
Disclaimer: This document was written in 1994 and concerns memories of 1930s life; as such there may be opinions expressed or words used that do not meet today's norms and expectations.

- * Transcript ID: JF-95-153PL001
- * Scan ID: JF-95-153PL001
- * CCINTB Document ID: 95-153-1a-o
- * Number of pages: 15
- * Date sent: 13 December 1994
- * Transcribed by: TP Transcription Limited/Standardised by Jamie Terrill
- * Format: Letter
- * Details: from John Fowler to Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold
- * Notes: This transcription has rendered the original text as written, including some spelling and grammatical errors. Letter written in response to call for cinemagoing memories published in the *Mature Tymes*.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Sudbury

SUFFOLK

[redacted]

13/2/94

Dear Ladies,

In reference to your request in "Mature Tymes" ref the cinema back in the 1930s. I was a schoolboy in the era, and then the cinema was a big part in everyone's life. We lived in the Port Dundas area of Glasgow then and looking back what I remember is the number of cinemas and music halls around.

In our area then the main, and I would say biggest was Astoria, in Possil Rd, now the County Bingo. One of my memories of the

2

Astoria was the French chocolate nougat, that they sold. Never, nowhere have I ever tasted any sweets like it, heavenly. Don't remember the admission price, probably 3 or 4d but they always showed the popular films of the time, and quite often it was full, and there would be standing room,

at the back, only. Then they had a waiting room, and the patrons were prepared to stand in a long crocodile to see the film, that was changed bi-weekly, not just one but two films.

Moving from the Astoria, and between it and the Round Toll on the R/H side was the Magnet

3

this was the bug hutch. It was housed in, I would say the basement part of a slum tenement, and the admission was 1D. The projection equipment was suspect, and there was frequent breakdowns, this caused the loudest catcalls and feet stamping. Their best of best feature was the serial or “following up” which always ended at a crucial part, and the patrons had to come back next week, to find out.

Next on the tour was the Phoenix, that was a down from the Round Toll, to-towards Cowcaddens. This took us through the slum tenement

4

of Garscube Rd, an area of great deprivation. The Phoenix - could be seen from Garscube Road, but was sited in Sawmillfield St. Never patronised the Phoenix, as it backed onto the canal, and had a pungent odour.

Then to Cowcaddens was the “New Grand”, don’t know why it was called “New” possibly it had been rebuilt. This a very nice cinema, though still catering for the poorer masses. I can still picture this, I would call him concierge. He had a lovely uniform, a double-breasted well-tailored uniform, an immaculate white shirt, and

5

highly polished shoes, waxed moustache, and never wore a cap. On reflection I wonder if he was also the manager. There was an old lady outside, summer and winter selling Seville oranges ½ D each. Again, its programme was two films changed bi weekly.

Round the corner was the Cambridge, almost opposite Stow College. Next to The Cambridge was a bakers called “Cakeland” this almost as much entertainment as the cinema, as they had a long frontage and one could watch the process from flour to the finished cakes. I can’t say for certain on this, but I understood that

6

the Cambridge was the site of Hengler’s German Circus. But that was before my time.

Back to travel along Cowcaddens to Hope St, now here we go upmarket. There was two Gaumont cinemas on Hope St and the other in Sauchiehall St. One was the Savoy and the other simply the Gaumont. I couldn't afford to frequent these cinemas so I waited till they came to the Astoria or the Grand. Now opposite in Sauchiehall St was a very elegant cinema, whose name I can't recall, I only went there once as a special treat [possibly: La Scala]. What I do remember is that down

7

the right hand side was a glass screened tea room that was posh. Three tiered cake stands. We could never afford to use this facility, but I would imagine it was wired for sound, so one could have afternoon tea and watch the film at the same time.

Further along Sauchiehall St was another cinema, that perhaps was called the Regal, then there was another small cinema near Charing Cross on the right hand side [possibly: Charing Cross Electric Theatre]. The next street was Renfield St, and there was the famous Greens [sic] Playhouse, which I believe to have been the biggest in Europe.

8

Further down Renfield St, just below Bath Street, was another cinema, I am not sure, it might have been Regent [possibly also Cranston's]. I went there special to see a film called "Love on the Dole" whose release had been delayed as it was considered subversive. Didn't think much of it. Further down there was Glasgow's premier Cinema the Paramount, now the Odeon. Then there was as small cinema on the right side, also similar to the one in Jamaica Street [likely: Grand Central].

Hope the is not boring you too much, but I would like to take you back and the North side.

In Saracen St, just past

9

Saracen Cross on the left hand side, was the Possil. That was also pretty cheap probably 1D, and I remember on several occasions going to a matinee for admission fee one jam jar. Round the corner at the corner of Balmore Rd and Hawthorne St was the Mecca/Avon a nice cinema, it was there I saw a drama whose title I forget: the villain was slowly poisoning his wife. In the cinema every thing was deadly silent, you could have heard a pin drop. When an aged lady, unable to contain herself, shouted at the top of her voice "you dirty swine" she was that carried away

10

by the intensity of it all. Then there was The Kinema in Springburn Rd, just round from Keppochhill Rd. This abutted onto Sighthill cemetery, and the people reckoned it was coffin shaped.

All the shows in the local cinemas were bi weekly, and were continuous showings, so if was a good film we stopped in to see it several times.

The films that I liked the best as a young boy were the adventure and cowboy films. The times I have seen the stagecoach, pursued by the

11

But the comedy films, were the finest, and must great business for the cinema. Lucan and McShane, who were Old Mother Riley and her daughter Kitty, always had an extended run, George Formby, as the gormless lad, was always a sure fire hit. Frank Randle, Lancashire lad. Then there was one called "Alf's Button Afloat" which I think was an early Crazy Gang. There was Charlie Chan detective. Great stuff, and what the epic "King Kong" what technology, for the early cinema, Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde, and Bela Lugosi as

12

Count Dracula how did we ever get in to see them. Then there was the wonderful "All Quiet on the Western Front" with Lew Ayers and Slim Summerville. Lew Ayers gave a great performance, and I was not surprised to hear that he was an objector to World War 2. He went on to great success in the "Dr Kildare" series with that other great actor Lionel Barrymore.

Generally speaking by the late 1930s it was all talking films but there was still some [silent films] around in cinemas such as the Magnet and Possil. I suppose it

13

was all down to finance.

There was all the great comedies to see for a few coppers [referring to a small amount of money]. Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, W.C. Fields, Keystone Kops, etc etc. However in a good number of films they always had good characters, like in the Westerns they had Gabby Hayes as the old timer, they were always around we didn't know, or I suppose care, who they were but there support made the films.

Here's hoping that this information, such as it is, can be of some help to you. Of all the cinemas I listed only the ODEON Renfield [Street], and possibly

14

the ones at Jamaica St and Charing Cross [referring to cinemas that remained open at time of writing].

The Astoria and Mecca/Avon remain as Bingo halls.

Lastly, there was where we used to go for our holidays, Saltcoats in Ayrshire, once a very popular resort.

There was a nice cinema in Countess St next to the town hall, and would you believe called The Countess. Moving along to Hamilton Street, opposite to each other was the Regal and La Scala. Both owned then by Harry Kemp, who also owned several amusement arcades. I would say he was a most successful Business man.

15

On a recent journey to Largs I noticed the amusement arcades were operating his logo.

Should any his descendants at all be running the business, no doubt they would be glad to help you with your research.

Well I seem to have gone on a bit, and I am sure most of the information is pretty useless.

If however you should require any further information don't hesitate to call me on 01787 376659

Yours Faithfully

John Fowler