



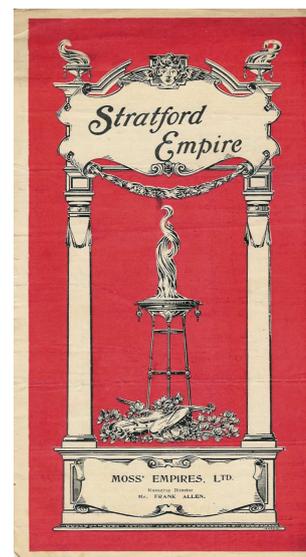
STRATFORD EMPIRE

1899 Opened
 1940 Destroyed by bombs and left derelict
 1958 Demolished

The Stratford Empire was one of the most famous music-halls in East London. It was designed by W.G. Sprague and opened in 1899. Its significance - along with the Empires at Holloway and New Cross - lay in that these were the first London venues of the ever-growing Moss Empire Circuit. Oswald Stoll and Sir Edward Moss had created the largest touring circuit in the country, and it was to become even bigger over the next decade.

By 1912 they owned or leased 29 theatres and were sole bookers for a further seven venues. Accordingly they were able to obtain the very best artists because they could guarantee non-stop work. For the forty years of its existence, the Stratford

Empire received every big name in music hall and variety. Marie Lloyd appeared there in July 1900, and June 1903, and the young Stanley Holloway recalled seeing her there on both occasions. The theatre was destroyed by bombs in 1940 and left derelict. It was finally pulled down in 1958.



STREATHAM GRAND THEATRE

1890 Opened
 1903 Closed and became a cinema
 1940 Closed

The Grand Theatre, Streatham was also known as the Town Hall Theatre—a misleading name since it had nothing whatsoever to do with the municipality. It opened in 1890 on the junction of Streatham High Road and Gleneagle Road and lasted just 13 years before it closed and eventually became a cinema. It was demolished in 1940.

STREATHAM HILL THEATRE

1929 Opened
 1944 Destroyed by bombs
 1950 Rebuilt and reopened
 1962 Closed and used for bingo
 2010 Still in use as a bingo hall.

The Streatham Hill Theatre opened on 18 November 1929 with C.B.Cochran's "Wake Up and Dream". The opening ceremony was performed by the actress, Evelyn Laye. It was designed by W.G. Sprague (his last of some 40 theatres) and W.H.Barton. For many of its early years it was run in partnership with the Golders



Green Hippodrome and was frequently a first port of call for major West End touring productions, receiving such tours as the Drury Lane "Glamorous Nights" and the John Gielgud "Hamlet".

On 3rd July 1944 it was destroyed by a direct hit from a V1 Rocket. The building was left derelict until 1950, when it was rebuilt to the original designs. It then sadly shared the fate of many other theatres in the television age and closed at the start of the 1960s. In 1962 it was taken over by Mecca and the building underwent some alteration for use by wrestling and then bingo. The seating was removed from the stalls, though the circle seating and the stage equipment remained. Mecca sold it to a private company which currently (2010) runs it as a bingo club.

STREATHAM ODEON

- 1930 Opened as the Astoria
- 1960 Renovated and modernised. Renamed Odeon
- 1979 Tripled
- 1991 A fourth cinema added. Stage removed
- 2001 Re-designed as an eight-screen multi-plex

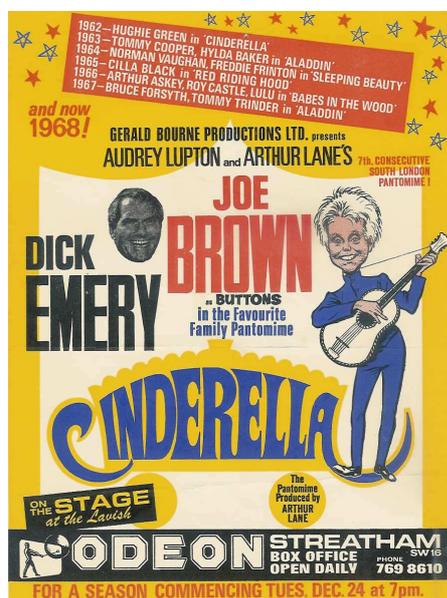
On 30 June 1930 the Astoria, Streatham opened as a luxury cine-variety with 2,614 seats. It had a large stage with an especially wide proscenium opening with 32 counterweight flying bars and ten large dressing rooms. It was designed in an “Egyptian” style and was clearly intended for use as a major cine-variety house. In its first few years it played a combination of live entertainment in between films every weekday—but on Sundays it was only permitted to show films.

In 1939 the Astoria Chain was sold to Oscar Deutsch and his Odeon chain. Oscar eliminated the stage shows to save cost. The Rank Organisation acquired Odeon Theatres following Oscar Deutsch's sudden death in 1941. The Astoria remained in cinema use, though by the early 1950s some stars would occasionally appear onstage to promote their films.

On 2 September 1960 the Astoria closed and the builders moved in, immediately sweeping away all the Egyptian murals and decorative lighting. Two weeks later the venue reopened with a new name - the Odeon. The old orchestra pit was covered and the dressing rooms sealed off.

In 1967 the Rank Organisation formed its own live show department. Streatham Odeon was converted back to a cine-variety with many things removed in 1961 having to be re-installed, the dressing rooms renovated and the screen put onto a frame which could be then flown out and up to the grid to allow for stage performances.

The first stage presentations were the Festival Ballet’s “Swan Lake” and “Nutcracker”. Christmas 1968 and 1969 saw two pantomimes running 3 - 4 weeks each: the first with Joe Brown and Dick Emery in Cinderella, and the following year Peter Noone, Herman's Hermits and Norman Vaughan in Aladdin. Odeon would not allow the cinema to remain dark on Sundays, so Saturday night saw the lowering of the screen down from the grid, the stage speakers put back and then a double re-issue programme of films presented. Then it was back to the live show on the Monday.



One night stands during the period 1971-73 included the Four Tops, Stevie Wonder and the Supremes, with further visits from the Ballet.

Another Christmas pantomime was staged in 1974; Cinderella again with Tony Blackburn and his then wife Tessa Wyatt. The last public stage show was in December 1978 with a concert from Ian Dury and the Blockheads.

In 1979 the cinema was “tripled” and all stage performances ceased. The balcony area formed one cinema seating 1095, with a new screen suspended in front of the balcony. The stalls rear stalls were adapted into two smaller cinema spaces. The stage and backstage areas were now unused and unusable spaces behind the cinemas.

In 1991 a fourth cinema was added—this time occupying the stage area. Ten years later the venue underwent further re-construction, ending up as an eight-screen multiplex.

(Much information supplied by Geoff Gill, formerly Chief Technician at the Odeon)



CTA Archive



The new screen placed in front of the balcony.
The old safety curtain can be seen behind.