

THE CONVERSATION KATE JORDAN

# How faith groups are reviving England's old cinemas

Comment les communautés religieuses redonnent vie aux anciens cinémas



The Christ Faith Tabernacle Cathedral in Woolwich. (Facebook)

**En Angleterre, 99 anciens cinémas ont actuellement été transformés en lieux de culte. Le déclin de la fréquentation des salles de cinéma depuis le début des années 1980 a rendu disponibles un grand nombre de bâtiments idéalement situés dans les centres urbains. Dès lors, plutôt que de créer de nouveaux lieux de culte, la plupart des communautés religieuses ont préféré adapter ces bâtiments, au prix de rénovations parfois coûteuses. Pourquoi cet attrait ?**

**O**n the corner of Powis Street and Woolwich High Street in south-east London stands a large brick building. Its curved exterior and wide canopy over the entrance immediately signals that it is a cinema. Looking up, however, passers-by might be surprised to see that in large letters arranged on the building's tower is the word "Cathedral". A lower sign specifies it houses the Christ Faith Tabernacle, a Pentecostal church group founded in Nigeria.

**2.** Directly opposite is another former art deco cinema with "New Wine Church" emblazoned

**1. to stand, stood, stood** se trouver/dresser / **curved** incurvé / **wide** large, grand / **canopy** auvent / **passer-by** passant / **to found** fonder.

**2. former** ancien / **to emblazon** ici, inscrire /

across the façade. This historic building now also houses a Nigerian Pentecostal megachurch. Across England there are currently 99 cinemas that have similarly been reinvented. Some, like the Nanaksar Gurdwara Sikh temple in Coventry, have been places of worship for longer than they showcased films.

**3.** The increasing number of empty churches across the country might suggest that faith is in decline. The 2021 UK census revealed that religious practice is, in fact, flourishing in many British cities. The numbers of Pentecostal Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists

**currently** actuellement / **worship** culte / **to showcase** diffuser.

**3. increasing** croissant / **faith** foi / **census** recensement, statistiques / **to flourish** croître, se développer /

have all risen over the past decade. These growing populations have not resulted, however, in commensurate numbers of purpose-built places of worship. Most minority communities have instead chosen to adapt secular buildings.

**4.** Repurposing existing buildings is common among migrant faith groups. The decline of movie-going from the early 1980s produced a ready supply of large buildings conveniently located in urban centres. These offered auditoriums for large congregations; spaces for community activities, soundproofing, parking and links to public transport.

**5.** Former cinemas were often cheap to buy and, until the late 1980s very few buildings were on

**to rise, rose, risen** augmenter / **decade** décennie / **growing** grandissant, croissant / **commensurate** proportionnel / **purpose** (construits dans ce) but, dessein / **instead** à la place / **secular** séculier, laïque.

**4. to repurpose** transformer, reconvertis / **supply** ici, offre / **large** grand / **conveniently** ici, idéalement / **soundproofing** insonorisation, isolation acoustique / **link** ici, liaison.

**5. late** ici, fin /



## A ÉCOUTER SUR LE COMPLÉMENT SONORE- SEQUENCE CONVERSATION

Quand certaines idoles disparaissent, d'autres prennent leur place.  
Le réalisateur américain Chris Mack et Shelly discutent de la logique  
architecturale surprenante derrière la transformation des cinémas en églises.  
**CD** **audio ou téléchargement MP3 (sur abonnement)**

the government's statutory list, which provides legal protection from demolition and significant alteration. This meant that securing planning permission for change of use was generally straightforward.

**6.** The erstwhile Rex Cinema, on the corner of Chapel Street and Trinity Way in Salford, actually started out as a 19th Scottish Presbyterian Church before being converted into a cinema in the early 1900s. From 1967, it served as a bingo hall until the 1980s, when it was Grade-II listed and the New Harvest Christian Fellowship moved in.

### Adaptive reuse

**7.** Similarly, the 1910 King's Theatre in Thanet, Kent, served as a theatre, a cinema and a church until 2017, when the Kent Tamil Association began converting it into a Hindu temple. The historic interior has been stripped out to open up the space. Meanwhile, in Stoke Newington, north London, the Aziziye Mosque, which opened in 1983, occupies the 1913 Apollo Picture House. With funding from the UK Turkish Islamic Association, the space has been progressively gutted and the façade covered in an intricate mosaic.

**8.** A significant historic building being listed means that buying it and changing its use usually comes with regulatory challenges and costly refurbishments. Despite this, many faith communities have chosen to remain in converted cinemas. Some organisations specifically seek old cinemas out for new locales.

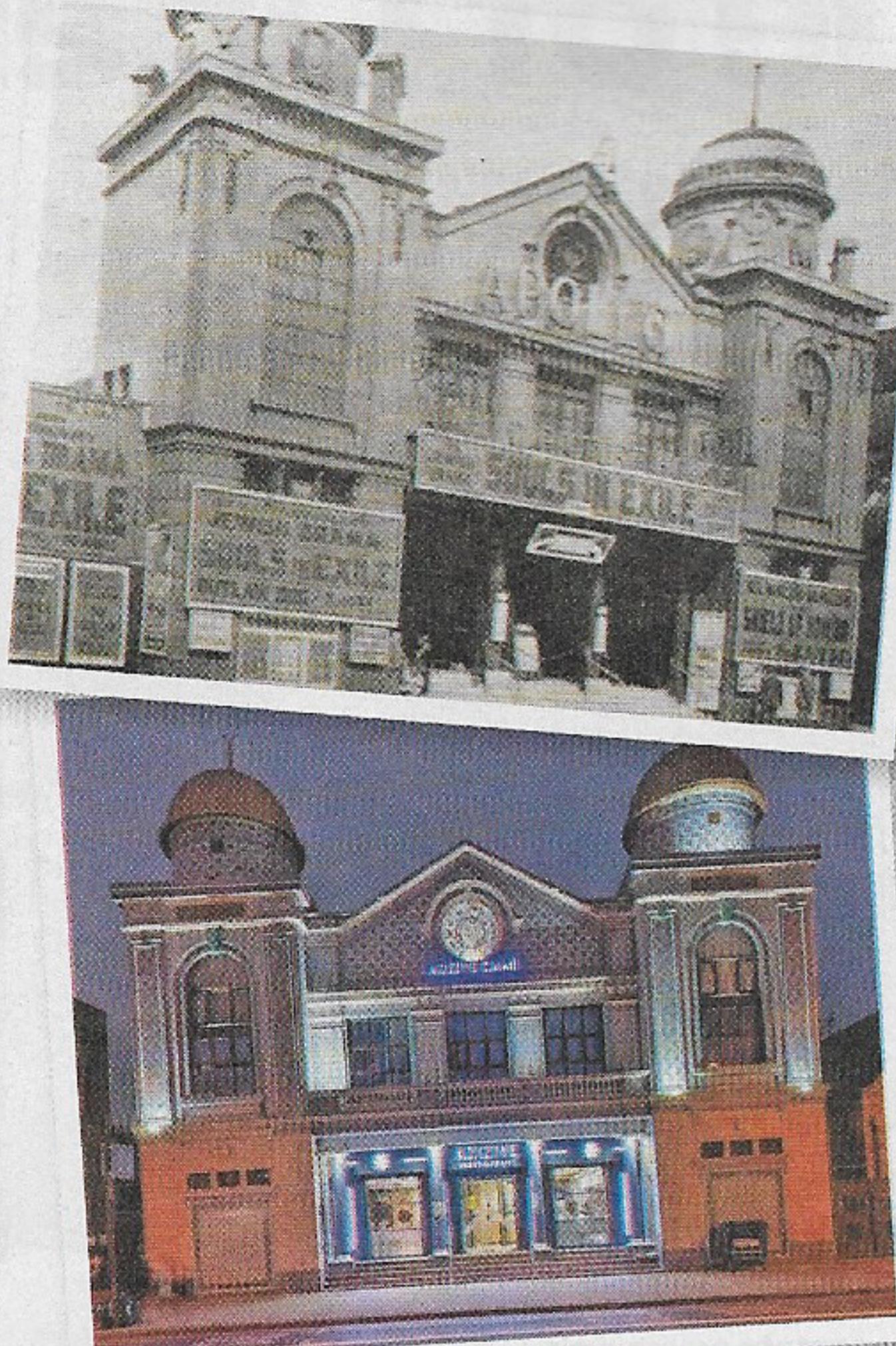
**9.** The listed former Ace Cinema on Rayners Lane in Harrow, north London, has been the Zoroastrian Centre since in 2000. The temple's

**statutory** réglementaire / **to provide** apporter, offrir, procurer / **significant** important / **alteration** modification / **to secure** obtenir / **straightforward** simple.

**6. erstwhile** ancien / **actually** en fait/réalité / **hall** salle / **Grade-II listed** classé Grade II (selon la classification des monuments historiques de l'Angleterre et du Pays de Galles).

**7. to strip out** vider / **meanwhile** parallèlement / **funding** financement / **to gut** vider / **intricate** élaboré, sophistiqué.

**8. regulatory** réglementaire / **challenge** ici, difficulté, problème / **refurbishment** réaménagement, rénovation / **to remain** rester / **to seek, sought, sought** (re) chercher / **locale** lieu.



North London's Apollo Picture House (up) is now the Aziziye Mosque (down). (Dominic Alves/flickr, CC BY-SA)

sacred fire is housed within what was the projection room.

**10.** Both the Freedom Centre International Church in Welling, Kent, and the Potters House Church in Leyton, east London, have spent considerable sums restoring the buildings in which they meet. These are not listed structures. As such, the occupants are under no legal obligations to protect the historical features.

### New life for old buildings

**11.** By contrast, the Granada Theatre in Woolwich was grade-II listed when the Christ Faith Tabernacle community bought it in 2011 for £5 million. The building had been a bingo hall for decades and fallen into disrepair. The total amount the congregation has spent on the purchase and costly restorations (to, among other things, reinstate the cinema-style fixed seating and install a theatre organ) would certainly have paid for a purpose-built church building.

**12.** This suggests that cinema buildings provide exactly what many faith groups need. The

**9. within** dans, à l'intérieur de.

**10. to restore** restaurer / **feature** aspect, caractéristique.

**11. to fall, fell, fallen into disrepair** se délabrer, tomber en ruine / **amount** somme / **purchase** achat / **to reinstate** réintroduire.

Cathedral is perfectly suited to Pentecostal worship. The stage is used to deliver sermons and live music to worshippers numbering into the hundreds. The advantages are more than simply practical, though. The manager tells me that, for the community, the gothic interior has a Christian flavour which provides the rationale for designating it as a cathedral.

**13.** This begs the question: why not repurpose one of the country's increasing number of redundant churches instead of a cinema that looks like a church? One reason for this may be that former churches bring the weight of a religious tradition that newer denominations are deliberately moving away from. Regulations that limit building reuse can deter faith communities from acquiring listed buildings. At the same time, it is vital that listing continues to identify, record and map significant buildings in inclusive ways.

**14.** Celebrating all layers of a building's history is crucial. So too is ensuring that it fulfils the most basic requirement of all – that it be used. ●

**12. to suit** convenir / **stage** estrade, scène / **worshipper** fidèle / **though** cependant / **flavour** ici, touche, aspect / **rationale** raison, logique.

**13. to beg the question** soulever une question / **denomination** confession (religieuse) / **to deter** dissuader / **to record** enregistrer / **to map** cartographier.

**14. layer** couche, strate / **to ensure** (s')assurer (de) / **to fulfill** ici, répondre / **requirement** exigence.



SUR LE BOUT DE LA LANGUE

### Conservation, préservation

**national heritage** patrimoine national  
**a listed building** monument classé au patrimoine

**Classement :**

Grade I  
Grade II\*  
Grade II

**Differentes manières de parler de lieux protégés :**

buildings are '**listed**'  
ancient monuments are '**scheduled**'  
(site d'importance national)  
wrecks are '**protected**'  
battlefields, gardens and parks are '**registered**'