

Summary - Victor Gallucci

Born in 1942 in North London, Muswell Hill, after this I lived in Soho for a few years.

My parents, father owned a couple of garages in Muswell Hill, they were Roots agents and my Mother worked in the kitchens at a school, then we moved to Kingston.

Cinema as a child? I called it the Corridor of Entertainment, the first cinema was the Century Elite, then the Granada lastly the Kinema, the flea pit but an upper class flea pit, also the ABC Cinema and the Empire Theatre opposite the Granada which also showed occasional films. On Friday and Saturday nights there was a lot to do.

Century Elite generally showed older films, Granada a great cinema which showed the latest releases and the Kinema which had third run movies, they had done the rounds of the other cinema chains and then ended up at the Kinema, ABC had its own run of ABP films, just a great variety of pictures.

Cinema with my family, the only time I went with Mum and Dad was to see a film about St. Bernadette, I was bored out of my skull. Mum and Dad were hard workers and didn't have much leisure time as they opened the first delicatessen in Kingston.

Saturday morning pictures, I went all the time; never really saw the film due to all the children shouting and screaming. Children's Film Foundation began making quality films for children. I loved Saturday Morning Pictures.

Cinema as a youngster was pure escapism, there was television but only two channels couldn't watch TV and escape.

Once in the Kinema I saw some strange looking people in the front row and could smell smoke, all those in the front row had stolen all the brass ashtrays. Also in the Kinema sometimes when a film was showing the doorman or projectionist would go to the boiler room and shovel coal into the boiler, we could all see this happening. In the Kinema expect the unexpected.

Interest in film, working in cinema. I would often walk past the Kinema and the manager was very friendly so I asked about a job, I was only fifteen and too young, but he said I could work on Saturdays rewinding the film later I was allowed to open the projector. I had to get a letter from my Dad as I was only fifteen because they sometimes showed X rated films and I was only allowed to help with rewinding, not allowed to look through the porthole, however I did take a sneaky look at the film when rewinding it! That was how I started working in cinema, I worked for a number of years at the Kinema and then left to go to the ABC. Here I spent eighteen months as a trainee projectionist making sure rolls of film were ready for projection, clean down projectors, check reels and check carbons. Had to keep the projection room clean and polish floors.

The Kinema I remember the secondary lighting was gas which had to be checked regularly as the mantles got broken. Saturday night was publicity night, which I hated, had to change all the stills and posters.

Working Environment. The Kinema was quite sparse and the chief projectionist was hardly ever there. I left to go to Hammersmith and then came back to the ABC in Kingston, here they also did one night stands, pop stars from the US and UK would play the chain of ABC cinemas.

I worked sometimes at the Empire Theatre in Kingston where I operated the big spotlight. The ABC had installed Phillips projectors with four track stereo heads, it was a great time.

Working hours, I remember job and finish first shift started at 09.30 and if no one turned up for the second shift had to carry on until 10.30 at night! I always loved film so this wasn't a problem.

Pay was very good, at the Kinema I earned £2.10' a week and gave my Mum £2.00, at the ABC I earned £25.00 a week. I was a member of the Union, it kept control, we got pay rises every year or eighteen months through the Union, glad I was a union member.

Worst aspects? Not being able to go out with the best looking usherette

Best Aspects? I could see a future for myself, if you got fed up you could go somewhere else, so many cinemas around and not just in Kingston, as I could operate the Stelmar Spotlight worked at Empire Theatre when their staff were on holiday.

Perks of the job. Any of my friends could get in free as I had passes being on the staff.

Anything that went horribly wrong? I remember at the Kinema we showed a Russian film made up of eighteen reels which we had been showing in a certain order, when a lecturer from Kingston Poly came in one night and he could speak Russian and complained to the manager that the film didn't make sense because we had been showing it in the wrong order!

Wurlitzer Organ. I remember a former manager of ABC Cinemas would come and practice on the Wurlitzer at Kingston, he made recordings and live broadcasts from ABC Kingston. The organ was massive, all the pipework and workings behind the scenes.

Technology – how did it change your work? When I first started at ABC Kingston the projector light was produced by carbon arc, basically a massive spark that went from positive to negative, then the manufacturers bought in an auto arc which was supposed to adjust the gap between the carbons automatically rather than by hand but this never worked properly. Then we got Projectomatic, would start record player for background music, open curtains etc. Worked by a drum with pins inserted, it worked but I could never see the point of it as we did everything anyway. Devices called Pancakes were introduced, these were flat discs that could hold long reels of film and used a new light source a xenon lamp, they gave out a great light, only problem was they would explode, if they went half way through a film had to wait 45 minutes to replace it wearing an asbestos overall and mask and gloves. Anamorphic lenses were the next innovation, they used two mirrors but they buckled under the heat of the lamp. Nowadays all programming is done remotely, but still need someone on site to change lamps etc.

Musical events. The ABC had one night stands, these would only take place in certain cinemas and Kingston was one, I would go to the ABC in Croydon to learn the cues. Used to get lots of people in and it was a great time.

Cinema buildings. Kinema was built as a cinema, only small an arthouse cinema, ABC was designed for theatre and cinema nice clean fittings and clean auditorium, the sound came through the screen back in the day and everybody smoked so the screen got filthy with nicotine which we all had to help keep clean.

Saturday nights were exciting, the programme changed over, we were looking forward to the new programme.

How did cinemas in Kingston differ? At the Century Elite, if you sat in the front row you had to be a giraffe to look up at the screen, the Granada was a much nicer cinema, bigger screen and more

theatrical as was the ABC. The Kinema had a much smaller screen and the seats were very uncomfortable but the screen was watchable.

How did the team get on? I was very helpful so usually got to do the last showing until 11.00 at night while the first projectionist went down the pub. Most people got on with each other and then went their separate ways at the end of the day.

Did you ever date anyone? I dated an usherette from the ABC in Richmond, where did we go for our date? The Odeon cinema of course.

What was the work life balance like? My main interest was to get on in the film business, I used to meet up with production staff from studios rather than my cinema colleagues.

What about pecking order? At the ABC we had the Manager who was really nice many of the managers were ex-military. Assistant Managers tended to be aggressive as they wanted to get on in the business. There was the head Usherette, the lead Usherette and all the other usherettes underneath.

Opportunities for women? There were management positions, I knew a couple of lady managers, also jobs in the kiosks selling cigarettes etc., they were very good at this job.

What about gay and lesbian workers? Really didn't matter if you were gay or lesbian, if you were nice that was fine. No one talked about it back then.

How did the atmosphere change? On Mondays mainly pensioners would pack out the cinema, they never bought anything from the kiosk, mid-week you would get lovers and people having affairs and later in the week the general public would come, the atmosphere was different for all these groups.

Typical Saturday morning? Start by getting the programme ready, films all had to be checked and joined if broken. Make sure children didn't smoke, the girls would point out boys who did.

And Saturday night? If it was a big picture the audience would enjoy it and it would be a great evening, rock and roll films however people would rip up seats and damage toilet cisterns.

What was the worst behaviour you witnessed? Probably ripping up and throwing seats around, the worst time of all was when the manager told us to kill the film and bring up the lights. Also there could be a clash between the cinema audience and the pub goers outside in the street.

How about naughty behaviour? Well if it got too naughty the manager got called.

Any other events? Surry County Council had their own film censoring unit and would override the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) and alter the picture, one example is The Loved Ones, a film that Surry County Council didn't like and made lots of changes.

Pantomimes didn't happen at the cinemas I worked at, they happened at the Empire Theatre.

What was your last role in cinema? I had a job with the Chief Executive of ABC Cinemas, he had his own cinema on Kingston Hill where I worked as projectionist, it was a great job.

What are you most proud of? My work in the production side of movies, I worked for Peter Sellers finding money for movies and loved doing that job, this was a direct result of my jobs in cinema and film.

Anything else? I don't like the ways movies are projected these days, not the cinematic experience it used to be.