

A special session of the Justices of the Peace was held yesterday to consider an application by Mr James Frederick M'Fadyen, residing at 19 Abbotsford Place, for a dramatic license for the public performance of stage plays within Her Majesty's Theatre and Royal Opera House, Main Street, Gorbals. There was a large attendance of Justices—Mr Alex. Miller presiding.

Mr THOMAS J. SMILLIE, writer, who appeared for the applicant, adverted first to the question of locality. He pointed out that in earlier years Glasgow theatres were situated in the centre of the city, and that for many years the old house in Dunlop Street was the only place of the kind open all the year round. More recently, however, owing to railway and other operations, the theatres had been removed to Cowcaddens and neighbourhood, or as he might say to the northern district of the city, leaving the centre and the South Side entirely unprovided for. This general consideration, amongst others, had influenced Mr M'Fadyen in entering upon his present enterprise. As to the situation which he had selected, a better could not be found. The theatre had been erected at the junction of two of the widest streets in the locality, affording ample room for carriages, &c., while the building itself had been constructed with special reference to the requirements of ventilation and to modes of entrance and to exit. Another matter had received very careful attention—namely, the provision for extinguishing fire and for emptying the theatre in the event of such a calamity occurring. Water-pipes for this purpose were carried all through the building, the stairs were very broad, and the internal arrangement of the house was such that the audience might pass from the auditorium on to the stage or vice versa, as the exigencies of the case might require. Assuming, then, that a proper situation had been selected and a substantial theatre erected, there remained to be considered the character of the applicant. On this subject he might state to their honours that Mr M'Fadyen was an alumnus of the Glasgow University, having attended during four sessions, taking Logic, Moral Philosophy, Latin and Greek, and Mathematics, in which last branch he was a prizeman. The applicant was therefore an educated gentleman; and, furthermore, in theatrical matters he was a man of experience and integrity. He had been in the theatrical profession for upwards of twenty years, and for ten years had been the lessee of theatres in Norwich, Yarmouth, King's Lynn, Whitehaven, and Marylebone, London. But the applicant might be a man of education and experience, and yet not have conducted his theatres without reproach. On this point Mr Smillie informed the bench that in all the English towns to which he had referred there had never been any complaint made against Mr M'Fadyen on the part of the press, the public, or the police. Mr Smillie added that his client expressly excluded from this application any right to sell drink in the theatre.

The CHAIRMAN—Have you had the place examined, and can you produce a certificate as to its stability and fitness?

Mr SMILLIE said the theatre had not yet been examined on behalf of the Justices, and possibly the better way might be for their honours to adopt the usual course of appointing such an examination to be made, the license being granted only on condition that the report proved to be satisfactory. He was informed by the builder and the tradesmen that only one or two matters of detail required to be finished, which could be done in two or at most three days.

Mr WAKEFIELD said he had much pleasure in proposing that the license be granted. He had visited the theatre that morning, and although there were one or two little things which required to be added before the theatre was opened, he might say that the theatre was practically finished. In three days the theatre would be as thoroughly complete as any one in Glasgow. The theatre was most admirably fitted up, and very prettily decorated. In his opinion it was in first rate order.

Mr MACLEAN—You did not look at the stairs?
Mr WAKEFIELD said he did. There were two staircases—one 12 feet and the other 11 feet wide. The vestibule was very large—as large as a third of the Justice's Hall, so that there would be no crushing whatever. There were two enormously wide exits, so that the theatre could be emptied in a very few minutes. Water was laid on behind the stage; it was also laid on in the pit and in the upper gallery—a large three-inch pipe, sufficient to put out any fire in a very short time.

Mr MACLEAN—How do the doors open?

Mr WAKEFIELD said they opened both ways. On the whole, he had never seen a more finished or perfect little theatre. It was very much wanted on the south side of the river, where at present there was no place of amusement. He believed it would do a vast amount of good, because, as he had stated to the Court on a previous occasion, people going to the theatre were never seen coming out drunk. He scarcely knew of a single instance of that kind. Gentlemen who did not go to theatres ought to do so, and see the admirable way in which they were conducted.

Ex-Bailie MINNISON said he had great pleasure in seconding the motion. He called the attention of their Honours to the fact that on the south side of the river there was a population of 250,000, and he thought it right that they should have reasonable and rational amusement provided for them.

Mr JAS. CLARK said he had gone over the theatre that morning, and he found it to be in such an unfinished state that he thought it would be well to postpone consideration of the application.

Mr THOMAS THOMSON thought the delay proposed by the gentleman who had just sat down was quite unnecessary. He hoped that the application would be granted, and that the time of the Justices would not be unnecessarily occupied.

Mr M'KIRDY considered that the inhabitants of the south side of the river were quite entitled to have a good theatre, and he believed this was the first time that an application for license had ever been made for any house of that description in Gorbals. Mr M'Kirdy went on to call attention to the regulations of the Lord Chamberlain as to theatres, and asked whether Mr M'Fadyen proposed to conform to these.

Mr SMILLIE said Mr M'Fadyen had held his English licenses from the Lord Chamberlain and knew all the theatrical requirements. Every one of these would be attended to in Her Majesty's Theatre.

Mr Wm. KIDSTON said he had seen the theatre, and it was not nearly finished, and could not be in a complete state for a month to come.

Mr WAKEFIELD—I am sure you have not seen it.

Mr KIDSTON said the question here was whether Glasgow would support a fourth theatre upon a first-class footing. He believed it was not able to support even three theatres, and in proof of that he appealed to the fact that the three at present in operation, although tolerably good theatres, were struggling for a living. They were not self-supporting in the proper sense of the term, and one of them Mr Wakefield had insisted on making a cross between a public-house and a theatre, in order that it might be self-supporting. It was said in the present case, that if a license was not given the premises would be turned into a concert-room. Well, he approved of concert-rooms and did not see why that idea should not be carried out. He moved that the license be not granted.

Mr SMILLIE said that any work necessary to be done before the theatre was opened could be carried out in three days at most. If their Honours appointed a builder and architect to inspect the building the lessee would await their certificate before taking license, and that, he thought, would afford a guarantee that all that was necessary would be done.

Mr A. GLEN COLLINS said he had gone over Her Majesty's Theatre, and he thought two days would be more like the time required to finish it than a month. Three days would certainly suffice for all that was required. He took special notice of the ventilation of the theatre, and he thought that no other house of the kind in Glasgow had anything like the same efficient arrangements in that direction. He gladly supported the granting of the license.

The CLERK (Mr Gray) asked whether anyone seconded Mr Kidston's amendment.

Mr ALEX. ALLAN seconded the amendment. He entirely differed from Mr Wakefield as to the propriety of licensing another theatre. He thought these houses were productive of very great evils to the city, and that we had already a sufficient number of them.

A vote was then taken, when 18 Justices voted for granting the license and 6 for refusing it. The license was accordingly granted, and it was remitted to Mr Robert Dalgligh, architect, and Mr James Graham, builder, to examine and report upon the condition of the building.