

ANDY

Clare (C) interviewing Andy (A)

Extract 1: 22.31 – 29.43

CLUBS IN THE '60s: THE A&B. THE CHEPSTOW. THE SALISBURY. THE GIGOLO.

I got introduced to a club that nowadays nobody will remember, except the oldies, people of my generation. It was called the A & B Club, which stood for The Arts and Battledress Club.

C: What sort of era was this?

A: Well, that was the '60s.

C: OK.

A: That happened before I went up to university, so that would have been before 1965, so I was about eighteen or nineteen at the time, and ... it was one of these left over clubs from wartime, when it was strictly illegal, of course, to be gay, to have gay affairs, but there were lots of servicemen in London on leave, and there were lots of people who were willing to give them a bed for the night in exchange for a bit of a cuddle and, you know, maybe some affection. And it was left over from there. It was on the top floor of a house in ... opposite the beginning of Lyle Street in Soho, and it was actually great fun to be a member there. You went up some stairs past a Chinese restaurant and past some doors labelled Lola, or Kitty, or something like that, and you went up to the very top floor and you were in an ordinary bar, and at the back there was the tiniest of patios, and it was just a little she-she gay club. Completely away from everybody down there on ... on Wardour Street and Lyle Street.

C: How would people you become a member?

A: By being introduced.

C: Right.

A: So this chap that I mentioned who was a brother of a friend of mine was ... introduced me and I got my membership there. It wasn't a ... I don't think I had to pay more than a shilling to join the ... forever! But I did have to have the membership card, 'cos I had to ... at the top of the last flight of the stairs in the building, you had to knock on a door and a tiny little hatch would open, and you showed your card and the door would open, right? That means they'd seen you. They'd vetted you. So you went up another ... the last, the very last flight of stairs and then you were in this upstairs bar, and it was great fun. There were lots of people there being themselves, to the extent that it was possible, and I got to know where people went to dance and where people went to meet people and so on. It was ... it was an interesting experience.

There were other gay places in the area that I knew. One of them was a pub called The Chepstow which is in Chepstow Place near Paddington, and the draw of The Chepstow was that it had a drag cabaret act upstairs. Hugely popular, always jam-packed and lots of laughter, and lots of singing and lots of jollity and occasionally I scored with ... with some guys there, but the main thing was that I felt that I was part of a kind of, slightly, underground, well actually underground gay community. I didn't actually ... I didn't actually verbalise that to myself but that was one of the things that nourished me when I was round about seventeen, eighteen and ... as an undergraduate.

Well, one of the other places that London had was a very famous gay pub called The Salisbury, which is still called The Salisbury and it's in ... it's in St Martin's Lane, and that was a very popular gay pub, but it was only a pub. It didn't have any acts in it. It was basically a kind of ... a cross between a little kind of place for people to rest after work and a pick up joint. It still looks now the way it looked then. Very old fashioned, Victorian plush ... plush sofas and mahogany and stuff. It's very attractive. No longer a gay pub. So between The Chepstow and The Salisbury there was another gay pub that I loved to go which was a club called The Gigolo. Now have you heard of any of these places?

C: Some, but not The Gigolo, no.

A: Right. The Gigolo was a place that I went to almost every Saturday evening. It was ... it was a cellar in ... underneath a restaurant in a square in Chelsea called Poulton Square, which is actually a little square just on The Kings Road. As you go down the Kings Road it's the street ... the thoroughfare is called Kings Road, but the square is Poulton Square, and it's just ... it literally touches the Kings Road, and The Gigolo was in the cellar of a restaurant. Rather a smart restaurant, and I often wondered what the clientele of this smart restaurant must have made of the fact that young, and not so young, men went down there to this ... to this ... to what was, to all intents and purposes, just a little club. The Gigolo was ... was hugely funny because it was so packed that if you lifted your feet off the ground you would not fall. It was ... it was smoky, 'cos of course everybody smoked, smoked like chimneys and it was ... if you had a space to dance in you were really, really, lucky, but usually, if you wanted to dance, it was ... you were already cheek to cheek with somebody and you just kind of, if you fancied him you stayed there and if you didn't fancy him, you moved on!

Extract 2: Track 2: 00.11 – 3.34

GAY DADS CLUB

I'm going to talk to you about an enterprise that ... that I was concerned in during the period that I was coming out to my wife and entering on the divorce, and the timings, because I told you that that happened very close ... it happened on the day of 9/11. For me personally that was the earthquake. But, erm, of course like a lot of gay ... married gay dads, erm ... you ... you

turn to the internet for support, and somehow or other I got wind of the fact that there was this support group called Gay Dads on the internet, and that it would be a good thing to be a subscriber to it, and I can't remember how I heard about this, but it was ... it was an internet group which operated as a Yahoo group, and you joined it by applying to the site owner and the site owner's name I gave you, you can fill it in if you want later, erm ... and the purpose of it was to provide support to gay dads at varying positions in their trajectory.

Now, Gay Dads typically would be new members who had just discovered that they were married but that they were really interested in the same sex, and wanted to pursue it. People who had realised this and were on their journey, towards their divorce, and people who had realised it but were determined to stay in the closet at all costs, and the costs were considerable because staying in the closet is ... is a strain.

Now, after I'd been a member of this and received a lot of support, during a period when I ... when I was basically suicidal and ... at a risk to myself, I realised that it would be a good thing if we developed on an initiative that one of our members had actually started which is, instead of having socials, which we would have periodically every couple of months - we'd meet in a pub in London for a social - Instead of just having socials we'd have formal group meetings and they would be our Gay Dads group meeting, and erm ... the person who initiated this arranged a number and then he bowed out, and I decided that it was an appropriate time in my journey, as it were, to take on, to take this on and I acted as a convener for the Gay Dads group, and we continued to have socials, but we also continued to have monthly formal meetings in individual member's houses, as often as not here, but as often as not in other people's flats and houses and there people discussed exactly the kinds of things that they discussed in their remarkably frank and outspoken outpourings on the internet, but face to face.