

Media
The Royal National Theatre



The Royal National Theatre by Night

The Royal National Theatre is one of Britain's most prominent publicly founded theatre companies. In this report the history of the theatre and information on its auditoriums are considered. The report is based on different internet sources and a visit and guided tour at the Royal National Theatre.

The Royal National Theatre, also known as "National Theatre" or "The National" was founded in 1963, but the idea of a national theatre existed more than 100 years before. The first proposal for a National Theatre was made in 1848 by Effingham Wilson, a London publisher. Many years followed without the foundation of a National Theatre.

More than 50 years later, in 1903, detailed plans for a National Theatre were published by the actor-director-author Harley Granville Baker and critic William Archer. The total cost was to be £300,000. A group which was planning a memorial to Shakespeare in form of "The Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre" was joined by supporters of a National Theatre, in 1908. A year later the group was given a donation of £70,000 from Carl Meyer, son of a banker from Hamburg.

In 1913 a Private Members Bill was brought before the House of Commons, which stated that the House wanted a National Theatre to be established. The total cost was now £500,000. There was also a site acquired, with over an acre of land, right behind the British Museum. That site was sold to the Rockefeller Trust in 1922. After the sale many other sites were considered for example Chandos Street, Grosvenor Gardens and Horseferry Road, in 1925. In 1930 Granville Barker wrote in his book on the National Theatre prophetically: "The site facing the river, between County Hall and the Surrey Approach to the new Charing Cross Bridge, is about all that one can wish for; a National Theatre could hardly be better placed." During the 1930s further possible sites were considered, for example Leicester Square, Hart Street, Bloomsbury, St George's Hospital and many more.

In 1937 a site in Cromwell Gardens was purchased, which measured 16,000 square feet. Granville Barker was asked to be the director of the new theatre, but he declined because he thought the site wouldn't have enough room for two stages. In 1942 the site was exchanged for a new site on the South Bank of the Thames. The new design included the two auditoriums as recommended by Barker.

Oliver Lyttelton became Chairman of the National Theatre Council in 1946. The cost for the theatre was now £1 million. In 1949 the National Theatre Bill was brought before Parliament and was passed; up to £1 million were contributed for the building of the theatre and equipment. On Friday 13th July 1951 a foundation stone was laid by The Queen, next to the Festival Hall.

In 1952 it was agreed that the National Theatre needed a better site. The building costs were put up to £2.3 million, in 1960. In 1962 the Royal National Theatre withdrew from the scheme. In August Laurence Olivier was announced to be the first director of the National. The first season was at the Chichester Festival Theatre.

In 1964 the first plays were brought on stage. Denys Lasdun was chosen to be the architect of the new National Theatre on the South Bank. In 1965 it was estimated that the new building will cost £5.5 million. The site for the new theatre was shifted a few hundred yards eastwards, which was its last move. The cost was now up to £7.5 million.

In 1969 the building was started and expected to be finished in 1973. The government could now support the theatre with up to £3,750,000 for building and equipping to the National Theatre. Another £2 million were provided, as the National Theatre and Museum of London Bill became law, in 1973. Laurence Olivier gave his last stage performance and resigned as director. "I was always dreaming of marching my little troupe up the road but that wasn't for me. I was hoping to feel a glow of satisfaction but I was so tired out, I was just glad to let it go." Laurence Olivier

In 1974 the building was still not finished, but the National Theatre Bill removed the limit on government support for the building work. Peter Hall, director of the National, decided to move into the unfinished building on the South Bank in 1975 and prepare it to open it, theatre by theatre. One year later the cost is put up to £16 million.

The Queen officially opened the theatre on October 25th 1975 although it was still unfinished. In 1988 the theatre was permitted to call itself "The Royal National Theatre".

The Lyttelton Theatre, named after Olivier Lyttelton, was officially opened on March 16th 1975.

It is known for its proscenium-arch design and can seat up to 890 people.

The proscenium-arch is like an window to another world, which means that the audience has to observe.



The Lyttelton Theatre



The Olivier Theatre

The Olivier Theatre, named after Laurence Olivier, was opened on October 4th 1975.

The Olivier Theatre is the main auditorium. It is modelled on the ancient Greek amphitheatre and can accommodate up to 1160 people.

What makes the amphitheatre so important is that it ensures that the audience's view isn't blocked from any seat and that the actors can see the whole audience from the centre of the stage.

It has an open stage and it's known for the "drum-revolve". The drum-revolve is a five-storey revolving stage section, that is operated by a single staff member. It extends eight meters beneath the stage. The drum has two platforms, which can both contain different scenery.



The "drum-revolve"



The Cottesloe Theatre

In 1977 the last auditorium, the Cottesloe Theatre, named after Lord Cottesloe, was finally opened.

It is a small adaptable studio space, which can hold up to 400 people, depending on the seating arrangement.

This is the special part about this theatre; it's a black box and seats can be arranged in many different ways, from the normal seating (in rows) to a court yard (like Shakespeare's Theatre).

The Cottesloe is often used to try new and different plays.

Each auditorium can run up to three shows in repertoire, this way more productions can be shown in a single season.

Finally it can be said that the Royal National Theatre is one of London's most popular theatres, next to the Globe. It is a place tourists go to, when they visit London, and it is very important for the Londoners, who are thrilled by theatres. Many galas are held in the theatre, next to the performances, which make the theatre important to hosts of those charity events.

The history of the National has been a major part of London for more than 150 years. Without the National London wouldn't be the same, it is as important as Buckingham Palace or Westminster Abbey.

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Technical Terms and their definition

Private Members Bill – is a proposed law by the government

House of Commons – Britisches Unterhaus

contributed – beigetragen, beigesteuert

proscenium-arch – Guckkastenbühne

drum-revolve – Drehbühne

Sources

www.wikipedia.org

www.nationaltheatre.org.uk

www.google.org