

Get Ahead

What a life I've had. So lucky to be created at the right time, when a classic style hat mattered. I could make an impact in so many different situations, exude success, professionalism and authority. Sadly, fashions have changed now. Style is a rare sight amongst the mobs of baseball caps which only adverts or slogans can differentiate.

My start wasn't easy, a middle class trilby for sale in the East End where most workers wore flat caps. I was boxed for months in Dunn & Co's Whitechapel branch until a local man was promoted. My crown became his foreman's symbol of authority, making him a King amongst serfs. I signalled his position for twenty years until he retired and, though he had cared for my felt, I thought the move to a charity shop would be curtains for me.

But fashions recycle, style always wins in the end. I was rediscovered when trilbys returned to favour with the Mods and Reggae bands in the 1960s. I appeared on Top of the Pops once and at the Isle of Wight Festival in 1971. Leonard Cohen was there, famous for his trilby. He didn't wear me but I like to think he admired me on another performer.

That was before I started my stage career. How fortunate I was to spend my later years in the wardrobe at the Haymarket Theatre. For those who know their Hat History this is where my style got its name. One of my early versions was used in the play *Trilby* at this theatre in 1895 and the hat became very popular for several years after.

I can't remember all the plays I appeared in but I can claim to have been on some famous actors' heads, Laurence Olivier, Kenneth Branagh and Albert Finney amongst many before I was finally discarded to the Scouts Jumble.

I'm in retirement now, bought by a nice family for their dressing up box. No pressure to impress everyday, just at special times. Both the parents and children use me. Last year the dad appeared as Frank Sinatra in a Tribute Band and I was his perfect headgear. And Danny, his son, is into amateur dramatics and he is planning to wear me as James Bond in a school play.

Anyway, it's a story without end yet. And, to progress from Whitechapel via Rock Music to the West End stage, I can certainly claim to be a hat that got ahead.

Word Count 411