



Theatres and Cinemas

Weston's earliest theatre was in a tent put up on land between The Boulevard and Palmer Street. Moving pictures were first shown here in 1898. Since then, Weston has offered a choice of theatres and cinemas.

KNIGHTSTONE THEATRE

The 2,000 seat Pavilion & Opera House opened on Knightstone Island in May 1902. The theatre staged regimental band concerts, plays and light operas. Films were shown regularly by 1911.

The Pavilion's electrician was drowned, and 300 people stranded in the theatre, during the gales of September 1903.

The Pavilion was renamed the Knightstone Theatre in 1927. Well-known actors and singers such as Paul Robeson, Clara Butt and Rex Harrison appeared there.

The theatre closed at the outbreak of World War II and became a uniform factory. After the war it continued to attract stars such as Norman Wisdom, Ken Dodd and Adam Faith. It became a leisure centre in 1978, before closing for good in 1991. The theatre was converted into flats in 2007.



The Electric Theatre © courtesy of Weston Library

ELECTRIC THEATRE

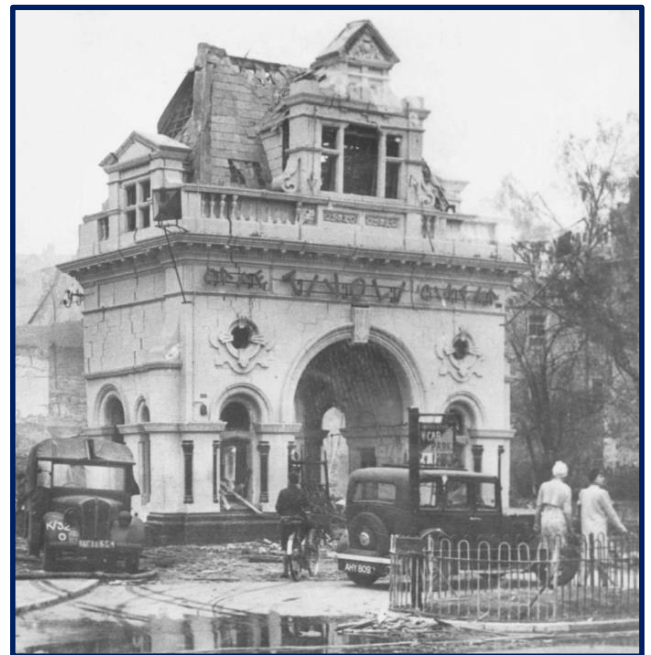
The Electric Theatre, seating 700 people, was Weston's first permanent, purpose-built cinema. It opened in 1911 next to the old railway goods yard on Walliscote Road. The Odeon cinema now occupies the site.

TIVOLI CINEMA

The Tivoli cinema on The Boulevard began as the Summer & Winter Gardens which opened in 1882. The Gardens had an arch-shaped entrance designed by local architect Hans Price. The Victoria Hall next door held a screening of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Procession in 1898. Films were shown there regularly by 1907.

By 1918 the site had been rebuilt as the Palace Theatre. Plays, variety acts, pantomime and film shows were offered. The Palace lasted until 1928, when it was converted into the 850 seat Tivoli Cinema.

The Tivoli was bombed during the raid of June 28th/29th 1942. Hans Price's entrance survived, but was pulled down for safety reasons. The site remained derelict until 1983-84, when it was turned into flats.



The ruins of the Tivoli Cinema, 1942 © courtesy of Weston Library

GAUMONT CINEMA

The grand Regent Picture House, Regent Street, opened in 1913. The cinema seated 1,500 people, and showed films between 3pm – 10.30pm. The name was changed to the Regent in 1930, and again to the Gaumont in 1954. The building became a bingo hall in 1973, and was demolished in 1985. A pub now occupies the site.

CENTRAL CINEMA

The Central Picture House, seating 700 people, opened on Oxford Street in 1921. It was renamed the Central Cinema in the mid-1950s. The cinema was bought by the Borough Council in 1961. It was bulldozed in 1964 during redevelopment of the Oxford Street and Carlton Street areas.

ODEON CINEMA

Weston's Odeon has been described as one of the finest in the Odeon Cinemas chain. Opening in 1935, it is built on the site of the Electric Theatre. The architect, Cecil Howitt, won an award for his striking design.

The 1,800 seat auditorium was dominated by the Compton theatre pipe organ, used for broadcasts and recitals. The auditorium was later divided to create three more screens, and the Odeon now has 1,000 seats. The Compton Organ is still used today. It is one of only two theatre organs to survive in their original location in a working British cinema.

The Beatles performed at Weston Odeon in the early days of Beatlemania. The band played twice nightly for six nights in August 1963.

A Cineworld multiscreen cinema opened in Dolphin Square in January 2018, near the site of the old Central Cinema.

THE PLAYHOUSE

The Playhouse Theatre, on North High Street, stands on the site of a market. In 1946 the market hall was converted into a 500 seat theatre. It later became known as the Playhouse. Performers included Bob Monkhouse and Frankie Howerd.

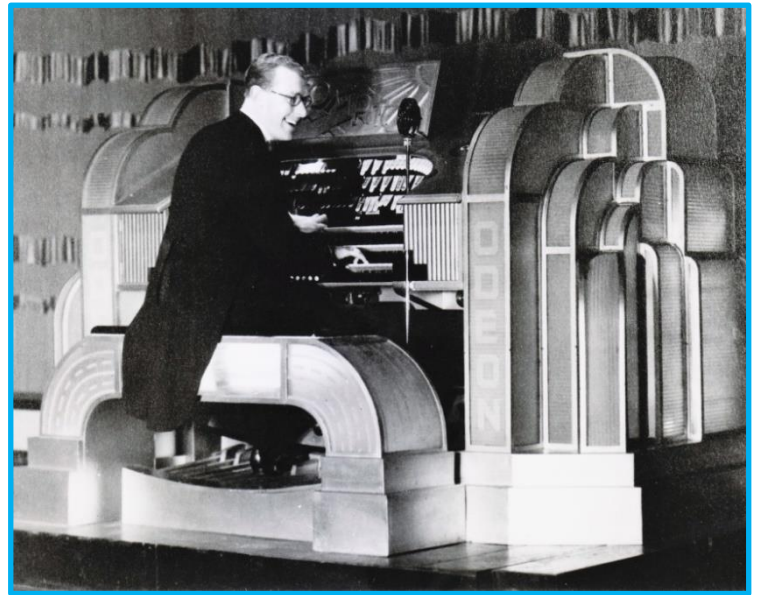


The Playhouse Theatre on fire, 1964 © courtesy of Weston Library

A fire destroyed the theatre in August 1964. A new venue seating 660 people opened on the site in 1969. The Playhouse stages a wide variety of productions, including ballet, opera, plays, music and pantomime. The orchestra pit can be covered to provide extra staging or seating.

THEATRE IN THE HUT

Weston's smallest theatre, seating 60 people, is on Milton Lane. The Hut is home to the Wayfarers Drama Group, an amateur dramatics society. The venue is over 100 years old, and has recently been refurbished. All proceeds from ticket sales go towards the theatre's upkeep.



Victor Sylvester on the Odeon's organ, 1938 © courtesy of Weston Library

BLAKEHAY THEATRE

The Blakehay is a 200 seat community theatre on Wadham Street. The name comes from "Black Hay", a field that once lay between High Street and Wadham Street.

The building was Weston's first Baptist Church, built in 1850 and remodelled by Hans Price in 1862. The church closed in 1985, but the building was saved by a charitable trust. It was run as a public venue by Weston Civic Society until 2004. The Blakehay is now owned by Weston Town Council. Events include theatre, music and dance. Extra rehearsal and performance space was created in 2017.

ST JUDE'S THEATRE

This small theatre on St Jude's Terrace, seating 100 people, is home to Weston Operatic Society. The Society, an amateur musical theatre company, bought the former St Jude's Hall in 1978 as a rehearsal space. The stage and lighting have been upgraded, however, and disabled access improved. Now suitable for shows, the hall has been renamed St Jude's Theatre.



Weston-super-Mare
Town Council