



# Edinburgh's Festival and King's Theatres (Through Time)

Jack Gillon

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The King's theater, the 'Old Lady of Leven Street', is one of Britain's most opulent touring venues, from the the Art Nouveau splendour of the original foyer to the auditorium, an Aladdin's cave of Viennese Baroque, with plush gilt fittings and a glorious chandelier above. The King's was built in 1905 with the millionaire philanthropist Andrew Carnegie laying the foundation stone. The doors opened the following year with a performance of Cinderella and the theater soon became of national importance to the whole of the UK. With a long tradition of Variety and pantomime, stars such as Stanley Baxter, Rikki Fulton and Jimmy Logan have all trod the boards over the years. Over the years the King's has played host to some of the world's biggest stars of screen and stage, including Sir Laurence Olivier, Maria Callas, Lesley Neilsen, Sir Patrick Stewart, Sir Ian McKellan, Penelope Keith, Simon Callow – and Sir Sean Connery even worked backstage here! Not fazed by the regular showbiz dazzle, the King's remains a community theater at heart. Managed by the Festival City theaters Trust, which also runs the Festival theater, this beloved venue earns its place as 'the people's theater' by remaining committed to supporting Edinburgh's long tradition of amateur operatic and musical societies, as well as playing host to the annual Edinburgh Gang Show extravaganza.

The Festival theater stands on Edinburgh's longest continuous theater site, dating as far back as 1830, before becoming the beloved Empire Palace theater in 1892. Over a century of famous acts trod the boards at the Empire - from Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy and Judy Garland, to Morecombe and Wise – before it became a Bingo Hall in 1963.



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