CHAPTER 7

LEARNING THE LESSONS OF THE SUMMERLAND FIRE

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, a non-technical account of the main findings of the *Summerland Fire Commission* Report was provided. It was seen that the high number of deaths was the result of delayed evacuation and the rapid spread of the fire. Defects in the means of escape, especially in terms of the location and design of staircases inside Summerland, also played an important role.

A book that analyses a fire disaster would be incomplete without an analysis of how the lessons of the tragedy were learnt when Summerland was rebuilt. The purpose of this chapter is to provide such an analysis. How did the architects of the rebuilt structure take into account the criticisms levelled in the Summerland report (chapter 6)? In this chapter, the reader will see how the lessons of one of the worst fire disasters in British history have been learnt. Before a comparative analysis is conducted between the two buildings, it is necessary to consider the torturous road to the rebuilding of Summerland after the fire.

7.2 The rebuilding process

The enthusiasm that lay behind the development of the original Summerland in the 1960s had evaporated overnight on 2nd August 1973; there was little, if any, enthusiasm regarding the development of the new Summerland. The site of the Island's tourist 'showpiece' had not only become synonymous with one of the worst-ever civil disasters in the British Isles, but also a burden and a seemingly bottomless pit for ratepayers' and taxpayers' money.

After the publication of the Summerland report in May 1974, Clifford Irving, the Chairman of the Island's Tourist Board, announced the Manx Government intended to build another leisure centre after the settlement of insurance claims arising from the fire. After the fire, many people thought Summerland should not be rebuilt. Peter Arlington, from Onchan near Douglas, expressed this view in a letter to *The Isle of Man Courier* (19th September, 1975, page 10):

> "I am convinced that the majority of the ordinary people on the Island would be pleased if any plans for a future Summerland, would be scotched once and for all…We don't want Summerland rebuilt. We want to get as far away from 'Summerland' as we can. The tragedy will never be forgotten so long as we still hanker after 'another Summerland'…All I want to see is the place cleared."

People holding this view believed it would be inappropriate to build another entertainment centre on the site. Some thought it would be more

desirable to leave an empty site as a memorial to the dead (e.g. a park like as at Aberfan in Wales) rather than redeveloping it for commercial purposes. Given that Summerland and the adjoining Aquadrome occupy 3.5 acres of prime land on Douglas seafront, this option was not economically realistic. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the fire destroyed only four of the seven floors of Summerland and caused only marginal damage to the Aquadrome. There were thus parts of the Derby Castle site that remained unscathed by the fire and which could form the basis of a new Summerland. Indeed, parts of the Aquadrome containing remedial bath facilities and saunas reopened 11 days after the fire. Mr Gordon Smith, the Manager of the Baths, said: "People have been coming in since we opened at Nine O' Clock this morning and we are quite gratified by the response". The Aquadrome's swimming pools did not reopen until 1st June 1974 because the building's roof had been damaged by explosions during the fire. This damage was compounded by gales during the winter of 1973/4.

When the Summerland inquiry was completed, sections of the eastern Galbestos wall overlooking the Manx Electric Railway (MER) depot were removed for safety reasons. However, the rest of the scorched steel skeleton remained throughout 1974 and 1975 as an uncomfortable reminder to residents and tourists alike of the fire. In a letter in *The Isle of Man Examiner* (31st May, 1974, page 7), a Douglas resident (unnamed) summed up what must have been the feelings of many of the town's residents:

> "The Summerland report published last week was correct when it said this tragedy would remain a scar on the minds of Manxmen. But could we not have taken swifter action to remove the physical scar, the awful ruins of Summerland before the season [summer 1974] began. It is before our eyes all the time, even when one strolls along the Promenade. And travelling past it up to Onchan remains a horrible experience."

The same letter writer continues by mentioning how Summerland's burnt-out skeleton had become a macabre tourist attraction.

> "Sitting on the promenade this week I overheard a group of young people saying they had 'been up to look at Summerland'. Hardly the sort of sightseeing for which the Island wishes to become renowned".

By early autumn 1975, the skeleton remained and little information about the rebuilding programme for Summerland had reached the Manx public. In particular, some Douglas ratepayers expressed their wrath at the situation to the local press. Mr Cyril Cain, Vice-Chairman of Douglas Residents' Association, said: "Residents and ratepayers in the town have the right to know". Another ratepayer asked: "What is happening about the million pounds plus paid out by the insurers? What is happening to the interest?" Members of Douglas Town Council also spoke out about the situation. "No one is prepared to commit themselves. Everyone has been told to keep their mouths closed in case they jeopardise their legal position…The situation is one gigantic farce", said Councillor Dominic

Delaney (quoted in *The Isle of Man Courier*, 5th September 1975, page 1). When the local press disclosed the Summerland skeleton was costing Douglas Corporation £78,640 per year, some residents threatened to take direct action and withhold a proportion of their rates cheque to the Corporation. "We are doing this as a protest at the lack of information and action", a female ratepayer said. The lack of information in the public domain at this time largely reflected the delicate and complex negotiations that were ongoing between the different parties (e.g. Manx Government, Trust House Forte) involved in the rebuilding of Summerland: e.g. a meeting took place between the parties on 25th April 1975. Little information could be released to the public until the deal had been sealed.

In late September 1975, the public became aware of progress when representatives of the Isle of Man Treasury, the Local Government Board, Douglas Corporation and Trust House Forte met in Douglas to discuss the rebuilding programme. Mr Clifford Irving, the Chairman of the Island's Tourist Board, was more optimistic about the timetable for rebuilding. Mr Irving told an audience of British tourist leaders assembled for the opening of a new Manx Information Centre in London on 24th September 1975 that rebuilding work would begin during the 1975/6 winter, with part of the complex being ready for the 1976 holiday season. He said:

> "We are determined to rebuild Summerland as the greatest contribution for all the year round tourism…We have reached agreement on the best way of doing this, and we are confident we can raise the considerable sum it will need".

Even at this stage, the Isle of Man Government was keen to distance itself from Mr Irving's comments about the rebuilding timetable. A Government spokesman told *The Isle of Man Courier* that Mr Irving was expressing a personal view and not an official one.

7.3 The Tynwald debate

Twenty-six months after the fire, definitive plans for the rebuilding of Summerland finally emerged. The proposed plans, which involved the Isle of Man Government contributing a maximum of £236,000, were debated in Tynwald on 21st October, 1975. The plans were the culmination of around six months of complex negotiations between the Manx Government, Douglas Corporation and Trust House Forte.

Finance

The original Summerland and Aquadrome complex cost Douglas ratepayers and Manx taxpayers £1,695,000, of which £1,005,000 was for Summerland. The physical fabric and fittings of Summerland were insured for £1,434,000. However, the insurance money paid out to Trust House Forte after the fire was only £1,045,897, reflecting the fact that the building's three lower floors were left substantially intact. After allowing for interest payments of £127,000, a total of £577,000 had to be found between the Isle of Man Government, Douglas Corporation and Trust House Forte. The escalation in rebuilding costs was largely accounted for by the high inflation rates (> 20%) of the mid 1970s. It was agreed the Government would contribute £236,000, the Corporation £118,000 and

Trust House Forte £223,000. Trust House Forte's contribution was largely used to re-equip Summerland with new furniture and fittings.

The original 1975 cost estimate for the re-building of Summerland was £1.75 million. However, the new Summerland cost £3.15 million, a figure nearly double the original cost estimate. An auditor's report was highly critical of the escalation in costs. "The fundamental cause of the financial problems was the fact that the design was not ready for the type of contract which was signed", the report stated. The construction period was over-optimistic and there was a "lack of detailed drawings". Trust House Forte "must carry much of the responsibilities for this…They should not have proceeded to seek tenders until all was ready". Costs also increased when the architects' plans were re-drawn after building regulation officers in Northern Ireland asked for 13 additional safety precautions to be incorporated into the building to compensate for a bye-law waiver (section 7.6.4).

The arguments

Whilst the Council voted unanimously in favour (7-0) of approving the use of Government money to rebuild Summerland, House of Keys members (MHK) were more divided (17-6), with six members voting against the plans.

The arguments in favour

Some members argued that the rebuilding of Summerland was an economic imperative for the Island. "This type of building in the Douglas area is essential if we are to keep ourselves in anywhere near a tourist isle", argued Mr Spittall. Mrs Hanson MHK expressed similar sentiments, believing a rebuilt Summerland would "be a great asset to both tourism and the residents of the whole Island and not only Douglas". Although some members expressed a personal dislike of the entertainment and facilities provided at Summerland, the building's wider appeal was recognised at the same time:

> "I would not thank you for it [Summerland] or the sort of entertainment that was provided but it was a great asset to the tourist industry of the island…I met people all over the British Isles who were fascinated by the facilities provided and it was a great tragedy…in that the disaster happened."
>
> (Mr Anderson MHK)

Given that Summerland's lower three floors still existed in the concrete shell, there was the recognition that Tynwald now had "to face the position of doing the best we can with a very bad job" (Mr Anderson MHK). More importantly, it was essential that Summerland's scorched steel skeleton be removed as quickly as possible. Mr Anderson argued:

> "As long as that skeleton is there, there will be a cloud over Douglas…it is the duty of every member…to see that sight, as far as possible, is removed as quickly as possible from the Douglas bay horizon."

Continuing this argument, Mr Anderson asserted that the Island's image was at stake unless prompt action was taken:

> "I believe it is the duty of the Court [Tynwald]…to support for the name of the whole of the Island, rubbing this blot out as far as it is humanely possible and put[ting] something there that will be acceptable to those…who visit this Island [in the future]."

Some arguments for Summerland's rebuilding were couched in cost terms, with some members reminding Tynwald of the realities of a high inflation economy. "This is the best bargain that we will get at this stage, or at any other stage, because the further we delay this thing [the rebuilding] the more they [ratepayers and taxpayers] will pay", said Mr Moore. Council member Mr Nivison stressed the need for action, arguing that "if we are to wait until such time as we get every "i" dotted and every "t" crossed we will never get off the ground".

The arguments against

Some members argued that the decision to commit Government money to rebuild Summerland should be delayed until more information was made available. Questions were also raised about the commercial viability

of the new Summerland and the suitability of the location. The most scathing criticism of the proposed new facilities came from Mr MacDonald MHK:

> "What are we getting for…£1.75 million pounds? The bottom floor…is a very brief discotheque with a lounge and lots of bar space. Perhaps another discotheque is a good thing in Douglas, I do not know, I am not in this racket. I turned to the next floor, this is very sketchily a sports area. It has four squash courts, it says roller-skating…and badminton and it has [a] gymnasium, children's rides. I turn to the next floor, what is that? There is a café, there is [*sic*.] table-tennis tables [and] a bar…I go to the final floor and what have we got there, again a vast bar area, serving…a one-armed bandit selection [and] a children's playing area. To me it is a new plan which has merely increased the drinking area…and provided very little else that was not there before apart from the squash courts…I cannot see this in any shape or form producing any returns to the Douglas ratepayers. I am certainly not travelling from Peel to sit in a T.V. lounge at the end of Douglas Promenade."

Some Tynwald members were unwilling to support the use of Government money to rebuild Summerland because they felt that issues relating to the insurance, public liability and financing of the original Summerland had been insufficiently transparent and remained unresolved. Commenting on the insurance issue, Mr Bell MHK queried: "Who paid the

premium, was it sufficient, what are the new arrangements; who has been paying the premium on the shell…We still do not even know whether the building is adequately insured." The insurance of the original Summerland was unusual in the sense the premium had been paid by the tenant (Trust House Forte) and not by the landlord (Douglas Corporation). "We did not know that [the insurance arrangements]", said Mr Bell in the October 1975 Tynwald debate. Mr Bell also expressed disquiet about whether the Manx Government was unknowingly entering into a commitment to be the landlord of Summerland, which could subsequently make it subject to litigation. "We have not yet even been advised that if [the Manx] Government enters into the realm of partner or landlord…whether we may equally be cited, if there is to be any litigation by any of the dependants of the persons who lost their lives so tragically", he argued. Mr Bell also felt the division of responsibility between Douglas Corporation and the Isle of Man Government for the original Summerland complex had been unclear:

> "When this building burnt down it was called the loss of an Island amenity but when the Douglas Corporation was building it it was called a tourist amenity for Douglas visitors. No-one has ever been able to firmly fix the role of Summerland and the responsibility for it."

Despite being sceptical about committing Government money for the rebuilding, Mr Bell recognised that it would be unfair for the financial burden to fall exclusively on Douglas ratepayers. "Douglas should be taken off the hook for a start, they have been bled enough on this", he argued.

7.4 The fun-palace re-opens

Nearly five years after the fire, Summerland re-opened to the public in two stages in 1978. There were concerns the re-opening would be delayed, when work permits for specialist bricklayers were withdrawn, leading to a delay in the fitting-out work (Cringle, 2000). There were also allegations of uneconomical working. The opening of Summerland in two stages reflected the building's dual function role as a sports and leisure centre during the winter and an entertainments centre during the summer. The first stage opened on Friday, February 24th, 1978, and included the sports and leisure

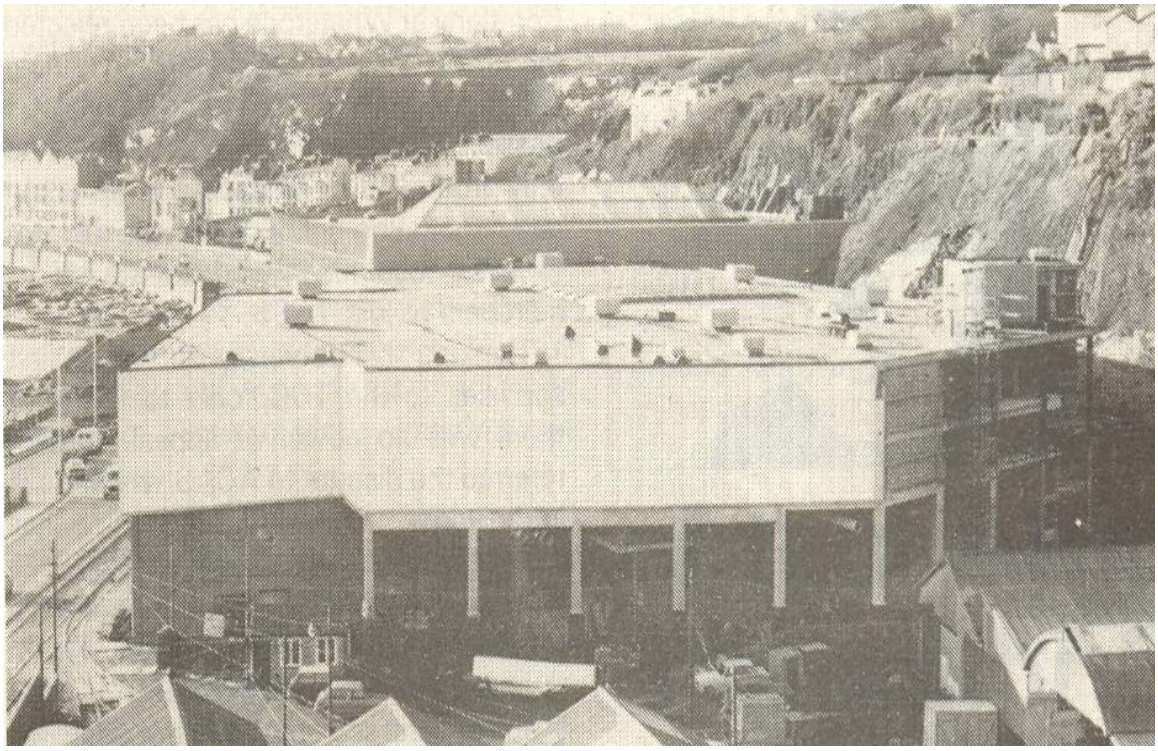


Figure 7.1: The new Summerland nears completion in late 1977
Only the NE corner of the building (bottom right of photograph) remains to be completed
(Source: Hayward, 1978, page 16)

facilities together with the basement discotheque. Trust House Forte claimed the building was the most modern and well-equipped sports and recreation centre in Europe. Using the over-hyped language common to tourist promotional literature, the company claimed:

> "Nowhere in Britain or Europe is there an entertainments centre to compare with Summerland. In sheer size alone, it is unique. A vast £3.5 million complex, combining sports and recreation with a whole world of entertainment under one roof…By its sheer size and variety, it is a complete resort within itself."

The facilities included four squash courts, a judo room, a netball court, eight badminton courts, four table tennis tables, one indoor hockey pitch, two indoor tennis courts, trampolines, a gym, two basketball courts, two volleyball courts and a sunbathing solaria. The new Summerland contained more sports facilities than the original complex. Summerland in its entertainments mode opened at the end of May 1978. During the summer, all sporting activities apart from squash were suspended, and the space used for a funfair and a roller skating rink. Capable of catering for 2,000 holidaymakers, the main floor was styled on a Mediterranean Piazza. To mark Summerland's re-opening, a more formal gathering took place at 5pm on Friday, June 23rd, 1978 when 200 invited guests assembled in the building's Piazza level in the presence of Sir Charles Forte to see the Island's Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Paul unveil a commemorative plaque. He described the building as "a memorial to the past and an act of faith in the future". The *Manx Star* newspaper commented:

> "Of necessity a low-key affair, pitched carefully to mark the launching of what it is hoped will be a major tourist attraction without offending the susceptibilities of those for whom the events on 2 August 1973 are still agonisingly vivid."

Islanders' reactions to the re-opening were mixed. Journalist Terry Cringle recalled: "When it was rebuilt, a lot of people were unhappy about it, but others seemed to think it would be kind of atonement for the old one" (quoted in Carter, 2003, page 8). Sharon Bridson, who was 12 at the time of the fire, was unimpressed with the new Summerland. She wrote on the BBC Isle of Man website:

> "[The rebuilt Summerland] didn't have the same atmosphere and at first people almost seemed to be looking over their shoulders as if they were waiting for something to happen. It was strange".

Unfortunately, the concerns expressed in Tynwald in October 1975 about Summerland's commercial viability came true. The building was not a commercial success, resulting in Trust House Forte disposing of their lease to a small concern. That did not achieve much success either, resulting in the centre being taken over by the Manx Government's Department of Tourism. The building was to remain a drain on taxpayers until its complete demolition in early 2006.

Did the fire reduce the number of visitors to the Isle of Man?

The number of visitors to the Island increased from 1971 to 1973 before declining sharply in 1974 - the year after the fire (**figure 7.2**). A three-and-half minute ITN news report broadcast on 27th August 1974 discussed the state of the Isle of Man tourist industry after the fire. Reporter Robert Southgate began by asking whether the fire had "left a permanent scar on the minds of the holidaymakers", and said there had been "a huge drop in visitors" since the fire. Mr. Southgate continued:

> "The vacancy signs in the hotel and boarding house windows tell their own story…Takings in the cafes are well down and there is no sign yet of a jackpot for the amusement arcade owners. The electric railway runs half empty."

Whilst the bad publicity resulting from the fire did not help, neither did the economic situation as Western countries went into recession following the sharp rise in oil prices in late 1973. The higher fuel prices forced the Isle of Man Steam Packet company to increase fares by nearly 40%; a return sailing from Liverpool to Douglas that cost only £6.60 in 1973 had increased to £9 in 1974. The recession "hit hard at the industrial north and Scotland, the areas from which the Island traditionally attracts its visitors", reported Mr. Southgate on ITN. In Britain, the miners' strike and the resultant three day week resulted in the fall of Edward Heath's Conservative Government in the February 1974 General Election; and high inflation meant that people had less disposable income to spend on luxury items such as holidays. After a weak 1974 summer season, the Manx Government decided to subsidize steamer fares by 50% from September 1974. This offer annoyed islanders

because these discounted fares were only available for people travelling from Britain to the Isle of Man. Manx people wanting to visit people in Britain had to pay the full fare.

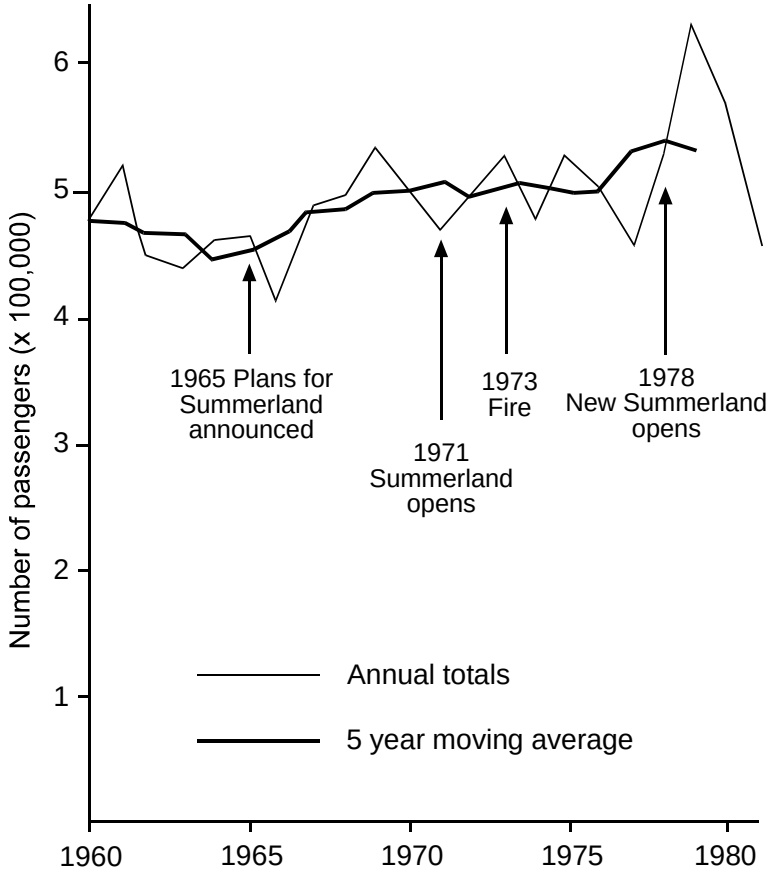


Figure 7.2: Tourist arrivals to the Isle of Man, 1960-80
(Enlarged from Cooper and Jackson, 1989)

The reduced number of visitors in 1974 thus reflected a combination of safety fears following the fire and the recession. In its October 1973 edition, the trade magazine *Manx Tourism* conceded:

> "It would be understandable if potential holidaymakers for next year [1974] were to hesitate before booking the Isle of Man for that [safety] reason: if such a disaster could befall the Isle of Man's most modern tourist building, they might wonder about the standards of fire protection in the old hotels and guest-houses."

In the August 1974 ITN report, even the Chairman of the Isle of Man Tourist Board conceded that the fire had had "a certain effect" on the Island's economy. He said that extensive coverage of the disaster had led some people to believe that Summerland was the only wet weather amenity in Douglas.

If the Summerland disaster had exerted a large influence over people's holiday plans, then Isle of Man tourist arrivals would have remained at 1974 levels or declined even further between 1975 and 1979. This simply did not happen, as numbers remained flat in the late 1970s (**figure 7.2**). In 1979, there were 763,145 visitors to the Isle of Man, but by 1986 the number had fallen to 471,260 (Cooper and Jackson, 1989), a fall of 38 %. Hence, visitor numbers did not show a sustained downward trend until around ten years after the fire, suggesting that the Summerland disaster was not the main cause. The Island's tourist industry would have gone into decline after 1980 regardless of the fire. Most seaside resorts on the British mainland were struggling at the time to compete with cheap Mediterranean package holidays and being an Island placed the Isle of Man at a further disadvantage (e.g. it received few day trippers). The cost of the sailing or the airfare (there were no cheap flights in those days) was also a significant factor.

With the recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s hitting the Island's primary catchment area of North West England particularly hard, the Isle of Man simply could not "compete on price or facilities in the mass [tourism] market" (Cooper and Jackson, 1989, page 394). During the 1980s, the Isle of Man was also criticised for having inadequate self-catering accommodation. Second holidays often taken outside the peak summer season were a growth area in mainland Britain during this decade. However, the expense of reaching the Island meant that the Manx economy did not benefit from the growth in the second holiday market. Cooper and Jackson (1985, page 74) added:

> "The problem is rooted in the fact that [traditional British seaside holiday resorts] represent major Victorian and Edwardian capital investment in bricks and mortar: a late nineteenth century recreational infrastructure that is no longer appropriate to meet the demands of the contemporary British domestic holiday market."

The number of people going on holiday to the Isle of Man was 287,000 in 2010. This means that the Island has lost roughly two in every three holidaymakers that used to visit in the 1970s.

7.5 Reacting against the Lomas-Gillinson design

Four weeks after the disaster, an article in the *Isle of Man Weekly Times* by Howard Fry suggested improvements that could be made to Summerland when it was rebuilt (Fry, August 30th 1973, page 9):

> "But let us hope that apart from using glass instead of acrylic sheet it will be possible to make other improvements…The whole Summerland idea would have had twice the charm if the whole ground [Solarium] floor had been arranged as a big indoor garden and if the two pools [the Aquadrome] had been landscaped into this garden using curves instead of straight lines to the pool's edges…It is obvious that there would be a great advantage in having an area of water in the main hall…And what about the great expanse of concrete wall [the cliff] at the back? Surely it is not beyond the wit of man to decorate that with not one but several waterfalls plus hundreds of indoor plants, shrubs and trees."

In the light of the holocaust produced by the burning of Summerland's Oroglas promenade wall and roof, it is understandable some newspaper commentators believed that the design faults in the original Summerland could be remedied in the new simply by replacing the acrylic sheeting with standard glass. Plastic Oroglas 'caused' the Summerland fire, the argument went amongst the public in the days following the disaster, so removing the Oroglas panels would solve the problem. This view is an oversimplification: the high number of deaths cannot be attributed solely to plastic Oroglas, but

reflected numerous defects in the building's design, construction and management (chapter 6). Moreover, the Oroglas did not ignite until more than 20 minutes after the Liverpool schoolboys had started the kiosk fire.

Let us suppose the architects submit their plans for the new Summerland. The architects want to make two major changes to the building's design. Firstly, it is proposed to use glass in place of Oroglas acrylic sheeting for the building's roof and sea-facing wall. Secondly, the architects' plans show that the three terraces at the eastern end of the building are to be served by two enclosed and properly designed emergency staircases instead of one. It can be seen that the approach here is to re-instate the Summerland design concept (chapter 3) using traditional materials whilst *partly* improving the means of escape at the same time. How would the authorities have reacted to such plans? As Mr Percy Radcliffe, the Chairman of the Local Government Board, explained (quoted in the *Isle of Man Examiner*, 24th October 1975, page 16), these plans would have been rejected for two reasons:

> "It was said that the reinstatement of the building to its original concept was impossible, on grounds of non-compliance with the expected new Building Byelaws and Theatre [fire safety] Regulations and also the requirements of the insurers."

The new Summerland described above would have been unsafe for two reasons. Firstly, a large volume of multi-storey space without compartmentation would still exist above the entrance level, making the building potentially vulnerable to rapid fire spread. Secondly, the building's

means of escape would remain unsatisfactory because of excessive travel distances on some open routes. In his *Isle of Man Weekly Times* article, Fry (1973) sees the absorption of the natural cliff face into Summerland as one of the great strengths of the original complex whose aesthetic appeal could be improved in the new Summerland. On the contrary, the cliff hindered the means of escape in the original Summerland; from a fire safety perspective, grafting the building, particularly the upper floors, into the cliff was not an acceptable solution for the new Summerland (**figure 7.2**).

Figure 7.2:
The upper floor of the rebuilt structure was erected clear of the cliff face
(Photograph: Ian Phillips)

The author obtained the minutes of a meeting held on 25th April 1975 to discuss the re-building of Summerland. They reveal that Trust House Forte would like to have re-instated the building to its original concept. Kenneth Paxton, the deputy manager of THF's leisure division, is minuted as saying their "architect did submit plans" with "transparent walls" whose aim was to create an "inside-out atmosphere". THF had even purchased steel for the re-building of Summerland; the Oroglas panels of the original Summerland were inserted on to a V shaped steel frame. These initial plans showed no further levels above the Solarium floor. To improve safety in the new building, the plans contained "more exits", a sprinkler system, the widening of the existing bridge over King Edward Road and the construction of a second bridge at Summerland's eastern end, and "protected escapes by the [Manx Electric Railway] tramway". The minutes of the meeting mention "screens to terrace levels", but this seemingly contradicts THF's intention not to re-build above the Solarium floor. This scheme, which would have required byelaw waivers, was submitted to the insurers who rejected the plans. Furthermore, as a purely theoretical exercise but one that nonetheless provided valuable insights to the scheme's suitability, the architect submitted the plans to the Greater London Council (GLC). The GLC found "various problems" with the plans: "Panels – materials – still would not be acceptable to GLC", the minutes record. The GLC was unhappy with the escape routes, but the minutes note how they would now be "acceptable" in the United States. The fact that the main entertainment area was not on the ground floor also did not satisfy GLC regulations. Admitting defeat, Mr Proctor, THF's solicitor, is minuted at the 25th April 1975 meeting as saying: "Impossible to reinstate. Would [word illegible but presumably be] same fire trap".

The three schemes

As it was impossible to re-instate the building to its original concept, three schemes were proposed for the new Summerland:

Scheme A: A single storey building on one level
Scheme B: Sports concept – inside and outdoor
Scheme C: Re-build Summerland on the Villa Marina site

The rebuilding period for schemes A and C was estimated to be 18 months. With Scheme A being approved, it is intriguing to understand why schemes B and C were rejected. In scheme B, the roof of Summerland would have been the Solarium floor, which would have been grassed over to create outdoor sports pitches (e.g. tennis, football). The area below the Solarium floor would have been used for a "sports and recreation hall". This scheme was rejected primarily because it was thought it would lose money. Scheme C was Trust House Forte's preferred option because of the Villa Marina's good central position on the Promenade. The Villa Marina is less than 15 minutes' walking distance from all of Douglas' seafront hotels and guesthouses, whereas Summerland is at least a 30-minute walk from hotels located on the Loch Promenade near the town centre. Kenneth Paxton, the deputy manager of THF's leisure division, is minuted in a meeting with Douglas Corporation on 25th April 1975 as talking about the "difficulties of [the] Summerland site". This is presumably a reference to the cliff face and the exposed nature of the site. However, Douglas Corporation rejected scheme C seeing it as illogical to abandon an existing site. The Corporation also feared that building Summerland on the Villa Marina site would generate an adverse public reaction. Tynwald members commented on Trust

House Forte's disquiet about Summerland's peripheral location. "When people like Trust House Forte with the ability to run things all over the country, when they say this is not the right place surely the public are fully entitled to know", argued Mr MacDonald MHK in Tynwald on 21st October 1975.

The logic of Scheme A

In scheme A, only one of the four floors destroyed by the fire was re-built. This was the Solarium floor, which was renamed the Piazza level in the new Summerland, and could accommodate between 1,500 and 1,700 people. The entertainment that was formerly provided in the Marquee Showbar on the first terrace was moved to the Piazza floor during the evening. Douglas Corporation and Trust House Forte wanted to maximise the use of the building around the year, and so allowed the Piazza level to be used for conferences and functions of various kinds. The artificial sunshine parlour (the Sun Dome) on the second terrace was never replaced in the new Summerland. Its closest replacement was separate male and female saunas below the Piazza floor.

The architects of the original Summerland claimed its revolutionary design would "set the architectural world alight"; innovation was an explicit component of the design process. By contrast, the architects of the rebuilt structure were primarily interested in creating a functional and *safe* building and were working to a *highly specific brief* from Trust House Forte. Functionalism as opposed to innovation was the only socially and politically acceptable path to take in the aftermath of the worst peacetime British fire disaster for 44 years. Whereas the original Summerland design construct

entailed “creating an environment where the sun always shines” (quoted in *The Summerland Story*, 1972, page 25), the architects of the rebuilt complex created an orthodox and much more enclosed structure that admits little daylight. The 1976 Summerland complex is thus best interpreted as being a reaction (or indeed an overreaction) against the Lomas-Gillinson design (chapter 3). It is an overreaction because the almost complete absence of windows in the building’s south wall adds significantly to the building’s brutality (**figure 7.3**). Lead architect Michael Joyce (personal communication) explained the logic behind the redesign:

> “Trust House Forte wanted one floor on top of the existing concrete box. This floor was a Showbar, where people would be watching the entertainment and so not require an outside view. We thus designed it to be inward looking”.

He added that entertainment centres were often designed in this manner, with few windows. The rebuilt upper floor is a low, white building. It has a steel frame construction clad with tall, vertical, convex panels of glass-reinforced plastic (GRP). Its bland nature complements the “triumphant display of concrete brutalism” of the lower floors of the original Summerland - “an environmental shock from which the northern end of Douglas Bay may well never recover” (Elleray, 1989). Former Manx Tourism Minister David Cretney is blunter in his views.

> "It is a horrible building and always has been. The original Summerland was far ahead of it and what followed looked more like a car park or prison rather than an entertainment complex."
>
> (quoted in the *Isle of Man Examiner*, 12th August, 2002),

With the three floors in the concrete shell and the Aquadrome remaining substantially intact, the architects' room for design manoeuvre was limited. The architects thus had to make the best of a very bad job. It is easy to criticise the appearance of a building, but the architects of the new Summerland faced considerable structural inertia as well as satisfying Trust House Forte's requirements. Michael Joyce said (personal communication): "We didn't experiment with different redesigns. Trust House Forte just wanted the one floor rebuilt".

Figure 7.3: Summerland from King Edward Road in 2003

This photograph shows the enclosed nature of the rebuilt upper floor and the rotting concrete wall of the original building. The fire exit is from the underground disco (CAVE 3) and was added after the fire. (Photograph: Ian Phillips)

It is perhaps understandable that the Manx authorities were preoccupied (or indeed paranoid) about safety standards during the rebuilding process. Before the plans for Summerland's rebuilding had even been discussed in Tynwald, Mr Clifford Irving, the Chairman of the Island's Tourist Board, conveyed the safety-first culture that was to prevail throughout the rebuilding process (quoted in the *Isle of Man Examiner*, 26th September, 1975).

> "We would expect the authorities to go to extremes in terms of safety…Considerable studies into all aspects of the construction and safety of the new Summerland have been undertaken with the assistance of specialised authorities."

Following the publication of the Summerland report, *The Times* (London) argued "it [the Summerland fire disaster] is a bitter warning to the Islanders, in their preference for self-sufficiency, not to despise the skills available on the mainland". During the rebuilding process, there was a pragmatic realisation that it was essential to consult widely and seek advice from Britain. This is self-evident in the comments made to Tynwald on 21st October, 1975 by Local Government Board Chairman Mr Percy Radcliffe.

> "The Board is assured that the building will be erected to the latest *United Kingdom* building standards and will be constructed in traditional materials. The Board will not hesitate to obtain specialist technical advice on the project from outside the Island, including from the [UK] Department of the Environment, with whom we have had considerable consultation, should this be necessary."

The Architects

The architects of the new Summerland were MacKeith Dickinson and Partners from Blackpool. This firm was chosen because they had already done much work for Trust House Forte by the mid 1970s, including redesigning Blackpool Tower after a fire in 1956. The lead designer was Michael Joyce and the job architect was Bill Cartmill. One member of the

redesign team said: “The subject was so sensitive that everyone felt he had to cover himself so added something to the list…The number of fire prevention requirements just kept growing” (quoted in Hayward, 1978, page 16). Around £250,000 was spent on the building’s fire precautions; a further £750,000 was spent on seeking impartial outside advice that the new Summerland was up to standard. The building’s fire precautions were well above acceptable standards. Eric Atherton, Douglas’ Borough Engineer, commented (quoted in Hayward, 1978, pages 16 and 17):

> “Money has never been a restraint when providing fire safety. We may have over reacted, but what happened before will never happen again. There isn’t anything else we could have done to make the building more safe.”

There were no formal inspections of the original Summerland by building control officers (section 6.7). During the rebuilding, the local authority stressed they were not going to make the same mistake again. Mr Atherton said: “Even if THF wants to do some painting or put up additional curtains, they must seek my approval”. The authorities stayed true to their word because Summerland was forced to close for a short period in the early 1980s when the local authority found out that work had been done on the building’s roof without seeking planning permission. The Island’s Chief Fire Officer John Hinnigan told *Fire* magazine (November 1984):

> “The complex operators were carrying out soundproofing work at roof level above the existing roof. There was no prior consultation concerning this work, which came to light when one of my fire prevention officers made an inspection”.

As the mixture of bitumen and felting being used was deemed to be a fire risk, Mr Hinnigan and Mr Atherton took the joint decision partially to withdraw the building's theatre certificate. Plans for the roof were then modified after the input of the fire chief and the borough engineer.

Summerland architect Michael Joyce drew a useful analogy between the building's fire precautions and wearing a pair of trousers. He said: "As well as using belt and braces to keep our trousers up, we've used string as well". **Table 7.1** summarises the structural fire precautions incorporated into the new Summerland.

Table 7.1: Structural fire precautions incorporated into the new Summerland (extracted from the architects' March 1976 diagram)

1 hour 30 minutes' minimum fire resistance to external cladding.
Glass-reinforced plastic (GRP) units to Class 0 fire resistance backed with 3/8 inch Asbestolux sheeting on 3/8 inch Asbestolux fillets. GRP units are fixed with metal angle irons to steel stanchions.
Internal linings: 3/8 inch Asbestolux on 3/8 inch Asbestolux fillets on ms 'T's with 2 inch thick mineral wool matt insulation with vapour barrier stapled to back of internal lining (90 minutes' minimum fire resistance)
2-hour minimum fire resistance to all structural steelwork.
All suspended ceilings to be constructed to Class I fire resistance (minimum).
Suitable and approved means of fire stopping to pipes/fire stopping and fire dampers to ducts through compartment and separation floors and walls.
Structural details to be submitted to Local Authority by Structural Engineers. No structural work to be carried out until details submitted and approved by the Local Authority.
Provision and construction of cavity barriers and fire stops to conform to Byelaw E.14.
Sprinkler system to be installed throughout building.
Vertical fire stops to be installed at not more than 65 feet apart.
Every separate surface finish must carry certificate indicating fire resistance

Fire detection

Whereas the original Summerland had only a break glass system, the authorities insisted on several methods of fire detection in the new Summerland. Smoke detectors and rotating infrared scanners were installed every few yards throughout the building. These detectors and scanners were linked to 2,000 sprinklers. The authorities even allowed for equipment failures by duplicating key systems. For example, the sprinkler system uses two different mains water intakes. Even if these had both failed, an internal water tank would have come into action, with pumps being operated by both diesel and electric motors. The false ceilings have a separate sprinkler system (Hayward, 1978).

The fire alarm's indicator panel is divided into seven main zones, which are in turn divided into 18 sub-zones. There are two stages in the operation of the building's fire alarm system. The first stage is initiated by any break glass point, heat sensor or sprinkler contact, and sends a signal immediately to the fire brigade. This stage "operates all the flasher/buzzer units…[and] provides an audible & visual zone indication on the main indicator panel [behind the reception desk]" (Architects' drawing of the fire alarm system, January 1977). After 80 seconds (the second stage), a pre-recorded announcement warns the building's occupants "of the imminent sounding of the evacuation signal" with the sounders operating 10 seconds later. This is completely different to the original Summerland, where the Control Room operative was relied upon to make an appropriate announcement.

During the re-design, the authorities considered moving the two tracks of the Manx Electric Railway that run directly in front of Summerland (**figure 7.3**). They decided against this solution, but instead the building's alarm system was wired to traffic lights on the Promenade that would change to red when activated to allow unobstructed access to the building (Hayward, 1978). The railway would not cause a problem for two of the four escape routes from Summerland's basement nighttime discotheque because the railway would have stopped running by that time. The track bed of the railway was hardened after the fire to provide easier access for emergency vehicles (Crawford, 1978). Summerland's fire detection equipment was so sensitive that it was often activated when dust was disturbed during dancing displays (Michael Joyce, Personal Communication).

7.6 Learning the lessons of a holiday inferno

In this section, the design, layout and use of the rebuilt Summerland complex (1978-2006) will be compared to the building destroyed by the fire (1971-1973). To simplify the description, the fire disaster complex will sometimes be referred to as Summerland I and the rebuilt structure as Summerland II.

7.6.1 The location of the main entrance

In the Tynwald debate of October 1975 (section 7.3), some members referred to the problems of access to the original Summerland. Council Member Mr Nivison said:

> "I would also hope that…the Architects…consider new approaches, new entrances. This place, it has been said, was hard to get out of, it was equally hard to get into."

Mr MacDonald MHK also mentioned the location of entrances during the debate:

> "It tells you here…they have changed all the entrances…The entrances are all perfect as far as I can see and I am not an architect. They are quite good from the study I have made, but I could not guarantee it, but I think they are quite good."

The *Summerland Fire Commission* (SFC) (Paragraph 201, page 67) criticised "the rather inaccessible position of the main entrance on its high terrace, as reached from the road". This configuration hindered the evacuation of the building because people exited the building on to a narrow terrace that was less than 17 feet wide in places rather than directly on to street level where they would disperse more easily (**figure 7.4**). Summerland survivor Mark Mitchell said (personal communication): "The concrete walkway…reminded me of my comprehensive school, overcrowded with running and stumbling". It is still possible to enter Summerland II by using this same route, but a new entrance has been added at street level in response to the lessons learnt from the fire disaster (**figure 7.5**). A visitor using the new entrance climbs seven steps from King Edward Road into a glass-fronted entrance podium before turning left into the building.

Figure 7.4: The walkway leading from the upper entrance in the rebuilt complex. (Photograph: Ian Phillips)

Figure 7.5: A new entrance at street level was added when Summerland was rebuilt

(Photograph: Ian Phillips)

This new doorway provides access to a staircase that was preserved from the original Summerland. On climbing one flight of stairs, the visitor reaches the building's reception level (**figure 7.6**).

Figure 7.6: The staircase leading down to the main entrance. The doorway leading to the open air was only added after the fire. A person using this staircase in the original Summerland would have had to descend a further flight of stairs to the right of the traffic cone into the Disco Foyer area. This illustrates how escape routes in the original Summerland were not direct enough.
(Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

A visitor then ascends a further flight of stairs to the Piazza level, which is the equivalent of the Solarium floor in the original Summerland (Level 4). In two flights of stairs, the visitor is brought directly from street level into the Piazza. This route is more direct than climbing the steps by the Aquadrome and entering the building by the terrace route (**figure 7.4**). Summerland's main entrance has thus been moved from the terrace to street level. This new entrance is separate from the original entrance into the basement discotheque, which is positioned 54 feet away.

Whilst the original terrace route into Summerland remains, additional signage has been added in response to the lessons learnt from the fire. The most prominent of these signs is attached to the pair of entrance doors that lead out on to the terrace (**figure 7.7**):

> "In the event of the FIRE ALARM SOUNDING, please proceed to the AQUADROME CAR PARK. DO NOT assemble on the balcony."

Figure 7.7: Summerland's upper entrance (E3 on figure 7.21). This was the main entrance into the original Summerland. The architects considered moving these doors to the south wall, where the chairs are currently stacked. The cloakroom and kiosk on the right-hand side of the photograph were added later.
(Photograph: Ian Phillips)

To resolve the problem of the pay boxes hindering people's escape from the building, a new set of doors with a total escape width of 14 feet was added to the north of the pay boxes (**figure 7.8**). When a general admittance charge to Summerland was dropped (along with the pay boxes), these doors were removed and part of the space used for a kiosk and cloakroom (**figure 7.7**).

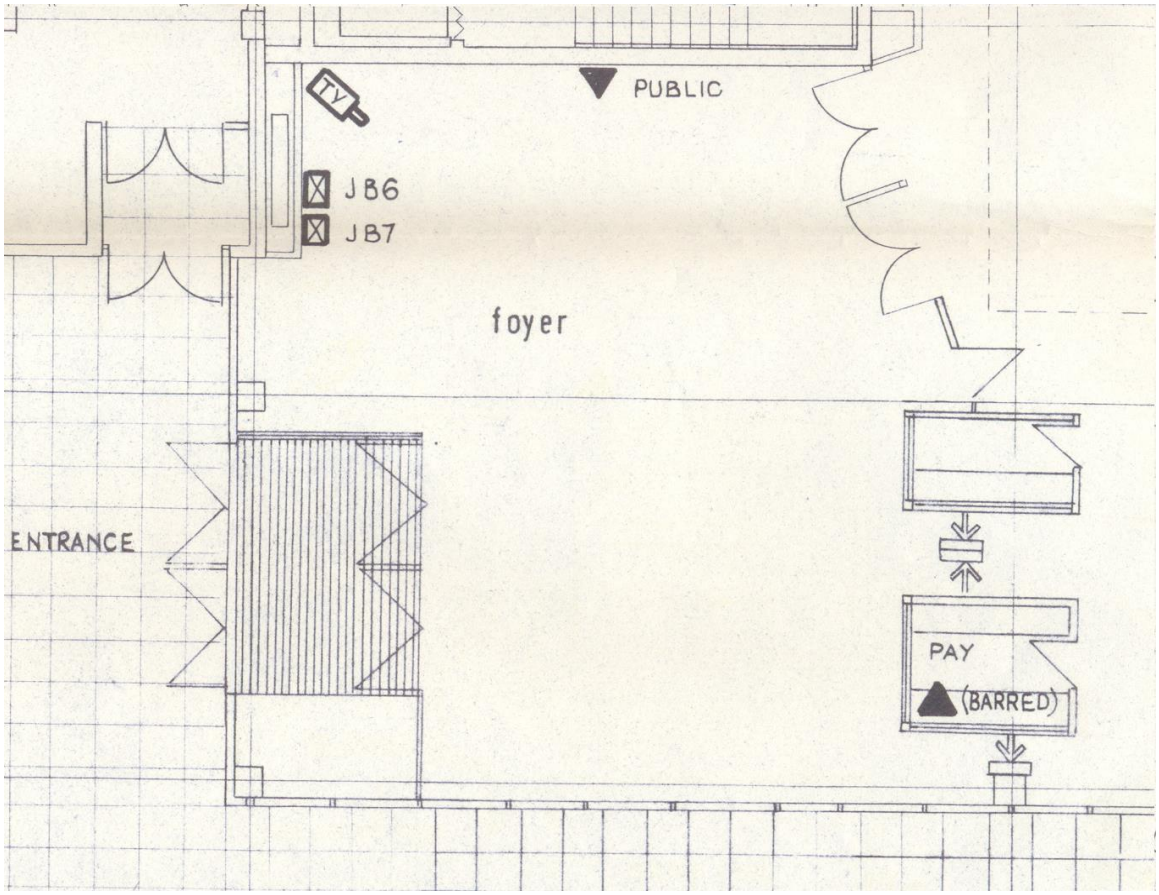


Figure 7.8:

Architects' plan of the upper entrance drawn in November 1977

The foyer is monitored by CCTV and has a public telephone.

Green fire exit signs and directional signs have been added to the terrace; the external stairs leading down to the Aquadrome car park are even marked by a large fire exit sign (**figure 7.9**). The purpose of these signs is to discourage people from lingering on the terrace in the event of an emergency. In terms of evacuation procedures, the external terrace is being treated as if it is an integral part of the building; it is not a place of safety, but an *escape route* to the assembly point.

Figure 7.9: The stairs leading down to street level from the upper entrance into Summerland
(Photograph: Ian Phillips)

When Summerland re-opened in 1978, a visitor could have reached street level by using the pedestrian bridge over the Manx Electric Railway and King Edward Road. The bridge was subsequently demolished (**figure 7.10**), which meant that the only public means of access to the terrace was by ascending the steps from the Aquadrome car park (**figure 7.9**). Summerland's management is also conscious of the need to keep the main entrance free from obstructions: a notice warning people against chaining bicycles is prominently displayed by the main entrance.

Figure 7.10: The Aquadrome - the railings and the uneven concrete surface show the location of the former bridge
(Photograph: Ian Phillips)

7.6.2 The replacement of the floors destroyed by the fire

Entering Summerland I by the terrace route, a visitor walked into the Solarium with its 67ft high Oroglas roof. They would immediately notice the building's large enclosed space and transparent nature. At the other end of the building were three upper floors arranged as open-fronted terraces above the Solarium floor (chapter 3). The Solarium and the terraces (Summerland's four upper floors) were destroyed in the fire.

By contrast, two dimensions of the complex's design are readily evident when a visitor enters Summerland II by the terrace route: the lower roof height (~ 20 feet) and the more enclosed nature of the building (**figure 7.11**).

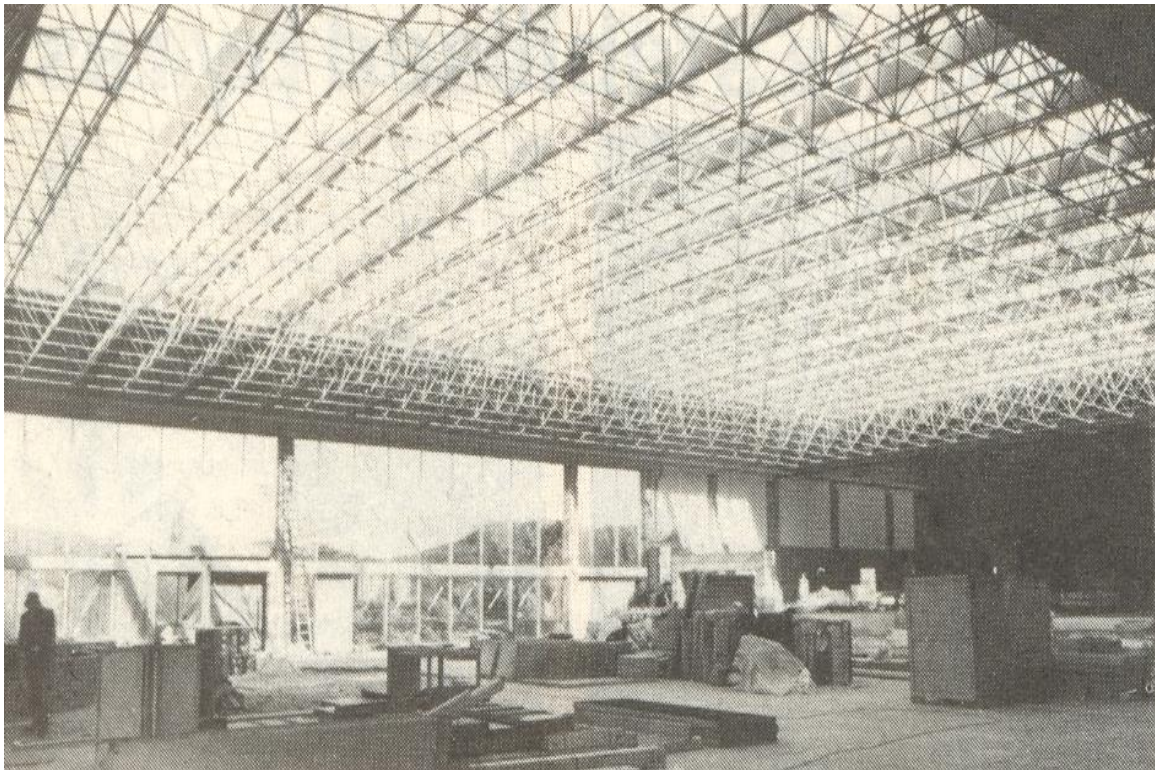


Figure 7.11: The new leisure hall (the Piazza floor) nears completion (Source: Hayward, 1978, page 17)

The roof of Summerland II is less than one half of the height of the original Oroglas roof. The lower height means the roof of Summerland II is no longer visible behind the Aquadrome when the Derby Castle site is approached from Douglas town centre. It can be seen that the architects have not sought to create the large enclosed volume that was fundamental to the original Summerland. "[Summerland] now appears as a mere appendage of the Aquadrome, which rises immediately to the west of it", commented Crawford (1978, page 37).

Summerland I was designed to provide an "environment where the sun always shines". This design objective was largely abandoned for the rebuilt structure, with the roof being an enclosed steel space deck covered mostly with metal decking topped with felt and chippings (Crawford, 1978). However, in the central area of the Piazza floor, the steel sheeting is interrupted by a square suntrap of barrel sectioned "Plastilux" sheeting (**figure 7.12** and **figure 7.13**). PéVéClair, an extruded rigid PVC sheet, 3mm thick, was used for the suntrap. This material satisfies building regulations as well as solving the problem of solar glare. This suntrap was later dispensed with to leave a totally enclosed roof. Dispensing with this suntrap completely changed the character of the Piazza floor (compare **figure 7.13** and **figure 7.14**). By 2003, Summerland II admitted little natural daylight and is mostly lit by artificial lighting (**figure 7.14**). Although large windows form about one half of the building's north wall (**figure 7.11**), these admit little natural daylight because they are in front of the cliff. There is another row of windows near the terrace entrance into Summerland; these are the replacement of the glass and Oroglas windows in

Summerland I. A long but narrow row of windows in the building's south wall admits even less light into Summerland II at this level (**figure 7.3**).

Figure 7.12: The suntrap of barrel sectioned "Plastilux" sheeting (Source: Crawford, 1978, page 37)

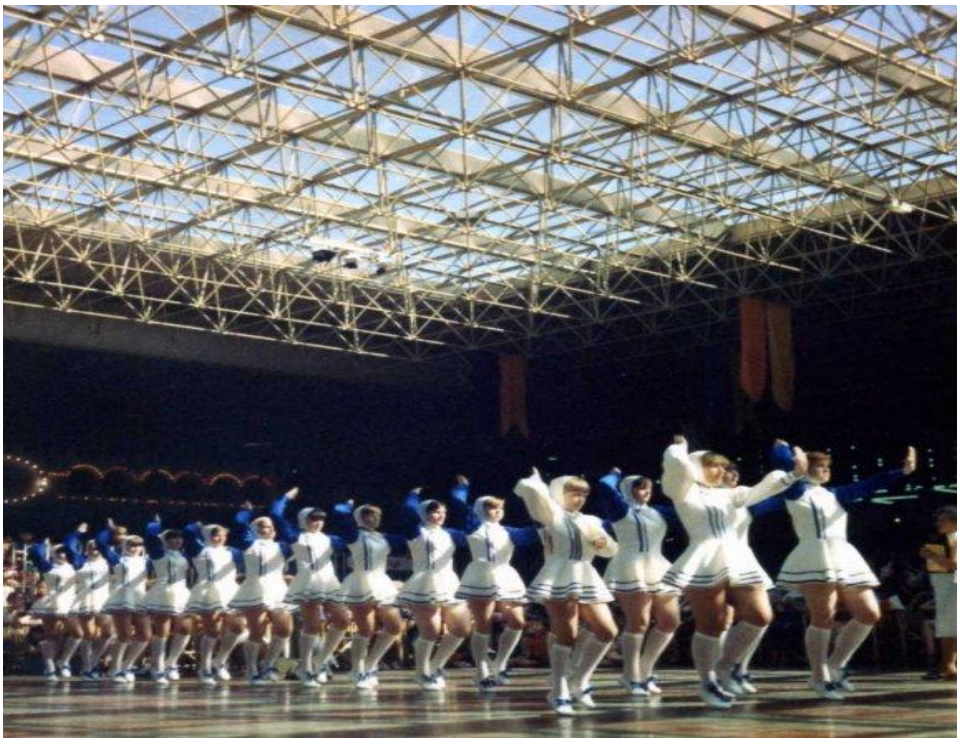


Figure 7.13: The suntrap during a display by majorettes circa late 1970s or early 1980s (Photograph supplied by Ricky Rooney; photographer unknown)

Despite the differences in natural light levels between the two Summerlands, a visitor entering the rebuilt complex by the terrace route will immediately notice some similarities with the building destroyed by the fire. The main similarity is that the western half of this level, which is known as the Piazza, serves the same function as the Solarium floor in Summerland I. It is a large undivided space where live entertainment shows and events (e.g. dinners) are held (**figure 7.14, figure 7.15** and **figure 7.17**).

Figure 7.14: The Piazza floor in 2003 – the height of the roof is less than one-half of the height of the Oroglas roof in the original Summerland. A sprinkler system runs through the steel space roof. (Photograph: Ian Phillips)

Another similarity is the Piazza Cafeteria (**figure 7.16** and **figure 7.17**), which occupies a similar position to the Restaurant in the original complex. However, the differences between the two Summerlands are more noticeable than the similarities. The most notable difference is that the three open fronted terraces have not been rebuilt. As Mr Radcliffe, the Chairman of the Local Government Board, explained to Tynwald members in October 1975:

> "It is proposed that the new building will be smaller but…will be a commercially viable scheme…The public entertainment areas will…be at the original main entrance level [Solarium floor] and below."

Figure 7.15: The Piazza floor set for a Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) dinner in 1983. The white railings on the right-hand side can be seen on the right-hand side of figure 7.14. (Photograph: Added to the *Summerland Appreciation Society Group* on Facebook by Chris)

Figure 7.16: The 53.66ft level of the Piazza floor. The Piazza Cafeteria is on the right-hand side of the photograph. The white railings on the left-hand side can be seen on the right-hand side of figure 7.15. (Photograph: Ian Phillips)

Only one of the four floors destroyed by the fire (the Solarium) was rebuilt. This was because Trust House Forte specifically instructed the architects to do this because the company felt the original Summerland was far too big (Michael Joyce, Personal Communication). In particular, the top floor (the Cruise Desk) was underused. Owing to this highly specific brief, the architects did not experiment with radically different plans. The rebuild was driven by THF's desire to create a building that was economically viable and affordable because the architects could have provided additional floors above the Piazza level that were more compartmentalised than the original terraces. The decision taken not to rebuild the top three floors could also be interpreted indirectly as a response to the fire disaster, so as to ensure

"parents and children pursing different activities in the upper portion of Summerland will not again find themselves stranded on different levels" (Crawford, 1978, page 37).

Figure 7.17: The Piazza floor in 1983 looking towards the Cafeteria, which is behind the brown screen (Photograph: Added to the *Summerland Appreciation Society Group* on Facebook by Chris)

The architects have also used the space on the building's four lower floors more effectively (e.g. enclosing the crazy-golf terrace, see **section 7.6.3**; erecting a mezzaine floor at the back of the building between the lower and upper downstairs levels, see **section 7.6.5**). This means that some of the facilities (e.g. sunbathing solarium, television lounge) on the original terraces (Marquee Showbar Floor, Leisure Floor and Cruise Deck) were relocated to lower floors after the fire. From a more indirect and

philosophical perspective, the removal of the building's upper three floors could be interpreted as a politically astute move designed to make the new Summerland more morally acceptable to a generally hostile Manx public. Summerland II could thus be viewed as being a balance between pragmatism, affordability and ethics. The approach taken was pragmatic because it made economic sense to modify what already existed in the concrete shell as opposed to demolishing the entire complex and starting again from scratch. At the same time, the approach taken was as ethical as was practically possible because the floors on which most of the victims of the fire died were omitted from the rebuilt structure.

Whilst the public entertainment areas in Summerland II are at the original main entrance level and below, there is one flight of stairs (see **figure 7.21**) that ascends from the Piazza floor to the north of the Cafeteria and provides access to a set of public lavatories and several storerooms (e.g. bottle store, spirit store, dry goods store, chilled areas). These lavatories are positioned at the 63ft level, which is six feet below the Marquee Showbar floor in the original Summerland. The new 63ft level also accommodates the top of the Cinema. At the end of the short windowless corridor serving these lavatories is a pair of double doors secured by panic bolts (push bar to open). This leads to an enclosed emergency staircase (C1: see **figure 7.21**) that discharges into the eastern service yard (section 7.6.4), thus providing an alternative escape route from the lavatories should the route via the Piazza Level become blocked by fire. This illustrates an important principle of public building design: "…if a person cannot go safely in one direction because of fire, he must be able to go in another direction and reach safety

unharmed" (SFC Report, Paragraph 173, Page 59). Only extremely short dead-ends are allowed in public buildings.

In addition to the Cafeteria (which is often used for children's birthday parties), the eastern end of the Piazza Level contains a 200 seat Dolby Sound Cinema showing the latest films (**figure 7.18**).

Figure 7.18: The Cinema. The doorway to the right of the screen leads to staircase C1 on the plan (figure 7.21)
(Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

The Cinema opens nightly at 8pm and on Saturday and Sunday at 2.30pm for matinees. Two television rooms were provided adjacent to the Cinema when the complex reopened in 1978. These rooms were to replace the television viewing area located on the Leisure Floor of the original

Summerland. In 2003, these two TV rooms were no longer open to the public, with the Manx Model Railway Club utilising space in this area. These television rooms occupy roughly the same position as the crazy-golf kiosk where the Liverpool schoolboys started the fire. The Cinema occupies a similar position to the amusements and bingo area in the original building. Summerland in 2003 did not have an amusement arcade as such, but machines line the wall between the Cafeteria and the flight of stairs providing access to the lavatories above the Piazza floor (**figure 7.16**).

7.6.3 The crazy-golf terrace

The Oroglas promenade wall encasing the Solarium and the three terraces of the original Summerland was set back from the reinforced concrete wall that formed the complex's three lower levels. The resulting roof space was occupied by a crazy-golf course that ranged in width from 32ft to 96ft at the eastern end of the site. It was, of course, on this crazy-golf terrace that the fire began (chapters 4 and 6). When Summerland was rebuilt after the fire, the decision was taken to remove this external terrace. The building's external wall now extends directly upwards from the original concrete wall (**figure 7.3**); thus, the space formerly occupied by the crazy-golf course is now enclosed inside the building. The terrace has been removed for a number of reasons. Firstly, it increases the total area of the Piazza floor from 31,600 to 37,700 square feet. Indoor space that was lost by not rebuilding vertically (section 7.6.2) has thus been partly retrieved by extending the enclosed leisure space horizontally. Secondly, it reduces the possibility of an external fire from threatening the building, thereby reducing the external exposure hazard. Although the walls of Summerland II are non-

combustible and possess two hours' fire resistance, it is still possible that a fire started on the external terrace could have threatened the building. For example, one possible situation could be a rubbish bin fire that occurs near an open window. Omitting the terrace reduces this exposure hazard, but does not eliminate it completely. Summerland is located in an urban environment, where it is extremely rare to find "a total absence of exposure hazard" (SFC Report, Paragraph 123, Page 44). It should, however, be noted that the Summerland fire kiosk scenario could not happen again in Summerland II even if the external crazy-golf terrace *had* been included in the plans owing to the properties of the external wall.

The area formerly occupied by the crazy-golf course was largely occupied in 2003 by the Manxland Children's Play Area (**figures 7.19** and **7.20**). Manxland is a soft play area that according to a promotional leaflet has "lots of exciting features including ballponds, climbing frames and an aerial glide". Manxland replaced the amusements and bingo area that occupied this area when the complex reopened in 1978. There was no bingo area in Summerland in 2003.

Figures 7.19 and 7.20: The Manxland children's play area

Note the prominent green exit sign on the left of the top photograph.

(Figure 7.19: Ian Phillips; Figure 7.20: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

7.6.4 Means of escape from the Piazza floor

The main problem faced by the architects in the redesign was the delay in obtaining byelaw approval for the Piazza floor, especially the design of the main hall to replace the Solarium. This account is taken from Hayward (1978). In April 1976, new Manx building byelaws specified that a single room (compartment) must not exceed 7,000 m^3. Despite the lowering of the roof, the Piazza's hall was around 20,000 m^3. Accordingly, Trust House Forte applied to the **Manx Government** for a waiver of the byelaw. Given the Government's considerable financial stake in Summerland, Government officials felt it would be unethical to agree to a waiver. For this reason, the Government sought advice from the **Department of the Environment (DOE)** in London. With the extra fire safety measures being incorporated into the complex, the DOE felt that it would be reasonable to relax the byelaw, but stressed a more detailed investigation would be necessary to be completely sure. Unsurprisingly, the Isle of Man Government took the precautionary principle and sought impartial advice from **building regulation officers in Northern Ireland**. They agreed to the waiver, but only after 13 conditions – all involving extra safety precautions – had been satisfied. Due to the delay in seeking byelaw approval, construction work began two months behind schedule in September 1976. There was a further delay, as the architects spent six months amending all the drawings to satisfy the waiver's conditions. Consequently, Manx contractors Parkinsons finished the building work around ten months behind schedule. Lead architect Michael Joyce recalled (personal communication): "Summerland was one of the first buildings to be

built under the new regulations. Dealing with the Northern Ireland regulations was particularly onerous".

In the light of the criticisms voiced by the *Summerland Fire Commission* (Paragraphs 170-189, Pages 58-64), fire exits from the Piazza Level needed to be more numerous and better distributed than those available on the Solarium floor (**figure 6.11**) when the fire broke out. Furthermore, the enclosure of the crazy-golf course at the front of the building increased the floor space of the Piazza Level by 19%. Accordingly, the maximum occupancy of the Piazza Level is greater than the Solarium floor, thereby necessitating further fire exits. When comparing the Piazza's means of escape to the original Summerland, it is important to remember that few people are entering the Piazza *from above*. The Solarium's exits and staircases needed to accommodate people on that level *and* those on the three terraces. By contrast, the fire escapes from the Piazza need only to accommodate people from that level plus the small number using the upper toilets at the 63 ft level. In theory, the means of escape in the original Summerland needed to be more lavish because of the higher occupancy figures (Solarium and the three terraces). In reality, the reverse is the case, with Summerland II having much more generous means of escape than the original complex despite its lower occupancy figures. The fact that there are 14 exits from the Piazza Level (**figure 7.21** and **figure 7.22**) compared to only eight from the Solarium floor graphically illustrates how the means of escape in the original Summerland were defective. Three of these escapes routes did not appear in the architects' original plans, but were a condition that had to be satisfied before the byelaw waiver was granted.

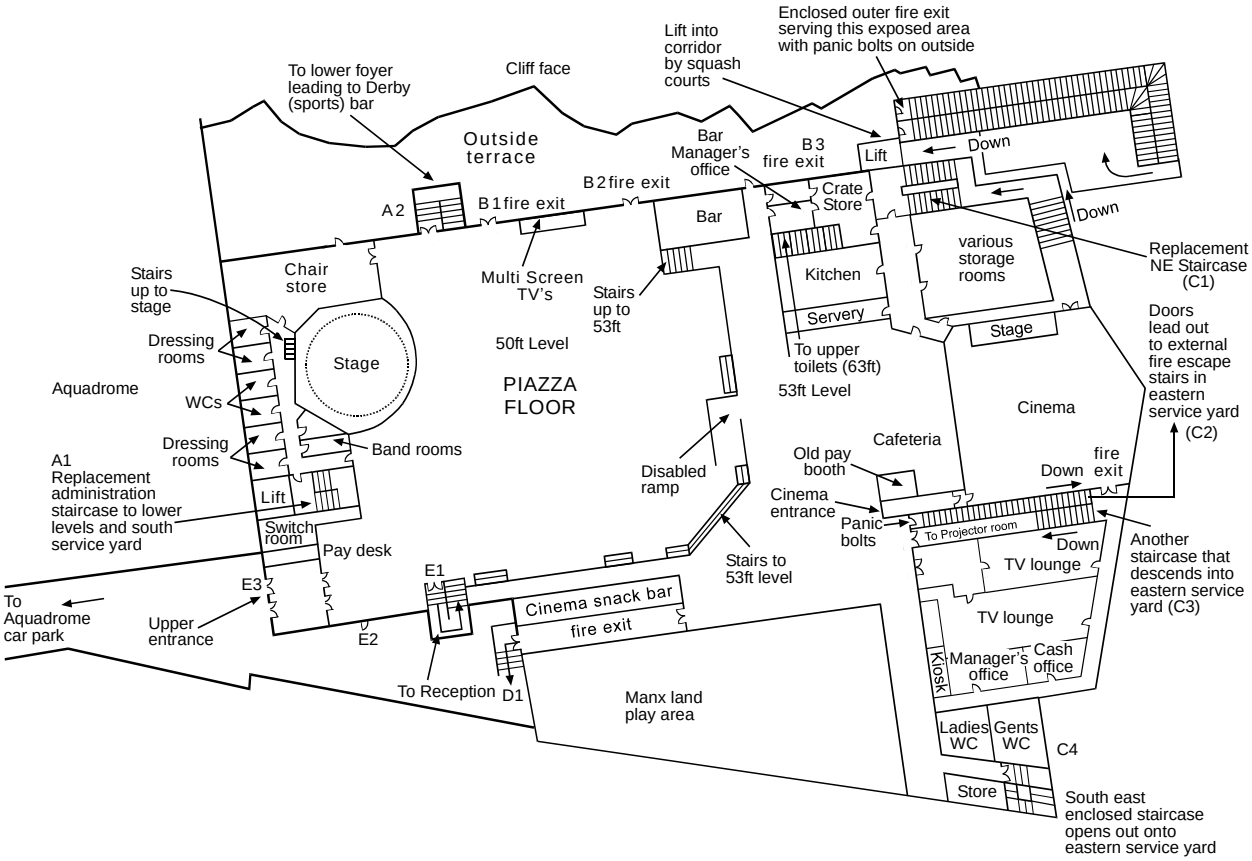
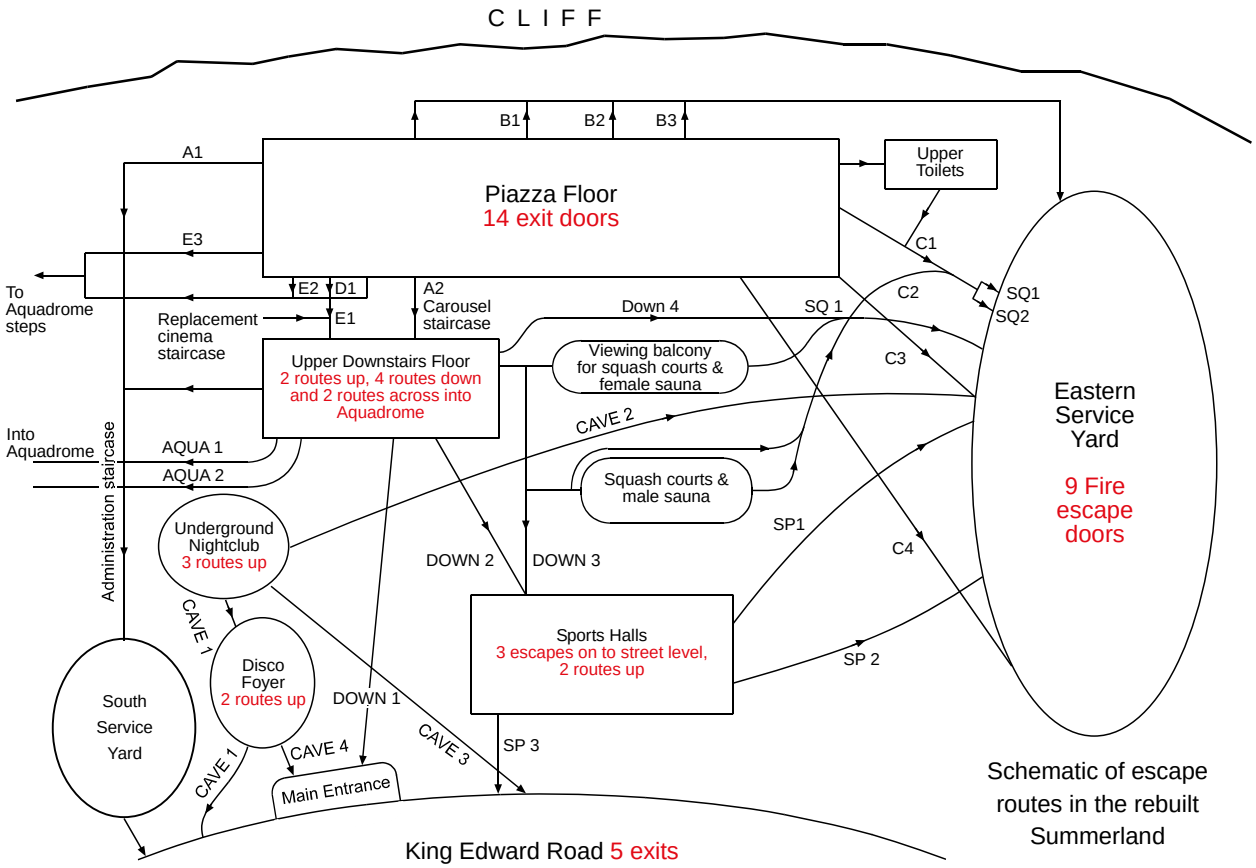


Figure 7.21: The Piazza level of Summerland (Plan by Ian Phillips, Kevin Burkhill and Anne Ankcorn of the University of Birmingham; and Ricky Rooney and James Turpin from Douglas)



Schematic of escape routes in the rebuilt Summerland

Figure 7.22: Schematic of escape routes in the new Summerland (Drawn by Kevin Burkhill and Anne Ankcorn, University of Birmingham)

The staircases and escapes

At a meeting between the Manx Government, Douglas Corporation and Trust House Forte to discuss the new Summerland, the architect drew attention to the means of escape. The dimensions of the staircases in Summerland II were related to the capacity of the adjacent areas and, as can be seen in **figure 7.22**, were in most cases separated so that each staircase did not admit more people as it descends out of the building (*The Isle of Man Examiner*, 24th October, 1975). These principles must be remembered when

evaluating the means of escape from the building's Piazza Level, which will now be described in a clockwise fashion from the upper entrance on the terrace (**figure 7.21**).

The terrace entrance

The exit on to the terrace from the Piazza floor (E3) is identical to that from the Solarium and consists of a double set of glass doors (**figure 7.7** and **figure 7.24**). Like the original Summerland, there is also a glass door secured with panic bolts (push bar to open) in the south wall near the terrace entrance to provide additional escape width (E2). The terrace entrance is a more satisfactory escape route than in the original Summerland because people can move directly from the Piazza floor to the main entrance doors (**figure 7.23**) without being impeded by the pay boxes. Furthermore, in Summerland I, escape width to these exit doors (E2 and E3) was narrowed by an escalator descending from the first terrace and the open plan Cinema Staircase that led downwards to the Upper Downstairs Level (**figure 6.11**). The escalator and the Cinema Staircase (**figure 7.23**) were removed after the fire. Pressure on the terrace entrance has also been alleviated by adding a further entrance to Summerland at street level (**figure 7.5**) and by improving the means of escape at the building's eastern end.

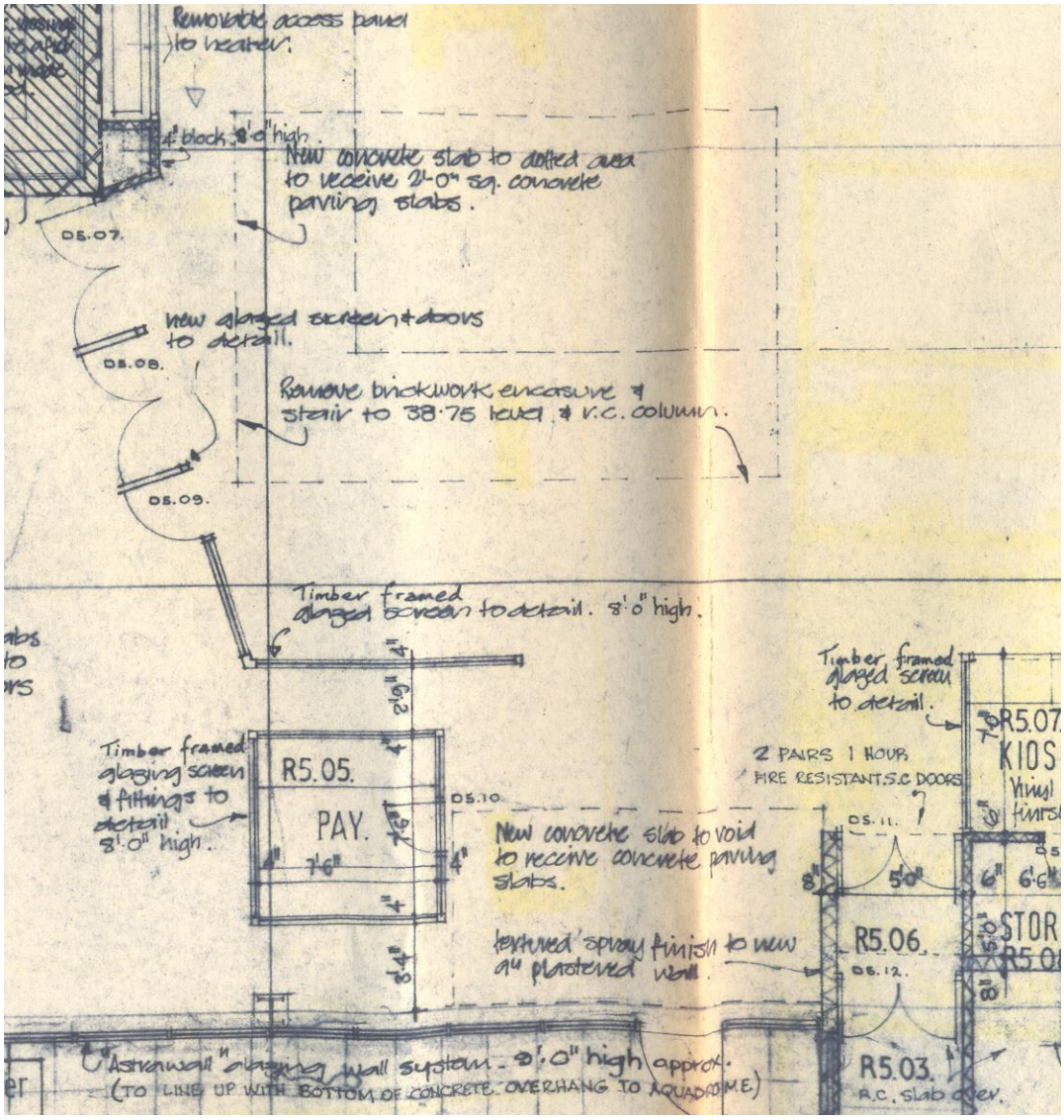


Figure 7.23: The architects' plan instructing the contractors to remove the Cinema Staircase down to the Upper Downstairs Level (Plan drawn in March 1976; all architects' drawings were obtained from Manx contractors Parkinsons)

Figure 7.24: The double set of glass doors forming the terrace entrance (E3) can be seen in the background of this photograph taken in 1983 (Photograph: Added to the *Summerland Appreciation Society Group* on Facebook by Chris)

The Aquadrome party wall and the cliff

The *Summerland Fire Commission* (SFC Report, Paragraph 180iii, Page 61) criticised the fact that one escape route from the original complex led into the adjoining Aquadrome. This was unsatisfactory for two reasons. Firstly, the Aquadrome is not fire-separated from Summerland; a fire in Summerland could have easily spread into the Aquadrome. Secondly, the row of six glass doors providing access to the Aquadrome was positioned at the end of a long open escape route across the Solarium floor (up to around

200 feet from the Restaurant). An escape route through the Aquadrome needlessly increased this excessive travel distance.

When the complex was rebuilt after the fire, careful consideration had to be given to the relationship between Summerland and the Aquadrome in order that the reconfigured arrangement did not impede the means of escape from Summerland. Unsurprisingly, the escape route into the Aquadrome was removed. A solid wall has replaced the glazed wall that formed a section of the party wall between Summerland and the Aquadrome. The Aquadrome's swimming pools are thus no longer visible from the Piazza floor. Moving north from the terrace entrance, the first fire escape has been provided by widening the existing Administration Staircase from 2 feet 9 inches to around 5 feet (A1). The staircase in Summerland II is reached by a set of double doors *directly from* the Piazza floor, which are clearly marked as providing access to an emergency escape route (**figure 7.25**). This staircase will now be referred to as the adjusted administration staircase (AAS).

Figure 7.25: The adjusted administration staircase (AAS) is reached through the doorway to the immediate left of the stage. This photograph was taken after Summerland closed to the public in 2004. (Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

After walking through these doors, a person walks along a short corridor (**figure 7.21**) before turning left into the stairwell (A1). There is a lift at the top of the stairwell. This differs fundamentally from the point of entry to the original Administration Staircase, which was positioned at right angles and located only 15 feet away from the terrace entrance behind a door marked 'Private'. This staircase was hidden from public view, reflecting the fact it was designed primarily for staff use in the original Summerland. In the light of the criticisms voiced in the Summerland report (Paragraph 180v, Pages

61-2), the architects of the new Summerland have been conscious to provide a staircase of adequate width that is clearly visible to members of the public on the Piazza floor. This staircase discharges into the South Service Yard and hence on to King Edward Road.

The corridor providing access to the AAS then turns to the right and provides access to backstage facilities (e.g. band room, dressing room, lavatories) used by entertainers (**figure 7.21**). The stage occupies the northwestern corner of the Piazza floor between the AAS and the building's north wall (**figure 7.25**). The architects of Summerland II needed to improve the means of escape from the northwestern corner of the building's Piazza level. This has been partly achieved by redesigning the Administration Staircase, so that its point of entry is clearly visible from the Piazza floor (A1). It has also been achieved by erecting the upper floor of the rebuilt structure clear of the cliff face (**figure 7.2**). "It will…be seen that the main walls of the building are to be some distance from the cliff face at the 50 feet levels [Piazza floor] and above", said Mr Percy Radcliffe (quoted in *The Isle of Man Courier*, 24th October 1975, page 18). Along the northern wall of the Piazza floor are four sets of double doors (A2, B1, B2 and B3) (**figure 7.21**). There is also an additional escape route from a chair store from the backstage area, which would not be visible to members of the public. The first set of doors visible to the public (A2) – the one on the far left nearest the stage (**figure 7.26**) – leads downstairs by a concrete staircase that was kept from the original Summerland (the Carousel Staircase). However, there is now a self-closing fire door at the top of this stairwell. Staircase A2 leads to the building's reception level and into a small foyer, which then feeds onto the Derby/Sports Bar area (section 7.6.5). A set of

double doors to the left of the bar then provides access to the AAS. The AAS also acts as one of the Aquadrome's fire escapes, being entered by a door next to the small pool.

Figure 7.26: Fire exits A2 and B1. A2 provides access to a staircase that descends to the reception level. B1 leads directly out into the open air between the building and the cliff face. This photograph shows preparation for a *Transport and General Workers Union* (TGWU) Banquet in May 1983. Note how the waterfall is now *outside* the complex – compare to figure 3.25.

(Photograph: Added to the *Summerland Appreciation Society Group* on Facebook by Chris)

The fire exits B1, B2 and B3 (**figure 7.21**) lead directly out into the open air and provide access to a raised path between Summerland's north wall and the cliff face (**figure 7.27** and **figure 7.28**). At the eastern end of this path, two doors secured with panic bolts provide access to an enclosed staircase about 12 feet wide (**figure 7.29**).

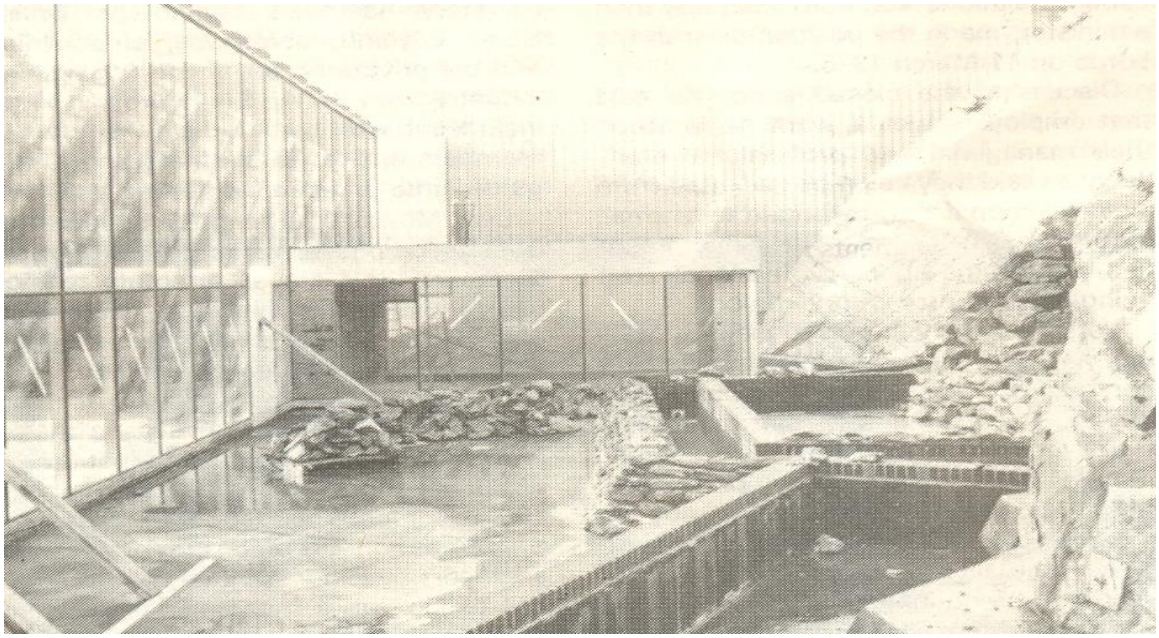


Figure 7.27: In the original Summerland, the rock face formed the hall's rear wall. Now a terrace has been created to provide an additional fire escape route. The now enclosed Carousel Staircase (A2) jutting out at the rear of the main hall can also be seen on the photograph (Source: Hayward, 1978)

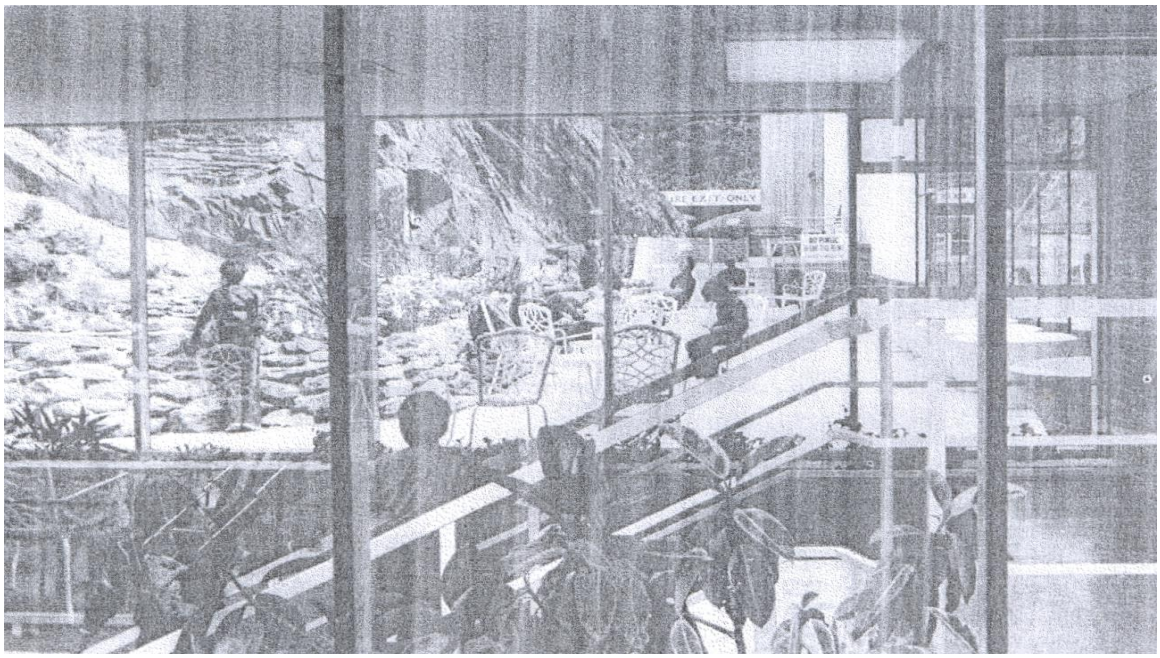


Figure 7.28: The terrace viewed from the Carousel Staircase (A2). Note the prominently marked fire exit sign in the background (Source: Crawford, 1978)

Figure 7.29: The fire escape reached from doors B1, B2 and B3 on the Piazza floor and the raised path by the cliff face
(Photograph: Ian Phillips)

This cliff staircase projects out into the eastern service yard. At the foot of this staircase are two sets of double doors secured by panic bolts. Opening these doors, a person completes their escape by descending sixteen external steps that lead down into the service yard (**figure 7.29**). It is of some significance that the exit doors are not positioned at street level. Whilst there are prominent 'No Parking' signs in the Eastern Service Yard, it is still possible that an inconsiderate person could have parked their car in front of the fire exit doors if they had been positioned at street level. This is precisely what happened at the bottom of the NE Service Staircase during the fire when people found one fire exit padlocked and obstructed by a parked car (section 6.5.2). Even though the fire exit doors are not positioned at street level, Summerland's management is still conscious of the need to

keep all escape routes free from obstructions. Accordingly, the outside of both sets of doors is clearly marked 'KEEP CLEAR FIRE EXIT'. Indeed, all fire exit doors leading into the yard are painted red and are clearly labelled.

In Summerland I, there were no escape routes in this area that led directly into the open air. This reflected the fact that the cliff face formed the building's north wall (**figure 3.25**). Hence, the means of escape from the Solarium floor were hindered by the presence of the Aquadrome *and* the cliff. The architects of Summerland II have thus sought to provide lavish means of escape on the northern side of the Piazza floor in response to the lessons learnt from the fire disaster (**figure 7.21**). People who were near the cliff face when the fire broke out have spoken of the difficulties they faced in escaping from the building, with many thinking they were going to die in the Solarium. For example, Sally Naden (quoted in Leverton, 1998, page 11), a dancer at the complex and a now a presenter on BBC Radio Lancashire, said:

> "Where I was we couldn't get to any of the exits at the back [e.g. northeast service staircase] or the front [e.g. terrace entrance], and there was a massive plate glass window overlooking the swimming pool [the escape route into the Aquadrome]. I can remember the fire getting closer and closer. And then some guys…grabbed a trestle table and started to ram the glass window, and I can remember seeing it bow and thinking it is not going to give, we are not going to

get out of here. Then it smashed and we ran through. It all only seemed like seconds."

The eastern half of the Piazza level

The *Summerland Fire Commission* (Paragraph 180vi, page 62) criticised the uneven distribution of exits from the Solarium floor. "If the exits from the Solarium level are considered from the point of view of alternative routes of escape, it emerges that most of the exits [six out of eight] are at one end [the western end] of the building." In other words, there were inadequate fire exits at the building's eastern end. In the original complex, only one staircase descended into the open air from the eastern half of the Solarium floor. This was the NE Service Staircase and had several serious design faults (section 6.5.2). By contrast, there are four staircases at the eastern end of the rebuilt structure (**figure 7.21**).

The first staircase (C1) is an enlarged version (width of 5 feet 2 inches) of the NE Service Staircase. This staircase descends from the 63ft level (the toilets) and serves the Piazza floor only before descending out of the building into the eastern service yard (**figure 7.30**). At the Piazza floor level, this staircase is reached by a corridor (length of 42 feet) that begins on the northern side of the Cafeteria (**figure 7.21**). This staircase is also one of three escape routes from the 200-seat Cinema, and is reached by means of a pair of doors secured by panic bolts on the Cinema's north wall to the right of the screen (**figure 7.18**). Persons entering this stairwell from the Cinema do so at a lower level (one half landing) than those persons entering the stairwell from the Cafeteria (**figure 7.31**).

Figure 7.30: The point of discharge of the staircase (C1) serving the NE corner of the Piazza floor and the upper-level toilets is the lower of the two doors. This door can also be reached from the protected escape corridor to the north of the squash courts at Lower Downstairs Level (Photograph: Ian Phillips)

This was an alteration to the original plans (**figure 7.32**), which showed the occupants of the Cinema and the Cafeteria using the same corridor to reach staircase C1. The modified plan ensures better separation of the occupants of the Cafeteria and Cinema until they reach the escape staircase.

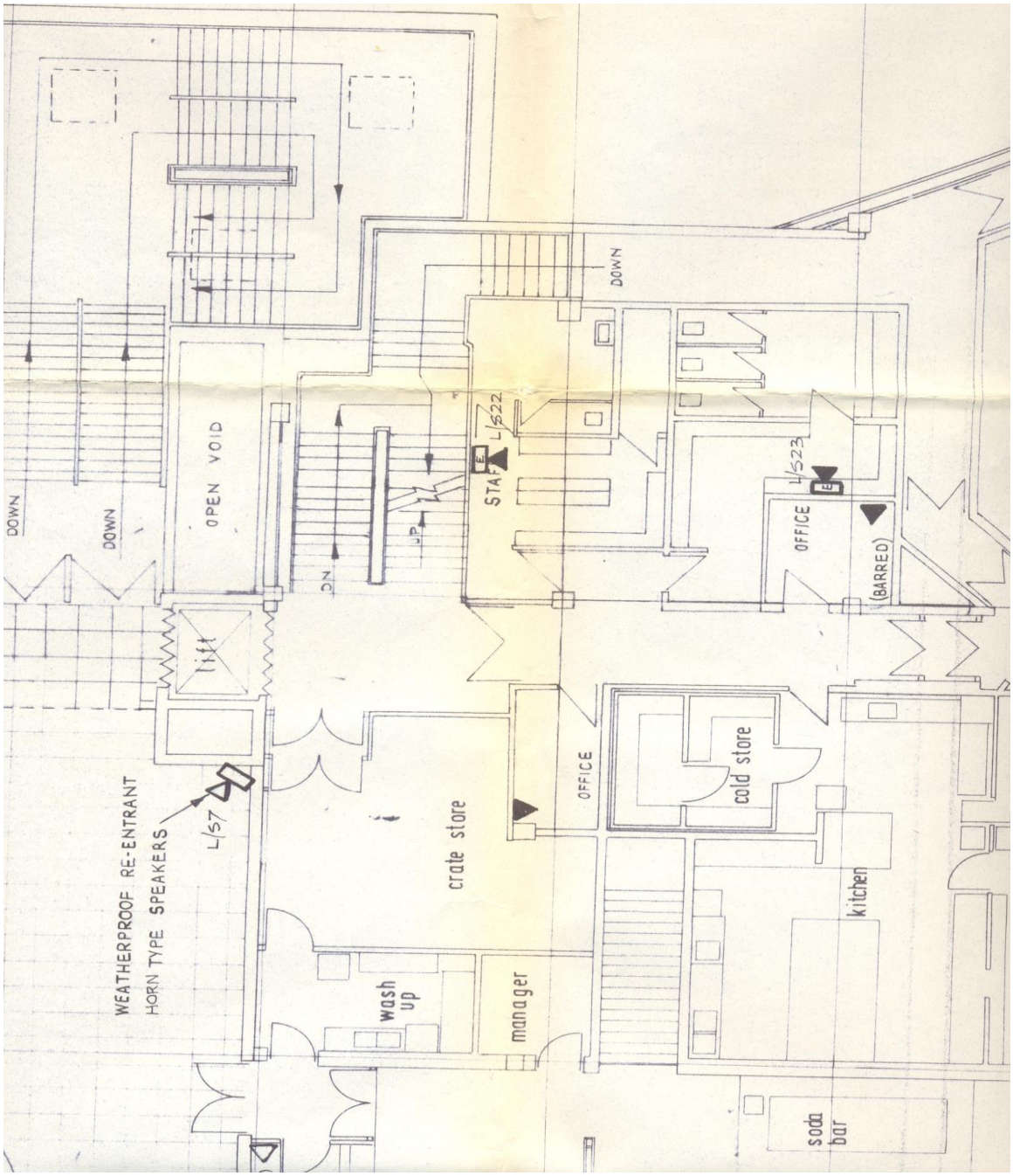


Figure 7.31: The revised architects' plan (November 1977) for the NE corner of the Piazza floor. Staircase C1 can now be reached by two corridors that enter the stairwell separated by two half landings.

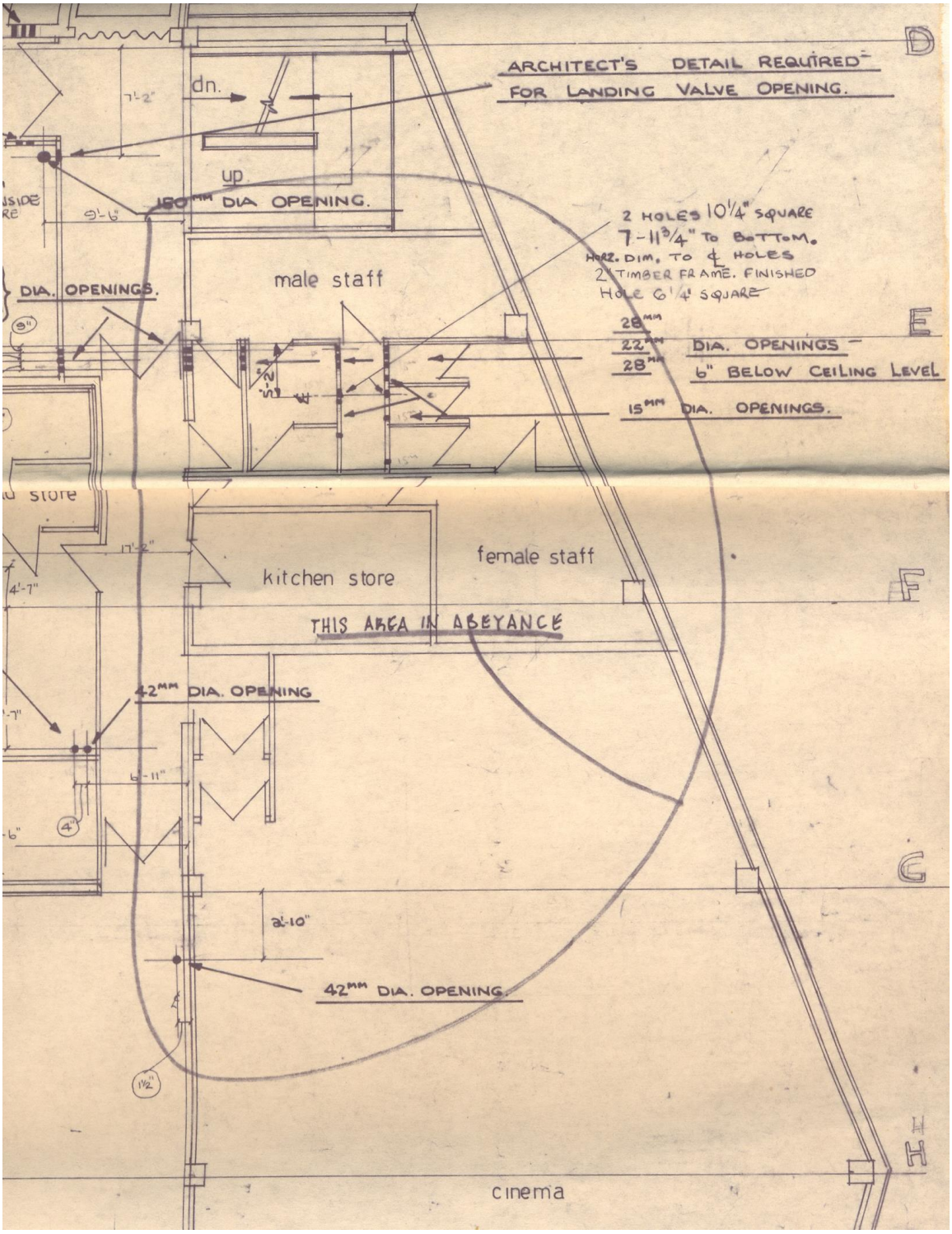


Figure 7.32: The original architects' plan (October 1976)

This plan was deemed to provide inadequate separation of Cinema and Cafeteria occupants.

Fire precautions in the Cinema consist of two fire alarms, two fire extinguishers and one fire hose reel. The Cinema's second escape route (C2: the new eastern staircase) is reached by a pair of doors on the Cinema's south wall (**figure 7.33**). A person then turns right to enter the stairwell, which discharges into the eastern service yard. These exit doors can also be reached by ascending a staircase from Nemo's Cave nightclub (exit CAVE2 on **figure 7.50**). This new eastern stairwell can also be reached from the corridor serving the two TV lounges (**figure 7.33**). Another escape route (C3) from the Piazza floor is by a door secured by panic bolts. This door leads to a corridor, which then descends to provide access to an external fire escape (**figure 7.34**) into the Manx Electric Railway's yard (C3).

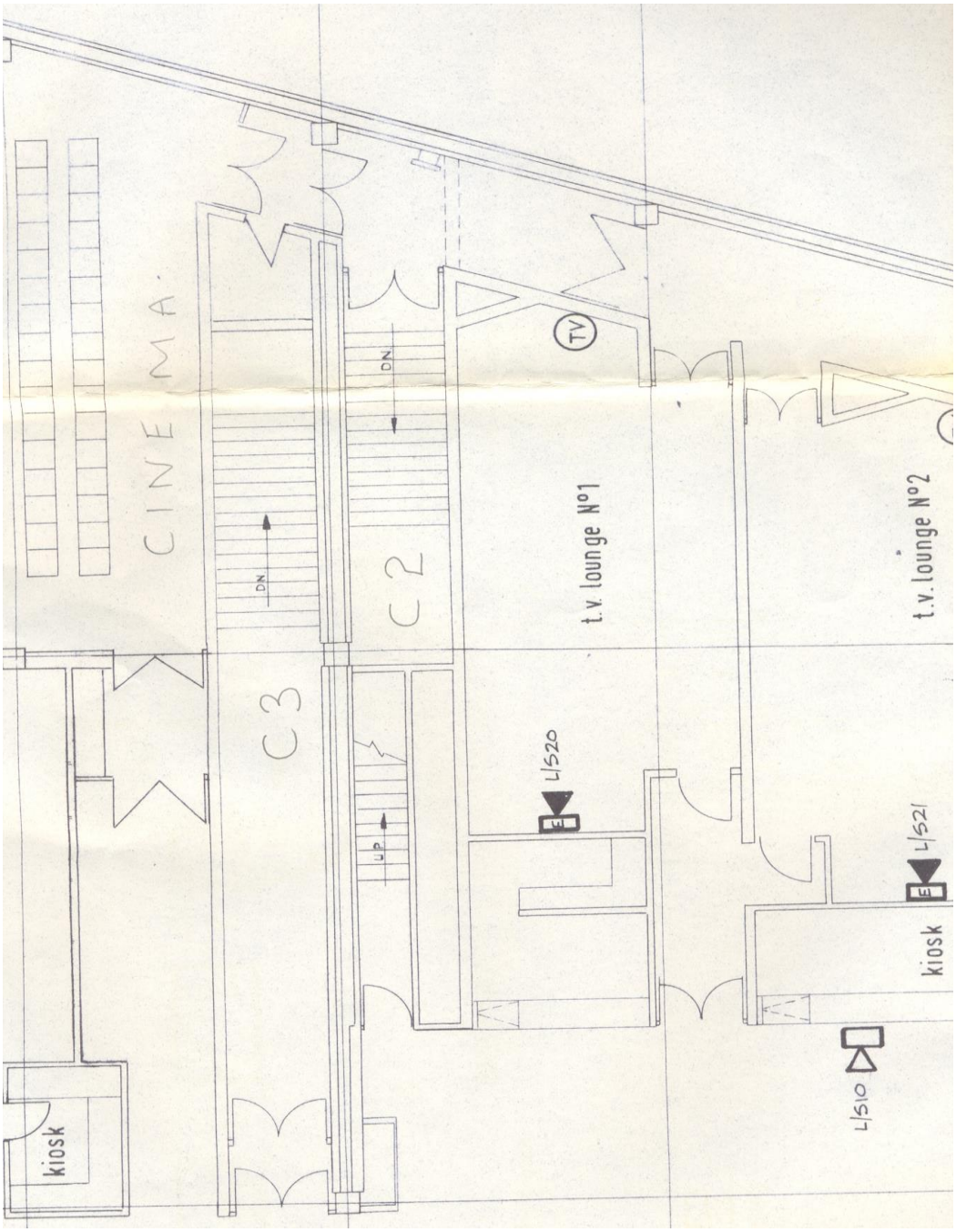


Figure 7.33: Escape routes C2 and C3 serve the cinema/TV rooms and Piazza floor respectively

Figure 7.34: The external fire escape with the yellow railings (C3) reached from the Piazza floor

(Photograph: Ian Phillips)

The final escape route from the building's eastern end is by an enclosed concrete stairwell in the SE corner (C4) (**figure 7.35**). The SE stairwell is clearly signed from the Piazza floor.

Figure 7.35: The SE Staircase. This staircase descends directly into the open air and can only be entered at Piazza floor level. Unlike the poorly designed NE Service Staircase in the original Summerland, the SE Staircase is a properly designed and sterile emergency escape staircase (Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin).

The enclosed staircase (C4) (**figure 7.35**) is reached by means of an L shaped corridor (**figure 7.21**) from the Piazza floor, which begins in a similar position to the crazy-golf course exit from the Solarium. This corridor initially heads south beyond the position of the original Oroglas promenade wall with the Manxland Children's Play Area to its right. The corridor then turns left before terminating at a set of double doors secured with panic bolts that provide access to the stairwell. The space occupied by this corridor and the stairwell entry originally formed part of the external crazy-golf terrace (section 7.6.3). This staircase descends from the Piazza floor and does not serve any other floor before discharging directly into the

open air at the extreme southern end of the Eastern Service Yard (**figure 7.36**).

Figure 7.36: The SE enclosed staircase discharges directly into the eastern service yard (left-hand door). The fire exit on the right is from the sports halls. (Photograph: Ian Phillips)

The SE enclosed staircase was added to the building partly to address the criticisms voiced by the *Summerland Fire Commission* about the defective means of escape at the building's eastern end:

> "We consider that…a second protected staircase [in addition to the North East Service Staircase] was essential to meet proper safety standards in this building."
>
> (SFC Report, Paragraph 176, Page 59)

> "If at the right time he [the Chief Fire Officer] had carefully reviewed the problems of escape, he would have strongly urged that a further enclosed stair in the south-east corner should serve the upper terraces [and by implication the Solarium and hence the Piazza floor]."
>
> (SFC Report, Paragraph 233, Page 75)

The SE enclosed staircase is also a response to the increased enclosed area at the southern end of the Piazza level, which resulted when the space formerly occupied by the crazy-golf terrace was enclosed inside the building. This enclosure process had means of escape implications because it increased the width of Summerland by 95 feet at its southern end, thereby necessitating a further escape route.

The south wall

There are two escape routes from the southern side of the Piazza floor between exits C3 and E2. The first of these fire exits (D1) is located to the immediate west of the Manxland children's play area by the snack bar and leads directly into the open air just along from the terrace entrance. This emergency exit reduces escape distances for people on the southern side of the Piazza floor around the Manxland children's play area. The second escape route is by an enclosed staircase (E1) that descends to the building's upper downstairs or reception level (section 7.6.1) (**figure 7.37**).

Figure 7.37: A view of the upper entrance (E3: the double set of glass doors) from the 53ft level. The staircase that descends to the reception level (E1) can be seen on the left-hand side of the photograph between the cinema snack bar and the notice board. Note the large green fire exit sign above the door.
(Photograph: Ian Phillips)

In contrast to the open plan Cinema Staircase that occupied a similar position (16 feet away) in the original Summerland, this new stairwell is completely enclosed from the Piazza floor by self-closing fire doors. This staircase is clearly marked FIRE EXIT in large letters (**figure 7.38**). The large FIRE EXIT sign partly reflects the fact that the Cinema Staircase was not marked as an emergency exit in the original Summerland, the result of which unnecessarily increased the pressure on the terrace entrance (E3 and E2) during the fire.

Figure 7.38: Staircase E1
This staircase replaced the Cinema staircase in the original Summerland (Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

A notice on the Piazza floor provides a chilling reminder of the fire disaster: the separation of parents from their children when the fire broke out. "IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN WILL BE MARSHALLED BY MEMBERS OF STAFF". The aim of providing separate entertainment areas for adults and children on different floors, so much a feature of the original Summerland, has been abandoned in the new Summerland. Visitors are reminded at the building's

main entrance that children must be accompanied by an adult at all times unless they are participating in certain activities (**figure 7.39**). This is different to the original Summerland complex where "young boys were admitted unaccompanied" (SFC Report, Paragraph 241, Page 76). The General Manager at the time of the fire admitted that unaccompanied 10-year-old children were allowed into Summerland.

Figure 7.39: Children are more likely to be accompanied by their parents in the re-built Summerland. This photograph was taken on stairwell E1: the replacement of the cinema staircase (Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

7.6.5 The concrete shell

Although Summerland's lower three floors were unaffected by the fire, it is still important to provide an analysis of these floors in the rebuilt structure for a number of reasons. Primarily, the *Summerland Fire Commission* (Paragraph 92, Page 34) insinuates that the exits from these floors were not "entirely satisfactory" had the fire started here. However, this statement is not substantiated in the SFC report by a detailed critique of the means of escape below the Solarium floor because they were irrelevant in the context of the fire. This implicit criticism has been addressed in the new Summerland by increasing the number, separation and directness of escape routes from the lower three floors, as well as making a number of plan alterations that seek to minimise the possibility of rapid fire spread.

The Upper Downstairs or Reception level

In the original Summerland, this floor (38ft level) contained a children's cinema, a cafeteria and the Carousel Bar. The floor also housed Summerland's administrative offices. The most notable characteristic of this floor is its narrow width (maximum of 85 ft). In 2003, this floor (**figure 7.40**) acted mainly as the building's foyer, which contains a large reception desk. Summerland's fire alarm panel is behind this desk (**figure 7.41**).

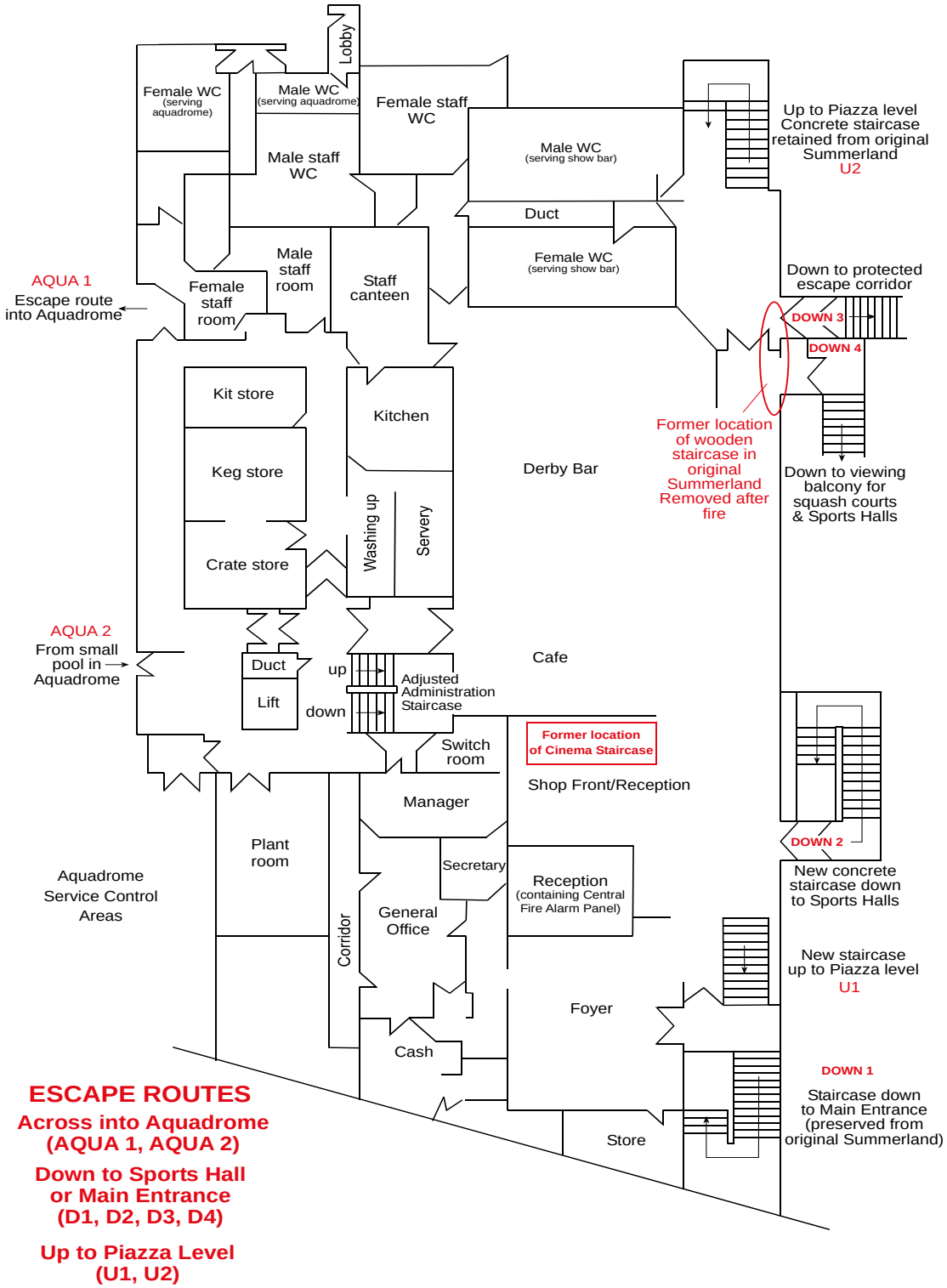


Figure 7.40: The Upper Downstairs (Reception) Level (Drawn by Kevin Burkhill and Anne Ankcorn, University of Birmingham)

Figure 7.41: Reception desk containing Summerland's central fire alarm panel. Note the 'Duty Manager' sign. (Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

In 2003, space on this floor was also occupied by the Sports/Derby Bar and Lounge, and the Energy FM Radio studio. The most novel feature of this floor is an indoor golf simulator, which allows a person to play some of the most famous golf courses in the world. The golf simulator is a comparatively recent addition to the centre, as this area was formerly a café. Behind the reception desk, radio station and Derby Bar is a labyrinth of corridors providing access to a kitchen, offices and store cupboards (e.g. kit, keg and crate store) (**figure 7.40**). In this maze of rooms and corridors, there was an entombed capsule of the original building encased within the

concrete of the new Summerland. Robert Thomson (b1983), who worked as a casual technician at Summerland, recalled (personal communication):

> "It was a place [that] I only went once with a colleague as this place had a stigma of being almost a shrine, somewhere you respected and visited if wished but not a place to freely traipse in or out off. My memory is hazy though [my colleague and I] believe it was accessed via a changing area through a small cupboard on the Derby Bar level and once within it [it was like stepping] back to…1973. I recall a short corridor, it was all by torchlight and an original defunct toilet block, then a larger room with about ten stairs that would [have led] to the large hatched double doors at the rear of the seating area in the Aquadrome".

There are nine escape routes from the Upper Downstairs floor (**figure 7.40**):

Routes down

DOWN1: A staircase that descends from the reception area to the main entrance at street level (**figure 7.6**). This staircase is reached by either a set of doors marked by an illuminated EXIT sign or by a set of doors secured with panic bolts.

DOWN2: a new concrete staircase that descends to the sports hall (**figure 7.43**), with escape routes out into the eastern service yard.

DOWN3 and DOWN4: these two doors provide access to a new mezzaine floor between Upper and Lower Downstairs levels containing the Spa Suite (e.g. sauna) and a viewing balcony for the squash courts. Details of escape routes from this mezzaine floor are provided in a later section.

ADJUSTED ADMINISTRATION STAIRCASE, which is reached through the Derby/Sports Bar. This staircase discharges into the south service yard.

Routes across

AQUA1, AQUA 2: these two escape routes lead into the Aquadrome.

Routes up

U1: up to the Piazza level using the new concrete staircase (E1) (**figure 7.38**) that replaced the Cinema Staircase.

U2: up to the rear of the Piazza floor using the pre-existing Carousel Staircase (escape route A2 on **figure 7.21**).

The architects' plans show how the wooden staircase connecting the Upper Downstairs to the Lower Downstairs level was demolished after the fire (**figure 7.42**). Another plan alteration has been the removal of the open balcony that allowed a person on the Upper Downstairs (reception) level to look down on the children's play area (now the sports hall) on the Lower Downstairs level. This balcony was removed in order to increase the degree of comparmentation inside the building, which minimises the possibility of rapid fire spread from the sports hall to the building's reception level. Even the open doorway providing access to staircase DOWN2 has been replaced by a self-closing fire door.

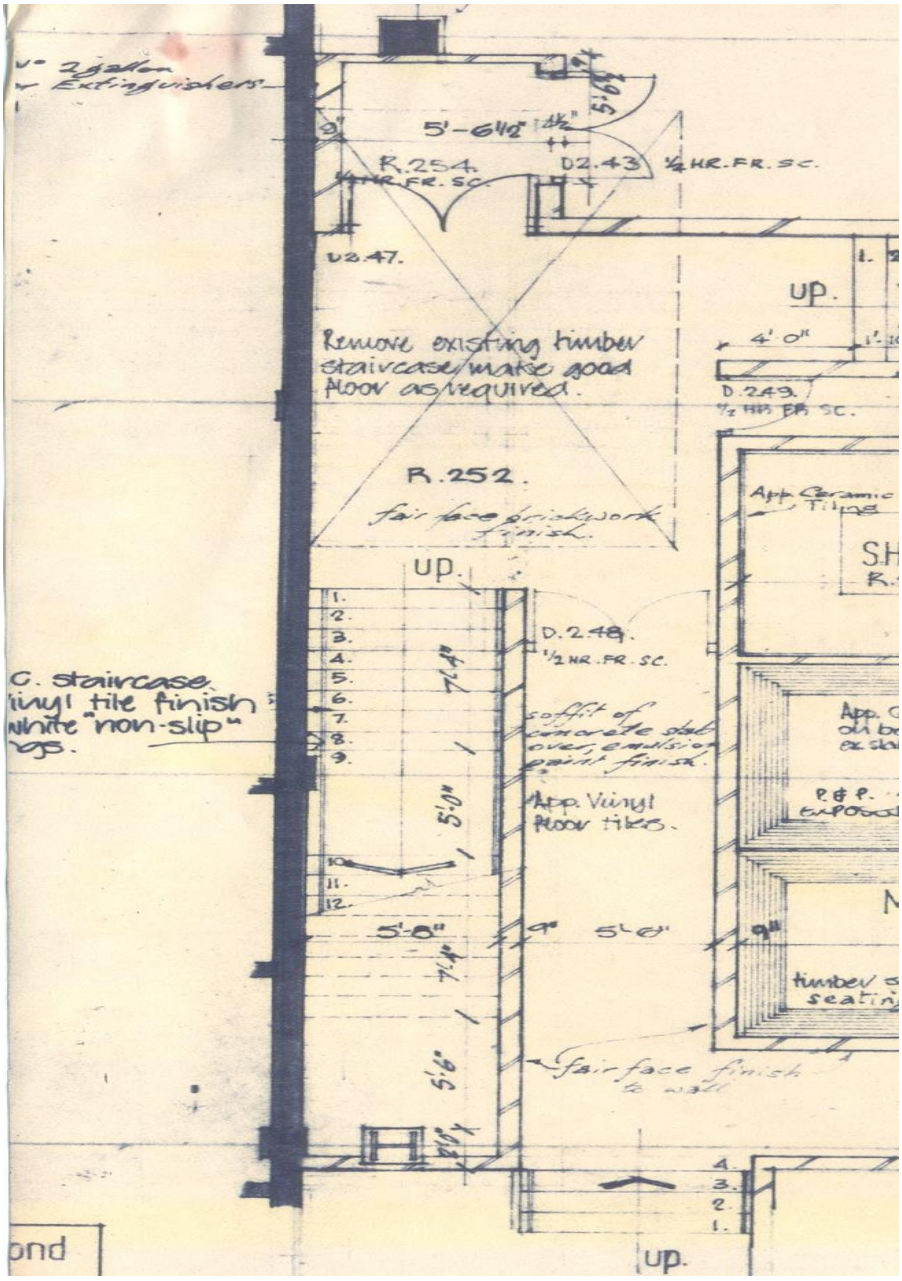


Figure 7.42: The architects' plan instructing the contractors to remove the wooden staircase that descended from the northern side of the Upper Downstairs Level. The new concrete stairwell (D2) can also be seen on the plan drawn in January 1977.

The Lower Downstairs: the sports halls

In the original Summerland, this floor consisted of one large undivided space between the main road and the cliff face, which housed a funfair and the rollerskating and astroglide areas. In Summerland II, this floor has been subdivided. Whilst a large sports hall (**figure 7.43** and **figure 7.44**) occupies the majority of the space on this floor, four squash courts (plus a spectators' gallery) and a sauna have been added on the floor's north side and a weights and fitness training room on the floor's south side. The area occupied by the sports hall in 2003 was used for rollerskating, badminton, a gymnasium and children's rides when Summerland reopened in 1978.

Figure 7.43: The sports halls in 1989. Concrete staircase DOWN 2 leading down from the Upper Downstairs Level (see figure 7.40) can be seen on the photograph (Source: Added to the *Summerland Appreciation Society Group* on Facebook by Amanda)

Figure 7.44: The sports halls in 2003

(Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

The new mezzanine floor

A new mezzanine floor was erected after the fire to house a female sauna (the male sauna is directly below on the same level as the sports hall: see **figure 7.46**) and a viewing balcony for the squash courts (**figure 7.45**).

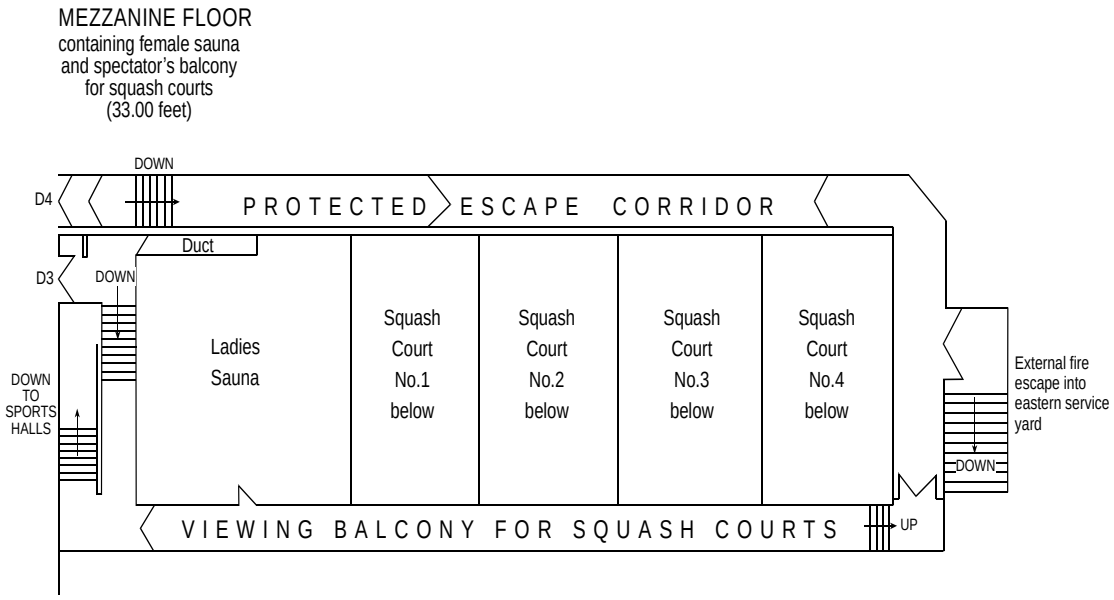


Figure 7.45: The new mezzanine floor
(Drawn by Kevin Burkhill and Anne Ankcorn, University of Birmingham)

In the new Summerland, three of the four exits from the Lower Downstairs level serve the sports hall (SP1, SP2, SP3) (**figure 7.46**); the remaining three exits serving the squash courts (and their spectators' gallery) and the sauna. At sports hall level, the two escape doors (SQ1, SQ2) can be reached from the bottom of staircase C1 that descends from the Piazza floor (**figure 7.21**). The fire exit doors at the end of the spectators' gallery of the squash courts (**figure 7.47**) are not positioned at street level, with the final flight of steps into the yard being outside the building. Other safety improvements to the Lower Downstairs level include protected escape corridors to the north of the squash courts at Sports Hall and Mezzanine floor levels; and a new fire exit (SP3) reached by ascending 14 steps that opens out on to King Edward Road from the western side of the sports halls (**figure 7.48**).

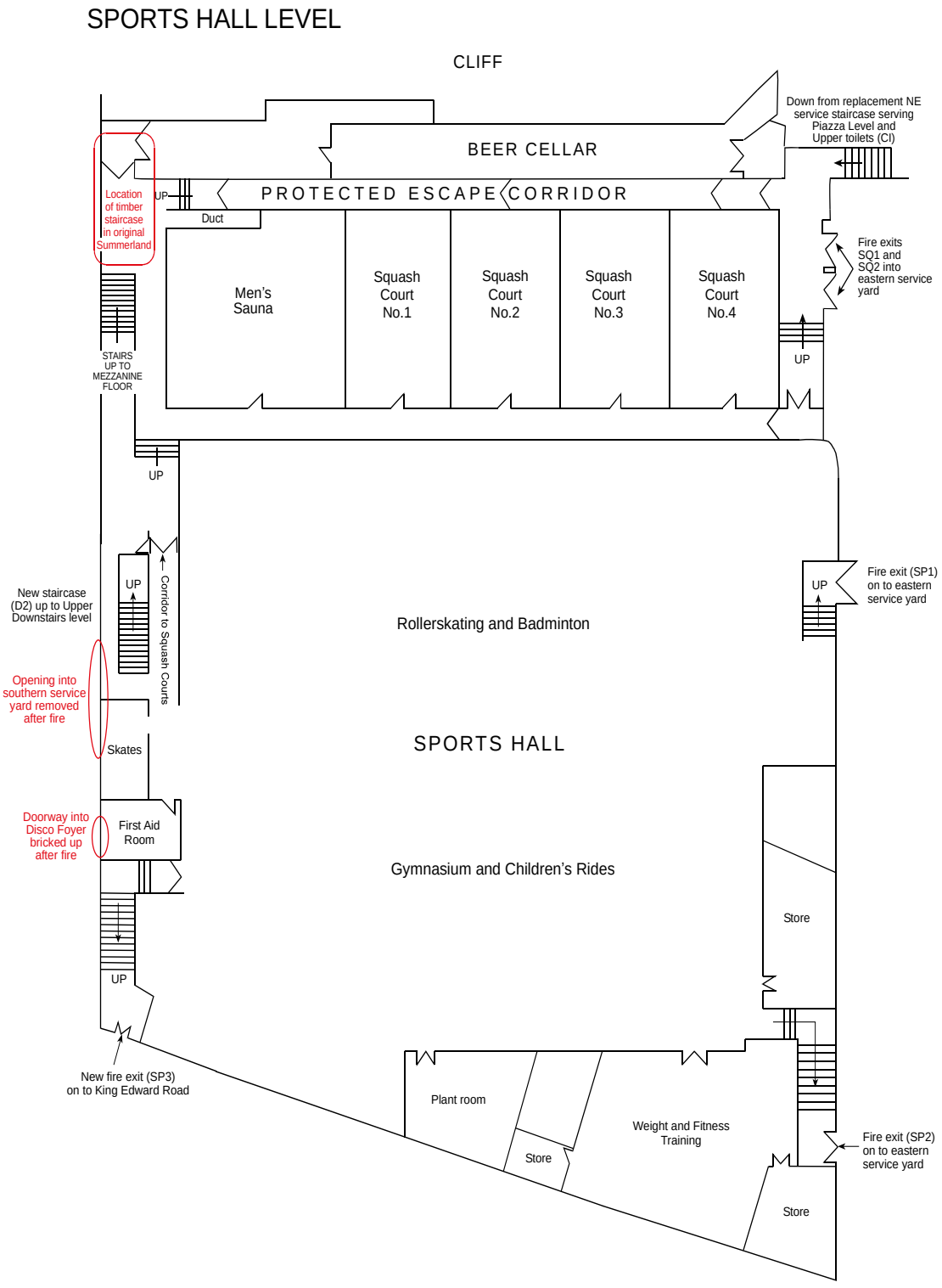


Figure 7.46: The Sports Hall level

(Drawn by Kevin Burkhill and Anne Ankcorn, University of Birmingham)

This fire exit is to the immediate right of Summerland's new entrance podium. This new arrangement ensures better separation of escape routes. In the original Summerland, there was poor separation of exits on the lower floors because one of the escape routes from the Sports Halls was through the Disco Foyer, which doubled not only as an escape route from the underground disco but also as an escape route from the Upper Downstairs Level (**figure 7.46**).

Figure 7.47: Two of the three fire exits (SQ1, SQ3) from the squash courts and their spectators' gallery. The third exit (SQ2) is out of view to the right of the ground floor fire exit visible in the photograph. Doors SQ1 and SQ2 can also be reached from staircase C1 that descends from the Piazza floor.
(Photograph: Ian Phillips)

Figure 7.48: The new fire escape from the Sports Hall directly to the right of the main entrance (SP3)
(Photograph: Ian Phillips)

The substantially improved means of escape from Summerland II is most apparent when viewing the building from the Eastern Service Yard (**figure 7.49**). There are nine exits on to this yard compared to only three in the original Summerland (**table 7.2**).

Table 7.2 Fire exits at street level

(Half of one fire exit means that the exit door can be reached from another level. This is true of doors SQ1, SQ2 and the eastern staircase. Escape routes from Summerland into the Aquadrome at Upper Downstairs Levels have not been included.)

	Fire disaster complex	Rebuilt structure
Exits to eastern service yard (specified by level)		
From above (the Piazza floor and upper toilets)	1 (NE Service Staircase)	4.5
From Lower Downstairs (sports hall) and Mezzanine Floor	2	4
From the underground nightclub (Nemo's Cave)	0	0.5
Exits to King Edward Road (all levels)		
	2 (Underground Disco and Upper Entrance)	6
Total number of exits	5	15

Figure 7.49: The authorities have gone to extremes in providing generous means of escape at Summerland's eastern end. Note that the roof height of the rebuilt Summerland is lower than the Aquadrome. (Photograph: Ian Phillips)

The basement: Nemo's Cave Nightclub

The building's basement is occupied by Nemo's Cave Nightclub, which was enlarged to accommodate 600 people as opposed to 350 before the fire. It should be noted that the Cave's floor space is significantly smaller than the sports hall level. The re-building of the underground disco after the fire illustrates extremely well how the architects of the new Summerland sought to achieve better separation of fire escapes and exits (**figures 7.50, 7.51** and **7.52**). The original Cave had only two exits – the bare minimum required to provide one alternative escape route. These two escape routes were far from ideal because they led to exit doors that could be used by people on other floors of the building. In other words, these two

exits were not dedicated *solely* for the occupants of the Cave. In Summerland I, the Cave's main entrance door could also be reached from the funfair on the Lower Downstairs level and from a staircase that descended from the Upper Downstairs level (Children's Cinema, Cafeteria and Carousel Bar) (**figure 7.51**). The only alternative means of escape from the original Cave was by a staircase that led up into the funfair area. When a person reached the top of this staircase, they would turn sharp right before climbing a short flight of stairs to reach the fire exit doors from the funfair area into the Eastern Service Yard. Again, this was an unsatisfactory arrangement because these exit doors were not dedicated entirely to the occupants of the underground discotheque.

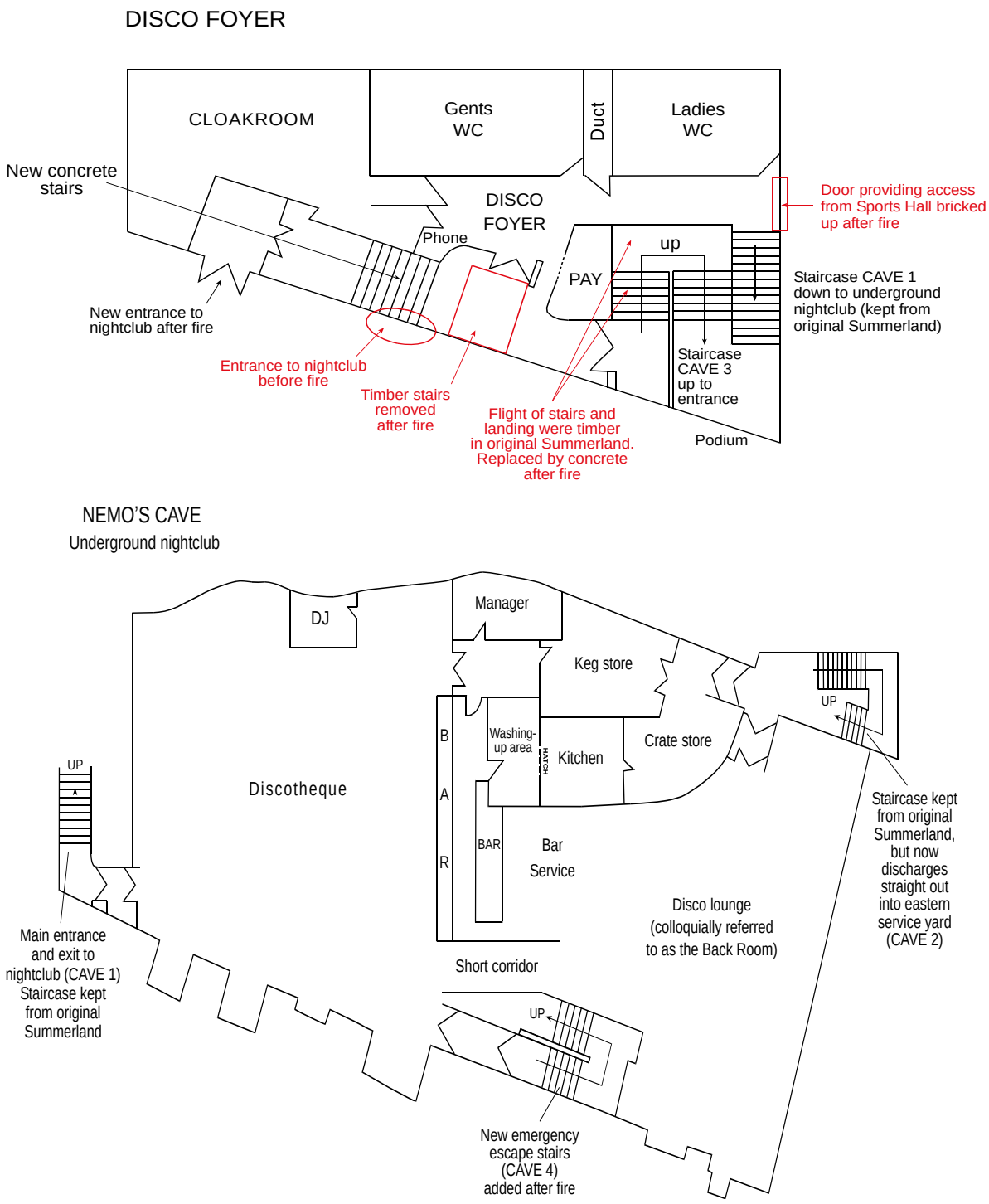


Figure 7.50: The Disco Foyer and Nemo's Cave Underground Nightclub (Drawn by Kevin Burkhill and Anne Ankcorn, University of Birmingham)

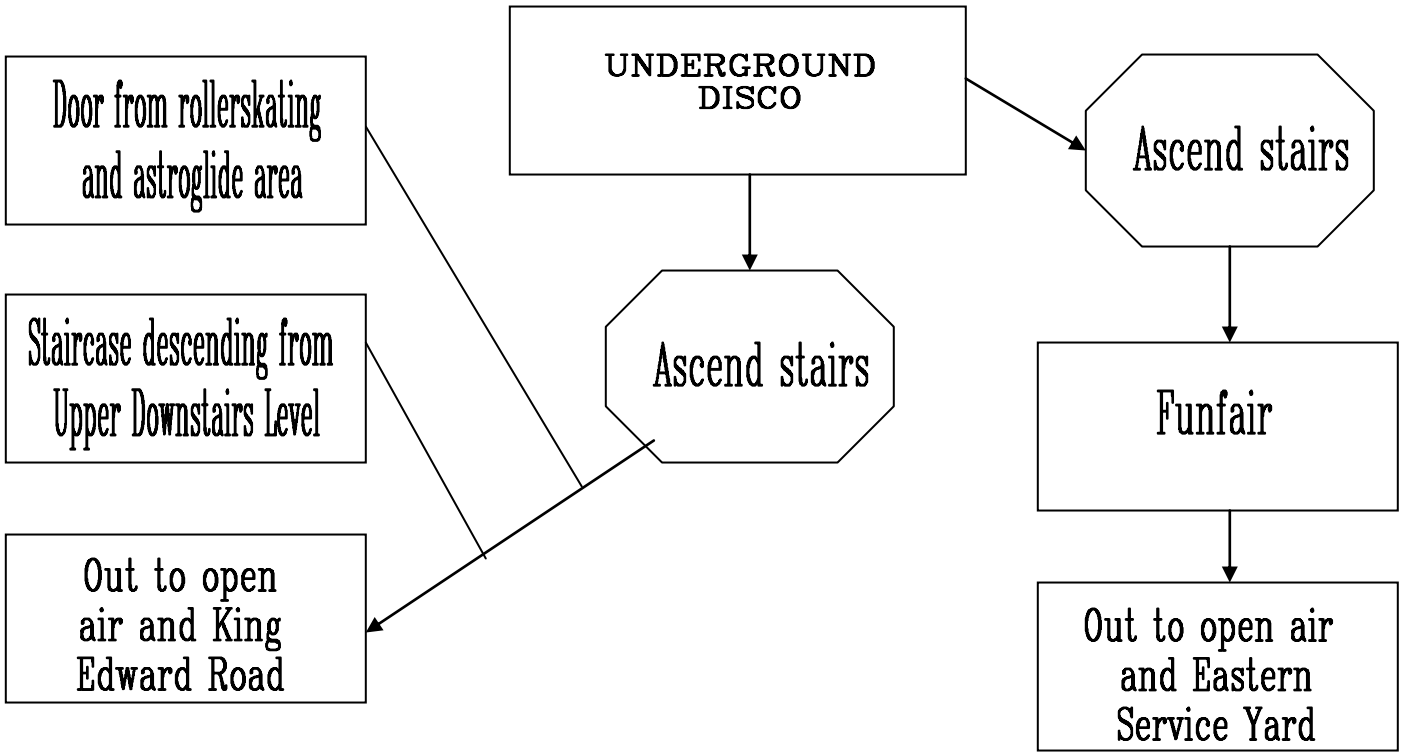


Figure 7.51: Fire exits from the underground disco in the original Summerland

The rebuilt Cave consists of two rooms (**figure 7.50**). The rooms are not separated by any doors, but by a short wide corridor and a double-sided bar that allows staff to serve people in both rooms. The room furthest away from the club's main entrance is often referred to as the back room. Nemo's Cave has four exits (CAVE 1, CAVE 2, CAVE 3 and CAVE 4). Two of these exits are dedicated solely to the Cave; one exit door doubles as Summerland's main entrance (section 7.6.1). The first exit is the Cave's main entrance and exit (CAVE 1). This is reached by going through two sets of double doors and climbing the Cave stairwell (**figure 7.55**) and turning left past the toilets to reach the Cave foyer.

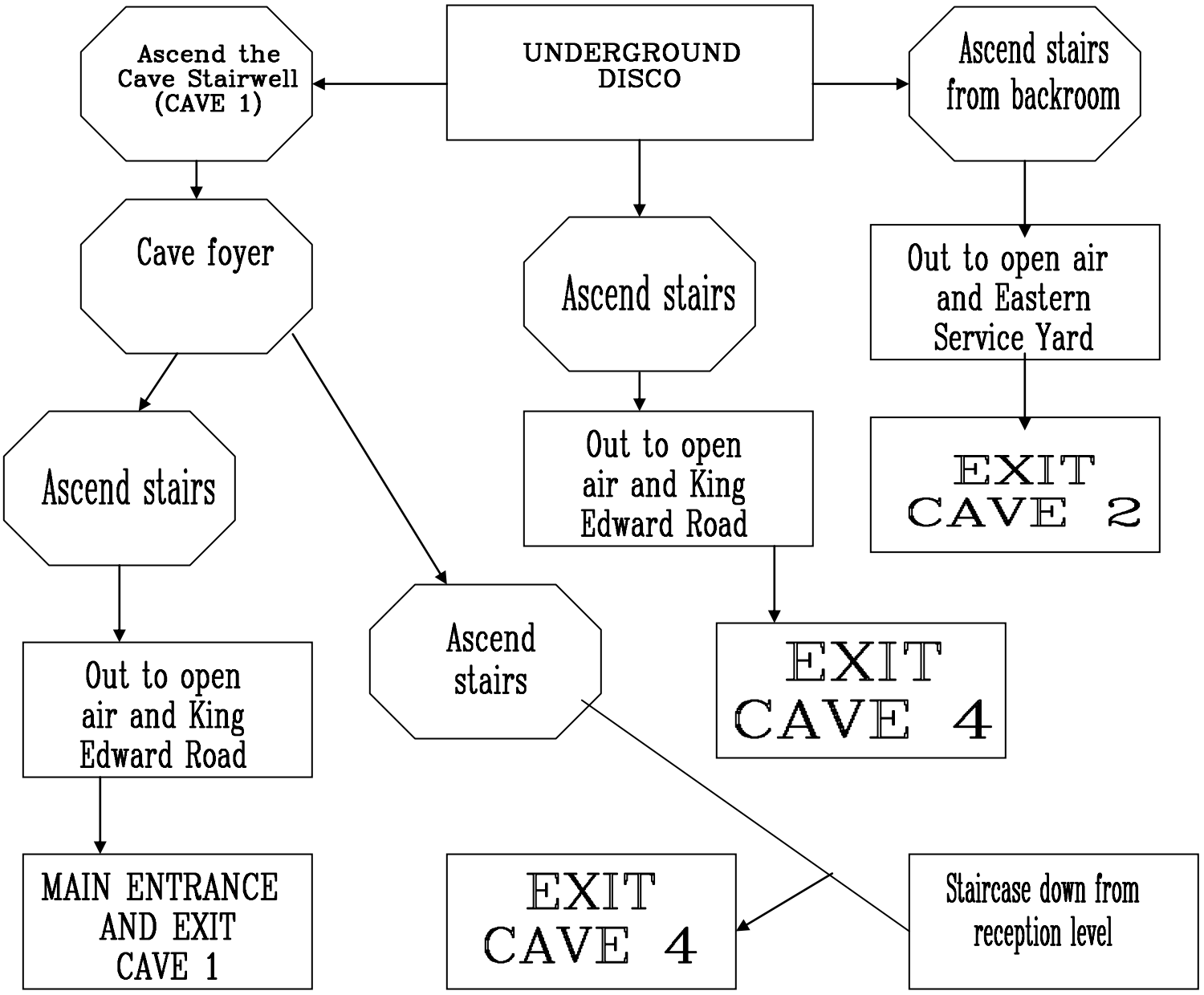


Figure 7.52: Fire exits from the underground disco in the rebuilt Summerland

In the original Summerland, a person might have been met at the top of the Cave stairwell by people escaping from the Sports Hall. The doorway providing access from the Sports Halls was removed after the fire to ensure better separation of exits (**figure 7.50** and **figure 7.55**). The clubber then ascends another seven concrete steps to reach the main entrance doors out on to King Edward Road (**figure 7.56**). These concrete steps replaced a timber landing and staircase 11 feet away in the original Summerland (**figure 7.52**). The position of these steps was moved after the fire to allow the Disco Foyer to be enlarged. Escape route CAVE 2 ascends from the back room *directly* into the eastern service yard. This staircase was retained from the original Summerland, with the stairwell being extended upwards to the Piazza floor (escape route C3).

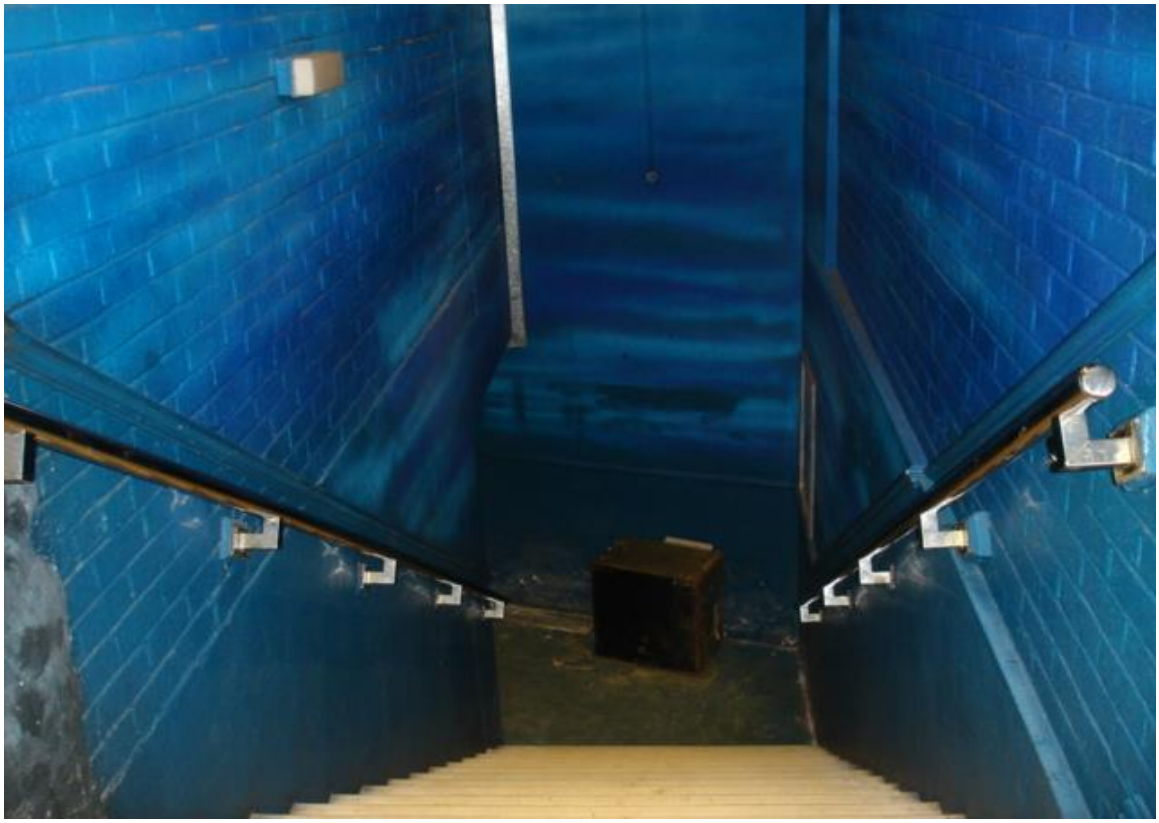


Figure 7.53: The main stairwell (CAVE 1) into Nemo's Cave nightclub (Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

Figure 7.54: The main entrance and exit into Nemo's Cave nightclub. These new entrance doors were built after the fire; the original entrance (now bricked up) can be seen on the right-hand side of the photograph. (Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

Summerland's main entrance (the glass-fronted podium that projects out into the pavement) (**figure 7.5**) can also be reached by a back stairwell that ascends from the foyer area (CAVE 3). During the day, a black metal gate is placed across this staircase to prevent people from wandering into the nightclub (**figure 7.56**).

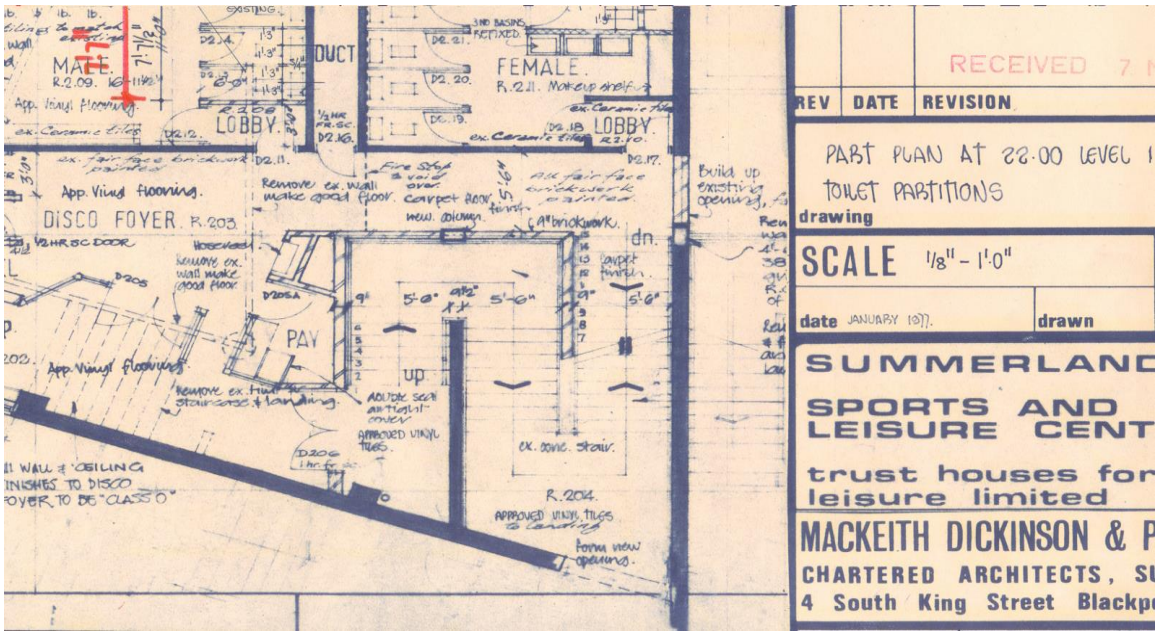


Figure 7.55: Architects' plan (January 1977) instructing contractors to 'build up existing opening' between the Sports Halls and the Disco Foyer

Figure 7.56: This staircase down to the disco foyer (CAVE 3) is reached from Summerland's main entrance podium; see figure 7.5 (Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

The Cave's third fire exit is by a new emergency escape staircase (CAVE 3) that is entered midway along the club's main floor just before the entrance to the back room. This staircase leads directly out on to King Edward Road (**figure 7.3**).

Figure 7.57: View from the main entrance into Nemo's Cave. Taken from the base of stairwell CAVE1

(Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

Figure 7.58: The backroom of Nemo's Cave

(Photographs: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)

7.7 Does the name really matter?

> "Even worse than the blackened ruins is the sign 'Summerland' in big bright red letters on the front of the building as one approaches it from the bottom of Summer Hill. Most people seem to think that the place must be renamed when or if it is re-built. So surely we could have removed this macabre sign."
>
> (Letter writer to the *Isle of Man Examiner*, 31st May, 1974)

No comment has so far been made on the fact that the complex's original name was retained after the fire. This section analyses the arguments for and against retaining the Summerland name, and uses them to develop a conceptual framework for the naming of disaster sites.

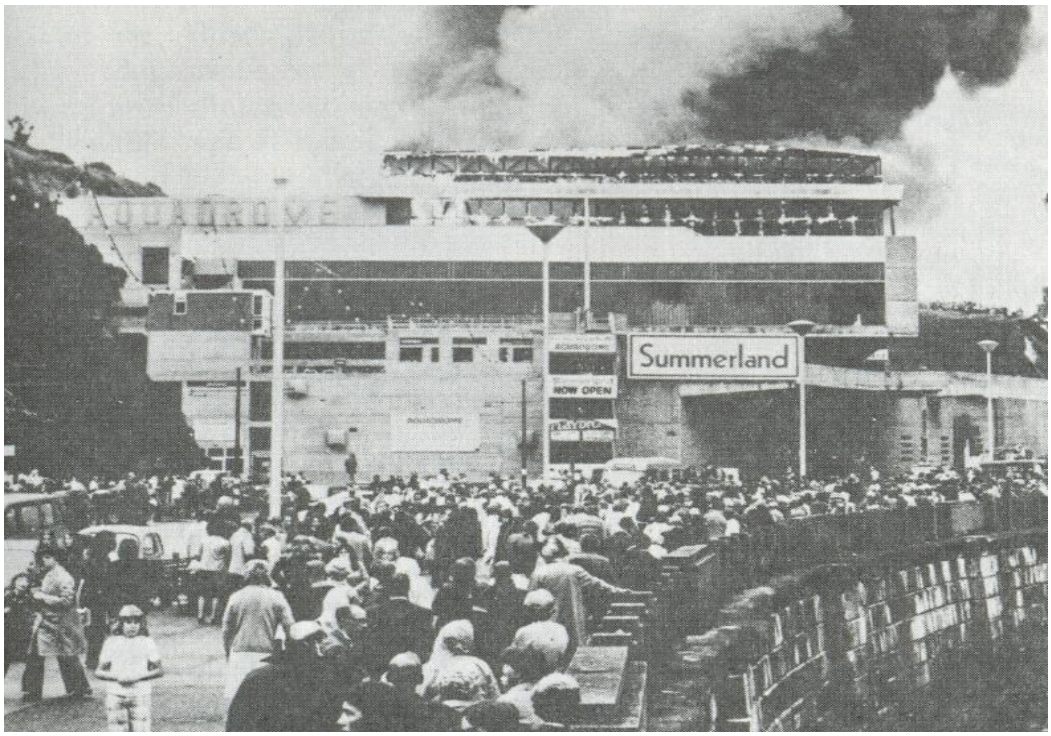


Figure 7.59: Emotive site. Emotive name. Was retaining the Summerland name for the re-built centre the correct decision?

In September 1975, Mr Clifford Irving, the Chairman of the Isle of Man Tourist Board, said the Summerland name would be dropped and the building renamed. In the following month's debate in Tynwald, some members referred to the name issue. Mr Nivison said: "I would hope that the Douglas Corporation…might find a new name. I personally think that a new name would be a new complex. However, Mr Clucas felt the Summerland name should be retained as a memorial to the victims of the fire.

> "I say retain the name for the new building which, incorporating, as it must, the best safeguards known at the present time, retain it as a fitting memorial to those who so tragically lost their lives two years ago. Can we not realise that people really are not that easily deceived? Can you imagine if we did change the name, nudging one another and saying, you know what that place used to be called? I say let us be honest, let us be fair and let us be straight. If this building is built to the highest standards then I say it will be a building of which we could be proud and we have nothing in it of which to be ashamed."

Mr Clucas' line of thinking can be seen in the Lieutenant Governor's comments at Summerland's re-opening ceremony in June 1978. The building was not only "an act of faith in the future", but also "a memorial to the past". Changing the name could thus have been interpreted as an attempt to conceal the past and deceive visitors.

I entered the debate in 1998. In a letter that formed the basis of a news story that appeared in the *Manx Independent* shortly before the 25th anniversary of the fire, I argued that the complex should have been renamed.

> "To me, and probably for millions of others, the name Summerland will always remain synonymous with one of Britain's worst post-war disasters.....Retaining the Summerland name is not only appalling public relations - being a blast to a truly appalling past - but also harmful for the Island's tourism industry.....I don't advocate renaming all buildings if there is a disaster, but the original building was only there for a couple of years before it was rebuilt. I think it should have had a new name and new image."
>
> (Phillips, quoted in Hendry, 1998, page 6)

I was spurred into writing this letter because I was surprised and bemused when I found out in 1998 that the original name had been retained. When I first read about the fire in 1985, I naturally assumed that the name would have been changed for two reasons: the age of the building and its function. It can be seen that the decision was taken to retain the name of a two-year building that formed the central element of the Isle of Man Government's strategy to attract more holidaymakers to the Island (chapter 2). Summerland was one component of an industry - tourism - where public relations and image are paramount.

There are two further arguments that can be advanced for renaming Summerland. Firstly, the Summerland name symbolised the transparent acrylic design of the original complex (chapter 3). The name is thus

inherently and emotionally bound up with the failures of that design. In terms of architectural symbolism, the name is less appropriate or indeed inappropriate for an enclosed structure that admits little daylight, an argument made by fire survivor Mrs Pauline Wynne-Smythe (the Manageress of the Marquee Showbar) in the Hendry (1998) article. Moreover, there are no historical reasons why a building on the site should be called Summerland. Summerland was a name invented in the 1960s to sell the revolutionary design of the original complex; Summerland is merely the name of a building occupying the Derby Castle site (section 2.2).

Although these arguments for renaming the Summerland complex seem persuasive, there are equally powerful arguments for retaining the original name. Firstly, the original Summerland was a success in statistical terms: in 1972, the building attracted 500,000 visitors and contributed 13% of the Island's total tourist income. Is it logical to rename a building that had been economically successful and may have been replicated (albeit with a modified design) in seaside holiday resorts in Britain? Secondly, the fact that the new Summerland was rebuilt around the remains of the fire disaster complex maintains the link to the past and hence supports the decision to retain the original name. Whilst the Oroglas roof and promenade wall have gone, there are enough similarities with the original building (e.g. section 7.6.2) to leave a visitor with few doubts that this *is* Summerland. The argument for a rename would have been more powerful if the entire complex had been demolished and rebuilt from scratch. Thirdly, the sites of most other post-war disasters (e.g. the Hillsborough Football Ground, the King's Cross Underground Station) still retain their original names. So, why then should Summerland be any different? Fourthly, it could be argued that a

building's name is unimportant. Certainly, compared to the design and management errors that killed 50 people, the decision whether to drop the Summerland name following the disaster seems a trivial issue. Changing the name of Summerland could be viewed as a cosmetic decision, which would have had no tangible economic and (in particular) psychological benefits. Most islanders and *some* visitors are aware of where the disaster occurred. The act of dropping the Summerland name would not have erased the memories of those directly involved in the disaster. Furthermore, it could be argued that retaining the Summerland name serves to remind the local population and visitors of the persons who died in the fire and the *reasons* why they died in the hope the mistakes that led to their deaths will never be repeated. This line of reasoning can be inferred from the comments of Mr Clucas and the Lieutenant Governor.

7.7.1 Towards a framework for the naming of disaster sites

The Summerland example has shown that the decision-making process of whether to retain or rename a building following a disaster will always be a subjective process with no right or wrong answer. It is possible to advance valid arguments both for and against retaining the building's original name. In this section, a conceptual framework will be proposed, whereby the retain/rename decision is reduced to a consideration of nine factors. This framework is designed to be applicable to a range of disaster types, including fire, structural collapse, stampedes and bombs, with the aim of attempting to objectify the decision-making process. A single factor should not dictate whether the site is renamed; that decision should only be made after all nine factors have been considered. The order in which the

nine factors is listed is not intended to indicate their relative importance. In particular, it is proposed that *in most cases* a building *should retain its original name* following a disaster, unless a majority of factors in the conceptual model (i.e. a minimum of five factors) point to a rename.

1. *The function of the building*

A distinction should be made between two types of building: image sensitive and image insensitive. Summerland falls into the first category (section 7.7). It is probably more desirable to change the name of an image sensitive building following a disaster. Conversely, there are buildings that perform functions where image and public relations are largely irrelevant. These can loosely be defined as those buildings that *have* to be used by an individual as part of their daily routine (e.g. a railway station). Changing the name of an image insensitive building solely from a public relations perspective is rather nonsensical. Image sensitive buildings may change their name for other reasons. For example, a nightclub may re-launch itself under a new name if it has acquired a bad reputation for violence and drugtaking. Alternatively, a disaster site may be renamed if the site's usage changes following the tragedy.

Application of model to Summerland > Rename

2. *The age of the building*

A distinction should be made between newer buildings and older buildings. In the latter category, it may be detrimental to drop a long established name even if a disaster has occurred. The Summerland fire

disaster was unique in a British sense because it occurred in a two-year old building. The building's short lifespan strengthens the link between the name and the disaster because there is little other history to mask or conceal that linkage.

Application of model to Summerland > Rename

3. *The historical legacy*

Place-names are nearly always permanent; the names of buildings are often ephemeral. In deciding whether to rename a building following a disaster, the following question should be asked: are there any historical reasons why a building on a particular site should have a particular name? In the case of the Isle of Man tragedy, there is no historical justification for retaining the Summerland name after the fire since the site had always been known as Derby Castle before Summerland opened in 1971. Summerland is thus an "invented name". This is completely different to King's Cross, which is the name of a *place* (and not a building).

Application of model to Summerland > Rename

4. *The economic success of the original building*

A distinction should be made between buildings that were economic successes and those that were economic failures before the disaster. It may be advisable to retain the names of economically successful buildings and change the name of money losing ventures (providing they are not scrapped in their entirety following the disaster). Summerland falls into the first category (section 7.7), thus providing one justification for retaining the

original name in the post 1973 period. This criterion can only be applied to commercial ventures; clearly, it cannot be applied to buildings that provide a public service (e.g. libraries) where the economic success motive is largely irrelevant.

Application of model to Summerland > Retain

5. *The number of deaths*

The loss of all human life is tragic. A distinction, however, could be drawn between the sites of tragedies and the sites of disasters. The word tragedy is used in this context to denote an accident that directly or indirectly affected fewer people than a disaster. Specifying a death toll that differentiates a disaster from a tragedy is difficult, if not impossible, but could arbitrarily be set at 30. Certainly, 50 deaths (like as at Summerland) constitute a disaster. In general, the higher the number of deaths the more persuasive is the argument for renaming a building.

Application of model to Summerland > Rename

6. *The layout of the new building*

In some cases, only minor damage may occur, with the building's physical fabric being repaired quickly and the new building having a similar layout to the original building. For these cases, it is perhaps more logical to retain the building's original name. If the damage is so extensive that the building is rebuilt to a design that is physically dissimilar to the original design, then the argument for a rename is more powerful. If this argument is applied to Summerland, a rename is implied because only one of the four

floors destroyed by the fire was rebuilt. Moreover, the physical appearance of the rebuilt upper floor (the highly enclosed Piazza Level) is completely different to the transparent design of the Solarium. However, there are some similarities between the two complexes (e.g. the large hall on the Piazza Level, the concrete shell), which means that the argument for a rename using this criterion is far from convincing.

Application of model to Summerland
> Rename but far from convincing

7. *Architectural symbolism*

Of the nine factors listed, this criterion is only applicable to buildings such as Summerland whose names were chosen to reflect their architecture (section 7.7). If a disaster site is replaced with a new building whose design is incongruous to the architectural symbolism of the original name, then it is logical that the existing name should be dropped.

Application of model to Summerland > Rename

8. *Institutional failure*

Disasters in buildings usually arise from the snowballing effect of a number of seemingly unrelated human errors. These errors are often not critical by themselves but prove deadly when acting in combination. The extent to which these errors were the product of system failures should be considered when deciding whether to rename a building following a disaster. Systems failures contributing to the Summerland fire included the authority's decision to waiver Byelaw 39 to allow the use of Oroglas acrylic

sheeting (section 3.3) and the failure to inspect the building whilst the public were on the premises. As the highly respected Isle of Man journalist Terry Cringle remarked: "For the Manx people, [the Summerland disaster] had a deep psychological effect because of the criticisms of the *systems* which allowed Summerland to be built…There was a great sense of guilt which persisted for years" (quoted in Carter, 2003). On the other hand, the *Summerland Fire Commission* (Paragraph 246, Page 77) recognised that not all of the mistakes that contributed to the disaster could have been foreseen. "It would be unjust not to acknowledge that not every failure which is obvious now would be obvious before the disaster put structure and people to the test", it stated.

Application of model to Summerland > Rename

9. *Local opinion*

The rename/retain decision should consider local opinion, which may strongly favour a change of name or may be indifferent to the retention of the building's original name. It is another question as to how local opinion could be canvassed. However, it is inadequate to consider solely the opinion of newspaper letter writers (sections 7.2 and 7.7), whose often vocal and polarised views may be unrepresentative of the wider population. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people had misgivings about the decision to rebuild Summerland, together with the retention of the building's original name.

Application of model to Summerland > Insufficient evidence

The conceptual model is applied to the Summerland and King's Cross disasters in **table 7.3**.

Table 7.3: Application of the Phillips' disaster name model to Summerland and King's Cross

	Summerland	King's Cross
The function of the building	RENAME	RETAIN
The age of the building	RENAME	RETAIN
The historical legacy	RENAME	RETAIN
The economic success of the original building	RETAIN	Irrelevant
The number of deaths	RENAME	RENAME
The layout of the new building	RENAME (with provisos)	RETAIN
Architectural symbolism	RENAME	Irrelevant
Institutional failure	RENAME	RENAME
Local opinion	Insufficient evidence	Insufficient evidence

Application of this model suggests Summerland should have been renamed after the fire because at least five of the nine factors in the model suggest a rename as the advisable course of action. Note that the model offers little support for renaming the site of the King's Cross Underground Station fire.

7.8 Summary

There was considerable controversy about Summerland's future following the August 1973 fire disaster. Although the adjoining Aquadrome had reopened fully by June 1974, the burnt out skeleton of Summerland remained by the latter half of 1975. Some people thought Summerland should be completely demolished; others supported the rebuilding, but were annoyed at the slow progress and apparent lack of information from the authorities. In October 1975, an agreement was reached whereby the Manx Government would contribute £236,000 to the rebuilding, with £118,000 coming from Douglas Corporation and £223,000 from Trust House Forte. Many Tynwald members supported the rebuilding plans, arguing it was an economic imperative for the Island's tourist industry. However, some members were sceptical, and questioned amongst other things the scheme's commercial viability, financing and location. Summerland reopened to the public in two stages in 1978. Of the four floors destroyed by the fire, only one was rebuilt because Trust House Forte felt the original Summerland was too big. The roof of the largely enclosed main hall (now known as the Piazza) is less than one half of the height of the Solarium's plastic Oroglas roof. The rebuilt complex is best viewed as the best pragmatic and economically viable option; it is also an over-reaction against the transparent design of the original complex. The external crazy-golf course terrace (where the fire started) was enclosed to retrieve partly space lost by not rebuilding vertically. The lessons of the disaster were learnt by using traditional building materials, installing a sprinkler system and having better signage within the complex. The building's means of escape were improved substantially, especially at the eastern end of the Piazza floor, with the new

complex being erected clear of the cliff face to allow exits along that wall. Summerland's main entrance was also moved to street level to relieve pressure on the terrace entrance.