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20 Interesting Facts About The Playhouse Buildings:

1. Artillery Street is the site of one of Derry's first theatres, Talbot's Theatre which was built in 1774 on the corner of Artillery Street and London Street (formally Widow's Row). The huge demand for the theatre led to the first new opening in the city walls (New Gate) since they were built, at the top of Artillery Street!
2. Artillery Street gets its name from a house situated against the walls (Artillery House – 1738) which probably housed artillery pieces
3. The Old Convent in Pump Street which is linked by a courtyard to The Playhouse on Artillery Street, was originally built as the *Kings Arms Hotel* in 1780 for the Grand Jury. In 1840 the Kings Arms was put up for sale and was purchased by a Thomas Doherty of Muff for £1,210 acting on behalf of the Catholic Bishop Dr Mc Laughlin, since at that time Catholics were not allowed to purchase property within the walls of the city
4. St. Columb's College and Thornhill College were both founded in the combined site of Pump Street and Artillery Street. The first convent in N.Ireland since the Reformation was founded on this site, when the Sisters of Mercy moved into Pump Street in 1848. The nuns set up a primary school in Pump Street in 1848, St Peters, and in 1887 due to expanding numbers the upper school in Artillery Street (St Mary's) was built. It was originally built as a school for homeless girls, but before it was completed it was decided it should be a high school for girls.
5. Due to expanding numbers the lower school on Artillery Street (St Josephs) was built in 1911. Again, it was originally built as a school for homeless girls but again was not used for that purpose.
6. The famous architect E.J. Toye who also designed other listed buildings in the city including St. Eugene's Cathedral spire, Lumni Christi and Pennyburn Church designed St Joseph's (Upper school in Artillery Street).
7. St Joseph's opened in 1911 with a play being performed in the New Hall; the same space nearly 100 years later is The Playhouse Theatre!
8. The schools are amongst the tallest on the Derry skyline and have unparalleled views of the city.
9. The lower school, St. Mary's is one of only two wooden cobbled entrances in the whole of Ireland, the other being Trinity College, Dublin. Each Storey is ventilated; usually buildings of more than one storey are vented just on the bottom floor
10. In a recent structural survey of the building of the Upper School, St Joseph's, it was found that each of the windows above ground level have hidden external wooden shutters which

are rolled up into a blind. The same windows are also sashed and hinged, making them unique in Ireland and possibly in the British Isles.

11. The Upper School (St Joseph's) is said to be haunted by a friendly ghost, a nun!
12. In 1986 an application was made to demolish the two schools on Artillery Street at a cost of £100,000. This was refused by the Dept. of Environment. The two buildings are now "B1" Listed, two of only seven in the city centre. St. Joseph's building appeared in the 6th edition of "Buildings at Risk" by the "Ulster Architect Heritage Society" in association with "Environment & Heritage Service".
13. In the early 1990's, the buildings were saved by Pauline Ross, The founder of The Playhouse, with the assistance of a local businessman, Joe Mulhern and £300!
14. The Playhouse buildings, despite their poor condition are now home to one of Ireland's best known art centres incorporating an Award Wining 192 seater theatre (one of only a handful of commissioning and producing theatre's in Ireland), gallery, dance studio, play resource centre, education and outreach department and also home to several cultural and art based tenants including resident theatre companies, artists, dance companies, and nine theatre groups/companies to name but a few!
15. The Playhouse is home to several flagship festivals including "The Big Tickle Comedy Festival" in September (the largest comedy festival in N.Ireland) as well as the Children's Art Festival in July of each year.
16. Over 100,000 people pass through the doors of the buildings each year, and an additional 30,000 are reached through The Playhouses Education and Outreach work ensuring that The Playhouse continually strives to meet its remit of "Making Arts Accessible to All". In 2004 The Playhouse was awarded "*The Stage – Outstanding Achievement in Regional Theatre Award*"; the first time the award ever was awarded to a theatre in N.Ireland as well as "*The Tower Hotel Business Excellence Awards Overall Winner – 2004*".
17. In 2004 The Playhouse won the N.Irish heat of the national television competition, *BBC Restoration*, and in August 2004, Blonski Architects presented the plans for the £4.6 million refurbishment of the two "B1 Listed" schools and new-build in the lower courtyard. Since then The Playhouse have raised £4.5 million of the £4.6 million needed to refurbish its buildings. The funding package is being completed at the moment, with work starting on the buildings in July 2007.
18. In March 2009 the Playhouse buildings (which were at the end of their refurbishment) won the "Royal Institute of Town Planner – Sustainability & Regeneration Award 2009", the first time that this prestigious award was won by an Arts Centre in N.Ireland.
19. In November 2009 the buildings won the prestigious BURA (British Urban Regeneration Association) Awards for "Best Practice in Regeneration". The building not only won because of the way the stunning buildings have been regenerated, but also how they acted as a catalysis for regeneration of the Cathedral Quarter of Derry, and more importantly, that in so many ways they acted as a tool in the regeneration of people themselves.
20. In December 2010 The Playhouse won The William Keown Trust "Prestige Access Award" for the County, in recognition of The Playhouses contribution to an accessible, user friendly environment.

If you would like to make a donation towards the "Playhouse Restoration Fund" then contact Niall Mc Caughan at Tel: (028) 71 268027 or email: info@derryplayhouse.co.uk