

The Grand Opera House, Belfast

What is The Grand Opera House?

The Grand Opera House is a theatre in Belfast. Frank Matcham, a well-known theatre architect, designed the building. It is the only theatre that he designed anywhere in Ireland. The theatre opened on 23rd December 1895.



Past Performances

The pantomime 'Blue Beard' was the first show in the newly opened theatre. As well as pantomime, early audiences were treated to comedies, dramas, opera and Shakespeare plays.

Over the years, the Grand Opera House has hosted circus performances, ballets, musicals and family shows. It was also used as a cinema for many years. Pantomimes have been part of the holiday season at the theatre for over a century. The production of 'Beauty and the Beast' in 2019/2020 was the 30th pantomime to feature Northern Ireland theatre legend May McFettridge.

Over the years, famous figures and entertainers that have graced the stage of the Grand Opera House include Charlie Chaplin, Laurence Olivier, Luciano Pavarotti, Darcey Bussell and Laurel and Hardy.

History of the Theatre

The Grand Opera House is the only remaining theatre built during the Victorian era in Northern Ireland. In 1972, during the Troubles, the building was closed and boarded up. It faced possible demolition. The historic theatre was saved after becoming the first building in Belfast to be awarded Grade A building status. This designation meant that the building was considered 'of greatest importance to Northern Ireland'. After five years of renovations the Grand Opera House reopened in 1980. Further restoration work was necessary after the changing block and other parts of the building were damaged by bombings in 1991 and 1993.



The new millennium brought more renovations to the theatre, including the 'Baby Grand' studio, an additional performance space, which opened in 2006. In 2017, restoration to the façade of the iconic building and its famous statue of Mercury the Roman god was completed.

Birthday Celebrations

In January 2020 the Grand Opera House closed to allow for extensive restorations to the building's interior. During this time, the paint, intricate plasterwork and famous elephant head brackets in the auditorium will be repaired and restored. The seats, carpets and curtains will be replaced. The first permanent exhibition (displaying the theatre's rich history) will be installed. On-site facilities and access will also be improved and technology updated to cater for modern touring productions.

The theatre is due to re-open in November in time for the pantomime season and the production of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. The celebrations for the 125th anniversary of the theatre are due to last all year long.



Grand Opera House Belfast

Persuasive Writing

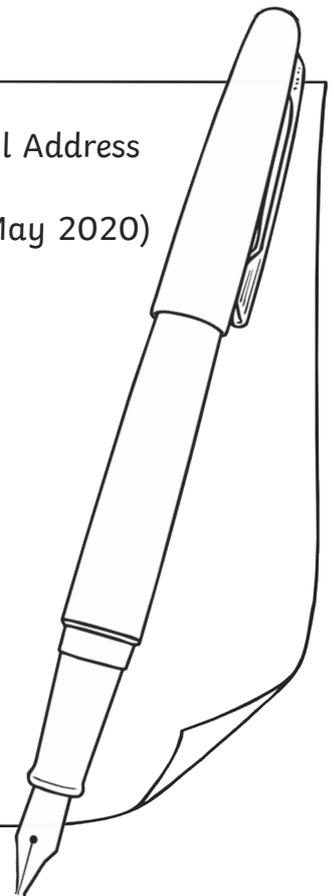
1. Read the Grand Opera House Fact File.
2. Imagine that the Grand Opera House has again come under threat of closure and demolition. Write a persuasive letter explaining why you believe the building is of 'special architectural or historic interest' and should be saved.
 - Think about the persuasive devices you will use in your letter, such as emotive language.
 - In your introduction, state why you are writing (emphasise that the building is under serious threat of demolition) and give your opinion about the threatened closure.
 - Organise your argument.
 - Within the letter, give reasons for your expressed opinion.
 - If you begin with Dear Sir/Madam, end your letter with, 'Yours faithfully', then sign your name.

Your Name and School Address

Date (E.g. 5 May 2020)

Department for Communities
Historic Environment Division
Historic Buildings Designation Branch
Lanyon Place
Belfast

Dear Sir/Madam,



3. Design a poster to persuade people to attend a performance of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' when the Grand Opera House re-opens after the renovations.