

SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE

- 1683 Thomas Sadler opened Sadler's Musick House, a wooden construction
- 1699 Renamed Miles' Musick House
- 1718 Known simply as Sadler's Wells
- 1753 Regularly used for theatrical performances
- 1765 Rebuilt in stone
- 1804 Occasionally known as the Aquatic Theatre because of its nautical dramas
- 1834 Damaged by fire
- 1838 Major renovation
- 1871 Closed. Many uses. Finally derelict.
- 1879 Reconstructed and reopened as a theatre
- 1893 Became a music hall
- 1901 Major reconstruction, but shortly became a cinema
- 1906 Closed and became derelict again
- 1931 Rebuilt and opened as a counterpart to the Old Vic
- 1934 Used almost exclusively for opera and ballet
- 1940 Closed and used as temporary housing for bomb victims
- 1945 Reopened as an opera and ballet house
- 1960 Building enlarged
- 1996 Closed for rebuilding
- 1998 Reopened

In 1683 Thomas Sadler opened a medicinal spring in the grounds of his house. From the 1690s onwards he provided entertainment for his visitors in a specially built wooden "musick house". In 1765 this became a proper stone-built theatre, and the home of burlettas, pantomimes and musical shows, with occasional straight drama productions. Edmund Kean, Charles Dibdin and Joseph Grimaldi were the leading performers at that time. In 1844 Samuel Phelps took over the management and for nearly twenty years made the theatre a home for high standard Shakespeare.

By the 1860s the growth of theatres in West End left Sadlers Wells isolated in an unfashionable part of the town, and the theatre gradually failed, being used for boxing matches, as a music hall, and even as a pickle factory. It closed in 1878. It was briefly revived by Mrs Bateman and her daughter, Kate, after they had left the Lyceum, and it later became a house of melodrama and music hall. It closed again in 1906, was converted into a cinema, and finally closed in 1916.

A new theatre was built on the site in 1931 with money from the Carnegie Trust, and under the management of Lillian Baylis of the Old Vic, it became a leading house for opera and ballet. The Sadlers Wells Ballet Company moved to the Royal Opera House just after the Second World War, eventually becoming the Royal Ballet. In 1968 the Sadlers Wells Opera Company moved to the London Coliseum, and became known as the English National Opera. From 1968 onwards the Sadlers Wells Theatre was used for touring opera and dance companies.

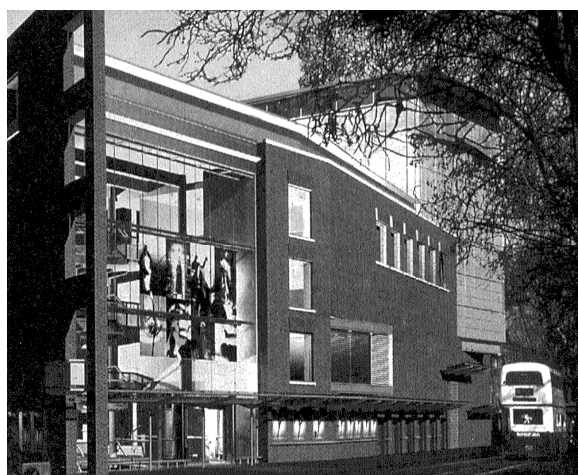
In 1996 it closed for a multi-million pound redevelopment made possible with a National Lottery grant. In 1998 the theatre reopened as a high-tech state-of-the-art dance theatre.

Thomas Sadler's original medicinal spring can be seen under a glass panel at the rear of the stalls.



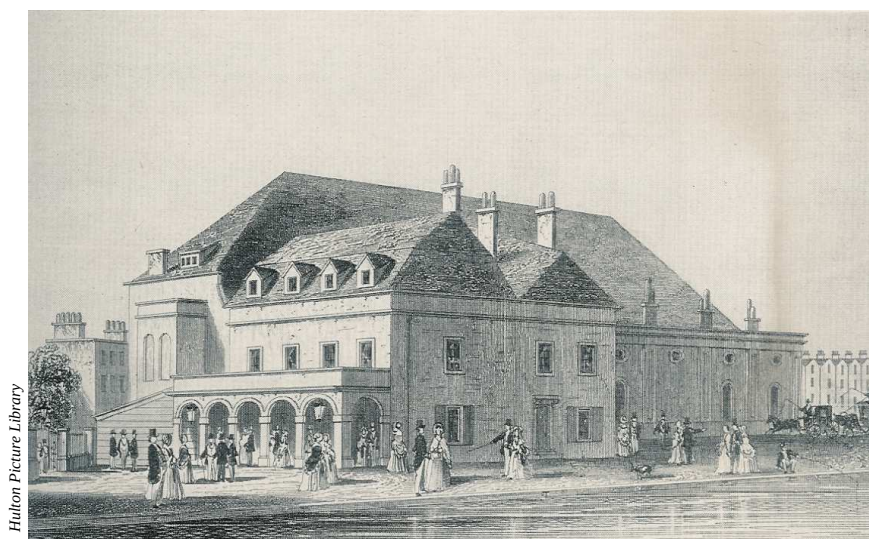
The original Sadler's Wells

Theatre Museum



The 1998 rebuilt Sadler's Wells

BBC Photo Library



Hulton Picture Library

Sadler's Wells in 1850—this building was finally demolished in 1930

ST GEORGE'S HALL, Langham Place, Regent Street

- 1867 Opened as St George's Concert Hall.
Renamed St. George's Opera House the same year.
Used till 1933 for concerts & shows.
Sometimes named Matinee Theatre, or Maskelyne's.
- 1933 Bought by BBC as a studio concert hall
- 1941 Destroyed by Blitz

Dr Henry Wylde was determined to build a decent concert hall in the heart of London. He acquired part of the site of the German Bazaar in Langham Place and on 24th April 1867 he conducted the New Philharmonic Society in its inaugural concert in the St George's Hall.

It was always intended that the concert hall could be quickly and easily adapted for theatre performances, and a company of amateurs—the Wandering Thespians—gave the first stage production there on 3 December 1867.

From December 1867 to March 1868 the Hall renamed itself the St George's Opera House for a season of operettas by Arthur Sullivan and Offenbach. In the 1870s it became a regular home for “Mr and Mrs German Reed's Entertainment” - a highly popular annual season of polite entertainment attracting middle-class audiences who frowned on theatres and would never be seen in a music hall. This annual series lasted almost twenty years. In between times the Hall offered a mix of concerts, amateur productions and unusual undertakings like William Poel's serious and educational Shakespearean explorations.

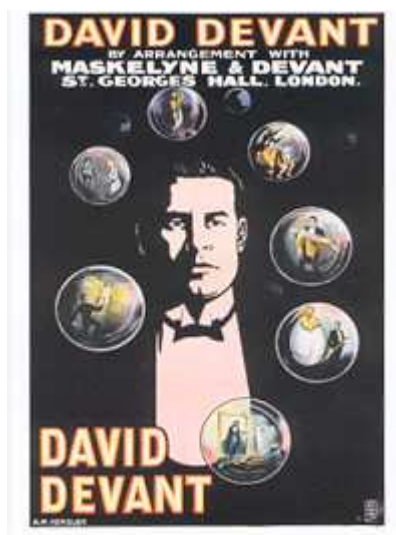
From 17 April 1897 it was renamed the Matinee Theatre and presented a range of “high class vaudeville entertainment”, but things were not the same without the Reeds, and the times were changing. The middle classes had embraced theatre. Henry Irving's knighthood had made the stage respectable. St George's Hall languished, and in 1904 it closed.

On 2 Jan 1905 it re-opened under the management of John Maskelyne and his partner, David Devant. They enlarged the premises and began a highly successful series of magical shows, with illusions of baffling complexity, “mental magnetism”, vanishing ladies and floating bodies. The management passed to Maskelyne's sons by the end of the First World War and by 1922 the venue had changed its name to Maskelyne's Theatre of Mystery.

In 1933 the Maskelynes retired and sold the building to the newly formed BBC. The BBC had already bought the neighbouring Queen's Hall for broadcasts of classical music, and needed a similar venue for variety and light entertainment. The first broadcast on 28 Oct 1933 was a Music Hall starring the Houston Sisters, Stainless Stephen, Marie Burke and the Jack Payne Orchestra.

On 24 Sep 1940 St George's Hall was gutted when fire-Bombs fell through the glass roof onto the stage. On 10 May 1941 the neighbouring Queen's Hall and the remaining portions of the St George's Hall were destroyed by a further bombing raid.

In 1963 the site was used to build the present-day St George's Hotel and the Henry Wood House.



BBC Photo Library



ST GEORGE'S THEATRE, Tufnell Park

- 1976 Opened in a converted church
- 1989 Closed and left unused
- 2003 Bought by a Pentecostal Church Group
- 2004 Occupied by squatters in protest against its non use
- 2005 Future uncertain

St George's Theatre Tufnell Park, opened in 1976—the brainchild of actor George Murcell, He wished to create a replica Elizabethan acting area complete with balconied stage and to produce Elizabethan and Jacobean drama in an “authentic” setting. The 450 seat theatre was built within a Grade II listed Victorian church. By the end of the 1980s the theatre was dark and remained unused for a decade.

In the year 2000, a company called Dragon Multimedia announced a £100,000 refurbishment scheme to relaunch the theatre, upgrade the facilities and establish a resident company. However, nothing happened, and in 2003 the building was offered for sale and was bought by a Nigerian Pentecostal Church group called House on the Rock. The theatre remained empty until October 2004 when it was occupied by a group of squatters who reopened it as a theatre and a community centre. The squatters claimed the Church had no interest in the building, and were allowing it to decay. The Church countered by seeking an eviction order on the squatters and announcing their intention to restore it as a place of worship. The Church said it was prepared to allow the building to be used for occasional performances once it had been restored as a house of worship.

The squatters refused to leave, claiming the Church would censor the plays and only allow performances of a type acceptable to the Pentecostal authorities. The local council gave permission for the premises to be restored as a church subject to the building being opened for performing arts on at least eight days in each month. There were reports of a mystery backer offering to buy the building from the Church and allow the squatters to develop the theatre for community use, but, according to the reports, the Church refused to sell.

ST JAMES'S THEATRE, Jermyn Street

- 1835 Opened as St James's in Crown Passage, Pall Mall
- 1840 Renamed the Prince's Theatre
- 1842 Reverted to name of St James's Theatre
- 1869 Major redecoration and reconstruction.
- 1879 More rebuilding
- 1900 Theatre enlarged and redecorated
- 1957 Closed and demolished

John Braham, the acclaimed opera singer, was 58 years old. He was famous, he was wealthy, and he was looking to ending his career with one final challenge. He wanted to build his own theatre. He bought an old hostelry dating back to Charles II and invested his life savings of £28,000 into his new St James's Theatre. The opening production on 14th December 1835 was “Agnes Sorel” with Braham himself singing the tenor role.



St. James's Theatre, 1836

Sadly, his theatre was not a success. His own productions failed, the attraction of an imported French company failed. Even a run of comedies based on Dickens's novels failed to draw the crowds. By 1838 Braham was penniless. He was forced to sell his theatre and return to working as a performer.

Alfred Bunn, the controversial “jack of all trades” who had recently been manager of both Covent Garden and Drury Lane at the same time, took over. He opened on 27 April 1840 with “Der Freischütz”, the opera by Carl Maria von Weber. This was to cash in on the current fashion for all things German (because of Queen



St James's Theatre, 1900

Victoria's new husband, the Prince Consort). Bunn even renamed the theatre the Prince's. However, he soon discovered that nothing except wild animal shows would draw the crowds. By the end of 1841, Bunn went bankrupt. The theatre closed.

In 1842 under its old name but with a new manager, the St James's Theatre reopened. For the next half century managements came and went, policies were changed, everything was tried. In 1869 the building underwent some renovation. In 1879 the theatre underwent further remodelling and redecoration and reopened under the joint

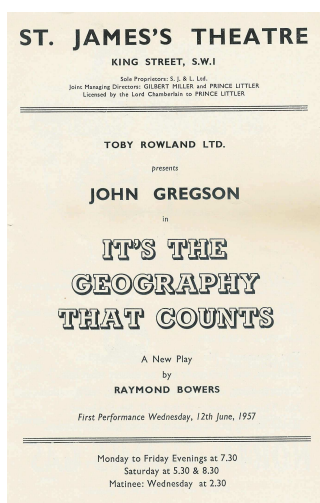
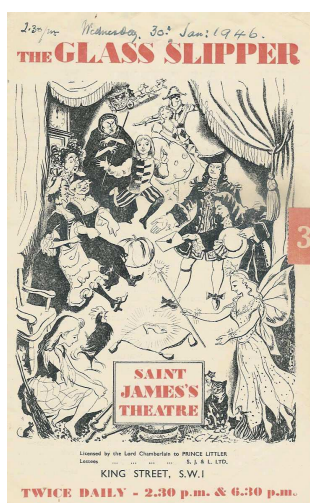
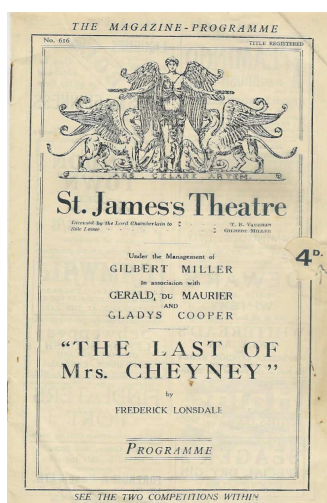
management of John Hare and the Kendals. At last the fortunes of the theatre seemed to be looking up.

The golden years of the St James's began when George Alexander took over and reopened "under new management" on 31st January 1891. His successes included "Lady Windermere's Fan" (1892), Mrs Patrick Campbell in "The Second Mrs Tanqueray" (1893), "The Importance of Being Earnest" (1895), and "The Prisoner of Zenda" (1896). In 1900 he had made enough money to have the auditorium completely reconstructed, and continued to enjoy successes until his death in 1918.

The theatre continued to thrive, notable productions being "The Last of Mrs Cheyney" with Gerald du Maurier and Gladys Cooper (1925), Emlyn Williams' "The Late Christopher Bean" with Edith Evans and Cedric Hardwicke (1933) and "A Month in the Country" (1943). After the Second World War the theatre staged seasons by John Clements and Laurence Olivier. In the Festival of Britain year, 1951, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh appeared in alternate performances of Shaw's "Caesar and Cleopatra" and Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra", Orson Welles appeared as Othello, and there was a season of plays from France performed by Jean-Louis Barrault, Madeleine Renaud and Edwige Feuillere. Terence Rattigan's "Separate Tables" ran for two years from 1954.

The theatre was sold to a building speculator in 1957. It closed on 27th July 1957. During its final months there was a nation-wide campaign, led by Vivien Leigh, to save the theatre. There were street marches and a protest in the House of Lords. Despite a favourable vote in the Lords, the Commons refused to act, and the theatre was demolished and replaced with an office block.

The loss of this important piece of theatre history, coming at a time when so many theatres up and down the country had been demolished, led to the London County Council agreeing that in future no living theatre would be demolished in central London without a replacement being included in any new development plans.



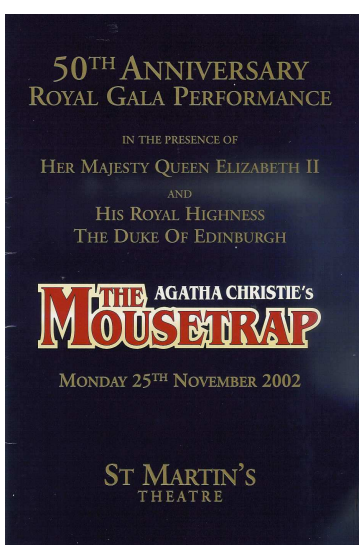
"It's the Geography That Counts" was the last production at the St James's. It opened on 12 June and closed on 27 July, 1957. The cast consisted of John Gregson, John Stratton, Michael Duffield, Liam Redmond, Jack Hedley and Jane Griffiths. It was directed by Noel Willman.

ST MARTIN'S THEATRE, West Street

1916 Opened
 1960 Major renovation
 1997 External rebuilding

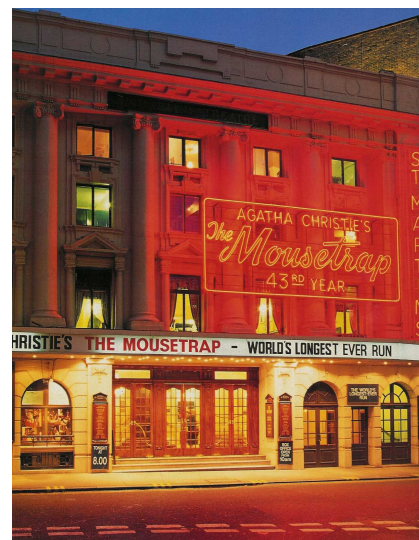
In 1913 the first of a planned pair of theatres opened. This was the Ambassadors Theatre (q.v.). Its twin was to be called the “Irving Theatre” and would be built on the adjoining site. However, the building was delayed by the outbreak of War and the twin was not completed until 1916—by which time its name had been changed to the St Martin’s Theatre. It opened on 26 November 1916 with Gertie Millar in C.B. Cochran’s “Houp La”. In 1920 Sir Frank Benson played Hamlet. He was 62 years old at the time.

In the 1923-1924 season the theatre experimented with a series of matinee performances known as the Playbox Theatre. The remainder of



the 1920s saw plays by John Galsworthy, Karel Capek’s “R.U.R.” and Noel Coward’s “The Queen was in the Parlour”, with the major success being Arnold Ridley’s “The Ghost Train” (1925). The 1930s saw the premiere of Priestley’s “When We Are Married”, and the highlight of the 1940s was 863 performances of Edward Percy’s “The Shop at Sly Corner”. Two successful plays by Hugh and Margaret Williams dominated the 1950s and then thrillers became the mainstay with “The Creeper” (1965) and a three year run of “Sleuth” (1970).

In 1974 “The Mousetrap”, which had been running for 22 years at the Ambassadors, crossed the road to the St Martin’s. In 1988 it reached 15,000 performances; in 1999 (for the first time) the show was given a completely new set; in 2000 the show reached 20,000 performances. In November 2002 the Queen attended a special 50th Anniversary performance. “The Mousetrap” was still running in 2009, celebrating its 57th year. The theatre is currently owned by Sir Stephen Waley Cohen.



ST PANCRAS PEOPLE'S THEATRE

1926 Opened in a converted hall
 1930c Also known as the Tavistock Little Theatre
 1940 Closed and became an educational venue

Mary Ward—Mrs Humphrey Ward, the Victorian novelist—strongly believed that religious faith should be expressed through public service and philanthropic activity. Accordingly she was a founder of Somerville College, Oxford, the first institution for the higher education of women and in London at Tavistock Place she created the first school for physically handicapped children and the first Play Centre in England.

Thanks to the generosity of the Duke of Bedford, the landholder, and Mr Passmore-Edwards, the philanthropist, she founded a “settlement” to provide educational facilities and recreation of an intellectual, moral and social nature. The settlement was built and named the Passmore-Edwards Settlement in honour of its benefactor. Mary Ward was awarded a CBE in 1919 and died in 1920. The Passmore-Edwards family requested that the Settlement be renamed in her honour—and the Mary Ward Settlement was created. Plays were frequently performed at the Mary Ward Settlement as part of its educational remit. John Galsworthy’s “Punch and Go” was staged there in 1924. However, the facilities for drama were inadequate. Encouraged by an enthusiastic member of the Settlement staff, Edith Neville, the nearby Charrington Hall was taken over and adapted for theatre use. The St Pancras People’s Theatre was a flat floor auditorium with 393 seats and a tiny balcony which held a further 26. The first performances took place shortly before Christmas 1926. The theatre remained under the control of Edith Neville for the next fourteen years and was licensed for public performances. At various times it was called the Tavistock Little Theatre and the Mary Ward Theatre as well as the St Pancras Peoples Theatre.

It ceased to be used for public performances in 1940 but remained in educational use.

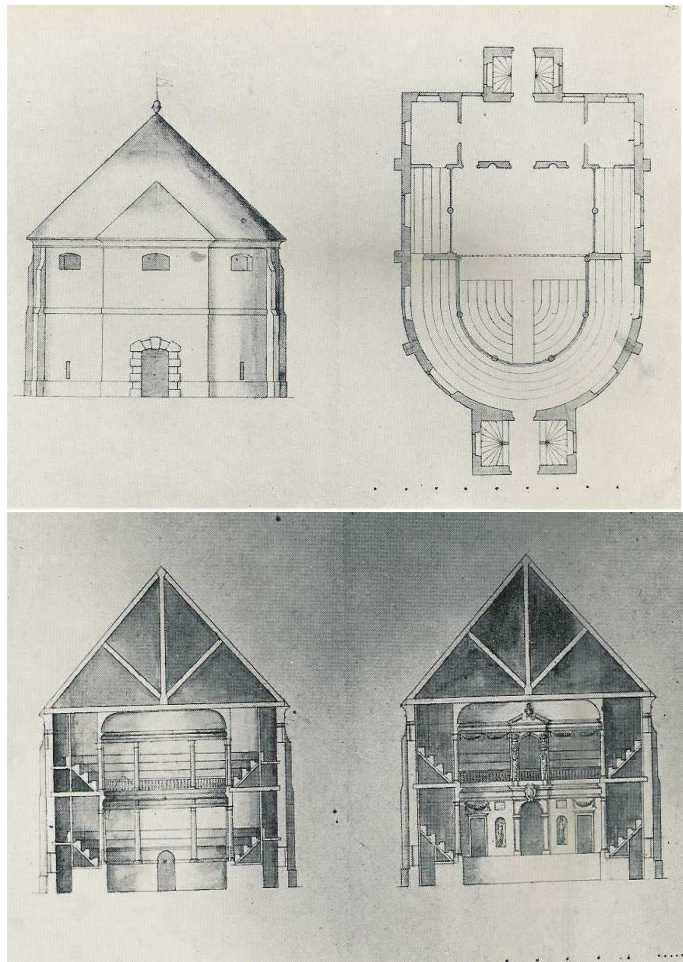
SALISBURY COURT THEATRE

- 1629 Opened as a "private" theatre
- 1641 Closed by Government order
- 1649 Interior destroyed by soldiers - "illegal use"
- 1660 Re-opened
- 1666 Destroyed in the Great Fire of London.

Designed by Inigo Jones and built by Richard Gunnell and William Blagrove for the sum of £1,000, this was the last theatre to be built in London before the Civil War. It was a "faire new playhouse", built as a replacement for the Whitefriars Theatre which earlier stood on the same site. It was a private theatre, at first used by the King's Men, then by Prince Charles's Men (1631-1635) and finally by Queen Henrietta's Men (1637-1642).

The company known as Queen Henrietta's Men was the second company to use that name. The first Company had been managed by Christopher Beeston and has been based at the Phoenix (Cockpit) (q.v.) It seems that business difficulties and closure due to plague had led the first company into bankruptcy.

The Earl of Dorset—the Queen's Lord Chamberlain—was actively involved in encouraging the re-formation of Queen Henrietta's Men at their new venue, Salisbury Court. This was not so much as a supporter of theatre, but through self-interest. The Earl of Dorset owned the ground rents of the new theatre, and therefore had a direct financial interest in seeing the building used as much as possible.



(Top) Ground-plan and exterior elevation of a theatre by Inigo Jones.
(Below) A cross-section of the same Theatre

*It is believed that this is a drawing for the Salisbury Court Theatre.
(From the Jones/Webb collection in the Library of Worcester College, Oxford)*

The company opened on 2 October 1637, under the management of Richard Heton. It is likely that their first production was "The English Moor, or the Mock Marriage" by Richard Brome.

Brome was employed as the regular playwright for Salisbury Court, but he soon quarrelled with Richard Heton and sought employment with Christopher Beeston at the Cockpit.

By all accounts, Heton was an autocratic manager. He regularly sought permission of the Lord Chamberlain for contractual extensions and more managerial control, and writings of the time talked about a domineering manager, a discontented playwright, and an unhappy band of players.

The worsening political situation had a serious effect on theatre business during the 1639-1640 season, and then a new outbreak of plague in 1641 led to the theatre being closed.

With the outbreak of Civil War in 1642 all theatres were closed by public order. In 1648 a further Government Order required all theatres to be demolished. However, the Salisbury Court was being used for "other purposes" by this time and escaped destruction. However, the following year a troop of soldiers stormed the theatre during an illegal private performance. The audience was forced to pay heavy "on the spot" fines and the interior of the theatre was destroyed.

During the 1650s William Beeston acquired the Salisbury Court premises and secretly carried on training his "Beeston Boys". In 1660, with the Restoration, Beeston immediately obtained permission to reopen both the Salisbury Court and the Cockpit. These proved profitable whilst the new Royal Patent Theatres were being built, and he was able to hire his premises out to both Rhodes and Davenant. He would have faced a great battle when both the Patent Theatres were ready, but before this his Salisbury Court Theatre was completely destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666.

SAVILLE THEATRE. Shaftesbury Avenue

- 1931 Opened
- 1941 Damaged by bombs, but remained open
- 1970 Converted to a cinema

The Saville Theatre, in the upper part of Shaftesbury Avenue opened on 8th October 1931 with a musical play called "For the Love of Mike". The theatre was under the management of Jack Waller.

This started a series of musical shows which filled the theatre for the next seven years. By the late 1930s a few plays were produced including Shaw's "Geneva" and Priestley's "Johnson over Jordan" but in 1940 the Saville had great success with a bright revue "Up and Doing". In 1941 the theatre suffered some bomb damage and closed for repairs. It quickly reopened and carried on with its policy of revues until the end of the War. In 1946 the Saville came under the control of Bernard Delfont. In February 1951 it had a great success with Ivor Novello's "Gay's the Word" starring Cicely Courtneidge, followed by "Love from Judy" (1952) and "Cockles and Champagne" (1954).

The rest of the 1950s saw three John Clements season of classics, then a return to musicals with "Expresso Bongo" and "Valmouth". Attractions in the early 1960s were Evelyn Laye in "The Amorous Prawn", Peter Ustinov's "Photo Finish", Laurence Olivier in "Semi Detached", and the musical "Pickwick" (1963).

In April 1965 the lease was acquired by Brian Epstein, manager of the Beatles. His intention was to let it run as a normal theatre on weeknights and to make it a mecca for pop shows on Sundays. On Sunday 19 February 1967 there was a riot at the theatre. Prior to the performance with Chuck Berry and Del Shannon, Epstein had sacked the house manager and criticised other staff. The backstage staff threatened to strike.

During Chuck Berry's performance two teenagers jumped up on the stage. The house manager, still on duty till the

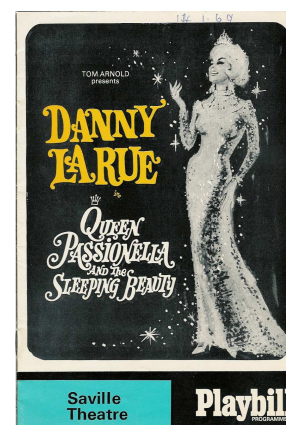


end of the performance, declared this was against GLC regulations and ordered the safety curtain to be dropped. Brian Epstein ordered it to be raised again but stage staff announced they were on strike and refused. The audience rioted and damaged the theatre. Shortly afterwards the sacked manager was reinstated and the Chuck Berry concert was repeated—this time without incident.

In August that same year Epstein died. The theatre abandoned its Pop image and returned to plays. The final production, Robin Maugham's play "Enemy" opened in December 1969. Early in 1970 the Saville closed and was converted into two cinemas—ABC 1 and ABC2—which opened on 22 December 1970.



The famous frieze by Gilbert Bayes, still visible on the outside of the building



SAVOY THEATRE, UXBRIDGE

- 1873 Opened
- 1921 Closed and demolished. A new cinema was built on the site.

Further information is needed on the original theatre and the subsequent cinema which replaced it. The cinema had closed by the 1970s and the ground floor had been converted into a betting shop. The premises were demolished in May 1983.



SAVOY THEATRE

Strand

1881 Opened
 1929 Completely reconstructed
 1990 Burnt down
 1993 Rebuilt and reopened,

For lovers of Gilbert & Sullivan this theatre is sacred ground. It was built by Richard D'Oyly Carte from the profits he had made from his G&S productions and opened on 10 October 1881 with a transfer of "Patience".

It was the first theatre in the world to be lit by electricity—although this applied only to the auditorium on the opening night. Electricity did not reach the stage until December. It was a three-tier auditorium of great splendour.

Until 1890 it was exclusively used for G&S productions, but then the pair quarrelled over the cost of a carpet. With no new G&S shows the Savoy produced works by other writers but these did not meet with much success. The partnership resumed in 1893 with "Utopia Ltd", and again with "The Grand Duke" (1896). However, this work was a failure and the pair ceased to work together.

Subsequently the theatre was run by J.E.Vedrenne and Harley Granville-Barker with a season of Shakespeare, then H.B.Irving was the lessee for nine years from 1910. From 1919 to 1929 the theatre was run by Irving's executors under the management of Robert Courtneidge. His final great success was R.C.Sherriff's "Journeys End"(1929).

The theatre then underwent a major reconstruction, converting it into a two-tier auditorium in Art-Deco style. It reopened on 21 October 1929 with Gilbert & Sullivan's "The Gondoliers", and then housed a series of productions, many of which were transfers from other theatres.

A wartime success was "The Man Who Came to Dinner" (1941) with Robert Morley. The 1961/62 season saw the return of D'Oyly Carte for the last time before the G&S copyright expired. Subsequent productions included Noel Coward's "Sail Away" (1962), "The Secretary Bird" (1968) and "Noises Off" (1982).

In February 1990 the theatre was very badly damaged by fire—damaged almost to the point of total destruction. With the most astonishing dedication, the management set about a complete restoration and a painstaking re-creation of the Art Deco interior.



Alberto Arzoz

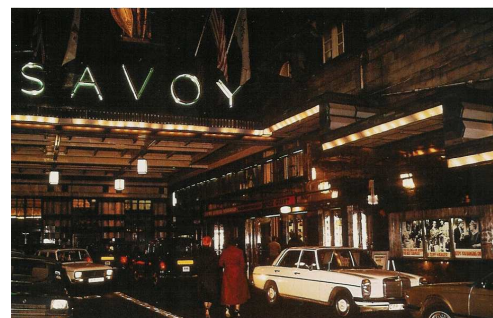
In 1993 the magnificent Savoy re-opened with a Royal Gala in the presence of the Prince of Wales. For the remainder of the 90s its productions included "The Importance of Being Oscar" with Simon Callow, and a revival of "Hay Fever" with Geraldine McEwan.

The new Millennium was marked with a return of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company with a production of "The Mikado" - and the company returned a few years later with a season including other G&S favourites. An attempt to turn the Savoy into London's third permanent opera theatre failed after just one season—as did a revival of Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" in 2007.

It seems that the Savoy's long history of involvement with opera and operetta may not be the recipe for its future success, especially since a revival of "Carousel" with Lesley Garrett turned out to be a long-running success in 2009. The theatre is currently owned by Sir Stephen Waley Cohen..



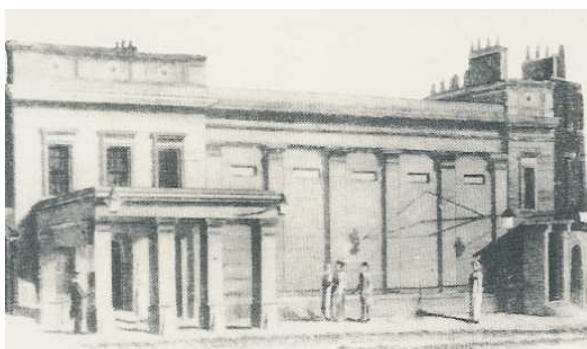
Above: The first Savoy Theatre, 1881
 Below: the 1929 reconstruction



SCALA THEATRE, Tottenham Street

- 1772 Opened as the New Rooms and used for concerts
- 1810 Converted into the “New Theatre in Tottenham Street”.
Many names used, including Regency, West London,
Fitzroy and Prince of Wales’s Theatre
- 1884 Closed and used as a Salvation Army Hostel
- 1903 Demolished
- 1905 The site redeveloped and enlarged for the Scala Theatre
- 1969 Closed and eventually demolished

Opened in 1772 as the New Rooms in Tottenham Street for concerts of vocal and instrumental music. In 1780 it was enlarged and equipped with a Royal Box, renaming itself the King’s Concert Rooms. It was used as a theatre in 1802, calling itself the Cognoscenti Theatre, and providing a home for private theatricals for the aristocracy. By 1808 it was used briefly as a circus and in 1810 it was rebuilt as the New Theatre in Tottenham Street, opening on 23 April 1810 with “Love in a Village”.



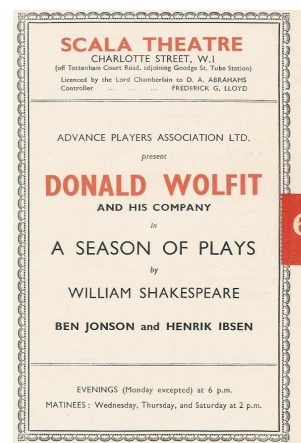
New Theatre in Tottenham Street, 1810



Tottenham Street Theatre 1830



The Scala interior in the 1960s



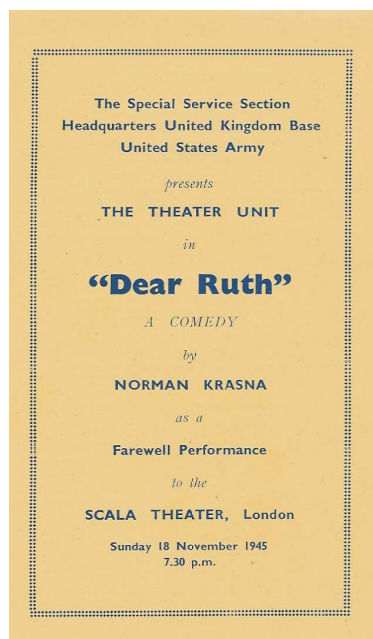
The owner, Mr Paul, a gunsmith, spent £4,000 on the building, but four years later the theatre had failed and he was forced to sell it for £315. It then underwent several changes of name and management during the first half of the 19th Century, becoming in turn the Regency Theatre (1815), the Regency Theatre of Variety (1819), and The West London Theatre (1820). In 1829 the management changed three times in one year.

It was the Queen’s Theatre in 1831 (in honour of Queen Adelaide) the Fitzroy Theatre (1833) back to the Queen’s (1835), back to the Fitzroy (under the management of Madame Vestris—1837-8), and then the Queen’s once more (1839). However, all these changes of name were a little irrelevant. The theatre had sunk so low, with its lurid melodrama and sordid condition, that everyone referred to it as The Dust Hole.

In 1865 it was taken over by the actress Marie Wilton. She reconstructed and redecorated it and gave it a new name—the Prince of Wales Theatre - and gradually transformed it into one of the most respected theatres in town. In 1867 she married her leading man, Squire Bancroft, and under their joint management the theatre introduced realistic scenery and more natural styles of acting. With a famous series of plays by T.W. Robertson, they pioneered “drawing room drama”, or “cup and saucer” drama and staged the first matinees of modern times.

After fourteen successful years the Bancrofts moved on to run the Haymarket, and the Prince of Wales did not long survive them. Four years after they moved out, the Prince of Wales closed and was used as a Salvation Army Hostel.

In 1903 the theatre was demolished. It was replaced with a new theatre called the Scala. The opening ceremony was performed by Lady Bancroft (as she had now become) on 19 December 1904, but the



theatre did not open to the general public until 23 September 1905 with “The Conqueror” under the management of Forbes-Robertson.

The Scala Theatre had a few successful runs in its early days including “A Royal Divorce” (1906) but by 1911 it was being used as a cinema. Films provided the main fare through much of the First World War and “The Birth of a Nation” was a big attraction in 1915. I

n 1918 the Scala returned to live theatre with Matheson Lang in “The Purple Mask”. However for the first half of the Twenties the theatre was either dark or being used as a cinema. From 1925 onwards the theatre was principally used for amateur productions with the occasional professional show.

In July 1943 the Scala was taken over by the United States Army for a production of Maxwell Anderson’s “The Eve of St Mark”. The performers were all American servicemen stationed in London, with the female roles played by American actresses either resident in London or stationed with organisations like the Red Cross. A number of British actresses supplemented the cast, appearing for no payment. The production ran for eight weeks and was free to all members of the Allied Forces. By the end of the engagement the play had been seen by 60,000 members of the Forces.

In May 1944 the Scala was requisitioned for use by American servicemen and was known as the US Post Theater. Interspersed with a season of Shakespeare and the classics from Donald Wolfit, the United States Army occupied the theatre for eighteen months presenting a series of plays and films. Because of an arrangement between the US War Department and the Motion Picture Industry the showing of films was restricted to US personnel in uniform only, but for all stage attractions the theatre was open to all Allied Forces and their guests. The price of admission was a uniform. The Scala became the goal of all soldier shows in the United Kingdom. The best soldier productions from areas all over England were brought into the Scala. The Sunday night Variety shows brought GI bands and entertainers from all over the country. By the time the Theater Unit gave its farewell performance on Sunday 18th November 1945 the Scala had become a much loved venue of thousands of Americans.

After the war Ralph Reader’s Gang Shows, D’Oyly Carte seasons and an annual “Peter Pan” interspersed with amateur shows were the usual programme for the next twenty years. On 18 January 1969, following a Christmas season of “Peter Pan” the Scala closed. It was used occasionally over the next few months for Indian and foreign films but by the end of the year it closed completely and was left to decay.

SEBRIGHT MUSIC HALL, Hackney

- 1865 Opened as the Sebright Music Hall
- 1903 Renamed the Regent Theatre of Varieties
- 1904 Closed and unused
- 1910 Reopened as the Sebright Picture Palace—a cinema
- 1920 Closed and used for other purposes.
- 1938 Demolished

The Sebright opened in 1865 as a music room annexed to the Sebright Arms Public House in Hill Street (nowadays Coate Street) Hackney. Rapidly it established itself as one of the East End’s leading halls. In 1885 it was reconstructed and the seating capacity increased to 704. Under the management of George Belmont (who was also known as “Barnum’s Beauty”) a system of “Two Houses Nightly” was introduced. It was claimed to be the first time twice-nightly variety was performed. The Sebright hosted one of Marie Lloyd’s earliest appearances and, in 1894, “The Era” heaped praise on the young Charles Chaplin for his patriotic songs and sketches..

When the Hackney Empire opened in 1901 the Sebright was distinctly the poor relation. It immediately lost its prestige and audience. In an attempt to survive, it renamed itself the Regent Theatre of Varieties and started mixing primitive film shows and bioscopes with variety turns. However, this failed and at the end of 1904 it closed. In 1910 it reopened as the Sebright Picture Palace, but ten years later it closed again.

The building was used for other purposes until it was demolished in 1938 and replaced with a block of flats.



SECOMBE THEATRE, Sutton and the Charles Cryer Studio Theatre

- 1984 Opened in a converted church
- 2002 Threatened with closure
- 2003 Run directly by the local Council

Named after Sir Harry Secombe, and created inside a converted Christian Scientist Church, it was used mainly for local and touring productions .

A financial crisis in 2002 threatened its future. Early in 2003 it was taken over and directly managed by the local council—chiefly as a theatre available for hire. The main auditorium seats 340, and there is a large multi-purposes Function Room attached. The Secombe Theatre is operated in conjunction with the Charles Cryer Studio Theatre, named after the man who led the campaign to open the original Secombe Theatre. The Charles Cryer Studio is in a converted hall in nearby Carshalton High Street.



SHAFTESBURY THEATRE (1) Shaftesbury Avenue

- 1888 Opened
- 1940 Closed
- 1941 Destroyed in the Blitz

The first theatre in the new Shaftesbury Avenue was designed by C.J. Phipps and built at a cost of £17,000. Great emphasis was placed on safety : just one year before, a disastrous fire at the Exeter theatre killed nearly 200 people. This new theatre was on an island site with exits on four sides, had the latest in safety curtains and was constructed out of entirely fireproof materials. The money was provided by a Manchester cotton manufacturer, John Lancaster. His wife, Ellen Wallis, was a well known professional actress in Manchester and he wanted to create the opportunity for her to make her mark in London.

It opened on 20 October 1888 with Shakespeare's "As You Like It" . Ellen Wallis played Rosalind and Forbes-Robertson was Orlando. Unfortunately the reviews were none too kind and that production was replaced with "The Lady of Lyons". Bad luck dogged this next production. The new safety curtain refused to rise on the opening night and that first performance was cancelled.

In 1890 Ellen Wallis returned in an adaptation of "Crime and Punishment". Once more she obtained poor reviews, but this time she publicly attacked the critics in a curtain- speech. This caused a sensation at the time. The first real hit came on 12 April 1898—the opening night of "The Belle of New York", which was to run for 697 performances.



Shaftesbury Theatre (the original) 1939

Robert Courtneidge took over the management between 1898 and 1917, staging mostly a series of musical comedies. Occasionally the Shaftesbury would attempt a straight play: in 1908 H.B. Irving tried a drama season, and in 1914 Basil Rathbone appeared as the Dauphin in a production of Shakespeare's "Henry V". However, the Shaftesbury was known chiefly for its musicals: "Tom Jones" (1907) and "The Arcadians" (1909)

During the First World War it remained predominantly a musical house, featuring shows under the management of George Grossmith, Jnr. During the 1930s it succeeded mainly with a series of light comedies and farces. The theatre closed after the Blitz on 7 September 1940. Plans to reopen were destroyed when a direct hit on 17 April 1941 reduced the Shaftesbury to a ruin. In March 1963 the redecorated Prince's Theatre along the northern end of Shaftesbury Avenue changed its name—and once more there was a Shaftesbury Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue. Meantime the site of the original Shaftesbury Theatre became a Fire Station.

SHAFTESBURY THEATRE (2)

1911	Opened as the New Prince's Theatre
1962	Closed for reconstruction
1963	Re-opened and renamed the Shaftesbury Theatre
1973	Closed when part of ceiling collapsed
1977	Reopened
1980	New counterweight system and rebuilt backstage
1997	Redecorated

The new Prince's Theatre opened at the northern end of Shaftesbury Avenue on 26 December 1911 with a transfer of "The Three Musketeers". It was designed by Bertie Crewe for the Melville Brothers who intended to run it as a home for popular melodrama and pantomimes as a sister theatre to their successful Lyceum.

In 1916 Seymour Hicks took over with a policy of musicals and light opera, and this was continued by C.B.Cochran when he became manager in 1919. Cochran formed an association with the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company and this lasted until the early 1960s.

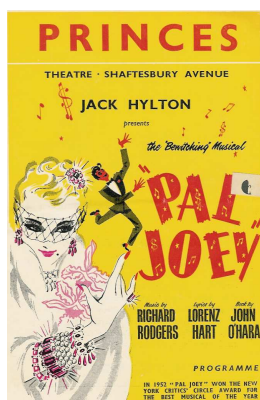
In the 1920s the programme was very varied, so that the shows on offer included Sarah Bernhardt in "Daniel"(1921), Sybil Thorndike and Henry Ainley as the Macbeths (1926), Diaghilev's Russian Ballet Company (1927) and Fred Astaire in "Funny Face"(1928).

In December 1928 the theatre was forced to close for several weeks following a major gas explosion in the streets outside. In the 1930s the Prince's Theatre survived on a series of short runs and revivals. In 1938 Bert Hammond became lessee following the deaths of both Melvilles.

Through the war years and immediately after revues and musicals were staged, including "Old Chelsea" with Richard Tauber (1943) and "Three Waltzes" with Evelyn Laye (1945). In the 1950s Maurice Chevalier played a season (1952) and Michael Redgrave and Peggy Ashcroft appeared as Antony and Cleopatra (1953).

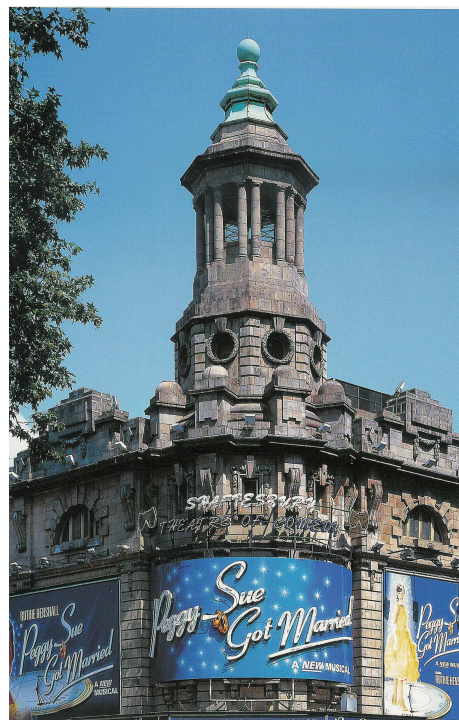
In 1962 the theatre was refurbished and reopened with a new name—the Shaftesbury Theatre (the previous Shaftesbury—lower down the Avenue—had been bombed in 1941). The opening of the "new Shaftesbury" was the musical "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying". It was home to the legendary flop musical "Twang" (43 performances, 1965) and to the scandalous "Hair" (1,999 performances from 1968). The run of "Hair" came to an abrupt end when the theatre's ceiling fell in on the night before the 2,000th performance.

There were plans to demolish the theatre but it was saved by public outcry, and in 1977 re-opened with a revival of "West Side Story" followed by a series of farces from its new owners, Ray Cooney's Theatre of Comedy. From 1987, with the occasional play in between, it resumed its policy of musicals with Sondheim's "Follies", "Song and Dance" (1990), and "The Kiss of the Spider Woman" (1992).

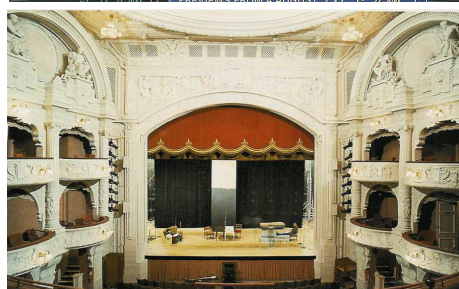


In 1997, during the rebuilding of the Royal Opera House, the Shaftesbury hosted a five-month long season of opera, then the following year presented the award-winning rock musical "Rent" (itself based on the opera "La Boheme").

From then onwards the Shaftesbury Theatre gained a reputation of an "unlucky" theatre for musicals: a whole series of shows suffered short runs: "Lautrec" (2000), "Peggy Sue Got Married" (2001), "Calamity Jane" and "Thoroughly Modern Millie" (2003) and "The Far Pavilions" (2005).



Alberto Arzoz





SHAKESPEARE THEATRE, Battersea

1896	Opened
1923	Closed and became a cinema
1956	Demolished

The Shakespeare Theatre and Opera House in Lavender Hill, Battersea opened on 16th November 1896. It was designed by W.G. Sprague and had 1,205 seats. The Clapham and Battersea area was already well served with theatres, and the nearest rival, the Battersea Palace (*q.v.*) was a variety and music hall open just ten years. The Shakespeare's policy was to perform the "straight plays" and musical productions which were part of the large touring circuit built up at the end of the century. However, its annual pantomime was an in-house production. The "Robinson Crusoe" of 1899/1900 was particularly successful.

Like so many other theatres this policy did not survive the Great War and by April 1915 the Shakespeare was chiefly used as a cinema.

The last theatre license for the premises was issued in 1917, after which the building seems to have closed for a while. It was open again by November 1923 but in exclusive use as a cinema. In 1930 it became part of the Gaumont Cinema Circuit. The Shakespeare suffered heavy bomb damage in a raid on 17 September 1940 and closed. It remained derelict until it was bought by Battersea Council in 1955 as part of a planned Town Hall extension. The surviving frontage was demolished early in 1957.

SHAKESPEARE THEATRE, Curtain Road

1820	Opened
1831	Closed

Very little is known of this early 19th Century theatre. It seems to have started as an equestrian theatre, and by the early 1820s was known for its musical entertainments, which on at least one occasion featured the famous clown, Grimaldi. It later became a house for legitimate theatre. It may have stood on the site of the Standard Theatre (*q.v.* under the name *Shoreditch Olympia*)

SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE

1996	Opened for "try-outs"
1997	Granted a permanent licence.

The American actor Sam Wanamaker conceived the idea of building a replica of the Elizabethan Globe Theatre as near to the original site as possible. He spent the best part of twenty years recruiting supporters and fund-raising, and finally work began on the site in 1993.

Sadly Wanamaker died shortly after building work began and did not see the completion of his dream.

In 1996 Shakespeare's Globe opened for a short season of "try-outs" with a temporary licence, and then, under the artistic direction of Mark Rylance, officially opened in 1997.

Productions of Shakespeare's plays are staged here and enjoyed by the audiences in a manner as close to the original as modern scholarship (and Health and Safety regulations) will allow. (The supplementary electric lighting is the only concession to the 21st Century).



John Tranter

SHAW THEATRE, Euston Road

- 1971 Opened as part of the St Pancras Library Complex
- 1994 Closed and building converted into an hotel
- 2001 The replacement theatre opened inside the hotel

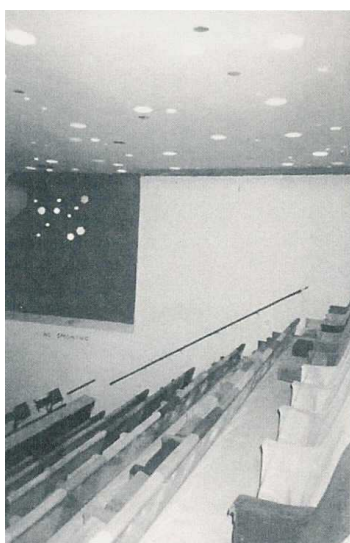
The Shaw Theatre opened on 5 July 1971 with a production of "The Devil's Disciple". It was a one-tier 458 seat venue on the upper floor of a new library building in Euston Road. Named after the great Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw, it was intended as a permanent home for Michael Croft's National Youth Theatre. Since the amateur Youth Theatre's work would only be seasonal, the professional Dolphin Theatre Company was created to stage classic plays with an emphasis on attracting younger audiences. Early ventures included Vanessa Redgrave in "Twelfth Night" (1971), Mia Farrow in "Mary Rose" (1972) and Susan Hampshire in "The Taming of the Shrew" (1974).

In the early 1980s the National Youth Theatre was in financial difficulty. In 1981 it moved out of the Shaw. For a while the future of the NYT was in doubt, but in 1987 thanks to commercial sponsorship the organisation was saved. Meantime the Dolphin Theatre Company disbanded and the Shaw Theatre staged a mixed programme of events aimed at the local community.

In 1994 the library and theatre site was sold and demolished. As part of the sale agreement, the replacement building—the 15 storey Shaw Park Plaza Hotel—would incorporate a similar sized replacement theatre of high technical standard. The new Shaw Theatre, with 450 seats and a flexible staging design, opened in May 2001. However, it has only had infrequent use since then.



Novotel



The balcony in the Shell Centre

SHELL THEATRE, South Bank

- 1957 Opened as part of the Shell Centre
- 2002 Closed and converted for other use

This was a private theatre built inside the massive Shell Centre on London's South Bank. It consisted of two blocks stretching over seven acres and linked by a tunnel. A basement theatre, fully equipped with a fly tower and a stage as big as many West End theatres, was built two floors underground. The top of the fly tower was at street level, and the get-in was effected via the flies with the scenery lowered to stage level. The public entrance was via a lift down to the recreation area which included an Olympic-size pool, baseball court, gymnasium, cinema, bars and the theatre. It was designed by Cecil Beaton with a seaside theme: white textured walls represented cliffs, the carpet was the colour of sand with integrated pebbles, the ceiling was sky blue. The foyer contained a huge Osbert Lancaster mural depicting London streets. The theatre was chiefly used for conferences and for productions by the Lensbury Theatre Group, an amateur company consisting mainly of Shell employees. The theatre never held a public performance licence, and was dismantled in 2002.

(Information supplied by Sally McGrath writing in "Old Theatres" in 2009)

SHELL THEATRE, Tottenham

- 1936 Opened
- 2011 Major renovation planned

This is an open-air theatre in the park known as the "Lordship Rec" (Recreation Grounds) in Tottenham. It opened on 13 June 1936 and cost £1,410. It has a sunken auditorium which can seat 250 in deck chairs. Over the years it has been used for all manner of entertainment and is due for a major restoration project in 2011 as part of the London Borough of Haringey's plans to re-vitalise the park..



SHELLEY THEATRE, Chelsea

1879 Opened as a private theatre
1896 Closed and demolished

This was a private theatre built inside the residence of Sir Percy Florence Shelley (son of the great poet) in Tite Street, Chelsea. Designed by Sir Joseph Peacock in Queen Anne style, it had 250 seats, and was nearing completion in May 1879 when it was described in detail in "The Building News". Shelley intended to stage charitable public performances, but his next door neighbour, the Hon. Slingsby Bell, a clerk at the House of Lords, objected strongly and obtained a court order preventing the theatre from opening to the public. Accordingly it was only ever used for private gatherings. In 1896 the entire residence was sold and demolished for redevelopment as Shelley Court—residential flats.

SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE

1903 Opened
1953 Closed and became BBC TV Studio
1991 Studios closed and venue left unused.
1995 Converted into a live music venue with some architectural restoration.

Built for Oswald Stoll, and designed by Frank Matcham, the Shepherd's Bush Empire opened on 17 August 1903. The very first act to appear on the stage of this 1,650 seat venue was The Fred Karno Troupe. The theatre soon became known as "The Coliseum of West London" and every major star appeared there: George Robey, Billy Merson, Vesta Tilley, and Marie Lloyd in the early days; Nervo and Knox, Lily Morris, Leslie Stuart and Layton and Johnstone between the Wars; and the regular names of the 1950s variety circuit up to 1953. The last performance took place on 26 September 1953 with a variety bill including Stan Stennett, Hal Monty, Dawn White and her Glamazons and Robb Wilton.

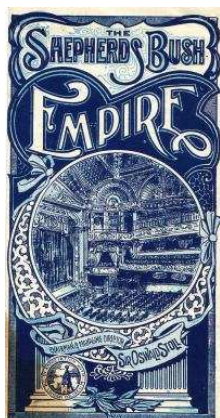


Hammersmith Public Libraries

In the early 1950s the BBC were looking to buy either the Shepherd's Bush Empire or the King's Theatre Hammersmith as a television studio. The King's was in better condition but was only leasehold. The Empire was freehold and much closer to Lime Grove and the proposed TV Centre in Wood Lane. The King's was cheaper, at £85,000 but the BBC bought the Empire for £120,000 - having negotiated a reduction from the asking price of £150,000. In October 1953 the first TV broadcast was "Variety Parade" starring Max Bygraves, Eve Boswell, Gladys Morgan and the Tiller Girls.

Within a very short time its stage and auditorium had become a familiar sight on the nation's screens. Early regular shows included "What's My Line?", "The Black and White Minstrel Show" "Juke Box Jury" and "Crackerjack". From the Sixties onwards the stage hosted stars to match the big names of its early years—stars like Cilla Black, Petula Clark, Nana Mouskouri, Shirley Bassey and Cliff Richard, though much of the performances took place on rostra built over the stalls, with cameras in the old circle and the Balcony Gents toilets used as an echo and reverberation chamber.

The TV Theatre was under siege when the Osmonds filmed a TV special in the 70s, while Bruce Forsyth and later Larry Grayson ("The Generation Game"), Terry Wogan, Esther Rantzen, Cyril Fletcher and even "The Old Grey Whistle Test" were regularly broadcast from the old Shepherds Bush Empire

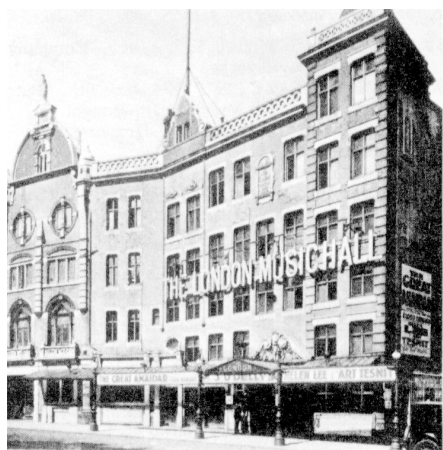


At the end of 1991 BBC TV gave up the lease and for a while there were serious concerns about the future of the theatre. In 1995 it was converted into a live music venue with some careful preservation and sensitive renovation. An extension was built at roof level and a new canopy added, but mostly the theatre was restored very much to its original state

In the years since then it has become one of the most successful of London's concert venues, and is currently run in conjunction with the O2 (q.v.) venue in Docklands.



John R Freeman



SHOREDITCH EMPIRE

1856	Opened as Griffin Music Hall
1894	Reconstructed
1896	Renamed the London Music Hall
1900c	Renamed the Shoreditch Empire
1934	Closed and demolished

In 1856 a hall for music was built alongside the Griffin Public House in Shoreditch High Street and the Griffin Music Hall came into being. In 1894 the building was completely rebuilt by Frank Matcham. It opened in 1895 as the London Theatre of Varieties. In 1896 Bransby Williams made his debut appearance on the halls in this theatre and Charlie Chaplin appeared here prior to going to America. In 1934 it closed and the site was sold as a drapery warehouse. In March 1935 the building was demolished.

SHOREDITCH OLYMPIA, Bishopsgate

1835	Opened as the Royal Standard
1845	Re-modelled and renamed the New Standard Theatre
1866	Burnt down
1868	Rebuilt on a much larger scale, as the Standard.
1876	Rebuilt as the National Standard Theatre
1888	Closed through bankruptcy
1889	Reopened as New National Olympia Standard Theatre
1926	Became a cinema
1940	Destroyed in the Blitz and demolished

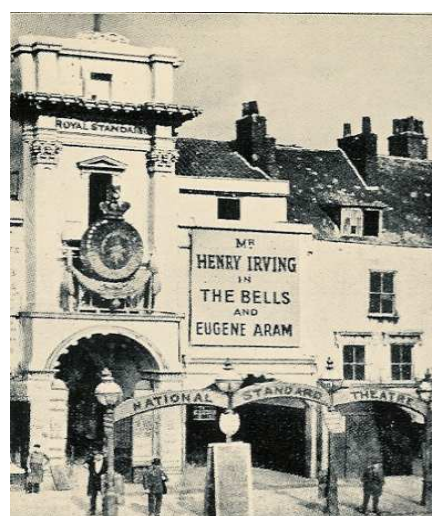
The Royal Standard Public House and Pleasure Gardens opened in 1835. Within two years the premises had been greatly enlarged and was under the management of the showmen Johnson and Nelson Lee. They remodelled it in 1845 and called it the New Standard. The interior of the theatre was horse-shoe shaped and the proscenium was 30 feet wide by 30 feet high. The stage could be removed to allow circus performances when required. In 1849 it was sold to another showman, John Douglass and it remained in the Douglas family for the next forty years.

The building was destroyed by fire on 21 October 1866. In December 1867 it reopened as the Standard. It was now capable of seating 3,000 people — one of the largest theatres in London—and had an orchestra pit bigger than that of Drury Lane. It had a stage that could be converted into a horse-ring, and to facilitate this, the theatre boxes were removable.

It had a good stock company and attracted the major West End stars, and it produced a highly popular annual pantomime to rival Drury Lane and the Hoxton Britannia. The nature of its audiences was always suspect, and it is said that on one occasion H. J. Byron, seeing the house half empty, asked John Douglass where all his audience had gone. Douglass replied, "Gone West, to Covent Garden," somewhat glumly. "To pick pockets, I suppose," was Byron's reply

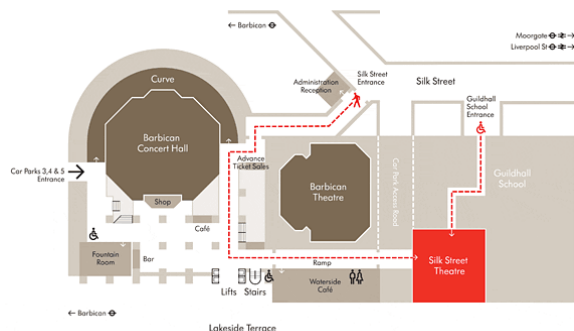
In 1888 the Douglasses were declared bankrupt and the theatre was put up for sale. The Melville family took over and engaged Bertie Crewe and W.G. Sprague to do a major remodelling of the building. By 1889 they were ready to open. With 2,463 seats and a new name—"The Olympia" - they were ready for what would become a twenty year success story with their formula of melodramas, spectacles and pantomimes interspersed with an annual visit from the J.W. Turner Opera Company.

When the Melvilles moved on to the Lyceum, the Olympia Standard came under the control of the London Theatres of Varieties consortium run by Walter Gibbons. The growth of other suburban theatres and easier access to the West End eventually forced the Standard to go the same way as many others and by 1926 it was in full time use as a cinema. It was bombed in 1940 and demolished



Victoria and Albert Museum





SILK STREET THEATRE, Barbican

The Silk Street Theatre is a 300 seat flexible theatre space inside the Barbican complex and primarily used as the performing space for students of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama which is based inside the Barbican.

The venue is difficult to locate and is part of the urban myth of people getting lost and missing the show because they lose their way inside the complex.

SONG AND SUPPER ROOMS

THE FREE AND EASIES

In the early years of the 19th century customers at inns provided their own entertainment. When the tavern owners began to employ professional entertainers, local unpaid amateurs continued to perform. These places were known as “free and easies”, though some of the taverns attempted to raise the tone a little, and would call their activities “Catch and Glee Clubs” or “Harmonic Meetings”. By and large they were disreputable establishments as witnessed by this article written in 1837:

“The epidemic of vocal music has more particularly spread its contagious and devastating influence amongst the youth of the Metropolis, the London apprentice boys. These young gentlemen generally give vent to their passion and display their vocal abilities in the spacious room appropriated to that purpose of some tavern or public house and these meetings are most aptly denominated Free and Easies: free as air they are for the advancement of drunkenness and profligacy and easy enough of access to all classes of society with little regard to appearances or character.” (From *The Town*, 1837)



There was no charge of admission, and food and drink was supplied at the usual rates. Anyone who wished to perform would simply approach the Chairman. If there were no takers, then the chairman was frequently a good vocalist himself and, if necessary, would sing a song. Free-and-easies were male-only establishments.

THE COAL HOLE

One of the more influential of the song-and-supper rooms was the Coal Hole, which stood in Fountain Court, just off the Strand. Among its earliest regular customers was the actor Edmund Kean who would indulge in its notorious drinking sessions. An 1851 advertisement in “The Era” describes it as “the oldest and most popular of the singing establishments”. The landlord at that time was J.A.Cave, the first singer to introduce the banjo into Britain. Other regular performers were John Rhodes, a bass singer, and Joe Wells, who was known for his saucy ditties. In 1858 Renton Nicholson transferred his mock trials from the Cyder Cellars to the Coal Hole, and from then onwards the Coal Hole’s reputation gradually sank. The tavern lost its licence in 1862 and was later closed and demolished so that the Strand could be widened.

THE CYDER CELLARS

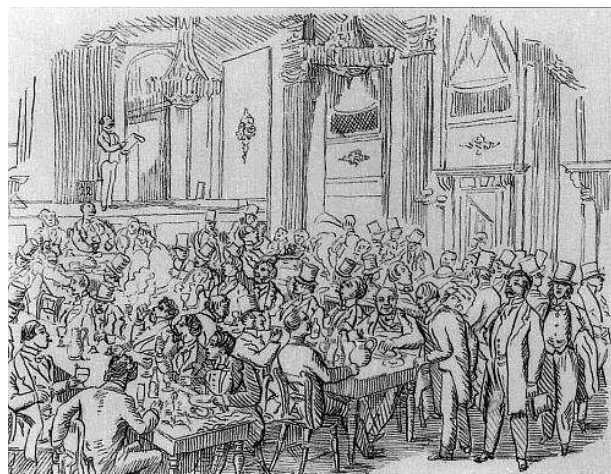
The Cyder Cellars were opened in the mid 1820s in Maiden Lane, next to the stage door of the Adelphi Theatre in Covent Garden. The original proprietor was W.C. Evans, who acted as Chairman three times a week, with Charles Sloman presiding on three other nights. William Makepeace Thackeray was a regular visitor and reported going twice in October 1848 at two o’clock in the morning to hear W.G. Ross sing. Thackeray described the clientele as consisting of “country tradesmen and farmers, young apprentices, rakish medical students, university bucks, guardsmen and members of the House of Lords”.

W.G.Ross was the Cyder Cellars’ star attraction. He built his reputation on one song, “The Ballad of Sam Hall” which recounted the thoughts of a chimney sweep on the night before his execution for murder. When Ross was performing at the Cyder Cellars it was usually jam-packed with customers. In 1853 there was a marked change in the entertainment policy. “The Era” reported that “instead of ribald songs, coarse allusions and a specious

immorality, glees, madrigals and choruses form the staple attractions". However, "Baron" Renton Nicholson's dubious Judge and Jury trials continued at the Cyder Cellars until they transferred to the Coal Hole five years later. Nicholson was an extraordinary character. In and out of prison, he scraped a living at various times as a pawnbroker, a jeweller, a newspaper editor, a cigar shop owner and a wine merchant, but it was the mock trials he presented that earned him the notoriety he deserved.

EVANS'S SUPPER ROOMS

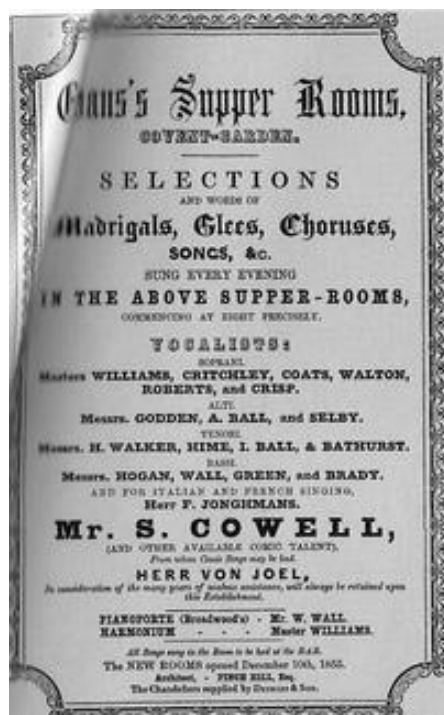
Evans's was the most important of the three main song and supper rooms. Situated in Covent Garden at the corner of the Piazza at 43 King Street, the façade still remains today. In 1774 the former mansion-house was converted into the Grand Hotel—the first family hotel in London. There were several owners over the years, one of whom was a Mr Joy, and under his regime in the very early 1800s the hotel's dining room became a popular eating and drinking place for the well-to-do. When he was succeeded by Mr William Carpenter Evans, the new owner called his business "Evans's late Joy's" - a name which was to pass into social and theatrical history. Evans, a former comedian at Drury Lane, converted the hotel's dining room into a song and supper room. He engaged a former actor, John 'Paddy' Green, as Chairman and Conductor of Music in 1842, and began a very successful period as one of the foremost entertainment venues in London. In 1845 Paddy Green succeeded Evans as proprietor.



Evans's, Late Joy's - Number 22 on the bill

Evans's most popular entertainer was the character singer Sam Cowell. In fact, by 1851, he had become so popular that he grew lax about the times of his performances. One night, in response to cries of 'Cowell' from the audience, Paddy Green told them: "Gentlemen, I have done my best to introduce many good and deserving singers to your notice, but you won't have them. You insist on having Cowell and none but Cowell. You have pampered him to such an extent that he has got too big for his clothes and now presumes upon the position you have given him. Cowell comes when he likes, goes when he likes and does what he likes - and you encourage him. In fact, he is your God. But, by God, he shan't be mine" Cowell arrived shortly afterwards and made his own speech, telling Green he was no longer a schoolboy and should not be treated like one, but he was taken aback when the audience started hissing him. He never appeared at Evans's again.

In 1856 Paddy Green built a very large hall on the back of his premises and used this for a new kind of entertainment catering for "steady young men who admire a high class of music but avoid theatres and ordinary music halls". The performances were by men and boys who sang glees and madrigals. Ladies were admitted reluctantly, and had to sit behind a screen.



Paddy Green retired in 1871 when the fashion for song and supper clubs was rapidly declining. The new owner changed the policy but allowed the performers too much licence and shortly diners were entertained by songs then considered risqué. The critic, Clement Scott, described Evans's as providing "songs of unadulterated indecency and filth" and in 1879 the saucy songs of comedian Arthur Roberts caused Evans's to lose its licence. The premises closed in 1880.

After some fitful attempts to re-start, the property was eventually taken over by the National Sporting Club who remained in occupancy up to the 1930s. William Makepeace Thackeray immortalised the Cyder Cellars under the pseudonym "The Black Kitchen" in his novel "Pendennis", and did the same for Evans's as "The Cave of Harmony" in "The Newcomes".

(The information on Song and Supper Rooms is taken from "British Music Hall—An Illustrated History" by Richard Anthony Baker (Sutton Publishing 2005) and from "British Music Hall" by Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson (Gentry Books 1965))

SOUTH LONDON PALACE OF VARIETIES

1860	Opened as the South London Music Hall
1869	Burnt down and rebuilt as the South London Palace of Varieties
1940	Closed
1941	Destroyed by bombs
1955	Demolished

The South London Music Hall opened in London Road Lambeth on 30 December 1860 on a site near the Elephant and Castle. It cost £8,000 with an interior modelled on a Roman villa and had a capacity of 1,200 but it was not generally welcomed, especially by the Licensing Committee. It was initially refused a licence on the grounds that the area did not need such an amenity. After some persuasion the manager, Edward Villiers, succeeded in getting approval and opened with the popular E.W. Mackney topping the bill. However, on 28 March 1869, after just eight years in business, the theatre burnt down. The foundation stone for a replacement theatre was laid in September of the same year, and the South London Palace of Varieties, designed by William Paice, opened on 19 December 1869.



Mander & Mitchelson Library

This new venue was larger than its predecessor and was very splendid indeed. However, the building and its lease was up for sale by auction in 1875. The Poole family took over management for the next fifteen years, after which it changed hands several times. The South London Palace retained the traditional music hall “Chairman” much later than many of its rivals. Its famous Chairman of these years was “Baron” Courtney—an ebullient larger than life man sporting an enormous ring on every finger. From 1900 to 1902 the manager was “The Great Macdermott”. From 1908 the building was part of the Ilford Ibbetson business and by 1925 was part of the Variety Theatres Consolidated.

On Friday 14 October 1938 there was a live radio broadcast from the stage, with Leslie Bailey introducing the acts. The theatre closed during the Blitz in November 1940 and remained unused, only to be destroyed by bombs in 1941. The derelict premises were pulled down and replaced with shops in 1955.

STAR, Bermondsey

1867	Opened
1883	Reconstructed
1919	Closed
1963	Demolished

In 1867 the landlord of the Star and Garter Public House, Bermondsey joined in the general enthusiasm to attach a “music hall” to the premises. With a seating capacity of 1,395 it proved to be a money-spinner. In 1883 he was able to sell out at considerable profit to Harry Hart “The Happy Hebrew” who had already been associated with the Raglan at Bloomsbury and the original Bedford at Camden Town.

In the last decades of the century the Star’s resident Chairman, Rodney Polgraze, became a “star” attraction in all senses and built up a loyal and regular audience for the venue. In 1892 the Star (temporarily renamed Johnny Hart’s Temple of Terpsichore) saw the debut of Bessie Bellwood, a local girl whose profession was a rabbit-skinner. With her song “What cheer, Ria” she went on to become one of the great names of music hall.



During demolition, 1963

London Metropolitan Archives

In 1904 Fred Karno created a new sketch and tried it out at the Star. Originally called “Twice Nightly”, it was found to be causing confusion amongst audiences, so it was renamed “Mumming Birds”. This elaborate “stage within a stage” sketch soon became a huge favourite and over the next twenty years was played in almost every theatre on the variety circuit. The “Drunken Dude” - a non-speaking part was regularly played by the young, unknown Charlie Chaplin. (In 1910 when the Fred Karno Troupe toured America, Chaplin again played this part—with the sketch renamed “Saturday Night at the English Music Hall”. He was spotted by Mack Sennett and offered his first film job.) After 1919 the hall was closed and used for a range of other purposes. In 1963 the building was demolished.

STRAND THEATRE, Strand WC2

1905	Opened as the Waldorf Theatre
1909	Renamed the Strand Theatre
1911	Renamed the Whitney Theatre
1916	Reverted to the name The Strand Theatre
1962	Major renovation magnificently restored
2006	Renamed the Novello Theatre

See entry under “NOVELLO THEATRE “



STRATFORD CIRCUS

Opened in 2001, the “Circus” is a series of flexible performing spaces in a specially built Arts Centre designed by Levitt Bernstein. It was built alongside the existing Theatre Royal with the intention of opening up the arts to a wider range of people from mixed ethnic minorities than those normally attracted to traditional theatres.

In August 2003 the venue went into voluntary liquidation, thus forcing Newham Council to create a rescue package. In 2005 Newham Sixth Form College took over the management on a ten year lease. Organisations based at the Circus include East London Dance, Theatre Venture, and the Newham Youth and Community Education Service. The University of East London’s Institute of Performing Arts Development and the London International Festival of Theatre are also working in partnership with the centre.

STRATFORD EAST THEATRE ROYAL

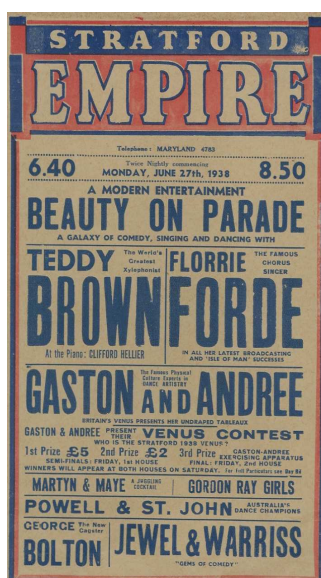
1884	Opened
1891	Enlarged
1921	Suffered fire damage
1953	Taken over by “Theatre Workshop”
1974	Threatened with demolition, but saved
1998	Closed for major renovation
2002	Re-opened

For most of its life the Theatre Royal, Stratford East was the home of “blood and thunder” melodramas, twice-nightly variety and revues at cheap prices. It had a policy of melodrama and pantomime, playing alongside the more serious fare at the rival Borough Theatre (q.v.), owned by the same management. The stage was enlarged in 1891.



In 1921 it suffered a major backstage fire. In 1927 it introduced a policy of twice-nightly variety, which continued until 1952. There were occasional attempts at running straight plays—notably 1935-36 and the high quality David Horne seasons of 1946 to 1949—but it was primarily a variety house and in a state of near dereliction by 1952. It was taken over for the next eleven years by Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop, beginning a legendary period which did much to fashion the shape of British Theatre in the second half of the 20th Century. It had enormous successes with “The Hostage” and “A Taste of Honey” (both 1958) and “Oh What a Lovely War” (1963).

A new tenancy took over in 1964, though Joan Littlewood made the occasional return as a guest director. By 1974 the Theatre was in financial difficulties and threatened with demolition. A Grade II Listing saved the building itself, and by the 1980s the sterling work of artistic director Philip Hedley managed to keep the theatre afloat. A major reconstruction with Lottery money turned out to be something of a disappointment with most of the money being spent front of house and then diverted to the Stratford Circus (q.v.) whilst the Theatre remained closed for several years. When it reopened the auditorium, at least, had been beautifully preserved, though little had been done backstage. Philip Hedley retired in 2004 after 25 years managing the theatre.



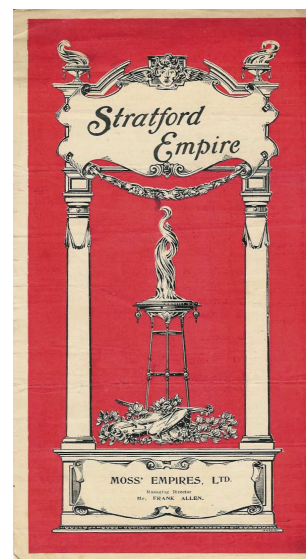
STRATFORD EMPIRE

1899 Opened
1940 Destroyed by bombs and left derelict
1958 Demolished

The Stratford Empire was one of the most famous music-halls in East London. It was designed by W.G. Sprague and opened in 1899. Its significance - along with the Empires at Holloway and New Cross - lay in that these were the first London venues of the ever-growing Moss Empire Circuit. Oswald Stoll and Sir Edward Moss had created the largest touring circuit in the country, and it was to become even bigger over the next decade.

By 1912 they owned or leased 29 theatres and were sole bookers for a further seven venues. Accordingly they were able to obtain the very best artists because they could guarantee non-stop work. For the forty years of its existence, the Stratford

Empire received every big name in music hall and variety. Marie Lloyd appeared there in July 1900, and June 1903, and the young Stanley Holloway recalled seeing her there on both occasions. The theatre was destroyed by bombs in 1940 and left derelict. It was finally pulled down in 1958.



STREATHAM GRAND THEATRE

1890 Opened
1903 Closed and became a cinema
1940 Closed

The Grand Theatre, Streatham was also known as the Town Hall Theatre—a misleading name since it had nothing whatsoever to do with the municipality. It opened in 1890 on the junction of Streatham High Road and Gleneagle Road and lasted just 13 years before it closed and eventually became a cinema. It was demolished in 1940.

STREATHAM HILL THEATRE

1929 Opened
1944 Destroyed by bombs
1950 Rebuilt and reopened
1962 Closed and used for bingo
2010 Still in use as a bingo hall.

The Streatham Hill Theatre opened on 18 November 1929 with C.B.Cochran's "Wake Up and Dream". The opening ceremony was performed by the actress, Evelyn Laye. It was designed by W.G. Sprague (his last of some 40 theatres) and W.H.Barton. For many of its early years it was run in partnership with the Golders

Green Hippodrome and was frequently a first port of call for major West End touring productions, receiving such tours as the Drury Lane "Glamorous Nights" and the John Gielgud "Hamlet".

On 3rd July 1944 it was destroyed by a direct hit from a V1 Rocket. The building was left derelict until 1950, when it was rebuilt to the original designs. It then sadly shared the fate of many other theatres in the television age and closed at the start of the 1960s. In 1962 it was taken over by Mecca and the building underwent some alteration for use by wrestling and then bingo. The seating was removed from the stalls, though the circle seating and the stage equipment remained. Mecca sold it to a private company which currently (2010) runs it as a bingo club.



STREATHAM ODEON

- 1930 Opened as the Astoria
- 1960 Renovated and modernised. Renamed Odeon
- 1979 Tripled
- 1991 A fourth cinema added. Stage removed
- 2001 Re-designed as an eight-screen multi-plex

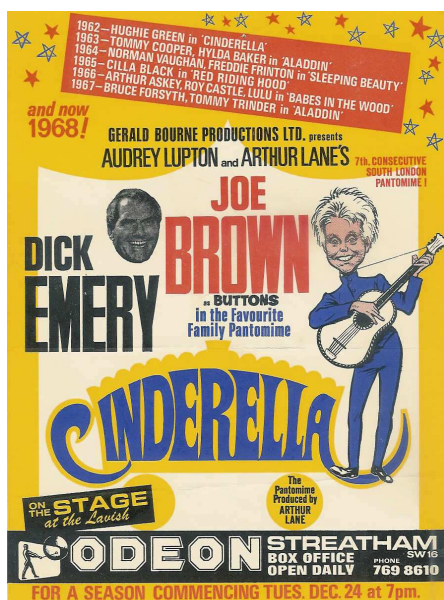
On 30 June 1930 the Astoria, Streatham opened as a luxury cine-variety with 2,614 seats. It had a large stage with an especially wide proscenium opening with 32 counterweight flying bars and ten large dressing rooms. It was designed in an "Egyptian" style and was clearly intended for use as a major cine-variety house. In its first few years it played a combination of live entertainment in between films every weekday—but on Sundays it was only permitted to show films.

In 1939 the Astoria Chain was sold to Oscar Deutsch and his Odeon chain. Oscar eliminated the stage shows to save cost. The Rank Organisation acquired Odeon Theatres following Oscar Deutsch's sudden death in 1941. The Astoria remained in cinema use, though by the early 1950s some stars would occasionally appear onstage to promote their films.

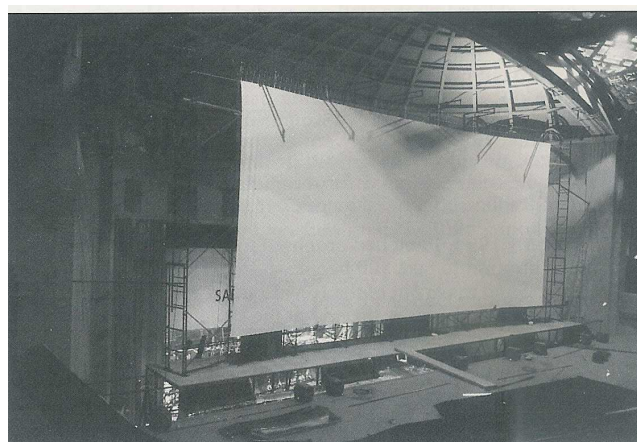
On 2 September 1960 the Astoria closed and the builders moved in, immediately sweeping away all the Egyptian murals and decorative lighting. Two weeks later the venue reopened with a new name - the Odeon. The old orchestra pit was covered and the dressing rooms sealed off.

In 1967 the Rank Organisation formed its own live show department. Streatham Odeon was converted back to a cine-variety with many things removed in 1961 having to be re-installed, the dressing rooms renovated and the screen put onto a frame which could be then flown out and up to the grid to allow for stage performances.

The first stage presentations were the Festival Ballet's "Swan Lake" and "Nutcracker". Christmas 1968 and 1969 saw two pantomimes running 3 - 4 weeks each: the first with Joe Brown and Dick Emery in Cinderella, and the following year Peter Noone, Herman's Hermits and Norman Vaughan in Aladdin. Odeon would not allow the cinema to remain dark on Sundays, so Saturday night saw the lowering of the screen down from the grid, the stage speakers put back and then a double re-issue programme of films presented. Then it was back to the live show on the Monday.



CTA Archive



*The new screen placed in front of the balcony.
The old safety curtain can be seen behind.*

One night stands during the period 1971-73 included the Four Tops, Stevie Wonder and the Supremes, with further visits from the Ballet.

Another Christmas pantomime was staged in 1974; Cinderella again with Tony Blackburn and his then wife Tessa Wyatt. The last public stage show was in December 1978 with a concert from Ian Dury and the Blockheads.

In 1979 the cinema was "tripled" and all stage performances ceased. The balcony area formed one cinema seating 1095, with a new screen suspended in front of the balcony. The stalls rear stalls were adapted into two smaller cinema spaces. The stage and backstage areas were now unused and unusable spaces behind the cinemas.

In 1991 a fourth cinema was added—this time occupying the stage area. Ten years later the venue underwent further re-construction, ending up as an eight-screen multiplex.

(Much information supplied by Geoff Gill, formerly Chief Technician at the Odeon)

SURREY GARDENS MUSIC HALL, Southwark

1831	Opened as a Zoological Gardens
1856	The enormous concert hall opened
1861	Burnt down. Rebuilt
1862	Used as a temporary hospital.
1872	Remodelled as a theatre
1877	Closed and demolished



The Surrey Gardens Music Hall, 1856-1861

The Surrey Literary, Scientific and Zoological Institution was founded by Edward Cross in 1831. Cross agreed to sell to the Institution the menagerie which he had established at Exeter Change, and Lord Holland agreed to lease the Institution a 13 acre site east of Vauxhall Gardens. Its zoological and horticultural attractions were a magnet for the public and for a while it proved even more popular than Regent's Park Zoo. However, the Regent Park site was subsidised with a low entrance charge, whilst the Surrey Gardens had to rely on its entry price of one shilling.

In spite of major outdoor attractions - flower shows, fireworks, exhibitions, "Colossal Pictorial Typorama", representations of such dramatic events as the Siege of Gibraltar and volcanic eruptions - the public eventually tired of the Zoological Gardens and took their custom to the newly opened Crystal Palace. It was decided to sell off the animals and to concentrate on the concert trade. The rebuilt venue cost the enormous sum of £18,200 and was designed by Horace Jones to hold up to 10,000 people. It opened on 15 July 1856 with the name "Surrey Gardens Music Hall" (thus causing the Surrey Music Hall (q.v.) to change its name). This was a magnificent, imposing building, intended to rival the Crystal Palace.

It was a large oblong building, admirably designed for its multi-purpose use. At each corner were octagonal towers containing staircases, originally crowned by ornamental turrets. An arcade surrounded the ground-floor, whilst to the first and second floors were external galleries covered by verandas. The great -hall, was twenty feet longer and thirty feet wider than the Great Room at Exeter Hall.

The Surrey Gardens Music Hall was used for concerts and all manner of "improving" events. An opening series of concerts were given by Jullien, the waltz composer, then fresh from the triumphs achieved by his promenade concerts at Drury Lane Theatre. In its opening year the evangelical preacher, Charles Spurgeon, delivered a fiery sermon to a huge crowd when a false alarm of fire led to a panic in which seven members of the audience were killed in the crush for the exits. An all-too-real fire burnt down the Hall in June 1861.



It was rebuilt and immediately rented as temporary accommodation for St Thomas's Hospital, whose own buildings were being reconstructed. The hospital moved out in 1872 and the building was remodelled as a theatre- the Surrey Gardens Theatre. However, it lasted just five years. In 1877 the Surrey Gardens were closed and the land sold for redevelopment. The final performance was given on 14 August 1877. The building was demolished the following year and the theatre was replaced with rows of terraced houses.

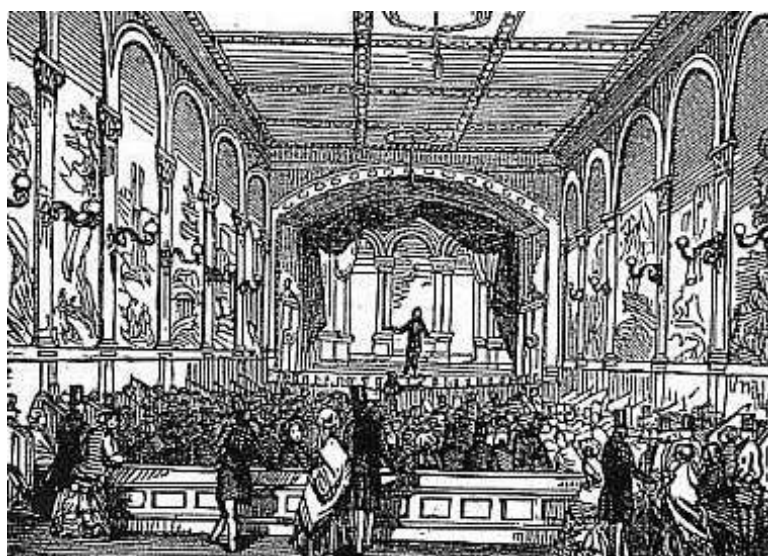
SURREY MUSIC HALL, Southwark Bridge Road

1843 Opened alongside the Grapes Tavern as the Grand Harmonic Hall
 1848 Renamed the Surrey Music Hall
 1856 Name changed to Winchester Music Hall
 1880 Closed and demolished

Built as an attachment to the Grapes Tavern, the Surrey Music Hall had a single balcony and could accommodate around 1,000 people. For most of its 35 year existence it was run by Richard Preece and his son, another Richard. The new hall developed out of the sing-song room that had been held in the tavern long room, and although it possessed a fully-equipped stage, the owner was happy to maintain a strong sing-along tradition alongside the more theatrical acts.

Richard Preece, the landlord, built a "Grand Harmonic Hall" next to his pub and began to present musical items to attract even larger crowds. In November 1848 he gave his hall a new name—the Surrey Music Hall—and thus became the first person to use the phrase "music hall" in association with this kind of entertainment.

The public bars were separated from the auditorium, a high standard was set by the orchestra, and the place was run on very respectable lines. Charles Morton's Canterbury Hall (q.v.) seems to have been modelled on the Surrey, and there was competition and rivalry between the two halls, each trying to out-do the other with picture galleries, ballet and pantomime.



*Said to be an illustration of the Surrey Music Hall,
 though the absence of a balcony is a problem*



The legendary Vokes Family.

(The famous pantomime artists, the Vokes Family, made their first London appearance at the Surrey. Following this they went on to become the biggest attractions in the annual Drury Lane pantomimes for many years)

In 1856 an enormous new concert hall was built in the Surrey Zoological Gardens (q.v.) and announced it was to be known as the Surrey Gardens Music Hall. Because of the obvious confusion this would cause, Richard Preece changed the name of his music hall to the Winchester Music Hall.

By 1878 the Winchester fell victim to the music-hall/variety theatre boom. The Winchester's respectability, intimacy and "family" feel were no longer enough for the general public.

The Preeces handed over management to William Burnham Fair who managed to keep it open for the next two years. Among the performers appearing at his final testimonial benefit in 1880 were Jenny Hill, Arthur Lloyd, Herbert Campbell and Chirgwin.

The music hall closed and was demolished sometime after 1882, although the Grapes Tavern itself survived into very recent times.

SURREY THEATRE, Lambeth

- 1771 Opened as a riding-school/exhibition area
- 1782 Rebuilt in Blackfriars Road as the Royal Circus
- 1799 Burnt down
- 1800 Rebuilt
- 1804 Burnt down
- 1805 Rebuilt and re-opened
- 1809 Converted into a theatre
- 1814 Reverted to a circus
- 1816 Re-opened as a theatre, called the Surrey Theatre
- 1865 Burnt down and rebuilt the same year
- 1904 Remodelled as a music hall
- 1920 Closed and became a cinema
- 1924 Closed and left empty
- 1934 Demolished. A hospital was built on the site.

In 1771, Charles Hughes, an equestrian performer, opened his riding-school and exhibition in direct opposition to the famous Philip Astley. Ten years later he had made enough money to splash out on a lavishly expensive amphitheatre in Blackfriars Road. In partnership with Charles Dibdin, and at a total cost of £15,000 he opened his Royal Circus on 14 November 1782.

The Royal Circus had a troubled existence: badly damaged by fire in 1799 and then reconstructed; totally destroyed by fire in 1803 and then completely rebuilt. When it reopened in 1804 it met with little success until Elliston, the Great Lessee, took over in 1809 and converted it into a theatre. When it reopened the following year, the amphitheatre had been replaced with a proscenium, and the stables were turned into dressing rooms. To evade the Patent Act he put a ballet into all his plays—thus “Hamlet”, “Macbeth” and “The Beaux’ Stratagem” were all staged with ballets in between the acts.

In 1814 Elliston gave up and the building reverted to a circus for a few years until Thomas Dibdin reopened it as a theatre in 1816, calling it the Surrey Theatre. After seven years Dibdin gave up and the theatre sank very low indeed. In 1827 Elliston took it over again—more experienced now since he had spent some time running Drury Lane. He engaged the famous actor T.P. Cooke at the phenomenal salary of £60 a week and he bought a play called “Black Eyed Susan” from the struggling young Douglas Jerrold.

The theatre was saved. The new play opened on 8 June 1829 and ran for an unheard-of 400 nights. For the next thirty-five years the Surrey Theatre thrived under a succession of managers and developed a reputation for rough and tumble melodramas and broad comedy. On 30 January 1865 the theatre burnt down and was rebuilt immediately, opening on Boxing Night the same year. The rebuilt theatre cost £25,000 and had seats for 2,161 plus standing room.

In 1881 George Conquest took over management and carried on the tradition of melodramas. He had formerly been manager of the Grecian Theatre where he had built a reputation for the most spectacular and entertaining pantomimes in London. At the Surrey he carried on with this tradition, and for the next twenty years the Surrey pantomimes were guaranteed money-makers. George Conquest died in 1901, and his son, George, Jnr, took over. The 1901 pantomime, “Aladdin” was the first in twenty years not to have a member of the Conquest family in the cast.

Times were changing. The Surrey became a house of lurid melodramas for a while and struggled on, but by 1904 the Conquest era was over. At his farewell benefit in July 1904 George blamed the closure of the Surrey squarely on the L.C.C. From the stage he said: “I have found it impossible to stand it any longer. They will not allow standing room; they want gangways all over the theatre, which would take the best part of half the seating capacity, and it would be impossible to make the place pay under such circumstances. That is the sole reason why I am going from this theatre.”

The Surrey was sold and remodelled as a music hall which opened in 1904 as part of the Frank Macnaghten circuit. It had some success in its new role, attracting artists like Marie Lloyd and George Formby Snr. But



Surrey Theatre 1782



Surrey Theatre - the 1806 rebuilding



Surrey Theatre 1904

towards the end of the Great War it was frequently playing to empty houses. In 1920 it returned briefly to its former theatrical role, staging a Shakespeare season from Ben Greet and an opera season from Mrs Hamilton-Miln— though the opera season ended with the orchestra going on strike after the first act of “Maritana”. They had not been paid. After much argument and a speech from the stage by Mrs Miln herself, the orchestra agreed to carry on with the opera, and the second act commenced at 10.45pm. “Maritana”, with many cuts, finally finished after midnight.

The Surrey struggled on, reliant as always on its pantomimes, and the 1921 “Mother Goose” had a star attraction in Fred Conquest, son of George Conquest Jnr— the man who had given up management of the Surrey 17 years earlier.

In the same year George Conquest Jnr himself returned as the She-Ape Kala in a lavish production of “Tarzan of the Apes”, complete with an elephant and a real lion discreetly behind bars - but spectacular shows like this were not enough to save the theatre.

For a brief while the Surrey became a cinema, attracting crowded houses in 1923 with the film “The Man They Could Not Hang”, but one year later it then closed and was tenantless for eight years.

The decaying building was offered for sale in 1932 and in September of that year an application was made on behalf of an unnamed syndicate to reopen the theatre, after restorations calculated to cost £30,000. The planned programme would comprise melodrama, Shakespeare and classical plays at popular prices. But, before any renovation work started, the new owners were declared bankrupt and the building was once more abandoned. On its 150th birthday - 7 November 1932 - the building was closed. It gradually became derelict.

(From: “Conquest—The Story of a Theatre Family” by Frances Fleetwood: W.H.Allen, 1953)

On 20 September 1934 the site was bought by the adjoining Royal Eye Hospital with a view to building an annexe. Over a year later the long disused curtain was raised again for a poignant little ceremony. Jack Hobbs and P.J.Hannon, Chairman of the Appeal Committee for the new hospital, with nurses of the Royal Eye Hospital for chorus and a crowd of workmen for audience, took oxy-acetylene burners and cut through the first girder. As it came crashing down on the stage, the spectators cheered; then the curtain was dropped for the last time and the building was left to the demolition workers”

When the Second World War broke out, the theatre had been razed but the projected hospital building had not been started, and work did not begin until the mid 1950s. The site of the old Surrey Theatre is presently occupied by MacLaren House, a student hall of residence for the London South Bank University.

SWAN THEATRE

1595 Built on the Bankside
1614 Closed

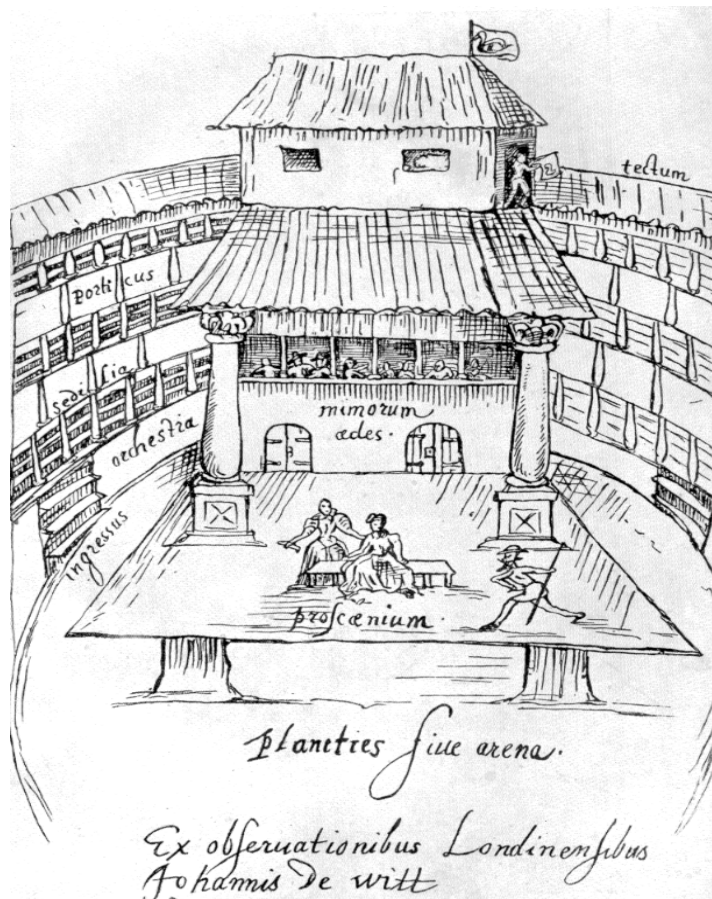
The Swan Theatre was built on the South Bank in 1595. The first resident company was the newly reformed Lord Pembroke's Men and the theatre's owner was Francis Langley, a moneylender and substantial businessman, who had strong influence at Court. However, despite his connections, Langley had to battle the authorities in order to get his theatre built. In 1594 the Lord Mayor petitioned the Lord Treasurer, calling for the construction of the theatre to be prevented, on account of the evils arising therefrom.

The Swan was the fourth theatre to be built in London. Situated on Bankside, it was named after the swans on the Thames and was constructed of wooden pillars with flint and mortar work between. It rested on a brick foundation and had a large raised platform stage with three galleries running around the building. The interior pillars were painted in imitation of marble. It was claimed the theatre could hold up to three thousand persons.

In 1597 the production of Ben Jonson's "The Isle of Dogs" caused such official annoyance that all theatres were closed for a while and the authors were jailed. In 1602 the interior was damaged following an audience riot: an amateur called Richard Venner had hired the theatre and announced a production of a play called "England's Joy". He took the money at the doors and then disappeared, leaving the audience without a play and cheated of their money.

In 1611 a new company - Lady Elizabeth's Men - received a royal patent, and entered into a contract with Philip Henslowe to perform at the Swan Theatre, thus suggesting that the great impresario, Henslowe, was now the owner or leaseholder. However, it seems that 1611 was also the last year when a play was presented at the Swan. After a performance of Middleton's "A Chaste Maid in Cheapside" the Swan was used for sports and fencing displays.

In 1614 it closed its doors for the very last time, unable to cope with the competition from rival theatres. From then on it was used exclusively for prize fights and other such exhibitions. By 1632 the building was being described as derelict.



A sketch of the interior of The Swan drawn in 1596 by John de Witt. He was a student from Utrecht in Holland, and was on a visit to London.