

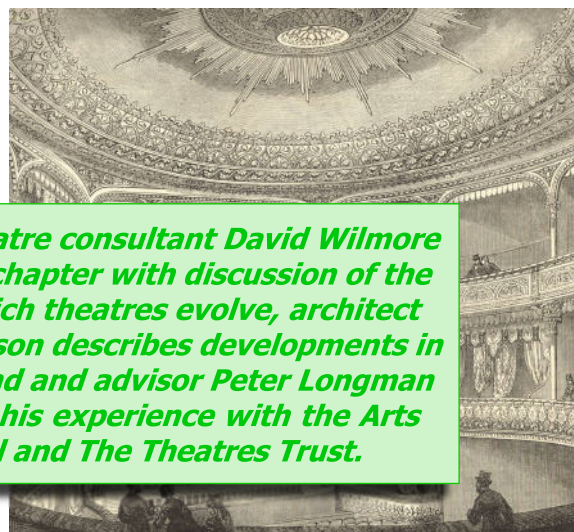
*Everyman, Cheltenham, from left: the original facade, after extension, and present day*

assessment, and do all the homework, then the chances are you are going to struggle to take that building forward into this century and beyond.

As I explained earlier, the problem of historic theatres is a modern one and we have to start to understand why. Conservation planning isn't about preserving the building in aspic. It is not about saying, 'this is absolutely sacred and thou shalt not touch it'. It is about understanding it and laying it out and having all the information before you start to actually intervene in the building. I believe that by doing that you can start to understand how buildings can be made to work properly in the future. We are custodians of these buildings, we are in many ways only looking after them for future generations and they do evolve. We are all well aware that some theatre buildings have been knocked down in the West End – the Westminster Theatre is a recent example – and we have also altered many theatres very significantly. But there are ways and means to improve these existing buildings sensibly and comprehensively. That doesn't mean just simply preserving the detail, it's not about hunger for ornament or the historic fabric, it is about making the theatre feel and function better. And undoubtedly many historic theatres in the West End could be improved.

A good example of sensitive refurbishment is the Royal Court Theatre. It has been radically altered since it was first constructed, but what a fantastic result. The relationships work, some of the original structure you can see quite clearly. It is respected and the whole comes together. Those of you who were there before the recent refurbishment will remember it as a very disparate auditorium with many different, unconnected elements. That connectivity was re-established in the recent redevelopment of the building which is really sensational. Talking about hunger for ornament, the second picture shows what the Royal Court looked like when it originally opened and that illustrates the extensive ornamentation of the period. But it would have been wrong, in my belief, to have tried to emulate that, to go back to those days, because we have moved on both theatrically and architecturally. So, putting the past to work must not be to preserve West End theatres in aspic.

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*The Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square, London after its refurbishment 1997–2000, and how it appeared when it first opened in 1888 designed by two other theatre architects, Walter Emden and Bertie Crewe  
Royal Court Photo: Theatre Projects Consultants*

**Historic theatre consultant David Wilmore opens this chapter with discussion of the way in which theatres evolve, architect Nick Thompson describes developments in the West End and advisor Peter Longman speaks on his experience with the Arts Council and The Theatres Trust.**

<sup>1</sup> The redevelopment of the Royal Court Theatre is described by the architect Steve Tompkins in Volume 2 page AP9-8 to 9-12