



Photo reproduced by permission of London Borough of Merton

Queen's Picture Theatre, Worple Road, Wimbledon, originally known as the Electric Theatre, this was the first local cinema and opened in 1909

## Theatre, Music and Festivals

By the late 1800s Wimbledon's booming population provided a ready-made audience for cultural activities. There was a choir and an amateur orchestra. A first cinema opened in 1909, then a second in 1910. The Wimbledon Theatre launched in December 1910, with the largest stage in the country. Its pantomimes became an essential part of local childhoods.

Wimbledon Theatre had a long-standing family tradition. Mr J.B. Mulholland, the first owner, was followed by his wife and his son up to 1955. Likewise, the first manager's son ran the theatre until 1951. With highs in the 1920s and 1930s, audiences were small after 1945 and again in the 1960s. Then, in 1968, the council stepped in when the theatre was threatened with closure.

Times were hard again in the late 1990s, and in 2003 the theatre was reborn as the New Wimbledon Theatre. Today, Wimbledon also has the Polka Theatre for children and two cultural festivals. The International Music Festival and Wimbledon BookFest return every year.