



A HISTORY OF TRINITY THEATRE

Holy Trinity was the first Parish church of Tunbridge Wells. It was designed by Decimus Burton (1800 - 1881), the noted architect of such famous London buildings as the Hyde Park Screen, the Constitution Hill Arch, and the Athenaeum Club and also, of course, the fine villas of Calverley Park and Calverley Park Crescent. Holy Trinity was built to meet the needs of the growing population of Tunbridge Wells, which, developing as a residential town, had doubled in size in the preceding twenty years to about 2000 people. The subscription list for the new church was led by Lord Abergavenny and a major part of the cost (£10,591) was met by a grant from the Church Building Commissioners under an Act of 1818 'to provide new churches in new and growing towns'. This possibly influenced Burton's choice of the Gothic style for its construction. It is built in locally quarried sandstone. The last religious service was held in 1972.

Saving the Building

In early 1974 Holy Trinity Church was declared 'redundant to pastoral needs' by the Church Commissioners. In May 1975 the Commissioners published a draft redundancy scheme providing for Holy Trinity's demolition. As a result residents of Tunbridge Wells raised a petition and public meetings were held. The protest was successful in persuading the Church Commissioners to grant the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society one year from October 1975, to find a suitable community or public use for the church. In April 1976, the Commissioners approved in principle the Civic Society's proposal, which was to restore the building and convert it into an Arts Centre subject to being satisfied with its economic viability. An Appeal Committee was formed to raise £50,000 in six months. In January 1977 the Church Commissioners accepted the viability of the scheme and a lease was granted by the Diocese of Rochester. Five years of hard work followed, changing an empty, neglected church building with dry rot and damaged stonework into a theatre with raked seating, fit for public performances and with the necessary licences.

The Beginning

The first two week season was launched in the summer of 1982. In 1983 there were shows during nine months of the year. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council regarded the growing enterprise with favour and gave £15,000 towards conversion of the building. Heating was installed, and the gallery was opened, concentrating on regular exhibitions by contemporary professional artists. In 1984 a bar licence was granted. South East Arts (now The Arts Council of England South East) awarded Trinity a grant of £10,000 towards operational costs. The Arts Centre was run entirely by volunteers and finances were balanced to secure the future of Trinity. Maintenance and restoration of the building remains a demanding responsibility. In 2000 the building was surrounded by scaffolding whilst work was carried out on the stained glass windows as well as the clock tower, this work was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. An application was made to the National Lottery in October 1995, for £600,000 worth of internal improvements including a new computerised box office, new seats throughout, and a new access ramp for wheelchair users. The grant was approved in March 1996, and Trinity reopened in October 1996: 10,000 people came through the doors in the first two weeks.

Now

Trinity hosts around 350 events a year, ranging from the best in theatre and dance through to the biggest names in comedy and music. It has collaborated with everyone from Steven Berkoff to the National Theatre, as well as hosting a truly diverse range of international performing arts, film and visual arts. With some 90,000 people coming through its doors each year alongside a dynamic programme of participation for young people, it is acknowledged as one of the leading venues in the South East.

Trinity

Trinity Theatre
Church Road
Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1JP
Box Office: 01892 678 678
www.trinitytheatre.net
[@trinitytheatre](https://twitter.com/trinitytheatre)



Registered Charity Number: 1054547
Registered Company Number: 3179063