

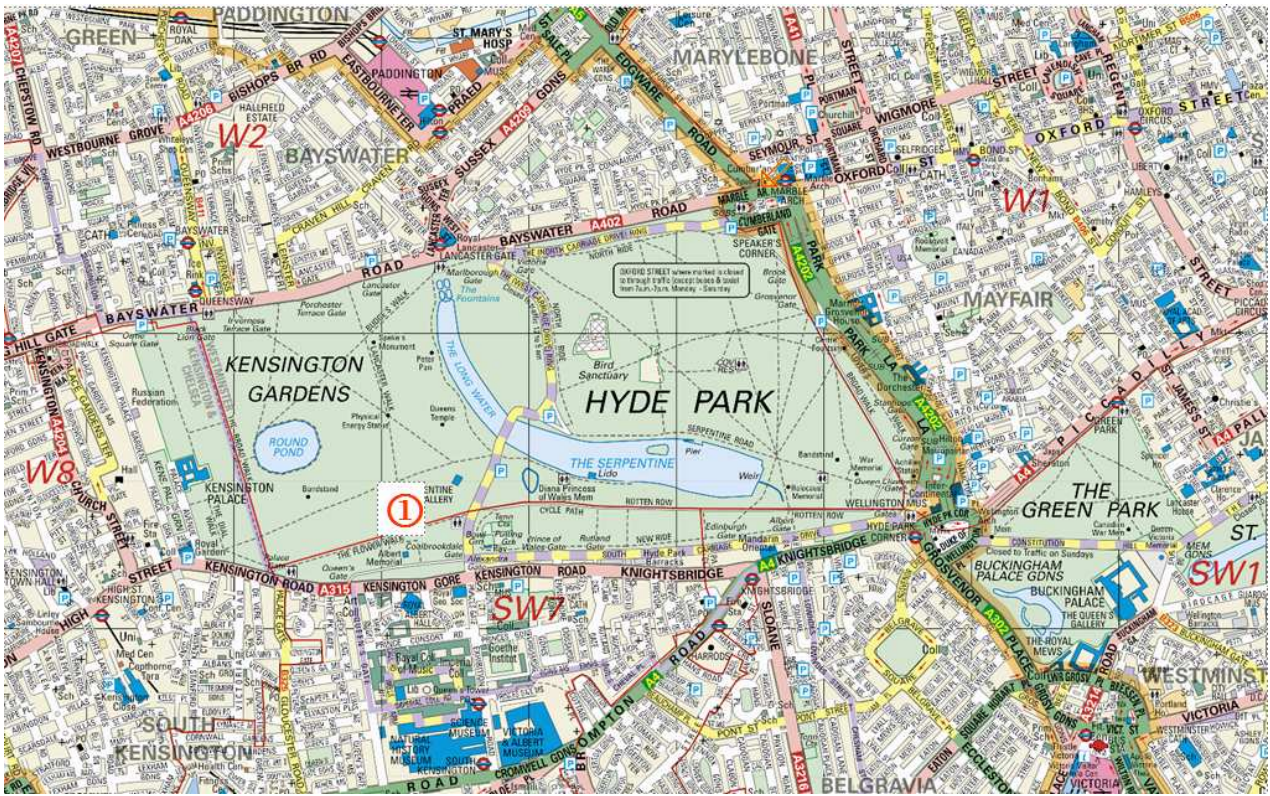


City of Westminster

Royal Albert Hall



The Royal Albert Hall is a concert hall situated on the northern edge of the South Kensington area, in the City of Westminster, London, England, best known for holding the annual summer Proms concerts since 1941.



Since its opening by Queen Victoria in 1871, the world's leading artists from several performance genres have appeared on its stage and it has become one of the UK's most treasured and distinctive buildings. Each year it hosts more than 350 events including classical concerts, rock and pop, ballet and opera, sports, award ceremonies, school and community events, charity performances and banquets.

The hall was originally supposed to have been called The Central Hall of Arts and Sciences, but the name was changed by Queen Victoria to Royal Albert Hall of Arts and Sciences when laying the foundation stone as a dedication to her deceased husband and consort Prince Albert. It forms the practical part of a national memorial to the Prince Consort – the decorative part is the Albert Memorial directly to the north in Kensington Gardens, now separated from the Hall by the road Kensington Gore.

In 1851, the Great Exhibition was held in Hyde Park, London, for which the Crystal Palace was built. The exhibition was a great success and led Prince Albert, the Prince Consort, to propose that a permanent series of facilities be built in the area for the enlightenment of the public. Progress on the scheme was slow and in 1861 Prince Albert died, without having seen his ideas come to fruition. However, a memorial was proposed for Hyde Park, with a Great Hall opposite.



Postcard of the Hall (circa 1903) with an inset of the [Albert Memorial](#).

The proposal was approved and the site was purchased with some of the profits from the Exhibition. Once the remaining funds had been raised, in April 1867 Queen Victoria signed the Royal Charter of the Corporation of the Hall of Arts and Sciences which was to operate the Hall and on 20 May, laid the foundation stone. The hall was designed by civil engineers Captain Francis Fowke and Major-General Henry Y.D. Scott of the Royal Engineers and built by Lucas Brothers. The designers were heavily influenced by ancient amphitheatres, but had also been exposed to the ideas of Gottfried Semper while he was working at the South Kensington Museum. The recently opened Cirque d'Hiver in Paris was seen in the contemporary press as the design to outdo. The hall was constructed mainly of Fareham Red brick, with terra cotta block decoration made by Gibbs and Canning Limited of Tamworth. The dome (designed by Rowland Mason Ordish) on top was made of wrought iron and glazed. There was a trial assembly made of the iron framework of the dome in Manchester, then it was taken apart again and transported to London via horse and cart. When the time came for the supporting structure to be removed from the dome after re-assembly in situ, only volunteers remained on site in case the structure dropped. It did drop – but only by five-sixteenths of an inch. The hall was scheduled to be completed by Christmas Day 1870 and the Queen visited a few days beforehand to inspect

The official opening ceremony of the Hall was on 29 March 1871. A welcoming speech was given by Edward, the Prince of Wales; Queen Victoria was too overcome to speak although she did comment that it reminded her of the British constitution.



The first performance at the Hall. The decorated canvas awning is seen beneath the dome.

A concert followed, when the Hall's acoustic problems became immediately apparent. Engineers first attempted to solve the strong echo by suspending a canvas awning below the dome. This helped and also sheltered concertgoers from the sun, but the problem was not solved: it used to be jokingly said that the Hall was "the only place where a British composer could be sure of hearing his work twice".

Initially lit by gas, the hall contained a special system where its thousands of gas jets were lit within ten seconds. Though it was demonstrated as early as 1873 in the Hall, full electric lighting was not installed until 1888. During an early trial when a partial installation was made, one disgruntled patron wrote to The Times newspaper declaring it to be "a very ghastly and unpleasant innovation".



Acoustic diffusing discs (lit in blue) hanging from the roof of the Hall. The fluted aluminium panels are seen above, lit in red.

In 1936, the Hall was the scene of a giant rally celebrating the British Empire, the occasion being the centenary of Joseph Chamberlain's birth. In October 1942, the Hall suffered minor damage during World War II bombing but was left mostly untouched as German pilots used the distinctive structure as a landmark.

In 1949 the canvas awning was removed and the glass dome was replaced with fluted aluminium panels in a new attempt to solve the echo; however, the acoustics were not properly tackled until 1969 when a series of large fibreglass acoustic diffusing discs (commonly referred to as "mushrooms" or "flying saucers") were installed below the ceiling to reduce the notorious echo. The Albert Hall is mentioned in the Beatles song A Day in the Life from the Sgt. Pepper album from 1967.

'... now they know how many holes it takes to fill the Albert Hall'

Renovation and redevelopment

Award for remarkable achievement. The East and West porches were glazed and new bars opened along with ramps to improve disabled access.

Internally the Circle was rebuilt in four weeks in June 1996 providing more leg room, better access and improved sight lines. The Stalls were rebuilt in a four week period in 2000 using steel supports allowing more space underneath for two new bars. 1534 unique pivoting seats were laid – with an addition of 180 prime seats. The Choirs were rebuilt at the same time. The whole building was redecorated in a style that reinforces its Victorian identity. New carpets were laid in the corridors – specially woven with a border that follows the elliptic curve of the building in the largest single woven design in the world.

The works included a major rebuilding of the great organ, originally built by "Father" Henry Willis in 1871 and rebuilt by Harrison & Harrison in 1924 and 1933. The current work was performed by Mander Organs between 2002 and 2004 and the organ is now again the second largest pipe organ in the British Isles with 9,999 pipes in 147 stops. The largest is the Grand Organ in Liverpool Cathedral which has 10,268 pipes.

Design

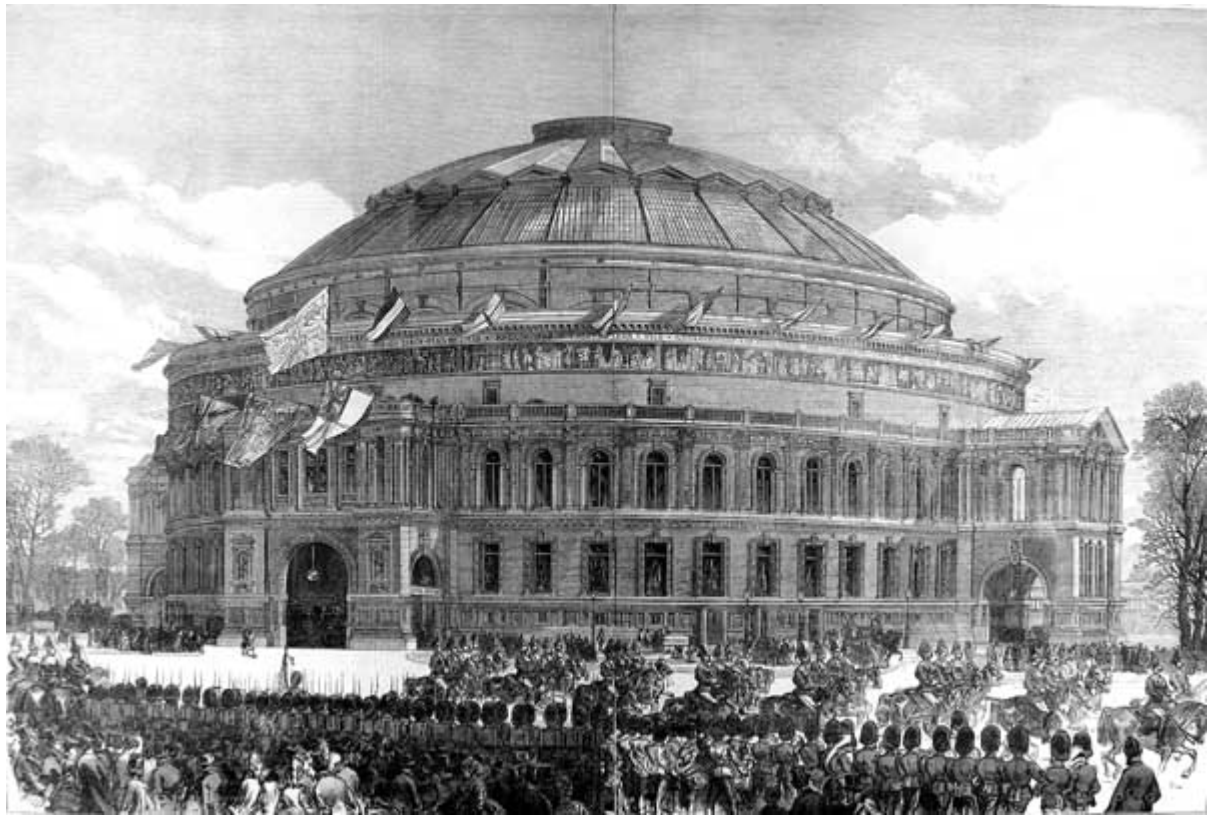


The Triumph of Arts and Sciences.

The hall, a Grade I listed building, is an ellipse in plan, with major and minor axes of 83 m (272 ft) and 72 m (236 ft). The great glass and wrought-iron dome roofing the hall is 41 m (135 ft) high. It was originally designed with a capacity for 8,000 people and has accommodated as many as 9,000 (although modern safety restrictions mean that the maximum permitted capacity is now 5,544 including standing in the Gallery).

Around the outside of the hall is a great mosaic frieze, depicting "The Triumph of Arts and Sciences", in reference to the Hall's dedication. Proceeding anti-clockwise from the north side the sixteen subjects of the frieze are: (1) *Various Countries of the World bringing in their Offerings to the Exhibition of 1851*; (2) *Music*; (3) *Sculpture*; (4) *Painting*; (5) *Princes, Art Patrons and Artists*; (6) *Workers in Stone*; (7) *Workers in Wood and Brick*; (8) *Architecture*; (9) *The Infancy of the Arts and Sciences*; (10) *Agriculture*; (11) *Horticulture and Land Surveying*; (12) *Astronomy and Navigation*; (13) *A Group of Philosophers, Sages and Students*; (14) *Engineering*; (15) *The Mechanical Powers*; and (16) *Pottery and Glassmaking*.

Above the frieze is an inscription in 12 in (300 mm) terracotta letters that combine historical fact and Biblical quotations: *"This hall was erected for the advancement of the arts and sciences and works of industry of all nations in fulfilment of the intention of Albert Prince Consort. The site was purchased with the proceeds of the Great Exhibition of the year MDCCCLI. The first stone of the Hall was laid by Her Majesty Queen Victoria on the twentieth day of May MDCCLXVII and it was opened by Her Majesty the Twenty Ninth of March in the year MDCCCLXXI. Thine O Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty. For all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine. The wise and their works are in the hand of God. Glory be to God on high and on earth peace."*



The Hall seen at the opening ceremony, seen from Hyde Park



- **Royal Albert Hall Tours 2012**

Wednesday 1 August 2012

[Select Your Time](#)



FRONT OF HOUSE TOUR

This is a one-hour tour covering all Front of House areas including the stunning auditorium, the Gallery and the Queen's private suites, the Royal Retiring Room.

Tours operate on the days indicated in the calendar above and start at 10.30am, running throughout the day.

The last tour starts at 3.30pm (November to March) or 4.30pm (April to October). Each tour is subject to availability and limited to 20 people. Booking in advance is strongly recommended. Please note that all tours will be conducted in English.

Cost per adult is £11* (£9.50 for students and senior citizens). Up to 2 under 16s free of charge for each adult ticket purchased. The free tickets for under 16s can be obtained in person at the Box Office or by calling the Box Office on 020 7589 8212.

Tours are not recommended for children under 7 as the content is not geared towards young children, however they are welcome to attend. Toddlers and babes in arms are admitted at the Tour Guide's discretion, although not during the BBC Proms season due to the nature of the rehearsal schedule.

To book: choose the date from the calendar above then click on 'select your time'.

GROUP TOURS

Special rates are available for parties of 15 people or more.

Please call 020 7959 0558 for more information.

AFTERNOON TEA TOURS

For selected dates only, the Royal Albert Hall is offering the chance to enhance your Front of House tour with this quintessentially English experience.

ROYAL ALBERT HALL TOURS 2012

Select Tour Time

Time	Adult	Concessions	Telegraph	Tour Disabled
<input type="radio"/> 10:30 AM	£11.00	£9.50	£5.50	£10.00
<input type="radio"/> 11:00 AM	£11.00	£9.50	£5.50	£10.00
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Select Quantity	Adult	Concessions	Telegraph	Tour Disabled
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