

Heritage Statement

1. The Dominion is listed Grade II¹, designed by W Milburn it was built in 1928 and the listing description includes the following summary:

The Dominion Theatre is a grand composition which embodies a transitional phase in the history of theatre design, incorporating the broad plan and decorative detailing more usually associated with cinemas of the period though always intended primarily for theatrical use.

2. The Theatres Trust database includes a useful review² of its chequered history from 1928 to 1990. The theatre is described as 'vast' and although built as a theatre it was used as a cinema from 1930 until the 1980's when it became a venue for ad hoc live performances until it reached its nadir with the auditorium painted black for 'Time' after which it closed in the late 1980's.
3. It was listed in 1988 in response to threatened redevelopment and was acquired by Apollo Leisure and Nederlander in 1990.
4. It is widely acknowledged that under Nederlander's stewardship the theatre has been transformed from what it was when it was listed. The whole theatre has been refurbished and its stage technology is state of the art. As it failed as a theatre for its first 60 years it is only now that it is in pristine condition and used as a theatre.

Physical Considerations

5. The installation of the new LED sign and the mounting of the stiletto on the canopy involve works of alteration to the building and as a result those works require listed building consent.
6. The works involved are relatively simple because the existing structural system on the facade for the current projecting LED sign can be used for the new sign. The details are provided on drawing 3822-208. Similarly, there is an existing structural frame on the canopy that can be used for mounting the glass fibre shoe and subsequent icons.
7. As a result of this existing framework the installation of the proposed signage does not involve any alterations to the main fabric of the theatre.
8. Due to the timescales involved and the need for the signs to be in place for the fixed opening of the show the structural details have been included in the submission to avoid any delay, or further submissions, in response to conditions.
9. As the works do not have any significant physical effect on the fabric of the theatre the residual consideration raised by the applications is the effect of the signs on the listed building and the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

¹ Listing in appendix 1

² Appendix 2

Visual considerations

10. Whilst theatre signage is controlled by the Advertisement Regulations it has little in common with general advertising which usually has no intrinsic relationship to the location, or building, and can be alien and incongruous.
11. Theatre show signage is the opposite because it is an integral part of the character of West End theatres and vital to their viability and continued commercial success. Show signage adds to the special character of Theatreland and the conservation areas in which it is located. There is a legitimacy and appropriateness for show signage on theatres and cinemas that is not shared by general advertising.
12. In association with Westminster City Council, Camden supported an initiative promoted as 'ShowTime' which encouraged the enhancement of the atmosphere in Theatreland by theatre owners in the evening when audiences start to gather and the lights and signs of the theatres contribute to a special bustling atmosphere. This became the Theatreland Strategy published by Westminster in partnership with Camden. These proposals are very much in sympathy with that approach bringing a showbiz atmosphere to the evening public realm in Tottenham Court Road.
13. Camden's Local Plan Policy D4 makes no mention of the special role of show signage on theatres but does express support for advertisements that preserve the character and amenity of heritage assets.
14. The proposed future format of a combination of background LED and canopy icon proposed in these applications is a more creative way of promoting a show than can be achieved with the existing sign. It brings the show out into the street and with the sign being on the façade rather than projecting it is less prominent in the street vistas along Tottenham Court with that role taken instead by the icon.
15. In conclusion, show signage is as an integral part of a musical theatre such as the Dominion, and it is in keeping with its significance as a listed building. It is directly related to its ability to attract show productions and their audiences. The success in doing that under the Nederlander ownership has resulted in a fully restored state of the art theatre. It is in better condition than it has ever been and, by having the ability to have the show signage that international productions demand, its future can be safeguarded.

April 2024

DOMINION THEATRE

DOMINION THEATRE, TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD

Listed on the National Heritage List for England. Search over 400,000 listed places



Official list entry

Heritage Category:	Listed Building
Grade:	II
List Entry Number:	1379033
Date first listed:	09-Oct-1988
List Entry Name:	DOMINION THEATRE
Statutory Address 1:	DOMINION THEATRE, TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD

Location

Statutory Address: DOMINION THEATRE, TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Camden (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
National Grid Reference:	TQ 29872 81442

Details

CAMDEN

TQ29815E TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD 798-1/104/1643 (East side) 10/10/88 Dominion Theatre

GV II

Theatre. 1928-29. Designed by W and TR Milburn. Steel-framed construction with Portland stone facade. EXTERIOR: narrow facade of 3 main bays; recessed entrance doors to full width of facade. Wooden doors, glazed in panels to full height, enriched with carved moulding, beneath projecting canopy facade above with pilaster strips to corners and projecting centre of 3 bays. Bases of pilaster strips with sculptured plaques with masks. Facade above concave in shape, with 3 square headed apertures filled with decorative wrought-iron work. Simple cornice band above, slightly raised to centre. INTERIOR: grand 2-storey entrance foyer with flights of stairs to left and right linking to central balcony; stripped Classical detailing and original pendant lights. Circle lounge and lower circle lounge with similar detailing. Auditorium with two galleries (one disused) also with Roman Classical detailing to walls and ceiling having 2 tiers of galleries and round cornered boxes (upper pair never seated) to left and right of proscenium. Original light fittings. HISTORICAL NOTE: The Dominion Theatre is a grand composition which embodies a transitional phase in the history of theatre design, incorporating the broad plan and decorative detailing more usually associated with cinemas of the period though always intended primarily for theatrical use. (Architects' Journal: 2 October 1929; Architect & Building News: 4 October 1929).

Listing NGR: TQ2987281442

Legacy

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number: 478398

Legacy System: LBS

Sources

Books and journals

'The Architect and Building News' in 4th October, (1929)

'Architects Journal' in 2nd October, (1929)

This List entry helps identify the building designated at this address for its special architectural or historic interest.

Unless the List entry states otherwise, it includes both the structure itself and any object or structure fixed to it (whether inside or outside) as well as any object or structure within the curtilage of the building.

For these purposes, to be included within the curtilage of the building, the object or structure must have formed part of the land since before 1st July 1948.

[Understanding list entries](#)
[Corrections and minor amendments](#)

The Dominion was built on the site of the Meux Brewery and the tiny Court Cinema opened in 1911. Proposals for a theatre there were first made in 1923, but it was only in 1928 that Moss Empires became interested in development. The result is typical of the work of the younger William Milburn. The Dominion is vast, yet distances from the stage are never great (save in the upper circle) and the sight-lines are excellent. The foyer and circle circulation areas are also remarkably generous for a London theatre, and there was originally also a café over the entrance. The style, however was the rather frigid neo-Renaissance of the 1920s Milburn houses; despite its original pink lampshades, the auditorium must always have been a cold, impersonal place best suited to large-scale extravaganzas. Its recent redecoration in dark colours suits it well.

It was not one of Moss Empires' successful ventures. A musical based on golf opened the theatre, but within a year it was being rented to film distributors. From September 1930 it became a permanent cinema, with W R Glen employed to strip out the cloakrooms and bars to expand the 'crush' areas to cinematic requirements. In January 1933 the building was sold to Gaumont British. Further alterations were made after the Second World War, when shortage of office space forced Gaumont, from 1940 part of the Rank empire, to convert the old café, carpenter's shop and the upper floors of dressing rooms into offices. Then in 1958 a vast Todd AO cinema screen was installed, along with a new projection box, and the upper circle was closed.

From November 1981 the Dominion became primarily a venue for one-off live shows; then, in 1986, it was painted black and hung with a velarium for Time. A legal dispute ensured the theatre was not subsequently restored, and Rank took the opportunity to seek the site's redevelopment. Only in 1990 was demolition for a hotel averted, when the building was acquired by Apollo Leisure and listed. It is interesting that no other London theatre has an empty upper circle stepped to modern standards.

The Dominion was refurbished and restored by Nederlander in 2014. The refurbishment included a new 56 bar counterweight system, hospitality suites and reinstating the Orchestra Pit. The refurbishment also included new carpets, reupholstering of all the seats, new lighting fixtures, new handrails, new toilets and upgrading the box office. An extensive restoration was undertaken including regilding the proscenium and ante- proscenium, restoring previously boarded up arches and the reinstatement of a huge ornate stone depicting two griffins which was once positioned above the entrance windows.