

Streatham was the area in my life as a young teenager where there was some glamour.

Now I didn't have very sort of high standards - my favourite place was the Wimpy bar - but a great luxury for me was the cheeseburger and chips at the Wimpy and opposite there was the Streatham Locarno, which had a peacock-like decoration on the doorway and you went there on Saturday afternoon and it was where you met other young people and you danced to a rock and roll band.

English rock and roll was in its infancy and I'd passed on from being a follower of traditional jazz to becoming a mod and I had a box jacket and cloth coloured buttons and Dents and Pointer shoes and I remember the bus conductor on the double decker bus and that stretch of road in Streatham saying "Stret'am Lorcano, all the mods get off!" and they all looked very sort of ashamed of themselves as they left the bus.

But there was that little stretch of dual carriageway and there was a record shop called Fisher's Music Salon on the corner facing the Streatham Hill Theatre and I'd taken to working there Friday night and all day Saturday for 25 shillings and it's the freedom that along from it was a Chinese restaurant and we had a menu and me and my friends would work out what we could afford and the meal that we were going to have at the Chinese restaurant and there was a great cinema and there was Streatham Hill Theatre and the Royal Ballet used to come - that was one of the visiting companies came to the Streatham Hill Theatre - and so the coffee bar that I used to use and go and get the coffees for Fisher's Music Salon you would actually see dancers in the coffee bar and I thought the women were so beautiful.

It was the real treat and that was it was the centre of the world for me Streatham, it was it had glamour and in Leigham Court Road there was a hairdressers and it had all these pictures in the window of men with college boy haircuts - this is what you aimed for - and I spent all this money and I came out and I thought I looked like Hitler without the moustache I didn't think it worked at all. but around that area of Leigham Court Road there were some flats which had an outdoor swimming pool and Americans and Canadians, they lived there, and it was a very glamorous place to me and when I say that to people now they find it hard to imagine that Streatham was ever glamorous but I've just been looking at some of the interiors of Streatham Hill Theatre and it looks rather sort of garish and a bit sort of a bit sort of candy floss in its colouring but the man that designed it, Sprague, he designed Wyndham's theatre in the West End.

I've done three shows at Wyndham's and it's a beautiful theatre and he worked for four years with Matcham, who was the great theatre architect of Britain. I've toured Britain three times and I've worked in lots of Matcham theatres and they're beautiful theatres. Acoustically they really work very well. The people that build modern theatres, they've lost the knowledge the touch or anything and those places are extraordinary and I can remember going to the Streatham Hill Theatre and seeing a touring version of a play by Keith Waterhouse called Billy Liar and I saw Tom Courtney as Billy Liar at the Streatham Hill Theatre.

It's a long time ago and I can't remember much about it but I think we should try and hang on to that that building in whatever way it could work and maybe it could be adaptable and maybe it could take touring shows but it should keep its life. It shouldn't become some warehouse or something, because I can remember in South London there are all sorts of

cinemas and things which haven't really survived and I think it's a shame because London is such an important place to get about and see things.

As a student I loved Marlon Brando and my knowledge of London was based on seeing Marlon Brando films wherever they were. I travelled to Tooting for the first time of my life to see Marlon Brando play Napoleon. And the Streatham Hill Theatre there's a magic to it which somehow shouldn't be let go because we had a wonderful working class vivid pride in going out to the theatre and that is encompassed in that building and should, if we can, it should be hung on to somehow.

The two areas in London that that were important to me were Streatham and Soho, very, very different places but in retrospect now, I've worked in theatres designed by Sprague, the Wyndhams three times and I did a year at the Criterion. I've done the Duke of York's twice, so Soho and I went to Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and that was on the fringes of Soho so Soho was a magical place and they used to give tickets for shows that weren't doing well to the drama schools and there was a famous Irish actor, or perhaps he was an Englishman pretending to be Irish, I can't remember, called Michael McClellan - I managed to see him three times I saw him in a play where he was Hitler in an old people's home and it was a theatre and I went to a matinee and there were old ladies and they were having cups of tea and biscuits.

It was a world that was rather sort of old-fashioned and extraordinary and Soho was a very friendly place. I mean the strip clubs were rather very pleasant places to go to. There was a great sort of camaraderie to the whole thing and Streatham to me was something American about it. It was partly that sort of dual carriageway near the Locarno and the girl who worked in the record shop she was an Irish girl and she came from Thornton Heath and she used to call it "Thornton Heath" and she'd come to work there and it was...

I'd cycle to the record shop, park my bike and I'd be there Friday and all day Saturday and I loved Streatham. It was it was a very... I used to go to the cinema there was an ABC cinema and it's where I saw my first Pinter play which was a film of *The Caretaker* and I was... it was the first time I was really aware of falling in love with writing and I saw Robert Shaw play Aston at the ABC and I got to play that years later on the television I got to play Aston. Aston has this extraordinary piece of writing this extraordinary speech and eventually it was mine and it was on the television. When you do something like that on the television many, many people see it and that was my first exposure to Pinter was in the cinema at the ABC

<http://streathamhilltheatre.org/kenneth-cranham-remembers-streatham-hill>