

MIKE HARTH

Clare (C) interviewing Mike (M)

Extract 1: 13.13 – 15.44

THE '67 ACT and BEING ARRESTED IN A SAUNA

M: I was 41 before it was legal.

C: Right.

M: Before it started to be legal, you know, it was ridiculous the '67 Act. We're just doing a thing on it in the, in the LEL (?) newsletter. I wrote a poem on it at the time which hopefully will be in the newsletter.

C: Oh great!

M: Oh Commons and Peers of this land
How grand your virtue
We know it hurt you
To pass that act.
The law did not affect one jot what we were doing,
But since repeal
It's good to feel
It's legal screwing.

C: That's wonderful!

M: Erm ... yeah.

C: So, before it was "legal screwing" ... and it was dangerous? I mean...

M: Yeah, I've been arrested twice.

C: Have you really?

M: Yeah. Once in a sauna, this was perhaps, I suppose about 30 years ago, now, I can't remember now. It was a sauna at Notting Hill Gate which I used to go to every week, a private sauna, and one day we were all in there and two coach loads of policemen, literally had two coaches, came in there and arrested ... one policeman for every single one of us, and arrested us. They'd had a guy, you know, in there the day before, observing, then they came back and arrested us all. So I ended up in the Old Bailey because the charge ... one of my charges was buggery, which was too serious for a magistrate - if you're ever heard anything so ridiculous! So I had to go to the ... an Old Bailey Court Number Two, with ... with four others. We were all ... all considered, you know, serious offenders and so on, yeah.

It didn't really bother me, because I didn't feel guilty about it. I've never felt guilty about sex. That's one thing I'm terribly grateful to my parents for. They never mentioned the subject, and I think it was just a general thing. I don't ... I probably had too small a sense of guilt! But I've never felt guilty about sex. I knew it all had to be hidden and all that sort of thing, but actually I'm so ... when I was, you know, up in court ... one of my fellow um, accused told me ... we were arrested, I think, in February and it came up in November, and he told me he hadn't been able to have sex from the time of his arrest to the time of the trial. Outrageous. I mean ... that's self-oppression ...

Extract 2: 19.27 – 21.34

POLICE ENTRAPMENT

M: I was living in Walthamstow at the time and at the top of the road I lived in there was ... across the road there was this sort of trolling area which was, you know, a bit like the Heath only on a much smaller scale. Anyway, I went in there one night and I was caught in the entrapment process. The guy I ... went for was a policeman. So they arrested me and took me to there, and they charged me with sexual assault and kept me in prison for the night, and I had nothing to read, it was so boring! And my friends were all panicking, you know, wondering what had happened to me of course and so on. Erm, anyway, to cut a long story short ...

C: Oh, don't cut it short! Tell me!

M: All right. Well I didn't ... they wanted me to admit it, of course, but I never ... I know very well you never admit anything, so I got a solicitor in, you know, who sat there and when they interviewed me it was 'No Comment', or whatever, as he told me, and so they gave up with ... I'd wasted their time and off I went. And I had a chat with my solicitor and he told me a couple of months later, I think it was, that they'd changed the charge of sexual assault to assault. He couldn't understand this because I hadn't laid hands on him or anything, you know? And ... he didn't understand it at all, but anyway that's what they had done, and then eventually the day came and it went up to the Magistrate's court, you know, and they offered me a binding over. I don't know if you know anything about these technical things. A binding over is just an agreement you enter into and if it goes through ... you know, you pass through your time without anything ... there's nothing on your record. So I accepted it. And thinking it over later, obviously, they didn't want it to come out in court what they'd been doing, that I'd been entrapped. Because I think by that time it was already against Home Office guidelines.

Extract 2: 27.27 – 30.28

THOUGHTS ON PRIDE IN THE '70s AND ON STRAIGHT PREJUDICE

C: When did you ... can you remember when you first would have gone on a gay pride march? Right at the beginning?

M: No ... I was on the committee originally years ago.

C: Really? What, when it first started?

M: The organising committee. Not at the beginning, but I joined it a few years later.

C: So it would have probably started ...'71, I think was the first gay pride march.

M: Was it really?

C: So what, are we talking mid '70s? Late '70s?

M: I expect so, yeah.

C: And what encouraged you to be on that committee?

M: I just thought I ought to. I wanted to help and, you know, I have certain skills. Writing and that sort of thing and I wanted to use them. I remember that was the year we tried writing to all sorts of gay people asking for money, and Tom Robinson was around, so that probably dates it for you?

C: '79. (*Editor- it was in fact released in 1976*)

M: Is it?

C: Glad to be Gay. Yeah. Yeah. And did you enjoy those days? Those marches? The atmosphere? ... Or was it still a bit scary?

M: I can't obviously say I enjoyed it, no, it was more a duty. I remember, do you remember, I don't suppose you remember one year they had the afterward party in Jubilee Park ...

C: Right.

M: If you know where Jubilee Park is? It's the other side of Waterloo Bridge, isn't it?

C: I'm trying to think, that's before it went to Kennington. 'Cos it was at ... it went down to Kennington after a while. Anyway, what happened at Jubilee Park?

M: Well, it's quite a small park ...

C: Right.

M: And the noise was so appalling that I couldn't even go inside the park. I respect my eardrums. I detest pop, you know, and ...

C: Yeah. So that's what mainly put you off?

M: Oh, yeah.

C: And you didn't get any good feeling about being on the march and marching with other people?

M: Yeah, I guess I did, yeah, yeah, yeah. It didn't make me want to get closer to them! But yeah, I guess I felt ... you know?

C: But in some ways ... I mean, you're obviously not mainstream political but you're political in ... as a ... with a small 'p' in that you've been involved with important gay, you know groups and movements ...

M: Oh yeah, I think that's important. We've got to stand up for ourselves 'cos nobody else will. And I'm, I'm quite aggressive really about straight society. I ... I haven't forgiven it for what it's done to gays in the past, and I never will, you know? Um, I mean, you know, my two best friends are straight, and they're very pleasant people and so on, but I've got a downer on straights and I'm quite happy with that, you know? I mean, it's quite unbelievable what gays have been through and it's ... mad, mad! You know, one tries ... tries to think of a reason for it.