

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.

* Transcript ID: DH-95-034AT001

* CCINTB Transcript IDs: 95-34-18a-f, 95-34-19a-z, 95-34-20a-z

* Tapes: DH-95-034OT001, DH-95-034OT002, DH-95-034OT003

* CCINTB Tapes ID: T95-18, T95-19, T95-20

* Length: 02:18:29

* Levershulme, Manchester, 26 April 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Denis Houlston

* Transcribed by Valentina Bold/ Standardised by Annette Kuhn

* DH = Denis Houlston/VB = Valentina Bold

* Notes: First of two interviews with Denis Houlston; Sound Quality: Fair; this interview was originally transcribed in a phonetic manner; the original phonetic version can be accessed through our physical collection - please contact Lancaster University Library for details.

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[tape Introduction by Valentina Bold]

[preparation of mic and machine, DH puts on the mic; cutting out on the tape before adjusted]

DH: Little ideas that came back, you know, that eh. The thing was, as I said, sort of, what aspect do you... instead of, I don't want to waffle about things! If there's a sort of skeleton on which we can put a bit of flesh that would be better!

VB: Well, I've made some notes of things that I wanted to ask you about--

DH: Mhm.

VB: Based on what you've said already but, erm, I was wondering if before we started talking about cinema mainly, if I could ask you just one or two questions about yourself. It's just so that we can get an idea--

DH: Mhm.

VB: About your background and...

DH: Yes, yes.

VB: Nothing too probing or anything! One thing I wanted to make sure I had straight was to have your full name.

DH: My full name. Albert Denis, with one N, Houlston.

VB: That's great. Were you born in Levenshulme?

DH: Yes. I'm one hundred percent Levenshulme so.

VB: Right. And lived here all your life then?

DH: My life's been in Levenshulme. Yes.

VB: Can I ask what your father did? What your father's work was?

DH: He was, eh, a, eh, chief clerk in the CWS printing factory. But he was into, he was one of the old school. He was born in 1876 and his father ran in those days a library come what we would call a fancy shop now. The sort of place and a, a newsagent's, that type of thing, in Chippenham [likely referring to Chippenham in Wiltshire] where, before they sent the 'Morning Post', as it was then, out to the Marquess of Bath, they ironed it! So my father was brought up to be an apprentice to his father but then, eh, the opportunity of a job in Manchester came up, which he thought would give him... big prospects. So he moved to Manchester in 1911 and that's when I was born here. So my father, when you say he's in the printing line, he was the sort who could make paper by hand.

VB: Yes.

DH: You know they really knew paper and that sort of stuff, you know.

VB: Yes, a very skilled job that, I'm sure. And did your mother work, or was she--

DH: No, no.

VB: Raising the family?

DH: She was the old traditional family mother who stopped at home to look after the family and brought them up.

VB: Did you have sisters and brothers? [DH nods] How many?

DH: An older brother and a slightly elder sister, who is living with me now actually! She never married.

VB: Right.

DH: She was one of those, erm, daughters who sort of... it's a big word really, sacrificed her own life to look after mother and dad and then me, so she never married. She had a terrible time during the war but that's beside the point so.

VB: Yes. Yes.

DH: So there's just my sister... and a brother. My brother died in a road accident, he was fourteen years older than me, so there was just the two of us left.

VB: Yes. [pause]

DH: And my wife of course, I may add.

VB: I noticed your photographs there.

DH: Yes, that's. [mic cuts out around 00:04:17 for a few seconds; DH knocks it off]

VB: [removing mic] I'll put that at the side here. [mic back on] Yes, as I say, I was admiring the photos just when I came in just now.

DH: That's my mother at the back there.

VB: Right. She's got erm, a very striking face actually, hasn't she?

DH: Pardon?

VB: She's got a very striking face.

DH: Yes. Yes. The most striking thing was her silver hair, she was known as the Lady with Silver Hair 'cause she went white when she was about twenty.

VB: Really, yes.

DH: And eh, I inherited that and I started going grey when I was about nineteen and eh...

VB: Right, I can see the resemblance as well.

DH: Yes, well I am more like my mother, and my sister's more like my father and yet people say that my sister and I look alike! Which we don't see!

VB: Yes! The other thing I was wanting to ask was when you were married, what year you were married in.

DH: I'm a late developer! 1971!

VB: 1971. And did your wife work?

DH: Yes she did do. She's now retired.

VB: Right. Eh, what was it that she did?

DH: She was a cashier.

VB: Right.

DH: Company cashier in a motor firm, you know, used and new cars, repairs of motor vehicles, a very small family concern, it was.

VB: Right. And do you have children?

DH: No.

VB: Right. [pause] The other things I was wanting to ask was, erm, if you had any strong political affiliations but I noticed your display in the..! [Liberal Democrat poster in window]

DH: That's for the local council. [explains Lib Dem do a terrific job in the area. He could talk about politics ad infinitum! Choice on voting like choosing hanging or electrocution or other way of death; glad in last ages because of political situation now, "sorry for the youngsters"; local politics, local issues therefore sticks with Lib Dems. Closest friend is the Councillor and remembers her being born; knew her mother and all her mother's in-laws.]

VB: The other thing, the last thing I was wanting to ask you was erm if you were raised in a particular religious faith, were you?

DH: I'm a little deaf actually.

VB: [speaking up] Were you raised in the Church of England? [pause] Or the Catholic church? Or...?

DH: Church of England.

VB: Church of England, right. And the last thing on the sort of 'official business' is, because as I'm recording this and, as I say, it's going to be kept in the University, erm, I was wondering if I could ask you to sign a, basically what it is is a form that would make it difficult for you to sue us! [laughs]

DH: I see!

VB: Should you decide erm, it's one of these sort of official things that they ask us to do and...

DH: Mhm.

VB: I was wondering if you would mind signing something to say, basically, that it's alright for us to keep it in the university and if future scholars--

DH: Mhm.

VB: Erm, wanted to listen to it.

DH: I'll read the form and see it first [laughs].

VB: Sure, of course.

DH: I will need my glasses after all! It's a pity that, I was hoping I could've sued you for something! Everybody's suing these days.... [signs form; pet hate is stress counselling; he went through the war and realised the stress he went through, but didn't have counselling; VB says if he has any reservations can sign another form or he can change his mind later and it's no problem; DH thinks form is alright--he doesn't think Spielberg is likely to make a film of his life story and he miss out on millions of pounds; VB agrees that would be nice but unlikely. DH asks if there has ever been any trouble; VB says no recorded case she's aware of]

VB: So the first thing I wanted to ask you about was to find out a bit more about the cinemas locally, I mean, we were talking just now when I came in about where they're located. I mean that one for instance, the Regal, that looks like quite a--

DH: When that was built, we thought that was the end! In actual fact, I didn't realise till I was thinking about it, and the ABC, I don't know who had it originally but I don't think it was ABC, but ABC they were a television company weren't they, and they came later? At least I think they were.

VB: Right.

DH: And they came later on.

[Evelyn, DH's wife, comes in and offers coffee and scones; general introductions and laughter]

DH: Yes, eh, that was the last one to be built which we thought, I remember thinking about it at the time, mainly because it was on the doorstep. But thinking about it since you got my mind working, the Kingsway was a far better one.

VB: Right.

DH: Because the Kingsway, erm, this [Regal] didn't have a balcony, the Kingsway did and it had an organ and a stage, and it had acts on it, so although it was built in 1930, the Kingsway and the Regal wasn't, popped up till later, the Regal isn't the, wasn't, the super-duper one.

VB: Yes.

DH: Though we all tended to think it was, but I suppose we thought it was that because it was the last one to be built. But the old Farmside--I still call it the Farmside--that's just off the A60, it's a little, little street called Farmside Place but the cinema itself is the Palace [also known as the Electric Picture Palace].

VB: Right.

DH: But nobody in my day ever called it the Palace. It was always the Farmside, "I'm going to the Farmside." And that was owned by--it wasn't a group, it was run by a family, and a family run that one and that was just a single store--oh, no it wasn't, that had a balcony--erm, but was very unpretentious it was, very small, the sort of thing that Peter Sellers would be in, the little single cinema, and it was run by this family that leased up to the war, and I think after the war, and they competed with all the others in, were in, in chains, you know the Broadhead group and the ABC and all these various big organisations. But this wasn't, it was an independent one and, eh, the family eventually couldn't cope and it lay empty for years and years, it lay empty until it was developed by--

VB: Erm.

DH: Pat Henegan and his Irish bar. But that was a fleapit, as we would say a fleapit, no, no pretensions at all.

VB: Right.

DH: It was just four walls, a roof.

VB: It didn't have these bench seats did it? Or was it...?

DH: Oh no, it did have tip-up seats.

VB: Right.

DH: And it had a raked floor so you got a good view of the screen, but it was very ordinary.

VB: Was that one you went to quite regularly?

DH: Yes. I used to go because it's, as I say it's only yards away, and the Grand was, the Grand was similar but that was also, that didn't have a balcony and that was single storey, so in that respect it was very similar.

VB: Right.

DH: And, and that also went out of existence, and that were derelict for a long time and our local Catholic church was doing so well, it bought it and used it as an annexe. So the cinema became St Mary's Roman Catholic Church! Until such time as they saved up enough money and built their own church at the rear of the cinema. So it then became derelict again.

VB: Right.

DH: Until this antique firm took over.

VB: Yeah.

DH: Which is ideal for antiques, because it's a very long, single storey building so it makes a good warehouse.

VB: Yes.

DH: Well now they've moved, they've moved to another suburb.... but they've left a map and a noticeboard saying "We are now at..." Obviously they still keep this as a warehouse, because it is, the gates on the front are occasionally open and you do see activity there, so they obviously keep it as a warehouse.

VB: Right.

DH: There's the Farmside [referring to the Palace], the Grand, now the Arcadia was the odd one, the early history of the Arcadia, that's a little farther along the A6 going towards, going northwards towards the city centre, but it's only about 150 yards from the Farmside. And it was never a skating rink in my day but my father said to me it used to be a roller skating rink, not an ice rink, a roller skating rink and that's another single storey building, with no pretensions at all, very ordinary very, eh, what a Nissen hut is to the army this was to the, eh, a three-bedroom semi, you know. Erm, the prices were all pretty much the same, and we used to go there. But then, they wouldn't let me in on one occasion--just to show you what a nasty piece of work I am--they wouldn't let me in, I was, I used to go with my friends--boys, all the boys we all went together as a little group--and they wouldn't let us in on one occasion 'cause I was always small, so I probably looked younger than I was, so I don't know what kind of film, it could've have been, I mean to me it wouldn't have been an X-rated one today, but they wouldn't let me in and so I took the huff and I boycotted them and I never went there again after that but, 'cause I still got the choice of the others anyway.

VB: Yes.

DH: So, eh, but then lower down in Longsight we've got these other two, well there's three, the Queen's which is a, quite an ordinary one, and that was by the side of a brook. The brook has since been culverted and that's been demolished, erm, and now on the right hand side going down was the Kings Theatre, which was a theatre but also a cinema, more cinema than theatre and I saw my first pantomime there. My parents took me to my first pantomime so I've a soft spot for the Kings Theatre. That's demolished and it's now a modern public library with all the cultural facilities! Then

on the opposite side of the road was the Shaftesbury cinema, and that was quite a nice one, now that was a little bit better quality than the others, that was on the left hand side of the road, well that's now demolished and it's now a Health Centre. But all that area was completely flattened and you wouldn't know it.

VB: Mhm.

DH: The [highway?] terraced houses went, the whole area went. But up here, I mean, it's still as it was, you know? To anyone like me eh they're still there, the Farmside [referring to the Palace], the Grand, the Regal, except the Kingsway, the Kingsway, the Kingsway, I don't know what group that was in, I'm sure it must have been in a group to be so luxurious. That was more like what you read of the old Gaumont Odeons, the Odeon cinemas which became the Gaumont, very posh. It really was, I mean looking back it was quite luxurious but that went empty and it was derelict for years and finally demolished.

VB: Right.

DH: And they built Manchester Corporation Housing Department houses on it now. But there we are. That's what we have. But then of course there are more. Looking back there were more cinemas all over the city, in the other suburbs, so I mean if you took a bus ride you got an even bigger choice but I mean being, I mean, on a penny, tuppence a week pocket money, we didn't travel far, but I mean we got them on the doorstep.

VB: Yeah.

DH: So those were our ports of call.

VB: Yeah. 'Cause I was interested when you said that, that you didn't go to the ones in the city really until later.

DH: I didn't even know they had them in the city.

VB: Yeah.

DH: Just, I was essentially a suburbanite. We, this is our area, this is where we lived.

[DH's sister comes in; enquires about journey, good weather; general chat; strength of coffee]

VB: So that is interesting.

DH: So, were we, erm, I don't think at the time that I was aware there were cinemas in the city. Eh, probably later on I did but I mean, they would be beyond us. I mean, as I say, a penny or tuppence a week pocket money and then eventually it went to threepence a week pocket money, and I think at the outbreak of war I was on sixpence a week pocket money, because my wages then were just over a pound. I mean, I started as an office boy at seven and six a week which is--what's that in modern money? Seventy-five pence is it?

VB: Mhm.

DH: And then after six months I was promoted to ten shillings a week which is fifty pence! And even so, by the, when the war broke out I was on somewhere between a pound and one pound fifty. So, I mean, I couldn't afford to go to the town cinemas anyway. So, mind you, we've got some nice ones. We've got what was the Paramount, that became the Odeon, and that had a Wurlitzer organ which the Organ soc [Society], the Lancastrian Organ Soc salvaged when the place was closed down.

VB: Right.

DH: The building has been redeveloped and is now a cinema, but the Wurlitzer organ was taken out of there and that's now in the Free Trade Hall in Manchester.

VB: Right.

DH: So they're quite proud of that Wurlitzer organ. So, but, no, I don't think I ever went to the town cinemas, city cinemas pre-war, but I went to them after the war.

VB: Right.

DH: Because I had a girlfriend from north-east Manchester and I'm south Manchester, south-west, so the city was our natural assignation point! So I used to take her to the cinemas then, but erm after the war it was still expensive for me paying for two! [both laugh]

VB: Yes, yes! Cause you were saying that, erm, that you went sometimes several times a week. Is that right?

DH: Oh yes. I've been thinking about that since I wrote and I would say I averaged three times a week and sometimes I went four times a week.

VB: Really!

DH: But I was subsidised by my parents, eh, for the evening ones. The Saturday matinees, which were Saturday afternoon, not Saturday mornings like they are now, the Saturday afternoon ones came out of my own pocket money, but during the week, because, looking back I wondered how I could go so often, obviously my parents paid for me.

VB: Mhm.

DH: And I'd go three or four times a week!

VB: Did your parents go to the cinema themselves? Did your parents go to the cinema?

DH: Did I..?

VB: Did your parents go to the cinema?

DH: Oh, not a great deal, no. No, no I used to go with the gang. They took me to the theatre occasionally but, eh, oh they did go to the cinema but nothing, nowhere near, they didn't take me. No, I'd come in from school and I'd say to my mother and father, "I want to go with the boys to the Farmside, it's Buck Jones in whatever." And they'd say, "Well, do your homework first," or whatever, and they would subsidise me, so I'm very grateful to them but, erm...

VB: Did you ever go with your sister or..?

DH: Eh, to the matinees, yes I did.

VB: Yes.

DH: And sometimes my sister and her friend would come with the boys at night but generally it was a boyish circle we had, and of course we went to all cowboy films in those days and the main one was Tom Mix and his horse, I think his horse was Trigger [Note: the name of the horse was Tony], and, eh, great excitement when Tom Mix and his horse came to Manchester between the wars.

VB: Did he really!

DH: Yes! Came over from Hollywood and, eh, oh it was great excitement, and I didn't see him because there again, I must have been very contrary as a youngster, but I decided that if Tom Mix was the one, he wasn't mine! So I, I went for Buck Jones and then another one called Hoot Gibson! [both laugh] And I, I didn't exactly scorn Tom Mix but, I mean, everybody, like Bing Crosby is the crooner, so, I, I must have been a funny sort of boy, I just said, I didn't say so, I just thought that oh, when they wanted to go to Tom Mix I'd go but I just used to say, "Oh no, Buck Jones is far better than Tom Mix." [both laugh] I don't know now why I should think so...

VB: Is there, I mean, I'm not familiar with Buck Jones...

DH: No.

VB: Actually.

DH: Well, these are all the cowboys, Buck Jones.

VB: Right.

DH: And he was the highest paid one, I mean the big star, Tom Mix. I think probably Buck Jones, if I remember rightly, I liked him because he would tend to wear a lot of black. Well, usually black was a sign of the villain and white was the sign was the goodie. The goodies were nearly always in white, the baddies were always in black. So you knew that the black ones would always lose, but I seem to

think Buck Jones used to wear an outfit that was black and white, you know, which was a bit different from Tom Mix. [both laugh] So we, we used to go to those and we used to go to, as we got a little older, and we realised that there were such things as girls around. We used to go to the adventure films like *Thief of Bagdad* and *The Mark of Zorro* and all that sort of stuff. Adventure, you know action sort of films.

VB: Yes.

DH: Not so much the lovey-dovey stuff.

VB: Yeah.

DH: We only got on to that a bit later on then. But, erm, we had a big choice as I said in my letter, because there was a change of programme every Wednesday, I think it was, Wednesday it changed or Thursday? Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Well, that would be it, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. So you got a programme for the first half of the week and a different programme the second half of the week. So you had quite a choice. Well then.

[tape cuts out]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

DH: Because, mind you I wouldn't like to swear to it that they weren't all doing the same films. Like they do now, you get a distributor and, eh, 'Four Funerals and a Wedding' [referring to *Four Weddings and a Funeral*] will be every cinema that that distributor's doing. But in those days I don't think that applied. So, where you'd have the cinema, like the Regal that was in a bigger organisation, they would be putting on the same films as the rest of that organisation's cinemas. But with the Farmside [referring to the Electric Picture Palace] and the Arcadia and the Grand being independent they were putting on their own. So, probably at times they coincided but quite often, as far's I remember, you'd get a different one at each of them, so you could go... you could go Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.

VB: Yes.

DH: To each of them and see something different, and then Thursday, Friday, Saturday, see something different again!

VB: Right.

DH: And then, if you couldn't afford it, or you missed one, they came round more often, we'd call them repeats these days, wouldn't we!

VB: [laughs]

DH: But you could always go down to Longsight to the Shaftesbury and the Kings and catch it there, I mean if, if your schoolmates, your friends at school said "Did you see so and so?" and you missed it, they said, "Ooh" and they raved about it, and you were kicking yourself... you could go, and think it'll probably come to Longsight, I'll go and see it there.

VB: Mhm.

DH: So it was quite handy. But the programme, looking back at the programmes, there again, as I said in my letter, you got such a load of little bits, you got the big film but then there were all the little bits and I estimate, looking back, you used to get about seven different short films to, to boost the programme. So... if you didn't like any of them you didn't suffer very long because they wouldn't be on for very long! [both laugh] Because it was two houses nightly, it wasn't continuous, if I remember the first house was six o'clock and the second house was about eight o'clock.

VB: Mhm.

DH: And that was it. They didn't let the second house in until the first house had come out.

VB: Oh, I see.

DH: So [laughs] you couldn't, when it became continuous I mean that was world shattering! Continuous performance, you went in any time and you came out any time! Well, what we had to do in those days then was to try and judge when the film would be ending. They used to put the times up over the box office when the big films would be on. So if we were going in at a particular point... if we had homework to do and had to be home for such a time we'd look at this and try and nip in just before the end of the big film so we wouldn't actually see the end but we'd catch the beginning of the programme. But, erm, that was when it was continuous. But when it was twice nightly you would get a news, that's the *Pathe News* or the *British Movietone News*, you'd then probably get a cartoon. You would then probably get, Warner Brothers used to put out small films on orchestras, American orchestras which we would never have heard of, we never heard of [probably referring to *Melody Masters*]. I mean, I know communications weren't as good as they are now but I mean, some of these bands that played might have meant something to the Americans but didn't mean a thing to us. Well, that wasn't too bad if it was jazzy stuff or something like that but we, we didn't know the bands so we'd no interest in it. I mean it wasn't Glenn Miller or anything like that, they were small bands and they were small short films, say what ten minutes, quarter of an hour or something like that. Well that was bearable, eh, the news would be bearable 'cause we had no television. I mean this is your only way of seeing things happening, the launching of a thing, or a crash, or I think the Hindenburg went up in flames in those days, I might be wrong, and you got the newsreel and that it was really something to see but erm nowadays you see it all on television you're blasé so. But Pathe, *Pathe News* also used to run short films about a... quarter of an hour or something like that of music hall acts, a bit of entertainment. You might get a couple in that time and we liked those because you got clowns and eh unicyclists and jugglers, which we enjoyed. I mean today, I mean, they wouldn't be of interest. They're all blasé today. I mean, to be entertained today, they want broken legs and blood all over the place or some violence!

VB: [laughs]

DH: I mean, I could watch a juggler in a theatre and on film, and admire his technique but there's no danger he's likely to fall off and drop twenty feet and break his spine so he's boring now! [both laugh] But in those days we liked it, and clowns in particular! And eh, so you get the newsreel, you get the band, you get, probably, this variety thing of Pathe's, and then you get a [Pearl Buck?] advertising film which told you that if you wanted the finest washing machine go and buy it from so and so's, Stockport Road, Levenshulme.

VB: [laughs]

DH: Mhm. We had to suffer that! Mhm, what else, oh you'd then get cartoons. You might get several cartoons, depending on how much time they'd got to fill in. And erm, and then you would get the big picture. Oh, I mustn't forget this, you'd then get a James Fitzpatrick travelogue! [referring to *Fitzpatrick's Traveltalks*] Erm, I believe these are a standing joke to people of my generation because they were, they were boring to us because they were geographical. The 'Geographical' magazine would probably welcome them with open arms!

VB: [laughs]

DH: Because, eh, they showed you Bali and these sort of islands which, once again, without TV or anything, you wouldn't know about. Erm, in fact the basis of the whole cinemagoing in those days, as I see it, is it, is sociologically, it was totally different from what it is today. In every way. I mean we were... simpler, you know we weren't so sophisticated, weren't so blasé, we were more innocent in the nicest sense than they are today. I mean, you see, you look at Rwanda rebellion and things like this and you see all this horrible scenes and... it sort of runs off you like water off a duck's back. But in those days, I mean, we were seeing things, so to see these places, it bored us as children because, unless you liked geography at school, you weren't particularly interested in all these places that James Fitzpatrick went to. But this joke about him was, and why became a standing joke and a national joke was the commentary was, was too diabolical to believe! Very portentous American ponderous stuff it was, and I have a record of Peter Sellers where he does an absolutely beautiful skit on it! Eh, which is a take-off of James Fitzpatrick, and it always, it always began the same way and it always ended the same way, in style that was. So, to give you an idea of what it was like, I'll try and remember a little bit of Peter Sellers, because this is how James Fitzpatrick would sound: [slow American accent simulated] "And as we enter the gates of Balham we see in the main street all these craftsmen at their skills," and then he would go on like this, "Moving on." And he'd got this awful American voice, very thumping it out, but he always finished up [overcome by laughter] he always finished up with what I suppose he thought was lyrical, romantic, and a grand gesture but was so corny, I mean as children we laughed, but he would always, Peter Sellers says in his, and a lot more of them would say, "And so we say farewell Balham, land of the romantic incense, land of the beautiful scents, a world beyond compare."

VB: [laughs]

DH: Well, you know, this is absolutely the end.... In fact, if you can get hold of a James Fitzpatrick travelogue...

VB: [coughs] I think I'd enjoy it.

DH: 'Cause you'll get a good laugh out of it.

VB: Yeah.

DH: You'll get some good scenes but, I mean, we weren't interested in, in the scenes, not like we would be now, I mean, India and all these exotic places. But oh that, that James Fitzpatrick. And I've found the Americans are very much like that which I, I just can't stick at all. They used to do a series, could've been post-war, *The March of Time*. And they would, that was unusual for these days in that instead of having a newsreel with a lot of events they picked on one particular one, erm, I can't think of anything offhand that they would pick on, but they'd do the whole what would be a newsreel on that one event and it was like a documentary but only short but the music, I can hear the music now: [sings] da da da da DA, dadada DA, da da da da DA, da da da DA, da da da DE de de de de de DEH! THE MARCH OF TIME! [in censorious voice]

VB: [laughs]

DH: TONIGHT WE ARE GOING TO... whatever! Talk about pumping it into you! So we got a giggle out of it as youngsters and erm. But then, as I say, you couldn't be too bored with all these shorts because they didn't last long enough and by the law of averages there must be something you'd like. But then they brought in eh continuous performance and you could go in when you liked and all the rest of it. But the snag was then if you weren't careful, you timed it wrong, if it was a mystery you got in at the end when it was all solved and you hadn't seen the beginning! So by the time you saw the beginning again, you sat it round, it spoilt it for you because you knew the end.

VB: Right, right.

DH: So, erm, but on the other hand it did have its advantages in that, if you'd thoroughly enjoyed something you could, you could sit it round again. So you could go in at six o'clock and come out

about ten o'clock, having seen the film twice. 'Cause they didn't, they made no attempt to throw you out but eh, sometimes if it was a very popular film you'd have to queue, on the twice nightly, you'd have to queue and in those days, being a young schoolboy, my parents wouldn't allow me into the second house; much too late, I'd be up much too late, so I had to go to the first house and you'd have to queue to get in! So, erm, now you just wander in and out more or less unless it's *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, when no doubt there's queues. But eh, continuous performances came along, eh, and they were looked upon as quite revolutionary, you know they, they hit us as this is, this is you know something out of this world. It must have had advantages for the cinema owners because they wouldn't have done it otherwise would they? Very handy.

VB: Mhm.

DH: Erm. I can't think offhand... oh yes, I must mention this. It's trivial but, in those days, they always played the Anthem at the end, so at the end of the first house, somewhere just before eight, they'd play the Anthem and then at the end of the second house, they'd play the National Anthem. [laughs] And everybody used to rush to get out!

VB: Really! [laughs]

DH: And they, in the very early days we all stood to attention, I can remember that, but it reached the stage almost like it has today, where people, I don't know why, whether they felt embarrassed, uncomfortable, I don't know, but as soon as the film ended, there was a stampede! A literal stampede! You'd hear feet going to get out rather than be, as it were, caught by the Anthem! There was just a few patriotic ones, you know, well we as lads, we were more uncomfortable with it than unpatriotic, so we used to join the stampede. But, eh, I'd almost forgotten that, I don't know why it should come to me during the day, but it did do and I thought, well, that's a little facet.

VB: Mhm.

DH: You might find and, then of course, they dropped it altogether, so you never got the Anthem after that. But the Kingsway was the one, because you got these turns, they cut out the smalls. Oh, incidentally, with grand double features, you lost all your shorts, you got some, you got [Pearl and Buck?] local advertising film, who your best shopkeeper was, and you got the news, you might get a cartoon and you might get a short comedy film, *The Three Stooges*, those sort of people, and Laurel

and Hardy you got, as shorts. Not as, because they used to be shorts, Laurel and Hardy, well they were alright, we thought they were great, well then they did announce, "Laurel and Hardy make a full length picture!"

VB: [laughs]

DH: And well, you know, that was really something!

[sister brings in tea; serving of tea]

DH: So the Kingsway had to cut it down by, because they'd have something on the stage, and the organ going as well, and, erm, so you'd get probably the newsreel, cartoon, back to Laurel and Hardy, a short one, before they started making the really big films, and then you'd have this interval on the stage and I can't for the life of me remember who I actually saw over the years there, but I do remember vividly Tommy Fields, Gracie Fields's brother.

VB: You were saying, yes.

DH: Being on the stage. That's the only one I can remember, and I must've seen a lot, but they couldn't have, and it was probably because he was Gracie Fields's brother that he stuck in my mind.

VB: Mhm.

DH: But the others I just can't recall which is a pity really but eh, it would've been nice to know who actually came to the Kingsway, Levenshulme. I suppose quite a lot. I went to the theatre a lot as well in those days so, eh, I've got a sort of, what they call nowadays a rollover between the theatre and the cinema.

VB: Mhm.

DH: But cinema was my main one and then what really, although I was going with the gang, eh, four times a week, three times a week on average three, what, and we just saw the film and came away and then we played football and that was it. But I was, I had every illness any school can pass on to children, so did my sister, I brought it home and gave it my sister, my sister picked it up and gave it

me! So chickenpox, mumps, scarlet fever, you name it, we had it. And mother always used to nurse us at home, being a very proud housewife, our mother, she was marvellous. And the one occasion a neighbour brought these books in and said to my mother, "Would your Denis like to look at these? I know he goes to the cinema." And, I can see it now, a pile like that, [indicates about 1-2 feet tall] and it was the 'Picturegoer', and I started going through these and it's full of gossip and titbits from Hollywood and all this sort of thing and, I'm already going with the natural interest but this got me a deeper interest, because I was looking at it more and, I was just accepting this Buck Jones and the stars that they were as I saw them that night. But now I'm reading about them and they tell me their family life and bits of gossip from Hollywood, and they're giving you, eh, the synopsis of the films in there, so that was very handy, they used to give the film and cast and the synopsis in the centre pages, and if you haven't seen it, you'd read it and think, "Oh, I'd like to see that." So I got really deep into it at that time, to the extent that I joined their Picturegoer Film Postcards club, where you sent off for threepence, for threepence each you could get a sepia photograph of your favourite star, so there's a list, you sent off for them. But if you ordered twelve you could get them for two and six, which is, what, twelve-and-a-half pence now, each. No, what am I talking about! Twelve-and-a-half for twelve! A penny each instead of threepence. So I had a collection, oh I collected these avidly.

VB: Ah.

DH: And then they brought out albums, a Golden Album of film stars to put them in, so, eh, they cost a bit more, so I got these albums and put them in and, eh, then, with getting really interested in what I read in the 'Picturegoer' I started writing to the stars, but I couldn't write to America, I mean to me America was the North Pole! I mean the other side of the world, thousands of miles away! I didn't even know how to write to America and I knew nothing about international money orders, but the, the British ones were on the doorstep: Pinewood, London and Elstree, so I wrote to the British ones, with addresses I gleaned from the 'Picturegoer', and said, "Could I please have your autograph?" And, eh, I built up a collection of signed photographs from the British ones because it was easier to do. And of course by that time, with becoming more conscious of eh, of girls being different from boys, so I started getting my favourite female stars, like Madeleine Carroll--

VB: Right!

DH: Was the quintessential English star. Blonde naturally! We didn't have colour so I can't remember if she was blue-eyed or not, but I mean Madeleine Carroll! [said slowly and lovingly] The first one I ever liked was a silent film star, American, Evelyn Brent, who was a brunette and I can't even remember why I fell for her now. But Evelyn Brent sticks in my mind, and I saw her years later in a film, when she was seventy, and I saw the name on the cast list and I thought, "That was my first film star lady love, from the silent days!" Then the next one was Thelma Todd who was a blonde, an American blonde, and she was in these B movies and in these short comedies, and she invariably lost her dress in the film. So to young, young [laughs awkwardly] schoolboys, erm, she was quite something. [laughs] And what we saw as quite daring step-ins and what the Americans call teddies, I mean nowadays [laughs] would be classed as fully covered, you know? [laughs] They were, they were just a slip, a satin slip but, eh, so, but Thelma Todd I can remember her, but then in the big talking films, Madeleine Carroll and, aw I, I thought she was beautiful, and I've never forgotten her because she was in *The 39 Steps* with Robert Donat and she was handcuffed to him and as little schoolboys we, we were thrilled to bits that, at one stage, when they're in this crofter's cottage, bothy, she wants to take her stockings off and she's handcuffed so his hand is inches off her... bare thigh and we thought that was the height of daring. We, we went to see that film more than once. And I've seen it since on television and I've waited for that to see, sort of, what was so exciting about it, but it was the old thing for males of course, of stocking tops. [laughs] And eh, that was my lookout on Robert Donat! Now Robert Donat was another great favourite, cause I went to Manchester Central High School for Boys and Robert Donat was a Manchester lad and he went to our school, and he came, after he'd become famous as a film star, he came to the school to give us a talk.

VB: Really?

DH: And he was one of those who, apart from being a handsome man, he had a beautiful voice. He, he, if I had to name more than one voice that's beautiful, the obvious one is Sir John Gielgud. Next to him is Robert Donat. He really did have a beautiful voice. And he made his name eventually in *Goodbye Mister Chips*, the definitive version of *Goodbye Mister Chips*. It's been done since but he, he was superb. So I wrote to him and I got his autograph back with a little note on the back mentioning he hoped I liked the film, some film or other, but erm, so that was quite a kick. But, as I say, we were becoming conscious of the ladies in those days. So then we, well I'll speak for myself, they made comedies then which they've never made since and they can't possibly make since and,

you'll find out from all your research the name Ernst Lubitsch, the European director, I don't know if you've already come across him?

VB: I've heard the name but I don't...

DH: Well, yeah, well he, he went to Hollywood--I'm not sure whether he was Austrian or German or what but he, he had a name on the continent. He went to Hollywood and he made all these comedies now, when I say they were sex comedies, they're nothing like sex today but they were, in their day, considered risqué. So we liked them, of course, as schoolboys 'cause they were risqué, but apart from that they were very witty, very funny and as frothy and light as a meringue. They were, I only wish they could make that sort of comedy today, but they won't because we're too blasé, we're too worldly wise. It was, it was more an age of innocence and one that comes to mind is *The Love Parade* with Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald and, erm, you got things, hints about the gentlemen going in the ladies' bedroom. Well, we never knew what went on there but, erm, they'd show you now, you'd have writhing, naked bodies. But those days, they'd go through a door and the door would shut and next thing the door would open and it would be the following morning or something like that. So, as curious schoolboys, we used to think, "Well, what goes on?" Well, when they had a song in that film, and I have a record of it, of Jeanette MacDonald singing it, a song called 'How I would love one hour with you', we gained this impression [laughs] that it took an hour that, that this was sort of the height of bliss: one hour with you! We didn't know quite why it was the height of bliss but, erm, it's strange really [laughs] looking back, but, as I was mentioning in my first letter, when you're talking about the thirties you have to bear in mind you're talking to somebody, I'm 78 now, so in those days, '30, I would be thirteen, and in 1939 I'd be twenty-two! So the, the early impressions were cowboys and Indians, and then we got farther on to romantic comedies. I'd love to see them again to see how they were but, of course, I don't suppose they'd put them on film now, because.... Oh and the musicals, we loved the musicals. We loved the musicals because there was lots of chorus girls, eh, and Dick Powell sings in one of the musicals about, eh, 'Why do we go, dames' and the song is called 'Dames' and that's why we go to these shows. [referring to the film *Dames*] Eh, well that's why we as schoolboys went. But, you couldn't explain that today, I mean how we were then is not like they are today.

VB: Mhm.

DH: And that to me is one of the biggest differences because when I've reprimanded youth today or children today, boys, they usually come back at me and say, "Weren't you a boy yourself once?" Well, yes I was but I was, I, my generation was the last since the war came up, the last of my generation. Theirs is completely different in every way. And it's different in every way because they are a marketable quality, or quantity, and even at twenty-two, when war broke out, my parents bought my suits, clothing and everything. I was on sixpence a week pocket money. I'd no money to buy anything. Actually I got money to go to the pictures but even then my parents subsidised me. But I'd no money to buy anything. I bought gramophone records by saving up my sixpences. Two and six for a Parlophone LP, erm, Parlophone 78, Richard Tauber collection, which I saved up religiously, which is why I treasure them. But, I wasn't a market. We were the last of 'children to be seen and not heard', if you follow me. That's an exaggeration, but that's what we were, erm, and in those days we played football. I'm a fanatic about football. But all these streets round here, and in Levenshulme, were empty. You didn't see cars. Now, you will have seen double parking on your way here. But in our, in my day and up to the war there were no cars because people couldn't afford cars. So you'd just, perhaps, see an odd one. So the streets were empty, we could play in them, we'd no fear of getting knocked down by cars 'cause there weren't cars. It takes a lot to believe this but really when you go back about sixty odd years so, it's a vast difference. And we used to kick a stone about, then a tin can, then a golf ball, then a tennis ball and then a big rubber ball. And we played in the streets and we got shouted at by the neighbours for the noise we made, but we weren't at risk from being knocked down. Well you couldn't do that today. So we had no cars, we had no money, we couldn't go and buy things ourselves, and, we were looked after by our mother and father, who housed us, fed us and dressed us, clothed us, which was the norm. But since the war, oh, and we had no groups, we hadn't got Oasis, or Take That, or Duran Duran, we'd no groups. The nearest we'd got to that--which is another one of my big interests--was every night, and we'd only got the radio, not the television--every night on the radio there used to be a band from the London, one of the London hotels, so I used to do my home-, and I can remember this, it always used to be 10:30 at night till midnight, well I would do my homework by then, I'd been to the pictures, played football and done my homework, 10:30 at night I'm doing my homework till probably one and two in the morning, listening to--well I can't be too sure about these--definitely Lew Stone and his band from the Monseigneur Restaurant on the Wednesday, definitely Roy Fox and his band from the Mayfair Hotel on another night. Savoy Hotel, eh, Carroll Gibbons and his Savoy Orpheans from the Savoy Hotel, London, on another night, Sydney Lipton and his band from another hotel. So our groups were radio ones that we listened....

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape One]

[Start of Tape Two]

[Start of Side A]

VB: Yes, I've just changed it, yes.

DH: We didn't go to Wembley to meet them, we never met them, we saw photographs, we heard them but I, I remember all these tunes, they were marvellous. I've got the records now, LPs, compilations from the early 78s, they're returning to these old records now. But, eh, so we had no money, we'd no car, we'd no groups, we had nothing, eh, so all you could ask from a girl, if you'd taken her to the pictures, taken to the Farmside [referring to Electric Picture Palace] and taken her to the balcony and that was it, they didn't even allow for Romeo, the balcony at the Farmside or the Kingsway or the Regal was the, eh, you know, gateway to Paradise as it were, but we'd nothing. So when you were courting, in the summer you'd, you went, we went in park shelters or something like that, erm, you went all over the place but your best place, it's a cliché this, I know, and everybody laughs, but your main courting area was the back row of the cinema. Not for the lewd jokes that you get about it now [laughs] nor the innuendos but because you went there, you were in the back row if you were lucky [laughs], if you could beat somebody else to it, it was, it, you were seeing your film favourites, Thelma Todd, the girl at your side was nothing like Thelma Todd but that didn't worry you, you were in the warmth, it was comfortable, you'd got sweets, they went round with a tray with ice cream and all the rest of it on at the intervals, so it was a cosy atmosphere. So, for two hours you were lost with your girlfriend and you did your courting there. Erm, all very innocent of course, well reasonably innocent courting, erm, obviously it didn't give you much scope for the greatest intimacy but there you were. I mean that was it, you accepted that, erm, apart from which you couldn't indulge in the greatest intimacy anyway, even if you were in those rows, for two reasons. There was a sense of community then, which there isn't now, and if the girl got pregnant that was a disgrace on the community, particularly your street, on her family, on your family; so that kept them, kept you both, on the straight and narrow. 'Cause there was shame in those days. Now shame has inverted commas now. But there was shame in those days. [laughs] And the other thing, of course, was you couldn't, unlike today, you knew about them, vaguely, but you couldn't obtain

condoms because you'd no money, and if you went in a chemist, [laughs] I mean he would look at you in your school cap and blazer, and probably if he was to sell them, even if you'd got the nerve to ask, which you hadn't, and the barber always says, "Anything for the weekend, sir?" you knew that from your elder brother, but I mean when you had your hair cut, you couldn't say "Could I have something for the weekend?!" So you had no chance of reaching condoms, so you accepted you couldn't get them so this, again, kept you on the straight and narrow. So you, you'd got shame and the social pressures on you, and lack of opportunities kept you on the straight and narrow and how contrary to what is going on nowadays, about bottling it up, you didn't need stress counselling, you lived with it, you had a happy life, you played your football, you went to the films, you went to the theatre, you listened to your dance bands. So you weren't a mass of repressions. I mean, you get the impression these days, listening to the experts, that you must have been absolutely seething. You weren't! You just accepted it and you just got on with life. Nowadays, the same lad, like me in the later thirties, take his correspondent, you know when he says "Weren't you a boy once?" Well, compare him now with me: a youth of eighteen, nineteen, he's got a car, particularly if he's at university.

VB: Mhm.

DH: He's got a flat or halls of residence, somewhere he could take his girlfriend, eh, he can buy condoms, he could get them given to him. There's no comparison. So we were adolescents. They are young adults. I don't say mentally and intellectually they were any better than us but, I mean, they were, when they say, "Weren't you a boy once?" yes I was but, the implication is that I ought to be more sympathetic to them because I've done it. If anything the boot's on the other foot!

VB: Yes.

DH: I understand, when you look at it, but I'm getting off the subject now, onto sociology! The only connection with the cinema is the back row, of course.

VB: Yeah.

DH: And, you're at the University of Manchester now aren't you?

VB: Yes. Yes. [VB was staying in halls of residence]

DH: And, do you know the Armitage Centre? Have you been near it?

VB: I haven't. No.

DH: Well, I'll tell you something, if you walk near it this is, this is quite ridiculous really. You'd nowhere to do your courting as I say, 'cause you couldn't, you wouldn't take your girl home. Eh, so you, the back row was your nirvana. Park benches and park shelters were, or little woody places, but one place in Levenshulme [laughs] that was very well known is [pause 2 seconds] as you go up Whitworth Lane, or down Whitworth Lane, to the Armitage Centre, there's a long footpath runs the whole length of the Armitage Centre and the sports ground, and it runs that way and it comes out on Birchfields Road. A great long, now the wall of the University buildings, the Armitage Centre wasn't there then, on one side there's Manchester Athletic Club, which had a big open-air racing track, on the left-hand side coming this way, the right-hand side is where the Armitage Centre is. But the big long wall with buttresses to hold it up, if you walked there, you'll remember this!

VB: [laughs]

DH: You'll never forget this if you have a walk there! And it can't be far from where you are. And a very long wall, hundreds of yards long with buttresses all the way along. I can guarantee every buttress was occupied by a couple [both laugh] In those courting days! It was, erm, what did they call it in those days? If it was Bernie's Lane, they'd call it a 'monkey road' on a Sunday, where the lads went picking up girls. But if you had one and you wanted somewhere to go for a little privacy, because it was wedged between the... what's now the Armitage Centre and the Manchester Athletic Club open-air cycle track, it was deserted, there was no houses there and you hadn't got the big halls of residence there are now, University was nowhere near as big. It was virtually secluded, so on winter nights, particularly when it was dark, you could guarantee every buttress along there would be occupied. And I speak from personal experience, not as one who's occupied a buttress, but as one who with a gang of young lads who, as you can well imagine, in their impish way, used to go along there to see if there was any chance of finding out the facts of life!

VB: [laughs]

DH: Well we never found out the facts of life but we did discover that these were apparently the official or semi-official places for courting. So we've wandered off the cinema now, haven't we!

VB: Mhm!

DH: So, eh, where do we go from here?

VB: Erm, well one thing I was--

DH: Has it raised any ideas in your mind? [laughs]

VB: Yes. Very much so. I mean, the stars you were mentioning, people like Robert Donat and--

DH: Robert Donat.

VB: Jeanette MacDonald and, what were your, did you have other favourite stars?

DH: Oh! Loads of them? Erm, oh...Maurice Chevalier of course. Erm, oh the musicals I haven't mentioned because, eh, once we got onto this, as we grew up and we liked the [district?] comedies of Ernst Lubitsch, the gaiety of them, and the froth and, oh they really were delightful, there was one, Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert, they weren't one of his but they had a delicious film, *It Happened One Night*.

VB: Right.

DH: Where, I think he's a newspaper reporter and she's somebody that he's antipathetic to her, and I know there's a scene in that where they have to put up at a motel and she insists on hanging a blanket on a string between the two beds. But it was a delightful comedy that, and we thought that was, you know, risky, with Clark Gable one side undressing and Claudette Colbert the other side undressing and we knew they wouldn't show us anything if anything did develop. Actually I don't think anything did as far as I remember the story, but they were saucy if you follow me, saucy but nice. So Claudette Colbert was another. Of course in my case it was nearly all the ladies I adored and I've adored the ladies ever since, you know! But Claudette Colbert, Madeleine Carroll! Eh, oh strangely they don't come to mind immediately, looking back, I can think of them since then but,

erm, who would attract me, oh that's dreadful! I'd tell better if I looked at my postcards that I've collected.

VB: Do you still have these or..?

DH: I've still got some.

VB: Have you really?

DH: Would you like to see them?

VB: I'd love to see them. Yes!

DH: Oh well.

VB: That would be great!

DH: [reaches to fetch cards] Yes, I've still got them.

VB: That would be wonderful.

DH: I managed to turn them out just in case... I wasn't really sure what was really interesting or not.

VB: No, that's... I'd love to see them.

[unwrapping noises]

VB: Oh my.

DH: These are all in alphabetical order, I was very methodical. But, I've even got my membership card--

VB: Ah!

DH: Which you can read.

VB: Oh that's wonderful. 'Picturegoer' Postcard Club.

[Mrs Houlston comes in to tell where bathroom is and offers another coffee which is accepted]

VB: So that's erm, they talk about the 'Picturegoer Weekly' which was tuppence at that stage.

DH: Yes, tuppence, that was about 1931, '32.

VB: That's amazing. 'Picturegoer' Postcard Club membership card.

DH: They used to cost threepence a card or twelve for two and six.

VB: Right. And I see you got a registered number.

DH: Yes.

VB: 7723.

DH: Unfortunately there's no date on that card.

VB: No, that's a shame.

DH: Like when I joined--

VB: Yes.

DH: But I'm sure it must have been '31 or '32.

VB: Yeah.

DH: Now I'll show you Thelma Todd because you'll realise why, as a romantic schoolboy, I fell in love with her. I'm pretty sure she's... [looks through cards and hands Thelma Todd to VB]

VB: Ah.

DH: Now see what I mean.

VB: Oh she's lovely.

DH: Now look at that, if you see that in a slip, I mean oh what! [laughs]

VB: She's beautiful, yes. Yeah.

DH: The thing was though, they were terribly crummy films she was in and mainly sort of, she's more, quite often a gangster's moll or something like that.

VB: Right.

DH: I mean she looks refined and everything there [laughs] but...

VB: Yeah.

DH: She's the sort that nowadays would play a tart with a heart of gold!

VB: Yes, she's got quite a cheeky smile actually, hasn't she?

DH: Yeah, yeah, but eh... [continues looking through photographs]

VB: She's lovely.

DH: That's, eh, Thelma Todd. Evelyn Brent, where's Evelyn Brent? Where's Evelyn Brent, my first.... 'Cause this is the point, I've been watching films from the silent days. Oh no, I haven't got Evelyn, could have sworn I'd got Evelyn Brent. Never mind, Madeleine Carroll, must have Madeleine Carroll somewhere.

VB: I see some of them have, are coloured as well, that's quite--

DH: Oh these have got a bit out of order, never mind, oh, Victoria Hopper, oh, William Powell was one of my favourites, he and Myrna Loy did these series of *The Thin Man*--

VB: Of course.

DH: With Asta the dog. Now that was a similar type of comedy, although he was a sort of detective type. But it was a light, witty comedy, and I liked anything like that. No, they're not in order, I thought they were, now that's a shame. William Powell, oh there's Evelyn Brent, I thought I had--

VB: Evelyn Brent.

DH: One somewhere. Coloured as well, by Jove!

VB: Yes! Well she looks like the vampish type!

DH: She was a silent film star this one--

VB: Yes.

DH: And she looks like a silent film star then.

VB: Yes, yes, that's wonderful. So that was your, one of your first.

DH: That was my first, that, I lost my heart to Evelyn Brent in the silent films and then I lost it to Thelma Todd and then after that, oh, William Powell, Milton Sills--he was in *The Sea Hawk*, [referring to 1924 version] eh.

VB: Was that with, was Errol Flynn in that?

DH: That's it, Errol Flynn was in that later on, yes. [referring to 1940 version of *The Sea Hawk*]. Oh Rin Tin Tin [both laugh at photo] Now these are the sort of British ones we got.

VB: Right.

DH: Dorothy Wilding was always the official photographer and she did court photography as well.

VB: Elizabeth Allan.

DH: So, I've got a lot of these, when the Rank starlets came along, the Rank school they'd have starlets and erm.

[Mrs Houlston comes in offering a sandwich; declined]

DH: Here we are, I've got three there of Madeleine Carroll, I went mad obviously.

VB: Ah.

DH: Three of Madeleine Carroll.

VB: Oh, they're very different actually these three.

DH: Yes, yes.

VB: Did you get these all at the same time or..?

DH: These are all '30s, you know, in the years...

VB: Yes.

DH: Oh I didn't get the three at the same time!

VB: No, I was wondering if you--

DH: No, I got them at different times, you know, I mean, they sent the coloured one I got, and I thought oh goodie, I'd have a coloured one! I'm sorry these have got out of order, but not to worry.

VB: These are in such good condition as well, you've kept them very well.

DH: Now you see, we thought that was out-and-out naughtiness.

VB: [sighs] Lily Damita.

DH: She's showing her leg there, that's, I mean can you imagine the effect that...

VB: And a bare shoulder.

DH: I'd want to have a cold shower after that!

VB: [laughs] Yes.

DH: Or I would've done, metaphorically! Eh, but here it is in colour as well.

VB: Oh.

DH: Oh, I'll tell you this.

VB: She's not someone I've come across before, Lily Damita, was she..?

DH: No, well, there was a lot of continentals went from Europe to Hollywood.

VB: Right, yeah.

DH: And they became vamp types you know, and, eh, they were and... oh we thought they were the bee's knees! Erm, there's one, Lilian Harvey who was a British girl who made her name in Berlin, a bit like Sally Bowles.

VB: Right.

DH: And she was in German films and, erm, she was gorgeous she was. And she made one film away called *Congress Dances* and then she faded away. So, I don't know quite what happened to her. Greta Garbo.

VB: Ah.

DH: I didn't like Garbo.

VB: Did you not?

DH: No, not erm, if I dare whisper it [drops voice] she wasn't sexy enough for me!

VB: Right.

DH: She was, erm, I mean as I understood the word then, I mean, as a schoolboy then.

VB: Yes.

DH: It isn't the same as a schoolboy now talking about sex. [laughs]

VB: Yes.

DH: Now, I mean at sixteen, he's probably a father.

VB: Yes.

DH: A schoolboy. That was, Oh here's Lilian Harvey, yes.

VB: Ah.

DH: Lilian Harvey.

VB: A coloured one as well.

DH: Yes, she was, eh. Oh and Jean Harlow of course.

VB: Was she one of your favourites?

DH: Yeah. Well she was a favourite because, in those days, in the early thirties, anything went. To such an extent that the Hays Code came out, which you will have read about, things like, mhm, you mustn't show the inside of a lady's thigh eh any, any, any couple on the bed the man must, a bit like snooker, the man--

VB: [laughs]

DH: The man must have one foot on the floor, eh, you mustn't show smoke coming out a gun that's been fired, all sorts of what seem piffling little things which they could and couldn't do. Well, before that they showed you virtually anything, [laughs] so I'm delighted to say, eh, in the nicest possible way, of course...

VB: Yeah.

DH: Once again as a schoolboy, with these, like the rest of my schoolboys with these nice ideas, we loved it because you got plenty of leg shots and the décolletage was quite generous, more generous than later on, eh, so we would see bits of the female body which, you know, we'd only dreamed about [laughs] and, eh, there were shots, stocking tops was a favourite thing, and always in pictures the leading lady would have to adjust her stockings some time. So up would come her skirt and we'd all be goggle-eyed and, eh, "Did you see Lily Damita" you know? But erm, very innocent. I mean, I stress, it was very innocent.

VB: Mhm.

DH: Because, eh, unfortunately--I'm glad I'm not a child these days, I think they lose their innocence too soon. In fact, we went from baby to child to youth, adolescent and adult.

VB: Mhm.

DH: But we had phases and you grew out of one and into the next. Whereas now, at sixteen, you've left the baby but you're a child-cum-youth-cum-father-cum and you're not anything and you don't drop in a category any more. I think they miss an awful lot.

VB: Mhm.

DH: But, eh, Benita Hume. Oh yes.

VB: Ah.

DH: She was an English actress who went to Hollywood. Most of them finished up in Hollywood. Some of these were in the theatre like, erm, June, she was a dancer in musical comedy. So quite why the 'Picturegoer' was selling pictures of her or not I'm not sure. Myrna Loy, I loved Myrna Loy.

VB: Mhm.

DH: I remember her first as the slinky vamp in, eh, *The Desert Song*.

VB: Ah.

DH: Azuri I think her name was, 'cause, with her eyes she could play exotic types.

VB: Yes.

DH: And Jeanette MacDonald I wasn't very keen on.

VB: [coughs]

DH: Sari Maritza. Phyllis Monkman was a theatre one. Oh Anna Neagle, of course, I liked Anna Neagle. Ooh, now that was interesting because she made a film called *The Little Damozel*, a musical, and she had a sheer dress on, sheer as, like a veil really it was, with block spots on it, if I remember rightly, but it was sheer. Well, I mean I realised years later [laughs] that she was obviously wearing a body stocking.

VB: Right.

DH: But I mean we didn't know about body stockings in those days. [laughs] We used to look at these pictures in the 'Picturegoer'--

VB: Yeah.

DH: Of her, and see the film and we couldn't get over it, how completely , what seemed to us nude female body. I hope I don't sound like a sex maniac or--

VB: No. Not at all, I mean I understand the age you're talking about!

[both laugh]

DH: But I mean, eh, lads are curious.

VB: Of course, yes.

DH: 'Cause particularly, eh, when you don't get a formal sex education.

VB: Yes.

DH: We'd pick it all up as we'd go along but in my case it worked out particularly well and I think probably the majority of our cases, it worked out very well, how we picked it up, but now they'll, I mean, I can't help thinking it's swung right from our innocence--

VB: Mhm.

DH: Completely to the other extreme and they talk about counselling and they must tell 'em this and there must be something out.

VB: Yes.

DH: And I wonder are they any better, will they be any better than I am, because I came through it all--

VB: Yeah.

DH: Without any stress counselling, without a social worker, without a carer. I'm happily married, I think I'm normal! Erm, so I don't think it did me any harm. But you've got to be careful who you're talking to--

VB: Mhm.

DH: Because they might think, "He's, he's a repressed sex pervert."

VB: [laughs]

DH: Or something, this bloke. But we weren't , but that's how we were in those days. Laurel and Hardy of course, Gracie Fields.

VB: Was Gracie Fields someone that you, you liked in the pictures?

DH: Oh yes. Gracie Fields, Rochdale, Lancashire girl.

VB: Yes.

DH: Naturally.

VB: Of course.

DH: I didn't particularly like her in films, I preferred her as a music hall act.

VB: Really.

DH: But I didn't like her films because you couldn't make her...you couldn't make her into a heroine for me. She was just Gracie Fields.

VB: Mhm.

DH: So, even if she's in the cotton mills, singing, and leading them out on strike or something like that, I didn't feel it was a character, I just thought, "Well, it's just Gracie Fields." But I like her, I liked her anyway. But, erm, well that's those few anyway, but you may well see these because these are the autographed ones.

VB: Oh!

DH: Now '37 I see, I got some of these.

VB: It's beautiful.

DH: Takes you back years.

VB: Jessie Matthews, that's wonderful. Jessie Matthews. "Best wishes, Joan Bennett."

DH: Oh yes, I liked Joan. Now, there was Joan Bennett and she had a sister.... What was her sister's name, it began with a C? Joan Bennett and Connie, Connie Bennett. I couldn't stand her sister but I liked her.

VB: Right, right.

DH: Sally Bowles! You know, I can't make that out, it's Sally somebody. And I can't for the life of me remember who that is. Now Harry Welchman, [laughs] he goes back to 1926.

VB: Aah.

DH: And he was the lead, he was a baritone and the lead in the original 'Desert Song' with Edith Day. [referring to the 1927 stage musical at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane]

VB: Aah.

DH: And I don't know quite how I got his but anyway here's some more. Betty Stockfeld, not Stockfield.

VB: Right.

DH: She was Australian and came over in the Rank organisation.

VB: Mhm.

DH: I think most of these would be round about the time of the Rank organisation.

VB: Right. Gordon--

DH: Gordon Harker. He always played Cockneys in British films. Cockney barmaid or, barmaid!
Barman - the definitive Cockney he was. That's Benita Hume. I see I put there. [indicates own note]

VB: Right. Yes.

DH: She went to Hollywood in 1932.

VB: '32. Yeah.

DH: But, eh, so you'll find these are all British films.

VB: Right. Yeah. Jack Hulbert.

DH: Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge his wife.

VB: Oh that's lovely with her in the little page boy's outfit! With the moustache! [laughs]

DH: Ann Casson.

VB: Yes.

DH: She appeared briefly in British films, she's the daughter of... oh 'struth! [pause] big, big British theatre, oh, [chap?]. Lewis Casson was an architect and he married, tsh, oh, Gia [referring to Sybil

Thorndike] and eh, I've got her photograph here as well. And she's the daughter. Did you know Ginger Rogers has died today?

VB: I know, I saw that.

DH: Or died recently, so.

VB: Yes.

DH: Ann Casson, Adrienne Owen, she took leads in, she was one of my favourites. As I say, British favourites, cause I could write to them.

VB: Yeah. [looks at photo] Angela Baddeley.

DH: Baddeley. She's related to Hermione Baddeley.

VB: Right.

DH: Who died. Elizabeth Allan, she went to Hollywood.

VB: 1933.

DH: I see I noted in my schoolboy writing!

VB: Yeah.

DH: Joan.

VB: Joan Gardner, is it?

DH: Joan Gardner, she was another one I liked.

VB: Yeh.

DH: Diana Beaumont. I wonder if that was Diana Beaumont in this other one?

VB: Aye, it could be actually, it's like her.

DH: Not Sally somebody. Oh no, I don't think so!

VB: No. Nelly?

DH: Rene Gadd.

VB: Oh Rene.

DH: Rene Gadd.

VB: That's a lovely one.

DH: They then brought out the little ones. Some little ones.

VB: This is amazing. [DH passes small photo Golden Album; VB looks through] Dennis King, Richard...

DH: [Richard Atcliffe?] Which are actually facsimiles of the big photograph one! [laughs]

VB: Yes, yes.

DH: But Dennis King was a tenor.

VB: Right.

DH: He sang in *The Vagabond King*. Willy Fritsch, he went to Hollywood, I don't remember him doing very much. Charles Farrell and Janet Gaynor were the romantic pair in silent films and early [talkies], they were the definitive romantic couple. I don't know who would pass today because they were in the days of romance when it was all very pure. A Burton and Taylor, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor.

VB: Right.

DH: You know how big they were in the star firmament. Well they were the same in their day.

VB: I see.

DH: But in silent films and then in the early talkies, but not to be compared with the sophisticated Taylors of course.

VB: Jeanette MacDonald.

DH: Jeanette MacDonald. Yes. She's...

VB: And Lilian Harvey. These are, these are wonderful, I've never seen anything like this.

DH: Ramon Novarro, well he was a heartthrob of the day, Ramon Novarro, the ladies swooned over him, he was 'The Pagan Love Song' [probably referring to *The Pagan*] was one of his films. Harold Lloyd of course, a comedian, who else. Greta Garbo, she wasn't feminine enough for me, Garbo.

VB: Mhm, mhm.

DH: I accept her beauty.

VB: Yes, yes.

DH: I'll accept she's a beauty but she's too ice-cold, too much of a statue. Mary Nolan, Barbara Kerr, they were just pretty ones, you'll see I picked pretty girls!

VB: [laughs] Yes.

DH: There's Tom Mix.

VB: Tom Mix.

DH: Oh he's in black there, I thought he used to wear white. Grant Withers was a romantic lead, I must say I can't remember him. Now Jean Arthur, aw, another one of my favourites. She'd speak, she did thpeak with a lithp! But she had a sort of thomething about the way she thpoke_

VB: Right.

DH: And she always had comedy roles. Light romantic comedies. Oh, I fell in love with Jean Arthur! Anna May Wong was always a seductress of some sort.

VB: Mhm. Is Carlotta King?

DH: Now Carlotta King, I don't, can't remember much about her at all.

VB: Is Iván Petrovitch?

DH: Haven't a clue.

VB: Yeah.

DH: Not a clue. I don't know why I got him. He must have sneaked in while I wasn't looking!

VB: Were these, these were from 'The Picturegoer' as well?

DH: These were, yes, these were sort of the same club as...

VB: Valentino.

DH: Ah yes, Rudolph Valentino of course. Raquel Torres, well she was always had Mexican roles, a bit of a firebrand.

VB: Yes.

DH: Lupe Velez was another firebrand. John Barrymore was he, oh Clive Brook I liked, 'cause he was always, I thought he was handsome and he was always playing opposite somebody like Madeleine Carroll.

VB: Right.

DH: And he was always stiff upper lip British officer type. And of course Dietrich! I thought, I thought, *Blue Angel! Blue Angel!* Oh those frilly knickers in *Blue Angel!* They sent us, you know!

VB: Yes.

DH: As you can imagine. Well, of course we liked the legs of course. Legs Dietrich.

VB: Was she...

DH: I must get off this! [both laugh] Because it's beginning to..!!

VB: [laughs] Norma Shearer.

DH: Norma Shearer. She had heavy dramatic roles.

VB: Mhm.

DH: She married Irving Thalberg, the director, and eh, he stuck her in a lot of films. But she was in a film called *Smilin' Through*. Aah. I think it was a grand double feature. And I had to sit through it and it was one of these mushy women's--

VB: Aww, I see!

DH: Sensitive films, you know, but eh--

VB: I might just change this over actually, it's near the end.

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

[silence until 1:32:15]

DH: Ivor Novello, of course, Barry Norton, not Barry Norman, he was in a British film. Douglas Fairbanks Junior.

VB: Oh.

DH: Oh Douglas Fairbanks Senior, oh he's fantastic, he used to leap about there, *Thief of Baghdad* and all these things. And he was very athletic. Anita Page was just a glamour girl. Lillian Roth was another of my American favourites, and Clara Bow was the original 'It' Girl.

VB: Mhm

DH: Well, you were all right with Clara Bow 'cause she was in films in the 1920s.

VB: Right.

DH: And she was the 'It' Girl. Elinor, Elinor Glyn said 'It', you know, that, we call it sex appeal, 'S.A.' it became eventually, but she'd got 'It' but nobody knew what It was.

VB: [laughs]

DH: But she was alright because in the '20s it was the flapper days so they always wore stockings and garters. And the skirts were always short. So they did the Charleston.

VB: Mhm.

DH: So you saw quite some erotic sights you, well, when I say erotic...

VB: Yes.

DH: You know, to us. But, erm, Charles King he was a singer. Richard Dix, he had dramatic roles.

VB: Mhm.

DH: David [Lea?]. I can't place David [Lea?]. Lupe Velez always had fiery temperamental Mexican roles. She'd have made a good Kate in 'Kiss Me...', in, erm, 'Taming of the Shrew'. Nancy Carroll. You could tell we always had Spanish types. I think she was in a film with, erm, the recent one they showed on television, with, erm, Fred Astaire.

VB: Oh right.

DH: I'm not so sure it wasn't *Flying Down to Rio* [Note: no known Carroll/Astaire films] and I think she was an heiress in whatever it was. But that's the sort she had, eh, high class Spanish type roles. Well that's it!

VB: These are really amazing.

DH: That's that. So, I don't know, is it getting us anywhere, all this?

VB: Oh, very much so, yes!

DH: Oh, Sybil Thorndike is one, Ann Casson's daughter. Sybil Thorndike married Lewis Casson and Ann Casson was their daughter. Raquel Torres again. So, now I have, should have, I think, I've got some more autograph ones, including Robert Donat. They don't mean anything to anybody else these days, 'cause I don't suppose many people know them. Now, I'm very pleased that I kept them in the original envelopes, because 1937... oh there we are, another one of my favourites, Elisabeth Welch.

VB: Oh.

DH: The singer.

VB: Yes.

DH: She's fantastic. She still is and she's well into her 70s now. And very frail.

VB: She's lovely, yes.

DH: But eh, no, she's eh, Elizabeth Walsh [referring to Welch?], that was typed. Anna Neagle's, with a letter.

VB: Aah.

DH: Anna Neagle. And you can see why I fell for her.

VB: Oh, yes. That's beautiful.

DH: "B and D Studios [referring to British and Dominion Studios], Boreham Wood, Herts, 1933."

VB: '33. Eighth of May. "Dear Mr Houlston, I must apologise for having this letter typed but my correspondence lately has been getting so heavy that this is the only way I can keep up with it and I am sure you will understand that the thought is just the same..."

DH: [laughs]

VB: "Thank you so very much for your letter. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your thought and I hope you will like the signed photograph which I enclose. With best wishes, Yours sincerely, Anna Neagle." That's wonderful. That's such a beautiful photograph.

DH: She was beautiful. If you can imagine her in a sheer dress and a lace body...

VB: Yes.

DH: [Stocking?], no wonder we went barmy! Smoke coming out of our ears! [both laugh] Oh dear! But you have to be careful who you say this to these days. I'm saying it to you because I presume you are the serious-looking young lady I think you are.

VB: Yes, yes.

DH: But I'd hesitate to, eh, say it to other people. "Denis Houlston Esquire." 1933 again. One and a half pence in the old money in postage, which is about half a pence in current money. Is this Robert Donat by any chance? Oh yes it is.

VB: Oh!

DH: Oh he's very handsome look.

VB: He is.

DH: It was a tragedy, he suffered from asthma all his life.

VB: Really?

DH: And it killed him, in actual.... He was just getting on, he did the *Inn of the Sixth Happiness* with Ingrid Bergman--

VB: Yes.

DH: That's where they take these Tibetan refugees and he staggered through that film and he died shortly afterwards.

VB: Uh.

DH: Very handsome bloke though with a beautiful voice.

VB: Yes.

DH: I could listen to his voice.

VB: I like the message on the back [of the photograph] as well: "Thank you for your nice letter. I hope you will like my films."

DH: I certainly did. And *Goodbye Mr Chips*, as a schoolboy I appreciated it even more--

VB: Yes.

DH: Why his boys worshipped him.

VB: Yes.

DH: Mr Chips. So... Robert Donat. Who's this one? 1932. I must've had a peak year, that year. Oh Florence Desmond.

VB: Aah.

DH: She actually was an impersonator eh, in the days when impersonators weren't ten a penny like they are now.

VB: Right.

DH: Rory Brenner and all the rest of them. And also a female impersonator.

VB: That's very unusual even now.

DH: And she used to do all the film stars. And I have a record now of her doing a whole party, part 1 and 2, it's an HMV 78, and she does, she wrote her own material, Florence, and she does Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo. And she did appear in one or two films, eh.

VB: She sounds very talented.

DH: Where they gave her a chance to. She was quite a nice-looking woman.

VB: Yes, she is.

DH: And they gave her a chance to do some of her impersonations. But oh I adored her, I thought.

Now is this Madeleine Carroll? Could well be. Yes. Madeleine Carroll and Peter somebody who was with her in a film [possibly referring to Peter Lorre].

VB: Right.

DH: That's taken in a studio obviously.

VB: Yeah.... Yes it looks like a sort of high society sort of film doesn't it?

DH: Yes. Yeah, it does.... Now that's more like her with her hair.

VB: Yes.

DH: In that sort of hairdo.

VB: Yes.

DH: But she would sweep anybody off their feet, well she did us anyway.

VB: Yeah. So that's from *Kissing Cup's Race*.

DH: And she'd got nice legs and, and I'll mention this, [laughs] I hope I don't keep harping back to sex! But she did one film, and I can't even remember the name of it and it was before the Hays Code--

VB: Right.

DH: And it was a period piece and it could've been something like Oscar Wilde's 'Lady Windermere's Fan'. [probably referring to the 1925 version of *Lady Windermere's Fan*]

VB: Mhm.

DH: But she was getting ready to go out [laughs] in the evening with a long period dress and the cameraman shot it from the floor looking all the way up her legs!

VB: Aah!

DH: So you got a, this dress comes down, you know, like a tent, [laughs] so it was a reversal of striptease really! And it actually, I can remember it now, it was quite beautiful really.

VB: Mhm.

DH: But erm I suppose you could call it erotic but, I mean we'd never seen under a lady's dress before! [laughs] As little schoolboys you know, and to get this shot of something... looking like that and then this dress slowly descends. Well they cut that out of course in the Hays Code. You wouldn't be able to show it in America, with disgusting things like that. [continues looking through collection] Oh Lord, what was her name? Corbett, oh Leonora.

VB: Right.

DH: Leonora Corbett.

VB: Yes, that's 1933.

DH: 19-- Oh, she's--

VB: Yes, she's put the date on it.

DH: She used to play society ladies. But the trouble with British films in those days... those like her and even Madeleine Carroll, they always used to [imitates 'society' accent] sspeak licke thaht, yew knyow? And they always very like, and they came out rather a little sort of tinny little voice, "Whoo's fawr tennis?"

VB: [laughs]

DH: Oh now, he was absolutely brilliant. Sydney Howard.

VB: Right.

DH: He was a biggish bloke, Les Dawson size, but he played lugubrious people but he was a good, he was a comedian essentially, but he was a good character actor.

VB: Mhm.

DH: And eh, I always think, looking back, they could have made a lot more of him. But, erm, you see they don't mean anything to anybody these things now. Like this one, this is only a penny, 1936. Now who've we got here, oh yes! Jean Gillie...

VB: Jean Gillie.

DH: Oh yes, now you can imagine any schoolboy [falling for that?], couldn't you?

VB: Oh she's lovely, yes.

DH: Ohh!

VB: She reminds me a bit of Vivien Leigh actually, she's got that sort of look.

DH: She does. She does.

VB: She's lovely.

DH: Yes. I wonder if by any chance her name appears in my little reference book here. Gillie. [looks through book 'Picturegoer Who's Who', donated to project] Gillie.

VB: [coughs]

DH: Gilbert, Gills, Gillet, no. No. No. She must have been in the charm school, no, she doesn't appear in this. So, just for curiosity let's see if Howard is in this. Edward Horton, Leslie Howard. "Sydney Howard: born in Sydney 1885," eh [this birthplace differs from other sources]. "Born 1885, was employed in a paper merchant's, he turned to the stage 1919, obtained a part in *Hit the Deck*, he

was in *Splinters in the Navy*, *French Leave*, *Tilly of Bloomsbury*, *Up for the Cup*, and *The Mayor's Nest*. Address care of British and Dominion Studios, Elstree." I used to write to these, you see.

VB: What is the book? It's 'Picturegoer Who's Who'. [almost identical entry in 'The World Film Encyclopaedia', also donated]

DH: This is an absolutely smashing book this, because it gives you, it's not just an index of the actors and so on, but it gives you studio addresses, birthdays of the stars, the year's Honours list, film section, studio section.

VB: Right.

DH: Technical terms, directors of film producing companies, trade organisations, it's, in fact, looking at it now, it's quite, it gives all these different associations, the cinema that was, entertainment acts, the awards and the films of 1932 and it's, erm.... and I got it particularly for the photographs.

VB: Right.

DH: It was. Conrad Veidt. He was marvellous. Lewis Stone was a favourite.

VB: Is that, I see it was 1933, is that one you've had since 1933?

DH: I've had this since 1932.

VB: Really. That's amazing.

DH: Yes. Oh yes, all the stuff you see here this is the 'Glossary of Terms', you know what a microphone amplifier is and then also service for ladies, it gave you a bit about it! [laughs] Diana Wynyard, she was British and played big roles. Now you see we thought that dress was, ooh, that dress, I mean looking at it now, look at her figure!

VB: Yes.

DH: Anorexic!

VB: Yes!

[both laugh]

DH: But eh, they were in musicals. Molly Lamont and Gene Gerrard. Oh, good heavens! Oh there's Claudette Colbert.

VB: Aah, she's--

DH: I loved her. She was French, she, a nice saucy French, if you follow me, and she had a nice accent.

VB: I saw one of her films quite recently, the one where she's Cigarette and, the one set in the, I think it might have been Ronald Colman that was in it as well. [referring to *Under Two Flags*]

DH: I. Oh Ronald Colman was one of our favourites. *The Prisoner of Zenda* and things like that. Well, I always remember I can't stand American sentiment. I don't mind sentimentality or sentiment even, but the American version leaves me cold.

VB: Mhm.

DH: I just, oh, it curls me up. And I believe this latest one about the, it's swept the Academy, I believe that's full of American sentimentality, it won't appeal to me. But I remember Claudette Colbert in this film, I was abroad in the Army, in the tropics, been there for years, and we went to the garrison tin hut to see this film and it was an American film and it had Claudette Colbert in as a Red Cross commandant. And it had her family there, typical mixed, mixture of Polish-cum-what-cum-American. Momma and Poppa, a big gang of kids. And the eldest son's been drafted so he's going to the dockside, and they're all going to see him off. So the grief scene's working like mad, Momma's losing her eldest son and, oh, they're all in a terrible state as, as mushy as can be. And Claudette Colbert came out with the erm, you've got to imagine this is a film that we're watching in a tin hut crammed with British servicemen who'd been in the Tropics for years fighting this war [laughs] against the Japanese--for years I stress--and Claudette Colbert, in an endeavour to take some of the burden off Momma, says to Momma, "Don't worry Mrs Patchinski" or whatever her

name was, eh, "He'll be back in six months!" And we thought Gawd! [possibly referring to *So Proudly We Hail!*]

VB: [long drawn-out sigh]

DH: Six month and the tears are flowing, and this was supposed to be the big dramatic scene!

VB: Yes.

DH: It got the biggest laugh you've ever heard of!

VB: [coughs]

DH: Very cynical we were.

VB: Mhm.

DH: In those days. Aah, here we are after all those years!

VB: Madeleine Carroll.

DH: My little darling! Madeleine Carroll. Eh, what's here? 1935. Oh that's that Betty Stockfeld, I've got two of her. Now how did I get two? Don't tell me I got carried away and got them twice!

VB: [coughs]

DH: I couldn't get this out, I had to break the envelope.

VB: Aah.

DH: Oh now June Barry [referring to Joan Barry]. Now June Barry and Harold Huth--H-U-T-H--they were the romantic pair of the British theatre. And they burst into Americ..., into British films.

VB: Mhm.

DH: And they were like Janet Gaynor and the Charles Farrell [inaudible] but she used to speak awfully like that: "Oah neeoah, Oah deeahr, Oah lem sawrry Charles, lem afraid Charles we cahn't get murried!"

VB: [laughs]

DH: Charles said, "Oah but my deear, we muhst! We lev one another." "We cahn't possibly!"

[both laugh]

DH: But, eh, at the time, they were the bee's knees.... Have you got somewhere else to go? Am I detaining you?

VB: No, no, not at all, no. Actually it's amazing to be able to see all this.

DH: Well this is Harold Huth you see, that's him. They were the pair. They were the real pair, Harold Huth, so with Barry, together, obviously. 1933. What have we got with this one? Is this Ann Todd or Ann Casson? Prince of Wales Theatre, Birmingham, "I enclose photograph." Ann Casson, that's Sybil Thorndike's daughter.

VB: Ah.

DH: [unfolds]

VB: I'm amazed at how, good condition these are in after that, you've kept them very well.

DH: Yes, I, this has got to be a foreign one, hasn't it.

VB: [looking] Yes.

DH: They've put Denis Houlston, Manchester, Levenshulme, with the street at the bottom. They don't do it our way.

VB: Yes.

DH: So this, I would guess, will be Camilla Horn. Yes, it's Camilla Horn.

VB: Aah.

DH: And she was a continental star who came over, I think she made about one British film. But of course there again you see for us, a [lowers voice] "foreign star, you know, Camilla!" With a name like Camilla.

VB: Yes.

DH: Camilla Horn. And she was a blonde as well.

VB: She's lovely.

DH: So, and gentlemen in those days did prefer blondes!

VB: [laughs] Right!

DH: Now it's [looking through] Camilla Horn, 192--, at least she must have written it herself, that's something not got her secretary--I'm always dubious about a lot of autographs... Aah, Anne Shelton.

VB: Aah.

DH: [laughs] It's strange that. When I was in the Army during the war eh, Vera Lynn, the forces' sweetheart--she wasn't mine, that was mine: Anne Shelton.... Even, even at twenty-two, twenty-three, I found Vera Lynn too saccharine.

VB: Mhm.

DH: And I much preferred Anne Shelton. So whilst everyone else was, eh, raving about Vera Lynn, it's true she was the forces' sweetheart, the lads worshipped her. But not me, you know?

VB: Mhm.

DH: I liked her, I liked her singing. I remember her singing with the big bands, half ten to midnight, Ambrose and his Orchestra. But erm, no, eh Anne Shelton was the one for me. And she did appear in some British films. '47, oh that's '47, so it's not prewar, really, is it, that? Pat Paterson, she was a nice one.

VB: Uhuh.

DH: She always played, erm, eh, the daughter of, the Lancashire mill girl or something like that.

VB: Right, yes. Yes, it's a nice picture that with the wee, is it a dog at the front? I can't really see it. It looks like she's, it's lovely.

DH: Is that the lot? [coming to bottom of his envelope] Oh, there's something? That'll be all.

VB: These are amazing, they really are.

DH: So where do we go from there? Haven't a clue! Have we exhausted everything?

VB: I'm sure we haven't actually, but eh! [laughs]

DH: You'll probably think of something afterwards.

VB: Well this is what usually happens.

DH: Yeah.

VB: I mean, it's--

DH: What you thought of.

VB: Well, I didn't expect to see all these things! So that was--

DH: Well the thing is, would you like these? Because I've no one to leave them to....

VB: Really?

DH: Um, yes.

VB: That, that would be--

DH: [passing over envelope] Ignore that [referring to writing] - it's the firm I used to work for.

VB: Right, right.

DH: But, erm, when I knew you were coming I got them together.

VB: Right.

DH: So, eh, I've reached the stage in my life, I've no - and my sister's the same - where we've no relatives to leave them to and we've got far too much, as you will have gathered. Over the years, in seventy-eight years, I've accumulated so much stuff, it's unbelievable. And since a lot of it's never touched from one year to the next...

VB: Yes.

DH: It's there for reference. I'm a big reference person I am. I would have made a good lawyer, because a good lawyer isn't one who knows everything about the law, a good lawyer is a man who knows where to look with a particular reference to something.

VB: Yes.

DH: I'm like my father, I've kept things (a) out of sentimental interest and (b) because they're always there to refer to.

VB: Yes.

DH: But, erm, it's reaching the stage where it will have to go sometime. So you are a godsend really, if you are prepared to accept them.

VB: Well, I mean it's tremendously generous of you and I'd be delighted to accept them!

DH: Well there you are, and those, and... [handing over]

VB: Aw, it's just so, so kind 'cause, I mean, these must mean a lot to you, when you've kept them for--

DH: True but, eh, I, I had thought at one time of trying to get rid of them.

VB: Yes.

DH: But instead of the 'Antiques Roadshow'...

VB: Oh no.

DH: But you never get a price.

VB: No.

DH: And I wouldn't, I don't want to throw them away.

VB: Yes.

DH: So I had a feeling, when I first got your letter, I thought this could be, you could be the ideal people, if they'd be of interest.

VB: Oh hugely.

DH: Yes. To look after them. So that one is the better of these two. That one I got from 'Picturegoer', and quite frankly I'm not sure where I got this one from. But it's very similar but I don't think, oh I say, oh my goodness, Marlene Dietrich, oh, [inaudible] The pictures aren't as good anyway. Oh, I

must show you a picture here, I must show this. I'm sorry, must get my specs on again now, if I can find it, these [flicking through] These are beautiful pictures, I think so anyway.

VB: They are.

DH: Beautiful pictures. She's not the one I'm looking [laughs] for, oh dear! [laughs] Is it with this lot? Oh, Joan Blondell was always in the early films. *Gold Diggers of 1933*.

VB: Right.

DH: She's always the tart with a heart of gold. She's always the heroine's tough mate with the subplot. Joan Crawford, oh come on. Here we are, this is it. I mean, look at, can you imagine the effect of that on a young schoolboy?

VB: Oh, yes!

DH: I mean, we knew they weren't built quite the same as we were.

VB: Yes.

DH: [laughs] But we weren't too sure but when we saw that we, well. She was a singing star.

VB: Lilian Harvey--

DH: And erm, ooh, that was, well you wouldn't get that after the Hays Code.

VB: No.

DH: They'd have banned that. No, women aren't supposed to have a bosom. But, erm, it's funny she..., as far as I know she only made the one British film. And, erm, but she made a lot in, erm, Berlin or wherever it was she came from. [reading out of 'Picturegoer Who's Who']: Lily, Lilian Harvey, born in 1907. Went to Germany before the war, that's the First World War of course--

VB: Mhm.

DH: Studied ballet dancing, travelled with her troupe to Budapest, Eichberg had yet to put her under contract. Played in such films as [inaudible]. She attracted attention and made *A Knight in London*, British, *The Temporary Widow*, British, I missed those. I saw *Congress Dances* which was her last one. Now with Fox Films Company. So, Lubitsch, let's have a look at Lubitsch. I wonder if his name is under here or whether he comes under directors, 'cause Ernst Lubitsch--

VB: Mhm.

DH: We could do with him today. No, he's not here. He's probably under film directors, but, well he'd be no good today. Oh he'll be under this lot probably. But, erm, he did beautiful comedies, and I love comedy, I love comedy and I love anything to do with words.

VB: Yes.

DH: I'm a big crossword aficionado. And I play on words. I read books, I love the writing and he was, he was delightful. He got this, this lovely touch with all the hints, of something, a bit risky.

VB: Yes.

DH: But you know it never developed. Which is a better way, I think so anyway. I mean I'm getting tired of writhing bodies, in the nude! I mean, I was brought up on the radio where you use your imagination. I don't need it spelling out! I mean, particularly now anyway! In all my years in the Army and the tropics if I don't know these things [laughs] now I never will. And I don't think it adds to it at all. It's gratuitous.

VB: Yes, yeah.

DH: Anyway, with my affection.

VB: Well, as I say, it's...

DH: You've earned these!

VB: I'm overwhelmed, I mean, it's so kind of you to, to give these all. They'll be both tremendously useful for the project and, after the project, I would imagine that we'll pass these to the University Library to look after.

DH: Yes, yes.

VB: Because I'm sure many--

DH: Well, I recommend that one now.

VB: Yes.

DH: And it's for the period, it's 1932.

VB: Yes.

DH: So everything in there is of the period.

VB: Yeah.

DH: And, eh, I've found it, in fact I refer to it a lot.

VB: Yeah.

DH: And eh [pause 2 seconds] I was going to say I shan't miss it, but I will do knowing I've got rid of it.

VB: Yes.

DH: It's better off in your hands. And I've, I've got to get rid of this stuff, I can't, I've nobody to leave it to, nobody will value it, so let's hope you will.

VB: Oh, absolutely.

DH: I'm sorry I'm not on the phone, which is a shame.

VB: Yes.

DH: I spent too much money on those postcards to have a phone, ah, so you can't really phone me. So you could have called to see--

VB: I was going to say, because, you know, you've told me so much, so much interesting, erm, so many interesting things today that I'm sure I want to go away and think "I want to ask him more about that" and--

DH: The thing is, as I see it, that you know what you're working towards--

VB: Yes, yes.

DH: So you will know what information I've got--

VB: Yes.

DH: If any, fits with various facets of what you're working on, so obviously, you're going to think "Oh, Gawd, I wish I'd asked him about so and so"--

VB: That's right.

DH: "I wish I'd asked him about so and so". It's sad by the way, the prices at the Kingsway, which is our supercinema. I only remember this because they were reduced, I don't know why they reduced them for this particular occasion, but they were reduced to threepence, fivepence, sixpence, and eightpence, which is quite incredible. [laughs] I mean, mind you, fair enough, OK, a wage those days, a good wage probably would be, say, at top rate, I think would be two pounds. 'Cause I, I was poorly paid.

VB: Mhm.

DH: And I was between £1 and £1.50, so I would think a top wage would be £2 or perhaps £3.

VB: Yeah.

DH: So, I mean, threepence, sixpence, fivepence, threepence, sixpence, fivepence and eightpence.

VB: Yeah.

DH: Related to that was not as low as it would seem to us. But, eh, they were quite a thing. *Gone with the Wind* I never saw.

VB: Aw.

DH: Mind you that's probably postwar.

VB: Yes. I think it came to Glasgow about 1941.

DH: The ironic thing is, I can't remember when I last went to the cinema!

VB: Really?

DH: Because, particularly now, we don't want to be in the city centre late at night.

VB: Of course.

DH: I don't want to be going out specially in the afternoon.

VB: Yeah.

DH: A lot of the films wouldn't interest me now. I should imagine that I'd like *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

VB: Yes.

DH: I should imagine I'd like that. But erm, eh, I don't think I'd like some of the others. Erm, and the price. I've got to get there on the bus, then there's the price.

VB: Mhm.

DH: And there'd probably be three of us.

VB: Yeah.

DH: Which would be [inhibitive?], I've not been for years, as far as I can recall the last film I actually saw in the cinema was before the Farmside closed [referring to the Palace] and it was the umpteenth rerun of *The 39 Steps*!

VB: Aah.

DH: No, it wasn't the rerun it was the one with Robert Powell in it. [referring to *The Thirty Nine Steps*]

VB: Oh yes, yeah.

DH: And I took my wife and said, "Well this is Robert Powell but he's not a patch on, on eh Robert Donat--"

[clock chimes]

VB: Yeah.

DH: And Madeleine Carroll!

VB: Yeah.

DH: But I've not been since and I don't watch much on the erm TV. I watch the musicals.

VB: Mhm.

DH: And the Busby Berkeley. I, I, everybody must say this, of my generation. If only Busby Berkeley had been doing these films when we had colour.

VB: Aah.

DH: 'Cause they're all black and white.

VB: Mhm.

DH: But I marvel at his routines now. I love his dance routines and, erm, they were absolutely and there again, you see, I keep coming back to sex, after, I'll have to have a cold shower!

VB: [laughs]

DH: I think but, there's one in particular where erm, a modern film, I can see it now, it was on the front cover of the 'Picturegoer', whether it's Ruby Keeler, it might have been, I think it was *42nd Street*, and Ruby Keeler's at one end and she comes through a tunnel and the tunnel is composed of the chorus girls' legs, and it's shot...

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape Two]

[Start of Tape Three]

[Start of Side A]

DH: Surprised, I might be wrong but I'm surprised that the musicals haven't dated.

VB: Yes.

DH: The stories are corny, I think Ruby Keeler is, eh, I thought so then and I think so now! I can't imagine how she got where she is unless she married somebody to get there!

VB: Yes.

DH: She's a moderate hooper, she can't sing, and she's a poor actress. I can't stand Ruby Keeler but I must admit I did fancy myself as Dick Powell.

VB: Yeah.

DH: I've always fancied myself as Dick Powell, well all these lovely girls around me. But we all did, not just me, I mean I'm speaking for my generation. And he was a handsome bloke with a little 'tache [moustache] but we dreamed our dreams but that's as far as it got with us.

VB: Mhm.

DH: So, so now they would say well of course, it incited us to go out and, it didn't do anything of the sort! We went, we enjoyed it, we came home and said, "Wooh!", you know, like any lad would, and we went in the park and we played football. And, eh, we were batty over football and we had our interests and that was it and our mothers didn't have to give us cold showers or bromide in our tea or anything like that. They, eh, we were just normal lads. And anybody who says different is telling little whoopsies I think, 'cause, eh, I'm being perfectly honest.

VB: Mhm.

DH: 'Cause there's no point talking to you if I'm not being honest.

VB: Of course. Yes.

DH: But, erm, I did think that that's the thing I must stress that, erm, the social background is, eh, when you're looking at these things you can't look at them with today's outlook on those, because it's the same with people who look back, say on the British Empire, 1700, 1800 and so on, and they criticise it by today's standards.

VB: Yes.

DH: So the feminists today would call what happened to women in those previous centuries something shocking.

VB: Mhm.

DH: But in those centuries there wasn't feminism. There wasn't this, that and the other. That's how life was in those days. So you can't judge that by today's standards. So you can't judge the cinema in the thirties with the cinema today. Well, you could compare it.

VB: Yes.

DH: But to understand it, you've got to realise that the audiences, it's the audiences that are different. What do they go to see nowadays?

VB: Mhm.

DH: Sharon Stone with no knickers or what? [referring to *Basic Instinct*] Erm. Or do they go for the period thing or do they go for the music, do they go for.... I'm telling you we went for the musicals.

VB: Mhm.

DH: You know, they were joyous occasions. We went and we came out and we thoroughly enjoyed it. Mind you, with the old silents, we got terrified. As I said, the children's matinee was on a Saturday afternoon and we used to go and see these silent films with black and white with the piano playing.

VB: Mhm.

DH: Which were made up of serials and some of the serials--I'm sure they started turning my hair white. I remember one, 'Tin Billy' [Note: no reference to this serial found] which was horrendous, when he came on the scene and all it was, looking back, was a man in a suit, great big massive suit a bit like a coloured diving bell.

VB: Right.

DH: You know these big diving bells where Jean Cocteau, eh, Cocteau, whoever he is, [referring to Jacques Cousteau] going down, exposing...

VB: Yeah.

DH: Well that sort of thing. If you can imagine that walking toward you in a silent this was horrifying. And then *Elmo, the Mighty* was another one. He was a bloke who come, oh it was horrible! Then, they filmed a lot of Sax Rohmer's books, Dr Fu Manchu, the evil Chinaman. We used to die the death at those, so we used to come out of the Saturday morning serials having laughed at the comedies but having seen the big film, terrified but drawn back the next week to see Episode 23!

VB: Yes!

DH: This sort of thing or, but then we grew up and grew out of that and then, as I say, we got into cowboys and Indians, adventure stories, then the musicals, then the Ernst Lubitsch ones, then the musicals and then the more dramatic stories. But, there we are, I'll leave you to it, and if you want to get in touch some time...

VB: That would be great, yes, if you wouldn't mind.

DH: You're welcome, just drop me a line.

[DH asks re. halls of residence VB is staying in. DH can walk there. He remembers the original university, Ashburne Hall on the corner, and remembers Owens Park, the original university. Woolton Hall named after Lord Woolton, Food Minister during the war [World War Two] and Manchester businessman. Advice to eat carrots to see in the dark and knighted after the war. Former Chancellor of the University. Discussion of sprawling Manchester University, largest student complex in Europe, fifty thousand students. "A good relationship between town and gown."]

DH: And I used to go to, there used to be the Manchester Film Institute Society put on continental films.

VB: I see.

DH: And they used to put them on in the Roscoe Building, Brunswick Street, which is a university building.

VB: Yeah.

DH: Friday night, when I used to go and see those French films and German films and all sorts. It was quite cheap but then that, there were two: Manchester Film Institute Society and then there was the Manchester and Salford Society.

VB: Mhm.

DH: But they were out Salford way, too far for me to travel really.

VB: Yeah.

DH: And I didn't think they put on as good a selection of films as this one. So I used to go regularly to that so I sort of got genned up and that's where I saw, I think, Lilian Harvey for the first time in one of the German films. But, erm, and theatre, if you ever get down to the theatre come and see me and I'll tell you all about the theatres in Manchester, 'cause that in itself--

VB: Aw it's a huge--

DH: I could keep you going all afternoon. In fact, I'll start it and I'll then let you go!

[went to Elementary School there, won scholarship to Manchester Central High School for Boys, best school next to Manchester Grammar which is for the rich; CHS near Piccadilly Station; Wednesday afternoon had four lessons; last two were choice between sport or higher mathematics. He was a football fanatic so opted for sport. Their headmaster Robert Crossley was "a Mr Chips. A marvellous old bloke." Played on Platt Fields public fields. Only theatre he'd been to was for panto, not a big theatre, at twelve, thirteen. Friend who wanted to be an actor; DH wanted to be a footballer and thought friend barmy; friend, to get out of maths and sports, put his name down as linesman/sponge carrier! When all went to Platt Fields, friend went to Opera House and the Palace

and the Prince's and watched plays. One time he asked DH to go too in the evening if mother/father allowed; he was thirteen. Let him go. In the early 30s, went to 'Romeo and Juliet' with John Gielgud and Peggy Ashcroft. "I watched this and I was absolutely fascinated." Didn't relate to the Shakespeare he'd studied in class. They'd parsed the verbs and tenses for years and "bored stiff". "It made sense" when on the stage but not when reading out in class. "I was hooked, it was like a drug"; started going with friend and then became independent. Went to all the Manchester theatres; Opera House and Prince's (now demolished) for drama and the Palace for variety and the Hippodrome for variety. Palace had a better balanced bill; Hippodrome had one good hour and two "a load of junk". Brilliant acts at the Palace: jugglers; unicyclists "they were actually brilliant"; balancing acts. Preferred the Palace, but went to the Hippodrome as well. Ardwick Hippodrome by Ardwick Green and Ardwick Empire [former name of Ardwick Hippodrome]. Then home to play football. Played not in the school team, but in class team.

DH: Those were not just mine but typical of my pals. In this order: football, cinema and theatre with me, they weren't keen on the theatres and drama. So, I'm waiting now for someone to say "Can I come and talk to you about the theatre." And I'll tell you when I saw Matheson Lang in *The Chinese Bungalow* at the Prince's. He was the top actor of his day. Those were the days. [passes over donations; thanks for "listening patiently". VB says she thoroughly enjoyed it.]

DH: It's strange, I've heard this said before. But, erm, people like yourself, as you said in your letter, say "I found it absolutely fascinating". We can't see why, what's fascinating about us.

VB: It's—

DH: But, eh, I mean, it was our life, that was all--

VB: It's so different, I think, to what it's like to go to the cinema now, I mean, is the short answer, I mean, it's like you're describing a different world really—

DH: Yes, well, as I say, it was a simpler, some might say a more naïve world, but, eh, the big thing about it was, the big difference, it had its standards, very strict standards in a community sense. And it kept, it kept people disciplined. And, within it, I mean looking back, compared with today, you were very, very strongly disciplined. You hadn't, this lovely word they use today, freedom, that they've got today.

VB: Yes.

DH: But, for all that, I wouldn't change it. If somebody said we can switch it back to that, or we can make you a youngster now, I'd say, "For Gawd's sake! [laughs] don't make me a youngster now! Switch me back and I'll go through all that again!" [rustling] [inaudible] Bearing in mind...

[tape cuts out]

[End of interview]