

# The Hippodrome Theatre

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The Dover Society continues to provide plaques around town honouring famous people and places. One plaque that could be replaced, in Snargate Street, would recall the years when the popular Hippodrome theatre dominated the narrow, but once important street.

There was once a plaque there commemorating the theatre, but this disappeared during redevelopment of the area. It was replaced by a large stone inscribed tablet, let into the frontage of a building. But one night that mysteriously disappeared. Do either of these long-forgotten items, a plaque, and a stone tablet, exist in someone's cellar?

It was on Monday, 25th September in 1944, when a 16-inch German shell wrote the final chapter in the life of our Royal Hippodrome. After that shell, the large building never reopened as a theatre, although a licensed bar continued to serve drinks for a while afterwards.

The theatre, built from public subscriptions in 1790 by a group of wealthy Dovorians, opened as the Clarence Theatre named after the Duke of Clarence who was a regular patron. Following demolition, a new theatre on the same site was opened as The Tivoli but

that was not a financial success and the name was changed again to the Theatre Royal, presenting music hall programmes. At the beginning of the 20th century the name was changed yet again to the Royal Hippodrome.

During both world wars, with Dover packed with servicemen, the Hippodrome did a roaring trade (especially when there were strip shows). The theatre even hit the national headlines in December 1943, when the Lord's Day Observance Society intervened, and a show had to be cancelled. This angered comedian Tommy Trinder so much he put on a Sunday charity show which got round the Lord's Day restrictions. Stars from London took to the Dover stage including Tommy Trinder, Sonnie Hale, Tessie O'Shea, Derek Roy, and Jerry Allen and his Trio. It proved a huge success with a big fat cheque for the Prisoner of War charity fund.

The last Dover saw of the war-wrecked Hippodrome building came in January 1951 when demolition gangs pulled down the last remaining wall of the theatre, still displaying the proud name of the Hippodrome. It made a dramatic departure. The wall collapsed right across Northampton Street (a highway that has now disappeared into dockland), instead of falling inwards onto the site as intended.



*Royal Hippodrome Theatre, Snargate Street*



*Demolition of the Hippodrome, 19th January 1951*