enabled a wider range of visiting companies and productions to visit the island, thus benefitting the local community in a myriad of ways.³⁹⁰ In addition to this, the creation of a new building may bring with it increased recognition for the company which will benefit not only Mull Theatre and the island but Argyll and Bute more generally. The increase of touring companies now visiting Druimfin may also benefit the wider area as they are more likely to present other nights in venues across Argyll and Bute; a region which was previously neglected by many arts organisations.³⁹¹

A research project conducted into audience attendance numbers in rural Scotland demonstrates that they were most consistent in Argyll and Bute - as opposed to other council regions - across a couple of years.³⁹² This may be, at least in part, due to Mull Theatre's regular provision of live performances to the halls and venues licensed for public performances throughout the area. Whilst the company plays a central part in this creative provision, then, it seems as though the building cannot fulfil this role to the same extent due to its geographical location on the periphery of the country.

Mull Theatre as Promoter

According to the 2001 Scottish Census, Argyll and Bute had 25 inhabited islands which is more than any other local authority; Orkney is the next largest with 19. In addition to this it has been recorded as being the second largest local authority area, after Highland, but has the third sparsest population.³⁹³ This goes some way to highlighting the practical implications of travelling round

³⁹⁰ After a performance of *Pierrot Lunaire* by the Hebrides Ensemble in 2010 I was speaking to one attendee who had driven up from Bunnessan in the south of the island. Although she had not been living on Mull for that long she stated that she had been over the moon to see this show advertised as it suited her artistic preferences. Had it only been traditional, text based productions being staged in the show she said she would have been unlikely to journey up to the venue.

³⁹¹ Interview with Participant AB (15/3/11)

³⁹² Jamieson, 'Hi-Arts Audience Development Survey,' p.19

³⁹³ An overview to the geography and demographics of the region can be found on the Argyll and Bute website: <http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/info/statistics/quick-facts-and-figures-about-argyll-and-bute> [last accessed 2/8/11]

this region, particularly as 45 percent of the resident population is classed as living in 'remote rural' areas with seven percent in 'accessible rural' areas. With many disparate communities, including those who live on the islands, it is clear that McCrone's notion of developing Druimfin into a physical 'hub' for the area is problematic. Not only are there obvious difficulties in trying to create one venue to serve the entire region but, moreover, Druimfin's location on an island itself would surely take it out of the running as a large number of people would be unable to visit, particularly if they were from a different island themselves. Mull Theatre does, however, have an important role to play within the wider rural touring infrastructure of Scotland.

Touring theatre forms an essential part of the contemporary Scottish theatre landscape, as has previously been mentioned. The majority of the nation's population is focused on the central belt with the remainder being scattered across a topographically diverse landscape. As Donald Dewar, then First Minister, noted:

rural Scotland is an important and integral part of Scotland, accounting for nearly 90 percent of our land, and 30 percent of our people. It makes an important contribution to Scotland's economic prosperity, with 27 percent of employment being in rural areas.³⁹⁴

The disparity between the two percentages of the land area classed as rural and the number of inhabitants highlights the largely scattered nature of Scotland's population. As a result it becomes clear that a strong touring theatre infrastructure is required if accessibility to the arts is to be sustained throughout the country.

There is a danger when referring to rural areas, however, of assuming a degree of homogeneity across the regions. Although there are certain experiences which are shared across rural areas - similar industries contributing to the local economy and increased travel costs, for instance - there are also a number of differences. Each region has its own nuances and topography and

³⁹⁴ Donald Dewar, 'Foreword,' *Rural Scotland: A New Approach* (Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2000)

these will bring with them requirements which are specific to that locale: the experience of living in rural Scotland for someone living in the Scottish Borders will be different to that of someone living in Shetland. This was reinforced during a networking day for volunteer promoters where each discussed some of the issues specific to their community and area. Although they all lived in areas classed as 'rural,' as the day progressed it became apparent that within this term there are a multitude of places, each with their own characteristics and identities: whilst some lived in a village with a clear centre, for instance, others lived in place with a far more scattered population and thus had different practicalities to negotiate. As a result, when people tried to offer solutions to often shared problems, others would assert that, 'that won't work for my audience!'³⁹⁵ Thus, whilst there are trends which echo across the national touring circuit it becomes understandable that regional variations will have emerged in response to the specific needs of an area.

Throughout Scotland, the rural touring network is heavily reliant on individual promoters, often working on a voluntary basis. This role can be held by people working in a range of capacities including regional arts officers and managers and programmers of established arts venues.³⁹⁶ However, due to the large prominence of (non-) performance venues in rural Scotland the most prevalent type of promoter is the volunteer who is working for a specific hall or venue either on their own or with the support of a wider committee. Indeed, as one arts consultant cited in Hamilton and Scullion's report asserts, they:

are an astonishing breed of folk and the reason the touring exists is because of these local promoters and if you did not have these people it would just not be here.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ NEAT Networking Day, Haddo House, near Ellon (25/9/10)

³⁹⁶ During the course of this research project I spoke to some arts officers, all of whom referred to programming as an important part of what they do. Not all wished to be named in this thesis and so for ethical purposes their names and code numbers cannot be used here as the latter might provide a means by which to identify them.

³⁹⁷ Hamilton and Scullion, *The Same but Different*, p. 44

These promoters are responsible for selecting and booking performances for their venue and facilitating access to the venue and thus they play an integral role in enabling touring companies to visit often rural communities.

In a study conducted into rural arts touring in England and Wales, François Matarasso and his additional researchers have identified that the majority of these promoters were members of the village hall committee and so were not working in isolation but as part of a wider group. In addition to this, it was noted that, ‘they tended to be well settled in the village, with most having lived there for 15 year or more.’³⁹⁸ This is supported by my own research which has highlighted that one of the key reasons that local promoters assume this role is to, ‘develop community ties.’³⁹⁹ Not only do promoters want to provide access to live performances within a local setting but, moreover, there is a sense that they have a pride in their community and want to strengthen the sense of belonging by providing events and activities which will help to bring people together.

With the emphasis on the development of community spirit and of the event within a wider social context, it becomes understandable that a number of these individuals will not have prior experience within the programming and staging of live performances. Matarasso’s study observes that the majority:

[tend] to have professional backgrounds, notably in teaching, but there were promoters working in manual and semi-skilled jobs, in farming and in the arts, and people who had not had a formal career.⁴⁰⁰

Regional arts officers and professional promoters who are attached to more conventional venues are often recruited on the grounds of skills and prior experience. In the case of rural promoters, however, it appears that they will usually volunteer due to an interest in the community and its local venue.

³⁹⁸ François Matarasso, *Only Connect: Arts Touring and Rural Communities: A Comedia Report for the National Rural Touring Forum 2004* (Stroud: Comedia, 2004) p.41

³⁹⁹ This was the reason posited by one volunteer promoter during the NEAT Networking Day and was met with a chorus of agreement from the other attendees. Haddo House, near Ellon (25/9/10)

⁴⁰⁰ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, p.41

This was again supported through my own observations at a networking day held for rural promoters operating in the north east of Scotland. One of the activities was a facilitated discussion between the attendees and a visiting company which was touring the north east of Scotland from England; Angel Exit Theatre Company. Through this it became evident that although the promoters have ownership of their building, their potential lack of technical knowledge can cause some tension with the cast and crew. As one promoter confirmed, ‘we don’t understand your world and to have a lot of creative people turning up can be quite intimidating.’⁴⁰¹ In addition to this, another noted that, ‘receiving all those technical specifications - it can be very daunting!’ The terminology used within these can be confusing for someone who is not familiar with the requirements of staging live, professional performances and so there was a general consensus that unless the company’s requirements are outlined in ‘layman’s terms’ they can often be unclear.⁴⁰²

Many of the promoters are operating outside of their comfort zone and are engaging with activities and people they might not have done otherwise. In a conventional, purpose-built theatre the personnel dealing with touring productions will have certain levels of experience and so will, in many cases, find it easier to communicate. It is not just discrepancies in skills or linguistics which can create a tension between the promoter and crew, however. There are also practical differences between expectations and needs of a village hall which is being used to house a performance and a building which was designed primarily for this purpose.

During the *Laurel and Hardy* tour it became evident that there were few discussions between the Mull Theatre crew and the established performance spaces about the use of a smoke machine during the final scene when the crew arrived to fit up in the space. It is likely that the majority of the conversations regarding the specific requirements of the production had already been held, prior to the arrival of the tour vans, but it may also highlight the normality of the request. A smoke machine is not an unusual feature and most professional theatre technicians will have experience of using them on stage. However, in

⁴⁰¹ NEAT Networking Day, Haddo House, near Ellon (25/9/10)

⁴⁰² NEAT Networking Day, Haddo House, near Ellon (25/9/10)

the (non-) performance venues used on the tour the smoke machine was often a source of contention between the crew and the promoter. At Crathes Village Hall, for example, the promoter explicitly mentioned discomfort at the use of a smoke machine because in order to use it the smoke alarms in the venue would have to be switched off and this would void the insurance.⁴⁰³ The anxiety at managing the often conflicting requirements of a performance with the day-to-day running of the building was also reiterated at the NEAT networking day. During one of the discussions a promoter commented that whilst they understood the value of raked seating for the spectators they were concerned about how the installation of this might impact on the annual insurance premium. Many of the village halls operate on a very tight budget and so these financial considerations are very real for the management committee in charge.

With potentially differing priorities to the crew and a lack of experience in staging live performances it is understandable that volunteer promoters may sometimes feel isolated and out of their depth. When asked what they think the most difficult thing about their role is, the majority of promoters have articulated that it is managing the multifarious elements which go into booking and advertising a performance. Indeed while one person stated that, 'the most difficult thing is time and a lack of it,' another confirmed that the main challenge is 'juggling and plate-spinning.'⁴⁰⁴ In addition to the practicalities of playing host to a touring company, the promoter also has a certain amount of social pressures laid on them in terms of ensuring that the audience is satisfied with the performance. Within the village hall setting it is the management committee's responsibility to ensure as many people as possible use the space and so they cannot risk having a bad performance which will put people off. It has been noted that within a rural setting people tend to be 'cash poor and time poor' and so the pool of potential spectators does not even extend to the entire geographical community.⁴⁰⁵

Although there is often a sense of pride regarding the local halls, it should be noted that theatre is an interest of the minority and so although many want to

⁴⁰³ Mull Theatre production of *Laurel and Hardy*, Crathes Village Hall (24/4/10)

⁴⁰⁴ NEAT Networking Day, Haddo House, near Ellon (25/9/10)

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with Participant AF (4/8/10)

increase access to the arts, not everyone wants to access them. Indeed, throughout the *Laurel and Hardy* tour it became evident that the promoters were familiar with many of the spectators and that this went deeper than them living in the same locale. This was furthered through the questionnaire returns where the majority of rural, village hall attendees stated that they had seen previously seen a Mull Theatre production and that frequently the ones listed were ones which had been performed in that venue. This suggests that there were few new audience members and that, instead, those watching the show were regular attendees of the theatre programming at that hall; however regular that programming may be.⁴⁰⁶ One promoter spoken to during the course of this research stated that for them the greatest challenge is, 'being confident about what I'm selling and whether it will live up to people's expectations.'⁴⁰⁷

Recommendations are therefore very important for promoters and at the start of the AGM for the PAN Autumn Forum it was the first question which was put to the promoters in attendance: 'what was the best and worst thing you have seen this year?'⁴⁰⁸ While a poorly received production in a more conventional performance space might be absorbed by the wider programming, in the case of the village halls it plays a much more significant role. Matarasso highlights this idea when he argues that:

Promoters influence the programming as much as the touring schemes [...] Established trust may allow a manager to persuade a promoter to take a risk on something different, but bad advice will not be accepted again.⁴⁰⁹

Promoters are not working in isolation, then, but are instead responding to the needs and tastes of their audiences as well as attempting to manage the requirements of the production and company in question. With this in mind, it becomes apparent that various support networks will have developed in rural

⁴⁰⁶ Unlike professional venues which tend to have a regular programme of events throughout the year or during certain months, the programming capacity of village halls will vary according to the amount of money available to it and may result on one or ten performances a year.

⁴⁰⁷ NEAT Networking Day, Haddo House, near Ellon (25/9/10)

⁴⁰⁸ PAN Autumn Forum, various venues, Ullapool (1/10/10 - 3/10/13)

⁴⁰⁹ Matarasso, *Only Connect*, p.43

Scotland in order to develop the capacity of the individual promoters and to strengthen the sector more generally.

One such example is NEAT which operates, as the name would suggest, in the north east of Scotland; primarily around Aberdeenshire and Moray. It has approximately 50 venues on its membership list with about 40 promoters and this number has been steadily growing each year. The organisation operates as an agency for both local promoters and for companies arranging a tour around the area and plays an integral role in increasing the provision of arts throughout the region. Visiting companies who wish to extend a tour to this area are invited to contact NEAT via its website and through this, as well as through its own research and recommendations; it compiles a 'shopping list' for potential shows.⁴¹⁰ This is then circulated to its members along with key guidance to the productions including any special staging requirements, the cost and the recommended audience age. It is then up to the promoters to contact NEAT and confirm how many shows they want to book and this is then centrally arranged through the agency.

There are a large number of benefits in adopting this approach for both the promoters and the companies. The first is that it ensures the tours follow a logical and practical route which is particularly important for companies visiting the area for the first time. In one interview it was noted that some performers from England in particular show their lack of understanding of Scotland's topography when their tours cover hundreds of miles in a day:

They go to the central belt and then go to Skye and then Aberdeen and then come back over to Argyle and then go out to the Highlands and come back into Argyle, you know, because they looked at a map and they think, 'Oh, it's not that far! It's a tiny wee dot; that won't take us long.'⁴¹¹

Touring is very tiring for the cast and crew and so by using the local knowledge provided by NEAT, companies may find it easier to arrange as efficient a tour as possible; particularly when they may not have prior experience of the area. It

⁴¹⁰ NEAT website: www.neatshows.org.uk [last accessed 1/11/11]

⁴¹¹ Interview with Participant AB (15/3/11)

also ensures that a production is not booked in two venues which are too close to each other and might be in competition for audiences.

It is not just the companies which benefit from this approach, however. It has previously been mentioned that there is a certain amount of pressure on the promoters regarding the quality of the performances they bring in to the hall as there is a fear that if the spectators do not like it they will not return. Some, such as William Wilson at Lyth Arts Centre, have a real passion for the arts and so actively seek out companies and productions which they can then book for their own venue.⁴¹² The majority that I encountered, however, volunteer in this role and so may not have the time to visit various places in the UK to identify potential performances. By allowing the staff at NEAT to do some of the leg work it might help to reduce some of the uncertainty with regards to programming and thus develop programming across the region. Indeed if the promoters are able to work on somebody else's recommendations it might encourage them to be more adventurous in their choices.

This idea was strengthened by the final session at the NEAT networking day which was dedicated to a discussion of the coming season's programming including a range of productions which were travelling as part of the Puppet Animation Festival - an annual series of children's arts events.⁴¹³ Although all available performances were discussed there was a clear emphasis placed on those which had already been seen by the Festival staff and which could be vouched for in terms of quality. Through this the attendees were able to ask specific questions about the productions and how they might work in each venue and seemed far more confident to make decisions on booking shows based on someone else's guidance. It is also worth noting that in order to further encourage its promoters, NEAT also offers a guarantee scheme which means that

⁴¹² After Mull Theatre's performance of *Laurel and Hardy* at this venue, the promoter, cast and crew all sat down for a meal together and discussed key developments in contemporary Scottish theatre, alongside some of the trips Wilson had made to Edinburgh and London in order to identify companies and productions which he was interested in booking for his venue.

⁴¹³ For more information on the Puppet Animation Festival please see the website: <http://www.puppetanimationfestival.org/> [last accessed 2/2/11]

should a production be less successful than anticipated the financial impact for the venues is lessened slightly.⁴¹⁴

For NEAT the priorities appear to be the development of programming and audiences within its region. On the west coast of Scotland a different network has developed - The Touring Network (previously the Promoters Arts Network or PAN) - which places the emphasis on the promoters themselves.⁴¹⁵ Catering primarily for the Highlands and Islands, this organisation aims to forge connections between promoters and artists as well as providing support and advice to its members. One of its projects, for instance, is the 'Go See' fund which enables promoters to see performances, works in progresses and other venues in order to strengthen the network and increase the range of programming which is brought into the area.⁴¹⁶ In making a proposal to this programme, it is suggested that the applicant assert how their knowledge following the trip will be used to benefit the Network more widely. Thus we can see that the emphasis is on connecting the disparate region and on producing various resources which can be utilised to share knowledge, experience and support.

During the NEAT networking day one promoter stated that one of the biggest challenges they faced was finding the time, 'to meet other promoters.'⁴¹⁷ This is something which the Touring Network is overtly seeking to address. Whilst both organisations have a core principle to increase the provision of arts within rural Scotland they have both developed distinct processes according to the specific needs of the areas they seek to cover. As Nick Fearne is quoted as saying:

I do not think NEAT could ever work in the Highlands or PAN work over here because, I think, culturally and geographically they are completely different. There is slightly more [of] a kind of get up [and go in the Highlands]. I think there is more of a feeling in the Highlands that, if you

⁴¹⁴ NEAT Networking Day, Haddo House, near Ellon (25/9/10)

⁴¹⁵ <http://www.thetouringnetwork.com/> Until December 2012 this network operated under the name the Promoters' Arts Network (PAN): <http://www.panpromoters.co.uk/>

⁴¹⁶ More information on this programme can be accessed through the website: <http://www.thetouringnetwork.com/portfolio-view/go-see/>

⁴¹⁷ NEAT Networking Day, Haddo House, near Ellon (25/9/10)

live in Skerray and you want anything, you need to get on and organise it yourself. Whereas here [in Moray] there is more an attitude [of] ‘the council should do it.’ I think that is a historical thing.⁴¹⁸

This may be because the north east of Scotland is more accessible and so relying on the council to co-ordinate activities or programmes across the region is easier than it is for the Highlands and Islands. As a result NEAT appears to focus on the programming whilst The Touring Network seeks to equip the members with the necessary skills to programme and promote their own venues.

Although The Touring Network does aim to serve all of the Highlands and Islands, it became apparent during PAN’s AGM in 2010 that those in Argyll and Bute felt like they were being slightly neglected in terms of the provision on offer. During this meeting it was noted that three new Support and Resource Officers had been employed who were operating primarily in the Highlands. These roles were created following a three year pilot project in the Black Isle and Argyll and Bute during which time an individual was charged with supporting the promoters and venues in a specific region. The person installed in Argyll and Bute left before the three years were over and a replacement was never found. In addition to this, the promoters based in that local authority were unable to vote for their favoured production through the Northern Scottish Touring Fund despite Mull Theatre (in collaboration with Wildcat) being shortlisted for the fund.⁴¹⁹

Thus, just as the previous section suggested that Argyll and Bute is frequently overlooked by companies, it also appears as though this notoriously difficult region to travel across has been neglected by policy makers and support networks alike. This gap in provision for Argyll and Bute becomes even larger when we consider that the role of Arts Officer for the region was not re-filled once Eileen Rae left the post in 2011. Since the founding of The Touring

⁴¹⁸ Hamilton and Scullion, *The Same but Different*, p.42

⁴¹⁹ This was a pilot project which was developed in partnership with NEAT, PAN, Highlands and Islands Theatre Network (HITN) and Hi-Arts. It hoped to delegate some control over how funding was spent in rural Scotland. A panel of representatives from the above organisations and Creative Scotland shortlisted six productions of which four would be awarded funding: the successful ones being voted for by the promoters themselves. There was then a second round in Spring 2011 through which a further four companies secured funding to tour.

Network it looks as though this inequality in service provision to different regions is being addressed and there is a specific programme being developed for promoters in Argyll and Bute.⁴²⁰ Nonetheless, this is still showing as ‘in development’ on the Network’s website and so it is not certain what form this will take. Mull Theatre is taking an active role in the creation of this resource and, given its own experiences in touring and promoting it will undoubtedly have a number of valuable insights to offer. Not only does it have an intricate knowledge of the region and the specific opportunities and limitations which exist within it but, moreover, it has also built up a relationship of trust with many of the volunteer promoters and is thus in a prime position to offer support and advice.

Through this we can see that the potential role for Mull Theatre within rural Scottish theatre goes far deeper than just being a successful touring company. Its new building can serve as a beacon to attract various visiting productions and the company itself can be seen as both a promoter and a producer of theatre productions. With this in mind we start to see that the production centre, Druimfin, is more than just a performance space or a rehearsal venue and that perhaps it is giving the company the resources to reinvent itself as a key player in the wider rural Scottish infrastructure.

Conclusion

Mull Theatre’s home, Druimfin, is a building with many inherent tensions. By firmly locating it on the island from which it draws its name there is an underlying assumption held by many of the island attendees that it will be a professional theatre company which caters primarily for the local residents and visitors to the island. However, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, this is not necessarily the reality of the situation. The company is funded primarily to tour the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and to increase accessibility to the arts in areas which may otherwise have limited access to live performances. As a result, the focus of its new venue is on the production rather than the reception of these events. Nonetheless, throughout the

⁴²⁰ The Touring Network website: <http://www.thetouringnetwork.com/portfolio-view/argyll-bute-development-programme/> [last accessed 1/6/13]

development of the space, from the initial concept to its current state, McCrone has had high expectations about what form it would take and the role it would play within Scotland.

As well as providing a comfortable and well equipped venue for outreach events, theatre performances, film screenings and various other cultural events, it is anticipated that Druimfin will eventually become a recognised hub of creative activity within Argyll and Bute. McCrone, for instance, has a plan for the building to be utilised by other companies who are looking for rehearsal space. By converting the current staff offices into liveable accommodation it is hoped that companies and individuals choose to complete residencies on the island where they will be given the space and facilities to produce their own shows in return for either performing or running workshops on the island.⁴²¹ Nonetheless there are practical limitations which stem from its island location and these may prevent the building becoming the hub its artistic director hopes for. With regards to the notion of the venue housing residencies, for instance, a number of people I have spoken to have recognised that this is unlikely to happen until accommodation can be provided for the visiting company. This is because the cost involved in staying on the island for an extended period of time would be prohibitive for most. Similarly transport links to the island in the evening mean that audiences from the mainland would also have to stay on the island if they attended a performance and would thus be required to spend more money than they might in other locations.

Despite this, it is possible that Druimfin could become a centre of sorts for the island and wider geographical location. Argyll and Bute is frequently overlooked by touring companies and so by having a well equipped, medium sized venue with a large stage it may serve to attract more touring shows. Once in the area there is then a sense that these companies may well book nights in more local venues throughout the region in order to make the distance travelled to Druimfin more financially viable.⁴²² Whilst Druimfin may not be a strong candidate for providing a performance venue catering for the local authority as a

⁴²¹ This was discussed during many conversations with McCrone and other core members of staff at Mull Theatre throughout the project.

⁴²² Interview with Participant AB (15/3/11)

whole, what it can be is a symbolic hub which can draw attention to the creative output of Argyll and Bute and to encourage more visiting companies to perform there.

In attracting new visiting companies to the area, Druimfin is also creating a new role for its resident company as a promoter. Not only do Mull Theatre's own shows nearly all get performed at Bunessan Hall as well as at Druimfin but so do a number of visiting productions to the island.⁴²³ These are all booked by Mull Theatre's own core staff which has evidently assumed the role of promoter on the island. There is a potential for this position to be extended further, however. As this chapter has demonstrated, the rural touring infrastructure is largely predicated on volunteer promoters and there is thus a need for support networks to provide information, advice and practical help where necessary. With an apparent lack of tailored support within Argyll and Bute it does appear as though Mull Theatre may be in the best position to provide this. Not only does the company have extensive experience as both a venue manager and a producing company but, moreover, it has a practical understanding of the needs of audiences, promoters and companies within Argyll and Bute specifically.

Although Mull (Little) Theatre has been established as a professional touring company for many years now it is possible that the increased facilities offered by its new home will serve to improve its reputation and profile within the contemporary theatrical landscape. It is already widely regarded and trusted by a number of existing promoters and stakeholders on the mainland as a frequent producer of high-quality theatre. There is a potential, however, for the opportunities afforded by its new venue to also locate it as a central component of the touring infrastructure more generally. Thus, while there are clear tensions within the building there are also a number of opportunities which have yet to be fully realised.

⁴²³ Bunessan Hall is a village hall in the south of the island which attendees from Fionnophort and Pennyghael will find more accessible than completing the 50 minute drive up the east coast of the island to Druimfin.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion

Mull (Little) Theatre has been referred to as an orchid due to its resilience and ability to survive in the face of adversity.⁴²⁴ Since its founding as ‘the Thursday Theatre’ in 1966, the company has persistently re-adapted itself to ensure that the venue has never ‘gone dark.’ Despite operating during two economic recessions and the general hardships experienced through island living, the company and its venues have continued to play an important role for theatre on the island as well as in rural Scottish theatre more generally. Nonetheless, despite this and the fact that various practitioners and stakeholders have highlighted the importance of the company has been largely overlooked by scholars.⁴²⁵ Certainly it has been left out of the three central texts of Scottish theatre history: Findlay’s edited collection, *The History of Scottish Theatre*, Stevenson and Wallace’s collated essays in, *Scottish Theatre Since the Seventies* and Hutchison’s, *The Modern Scottish Theatre*.⁴²⁶ This thesis has attempted to re-affirm its significance and to write it into the main narrative of Scottish theatre.

Mull Theatre currently occupies a unique position in Scottish theatre in that it is the only professional touring theatre company with its own permanent rehearsal and performance space. In addition to this, neither of its buildings - past or present - fit into the prototypical image of a theatre. As a result, an exploration of the company and buildings can be used to contribute to existing debates around space, place and theatre. The immediate relationship that one has with the space of performance is often largely subconscious. Very few of the questionnaire respondents on the *Laurel and Hardy* tour, for instance, had filled out the extra comments section in which they could note their observations regarding the space of performance. It should be noted here that Christopher Olsen noticed a similar trend in his own audience analysis studies. He claims that, ‘frequently people do not give opinions because they fear their

⁴²⁴ Interview with David Pitman (18/8/09)

⁴²⁵ Throughout this thesis a number of stakeholders have spoken about Mull (Little) Theatre in very positive terms and have asserted its continuing significance within Scotland. Due to ethical reasons specific interviews cannot be cited here, however, as not all of the participants wished to be named.

⁴²⁶ Please refer to the bibliography for the full references

answers might be considered embarrassing or unreasonable.’⁴²⁷ Nonetheless, I would suggest that it is also indicative of the fact that few of the spectators who filled out the questionnaire were actively considering the space during the performance. Instead, their attention was focused on what was happening on stage.

Similarly, Fisher has asserted that we do not go to the theatre because ‘we like the building.’⁴²⁸ In the case of Mull Little Theatre, however, it appears as though the building itself was vital in underpinning people’s relationships to the company. When speaking with participants about their memories of the Little Theatre, a number only mentioned specific plays in order to illustrate their discussions of the building itself.⁴²⁹ This resonates with Carlson’s assertion that the performance itself ‘is only part of the total experience of attending the theatre and making sense of what happens when we undergo such an experience.’⁴³⁰ Certainly, many of the people I spoke to before performances at Druimfin and whilst on tour mentioned the Little Theatre with fondness and offered unprompted anecdotes relating to the venue.

Despite this, there was not as much resentment towards the move into new premises that one might suppose. The main points of contention have been the as-of-yet unfinished state of the new building and the lack of a regular summer season. Nonetheless, as Elizabeth Mclver and Barbara Weir suggested, ‘we know it’s not [Mull Theatre’s] fault. It’s the funders’ choice.’⁴³¹ Although many of the attendees had anticipated the move would result in them benefitting from a better equipped performance space than the Little Theatre had previously offered, the Scottish Arts Council thought differently. In providing a grant for the construction of a production centre, it recognised a need for Mull Theatre to have its own rehearsal space and workshop but did not agree that a performance

⁴²⁷ Christopher Olsen, ‘Theatre Audience Survey: Towards a Semiotic Approach,’ *New Theatre Quarterly* 18(02), p.264

⁴²⁸ Mark Fisher, ‘From Traverse to Tramway,’ in Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace (eds.), *Scottish Theatre Since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996) p.50

⁴²⁹ Such participants include Barbara Weir and Elizabeth Mclver (24/2/09), David Pitman (18/8/09), Participant AG (7/2/09), Zelda Sawyer (6/3/10) and Gordon Cooper (30/4/10)

⁴³⁰ Marvin Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) p.41

⁴³¹ Interview with Elizabeth Mclver and Barbara Weir (24/2/09)

venue was necessary. Through discussions with McCrone and the architect, however, it has become apparent the company itself does envisage Druimfin as being a performance venue as much as a rehearsal space. As such, the initial phase of construction has been designed to provide the opportunity to develop this side of the building as more money becomes available.⁴³² With this in mind, it becomes apparent that there are a number of tensions inherent within the often conflicting understandings of this company, its building and its wider role and these have become embedded within the bricks and mortar of the new venue.

By trying to create a 'one size fits all' approach to the building and its design, Druimfin almost failed to meet any of its intended aims in full; particularly in its first year. Although logically it makes sense for the set construction to take place as close to the rehearsal room as possible, the lack of sound-proofing within the building means that when any power tools are being used the cast have to vacate the building or they cannot hear each other's lines. During rehearsals for *Laurel and Hardy*, personal belongings were also frequently covered with a thin layer of sawdust as a result of the building work taking place next door.

Nonetheless, through discussions with various attendees, it has become evident that many were expecting Druimfin to open its doors as a fully equipped, purpose-built performance space: they were anticipating the desired end-point for the building and not phased periods of development. As a result of this apparent disappointment, many have focused primarily on the elements which they felt had been lost in the move and not on those which they felt had been gained.⁴³³ In addition, some have even questioned whether the move was necessary at all.⁴³⁴ As a result of the continuing attachment which many still feel towards the previous small venue, there is an underlying notion for some island attendees that if the new venue is not as good as the old, why did the company feel the need to change in the first place?

⁴³² Interview with Moray Royles (30/3/10)

⁴³³ This was a recurring theme throughout the interviews with island attendees.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Participant Z (30/7/10)

The practicalities of rural touring suggest that the construction of a new building on the island was warranted. Although Mull Theatre was able to operate out of the Little Theatre, various staff members and practitioners have noted that the lack of rehearsal space and facilities for building sets was a crucial motivation behind the 2008 relocation. With few other suitable venues available on the island for these purposes it is understandable that the company would require a building - designed for its own specific purposes - which would enable it to continue developing into the 'centre of artistic excellence' which McCrone envisages.⁴³⁵ Nonetheless, criticism has been levelled at the company for apparently having ideas above its station and for perhaps spreading itself too thin and, as a result, neglecting the island on which it is based.⁴³⁶

This has largely been felt because Druimfin is not experienced with the same affection as its predecessor and, moreover, because the summer season which has been a central part of the company's annual programming for so long is now no more. The relocation, the loss of regular performances on the island and the perceived increased professionalisation of the company have all happened simultaneously and led some to feel that the company is trying to move away from its island roots.⁴³⁷ Although the emphasis from attendees during the interviews has largely been on the negative impacts of the move, it is important to note that the new venue has also brought with it a number of benefits. While the diminutive size of the previous building meant that only a limited number of activities could take place within it, the increased amount of space afforded by the new venue has resulted in a number of classes now being held on the island. Storytelling and dance classes are now a regular fixture throughout the year and, in keeping with a strong tradition of amateur dramatics on the island, a new youth theatre has now been formed which both rehearses and performs in Druimfin. Alongside increased opportunities for the local community to participate in various artistic activities, the larger stage and scene dock has also meant that a wider range of visiting companies can perform on the island: the

⁴³⁵ This was listed as one of the options for 'what we want to be' under the re-branding questions and was cited by McCrone as the future which he anticipates for his company. Informal conversation with Alasdair McCrone (9/9/10)

⁴³⁶ Interview with Participant B (28/2/10) and Participant AB (15/3/11)

⁴³⁷ Interview with Participant B (28/2/10)

Little Theatre could not have hosted The Hebrides Ensemble or the National Theatre of Scotland's double bill of *Lady Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* and *My Teacher's a Troll*.⁴³⁸

Mull Little Theatre formed an intrinsic part of the company's perceived identity, both on and off the island; Druimfin appears to be more than just a home base for the theatre group based there. Indeed, on Mull Theatre's website there are different tabs for the company and its new venue suggesting that the two should not be seen as synonymous as has previously happened.⁴³⁹ The company itself is funded by Creative Scotland to tour live performances throughout Scotland with a particular emphasis on the Highlands and Islands. It does not, however, receive any money to perform in its own space, unless as part of a wider tour. As such, the funder is clearly seeing the building as distinct to the company's theatrical output with no specified purpose beyond supporting the production and rehearsal of the touring shows. Nonetheless, even though it is still in an unfinished state, the new venue has served as a production centre for creating touring shows, a receiving venue and a performance and rehearsal space. Thus it can be seen as playing a significant role on the island and on the surrounding area more generally.

As well as looking at ways in which the relocation has contributed to a potential reinvention of Mull Theatre's perceived identity, this thesis has also tried to situate the chosen case study within a wider rural framework. In doing so it has also referenced a range of other venues which are continually utilised on the touring circuit and has suggested that there is a notion of quality which is embedded within different types of (non-) performance spaces. This has been reinforced by one interviewee I spoke to who has claimed that there is some resentment towards Mull Theatre from the wider sector as a result of its decision to build a purpose-built venue as opposed to utilising the types of venues which it regularly tours to.⁴⁴⁰ In doing so it is apparently suggesting that the village

⁴³⁸ This has been articulated through various conversations with Alasdair McCrone throughout the course of the research process as well as during interviews with Participant B (28/2/10) and Participant Q (3/9/10)

⁴³⁹ Mull Theatre website: www.mulltheatre.com [last accessed 1/6/13]

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Participant AB (13/3/11)

halls and community centres are presenting a lesser experience to the spectator than their more conventional counterparts.

Throughout this thesis it has been suggested that there are a number of practical reasons behind the decision to build Druimfin, including the difficulties in booking adequate rehearsal space for the company's productions. There is also an argument to be made for the new building contributing to the economy on the island. It has been acknowledged that Mull Theatre is a key employer on Mull and so its absence would be felt on a number of levels.⁴⁴¹ By bringing more visiting companies to the island, with the further possibility of providing residency opportunities, the production centre is increasing the number of visitors to the island, each of whom is paying for accommodation, travel and food whilst there. Having said this, it has also been observed that one of the benefits of the new space is that it enables the island attendees to experience the shows 'as they were intended.'⁴⁴² This does imply that there is an expectation of quality within different types of spaces and that, despite Mull Theatre's remit to tour rural areas the shows are not necessarily primarily designed for the staple venues of this circuit.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that neither of Mull Theatre's venues conform in full with the stereotypical image of what a 'theatre' is. The prototypical image presented by participants throughout this project has been largely consistent and tends towards an image of a conventional proscenium arch stage, ornate decor and raked, padded seating. The experiences and facilities of Druimfin and the Little Theatre, however, are to some extent more akin to that of a village hall or community centre. There are some technical resources available to the practitioners - a lighting desk and some lights available on free-standing lighting bars - but these are minimal. The addition of the raked seating bank in the production centre has brought with it the sense of a more traditional theatre-going experience which may serve to increase the building's popularity amongst the island attendees. This was frequently posited as one of the main sources of contention regarding the new space. As further phases of construction are completed, it is anticipated that the venue will become

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Participant T (5/8/10)

⁴⁴² Interview with Participant O (5/8/10)

increasingly experienced as a state-of-the-art performance space, but it is not quite there yet. Indeed, the cast and crew on tour only ever referred to it as either 'the centre' or 'the venue,' never 'the theatre.'

Alongside embedded notions of quality, Fisher has also argued that there is a direct link between programming and types of spaces. This is in part to do with the practicalities imposed by certain spaces but is also, he suggests, related to cultural understanding of theatre spaces and genres.⁴⁴³ Mainstream, conventional modes of performance are still seen as being the domain of mainstream venues whilst (non-) performance spaces are still recognised as the domain of political and alternative theatre. This could explain why the favoured image of a theatre reflected those buildings found in the West End of London as opposed to the alternative venues of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, for instance. I would suggest that there is a danger in clearly differentiating between mainstream and periphery venues with no interrogation as to what these both mean, particularly within a rural context.

Creative Scotland, and the Scottish Arts Council before it, has placed an increasing amount of attention on increasing accessibility to the arts across Scotland. In a paper delivered at the Theatre, Film and Television Studies and Centre for Contemporary Policy Research Postgraduate Symposium, Felorunso asserted that touring productions would be largely prioritised over building based ones because of the increased geographical reach they will have.⁴⁴⁴ Within this touring context, rural village halls play a central role and it could even be asserted that, for the audiences they cater for, these venues have now entered the mainstream. Many of them frequently programme visiting companies and through the *Laurel and Hardy* tour I was able to observe that, when given the chance to see the show in a conventional, studio theatre in Aberdeen or the local village hall, at least one spectator consciously chose to see it in 'his' village hall, in *his* venue.⁴⁴⁵ Whilst these types of venues have become increasingly significant within the contemporary theatrical landscape, scholars have rarely accounted for this in studies of performance spaces. Indeed, these

⁴⁴³ Mark Fisher, 'From Traverse to Tramway,' in *Scottish Theatre Since the Seventies*, p.50

⁴⁴⁴ TFTS and CCPR Postgraduate Symposium, The University of Glasgow (19/5/10)

⁴⁴⁵ This came out through a discussion with a spectator in Crathes Village Hall (24/4/10)

venues are only really mentioned with reference to the alternative theatre of the 1960s and not in relation to the largely mainstream performances that they now regularly present.

This may go some way to suggesting why Mull (Little) Theatre has been frequently overlooked within historical studies of Scottish theatre: the types of venues it consistently performs in are largely seen as the domain of the alternative. This company, however, has chosen to tour text-based productions which do not necessarily present rural issues back at the audience but which are instead chosen for their commercial and/or artistic value. Despite an underlying scepticism about the quality of performances within these venues, this thesis has highlighted that they form an essential part of the circuit and should be more widely acknowledged as such. Indeed, as the economic crisis of the last few years deepens, funding will become increasingly harder to obtain and other established venues may be looking for additional uses of their spaces as a means of generating a higher income.⁴⁴⁶ With theatre buildings being used increasingly for events outside of live performances, including classes, conferences and a variety of art forms, the relationships which grow between spectators, practitioners and performances will potentially change, thus making the current, prototypical image of a theatre even more obsolete.

Due to its unique position within Scottish theatre and the possibility of analysing the immediate impact of its relocation, Mull Theatre was identified as the central case study for this collaborative PhD. Although it has been frequently overlooked it does play a significant role for theatre provision within a rural context and so it was considered important to write it into the contemporary theatrical landscape. Moreover, by looking at the two buildings Mull Theatre has occupied side by side, it has provided the opportunity to contribute to existing conversations about the relationship between space, place, audiences and productions by presenting original knowledge in the form

⁴⁴⁶ Alasdair McCrone has acknowledged this with regards to Druimfin, for instance. The future plan for the building is to expand the top floor and to develop a bar/cafe which can be used throughout the day by attendees as well as locals and visitors who want to get out of the centre of town. Hiring out the venue for rehearsals and residencies by companies from the mainland has also been suggested as a way of developing the resources and profile of the space, along with its income. Various informal conversations with Alasdair McCrone and Mull Theatre, 'Business Plan' (2008)

of new, primary fieldwork. Whilst the aims of the project have been clear it must be noted that the research has been conducted at a fixed moment in time. Various spatial theorists have reinforced the importance of understanding space as fluid and moveable; shaped by the memories, activities and experiences of its users as much as it shapes them. As such, whilst this study has looked at what was lost and gained in the move to a new building on a different part of the island, this process will be ongoing and perceptions of the company's identity will continue to shift after the point of writing.

Indeed, since writing this thesis, there has been a further evolution for the company following the development of Comar: a partnership between An Tobar and Mull Theatre. During the 2010 Mull Theatre Board Development Day, there were discussions around the creation of a potential partnership and what form this might take.⁴⁴⁷ It had been suggested that, due to limited funding, Creative Scotland might have been unwilling to continue funding two established arts producers in such close proximity to each other but with a limited local population from which to draw its audiences. Although both have different remits - Mull Theatre is a touring theatre company while An Tobar is a venue which specialises in exhibitions and folk music - there was potential for the two to adopt a more co-ordinated approach. At present the website for this new partnership is still under construction and the programme for 2012/2013 clearly separates the two venues within its pages.⁴⁴⁸ Consequently we can see that despite the convergence of these two organisations on one level, on another they are still operating separately.

The development of Comar is still in process and, as it started to take form after the research period for this thesis had passed, it has not featured within this thesis. It does, however, highlight that there are still potential areas for further research following on from this thesis. Not only will the company's perceived identity and relationship to the island continue to change but, moreover, the potential it has to develop its role within the wider touring

⁴⁴⁷ Following this some of the findings from this project were shared with the consultants hired to explore the impact of a potential partnership so that it might help them to understand Mull Theatre's position on the island.

⁴⁴⁸ Comar brochure, accessible online at:
http://media.wix.com/ugd/4030bd_bd1f0ec95b2b7af1b7a5762d9818076d.pdf

theatre infrastructure has yet to be fully realised. This is particularly true given the possible constitutional changes in Scotland in 2014 and the impact that this may have on public spending and rural policies. Much as the Little Theatre was undoubtedly important in developing the perceived identity of the company, it appears that Druimfin has the ability to take it in a new direction and to have a resulting impact on the sector more generally.

Previously, the company was a key feature on the touring circuit with a quirky building that rooted it firmly to the island on which it was based. Now it is perhaps more apposite to view Mull Theatre the touring company as separate to Druimfin which is a receiving venue, production centre and promoter. Many of the current tensions associated with this move appear to have come about due to a shift in these roles and priorities; only time will tell if they will fade as the new venue becomes more established. For the time being, however, Mull Theatre continues to be the most active company on the small-scale rural touring circuit. The potential for Druimfin to enhance this, while also actively creating, supporting and promoting live performances within Argyll and Bute more generally, means that its significance should not be underestimated or overlooked.

- Chris Baker Taped interview (6/3/10)
- Past Board member of Mull Theatre
- Jill Galbreith Letter (10/3/10)
- Previous Board member of Mull Theatre and frequent attendee
- Moray Royles Taped interview (30/3/10)
- Architect of Druimfin
- Gordon Cooper Un-taped interview (30/4/10)
- Past attendee of Mull Little Theatre
- Participant M Taped interview (6/5/10)
- David Pitman Taped interview (18/8/09)
- Previous Artistic Director of Mull Theatre
- Participant O Taped interview (5/8/10)
- Participant P Taped interview (3/9/10)
- Participant Q Taped interview (3/9/10)
- Kevin Hill (Hilly) Taped interview (5/8/10)
- Frequent employee of Mull Theatre
- Sarah Darling Taped interview (5/9/10)
- Part-time employee of Mull Theatre and B&B owner on the island
- Participant T Taped interview (5/8/10)
- Nick Fearne Taped interview (25/2/11)
- Arts Development Officer for Moray Council
- Participant V Taped interview (25/2/11)

- Participant W Un-taped interview (2/9/10)
- Patricia Haworth Un-taped interview (29/10/09)
- Employee of Mull Theatre
- Adrian Lear Taped interview (30/7/10)
- Chair of Promoters Art Network (PAN)
- Participant Z Un-taped interview (30/7/10)
- Participant AA Taped interview (18/8/09)
- Participant AB Taped interview (15/3/11)
- Participant AC Taped interview (6/4/11)
- Participant AD Taped interview (6/4/11)
- Participant AE Un-taped interview (30/10/09)
- Participant AF Informal conversation (4/8/10)
- Participant AG Un-taped interview (7/2/09)

Appendix 2 - Interview Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS Building Theatres/Theatre Buildings: Reinventing Mull Theatre

The Project

I am a PhD student at the University of Glasgow and am carrying out a three-year, AHRC funded research project on the recent relocation of Mull Theatre from a converted coach house in Dervaig to a new purpose built venue just outside of Tobermory. By charting the evolution of Mull Theatre as a touring company and analysing its two buildings – both the architecture and their geographical locations – I hope to ascertain the role played by the buildings on the company's perceived identity, both locally and nationally. Through residencies at Mull Theatre and interviews with stakeholders, audiences and non-attendees alike I hope to get a sense of how the buildings are experienced and thus to explore what makes a building a theatre.

What does this mean for you?

I am looking to hold a number of semi-structured interviews; some individual and some group ones. Each of these interviews will be taped and then transcribed by myself and I may then use all or some of the information in my final project, writing down everything exactly as it was said. You have the right to either put your name to what you said or to remain anonymous, in which case I shall assign a code letter to you and delete any information by which you might be identified. The audio recordings and transcripts will be kept safely by myself for the duration of the project. After this they will be stored in an archive for use in future academic research.

What happens next?

The project will end in September 2011, culminating in a 90,000 word thesis which will be published both online and in print. There is also the possibility of articles and conference papers being produced along the way in addition to future projects being developed which may stem from, and draw on, this fieldwork.

What are my rights?

Participation in the interviews is completely voluntary and so I ask that you carefully consider this information. You will need to fill out a consent form prior to the interview. If you are under 18 consent must also be given by your parent or guardian. This protects your legal rights and enables me to use the information that you give in the interviews.

As I write up my research I will send you a copy of your contributions to ensure you are satisfied with how your words are being used and giving you the opportunity to edit, delete or add to any of the information I have used. This process will continue until everyone is happy.

Any Questions?

If you have any questions on any of this information then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Email me at: c.rutherford.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Or Write to me at: Cassy Rutherford,

Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies,
University of Glasgow,
Glasgow,
G12 8QQ

Yours sincerely,
Cassy Rutherford

Appendix 3 - Laurel and Hardy Questionnaire



Laurel & Hardy

Dear Audience Member

We would be very grateful if you would assist us by completing this form. If there is a particular question you do not want to answer, please move on to the next question. Thank you.

Please give your age, and the ages of those in your party

Age	how many	male/female
Under 5
5-16
17-35
36-60
60+

How far did you travel to see this show today (round trip)?

..... miles (approx)

Are you...

local resident..... visitor.....

If a visitor, what is your city/town/county of residence?.....

If local, how many other theatre productions have you seen **in your area** this year?

Have you seen a Mull Theatre production before?

Yes..... No/don't know.....

If yes, which one?

How did this evening's show compare to previous Mull Theatre show(s) you have seen?

Not as enjoyable as the last show

About the same

More enjoyable than the last show

If no, is this the first time you have seen a theatre production?

yes/no (please delete as appropriate)

Why did you come to tonight's performance? (tick as many as apply)

- I've seen a Mull Theatre show before and enjoyed it
- I have heard of Mull Theatre
- It was recommended by friends/venue
- I'm a Laurel and Hardy fan
- I enjoy comedies
- I enjoy drama
- Other (Please state).....

Will you come to a Mull Theatre production again?

yes/no (please delete as appropriate)

If not, why not?

.....

.....

Do you have a preference for any type of play/subject? (tick all that apply)

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------|-------------|-------|----------|-------|
| Comedy | | New work | | Serious | |
| Revival of well-known play | | Family show | | Scottish | |

How did you hear about this performance?

- Poster/flyer
- Newspaper advert/feature
- Word of mouth
- Radio
- Mull Theatre website
- Other website
- Other (please indicate)

Would you like to hear about Mull Theatre's future tours in your area?

yes/no (please delete as appropriate)

If 'yes', how would you prefer to receive information?

By post by email by text

Please let us have the relevant information, so that we can send you information:

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Email..... Mobile number.....

We'd love to hear any other opinions on the show, the company or the venue.

Appendix 4 - Focus Group Publicity

The text below is an editorial which appeared in the February edition of 'Round and About': a local publication on the Isle of Mull. It was supplemented by flyers and posters which were put up in various venues across the island and a smaller advert which appeared in Am Muileach. The majority of households on Mull will refer to at least one of these local publications and so the aim was to garner interest from as many people as possible.

'Round and About' Editorial

**What do you think about Mull Theatre's recent move?
Do you have a memory - good or bad - of Mull Theatre?
Have you never been to Mull Theatre?**

'Building theatres/Theatre buildings' is a three year research project looking at Mull Theatre and its recent move, from Dervaig to Aros Park, to ask what makes a theatre building different from any other performance venue.

The research is being carried out by Cassy Rutherford who is based in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies at the University of Glasgow. Cassy will be spending time at the theatre and speaking to local people, examining the company at a key stage in its evolution and exploring what was lost and gained in the move to a new building.

A key part of the research is talking to audiences and gathering community perceptions of Mull Theatre and its changing buildings and this is where you come in! Do you have an opinion to express about the theatre, the buildings or the company? Maybe you have something to say about the sort of shows the company puts on or the style of their new building? Perhaps you have a story or memory to share of a past experience at the theatre or maybe you've never been involved with the theatre or seen a show. Whatever your thoughts or level involvement, Cassy would like to hear from you!

To get involved, pop into one of the focus groups that Cassy will be running across the island during March. This will be a chance to meet Cassy, chat about the research and share your thoughts and opinions in a relaxed atmosphere with tea and biscuits provided.

Please keep an eye out for posters across the island or alternatively you can contact Cassy directly for more information on the project or how to get involved:

Email - c.rutherford.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Write - Cassy Rutherford, Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies, University of Glasgow, 12 University Avenue, G12 8QQ

'Building theatres/Theatre buildings' is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and is running from 2008 to 2012.

Am Muileach Advert

**What do you think of Mull Theatre's recent move?
Do you have a memory of Mull Theatre?**

If you have an opinion to express or a story to tell then please pop along to one of the following focus groups:

Monday 8th March, CREICH HALL, 3-4pm/4-5pm
Tuesday 9th March, CRAIGNURE VILLAGE HALL, 2-3pm/3-4pm
Wednesday 10th March, AROS HALL, 3-4pm/4-5pm
Thursday 11th March, DERVAIG VILLAGE HALL, 2-3pm/3-4pm
Saturday 13th March, AROS HALL, 3-4pm/4-5pm

Each session will be very informal with a mixture of short activities (none of them physical!) and group discussions which are designed to explore what you think of Mull Theatre. Participation is completely voluntary and so you can opt out of any activity you don't want to take part in. Refreshments will be provided.

If you have any questions about the project or your involvement in it please email Cassy at c.rutherford.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Appendix 5 - Mull Theatre's Productions

This table provides an overview to the shows which have been produced by Mull Theatre since it was founded in 1966. It has been collated from a variety of sources including Barrie Hesketh's book, *Taking Off*, informal conversations with past-employees and attendees of the theatre(s) and from publicity kept in the archive. It should not, however, be taken as an exhaustive list. Since its founding in 1966 there is not a single season where Mull Theatre has 'gone dark' and yet there a number of absent years here. These fall in the years preceding McCrone's directorship and are attributed to gaps in the archive: with limited storage space at the Little Theatre or the administration offices, archiving was not considered a priority for the company and so a number of promotional materials such as reviews, programmes and posters were thrown away. There are also a number of shows which I have encountered throughout the research process but to which I cannot attribute a date. These have been noted at the bottom under the name of the Artistic Director who was in charge at the time.

It should also be noted that this is only a list of productions which Mull Theatre has presented and does not include any visiting companies which have performed on the island. Moreover some of these shows, such as the 1983 revival of *The Life and Death of Betty Burke* were only performed on tour and not at Mull Theatre's venue.

Year	Show	Writer
2011	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Tom McGrath
	<i>The Mysterious Case of Netta Fornario</i>	Chris Lee
	<i>Singing Far into the Night</i>	Hamish MacDonald
2010	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Tom McGrath
	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Thomas De Quincey
	<i>The Weir</i>	Connor McPherson
2009	<i>Island Nights Entertainment</i>	Various

2008	<i>Macbeth</i> <i>Accidental Death of an Accordionist</i> <i>Swindle and Death</i> <i>Katie Morag</i>	William Shakespeare Euan Martin and Dave Smith Peter Arnott Lisa Grindall
2007	<i>Cyprus</i> <i>Brightwater</i> <i>Katie Morag</i>	Peter Arnott John Pope Lisa Grindall (based on the stories by Mairi Hedderwick)
2006	<i>Art</i> <i>Old Herbaceous</i> <i>EGG</i> <i>Macbeth</i>	Yasmina Reza Reginald Arkill Fiona Colliss William Shakespeare
2005	<i>The Lonesome West</i> <i>Cyprus</i> <i>EGG</i> <i>Katie Morag</i> <i>Cyprus</i>	Martin McDonagh Peter Arnott Fiona Colliss Lisa Grindall (based on the stories by Mairi Hedderwick) Peter Arnott
2004	<i>Kidnapped</i> <i>Whisky Galore</i> <i>The Lonesome West</i> <i>Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</i> <i>New Writing Project</i>	Adaptation by Robert Paterson and Alasdair McCrone Compton Mackenzie Martin McDonagh (unknown) Various

2003	<i>Skylight</i> <i>Kidnapped</i> <i>The Designated Mourner</i>	David Hare Adaptation by Robert Paterson and Alasdair McCrone Wallace Shawn
2002	<i>Copenhagen</i> <i>There was a Man</i> <i>A Skull in Connemara</i>	Michael Frayn Tom Wright Martin McDonagh
2001	<i>The Beauty Queen of Leenane</i> <i>Para Handy's Treasure</i> <i>King of the Fields</i>	Martin McDonagh Alasdair McCrone/Robert Paterson Stuart Paterson
2000	<i>The Real Wild West</i> <i>Bairn's Brothers</i>	David Cosgrove Bill Findlay/Raymond Cousse
1999	<i>Consider the Lilies</i> <i>Duck Variations/Dumb Waiter</i> <i>The Woodturner</i>	Iain Crichton Smith/Robert Paterson David Mamet/Harold Pinter David Cosgrove
1998	<i>Duet for One</i> <i>The Bear/Moscow Stations</i> <i>Dr Sullivan and Mr Gilbert</i> <i>Whisky Galore</i> <i>The Elves and the Shoemaker</i>	Tom Kempinski Anton Chekhov/Venedikt Yerefeev Christopher Webber Compton Mackenzie/Paul Godfrey Lisa Grindall
1997	<i>Retreat</i> <i>Whisky Galore</i>	James Saunders Compton Mackenzie/Paul Godfrey

	<i>Death and the Maiden</i>	Ariel Dorfmann
	<i>The Fisherman and his Wife</i>	Lisa Grindall
1996	<i>Not About Heroes</i>	Stephen MacDonald
	<i>Whisky Galore</i>	Compton Mackenzie/Paul Godfrey
	<i>Speed-the-Plow</i>	David Mamet
	<i>Nancy Sleekit</i>	Donald Campbell/James Smith
1995	<i>Shirley Valentine</i>	Willy Russell
	<i>The Bend</i>	Ariel Dorfmann/Tom McGrath
	<i>The Road to Mecca</i>	Atholl Fugard
1992	<i>A Marriage has been Arranged (+ a Concert)</i>	John Grace and David Richey
1990	<i>Sheila</i>	Ann Marie Di Mambo
1989	<i>Cora</i>	(unknown)
	<i>Dead Dad Dog</i>	(unknown)
	<i>Dear Desperado</i>	David Pitman
	<i>Joe</i>	Ann Marie Di Mambo
	<i>The Officers' Mess*</i>	Iain Crichton Smith
	<i>Two by the Sea*</i>	Iain Crichton Smith
	<i>King 'O</i>	(unknown)
1988	<i>Amateur season</i>	Various
	<i>A Mull Tale</i>	(unknown)
1987	<i>Movie Time</i>	David Pitman
	<i>Dear Desperado</i>	David Pitman
1986	<i>Movie Time</i>	David Pitman

1983	<i>Village Wooing</i>	Bernard Shaw
1982	<i>The Life and Death of Betty Burke</i> <i>Macbeth</i>	David Pitman William Shakespeare
1979	<i>The Owl and the Pussycat</i> <i>Old World</i> <i>The Four Poster</i> <i>Macbeth</i>	Bill Manhoff Alexsei Arbusov Jan de Hartog William Shakespeare
1978	<i>Old World</i>	Alexsei Arbusov
1968	<i>The Tempest</i>	William Shakespeare
1966	<i>Two by Two</i> <i>Village Wooing</i>	Various Bernard Shaw

Please note that the two starred productions in 1989 were produced as 'curtain raisers' for other plays in the repertoire: *Two by the Sea* was shown before Joe and David Pitman performed *The Officers' Mess* as an opener to *Dead Dad Dog*.⁴⁴⁹

Miscellaneous Productions

This refers to productions which have been identified through a variety of sources including box office records, conversations, *Taking Off* or other documents found in the archive. Despite these records however, no date can be attributed to them.

⁴⁴⁹ David Pitman, Mull Theatre Newsletter (4/1/89), unpublished

David Pitman

Play	Writer
<i>Village Wooing</i>	Bernard Shaw
<i>Miss Julie</i>	August Strindberg
<i>Two-Way Mirror</i>	Arthur Miller
<i>A Perfect Analysis Given by a Parrot</i>	Tennessee Williams
<i>Equal Terms</i>	Jill Hyem
<i>When the Rain Stops</i>	(unknown)
<i>From the Hills of Dream</i>	(unknown)
<i>A Once and Future Past</i>	(unknown)
<i>Consider the Lilies</i>	Iain Crichton Smith
<i>Laughing Wild</i>	Christopher Durang
<i>Soliloquy for an Exile</i>	Iain Crichton Smith
<i>Bones</i>	David Pitman
<i>Station</i>	(unknown)
<i>Interior Designs</i>	Jimmy Chinn
<i>A Respectable Funeral</i>	Jimmy Chinn
<i>The Choristers</i>	John Reason

Barrie and Marianne Hesketh

Play	Writer
<i>Chinaman</i>	Michael Frayn
<i>A Kind of Play</i>	Iain Crichton Smith
<i>Phones</i>	Iain Crichton Smith
<i>Waiting for the Train</i>	Iain Crichton Smith
<i>Miss Julie</i>	August Strindberg
<i>The Bond</i>	August Strindberg
<i>Tatyana Repin</i>	Anton Chekhov
<i>The Bear</i>	Anton Chekhov
<i>St Joan</i>	Bernard Shaw

Appendix 6 - Rebranding Questions

Please have a look at these responses to our rebranding questions whenever you get a chance and see which ones you feel are most relevant...

Thank you

WHAT IS MULL THEATRE FOR?

- Entertainment
- Thinking
- Touring
- Professional arts
- New writing
- Creating
- Live theatre
- Highland vs. central culture
- Quality
- All Ages
- Inspire
- Challenge
- Stimulate
- Cultural pleasures
- Performing arts on Mull
- Artistic Excellence
- Small spaces
- Local community
- Professional centre
- Education
- Love for the theatre

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

- Commitment
- Years of hard work
- Different identities
- We made theatre an important part of people's life
- Struggle
- Invention
- Leaps of faith
- Persistence
- Quality
- Enthusiasm
- Dedication
- Loyalty
- Team work
- Risk taking
- Surprising audiences, critics, and funders

WHAT ARE WE NOW?

- Well regarded
- Touring theatre company
- Over-dependent on public subsidy, particularly from the SAC
- Changing
- More conventional
- Loved
- Expanding
- In a stage of flux
- Well-known
- In transition
- Highly regarded
- Established

WHAT DO WE WANT TO BE?

- More than we are now
- Community focused
- A centre of international repute
- Facility that attracts companies and individuals
- A renowned centre of excellence
- At the forefront of theatre practice in Europe
- Less dependent on subsidy
- Risk-taking
- Innovative
- Far-reaching
- Inclusive
- A recognised theatre 'brand'
- Vibrant
- Based on Mull
- Successful
- Famous
- Looking for new targets

Appendix 7 - Summer season at Druimfin (2010)

Date	Show	Company	Time	Other
JANUARY				
Friday 29 th	<i>A Scottish Winter</i>	Matilda Brown	8pm	
FEBRUARY				
Tuesday 23 rd	<i>Clutter Keeps Company</i>	Birds of Paradise	7.30pm	
MARCH				
Tuesday 2 nd	<i>The Government Inspector</i>	Communicado	8pm	
Friday 5 th	<i>Works of Shakespeare, Abridged</i>	Mull Youth Theatre	7.30pm	
Thursday 11 th	<i>Pierrot Lunaire</i>	Hebrides Ensemble	8pm	
Saturday 20 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	Opening night
Monday 22 nd	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	3pm	Matinee
APRIL				
Monday 12 th	<i>Alice and the White Rabbit</i>	Puppet Animation Festival	3pm	
Thursday 15 th	<i>Rainbow Man</i>	Puppet Animation Festival	3pm	
Saturday 17 th	<i>Small Worlds</i>	Puppet Animation Festival	11am/ 12.30pm/ 2.30pm	
Saturday 24 th	<i>The Highland Famine</i>	Argyll Youth Theatre	7.30pm	

MAY				
Wednesday 12 th	<i>Solo Works</i>	David Hughes Dance	8pm	
Monday 31 st	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Wildbird	8pm	
JUNE				
Tuesday 1 st	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Wildbird	8pm	
Friday 25 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Wednesday 30 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
JULY				
Thursday 1 st	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Wednesday 7 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Thursday 8 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Wednesday 14 th	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	CANCELLED
Thursday 15 th	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	CANCELLED
Tuesday 20 th	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	Opening
Wednesday 21 st	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Thursday 22 nd	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Saturday 24 th	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	Bunessan Hall
Tuesday 27 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Wednesday 28 th	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	Iona Abbey
Thursday 29 th	<i>Abba-Cadabra (Abba Tribute</i>		8pm	

Friday 30 th	<i>Abba-Cadabra (Abba Tribute Band)</i>		8pm	
AUGUST				
Tuesday 3 rd	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	Duart Castle
Wednesday 4 th	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Thursday 5 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Friday 6 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	CANCELLED
Tuesday 10 th	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Wednesday 11 th	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Thursday 12 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Friday 13 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	CANCELLED
Tuesday 17 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Tuesday 17 th	<i>Women Behaving Badly</i>	MsFits	8pm	Bunessan Hall
Wednesday 18 th	<i>Women Behaving Badly</i>	MsFits	8pm	
Thursday 19 th	<i>Women Behaving Badly</i>	MsFits	8pm	
Friday 20 th	<i>Jumping Mouse</i>	Unpacked	5pm	
Tuesday 24 th	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Wednesday 25 th	<i>Opium Eater</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Thursday 26 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	
Friday 27 th	<i>Laurel and Hardy</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	

SEPTEMBER				
Saturday 4th	<i>The Weir</i>	Mull Theatre	8pm	Opening
Monday 6 th	<i>The Weir</i>	Mull Theatre	3pm	Matinee
Friday 10 th	<i>Be Honourable!</i>	Josie Long	8pm	
Saturday 11 th	<i>Gala Night</i>	Friends of Mull Theatre	7.30pm	
Wednesday 22 nd	<i>Magic Spaghetti</i>	Licketyspit	10.30am	
Thursday 23 rd	<i>Jacobite Country</i>	Dogstar	8pm	
NOVEMBER				
Thursday 11 th	<i>Phileas P. Souper</i>	Loon and Theatre Mi Mi	7.30pm	
Thursday 18 th	<i>Ignite</i>	YDance and SmallPetitKlein	7.30pm	

Appendix 8 - Laurel and Hardy Tour Dates (Spring 2010)

This is a full list of dates and times for the tour. Each of these venues and performances is described in more detail in chapter 6 - Building Performances although, due to personal reasons, I was unable to attend the performance at Rosehall Village Hall on Saturday 10 April 2010. As such this performance has been omitted from the chapter.

Date	Venue	Time	Ticket Cost
Saturday 20 th March	Mull Theatre@Druimfin	8pm	£10/£8
Monday 22 nd March	Mull Theatre@Druimfin	3pm	£10/£8
Tuesday 23 rd March	Victory Hall, Benderloch	8pm	£10
Wednesday 24 th March	Innellan Village Hall	8pm	£9/£7
Thursday 25 th March	Cove Burgh Hall	8pm	£10
Friday 26 th March	Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh	7.30pm	£10.50/£8.50/£6
Saturday 27 th March	Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh	7.30pm	£10.50/£8.50/£6
Friday 2 nd April	The CatStrand, New Galloway	7.30pm	£7/£5
Saturday 3 rd April	Howden Park Centre, Livingston	7.30pm	£12/£9
Monday 5 th April	Resolis Memorial Hall	7.30pm	£10/£8/£6
Tuesday 6 th April	Lyth Arts Centre	8pm	£12/£10/£8
Thursday 8 th April	An Lanntair, Stornoway	8pm	£10/£9/£8
Friday 9 th April	Macphail Centre, Ullapool	7.30pm	£8/£6/£2
Saturday 10 th April	Rosehall Village Hall	8pm	£8/£6
Sunday 11 th April	Eden Court Theatre, Inverness	7.30pm	£10/£8

Monday 12 th April	Glengarry Community Hall	8pm	£10/£8/£5
Thursday 15 th April	Falkirk FTH	7.30pm	£10/£9/£7.50
Friday 16 th April	Eastwood Park Theatre, Giffnock	7.30pm	£10/£8/£5
Saturday 17 th April	Roths Halls, Glenrothes	7.30pm	£10/£8
Tuesday 20 th April	Dundee Rep Theatre	7.30pm	£14/£12/£9
Wednesday 21 st April	Dundee Rep Theatre	7.30pm	£14/£12/£9
Thursday 22 nd April	The Lemon Tree, Aberdeen	7pm	£12/£10
Friday 23 rd April	Edinvillie Hall	7.30pm	£8/£6
Saturday 24 th April	Crathes Village Hall	7.30pm	£8/£6
Monday 26 th April	Dalrymple Hall, Fraserburgh	7.30pm	£8/£6
Tuesday 27 th April	Lonach Hall, Strathdon	7.30pm	£8/£6
Thursday 29 th April	Eastgate Theatre, Peebles	7.30pm	£10
Friday 30 th April	Arts Guild Theatre, Greenock	7.30pm	£11/£9
Saturday 1 st May	Cumbernauld Theatre	8pm	£9/£8

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NEAT - <http://www.neatshows.org.uk>

Northings - <http://www.northings.com> (a website for Arts and Culture in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland)

PAN - <http://www.panpromoters.co.uk>

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Scottish Census results - <http://www.scrol.gov.uk>

Scottish Government - <http://www.scotland.gov.uk>

Scottish Islands Federation - <http://www.scottish-islands-federation.co.uk/>

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