

Disclaimer: This interview was conducted in 1995 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.

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\* Transcript ID: AB-95-198AT002

\* CCINTB Transcript ID: 95-198-5a-ag, 95-198-6a-n

\* Tapes: AB-95-198OT002

\* CCINTB Tapes ID: T95-104, T95-105

\* Length: 1:19:15

\* Ruislip, Hillingdon, 26 July 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Ashley Bird

\* Transcribed by Joan Simpson/Standardised by Richard Rushton

\*AB=Ashley Bird, VB=Valentina Bold

\* Notes: Second interview of two with Ashley Bird; Sound Quality: Poor

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[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[VB tape introduction; background noise throughout]

**VB: Film stars that you liked.**

**AB:** Yes.

**VB: And the ones that you've seen with your wife. And I was wondering if there were, say, particular qualities that [inaudible] in film stars. You talked about people like erm, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.**

**AB:** I suppose really, erm. [pause 3 seconds] We probably weren't sophisticated enough to know whether an actor was good or bad in those days --

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Much. I think is one of the of the. I mean you look at the old films that I think you said, and you realise, not how bad they were, but how unfinished. Not so the... But I think we accepted the actors and actresses... [pause 4 seconds] Because they were so new. And so out of our world. You really didn't know what erm, was good or bad. I suppose we threw things at the screen if it was, well they were baddies, I suppose.

**VB: But erm. That's interesting. So do you think you weren't very critical about the stars at the time?**

**AB:** No, I'm sure we weren't. It was all so new. It was all so ooh, out of this world. As far as, when the first talkies came on, you see. I mean we'd been used, for a very short time, the silent films. Erm, with subtitles. But, when talkies really sort of made their impact, it was fantastic. And of course, the cameras were improving. Their scope was improving. But, that, I don't think at that fairly young age, and we were unsophisticated, that we were critical at all. We were quite happy to see what they dished up more or less. I can't ever remember thinking that erm. Well, I presume you come out sometimes, "A lot of old rubbish." Or some such expression. But, no we were so, sort of, in those early, few years, I mean, the years go by now so quickly that, they hung about, it seemed to me in those days, but. And of course the hype from eh, America, with their advertising, their billboards. And also magazines. My son was saying actually. Have you done any research through the old 'Picturegoers'?

**VB: I have actually. I've looked at some and I also--**

**AB:** 'Cause he collects them.

**VB: Does he?**

**AB:** Well, he doesn't now. He's got about a thousand.

**VB: Ah. He sounds like a good person! Erm, I was going to say, I brought along a film annual.**

**AB:** Ah. '38.

**VB: From the late thirties. 'Cause I thought you might be interested in --**

**AB:** The year I got married. Norma Shearer, oh I love her.

**VB: Ah. 'Cause obviously some of the stars we were talking about--**

**AB:** Yeah, they're all there.

**VB: Feature in that.**

**AB:** See, now I would recognise a face. Unless it got a name under it --

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** I would have a job, very often, to say it. But erm, Robert Donat. I was looking at an old film. Was it yesterday? It was wrongly advertised in the paper and in the [inaudible], *Trooper*.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** That wasn't what was in the book. This is lovely, isn't it?

**VB: I was really thrilled to find it.**

**AB:** Yeah. This was our sort of age group. This man, as far as the women were concerned, was the last word, you know.

**VB: Oh, Robert Taylor.**

**AB:** O-oh, ye-es! You know the girls went absolutely... They didn't do quite what they do with the pop stars today but, you know. *Yank at Oxford*.

**VB: Mhm. Did the men like Robert Taylor quite as much?**

**AB:** No, they'd boo him!

**VB: [laughs] Competition.**

**AB:** All the boys. Yes, yes. 'Course Gracie [Fields] and a lot of her early films were the ones we [inaudible]. We thought they were fantastic films but pretty poor [inaudible].

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Gracie. One of the ones she sang her usual songs. How did you manage to find this?

**VB: I got it in a second-hand shop in Glasgow, actually. Yeah.**

**AB:** Yeah. I was talking to my son about it and he said, "I can't do anything for you at the moment, Dad," he said, because, well he, he moved eighteen months ago and he's pulled this house inside out. I can't recognise the place now and of course, he's taken vast quantities of paperbacks.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** His wife was... And erm, 'Picturegoer'. What's the other one? Oh, 'Picture Post'. Erm, I said "Where have you got them?" He said "They're poked in boxes in the backs of cupboards." Wherever. He hasn't settled down. So, erm. [pause 4 seconds] Merle Oberon. See all these people,

there was nobody like them as far as we were concerned. They were fantastic. They were out of this world. You haven't got it so much today, or not in the quantity, have you? I mean, I can't. I don't know how many other people can name too many actresses or actors. One or two.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Not the quantity. [looking through book] Ooh, lovely, yeah, smashing. [pause 3 seconds]

**AB:** I as a kid, erm, oh dear. Used to act as Charlie Chaplin. I went to a party, a street party in a village near here. In a parish hall. And it was fancy dress. Oh, Cooper, Jackie Cooper.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** I went as Jackie Cooper. Used to wear his cap, his black cap, on one side.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** I don't know whether you've got any pictures of him here.

**VB: I think I know the chap you mean. But I mean, was that your idea or your mother's idea?**

**AB:** I don't really know. Mine I should think.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** 'Cause we used to wear these flat caps. My friend now has got, we would wear those flat caps [inaudible].

**VB: It's interesting. He must've caught your imagination --**

**AB:** Yes, yes.

**VB: At that sort of age.**

**AB:** Well, I was a bit of little devil [in me?] and erm--

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** 'Course, he's still about. He was a few years ago. Still, erm, still doing bits.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** As an old man. So. [laughs] Oh dear. Fantastic. Till you turn a book over like this, if you said to me, can you name some, I'd have to sit here for some time with a pencil, and erm, as they came to me. But when you see them. Erm. Are you able to, is there somebody else doing this as well somewhere else or only you at the moment?

**VB:** **It's only me at the moment.**

**AB:** Oh, I see. So you can't sort of liaise with other people are turning out?

**VB:** **Erm, not really. I mean, this is really the only project that's doing the great thirties films just now, so.**

**AB:** Oh. Deanna Durbin.

**VB:** **Ah.**

**AB:** Yeah. Beautiful voice. Another, of course, heartthrob.

**VB:** **Ah, Ray Milland.**

**AB:** Yeah. [pause 4 seconds] 'Course, Clark Gable had all the older ladies going mad.

**VB:** **A-ah.**

**AB:** Different age group. You see, the girls wouldn't go for him.

**VB:** **Right.**

**AB:** For the moustache.

**VB:** **'Cause of the moustache, right.**

**AB:** And the suave sort of--

**VB:** **Ah. So he appealed to more, the older women, you think, than--**

**AB:** Well, when you say older I suppose--

**VB:** **Well.**

**AB:** Twenty-five to thirty.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** I mean, like your mothers, I expect.

**VB: Yeah. Was Robert Taylor someone that appealed more to the younger ones?**

**AB:** To the eighteen to twenty-fives. Not, not the very young girls. They didn't seem to, they weren't, quite like they are today I suppose. Bette Davis.

**VB: Did you, did you like her?**

**AB:** Oh, yes, as an actress. Very, yeah. Always had a cigarette.

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** She was featured, I think, on a forthcoming attraction on the TV.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Was it a film? I don't know. My friend said, "That's Bette Davis." And I suppose it was not long before she died. Whether she'd had a stroke--

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** It was all one-sided, that's all I couldn't believe that it was her. Yes, this brings eh... [pause 4 seconds]

**VB: Were you interested in? I mean, that piece about behind the scenes. Were you interested in the technical side of pictures, or?**

**AB:** Erm, yes. Only in as much that, how they made them and where they made the. 'Cause we had a, a lot of people don't know this. We had, erm, a film set in Northolt where I used to live. And I got married in '38, moved to Northolt and they'd closed down the... It was an outside set and Conrad Veidt built it down there, with a big force. These outside, when they built roads. When they'd gone in my first year of marriage... I used to go to the... I used to cross the fields in my wife's bike, and pinch the soil out of their rose hedge.

**VB: Ah. [laughs] Allegedly! [laughs]**

**AB:** Allegedly. I don't think anybody'd be interested! In fact, I got onto this history society and they didn't know. The majority had never heard of it. It was buried in a dell the other side of Northolt. Between there and Northolt Aerodrome. And there was only fields behind where I lived, got married. Open fields. They weren't cultivated. Erm, they had a few cattle sometimes. Few horses and a few sheep. But I just wheeled the wife's bike with the sack over it. Helped myself to the nice loam. 'Cause it was being wasted over there.

**VB: Of course, yes.**

**AB:** But erm, oh, that's right. Of course, they made Sabu the *Elephant Boy* there. Now if you... And he lived in, while they were making it, the months they were making it, he lived in one of the bungalows there.

**VB: A-ah.**

**AB:** Yeah. It's a little village. Nothing-ish place now. But it was a village, sort of a mile, mile and a half, two miles from where we lived, you see. In South Harrow. And there was only, what? Two pubs, three pubs, three pubs, church and one or two people. Erm, but that was one of the first ones. All the kids went down there to see that. I can't remember what year. Quite young, so I should think it would be very early thirties.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** '31 or '32. Yeah. Sabu the *Elephant Boy*. Ha!

**VB: Mhm. Did you like his films then?**

**AB:** I don't know whether I ever saw them. [pause 3 seconds] I can't remember. May have done. Can't remember. I knew that, I remember them making them. 'Course you didn't see them for sort of twelve months. There's not a lot of people now in the local area, of course, know all these.

**VB: No.**

**AB:** When I told you, I joined this history society, I was surprised how, it's a very middle-aged group.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** There's one or two of us older like the lady, Mrs, Miss Curnick. Erm, one or two more. Most of them are incomers, sort of forties and fifties, I suppose.

**VB: Ah.**

[sound of thunder]

**AB:** That'll be recorded.

**VB: That'll be recorded. [laughs]**

**AB:** [laughs]

**VB: Thunder and lightning. That's weird.**

**AB:** Of course, that's another family. The Bennetts. [referring to Joan and Constance Bennett, and father Richard Bennett]

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Erm, two girls. And erm, Dad, I believe. Married to Clark Gable.

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Well, when I say married. It was his girlfriend, anyway.

**VB: Yeah. Did you like Carole Lombard?**

**AB:** Yes, yes. Very sophisticated. Have they got anybody today like these?

**VB: Spencer Tracy.**

**AB:** I don't know whether they have. Individually-- [inaudible] in that shot.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Seems to me, with today's entertainment, that the television has thrown up the greatest amount of talent.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** In so many forms. But, erm. Another one, Jean Arthur. If you'd asked me to name all these... Adolphe Menjou. [Vivien Leigh?]. Ooh, dear, dear, dear. [pause 10 seconds] What a lady. Sad life, really, I think.



**VB: Did you like her films?**

**AB:** Yes, yes. I remember going to the Coliseum once. What did I see there? [pause 3 seconds] *Charley's Aunt*. [pause 3 seconds] Which was a British story, I think. 'Course, they had got the American accents in it. It was a bit later, the late thirties.

**VB: Mhm. Yes, 'cause I mean, I think of her in *Gone with the Wind*.**

**AB:** That's right. I saw that in eh, Alexandria--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** During the war. Going to the cinema over there, you did [inaudible]. 'Course, all the seats were cane seats. I don't know whether you know the chairs, the chairs, the Lloyd Loom chairs. They used to use them in eh, bathrooms years ago. Woven fine cane. Rather like metal.

**VB: Ah. I think I know them.**

**AB:** Eh, and all of their seats out there. When you used to go to the cinema there, of course, in our white shorts and shirt. Get bitten to death by bugs! Every chair had loads of bugs so you come out there bitten.

**VB: Uh,**

**AB:** But erm, we used to get in if we could and erm, what's the singer that died? Janet Gaynor. No. Not, Janet Gaynor. That's one of the early ones, too. That was my father's, stepfather's. Mad about her. And this erm, Farrow, Fallow, Farrow? No. No.

**VB: Was it Charles, Charles, Charles Farrell, or?**

**AB:** Charles Farrell!

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** That's right. Janet Gaynor. Got to reading about films, but erm. But it was erm, oh. The one whose daughter's now... [pause 3 seconds] Daughter of Liz... Minnelli.

**VB: A-ah.**

**AB:** What was her mother?

**VB: Erm, Judy Garland.**

**AB:** [laughs]

**VB: Yes.**

**AB:** 'Course, her acting with erm, here we go again. The little fat man. [laughs]

**VB: Erm. Was he very small?**

**AB:** That's right.

**VB: Erm, Mickey Rooney?**

**AB:** Mickey Rooney.

**VB: Yes.**

**AB:** The *Andy Hardy* stories.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**AB:** You know, they... [pause 3 seconds; laughs] Lovely times, you know. When you look at them. You wonder now whether people were paired then. I don't know. 'Course another pair.

**VB: Oh, Myrna Loy.**

**AB:** And William Powell. Yeah.

**VB: How did you feel when you were going to the pictures in the thirties? 'Cause it sounds--**

**AB:** Excited.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** Excited. 'Cause we were not very well off and, I mean your grandma's penny was a lot of money.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** So if you got a sixpence. For doing something, for running errands or something. Erm, you know, we were so excited as kids, it was so new. There was no television--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** No radio, really. I mean the crystal set was in its infancy. One of my relations started a manufacturing firm of radio sets and wirelesses and eh, so we got one of the first. So that was pretty fantastic, I think. But most of us had our crystal sets. So the cinema, erm. Of course there was so many wild westerns. [laughs] And for boys of ten, eleven, twelve, you can imagine. Erm, there was goods and bads, and people looking [inaudible]. [laughs] It's... As I say, I said to my son, I was telling him. I said, "Do you remember going, on a Sunday or Saturday morning?" "Oh, yes," he said, "Not for a very long period." I said, "No". I said, "You used to come home and bore us to tears!"

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** Come home for lunch, half past twelve, one o'clock. Dinner on the table. And he'd go on.

**VB: Do you think you did that when you were that sort of age?**

**AB:** No. I didn't have that relationship. See I was a stepchild. I was the oldest, eldest son. I had two younger brothers. Next one to me was seven years younger than my only brother, now, who's nine years younger. So there wasn't that. As I say I was a stepchild. My father was killed in the First World War. Mother married again in 1921. I was four and a bit. And, didn't live at home for long. Lived with me gran, you know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** So there wasn't that, type of rapport like we've got today.

**VB: Mhm. Was you grandmother interested in films as well?**

**AB:** Erm, mother used to take her occasionally. Yes. Not erm, that's strange [inaudible]. I was wondering today, I'm going to ask my brother who, as I say, is nine years younger. What he can remember of his grandma from my mother's side. If at all. I mean, he's a granddad. He's got six grandchildren. They're very close to him. And erm, I would have thought those children will remember a lot. And I'm wondering how much he remembers.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Grandma went occasionally but... [pause 3 seconds] But, she was getting hard of hearing anyway, at that time.

**VB: Mhm. I wonder if for her generation it was maybe not so--**

**AB:** No, no.

**VB: It wouldn't be something she'd grown up with like you did.**

**AB:** My granddad died in 1923.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** He would've been sixty-odd, I suppose. So, erm, I've only got vague memories of him. I have one or two, but erm, the memory. Council estate's just, the other side of the bridge--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Yeah. Lascelles Avenue. And I remember bringing his lunch sandwiches. And he was a carpenter, working on the roofs. I can see him now on those roofs. I should think that would've been, I was about seven, I suppose, in 1924. No, it couldn't, no. I must've been earlier than that. He died '23 or '24. I don't know. Grandma had gone till erm, well into her eighties. She'd gone senile, you know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** No, they weren't, not really part of... [pause 3 seconds] Mother was very keen. She always wanted to go once a week once they built the cinema, you know. He's still about, isn't he?

**VB: Oh, Don Ameche, yes.**

**AB:** Yes, yes.

**VB: He's changed a lot of course since he-- [laughs]. The matinee idol, there...**

**AB:** I can't recognise him. And I thought very, I don't know what I thought. But I saw him, some, couple of years or so ago, and I thought, on my goodness! [pause 3 seconds] [laughs]. Dear old George.

**VB: George Formby. He looks a lot younger there, actually. I think of him more, later--**

**AB:** That's right. Nova Pilbeam.

**VB: I don't really know much about Nova Pilbeam.**

**AB:** She didn't eh, she only did a little. Erm, I don't know how many films she made. Not very many.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** She didn't get very well known. Over a very short period. [pause 7 seconds] The Barrymore family. Another one.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Lionel. Two, two Barrymores, weren't there?

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** There's so many! So many--

**VB: Right.**

**AB:** That were sort of household names. You can't bring them back to mind but seeing them, you remember they were household names. You would know them all.

**VB: Mhm. Did you talk much about films now? With your friends?**

**AB:** Yes, yes, yes. All the time, you know. Because there'd be, eh, well you got the fleapit here. The one in Wembley. Eh, I never got to the one in Wealdstone. In fact, I can't remember where it was. There was one there.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** But this is what kids, you know. They could get, 'cause it's cheap. Get in for tuppence sometimes.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Yeah, oh but erm, you'd be saying, you've been to so and so, and this...

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Claudette Colbert.

**VB: Did you like Claudette Colbert?**

**AB:** Oh yeah. Yes. [pause 3 seconds] All these. I mean if they were good or bad actresses or actors, you didn't, didn't consider it really. I mean, they were easy on the eye.

**VB:** Yes. It's interesting you say that because I mean, looking at all the gowns and the costume and everything. Was that part of the attraction?

**AB:** That's it, you see. Because we couldn't make musicals. It was the Americans. And, I mean their musicals, even their early ones were out of this world with the girls, you know. Their, eh, dancing troupes. Hhm, yes. Now, I wouldn't go, but there you go... [pause 4 seconds] Now you have me. Cagney.

**VB:** Mhm.

**AB:** 'Course, everybody did Cagney, if you know what I mean.

**VB:** A-ah. [laughs]

**AB:** [laughs]

**VB:** Did you like that sort of film?

**AB:** Oh, yes. Erm, because the early gangster films were another thing that erm. And the car chases which were ridiculous things. But it was, oh you got the whole audience, kids audience up, shouting and screaming. [laughs]

**VB:** [laughs]

**AB:** More or less like the pantomime, you know. "He's round the corner!" sort of thing.

**VB:** Ah.

**AB:** "He's round there. Shoot him!" [laughs]

**VB:** It's interesting you say that as well. Because these are films, I can think of Cagney, but I've seen them on television or--

**AB:** Yeah.

**VB:** On video, and you don't get that sort of atmosphere, of course. It sounds completely different in a cinema.

**AB:** Yes. You'd get the same thing there as you'd get at a children's pantomime. When you say, "Oh, no he doesn't!" You know. Because people say, "He's behind you," sort of thing. People shout out, "Look behind you!" sort of thing. Well, you'd do the same for films.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** If somebody was creeping up. [laughs]

**VB: Ah. And of course, it's got the huge images as well.**

**AB:** That's right, yes.

**VB: It must've been really exciting, as you say.**

**AB:** And the kids would run to the rail that went round the, [pause 2 seconds] could be the orchestra pit. If it was only the lady in there with the piano. They could run into that and, oh yes. You don't know how much this sort of brings the memories back 'cause you, unless they are sort... [pause 2 seconds] Though I and my friend are both of the same sort of age group.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** But erm, my wife or my young lady and myself would never miss our Saturday evening. Unless it was very hot. And even then, [pause 2 seconds] we'd find the one and thruppence to go. [laughs]

**VB: Were the cinemas quite hot in the summer then?**

**AB:** Yes, the new ones. The new Odeons, of course, yes, they had, yes, um, oh, of course that became a feature. In the middle thirties, I suppose. The used to stick it on there...

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

**VB: You were saying about the cool air.**

**AB:** Yes. It was beautiful to go to the bigger cinemas in erm, Hammersmith. Erm, you'd go in and there was this beautiful cool, calm. That was the thing I remember in erm, South Africa. Being taken to the Bioscope, it was called out there. You walked into the foyer and it was freezing cold. You know it was beautiful. [pause 3 seconds] There were so many, wasn't there? Barbara Stanwyck.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Is she still with us? I think she is, isn't she? Yes.

**VB: Was she not married to Robert Taylor?**

**AB:** I think she was.

**VB: Yeah. 'Cause I remember someone saying that they were really jealous when, [laughs] when Robert Taylor got married.**

**AB:** Yes. The girls were.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** Not, you didn't get the very young children. You know, the thirteen and fourteen year olds--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Quite in the same. They hadn't learnt to do it like that today. [laughs]

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** That was a young one. [pause 3 seconds] As I say, this was the year I got married, so...

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** And then of course, there wasn't so much money to go.

**VB: Mhm. Did you like cartoons?**

**AB:** Well I was thinking this morning before I came that I don't remember, [pause 3 seconds] when the cartoons first, first started.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Oh. It was later I think. Things like Mickey Mouse.

**AB: Ah.**

**AB:** I can't remember the first one... I mean Mickey Mouse was the first ones that I can remember.



**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** And his [throw-offs?]... Whether there were moving drawings, I don't remember.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** I don't think so. Not in the early, the very early days. Have you any evidence of?

**VB: Erm... Yeah I think things like, I know that was one of the earliest full length ones. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*.**

**AB:** Yeah. I wonder what year that was, well, well. It's here. If it's in here.

**VB: Yes.**

**AB:** Oh, yes. Well one of the [inaudible] from '38.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** So that erm... ['21 so?] I really can't remember. I would have thought, well Mickey Mouse was before that.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Mickey Mouse was popular with my brothers--. [pause 2 seconds] They had a, when they were at the seaside, they had their photographs taken standing beside a puppet, a bust type, stuffed Mickey Mouse. My brother would have been about four. Oh, 1930, 1930.

**VB: I suppose though if you were late teens, twenties, it wouldn't be quite so interesting,**

**AB: No.**

**VB: To you.**

**AB:** I suppose. Well I mean I can look at cartoons today, and be a bit, yes. I suppose we were but not in quite the same way.

**VB: Yeah. The other thing I was meaning to ask you about was eh, the news and sort of factual.**

**AB:** Ah, yes. That's one of the things I suppose you looked forward to [inaudible]. With the sort of programme you had, erm, with news eh, a B film. I suppose in the middle part you'd have had the

cartoons. And then your main film. That was twice a week. So you'd get film, erm, the news changed twice.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** And this was our first sort of information of the other parts of the world. I mean, all right, it was not spread like it is today but I mean you got American news and some of Europe. And no, you learnt an awful lot. Always looked forward to the news. They were quite long some of them. You got your money's worth. [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** Erm, what was the first erm, [pause 3 seconds] Pathe, wasn't it? Pathe. *Pathe Gazette*, were our first I suppose. I suppose if you look back on them most of them were very parochial, very sort of near to hand. But you'd get the odd--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Bit of news. [inaudible] And then it was out of date, of course.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Jessie Matthews.

**VB: Is she someone that you like?**

**AB:** She lived somewhere near here.

**VB: Someone was saying that she's erm, she's buried in Ruislip or something like that. Is that right?**

**AB:** I don't know. But she lived, I would've thought, Harrow Weald way.

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Stanmore way. Her and Sonny Hale, that's right, isn't it?

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Sonnie Hale. Yeah. Of course Jessie Matthews, she played Mrs Dale in 'Mrs Dale's Diary'.

**VB: Ah!**

**AB:** On the radio. [laughs]

**VB: Did you like her as a singer?**

**AB:** Oh, yes, yes. (pause 8 seconds)

**AB:** Brings so many memories back.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** There were so many films. I suppose they are turning them out more today but there was less at one period, I think, than another, was there not? Where they weren't turning out the quantity, they were only turning out the bigger blockbusters.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** But the studios, I presume, that started up in the early twenties, so many of them. There were lots of them. And they turned out these, not very good films, but--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** There was masses of them.

**VB: Mhm. Just looking through that. I mean there were--**

**AB:** Mhm, mhm.

**VB: So many stars and--**

**AB:** Well this is it. It made, it made these actors and actresses, those days. Of course there was such a big coverage, I suppose--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** In America to start with and then over here and in Europe. Not in other parts, I suppose. So where they became, oh another... [inaudible] Oh, dear.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** And of course the early comedies, the American comedies. A-ah. I suppose Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton but it was a, there was a man who made his name producing them.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Erm. [pause 3 seconds] Oh, the Keystone Cops. Yes, Keystone Cops. And then there was the three, oh, you still get them today. Stupid people, three stupid people [referring to the Three Stooges]. He used to bang him on the top of his head, you used to go mad, you know. As far as we were concerned it was the last word in funniness. [laughs] Chuckling down the aisles!

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** No. And I suppose the youngsters of today wouldn't do it.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Wouldn't do it. Wouldn't do it. Too sophisticated, I suppose. I suppose the young ones of six and seven would.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** But I mean, that went up to ten or twelve. And the generations said "Ooh here we go". How many, erm, Robin Hoods have there been?

**VB: I don't know but that must be one of the best films, the Errol Flynn one.**

**AB:** Oh, it is. Errol Flynn and Tyrone Power.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Another girl's delight.

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** They would absolutely swoon, you know.

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** So if you got Tyrone Power, the three of them, Taylor. I mean, you wouldn't go once. Another thing, of course, you did, [catch you?] if you didn't get caught in the cinema. You'd erm, when it

finished, when the cinema cleared, you'd go and hide behind the seats and go into the toilet.

[laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** And see it all again, sit all through it again.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** And you used to do naughty things like, erm, the exit doors. Always had push up bars. And you'd go to the toilet, run and buy, run and buy a ticket, you see. Go in, sit down and the first chance you'd got, you'd go out and push the bar and let his mates in! [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** So about five of you would get in. See nobody really, as long as you weren't sitting in seats--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Terrible. Dear, dear, dear. [pause 5 seconds] You could actually get cups of coffee. Not so much coffee, more tea in those days. For one period. A very short period. I think the erm, the Granada was one of the first.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** To start it, I think. I mean, there was the usual ice creams and sweets. And they'd come along with erm, cups of tea. [inaudible]. I can't remember. I know mother used to like that. She could get her cup of tea in the middle.

**VB: Sounds very civilised, actually.**

**AB:** Yes, coffee, wasn't so, 'cause there wasn't erm, instant coffee.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Eh, there was Camp coffee.

**VB: So were the ja--, the ones you get in the bottles?**

**AB:** Jars.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** I mean, not so very long ago, I don't know what happened but erm, I was down in Hampshire, [pause 2 seconds] about fifteen years ago, I suppose. Eh, my brother's sons, they were at colleges down on the south coast.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** One of these boys brought his girlfriends, erm, to us in Hampshire. And they just said, "Can we call?" I was at work. And when I got home my wife said, "Do you know, those boys turned up with their girlfriends." And she said, "I hadn't got anything to give them. Only Camp coffee." I said, "How did they take that?" She said, "Not very well!" [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** 'Cause my wife didn't like coffee.

**VB: Ah, I see.**

**AB:** So, erm, I suppose that there was this bottle in there, I suppose. But I mean, at that time, Nescafe was [inaudible].

**VB: Uhuh.**

**AB:** But, coffee wasn't served. Because that's all you would've been given, Camp coffee. Coffee and chicory, I think it was.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** You could get coffee ice creams. I remember that.

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Ooh, yes. Go in, yes. Always got to have a tub, if possible, of coffee ice cream.

[pause 10 seconds]

**AB:** Peter Hadden? Now. It was Peter Madden.

**VB: Mhm. [pause 2 seconds]**

**AB:** Kay Francis. Sad girl. [pause 3 seconds] [inaudible]

**VB:** He's rather like Ronald Colman, isn't he?

**AB:** Yes he is.

**VB:** I thought it was Ronald Colman at first.

**AB:** There's another one, you see. Suave, absolutely the last word. And, of course, in later days, erm, Michael Wilding, erm. [pause 5 seconds] He used to be worth a few bob. He, in your lifetime...

[pause 5 seconds] When my son gets himself together I'll get him to lend me some of his--

**VB:** Mhm.

**AB:** I had some of his 'Picture Posts' which came out before the war. Erm, that was possibly only photographs, but there's [inaudible]. Jane Withers. Cute girl. [laughs] Ahaa, yes. Another one.

Maureen O'Sullivan. *A Yank at Oxford* again.

**VB:** I mean were you interested in the sort of child stars then, erm, Shirley Temple and people like that?

**AB:** Yes, Shirley... [pause 3 seconds] I don't remember when her films first started. Very precocious child, I think. I don't think we were very interested when we first saw her.

**VB:** Mhm.

**AB:** We were beginning to grow up. And it was erm. [pause 5 seconds] She eventually became an ambassador, didn't she?

**VB:** I think she did, yes. She went into politics--

**AB:** In one of the African countries. Whether... Zimbabwe. Yeah, I mean, oh dear, dear, dear. [pause 3 seconds]

**VB:** Ah, I like his films very much. He was good.

**AB:** Yeah. Yeah. See it's erm, hear his voice.

**VB:** He always seemed to play the same sort of character, didn't he?

**AB:** That's right.

**VB: He was very suave, as you say.**

**AB:** Yes. There weren't many people that could spread themselves into erm... [pause 2 seconds]  
They were always themselves in a lot of cases, you know. They were either tough guys, suave guys,  
or rotten crooks. I mean when I think of erm – there we go – the man with the, the *Casablanca* man.

**VB: Oh, erm, Humphrey Bogart.**

**AB:** Humphrey Bogart. And then he had one or two similar, always got the big fat cigars--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Who were always crooks.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** They had always got erm, fast cars, you know.

**VB: Yeah. He was in that one with James Cagney, wasn't he where he was, [laughs] erm, the film where, the one where Cagney ends up going into the electric chair and being, being yellow [referring to *Angels with Dirty Faces*]. And Humphrey Bogart was, sort of... Was it that scene? Cagney had been in prison and he came out and Humphrey Bogart was sort of double-crossing him. Eh, he was a nightclub owner or something.**

**AB:** That's right, yes.

**VB: Erm. And Cagney was sort of bad but quite likeable but Humphrey Bogart was just horrible.**

**AB:** Horrible. That's right.

**VB: Yeah. [laughs] Even when he was sort of good, when he's a detective, he's still--**

**AB:** Yeah.

**VB: Something a bit, [pause 2 seconds] nasty about him.**

**AB:** That's right.

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** Oh, yes. William Talman, Gene Autry.



**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Yeah. I suppose really, as far as boys were concerned, the erm, the westerns were our thing. The crime ones were our biggest, you know. We weren't so keen on the, you know, going to. Not until we had girlfriends, I suppose, and they wanted to see the musicals.

**VB: Mhm.**

[pause 9 seconds]

**AB:** I was just wondering if were there any of the British made, erm--

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** Films, erm. [pause 4 seconds] Bobby, oh yeah, Bobby Howes. [pause 3 seconds] Jack Buchanan. Another one of the suave... [pause 2 seconds] You know the girls did all right in those days as far as. I mean, we didn't think so but--

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** But erm... [pause 2 seconds] The Edgar Wallace stories. That's right. Anton Walbrook. [pause 4 seconds] Leslie Banks. [pause 4 seconds] Oh, Tom Walls. The Tom Walls pictures. Used to love them! I think he was a lousy actor. At least, I saw him on the stage, erm, I can't remember. But I don't think there were much on with his acting.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** But he... [pause 4 seconds] And that look...

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** I mean from what the, erm, Brian Rix and the farce type of, erm, stage things. I mean, that's where they did all their, their training. 'Course they looked, you know, the way they sort of portrayed it, it was everything.

**VB: Yeah. Yeah, I see what you mean. Even in that picture. His expression as well.**

**AB:** Yeah, that's right. Their expressions were always. Of course, erm, when they were in silent films, that's the only way they could express themselves. The few words that came up, the answer came up "Yes", you know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Or that... So. There is still the same today, the people are expressive on the television, are, if you could take your mind off the story, for instance, and see their expressions. I mean, we were looking at erm, *One Foot in the Grave* last night. [laughs]

**VB: Yeah. [laughs] That's wonderful.**

**AB:** I mean, her expressions. She's so good. Erm, and of course, Judi Dench is another one.

**VB: Oh, yes.**

**AB:** And Michael Williams. They're so good at their expressions. I mean, oh yes, they're trained to do it but, it makes the difference--

**VB: Oh, yes.**

**AB:** Between good and bad, as far as I'm concerned.

**VB: Yeah. That's right. Even a look they can--**

**AB:** Yeah.

**VB: Just, you know.**

**AB:** Cesar Romero. He's still about, isn't he?

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Oh yeah, the skater.

**VB: Ah, Sonja Henie.**

**AB:** Yeah. I don't think she did much in the way of films. I mean, but basically she was a, an ice skater. That's all she--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Well, as far as I'm aware. She made her name in the world of skating and then went on to be a... [pause 4 seconds]. Greta Garbo. Hah! [laughs]

**VB: Did you like Greta Garbo?**

**AB:** Erm, I suppose we didn't go much on her, as kids. She was, I mean, as far as we were concerned, all you used to hear from her was, was it, "I wanna go home."

**VB:** Oh, yes. "I want to be alone." [laughs]

**AB:** "I want to be alone." That's right.

**VB:** Yes. [laughs]

**AB:** That was all for the girls more. [laughs] But as boys we weren't. I think later we realised when she came on with some of the, *Anna Karenina*, they were all fantastic, you know.

**VB:** Mhm. But when you were a teenager--

**AB:** Teenager, no.

**VB:** She didn't really.

**AB:** No, no. She didn't eh. I think my stepfather did.

**VB:** Ah. That's interesting. It sounds like she appealed more to, sort of, adults, I suppose, than to--

**AB:** Yes.

**VB:** Than to teenagers.

**AB:** That's right.

**VB:** Yes.

**AB:** It was the early thirties, what fifteen? We were only just beginning to find our feet, if you know what I mean.

**VB:** Ah, yeah.

**AB:** 'Course, 'Mounty on the Beauty [sic], Bounty' and things like that [referring to *Mutiny on the Bounty*].

**VB:** Uhuh.

**AB:** Erm. There was quite a number that erm... [pause 3 seconds]. And when we had girlfriends, we had to go and see the, what we would call, sloppy films.

**VB: Yes. [laughs]**

**AB: Ye-ah. Stupid teenagers.**

**VB: Were you sitting through these gritting you teeth? [laughs]**

**AB: That's right. Yes. [laughs] Trying to get to grips with the girlfriend, that's a fact. [laughs]**

**VB: [laughs].**

**AB: Stop it, or else! [laughs] Yes. You could hear it going on. [laughs] Yes.**

**VB: I bet, yes. [laughs]**

**AB: And then you'd get the stories, of course. You managed to, erm, save up for the back row, [laughs] you know. Of course you'd get the stories then.**

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB: But if it was a good crimin-- you know, a crime film--**

**VB: Uhuh.**

**AB: Sylvia Sidney. Yeah. [pause 3 seconds] I suppose this is something. That was my wife, all over again [inaudible].**

**VB: Really!**

**AB: She was Sylvia. She was my [inaudible]. Sylvia Pankhurst, of course. But erm, same shaped face. She had very dark hair.**

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB: Brown eyes. Oh, I used to call her, oh, that's right. Anna May Wong. Now, erm. I suppose she was Chinese, I really don't know. But my wife in the early days had a fringe, and of course, straight hair. Erm, perms were only coming in. 'Course, girls couldn't afford perms.**

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB: There wasn't the sort of... It's different today. So, she used to get very annoyed. I used to call her Anna May Wong.**

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** Then, later on, when she started to have perms. Yeah, Silvia Sidney.

**VB: She must've been lovely, actually, when you say that.**

**AB:** Erm, she wasn't as pretty as her, but erm, as far as I was concerned she was the cat's whiskers.

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** We used to meet outside there. She used to work in here. In the, erm, laundry office. I used to come down from [Fulham?], when I was at school in the [inaudible] school at [inaudible]. I was still in short trousers. Because you didn't wear long trousers in those days. I mean, I was thirteen and a half when I got my first pair of long trousers.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** I was twelve and a half when I went to the poly. And erm, I used to meet her outside. She used to finish work half past four on Friday. And I used to come off the train and we'd sit on the bus together.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** We didn't go to the cinema together in those, at that time. A couple of years after that.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Oh, there's another one. I used to erm, Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge. I used to work for a firm in Pinner. A horticultural supplier. And a lot of these English people, actors and actresses, had their gardens. And we were the only few firms that could supply a lot of things. I mean, there weren't a lot of garden centres in the early fifties. They'd only just come in. The first plants that you now buy in plastic bags. The first plants were planted in old tin cans.

**VB: Ah!**

**AB:** Eh, there was a mad rush for margarine cans, the big ones. And erm, Cicely Courtneidge, they used to live out at Essendon, Jack Hulbert, Claude Hulbert, and, oh, quite a number of them used to come to this firm--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** And I used to get their phone calls up come up to the order office and we used to deliver all round to these erm--

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** And they were a smashing couple. [inaudible]. They had this lovely... And of course our driver, Alf, [laughs] erm. I used to say, "You've got some [inaudible] for Cicely this week." "Ooh, good," he said.

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** "I always get a cup of tea or coffee up there." 'Cause it was off his beat actually. Essendon. A bit far out. This was in the middle, late fifties.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** But erm, Cicely. Yes. But Claude, his brother, had a most peculiar voice. Well, so had he, I suppose. Erm, so, when he came to the phone you could always recognise him. [pause 3 seconds] Ah, [Edward Hansen?].

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Didn't go too much on that 'cause it was sing and dance again, you see. [pause 3 seconds] If they'd got a good story to it, erm, but if they failed to come on and sing too much, too much, I lost...

**VB: [laughs]**

**AB:** [A number of times?].

**VB: Again I would say that must be one of the best ones though. The Ronald Colman one.**

**AB:** Madeleine Carroll. Oh, yes. Madeleine Carroll.

**VB: Oh.**

**AB:** What was that I saw her at the Coliseum?

**VB: She was in *The 39 Steps*, wasn't she?**

**AB:** That's right. I think that was what I saw.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** At the Coliseum. Yeah. [pause 3 seconds] I remember, oh dear, 'course she went anti-British.

**VB: Mhm!**

**AB:** At least, that is the rumour. Whether it was true, I don't know. When the war started she went to America and erm, the story was she was anti-British.

**VB: Mhm!**

**AB:** Whether it was true, I don't know.

**VB: Yeah. Right enough 'cause I can't really think of her in films. You know, later films.**

**AB:** No, no.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** She was very lovely.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Lovely woman. They all were. Well, they are today. Except, of course... [pause 3 seconds] George Arliss. [pause 4 seconds] Joan Blondell. The blonde bombshell.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** [inaudible]. Bogart. Are these alphabetical? That's nice.

**VB: I think so, yes. It's handy.**

**AB:** Yes. George Brent. Another one of the gangster-type. [pause 3 seconds] Edward Arnold. Another one. Oh, dear, dear, dear. [pause 5 seconds] I'd always take his films, of course. Crosby [referring to Bing Crosby].

**VB: Oh, Crosby, yes.**

**AB:** Him and erm, Bob Hope.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**AB:** The Road films. Of course, they were later on, weren't they?

**VB:** Slightly, yeah, yeah.

**AB:** But I mean, erm.

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape One]

Start of Tape Two]

[Start of Side A]

**AB:** Jack Holt. That's another one. [pause 3 seconds] Will Hay. I mean when you look at a Will Hay film today and you think to yourself, how did I ever laugh! You have to laugh now because it was so ridiculous, you know.

**VB:** Ah.

**AB:** But I mean it was so... I don't know. I don't know how to express it, but in those, when you first saw them, you're dying! [laughs] Gordon Harker. [pause 4 seconds] Robertson Hare. Oh that. Not so much in films but more so on stage in those days. There's Laurel and Hardy there. We don't have to say any more, do you? I mean, you got a Laurel and Hardy film, you had to go and see it.

**VB:** What was it about them that made them so funny?

**AB:** They were so stupid, I suppose. It was their stupidity, that erm, made them so lovable. I mean... [pause 3 seconds] Can't call it being funny today. I suppose you'd laugh today but at its stupidity whereas you laughed in those days because erm, it was like the slapstick on the stage.

**VB:** Mhm.

**AB:** Or erm, the circus. Appealed to you at that, that period. [pause 3 seconds] John Lodge, another one. A lot of these people's names disappeared. Oh, the Lupino family.

**VB:** Ahh.

**AB:** 1916, see.

**VB:** I don't know that.



**AB:** She'll be eighty next year. Ralph Lynn. Another stupid [inaudible]. Yes, yeah. Dear, dear, dear. Dirty work [inaudible]. Singer.

**VB:** Was that? Someone was saying to me that they liked erm, comedians and they liked Laurel and Hardy because they weren't really cruel. It was quite sort of gentle humour in a sense.

**AB:** Yes, that's right, yes. There was no cruelty.

**VB:** I don't know if you.

**AB:** Yes. Well, erm, most of the comedy was that... [pause 3 seconds] I mean there was plenty of killing.

**VB:** Yes.

**AB:** But quick killing. I can't remember any sort of hung-on type... [pause 3 seconds]

**VB:** Certainly not the blood and gore that they do now.

**AB:** Yeah. No, no there wasn't.

**VB:** No.

**AB:** There wasn't erm, 'course there wasn't, [pause 2 seconds] the sex of course.

**VB:** Yeah.

**AB:** They'd disappear into a room and that was it. You wouldn't see anything. But, erm [pause 2 seconds], you didn't expect to. [pause 3 seconds] And, as I say, with the killing it was shoot, bang, fire and you were dead, and that was gone.

**VB:** Yeah. No blood on him probably either. [laughs] James Cagney, shot.

**AB:** No. Well you may see it but they didn't dwell on it.

**VB:** No.

**AB:** Well they weren't allowed to, I suppose. I suppose if there was a... Of course, in America as far as the other sex side of it was, you weren't allowed. You weren't allowed to see--

**VB:** No.

**AB:** Parts of a woman's body or a man's body, I suppose.

**VB:** I suppose that's right. I mean when you think about the violent films as well, the baddie always gets--

**AB:** He gets his comeuppance.

**VB:** His just desserts, doesn't he?

**AB:** Yeah. I mean, if he didn't get his comeuppance you would often think it was a sequel and there was going to be another one where he got it.

**VB:** Yeah.

**AB:** Oh, no. It'd always have to end.

**VB:** Yeah.

**AB:** Like--

**VB:** It's interesting. 'Cause I'm wondering, do you think that films like that influenced your, your own sort of code of behaviour or your morals or? Do you think you learned things from watching the pictures?

**AB:** I would think so. I would think so. Yes. Of course our upbringing was tighter. I'll use that word, tighter.

**VB:** Mhm.

**AB:** But erm, you hadn't the freedom to be, just to be free and do the things you're allowed to do today. So that, you know, the films did [encourage?] quite a bit. Not in a very. I remember, [pause 3 seconds] when you were eight or nine. Once again the children of today wouldn't do it but we made our swords. From bits of wood with a piece of crossbar and we'd do *Mutiny on the Bounty*, you know. Or erm, what was his name? Saw him just now...

**VB:** Was it Robin Hood, or?

**AB:** No, it wasn't Robin Hood. What was the other one? Fairbanks.

**VB:** Ah!

**AB:** Douglas Fairbanks, that is. Ronald Colman. You'd ape all that. Thing is... [pause 3 seconds] No, there was a lot of influence. But luckily, I suppose, not the sort of influence you've got today.

**VB: Mhm. I'm sure you must have played at cowboys as well.**

**AB:** Ah, always, always. I mean the spare bit of ground at South Harrow. Where you went up to the Curnicks. There's a pub there. I can't remember its name. Something to do with stars, I believe.

**VB: Oh, yes. There's a, 'The Constellation'.**

**AB:** Constellation.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** Well, there's three or four shops in the front there.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** Terrible broken down. But that was our shops in those days. There was the watch mender. Erm, the two Smith ladies ran the oil shop. And then there was Mrs Bell, the sweet shop. Tom Pratts, the butchers. Collinsons. They were all flourishing shops. It's all there were. A few up further, but--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** And the Tom Pratts owned all of them, I think. He was the butcher. And behind there were stables. And he had a son. We were all mates.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**AB:** He was the rich boy. Everything he wanted, he had. Beside that where 'The Constellation' was there was a sort of field. And eventually they put hoardings up all round, big hoardings. That's where they put the [films]. And he had these buses, no wheels, just the chassis, just the bus. And, of course, he allowed his son and all his friends to, we had our cabins and our dens.

**VB: Ah, great.**

**AB:** We did all that. Acting up on the. Shoot, bang, fire.

**VB: Ah. [laughs] Sounds wonderful. You must've been sort of, like, in another world of your own.**

**AB:** A bit envious, I suppose, in those days. Because the boy, he was rich in our way. Yet his father was a Labour man. [Communist?] I mean, in fact all his friends turned to the Young Communists. My mother and father were as blue as blue can be. In fact our house always used to be the committee room for the local elections. That's where Isidore Salmon... Very Conservative people. My mother normally used to do a little bow--

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** When they turned up. [laughs] And of course, my friends were Communists. I couldn't bear to be a Tory. I've never been a Tory. [laughs] Well, I was never a Communist but I, but erm, yeah.  
[pause 3 seconds]

**VB: I mean was politics important to you at that stage of your life or?**

**AB:** [pause 3 seconds] Not really. All I knew was, that my people were Conservative and all my friends' mothers and fathers, were Labour. Erm, I couldn't bear the snobbery of the Conservatives, that's the way it was done. Erm, I wasn't attracted erm, I wasn't, the other families weren't [pause 2 seconds] into politics, I suppose. Just another little thing. I always wanted to go into the Navy, but couldn't do. Erm. Erm, mother tried to get me into the merchant marines.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** As a boy. So at sixteen I joined the RNVR [Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve]. Gave my name, my age, eighteen.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Got into trouble later years. Erm, so I joined the RNVR [trading?] ship.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** You know. Part-time. That was the not the territorials, but the investment stuff.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** These boys, this was 1935, '36, and they were still in the Young Communists. And erm, they said, how can you, you know, belong to the military? As far as I was concerned it wasn't the military. It was a good club, you know. They had a bar on board and at sixteen I wasn't allowed. There was beer. Baked beans on toast. There was sailing. Used to go down to [Bisley?]. They arranged

weekends down there. All sorts. But, I'd come back, on a Saturday evening, see my girlfriend, go to the cinema.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Yeah, they all wanted to know why I wanted to belong to a military. I was very lucky because erm, I saw all the big, part of all the big things that were going on. The Coronation of 1937.

**VB: Ahh.**

**AB:** I was erm, I was in that. George the Fifth's funeral. George the Fifth's Jubilee. Eh, all sorts of things, you know. Ceremonial stuff which... The Cenotaph. The Lord Mayor's Show. I got to do all that. Erm, fantastic as, for a 17-year-old.

**VB: Oh, yes. It must've been.**

**AB:** But erm... [pause 4 seconds] There's one person I can't, another gangster-type. [pause 4 seconds]

**VB: The one I was thinking of when you were talking about gangsters was Edward G. Robinson.**

**AB:** Edward G. Yes.

**VB: Yes.**

**AB:** Another. Yeah. Yes. I liked, yeah. And I think there was someone called Ray? [pause 4 seconds] Must be in here. [pause 7 seconds] Pat O'Brien.

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Yeah. Jack Oakie.

**VB: He was often the priest, wasn't he? Pat O'Brien.**

**AB:** Yeah. Later.

**VB: Gangster's sidekick. [laughs]**

**AB:** That's right, yeah. [inaudible] And there was another one with the big mouth. [pause 3 seconds] Claude Rains.

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** [inaudible].

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Martha, Martha Raye.

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** She opened a... [pause 7 seconds] Yeah, I don't know. Well, I envy you that book.

**VB: Yes. [laughs]**

**AB:** I envy you that book.

**VB: I was really pleased to find it.**

**AB:** I really do. Yeah.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** Did they have any, oh, nobody had written in it.

**VB: No.**

**AB:** A lot of these, erm, have written. Did you know you, did you just come across it?

**VB: Yes, more or less, yes.**

**AB:** Lovely, lovely.

**VB: I envy your son his collection of 'Picturegoers', 'cause I've seen one or two but not--**

**AB:** Yeah, well.

**VB: Not a lot.**

**AB:** Erm. [pause 2 seconds] You know where I live and if you want to get in touch, you know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** It's not reliable that they're going to be available--

**VB: Oh, sure.**

**AB: To erm, see at the moment.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB: But I will natter to him about it and I will very likely, when I get the chance, borrow a few.**

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB: Anyway, that's very comprehensive, I will say, very comprehensive.**

**VB: Yes, mhm.**

**AB: Lovely.**

**VB: There's people in the bit at the back as well. It tells you a bit about the films people made and-**

-

**AB: Yes, yes. The erm, later one than that. My father-in-law was... [coughs] He was in the printing trade. And he used to get erm. We used to have books, that's when we were about seventeen or eighteen.**

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB: I guess in 19... [pause 4 seconds] Oh go-, the big pictures. Rather similar to those we've got today but not as comprehensive as that in any kind of shape or form. You'd get about twenty or thirty. It was a big name.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB: With the full... But they were very welcome additions to our entertainment in those days.**

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB: Of course, the girls used to buy 'Filmgoer', that's right, 'Filmgoer' and 'Picturegoer'. The girls used to buy them.**

**VB: Uhuh.**

**AB: Yeah. Much as I suppose they would do, I suppose the pop magazines of today, I suppose.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** Erm. Well thank you, you know, for allowing me to talk to you about it.

**VB: Well thank you for talking to me. It's been great.**

**AB:** It's, it's it's, you know. It's smashing. It draws you out, memories, you know. I've thought, before I came, yesterday and this morning, and the day before, I thought, well, I don't know how much more I've got to sort of remember, but that's done it, you see.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** 'Cause, now your memory's beginning to play you tricks. It's pretty awful because you, you start a conversation. My friend and I, she says, "Oh, no, don't do it again!" About three times during the evening, "Don't do it again!" I say, "That bloke, you know. He's down here, and he was in that film."

**VB: Mhm. [laughs]**

**AB:** "I can't remember any more than you can," she says. And it's awful. These... names have gone.

**VB: It's not, I mean, it's not surprising really. I mean, it's sixty years ago.**

**AB:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sixty years ago I was eighteen.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** So we're talking about seventy years ago, when we were very young.

**VB: Yeah.**

**AB:** But erm... [pause 4 seconds] I mean me eyes go to the back of my head now when I think of those days. But I still see that, as far as I am concerned, the first film. Erm, was it Notre Dame? Something of Notre Dame [referring to *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*]. With Lon Chaney [sic].

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Chaney, or whatever, how you pronounce it. And his big hump back. Skulking around Paris.

**VB: Mhm.**



**AB:** And the other thing, one of the things I can remember was a silent film. It was a crime film that was solved by a television.

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Now that was erm. They had. Somebody did murders or something. And unbeknownst to the murderer there was something taking pictures. Never sort of mentioned there was a camera taking pictures. Suppose it was there, but we didn't... All we knew, the policemen and the detectives were seen doing the murder, sort of thing. The cameras. And they had it brought up onto the big screen, you know.

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** Strange. Yes. [pause 2 seconds] Yeah. It's been lovely sort of recalling the memories. Now that my wife's gone, I haven't got her... to join in. Nobody wants to hear it. I'm friends with this lady now, but erm. I can't recall too many memories of previous girlfriends! [laughs]

**VB: Of course.**

**AB:** But erm. I mean the one of sitting in the cinema and getting wet, coming through the ceiling. [laughs]

**VB: Ah.**

**AB:** You could see through the tin roof! [laughs] Dear, dear, dear. Yeah. I think back up on the Hill now and I can't remember... [pause 3 seconds] I think the Harrow School who owned it. They controlled this area.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** The Harrow School. There was no pawn shops in Harrow.

**VB: Really?**

**AB:** They had the licences. They kept the licences.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** Erm, nearly everything that went on in Harrow was governed by Harrow School.

**VB: Mhm.**

**AB:** They provide a lot of the work--

**VB: Oh, I'm sure.**

**AB:** [inaudible]. The big houses. How they ever let it out as a cinema I don't know but I understood in later years that they took it over. But erm... [laughs] [pause 3 seconds] Well, I suppose, there we are.

**VB: Yes.**

**AB:** I've been with you an hour and three-quarters.

**VB: Yeah. It's passed very quickly. It's been really interesting.**

**AB:** Yes. Well. As long as I haven't, you know--

**VB: Thanks very much for talking to me.**

**AB:** Good. It's been a pleasure, it's been a pleasure.

**VB: I've thoroughly enjoyed it so it's--**

**AB:** Well, you know, if there's anything develops... [tape cuts out]

[End of Side B]

[End of Interview]