

### Luxor Cinema, Twickenham

The Luxor Cinema, at the junction of Heath Road and Cross Deep, Twickenham was opened on 18th November 1929. The architect was J. Stanley Beard, FRIBA.

The main elevation in Cross Deep was faced with terracotta, the design being a combination of Egyptian and modern architectural detail with harmoniously blended deep and brilliant colours. At night the front was flood lit and a canopy extended the entire length of the building to protect queues from the weather. The foyer was in a modern style and housed two box offices both equipped with seating indicators showing where seats were available. The auditorium repeated the Egyptian theme and in the centre of the ceiling, painted to represent sky and clouds, was a large sun design in red and gold. Over the proscenium was a winged creature with the word 'Luxor' below. The general colour scheme was a warm mixture of yellow and light red, with dark wood panelling at a low level around the side walls. The cinema as originally built seated 1,700, using spring edge seats with upholstered backs throughout. The carpet, a Wilton, was specially designed with an Egyptian pattern. The architect and builders were particularly proud of the heating, ventilating and air purifying system. This heated, or cooled, and washed incoming air whilst powerful extractor fans in the ceiling removed tainted air enabling continuous circulation and an even temperature.



Drawing of the Luxor Cinema for the 1929 Opening Programme

Although equipped for both talkies and silent films, the Luxor also boasted a symphony orchestra under the direction of Edward van Praag, an organ built by the John Compton Organ Company, a stage with a forty foot proscenium opening and a cafe in the dress circle.

The John Compton Theatre Organ was one of the latest two-manual Unit instruments available. It consisted of several hundreds of pipes of all sizes ranging from sixteen feet to half-an-inch. It provided a full range of percussion instruments, including drums, cymbals, triangles and castanets, a Chrysoglott, Glockenspiel, Xylophone and Cathedral Chimes as well as a range of comedy effects such as surf, aeroplanes, birds, car horns etc. The console was housed in the orchestra pit and connected to the main organ housing by the proscenium arch, by a flexible cable of some four hundred wires. Unlike some theatre organs the Luxor organ was not on a lift and was usually played in conjunction with the orchestra.

The programme for the Inaugural Ceremony was not unusual in combining both movies and live performance of music or variety artistes.

### Inaugural Programme

1. Grand Opening by Councillor His Honour J. Cusack, K.C., J.P., Mayor of Twickenham.

2. The Luxor Orchestra Selection - Musical Director: Edward van Praag
3. Rodney Hudson's Eight Victoria Girls (a well known troupe of team dancers)
4. Movietone News
5. Mickey Mouse in Oprey House
6. Rodney Hudson's Eight Victoria Girls
7. Organ Solo - Solo Organist: J. Armitage, F.R.C.O.
8. King - of the Khyber Rifles starring [Victor McLaglen](#) and Myrna Loy

When it opened, under the management of Rialto (Twickenham)Ltd., The Luxor provided a continuous daily performance from 2.15pm to 10.45pm. Admission prices were:

Front Grand Circle 2/4d (1/3d matinees)  
Rear Grand Circle 1/10d (1/- matinees)  
Rear Orchestra Stalls 1/3d (9d matinees)  
Front Orchestra Stalls 9d and 6d (6d and 4d matinees)

In 1932 the Luxor was taken over by Joseph Mears Theatres and then, in turn, sold to Odeon with the rest of the Mears group in 1944. Renamed the Odeon, the interior was refurbished and the seating reduced, but the exterior remained almost as it was originally designed.

The cinema finally closed its doors to the public on the 10th October 1981. The organ was removed, part of it being incorporated into the organ at the Odeon, Leicester Square and the remainder returning to the makers. The building was finally demolished five years later.



### Victor McLaglen

Victor McLaglen (1883-1959) was a burly good-humoured star of British silent films. Later in his career he became popular in Hollywood, appearing in films such as *Gunga Din* (1939), *Fort Apache* (1948), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *Rio Grande* (1950) and *the Quiet Man* (1952) for which he was nominated for an Academy Award. His son, Andrew, born in 1925, became a director of large-scale westerns, for example, *The Undefeated*, *The Rare Breed* and *Shenandoah*.

Victor  
McLaglen in  
"King - of the  
Khyber Rifles"

More information on The Luxor and other historic buildings in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames is available from the Local Studies Collection.