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- * Notes: This transcription has rendered the original text as written, including some spelling and grammatical errors. First contact with Maurice de la Bertauche who wrote in response to a call for cinemagoing memories published in the *Mature Tymes*.

Mr M. De la Bertauche
[redacted]
Honeybourne
Evesham
WORCS. [redacted]
6th February 1995

Dear Annette Kuhn and Valentina Bold,

With reference to your letter in "Mature Tymes", I am wondering whether I can be of any assistance to you in connection with your book. Presumably you are students, or researchers, at the University of Glasgow? If so, I shall be happy to help as I appreciate that information about the hey-day of the cinema may be interesting.

May I preface my remarks by saying that I was born in 1925 so I am now nudging the proverbial 'three score years and ten.' If any memories I have can be of help I shall be pleased to let you have them.

My mother was an avid picturegoer and invariably I accompanied her. I saw most of the 'big' pictures of the era at a number of cinemas in the Surrey, Cheam area of Surrey, where we lived. How well I recall being fascinated by certain pictures to the point of obsession back in reality, stomping around the school, scowling with hands

clasped behind my back looking at boys I disliked, saying: "Have him lashed Mr Christian." I adored "Oh Mr Porter" with Will Hay, especially that scene when his wheel-tapping hammer became engaged with the control cord of the water tower, drowning the railway directors. And oh! The impression of that poor girl in "Lost Horizon" when she was taken from the valley (although she was three hundred years old), only to shrivel and crumple in the snow. Happy days.

But I rush ahead because I am writing to you primarily to mention that I left school at fourteen (1939) and became a rewind boy and cinema projectionist (we called ourselves 'operators'). I am able to tell you a lot about working in cinemas; the long hours we worked, the organ interlude (whyever did cinema organs have such a vicious vibrato and wobble). We put on a real programme in those days, invariably four hours long with feature film, second feature, newsreel, travelog perhaps, trailers, plus an organ show. It was all continuous running too; anytime from around 1pm through till 1030 or 1045pm.

If you are interested in any of these events please let me know what you are looking for, how long a contribution needs to be, what sort of deadline, if any, you have and whether working in a cinema is of any help. I now restrict my written output per day but I suppose I could let you have two or three thousand words in a fortnight or so.

Whilst writing I would mention that at fourteen I had very little idea of music but I did gain a lot from motion pictures. What a debt of gratitude I owe to Max Steiner and Warner Brothers and to H. Robinson Cleaver, one of our regular organists. We had a massive Wurlitzer and what an incredible sound they could produce in the hands of a brilliant organist on straight tone. Better than any cathedral! I can tell you about the performances too if you like, it was another, happier world then with everyone singing: "Sister Susie's sewing shirts for soldiers, such shirts for soldiers Sister Susy [sic] sews" etc.

I await your reply!

Yours Sincerely,

Maurice F de la Bertauche.

PS. What amazing diction Charles Laughton had in "Mutiny on the Bounty", failing to drop his voice at the end of a sentence gave a marvellous impetus to "Have him lashed" all with the same level of voice. And that marvellous scene after the mutiny when he is standing up defiantly, spitting venom, shaking his fist declaring "You have cast me adrift in an open boat three thousand miles from the nearest port, but I'll live to see you hanged from the highest yard arm in the King's fleet". All a travesty of the real Bligh, but that word "fleet" on a high note was brilliant! I think Laughton was

nominated for an A. [academy] Award? Victor McLaglen got it I believe for "The Informer", how I remember his finger nails scratching the window sill after the IRA shot him. And what competition too for Laughton - "Lives of a Bengal Lancer", "Top Hat," "David Copperfield," "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and so on...