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* Transcript ID: RA-95-232PL001

* Scan ID: RA-95-232PL001

* CCINTB Document ID: 95-232-1a-d

* Number of pages: 4

* Date sent: [1995]

* Transcribed by: Annette Kuhn/Standardised by: Annette Kuhn

* Format: Letter

* Details: from Raymond Aspden to Valentina Bold

* Notes: This transcription has rendered the original text as written, including some spelling and grammatical errors. Sent in response to 1995 call for cinemagoing memories.

Tel: [redacted]

Raymond Winston Aspden

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Accrington

Lancs.

BB5[redacted]

Dear Valentina

Reading in the 'Weekly News' that you were after information about the 30's cinema. I was born in Blackburn in 1923, like most of my generation spent a great deal of time in the picture palaces of that era. My first recollection of the cinema was being taken to see 'All Quiet On The Western Front', which stayed vividly in my memory, especially the scene at the end where the young soldier strays above the trench to catch a butterfly and is shot by a sniper.

Blackburn had in the region of 12 cinemas, the main ones being in the centre and lesser ones in the surrounding areas. When I first started going on my own, or at least with a group of youngsters to the Saturday matinee's round about 1930. Silent films were still being shown, mainly cowboys to cater for the younger audience. This was also where I was introduced to the Saturday afternoon serial, each episode ending in cliff hanging fashion. Having us wondering how the hero or heroine could possibly escape, going over the waterfall, avoid the oncoming express after being tied to the railway line, or being cut in two by the circular saw. That they always escaped never dampened our enthusiasm.

The main cinema in Blackburn was the Rialto the only one to have an organ, which rose majestically in front of the screen, before the performance started and again during the interval when refreshments were served. Memorable films I remember being shown there, were 'King Kong', 'Mutiny On The Bounty', 'Way Out West' the 'Laurel and Hardy' classic.

First time I saw the comedy duo was at a small cinema not very far from where I lived at the time called the 'Star'. They just had one showing at night this started at 7-30p.m. and I was allowed to go now and then. There was nearly always a comedy short, Edgar Kennedy, or one of the Hal Roach 'Laurel and Hardy' funnies. Shirley Temple was also starting about then she seemed to be in a lot of these shorts. This was followed by the 'Movietone News' and then the main feature, a well put together programme. I recall seeing 'Flying Down To Rio' which I believe was the first Astaire, Rogers film.

Another cinema in Blackburn that I frequented was the 'Majestic' this was situated in the centre. Two o'clock till five for tuppence Saturday afternoons, we also devised a system to get in free. One boy would pay to go in, make his way to the toilet, where the emergency exit doors opened on to the street, when he opened these doors we all trooped in. Our little ruse came to an end when an usherette noticed the large numbers coming out of the toilet, and we were all turfed out. As usual the nucleus of the programme was Cowboy films and the serial. Tom Mix in a white Stetson and rustlers and outlaws in black looking sinister, to no avail, Tom justice would always administer. In the mid thirties it was possible to get two woodbines and two matches for a penny from a vending machine. We puffed away in the darkened cinema till we felt sick and went green.

'Lives Of a Bengal Lancer' was one of the films I recall seeing at the 'Majestic' which had a continuous programme during the week. Starting at two o'clock and continuing till late evening. I enjoyed Bengal Lancer so much that I sat through it twice. My mother going berserk when I got home wondering where I could be.

In 1938 I came to live in Accrington which was also abundant in cinemas. My wife Phyllis told me about a small picture place name the 'Queens Hall' near where she lived. Around the early thirties time, she and her sister Iris used to go to the Saturday afternoon matinee to see silent films. They had a pianist by the side of the screen by name 'Tal Westwell', as the film reached an exciting climax Tal's playing became more frantic. At one film Iris carried away by the excitement started pulling the tacks from the soles of her shoes and putting them in her mouth, unfortunately swallowing some of them. These were retrieved by the use of castor oil and natural causes.

One cinema called the 'Kings Hall' nicknamed the 'Ranch' or the 'Bug Hut' had a very cheap admission price, most of the films they showed had been around a time or two. The seating at the front consisted of wooden forms, barbed wire was at either end of the very low balcony to prevent the patrons climbing up out of the cheaper seats. Accrington's main cinema was the 'Regal' built in 1937 with luxurious seating and tastefully decorated. 'Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs' was a film I saw there.

Yes the thirties was a magical age for the silver screen, with not much money to spend, a cheap form of entertainment where you could forget your troubles for a short while in the land of make believe. Adventure, Comedy, Musicals, Gangsters, Romance, beautiful women, handsome men, cute and not so cute children, it was all there. Standing in the street queueing in pleasant anticipation of what the next couple of hours had to offer, as the lights dimmed and the screen lit up away we went transported into a world of fantasy.

Accrington has no cinema, this has been the situation for the past few years unfortunately. Some how though I don't think the atmosphere of the thirties could ever be recaptured, this was

most certainly the age of the cinema. Hopefully I've managed to portray what it was like cinema wise from the viewpoint of a young boy to a young teenager.

Yours truly

R.W. Aspden