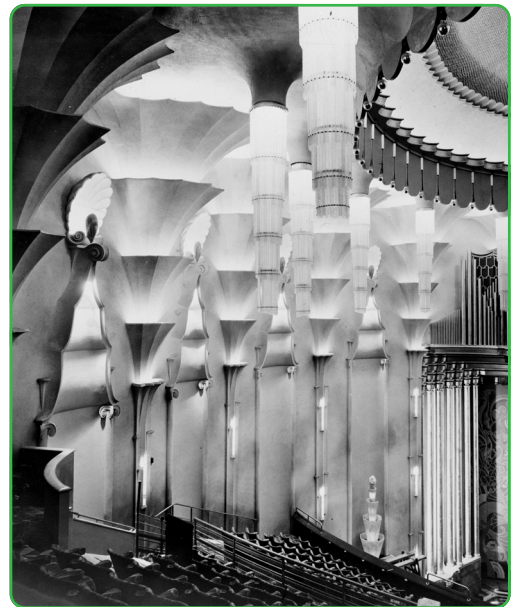# History

The Apollo Victoria Theatre

"Opening as the New Victoria Cinema in October 1930, what is now the Apollo Victoria Theatre has been a giant London landmark for nine decades."
The Daily Telegraph

Designed by architect W.E. Trent, together with E. Wamsley Lewis, and built in 1929, the **New Victoria Cinema** opened on 15 October 1930 with the film 'Old English'. Grade II* listed by English Heritage in 1972, it is **"arguably the most important cinema ever built in Britain"** (Theatres Trust) and, since 1980, one of London's biggest and most renowned theatres.

The New Victoria Cinema. Heritage Image Partnership Ltd / Alamy.

Originally constructed for Provincial Cinematograph Theatres (PCT) as an almost 3000-seat cinema, the venue was also intended to present live variety shows and therefore stage and orchestra facilities and some dressing rooms were included within the design. Uniquely, the building has two almost identical facades and entrances, one on Wilton Road and the other on Vauxhall Bridge Road.

The theatre's magnificent auditorium was designed in the art deco style and lavishly decorated in an underwater theme (described as a 'mermaid's palace') with an extravaganza of scallops around a huge dome.

"The building is widely believed to be the most important and architecturally interesting cinema building ever erected in the UK."
WestEndTheatre.com

WICKED
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With the advent of television, the popularity of the 'Super Cinema' gradually declined and the **New Victoria Cinema** closed in 1975, remaining 'dark' for almost five years. While many historic cinemas were permanently lost to developers, what perhaps saved this treasured building was its stage facilities. The venue was eventually purchased by the Apollo Leisure Group, who restored it and the newly named **Apollo Victoria Theatre** opened on 15 September 1980, with Shirley Bassey performing a week of sold-out concerts.

Other headline stars who have subsequently performed on its stage have included Cliff Richard, Dean Martin, Shirley MacLaine, and Liza Minnelli.

The venue's first major stage musical production, which officially opened on 17 August 1981, was producer Ross Taylor's major revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'The Sound of Music'. The cast featured Petula Clark, Michael Jayston, June Bronhill, and Honor Blackman. The opening night was attended by Baroness Maria Von Trapp.

In November 1982, the venue hosted a revival of 'Camelot' starring Richard Harris, which was followed by an 8-week season of Wayne Sleep with Dash. In June 1983, Topol returned to his great starring role of 'Tevye' in a revival of 'Fiddler on the Roof'.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's spectacular 'Starlight Express', directed by Trevor Nunn and designed by John Napier, opened in 1984 and played for almost 19 years. Other stage productions have subsequently included the Bollywood musical 'Bombay Dreams', a revival of 'Saturday Night Fever' and a limited engagement of the Billy Joel musical, 'Movin' Out'.

The Broadway musical **Wicked** held its UK premiere at the theatre on 27 September 2006, with a cast headed by Idina Menzel, recreating her Tony Award®-winning Broadway performance as 'Elphaba', Helen Dallimore, Adam Garcia, Nigel Planer and Miriam Margolyes OBE. The hit musical continues an open-ended run.

Left to right: **Her Majesty The Queen**, **Sir Michael Morpurgo** and **Wicked** Executive Producer **Michael McCabe**
PA Images / Alamy.

WICKED
ACTIVE LEARNING

Her Majesty The Queen (formerly HRH The Duchess of Cornwall) visited the theatre in 2010 and 2011, as Patron of the Wicked Young Writer Awards.

The theatre is now owned by the **Ambassador Theatre Group** (ATG), who have undertaken an extensive, and ongoing, programme of restoration and preservation.

"The Apollo Victoria is one of the UK's best preserved 1930's 'super cinemas' and its unique design and excellent condition fully justify its Grade II* listed building status, which was bestowed by English Heritage in 1972."
Cinema Treasures

Photograph of *'The Spirit of Film'* in the theatre foyer by Troy David Johnston.