

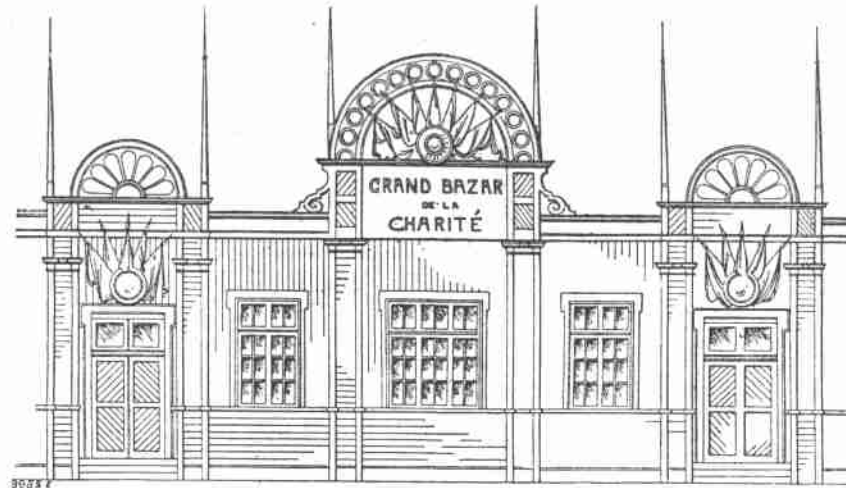
Paris Charity Bazaar, 1897

- On 4 May 1897 a fire in a charity hall on the banks of the Seine caused the deaths of 124 people and was famous because many of the dead were very important persons .
- It exemplified the dangerous use of draped 'canvas' as a suspended ceiling which encouraged rapid spread of flame. Several exit doors opened inwards and could not be opened in the panic

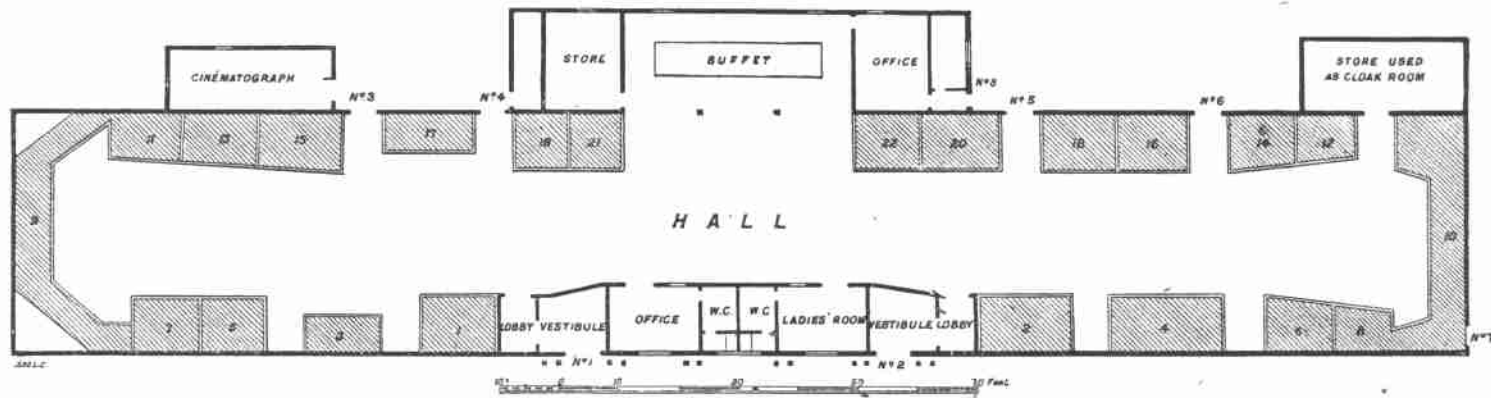
Led to first French fire safety regulations



Front elevation and plan



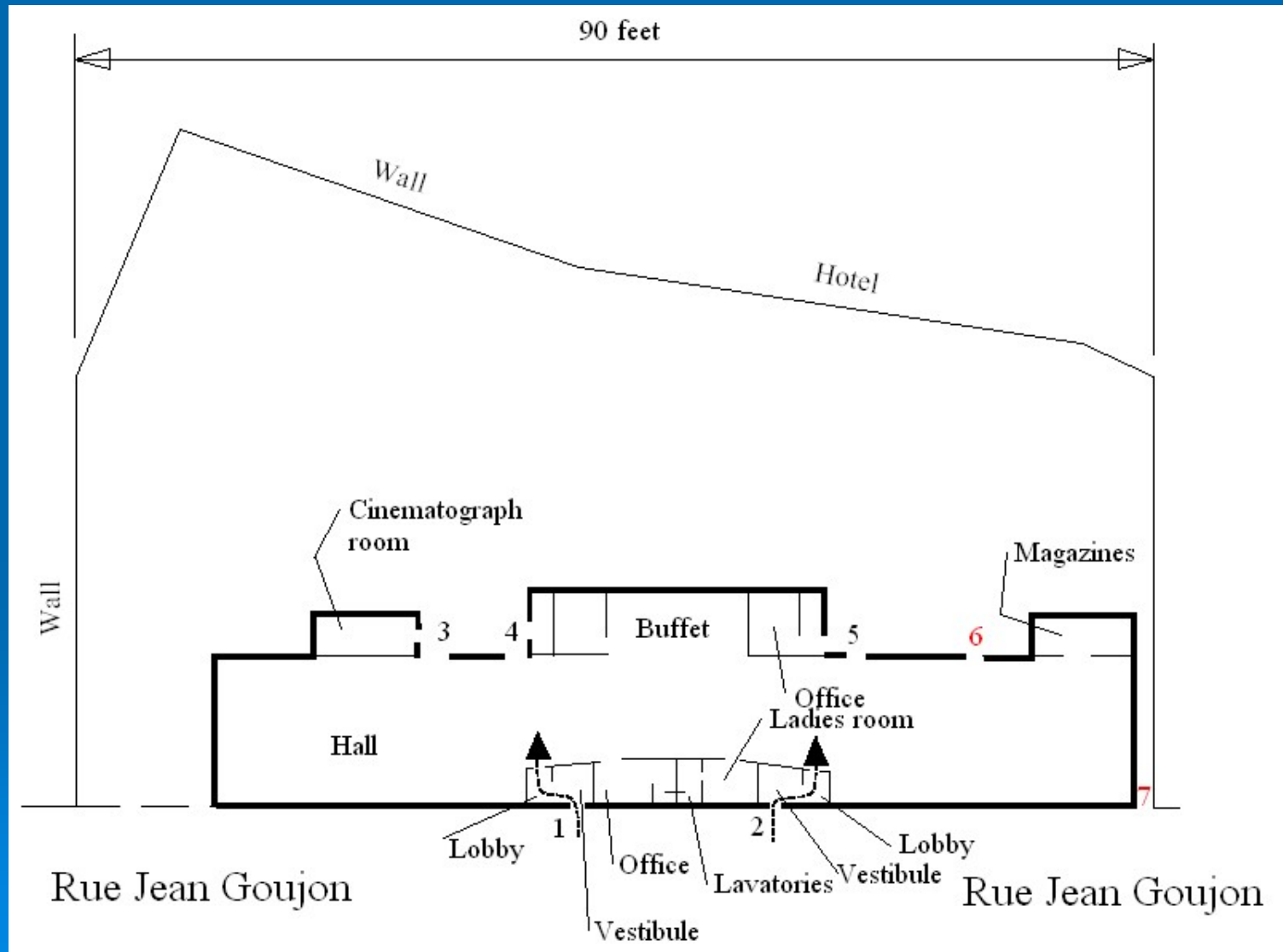
ELEVATION OF MAIN ENTRANCE.



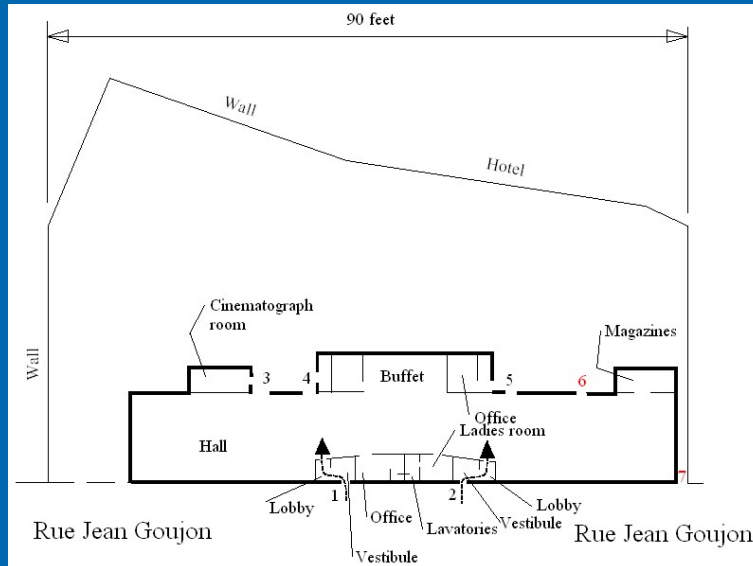
GROUND PLAN.



Site plan showing means of escape



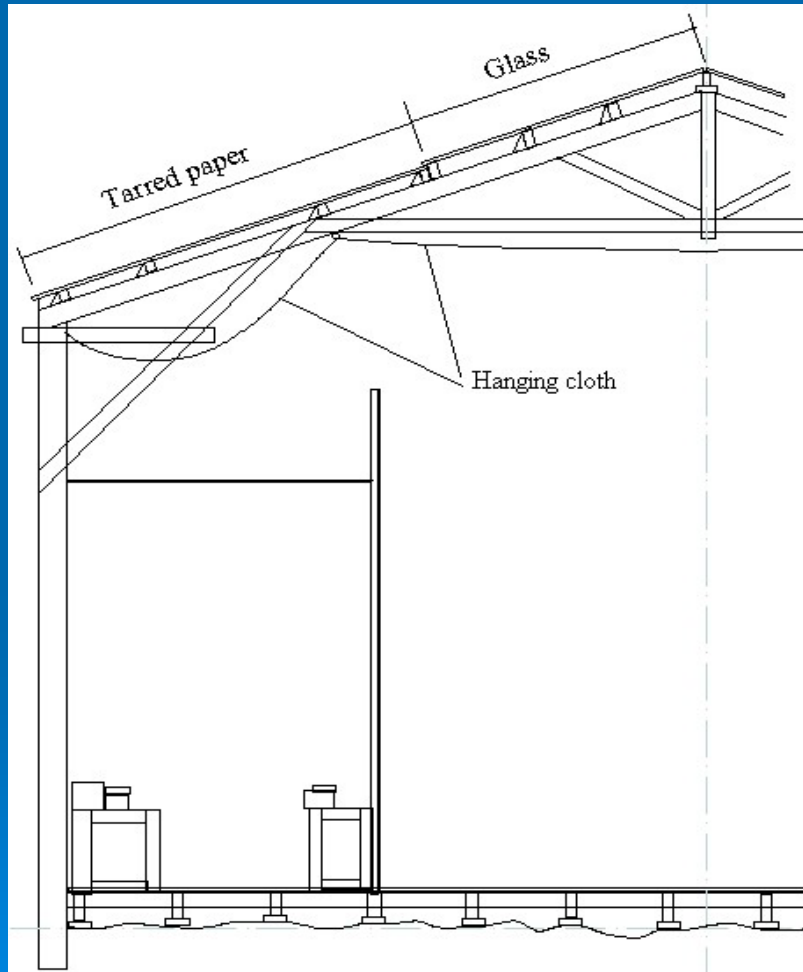
Escape conditions



- Near one end of the hall there was a cinematograph room which was, according to the plans, inaccessible directly from the hall – a person would have to leave the hall by entrance no 3 (the best known rear exit) and access the cinematograph room from outside.
- At the other end of the hall was a store used as a cloakroom labelled 'magazines' on the plan. Exit 7 was used by service personnel and stallholders but the public were unaware of this exit.



Part-section through Paris Bazaar



- Paris bazaar could be described as a timber shed with combustible fabric ceiling.
- Opportunity for fire to develop behind screen without being seen early on – a very dangerous scenario.
- Hidden-fire scenario similar to Stardust disco

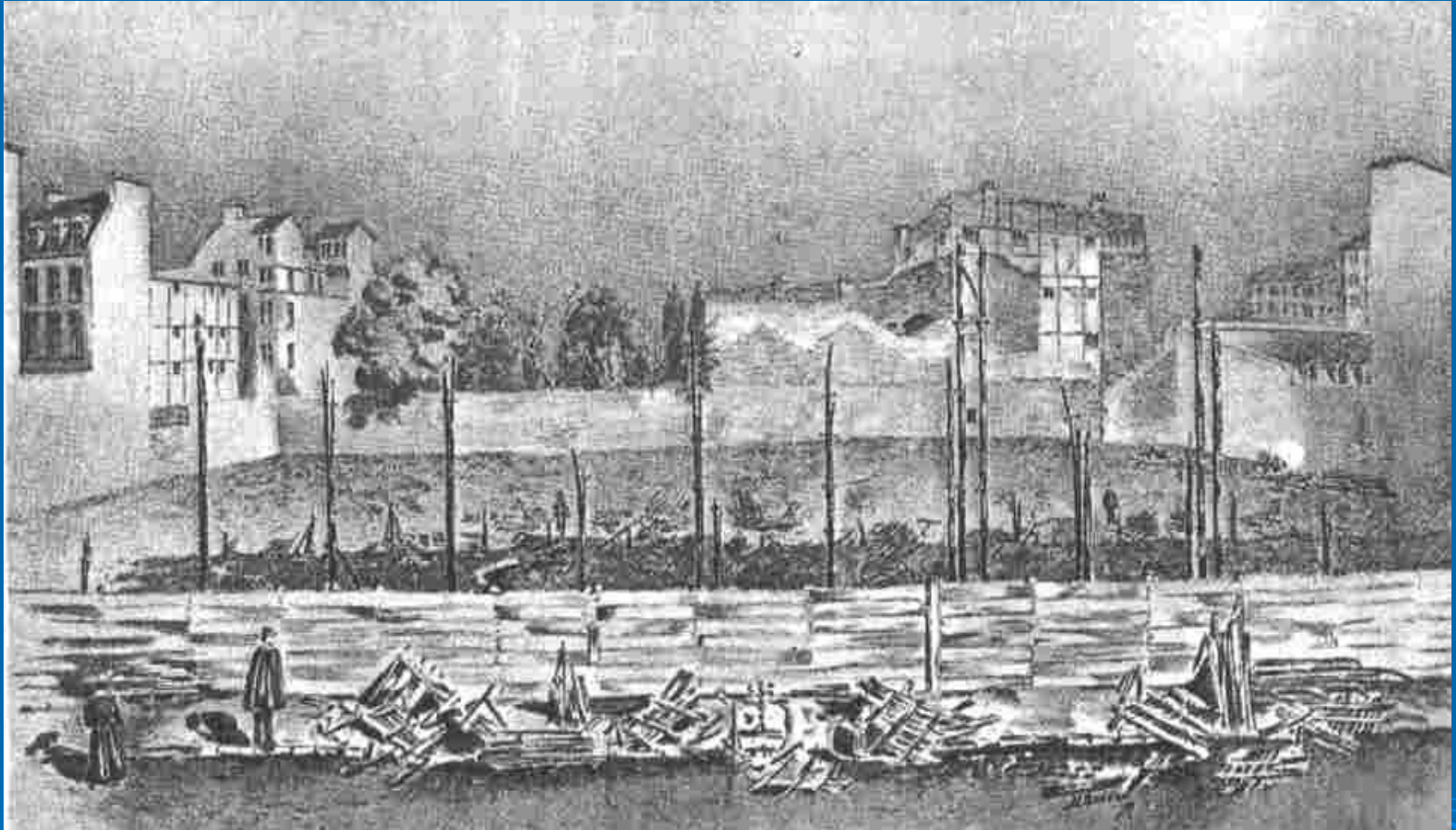




- Paris bazaar interior before fire. It exemplified the dangerous use of draped canvas as a suspended ceiling which encouraged rapid spread of flame
- The building had been previously used as a theatre equipped with a raking floor with fixed seats and all the equipment for providing illumination and dramatic effects. For the bazaar event the stage and seats had been removed.

A British member of the Salvage Corp who visited the building 24 hours after the fire described the building as a 'wooden shed fitted with canvas'.





Paris Bazaar after the fire



Paris Bazaar - observations

- The visitors were mostly ladies dressed in flimsy spring apparel. Their dresses would have quickly caught fire as the burning vellum sheets and bitumen fell onto them. A witness reported that the glass and the vellum fell at about the same time. A worse fire scenario is difficult to imagine.
- To prevent a similar disaster there would have to be strict controls on the flammability of materials used on exhibition stands and a prohibition on the use of combustible ceiling fabric
- Intervention by the fire service would have been of no consequence because the fire spread was so rapid.
- There were eight exits providing an aggregate width of 40 ft – more than enough to allow safe evacuation from a normally constructed and finished building of this size.
- All exit doors should open outwards. Those at the rear did not and there was some doubt about the direction of opening of the principal entrance doors at the front.



Paris Bazaar – observations continued

- If people pile up against a door it is impossible to open it against the crush
- The radiated heat from the fire was great enough to force those who had fortunately escaped onto the open ground at the rear to have to exit through a hotel window. Ladies seemed unaware of the wide passage onto Rue Jean Goujon.
- There was some uncertainty as to whether or not the building was a public building – people attended by special invitation and were not required to pay an entrance fee and it was argued that the building was therefore not a public building.
- Management were considered reckless in allowing a temporary structure to be used in this way.
- There should be a check before each event to ensure that exit doors will open and open in the correct direction.



Paris Bazaar – Edwin Sachs opinion

- Sachs, while talking at the Architectural Association in November 1887, reflected that the architect might feel quite proud when, in designing a factory for instance, he could tell the client that he had managed to omit an emergency staircase that featured so prominently in the cost schedule, perhaps getting an extra fee for making the economy.
- The same pressures are present today in the design of fire safety engineered buildings.
- Sachs said it was reprehensible to oppose every regulation for the safety of life and property merely for the sake of opposition, and for the sake of pleasing one's client. He counselled that designers should study the requisitions conscientiously and challenge exaggerated demands of the authorities while trying to get best value for the client.



Theatre fires - Sachs opinion

- Edwin Sachs, founder of the British Fire Prevention Committee, was an expert on theatre design in the late 1800's. He commented that people had remarkably short memories of such incidents
- Going by press reports the charity bazaar fire was forgotten in three days and it was so with:
 - the Vienna 'Ring' theatre fire of 1881 with 450 fatalities,
 - the Opera Comique fire of 1887 with a death toll of 115,
 - and the Exeter theatre fire of 1887.

