Royal Cobourg Theatre (later the Old Vic), London 1818.

THEATRE LIGHTING
Through the Ages

BRIAN ROBERTS
GENERAL INFORMATION
This listing is indicative only. It covers both legitimate and movie theatres. Names of theatres often changed when reconstructed or when the ownership changed. The dates shown are those attributed to when the theatre first opened.

THROUGH THE AGES  Candlelight, Limelight, Gas Lighting, Electric Lighting
In page order
Royal Coburg Theatre (rebuilt becoming Old Vic), London: 1818, 1871
Lincoln Centre (The New Metro), New York City: 1966
Red Bull Theatre, London: 1672
Medieval Entertainment: 15th century
Limelight: 1874
Gas Lighting: 19th century
Theatre Royal, Leicester: 1864
Gas Regulations: 1864
Strode & Company: 1889

FEATURED THEATRES
In page and alphabetical order
Apollo Theatre, London: 1908
Avalon Movie Theatre, Los Angeles: 1929
Chicago Movie Theatre, Chicago: 1921
Coliseum Theatre, London: 1904
Covent Garden Royal Opera House, London: 1810, 1858
Criterion Theatre, London: 1872
El Capitan Movie Theatre, Los Angeles: 1926
Haymarket Royal Theatre, London: 1823
Her Majesty's Theatre, London: 1897
Kings Theatre, Edinburgh: 1930
Loews Kings Movie Theatre, New York City: 1929
Los Angeles Movie Theatre, Los Angeles: 1921
Metropolitan Opera House, New York City: 1883
Old Vic Theatre, London: 1871
Orpheum Movie Theatre, Los Angeles: 1926
Palace Theatre (opened as The Royal English Opera House), London: 1891
Palace Music Hall, Manchester: 1913
Pantages Movie Theatre, Los Angeles: 1930
Palais Garnier (Paris Opera), Paris: 1875
Tivoli Movie Theatre, Chicago: 1921
Uptown Movie Theatre, Chicago: 1925

BMR, Budleigh Salterton, 2021.
Red Bull Theatre, London with candle footlights and chandeliers on stage. The Wits, or Sport on Sport, 1672 (*Theatre Lighting Before Electricity*).
CANDLELIGHT

Medieval entertainment by torch and candlelight, 15th century (*Princely Feasts and Festivals*).
Limelight men operating in the fly-gallery (*The Graphic*, 1874).
“In the Limelight”

It is interesting to trace the origin of the phrase “in the limelight,” which has come to mean “the center of attraction.” The “Limelight” was nothing more than a spotlight invented by Henry Drummond in 1816, but not used to any great extent until about 1860.

Drummond discovered that by heating a piece of lime to incandescence, a brilliant white light resulted, and this invention has been improved by lighting engineers until we have the present electrical “spot” without which no theatrical performance is complete.
GAS LIGHTING

Offstage left, view of a gaslit stage (Theatre Lighting before Electricity).
Gas lighting backstage at The Theatre Royal, Leicester 1836.
(The Development of the English Playhouse).
REGULATIONS
FOR THE BETTER
Protection against Accidents by Fire at Theatres,
Licensed by the Lord Chamberlain.

I.
All fixed and ordinary GAS BURNERS to be furnished with efficient Guards. Moveable and occasional Lights to be, when possible, protected in the same manner, or put under charge of persons responsible for lighting, watching, and extinguishing them.

II.
The FLOATS to be protected by a Wire Guard. The first Ground-Line to be always without Gas, and unconnected with Gas, whether at the Wings or elsewhere. Sufficient space to be left between each Ground-Line, so as to lessen risk from accident to all persons standing or moving among such lines.

III.
The rows or lines of GAS BURNERS at Wings to commence Four Feet at least from the level of the Stage.

IV.
WET BLANKETS or RUGS, with BUCKETS or WATER-POTS to be always kept in the Wings; and attention to be directed to them by PLACARDS legibly printed or painted, and fixed immediately above them. As in Rule I., some person to be responsible for keeping the Blankets, Buckets, &c., ready for immediate use.

V.
These REGULATIONS to be always posted in some conspicuous place, so that all persons belonging to the Theatre may be acquainted with their contents; every Breach or Neglect of them, or any act of carelessness as regards Fire, to be punished by Fines or Dismissal by the Managers.

SYDNEY,
Lord Chamberlain.

Lord Chamberlain’s Office,
St. James’s Palace,
February 5, 1864.

Printed by R. Harrison, and E. Coates, St. Martin’s Lane.
Apollo Theatre, London 1901 (London’s Great Theatres).
APOLLO THEATRE, LONDON
Avalon Theatre, Los Angeles, California 1929 (*The Last Remaining Seats*).
CHICAGO THEATRE, CHICAGO

Chicago Theatre, Chicago, Illinois, 1921.
COLISEUM THEATRE, LONDON

Opened as the London Coliseum 1904, present name from 1931.
Coliseum, London's largest theatre and one of the first to have electric lighting.
COVENT GARDEN, LONDON

The second theatre lit by candles, 1810.

The third Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London 1858.
COVENT GARDEN, LONDON

The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, stage lighting and controls (*London Theatres*).
DUKE OF YORK, LONDON

Auditorium of the Duke of York's Theatre (photographs from Theatres own website).
EL CAPITAN, LOS ANGELES


El Capitan auditorium.
HAYMARKET THEATRE, LONDON


Theatre Royal Haymarket (Access Entertainment).
HAYMARKET THEATRE, LONDON

Auditorium Ceiling (London Theatres).

Theatre Royal Haymarket (Theatre Crafts).
HER MAJESTYS THEATRE, LONDON

Her Majesty's Theatre view from stage.

KINGS THEATRE, EDINBURGH

King's Theatre, Edinburgh 1930 (Victorian & Edwardian Theatres).
Loew's Kings Theatre, Brooklyn, opened 1929. view of proscenium arch (Kings Theatre).

Loew's Kings Theatre, the inner lobby (Kings Theatre).
LOEWS KINGS THEATRE, NEW YORK

The restored Loew's Kings Theatre (*Kings Theatre*).

Loew's Kings Theatre, the auditorium restored (*Kings Theatre*).
Los Angeles Theatre (The Last Remaining Seats), Chicago, Illinois, 1921.
Architect: S Charles Lee.

Concert in the Old Metro.
The Old Vic, London opened as The Royal Coburg Theatre in 1818.

The Old Vic auditorium.
OLD VIC, LONDON

Audience in the The Old Vic in 2016.
ORPHEUM, LOS ANGELES

Gala Premiere at the Orpheum Theatre, Los Angeles.

Orpheum Theatre, Los Angeles, opened 1926 (Mike Hume's Historic Theatre Photographs).
The auditorium commissioned by Richard D'Oyly Carte as the home of English opera.
PALACE MUSIC HALL, MANCHESTER

Palace Music Hall, Manchester 1913 (Victorian & Edwardian Theatres).
PANTAGES, LOS ANGELES

Pantages lobby 1930 (*Historic Theatre Photography*).

Auditorium ceiling lighting Pantages.
PALAIS GARNIER, PARIS

Inauguration of Paris Opera.
TIVOLI, CHICAGO

Tivoli Theatre's Music Room, Chicago 1921 (Rapp & Rapp).
The Grand Staircase and chandeliers (Fine Art America).
TIVOLI, CHICAGO

Tivoli Theatre's Grand Lobby, Chicago 1921 (Rapp & Rapp).
REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

2006 Theatres of Achievement, Higgins & Eggleston, Entertainment Technology,
  Cambridge.