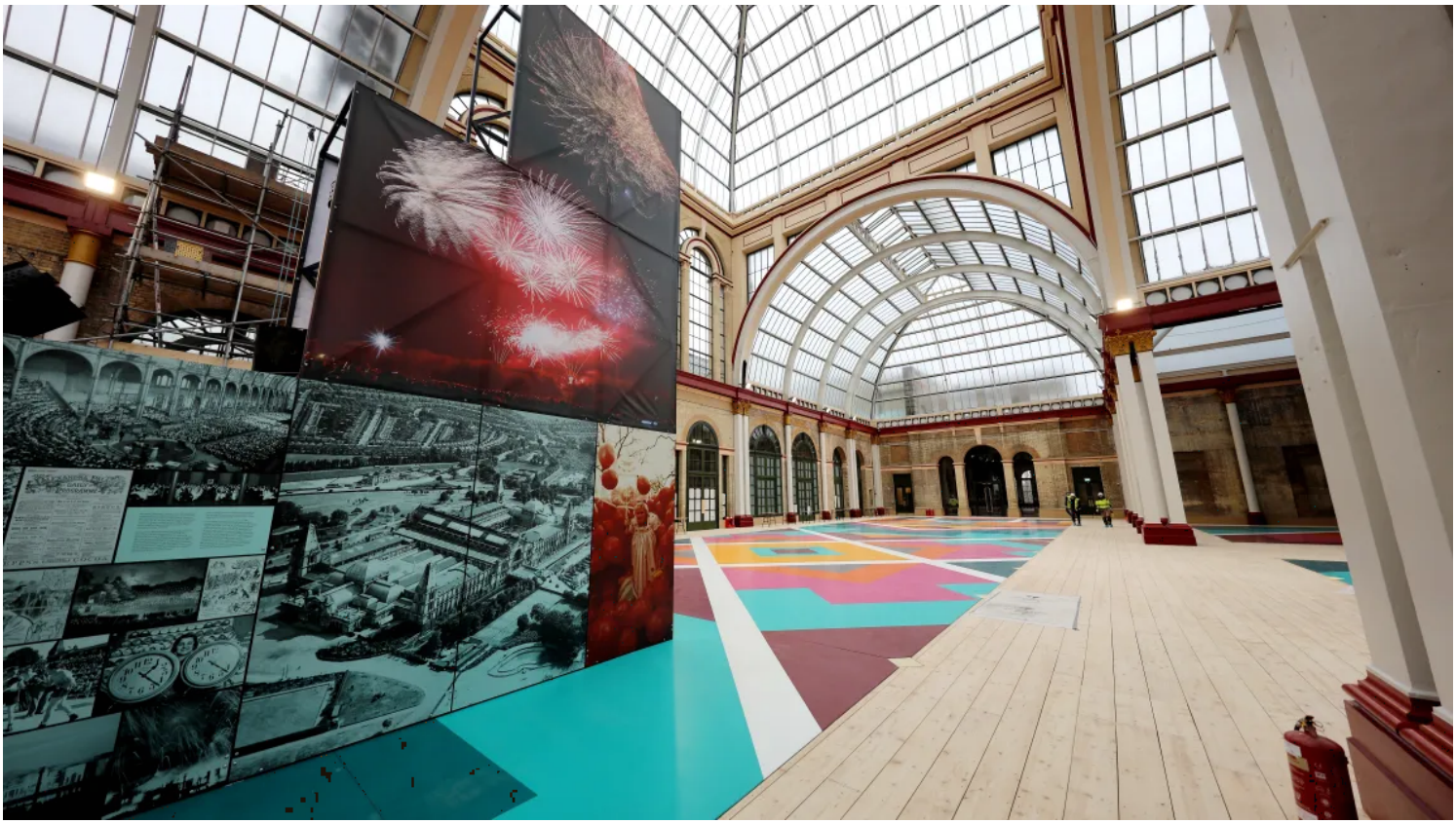

East Court will take visitors on an interactive journey through history Keith Armstrong

Alexandra Palace’s theatre played an era-defining role in popular culture, but it had been frozen in time and hidden for eight decades.

Now the curtain has lifted on a new chapter for the much-loved North London landmark, thanks to a major restoration of its East Wing, made possible by £18.8million from the National Lottery.

Still with all its Victorian character and charm, Alexandra Palace's theatre is now ready to welcome modern performances and audiences.

Ally Pally stories

The East Court is now a communal space for exhibitions and community events. It is also home to an interactive installation telling the story of the Palace’s role in the history and future of entertainment in the UK.

Here are some of the stories being told:

Fire

Two weeks after it opened in 1873, Alexandra Palace was devastated by a fire. It did not reopen until 1875. Over a century later, in 1980, another fire hit the building. This time the theatre was mostly spared, but with the rest of the building in desperate need of rebuilding, the theatre, already unused for 50 years, was left to continue its slow decay.

Innovation

The original design of the theatre provided no way to get scenery on and off the stage. To solve the issue, the next stage designers created one of the earliest, and last surviving, examples of counterweight flying architecture – allowing props and actors to appear to fly across the stage.

Cinema

Alexandra Palace was quick to embrace cinema, with ‘animated pictures’ shown there less than three years after the Lumiere Brothers held the world’s first public screening of motion pictures in 1895 in Paris.

War

During the First World War, the government took over Alexandra Palace to use as a refugee camp for Belgians who had fled from Germany. It was also used as an internment centre for Austrian, Hungarian and German men who had been declared ‘enemy aliens’. During this time, the theatre was used as a chapel and possibly a hospital.

BBC

In 1935, the BBC arrived at Alexandra Palace. It used the entire East Wing to broadcast what was then the latest in entertainment – television. It was then used as a workshop and prop store, with Daleks at one point lining the corridors.

Opening celebrations

To celebrate, a weekend of free events for all ages will take place on 1 and 2 December, with a Christmas Carnival running until 16 December.

Take at a look Alexandra Palace’s website to find out more about the events and the project.