

Frank Flood Transcript

Frank Flood
b. 1958

(What was the first film you remember seeing in Brighton?)

Well I came to Brighton in 1981? So it would've been something at the Duke of Yorks. I'm trying to think back, the Duke of York's was very run down those days. Apparently it had gone through a stage of having Bingo in it in the afternoons and only showing films in the evening. By the time I got to Brighton it was largely inhabited by dope-smoking students. It was a bit of a fleapit to be honest. I'm trying to think, among the earliest things I remember seeing here in that period would have been something like... There was rerun of 'Doctor. Strangelove' when we all thought we were gonna die in a nuclear holocaust, this was Thatcher/Reagan era I remember there were quite a lot of anti-nuke films, things like 'The Atomic Cafe' was screened here. But there was a rerun of 'Doctor Strangelove' - a 1960's antinuclear comedy I suppose, a black comedy. And that was on a double bill with 'The War Game' - Peter Watkins film about the aftermath of nuclear war. Very jolly thing to remember seeing here. But there were an awful lot of art house revivals in the early 1980's, You'd get double bills and triple bills of movies from the 60's and 70's and I used to go to a lot of those. And it's fair to say that alcohol was imbibed and other intoxicants may have been used. It was very much that sort of time in the Duke's. As I say, a fairly run down, sort of... It went through several changes of ownership I think during the 80's and 90's and I think really it's only been restored to anything like it's previous glory in the last ten or fifteen years under, well I have to say excellent present management.

(I don't really know about any of the other cinemas)

Oh well there were dozens - They were mostly closed down by the time I got to Brighton. I think really, You know, compared to the people who are gonna be interviewed who grew up in Brighton, they will have been able to go to places like the 'Astoria' which of course is now awaiting demolition sadly but has now been converted into a bingo hall and that was the fate of a lot of cinemas that were open in Brighton during the 60's, 70's, 80's. Some of the people I work with who are the same age as me but grew up in the area, they can remember going up on Western Road, they can remember going to The Embassy further down Western Road, they can certainly remember going to the Astoria or going to the new Cinema up near the Clock tower. That was one that I did get to go to in it's last incarnation. The place that's now Burger King, does actually still have a bit of the old cinema auditorium in the back apparently potentially it could be used for screenings but they'd rather use it for storing burger buns or whatever. But that was, the old Cinescene and I remember going there in the early 1980's, that was, again, a rather wonderful, slightly eccentric operation - it seemed to be fronted by an old couple, one of whom

sort of ran the box office and I think she baked the cakes as well. They weren't very good cakes. And the old bloke he actually stood there as front of house and he stood there and showed you to your seats and ripped your tickets and stuff and they were very sweet. And I remember going to see 'Gregory's Girl' there with a couple of friends and it's the last time I remember being in a cinema, falling off my seat with laughter and literally rolling in the aisles, and I don't think I was the only one. Very much of it's era I watched it again a couple of years ago and although it was funny I don't think it was as funny as I thought it was in the early 1980's but, yeah that was quite a nice little cinema and you got a sense of how it would've been in the old days, 'cause that was open from the early 1920's onward, but it was really almost the last survivor, I was just too late to get to Lewes Road which had become the 'Vogue' and then the 'Classic' and that closed in 1979 I think. But I was talking to Jimmy, the projectionist here this morning and in fact he started his projection career up at the old Vogue which was notorious because by that stage it had 'Blue Movies' as we used to say in the 1970's in the evenings and at lunchtimes instead of showing films they had live strip shows! So it was really down market! Really sleazy but poor old Jimmy aged 17, his job was to entertain the strippers for the afternoon and pick up their underwear after their routines... What a tough job for a 17-year-old, ay! Shocking really

(What's a blue movie?)

Oh god! You're probably too young! Blue movies were the sort of, they were the pornography of their day, but you know, of course, it would seem unbelievably innocent now. There were a lot of bosoms and possibly a little bit more on occasion but nothing like the sort of stuff that you get at the click of a button nowadays. It was all very 'rite of passage', very eliciting going to your first blue movie. Not that I went to any of course! But it's the sort of thing that 15 and 16 year olds would do after they'd had a few illicit drinks down the pub, they'd sort of egg each other on to go to something like that. I mean before I came to Brighton I do remember when I was 16 probably we'd been drinking in my home town and we did actually go to see something called 'Deadly Weapons' which had probably played in Brighton as well I suppose or possibly at the Continental up in Kempton which was also notorious for that sort of thing. And 'Deadly Weapons' was billed as; it's shocking how much of this I remember! But it starred a woman called 'Chesty Morgan', I will leave you to guess why she was called Chesty Morgan but certainly the handle said something like 74 23 32 36, seeing is believing and she was in a film called 'Deadly Weapons' and sadly I still remember that all these decades later, must've traumatised me. Anyway yeah that's what blue movies were, they were sort of naughty things from Europe or very occasionally the States that would be shown at the down-at-heel cinemas like the poor old Vogue or the Continental which of course then got converted into flats. One of my great regrets is not going to the Continental because that was open until sort of '84 and was just down the street from where I was living in Kempton but it was only showing smut and by that stage I was in my 20's and you know what, when you're out of your teens and before entering your dirty raincoat phase in your 60's or 70's you probably didn't need that sort of thing

anymore. But I regret not going to the Continental because it would've been nice to add that one to my list. Other than that I'm trying to think of other cinemas that aren't open anymore. The ABC as it was which used to be. What was it called? Before my time. But that's one that's down East Street. If you're going down towards the seafront. And I think It's now a lap dancing club or something similar but that was an ABC cinema and something else before that, Savoy or something I think for many a long year, I remember going to it in the 1980's. That's the cinema that can be seen very, very briefly in the background of 'Quadrophenia' so if you ever watch it, again that's probably before your time but you've heard of it surely, it was set in 1964, Mods and rockers, so yeah the ABC appears very briefly in the background of that. So yeah, that was a cinema. The Cinematech in Middle Street, that showed, very much arty, alternative fair and was really kind of a 50-seater cinema/club. That one is now, well I don't know what the actual room is used for I don't know if it's got any of the original seating or what but younger people might know the frontage of it as 'Sticky Mike's Frog Bar' yeah, Sticky Mike's, well Sticky Mike's used to be the frontage of the Brighton Media Centre and the Cinematech was kind of part of the Media Centre and that showed very sort of arty alternative sort of fair and was famous for late night screenings. It was also famous because every Christmas, they'd lose money all year on these arty films, and then every Christmas they'd have a kind of fundraiser where they'd show Laurel and Hardy films back to back and that was always a sell-out because everybody wanted to go and see Laurel and Hardy so yes, so that sort of made up for the rest of the year. So yeah, great stuff, great times at the cinematech and that would've been in the 90's particularly I suppose. I mean the Odeon down the King/West Odeon. That's been going every since I was in Brighton, The dreadful thing at the Marina, that was opened in the 1990's, who's that? Cineworld. Who now own this as well, strangely enough. So yeah there is that as well.

(So are there three cinemas?)

There's here and of course there's the Odeon and there's the one at the Marina and I suppose you ought to and that there is Duke's at Komedia. It's part of the same Picture House organisation as this one.

(Were there any that you found it difficult to get in? anything that was really popular)

I think because my taste was always more art house and eclectic stuff anyway, I haven't got any great memories of having to queue round the block for, you know, major block busters or things like that - I can remember some films that inexplicably got very popular, particularly at the Duke's and you'd actually be fighting for the last seat, but that wasn't like a Star Wars experience or anything like that, it'd be some obscure art house film, I seem to remember well, obscure relatively speaking, but I seem to remember 'Wings of Desire' in the late 80's and you know, word of mouth spread and it was this film you had to see and it got very, very rammed, as I say you'd be fighting people for the last seat in the balcony, you know, stuff like that.

But yeah, I mean my memories are more sort of either, when I was a student sort of going in the afternoons when there was like 6 people in the audience, or alternatively going for late nighters. And that would be, well it would be an excuse for hedonism, the films themselves would be fairly hedonistic, sort of trash horror or whatever and you would've had a few jars and there would be a certain amount of heckling from the audience and shouting out of various things and probably substances being imbibed. Certainly my wife remembers coming to the Duke's in the late 70's and hardly being able to see the screen because of the hash smoke. I don't know what movie she was going to watch but I think I was more of an all round sensory experience - You know, a lot of it was very ad hock. One night this would've been, I don't know 1990's probably, I was out drinking with some friends and it was Saturday night and it got to sort of quarter to 11 and someone seized a handbill and realised that 'ABBA: The Movie" was the late nighter at the Duke's so we all had to charge off to the Duke's en masse, like 20 of us and we all had to go and see ABBA the movie and we all sat on the balcony singing along. As you would really.

(So were you one of these, as you call them 'dope smoking students'?)

Oh no I couldn't possibly comment! Was it Bill Clinton who said "I never inhaled". I think there's probably a generation of outwardly respectable 50 something's in Brighton who have been here for 30 or 40 years and had a hedonistic time at the time. And I wasn't into going clubbing and raving so much as I was into sitting down and enjoying myself with a good movie. And the Duke's out of all the places in Brighton, certainly in my time was the best place to do it, you know earlier generations would certainly have their own favourites, I mentioned the Astoria, and the classic one that went long before my time was the Regent which is, you know where the Boots is up near the Clock Tower? I mean that whole building, was basically the Regent and there was a massive dance hall upstairs as well. People used to go to the movies first and then go upstairs for the dancing after and you know that was the complete entertainment package. So I think that sort of grandeur had gone, certainly by the 1980's it had all gone sort of down at hell and seedy. And the 80's and 90's were grim years for cinema going anyway you know everybody was watching TV and they had videotapes as well Okay, and so you know, you actually felt like you were in the minority actually. Since cinema audiences have started increasing again it feels more like a mainstream pursuit. But in the 80s and 90s it was more 'alternative lifestyle choice'

(So did you ever watch films at home?)

Well I was living in a student house and we hired our first video recorder when they were a really big novelty item in about 1983 and it was, you could kind of see the writing was on the wall, at that point, that people were gonna go for home entertainment, this was crappy video on a crappy 20 inch old fashioned TV screen but even so, the idea that you could get a few beers in and get some mates round and watch a video for the evening suddenly become the thing. Personally I always thought, you know, let's get out and sit in the cinema. and no matter how seedy or

cold or drafty it is. And you know, the port old Duke's, it let the rain in a bit and they had to have the roof repaired in the late 1980's 'cause it was letting the rain in in places. That always appealed to me more than anything else. But like anyone else, the technology improves and you just get very complacent, like why do I have to go out? why do I have to spend money? And that sort of thing. And it's a social experience as well I think that's absolutely crucial as well, I have to say, even if I do go along to the movies these days on my own. I will probably meet people I know who are like-minded people who are into the same sort of movies as me, and we'll maybe go for coffee afterwards, have a chat that sort of thing. I mean the great thing is it's something you can do at any age pretty much and it doesn't demand any particular physical aptitude other than the ability to sit down. And stay awake for two hours. I'm pretty good at both of those I like to think.