

Interview Transcript: Jim McManus Remembers Streatham



Staś Smagala 0:01

So, memories of Streatham with Jim McManus. So, you were saying, Jim about queueing for the cinema?

Jim McManus 0:09

Oh, well, I remember we were trying to get to... there was a film called Just William and was hugely successful. And the theatre was the cinema. The ABC in Streatham Hill was round the clock, round the block, with kids queuing up to that. And I remember because I remember it was the word "bloody tower" was used. Because they built it, they built a thing in the back gardens. And they called it the bloody tower. Because the Tower of London was known as the bloody tower. And I think it was about as clumsy, if you can imagine, as if somebody got a bit of cardboard and shoved it over the bottom part of the screen. And they turn the sound off, just before he said "We're going to take you to ... " and afterwards we're going ...

Staś 1:20

so, they edited, they censored out ...

Jim 1:23

They censored out the word "bloody"

Staś 1:25

Right.

Jim 1:26

And that was with the ABC Saturday, Saturday morning. Saturday morning people they ...

Staś 1:31

... literally turn the volume down ...

Jim 1:32

... they turned the volume off and but they held a piece of card up [...] so you couldn't see the action. Even if you would lip read, you couldn't even lip read.

Staś 1:47

Right. Oh, so on the projector they ...

Jim 1:49

They shoved a piece of code in front of the projector. And if you think back about some of, some of the some of the things you hear now, the "bloody tower".

Staś 2:01

I know. You went to school in Streatham.

Jim 2:05

Yes, Andrews St. Andrews and the primary school are attached to the Catholic Church. The big one is with a parish church with St. Leonard's that was CofE. There was a convent attached to the priest's house, was attached to the English Martyrs. So I went in with the English Martyrs and I thought was it ... the Catholic school was by Streatham Common - still there. St Andrews. And I remember this, what they told us that, what they talk about now, they say school dinners. You don't know you're alive these days. I actually

got taken before the headmistress Miss Bells, caned, and then because it was a Friday, Friday, Friday, and we used to then have to go walking, walking, we didn't even know it was called a "crocodile", but we just walking up to the English Martyrs from St. Andrew's School, where we then had the service of Benediction which is the blessing of the host. And on that one because I had made the journey that afternoon and walked through Streatham that they considered it was a terrible situation I was in because I had to walk in this file of crocodile with the other children holding hands probably carrying my lunch which had been fish and mashed potatoes. What we would call concrete mashed potatoes and does hideous - wish we could have pictures about this hideous mashed potatoes - that when you put your finger in if you pull your finger out of the mashed potatoes the crater that your finger had left in the potatoes would vanish as the potato assumed its proper form again. And, and I was really a bad boy from that, because I had to then carry my manila envelope from the headmistress's office. But they put the remains with my school lunch. That was not called lunch in those days, it was still dinners. And I had to take it home to my mom and in this brown envelope and to show her what a wasteful son she had ...

Stas 5:21

They put the food in the envelope?

Jim 5:23

They put the food in the envelope from the school dinners tray and to carry out to walk through stuff straight up Streatham High Road. I went to the English martyrs, and I had to leave it there. They didn't make me take it into the, into the church - they were wise enough about that. And it was waiting for me in the places when you sold the Catholic newspapers and that sort of thing afterwards, where you where you got your books and your literature, and I had to collect it afterwards, and then take it home to my mother. When she talks. All took a long while I was at this. This was a late school dinner, time we got it back to my mum who lived, we lived in Clapham Park.

Stas

So, you travelled from Clapham Park to Streatham to the school?

Jim

Yeah,

Stas 6:13

Right. Yeah.

Jim 6:14

Yeah.

Stas 6:15

Quite a distance.

Jim 6:16

Yeah. Then well, yes. All back to the to the English martyrs. And then my Mum. Mum. I had to bring this envelope, big, big envelope with all these fish and chip lunch. Efficient mashed potato, pom potato they were called, the creation of the devil. And, and so then the thing is, my dad was working in London. We came home that night and my mum said Jimmy's, Jimmy's had to bring his lunch home, bring his dinner home. That was it. Jimmy's had to bring his dinner home, it's all in that envelope over there by the draining board? To prove

what a wasteful child he's got. She had a funny little smile about what she was telling us. And my dad took one look at it "I don't know whether the cat will eat it, and if he does that'll be good for his dinner".

Stas 7:25

Do you you're telling me what's the one time about the trams?

Jim 7:29

The trams? Yeah

Stas 7:30

In Streatham you remember the trams?

Jim 7:32

You should try not to get, you lived in fear of your bicycle wheels going down the tram lines, because that would have been suicide. And, and it was another thing, the streets in those days were woodblocks. Everybody used to, used to, love the idea because they were re-surfacing the main road where the trams were, there was wood blocks, that were wood blocks and they were all soaked in tar. They were tar. And so when they were re-surfacing the road, everybody went, everybody in South London seem to, seem to suddenly discovered they had a pram left over from the war, which they've all produced we were the same were all produced and went down to the where, the where Tesco's is now, behind that pub and they've been and that's where the resurfacing stopped... when you come when the trains come down the hill ... the resurfacing work you know, the road was all pulled up and then a new bricks were put down. But the blocks that the old surface road surfaces was made, were tar, wood wood wood bricks but soaked in tar. So, if you could get about two to three of those and whack them in your fire - no such thing as a smokeless zone then - one of those blocks would burn for half a day.

Stas 9:24

So, you people took the blocks and put them in their fires?

Jim 9:41

Yeah. You get in enough blocks, about half a dozen blocks, that would that would do for fuel for a week. London was sick with fog. I mean I was young - I'm old enough to remember the killer fog of the 50s. I'm not surprised it was important at all we use what we used to put on our fires in the 40s. But because there was all this, you couldn't get you couldn't get ... as soon as they they'd ripped the road up, there was other kids will be there with their, with their, with their prams. I was one of them and getting these tar blocks, and I'm rambling now so 'night.

<http://streathamhilltheatre.org/jim-mcmanus-actor-remembers>