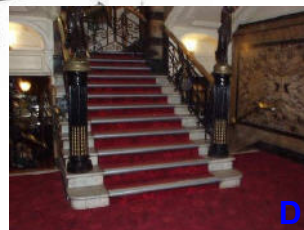
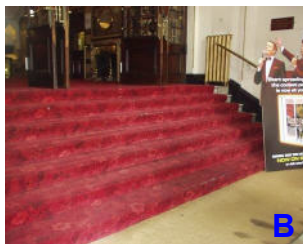
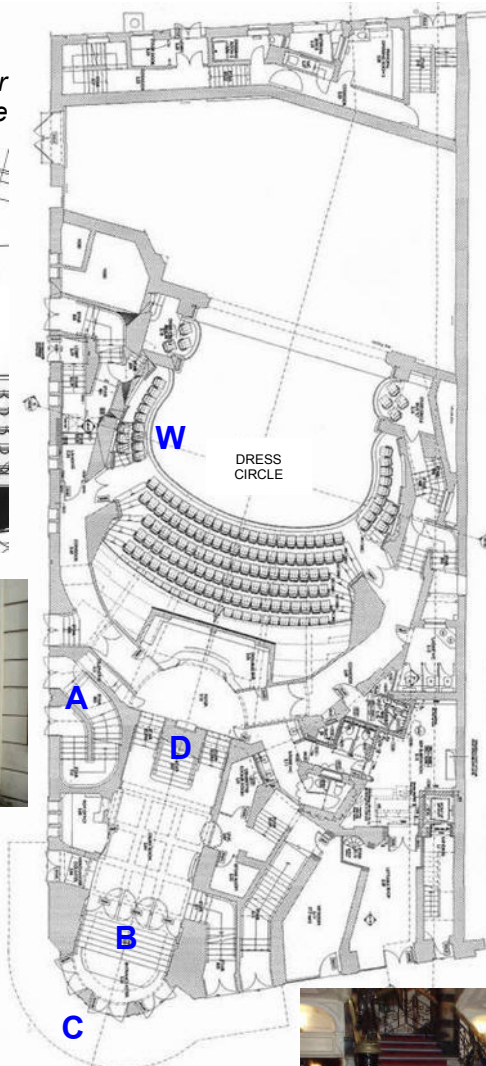
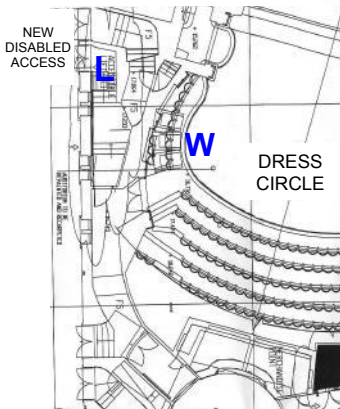


Plans of the Novello Theatre indicating the provision that has been made for wheelchair access (W) in the Dress Circle



The lift providing direct access for the disabled is indicated by L on the top left plan
 Drawings: Arts Team
 Photos: Lisa Foster

This chapter starts with the touring experiences of disabled dancer Marc Brew, continues with a view on the practical aspects of dealing with access problems as described here by Lisa Foster, a UK consultant on disabilities and access, and concludes with comparisons between the UK and US and suggested solutions from theatre consultant Bill Conner.

which are being insisted upon by Arts Council funders and now by building regulators really work? Are they the right size? Is the layout right? As a result of the Building Standards, Part M, there are now a lot of 'standards' around. I have absolute confidence in some of the standards and no confidence at all in others. There is a big gap in the standards that we have here in the UK in terms of reality. The Arts Council Access Checklist is obviously one of these.

NOVELLO THEATRE

One project I worked on with Arts Team for Tom Redmond at Cameron Mackintosh was the refurbishing of the Strand Theatre, now called the Novello. They realised they needed to provide access, as this theatre is liberally supplied with steps; there is great difficulty in getting in through the main entrance on the corner.

Fortunately for the access strategy there is a slight change of level outside around the corner but you don't get very far because there are also steps there [A]. Half a level up [B] you have the main box office facilities followed by a second set of steps [D], up or down depending on where your seats are. So quite a difficult historic and listed theatre to cope with. Many of these London theatres are on tight sites and all types of staircases had to be fitted in to provide escapes.

Cameron Mackintosh wanted to do quite a comprehensive scheme which in the end was not funded by his enterprise. The DDA scheme is based on what it had to be, a side door route into the foyer. It is really awful if you are in a wheelchair, but there is a platform lift that takes you from the side entrance to a bar and to the wheelchair seating level. That is better than being man-handled, although better than nothing would be a good way to describe it. There is no direct non-stepped access to the main foyer.

Disabled people can get into the lower level of the main foyer independently and then ring for assistance. At least they are not left outside; I would not want to be stranded on the pavement after dark, no matter how many people are around or how good the weather. By implementing this scheme people can get inside and use the box office services in the foyer. Going to the theatre is so much more than just sitting in your seat; it is about the ticket purchase, meeting your friends, having a drink, having access to the loos and whatever. It is very much about an integrated theatre experience.