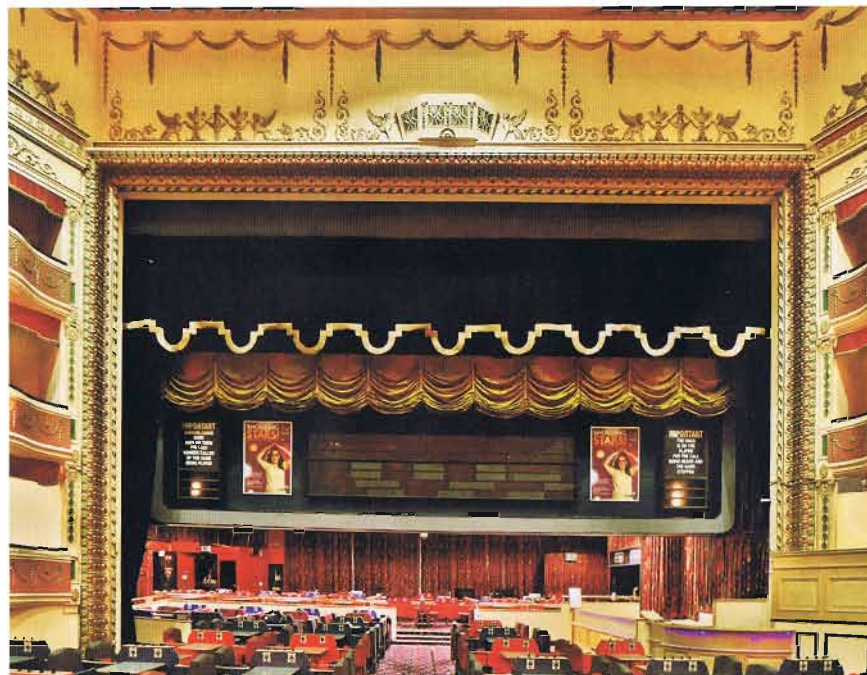


Streatham Hill Theatre

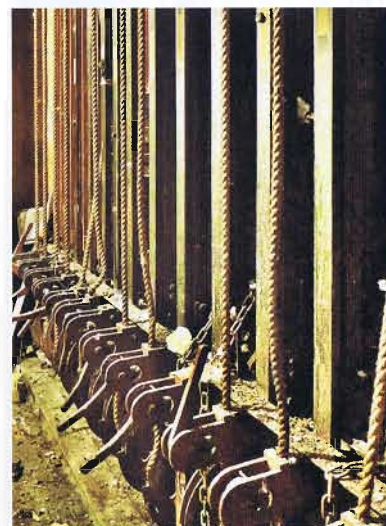
Roger Fox reports on a sleeping beauty in South London



Proscenium arch with Tannoy installation



Drum and Shaft for the downstage bridge



Downstage section of counterweight frame



The central vacuum plant in the basement

Streatham Hill Theatre opened as the Streatham Hill Playhouse in 1929 with over 2,000 seats. Remarkably, it was swiftly followed by three other similar scale entertainment venues within half a mile: the Gaumont, the ABC and the Astoria.

It was the last theatre work of architect W.G.Sprague, working in collaboration with W.H.Barton. It was built at a time of change in theatre technology and included wooden stage machinery as well as the latest in flying equipment and orchestra pit lifts.

The auditorium is on three levels and is in remarkably good repair with original seating in place, apart from in the stalls, which have been levelled to accommodate bingo tables. The raked stage is covered with bingo installations but all the theatre equipment remains. A special feature is an installation of Tannoy loudspeaker cabinets above the proscenium, which have been worked into the décor. Perhaps this was an example of local sponsorship as Tannoy's works were located about a mile away in West Norwood. Programmes carried a front-page credit.

There are 57 sets of Burkitt single purchase counterweighting with bars attached and some hauling lines still in place. Evidence remains upstage of two full-width stage bridges, which are known to have been extant in the 1950s. Downstage there are fine examples of corner traps and a grave trap. One of the corner traps is roped and ready for action.

The orchestra pit has three screw-jack operated elevators and the central one carries subsidiary lift for the conductor. There is a central microphone riser mechanism. All the motorised engineering, including the electric house curtain, was supplied by Knight and Co of New Southgate – a company which went out of business during World War Two, following the destruction of their works by enemy action. They were responsible for major installations including those at the Pavilion Theatre, Bournemouth and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

The theatre was run as a touring venue and booked in conjunction with the Golders Green Hippodrome. Often it would be the last date on a pre-West End tour or the first on a post-West End tour. The stage is large and accommodated major productions like Noel Coward's *Cavalcade* immediately after its Drury Lane run.

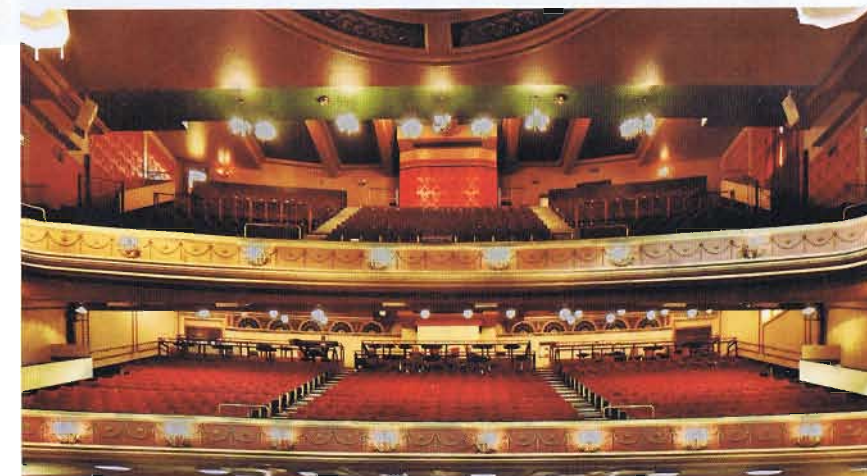
The theatre received a direct hit from a German bomb in 1944 and remained closed until it was rebuilt to the original design in 1950. A rationing of bricks after the war had prevented earlier restoration.

The theatre closed in 1962 when it was acquired by Mecca Bingo and it continued as Beacon Bingo until the end of January 2017. The owners are looking for a new tenant for the theatre and are being encouraged by the local authority, Lambeth, to bring a cultural use to an up and coming residential area.

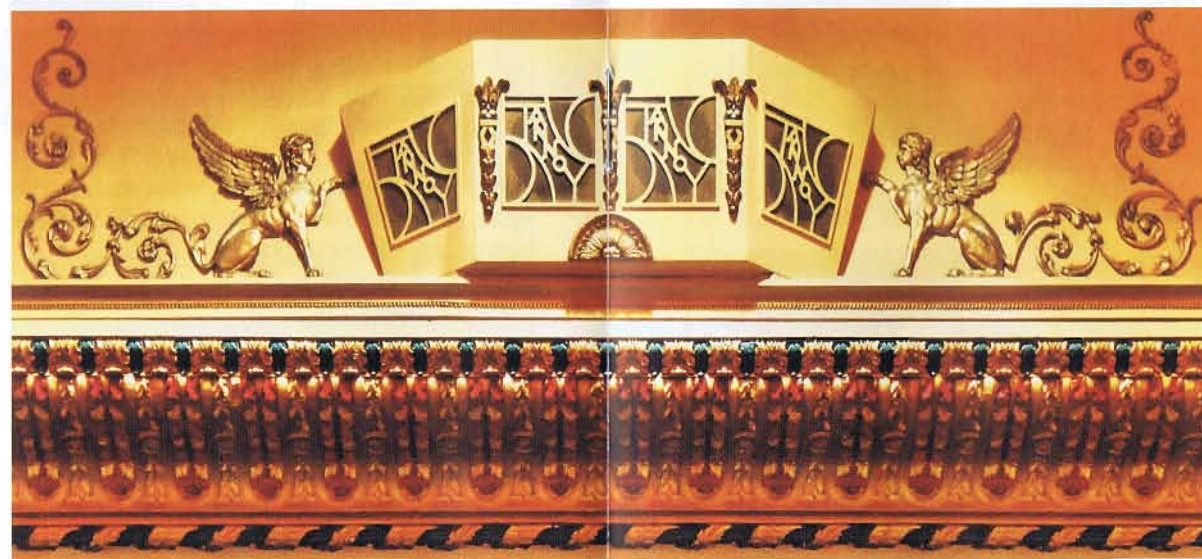
ABTT Member David Harvey lives locally and has recently successfully created some site-specific works at the theatre in the front of house areas. Using David's working relationship with the management the ABTT Historical Research Committee was able to visit the building in early March and Committee Member Tim Hatcher took these photographs.



Conductor's lift carried within the central orchestra pit elevator



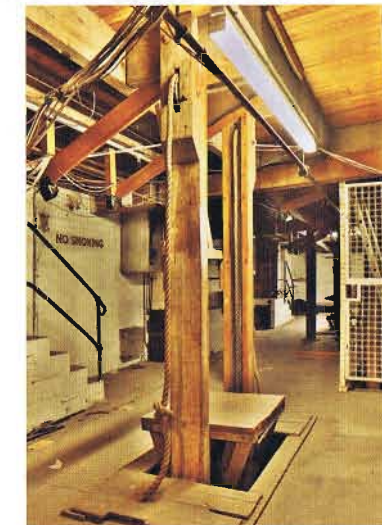
Dress Circle and Gallery



Detail of Tannoy loudspeakers



A weight still hangs on the house curtain guide wire after 55 years



Stage left trap in working order with ropes.