
Disclaimer: This document is a transcript of a telephone interview that was conducted in 1996 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: JW-95-323AT001
- * Scan ID: N/A
- * CCINTB Document ID: 95-323-7
- * Number of pages: 5
- * Date: 20 February 1996
- * Transcribed by: Valentina Bold/Standardised by: Annette Kuhn
- * Format: Transcript of telephone interview
- * Details: Valentina Bold interviews John Watson over the telephone
- * Notes: According to notes from the original transcript, a recording of the interview was created using a telephone answering machine and this recording was deleted shortly after the interview took place due to its poor quality.

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

VB: The first thing I really wanted to ask you was what your own first memories of mobile cinemas were like? When do you first recall having come across them?

JW: I came across one that was in the town hall at Aylsham.

VB: Yeah.

JW: A little market town, that would have been in the thirties--

VB: Yeah.

JW: And it visited, I don't know whether it was--obviously at that time I was only about twelve or thirteen. I suppose weekly, maybe monthly.

VB: As much as that?

JW: I don't know, you see I maybe led a more sheltered life than today's young do, and when there was something there we went to see it. I have a recollection of a mobile cinema at the town hall at Aylsham.

VB: [explains popping noise] So what was that cinema in the town hall?

JW: Erm, well it had [inaudible] in those days, and of course it would be silents.

VB: I see.

JW: I don't really remember in detail the films.

VB: How did they actually go about showing it? Was there a screen at the back of the hall or something like that?

JW: They had a sort of stage and the screen was on that and the projector was at the back of the hall. Sometimes you'd get a little sort of booth built round it--

VB: I see.

JW: Just to keep the noise down. And of course the noise was of little consequence when you had silent films.

VB: Of course.

JW: I think there was a pianist who produced some sort of music, erm, again though it's so far back I couldn't really remember the details.

VB: Sure. So you were quite young then?

JW: Yes, I was born in 1918.

VB: I see, right. Erm, it sounds quite something actually. What was the atmosphere like at these showings? Was it something that you really looked forward to?

JW: Eh, I think if I'd gone regularly I would have looked forward to it more. What would happen would be that my grandmother lived in Aylsham and she was recently widowed and I used to go and spend weekends with her--

VB: Yeah.

JW: And sometimes we would do things for a treat but obviously, I suppose at that time I would be going to bed about 8 o'clock--

VB: Yes.

JW: So it would be the exception rather than the rule that I would be allowed up to see the pictures.

VB: Ah, I see, yeah. So you weren't actually living in Aylsham. That was the other thing I wanted to ask. Where were you living in the thirties?

JW: In the thirties?

VB: Yeah.

JW: In Norwich. We were coming to the end of the time. When we were first born we were in the city to be near the school. In 1933 we moved down here to a house in the village and went to school by train. Sometime in the late twenties I remember going with my girlfriend--it was kindergarten I suppose--and the local cinema was called the Kings and it was a silent film.

VB: That's amazing, you 've got such a good memory to remember all these things from so long ago.

JW: It's [laughs] intact! I can remember some things and then there are parts in my history I can't!

VB: Ah! How did the mobile cinemas compare to attending the conventional cinema? Was it very different?

JW: Um, yes it would be rather different because you tended, when you went to the mobile in the town or the village where you lived, you'd know most of the people.

VB: I see.

JW: To go to the conventional cinema you'd just be dumped on a seat and there might be a hundred people round you and you wouldn't know any of them.

VB: That's interesting. It sounds like it was almost more of an intimate experience, is that right?

JW: Yes, I think that's true.

VB: Was it something then that attracted more of a wide variety of ages, say, than--did people tend to go because the cinema was there? I don't know, I just wondered if there was a different sort of quality?

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

VB: [recording starts mid-conversation] Of course, yes.

JW: There wasn't an awful lot happening, as far as I'm aware, in the town of an evening, and film, anything which offered an opportunity for a night out was very acceptable

VB: Yes. That's what I was kind of wondering because obviously, I grew up in the countryside as well, and anything that was on, people went to [laughs] in a way which people don't in the town when there's more on offer.

JW: Yes.

VB: It sounds to me. I mean, did they advertise these shows?

JW: Yes, I'm not sure of the mechanics of the thing. I think though, from that letter I sent you--

VB: Yeah.

JW: From that language it had, every so often at those things, presumably he'd leave his publicity for the next show--

VB: Yeah.

JW: Or he might publish a month's programme or whatever.

VB: Yeah.

JW: I don't think the mobile would be able to employ somebody to go, sort of flyposting before they came.

VB: Of course.

JW: I think it had to work that it was an ongoing thing at the same location, and they would leave a note of what was coming next.

VB: Right. And I suppose, as you say, when it's a regular event people would, eh, would be quite [unintelligible] about that.

VB: That's great. I just really wanted to ask a few questions because I haven't met somebody who remembers mobiles from as early as you do. It's been very useful. [sums up having talked to people who remember the 1950s]

JW: I think they were probably in their heyday in the thirties. I think that the coming of talkies led to technical problems.

[equipment including driving motor all right for silents; when sound mechanism projector 'critical' so could lead to problems; less equipment]

VB: Do you have any memories of the people who were showing films in that Aylsham hall?

JW: No, they were grown up and I would be a child!

VB: Of course! It certainly sounds like a wonderful experience.

JW: I think it was. You know, there was certainly an element of excitement, and the fact that it was something that didn't happen every day [unintelligible] there were novelties as there aren't today.

[alternative entertainment: local amateur dramatic society in Aylsham, borrowed generator from the local garage. Came to [Lingwood?] in 1932 and stayed there till the war, when away in the Army, now lives in parent's house [He married and spent twenty-seven years in London for his working life; retired early; much prefers Norfolk to London]

VB: Thanks for answering questions over the phone.

[End of Interview]