

COMMEMORATING GRACIE FIELDS

Rochdale town centre



December 2013



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This January marks the 116th birthday of Rochdale's own superstar: Dame Gracie Fields.



From humble beginnings above her grandmother's fish and chip shop in Mabesworth Street, to the enchanted Isle of Capri, during her 60+ years in showbusiness Grace Stansfield, the mill girl from Rochdale, became the favourite of Kings, Queens and most importantly to her: the ordinary working lads and lasses.

Whilst Gracie's popularity suffered at the hands of the British press during the Second World War, her down to earth, no airs-and-graces style recaptured the hearts of the West End and the world when she made her Palladium comeback in 1947.

Now, some 65 years after her comeback her name is being kept alive and preserved by the legacy of the 'Dame Gracie Fields Appreciation Society', and its President

Sebastian Lassandro. Sebastian wasn't even born when Gracie died, and yet in his past five years of collecting and researching the great lady he has become one of the leading experts on Gracie, assisting British Heritage in their Blue Plaque placement and the BFI in showing 'This Week of Gracie' in 2011.

Sebastian has amassed a museum-worthy collection ranging from hundreds of signatures, photographs, programmes, 78 records, sheet music and even personal effects of Gracie's, including stage-worn costumes, handkerchieves and her 1940 USA export visa, birth certificate and private unreleased home recordings of Gracie in her later years. He has just returned from his sixth visit to the Isle of Capri this summer, where he is one of a few fans who tends to her grave, bleaching and cleaning the white marble and ensuring its upkeep is preserved for years to come.

"The charm," he says, "is that Gracie had a fascinating life, and she truly was the first lady of the British Music Hall stage. As time has moved on, Gracie remains mainly un forgotten for her massive war efforts, overshadowing the likes of Anne Shelton and Vera Lynn. Whilst she still does have a loyal fan base, Gracie should be properly recognised and remembered for what she was. She could set the audience crying or laughing in the same song; had a vocal range opera singers envied, but never lost her Rochdalian groundings."

The Dame Gracie Fields Appreciation Society, based online, holds the internet's greatest resource of Gracie photographs, in excess of

2500, and hosts many rare and exclusive television clips and appearances of Gracie unavailable elsewhere. They host a core of Gracie experts in their own field, from those interested in the recordings to those interested in the personal side, the DGFAS is the place to go whether you have a Gracie query or want to share your love and appreciation of the great Gracie.

Sebastian is always looking to extend his Gracie collection, so don't hesitate to contact him if you have a photograph, a 78 or anything Gracie related, or just want a conversation with a Gracie collector and researcher, he would be delighted to hear from you. He also does talks and lectures on the life of Gracie and is available for bookings for any type of event or group.



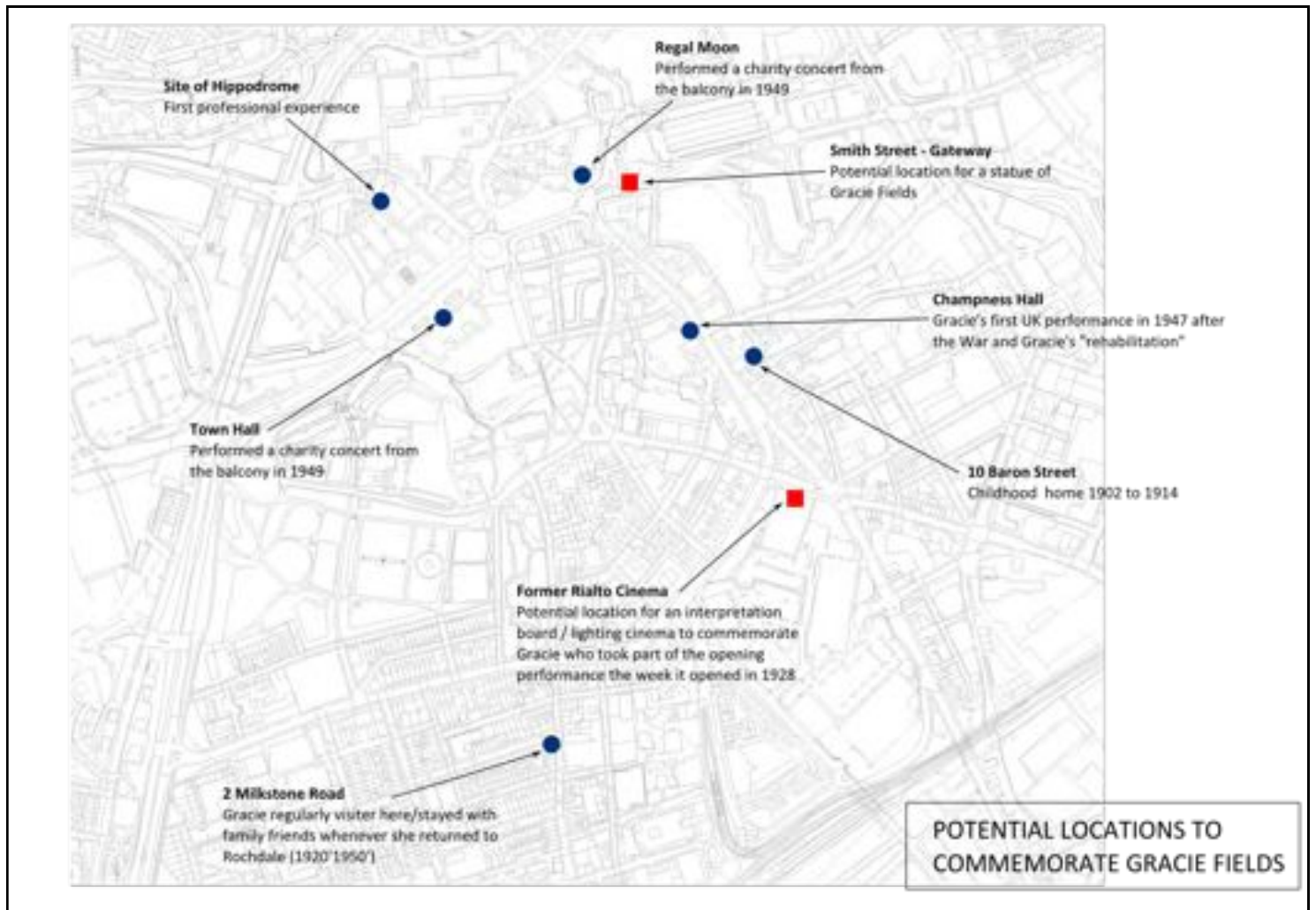
1. EXISTING MEMORIAL STONE

The memorial stone to Gracie Fields is currently located on Molesworth Street, where she was born. However, its location in an industrial area and along the dual carriageway is inappropriate. The Rotary Club is considering the installation of a new memorial in the town centre of Rochdale, where the footfall is more important.



2. LOCATION MAP

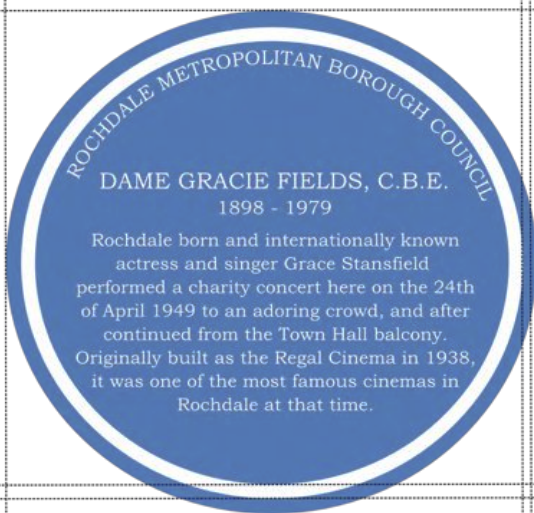
The map below shows the preferred locations for the installation of a blue plaque or a commemorative stone/statue. **These sites could also be linked altogether to form a trail dedicated to Gracie Fields.**



3. BLUE PLAQUE

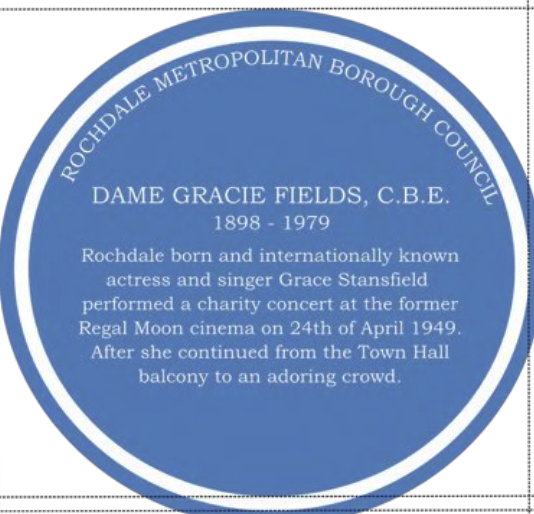
Cost (Leander Architectural): £450 /unit including installation
Delivery: 6 weeks

Former Regal Moon cinema



Regal Moon cinema, 1938

Town Hall

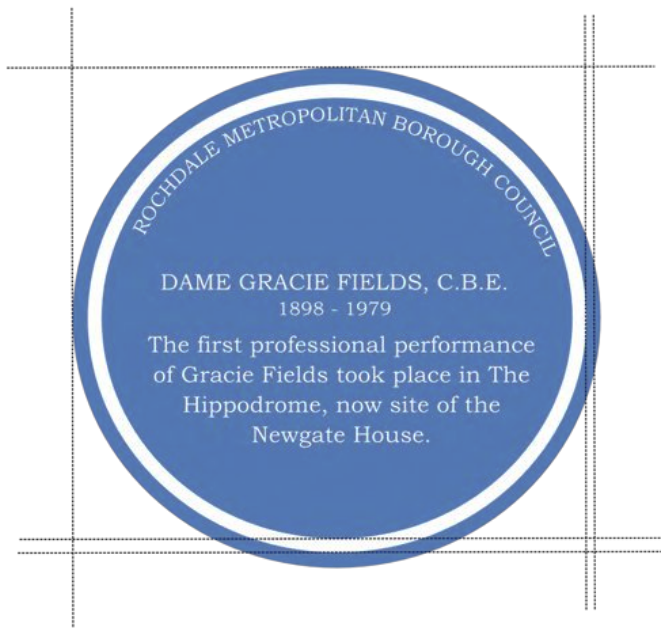


Town Hall blue plaque, 2013

Alternative text proposal (Gracie Field's Appreciation Society):

Rochdale Town Hall was the focal point of Gracie Fields' visits and civic receptions, with her always performing on the balcony. Gracie is a Rochdale born and internationally known actress and singer.

Site of the former Hippodrome



Alternative text proposal (Gracie Field's Appreciation Society):

Gracie Fields played in The Hippodrome when she was a child. She made one of her first professional performances there. From when she did turn professional in the early 1920s she always played the theatre during her charity weeks many times up to its destruction by fire in 1956.

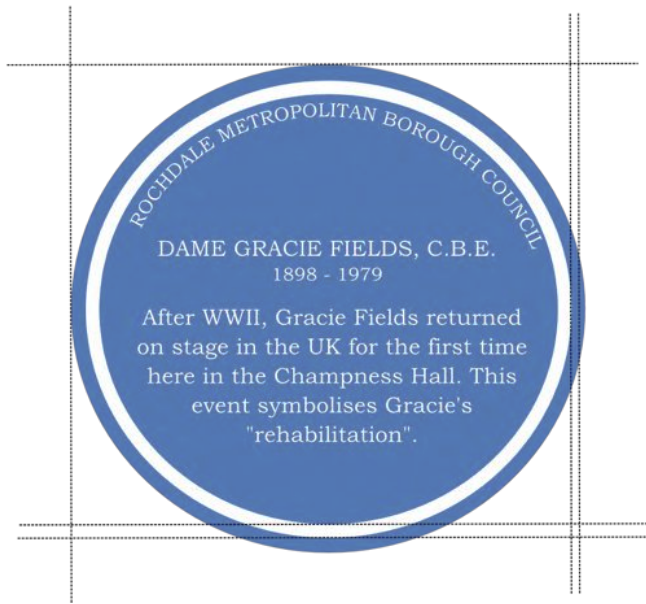
2 Milkstone Road



Alternative text proposal (Gracie Field's Appreciation Society)::

Gracie Fields regularly stayed here, on 2 Milkstone Road, when visiting her family and friends 'Bertha and Ada Schofield' whenever she returned to Rochdale during the 1920s-1950s.

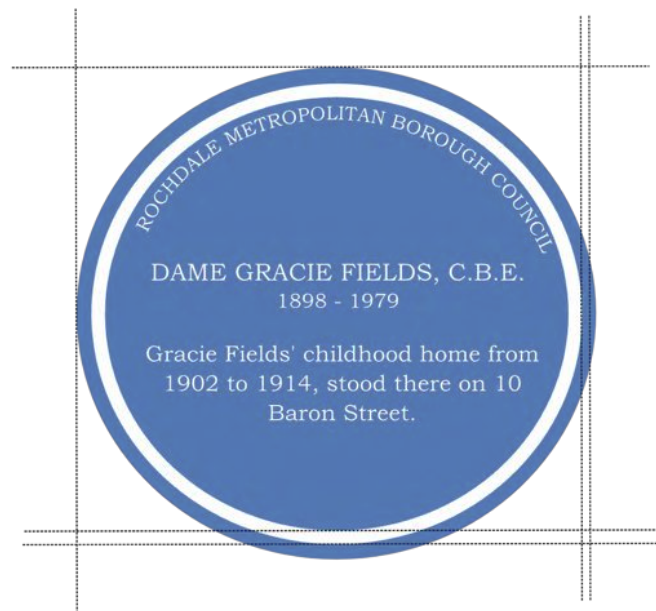
Champness Hall



Alternative text proposal (Gracie Field's Appreciation Society):

After WWII, Gracie Fields returned on stage in the UK for the first time here in Champness Hall. This concert was 'Our Gracie's Working Party' and was recorded live on July 23rd 1947 by the BBC. This event symbolises Gracie's "rehabilitation".

10 Baron Street



Alternative text proposal (Gracie Field's Appreciation Society):

From circa 1902 to 1910. Gracie also sang outside the theatrical boarding house on Baron Street and it was outside here that she was first noticed by a professional tour manager. This is the address the family are known to have lived at for the longest amount of time.

45 Kenion Street

Proposed new blue plaque (Gracie Field's Appreciation Society):

The Stansfield family lived here (1911 census)

16 Huhjtrede Street

Proposed new blue plaque (Gracie Field's Appreciation Society):

This is where the Stansfield family were living from around 1914 and it was the address given on Gracie's first professional contracts as a performer.

4. COMMEMORATIVE STONE / STATUE

Wet Rake Gardens, facing the former Rialto cinema

Built on Drake Street in August 1928, The Rialto was entirely built and furnished by local firms. It was located at the junction of Milnrow Road and Drake Street, facing Wet rake Gardens and possessed 1874 seats. The Rialto was taken over by the Rank Organisation in the 1950s and renamed Odeon. It finally closed in 1975 and was demolished in 1981 after several years of vacancy (fire damaged the cinema which was not restored). The 25TH August 1928 the cinema opened and Miss Gracie Fields took part of the opening performance the week it opened. This garden is located close to Molesworth Street, the birthplace of Gracie Fields.



Rialto cinema, 1940s

Smith Street square

The square adjacent to the new town centre Metrolink stop is a potential location for a commemorative stone/statue. The area has a reasonable size to accommodate a statue, but most importantly is a gateway to the town centre. The creation of a Gracie Fields statue would be appreciated by the locals and visible by the commuters. To tie in with the 'modern' character of the site, a contemporary design can be preferred.



Smith Street