

Disclaimer: This interview was conducted in 1995 and concerns memories of 1930s life; as such there may be opinions expressed or words used that do not meet today's norms and expectations.

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[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[tape introduction by Valentina Bold]

**VB: [laughs] two things at once--**

**DH:** I wrote to the British ones, because [they were in the land?] and as a youngster, I wasn't too sure how to write to America and get a reply.

**VB: Yes. It must've seemed--**

**DH:** It's probably far easier--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** And these, I wrote to these. And this one in particular, is particularly good. I've checked them all and they both have written on them, up to 1932.

**VB: Right.**

**DH:** In the back. It's fascinating. In the back there's a list of erm, there's a list of awards for the year. Before the Oscars it was, all this. And erm, there's even a list of WAMPAS 'baby stars' [referring to the Western Association of Motion Picture Advertisers].

**VB: [gasps]**

**DH:** Well that was equivalent to the Rank starlets. The young girls that were picked every year.

**VB: Right.**

**DH:** It shows you them from 1922 onwards. '23.

**VB: That's... I wonder how many of them went on to become famous. And how many just--**

**DH:** Yeah. Don't know. But this is the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

**VB: [gasps] Wonderful!**

**DH:** From '27 to '28, they give you the awards. Best performance, actor so on. I'm quite interested again, reading it. Copy of the Cinematograph Films Act 1927. It's very comprehensive this [probably referring to 'The World Film Encyclopedia' donated to the project]. And this bit here starts off with a, if I remember rightly it's the director. Giving a general thing, and then each chapter is a separate one on sound, make-up--

**VB: Right.**

**DH:** And so on. And a studio section. A comprehensive survey of filmmaking in all its branches.

**VB: That looks wonderful. There's so much information that's really useful in that.**

**DH:** I know, and I looked up Thelma Todd in this and eh, 'cause she was never, as I say she was my first sweetheart, when I was about what? Fourteen. But the thing was, she was never a star!

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** She was always in second-rate things. But erm, the other one, which was not as good. Was still quite good. But it does give a list of films. Five hundred films. And it gives the cast of them. Five hundred famous casts. And this is how, half the time, I was able to spot... Because it goes up to 1932! Goes up erm, where are we? Goes up erm, from '22 to '32.

**VB: Right. Did you have that in 1932 then?**

**DH:** I had this, yes, in 1932.

**VB: Yeah. Did you use it to follow up..?**

**DH:** I just got it. So eh, I got them both. That one I got from 'Picturegoer' and this one I got from 'Film Pictorial'.

**VB: Right. I see.**

**DH:** If I remember rightly. And erm, the interesting one, thing is, that they came in erm, brown cardboard containers by rail. Not by post.

**VB: Oh.**

**DH:** I can show you an example actually. Erm... [pause 5 seconds] That's--

**VB: Ah, I see!**

**DH:** 'A World Pictorial Gazetteer' I've got.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Books with care, carriage paid. It's come by rail.

**VB: That must've been an exciting thing when these arrived.**

**DH:** Oh yes! It was.

**VB:** Ah.

**DH:** Of course now you tend to think that everything comes by post.

**VB:** Yes, that's right.

**DH:** But in those days, it was erm, probably easier to do it by rail.

**VB:** Yeah. I suppose with the weight of these as well. They must've been quite heavy.

**DH:** The weight.

**VB:** Yes.

**DH:** Yeah.

**VB:** Do, did you use these a lot at the time?

**DH:** Oh, yes. Yes, erm, because in one of them it gives the addresses of the English stars. If you want to write to Margot Grahame--

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** Write to Pinewood Studios at such and such an address.

**VB:** Yes.

**DH:** It's all in there so that's how I got to know where to write to.

**VB:** Ah I see.

**DH:** So erm, I had a word with my sister. She said, "Oh, all the family went to the cinema." Mother and dad did. But they weren't as fanatical as me.

**VB: Right.**

**DH:** And she reminded me that being my only sister, she was allowed to take me to the erm, second house.

**VB: [gasps]**

**DH:** So, I'd be late but I mean, I wouldn't be roaming the streets at a late hour.

**VB: I see.**

**DH:** So eh, my sister went quite a lot but I used to go. I mean I was, looking back, I must've been fanatical really. I mean, three times a week at least. Sometimes four. So...

**VB: Yes, it's a lot.**

**DH:** So I thought, well I'll write on a bit of paper two questions that I [emphasised] thought of in case you asked me then.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Well you haven't asked me them so I want to tell you what I've got written down here. Why did we go to the cinema? And how did we choose what we went to see? [laughs] So, as you will have gathered, I've been thinking about it. Why did we go? It's a bit like, I was an avid reader. I joined the library.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** My father took me to the library. And it used to be anything and everything. And I think it's the same as reading a book. Why do you read a book? And erm, I think, you could say you were going to the cinema for the same reason. Simplistically, it's escapism. Because in those days, we got the radio

all day. Wireless as it was in those days. And that's where we got all the news and everything and plays and variety programmes. But we didn't see anything! I think it's hard for anybody these days to imagine what it would be like if you hadn't got the television. And if you hadn't got the cinema for that matter. You just had, you rely on the radio, for, oh, up-to-date stuff. But, to see things, I mean, to see, like these days you see 'Dallas' [US TV series], the beautiful homes it's got. So presumably you see glamour. It took you out of yourself. You saw the way the rest of the world lived. You saw, and you got good stories! You enjoyed the stories. It took you out of yourself. You enjoyed a good read. You read a good book. So, you get enjoyment. So it's for enjoyment, obviously. But, as a schoolboy, cowboys and Indians. I mean I wanted to be a cowboy. Erm, and then when I fell for Thelma Todd, you know. And I thought well, I'm a schoolboy, little schoolboy, and this is, you know, aw!

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Erm, there's pleasure. See, you went for pleasure. Eh, which you got. Now the thing was, this struck me forcibly, thinking about VE Day. In those days, you see, a big event like VE Day now. King George V's Silver Jubilee, in 1936. Well, you get day-long stuff on the television now. Then you didn't! You heard it on the radio. You'd get lots of radio reports. And they'd go over to erm, Buckingham Palace, on the radio. And you'd get a word picture given to you, you know.

**VB: [coughs]**

**DH:** But you had to use your imagination. With films, you could see it. You could see things on a film. And you did enjoy them anyway. Erm, but the thing then, the following day if you were lucky, they had a special film on the celebrations. For George V's Silver Jubilee. And it'd say, it'd have the usual erm, film on. Garbo or whatever. Special tonight! The royal film! And you know, folk go to that cinema to see the film of eh, George V's Silver Jubilee. Or other, mainly royalty in those days, you know, 'cause they were very, very monarchical. Eh, you couldn't explain just how people revelled in it. But these would come on specials, you know. If you were lucky with some events, they might, if they happened early enough, you might get them on your Pathé. Oh, you'd get stuff on your *Pathé News* normally. *British Movietone News*. But erm, well usually it'd be the following day. Whereas now it's all immediate, isn't it? There was no immediacy in those days. So erm, and it did strike me how we used to look forward to these... when erm, the Kents got married. Duke and Duchess of Kent, when he married Princess Marina. Eh, oh! You know. A royal romance. Special film the next

day. At the cinemas, you know. And they were billing it as star attraction. And people would flock to see it! Whereas now you sit at your own home and it's on and you go out and make a cup of tea and miss half of it. But then those days, you went to see it. So you'd go, as I say, it took you out of yourself. And it was escapism. And as young boys, we were Robin Hood. Or we were Zorro, you know, *The Mark of Zorro*. Or we were *The Thief of Bagdad*. So, I mean, as a youngster of course, it was magic.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** But then you'd grow a bit older so it's, there again, it's like reading a book. When I first started reading, I read them, 'Treasure Island', all the usual classics 'cause I enjoyed them. The teachers put you onto them. You enjoyed the story. But then as you get older, I think you get an appreciation of style. And, since I'm a crossword fanatic, and I like words... and I like languages, not that I speak languages. I don't... but I used to like the languages at school.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Erm, I was happy with them. Maths and the rest of it. Science. But languages, anything to do with words I enjoyed. So, reading a book, I then got to appreciate the style of writing and the choice of words. Erm, phrases, a turn of phrase, you know. Which gave you added enjoyment. So, it was the same with the films, in a sense, in that... I used to go for cowboys and Indians and detectives, adventure ones. But, as I got older and I began to appreciate things more. Particularly, I liked to think I've a sense of humour, and, particularly with the comic one. I, I would've gone to an Ernst Lubitsch film [pause 2 seconds] whoever was in it. I should've said, what made you choose a film? Well, cowboys and Indians. Because it was cowboys and Indians. But then, you would go also for the stars. Stars in those days were stars. I mean, what you call stars nowadays! [laughs] The 'News of the World' and the 'Sun' is full of them. All sorts of, I'm being debunked, you know, Joan Crawford's daughter--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Telling tales and all, you got none of that in those days. So, they were magical figures to you. So, Marlene Dietrich. You'd go and see a Marlene Dietrich film. In the same way that nowadays you'd go and see a Marilyn Monroe film. Probably more for her than the film. Others, you would go for the

story. I mean as youngsters you went for the story. You weren't really bothered who was in it. I say, you got to like some of them. But eh, then you'd go for the stars. The Dietrichs and so on. I [emphasised] never liked Garbo, so, I didn't go to Garbo. I can say I didn't like her. It's a bit like people who say, "I can't stand tripe." And I say, "Have you ever eaten it?" And they say, "No."

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** And I say, "Well how d'you know you don't like it?"

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Well I can say I don't like Garbo because I saw her either because girlfriends insisted I went with them. It was their turn. So I enjoyed the double feature, not Garbo. [laughs] That's on account I didn't like her. Or because I went, there was a grand double feature on and Garbo was the main one, but in actual fact, for me, the attraction was the B. Well not the B film--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** But the other double feature. So I used to sit bored through films by Garbo. So, erm, so you went for the stars. But then as I say, when you got to enjoy the comedy and the writing, erm, I wanted [inaudible]. If it'd been Garbo in an Ernst Lubitsch comedy... Social comedies they were. They were so witty. Eh, I don't know, satire today is vicious. Well a lot of it is anyway. I mean 'Spitting Image' is a shining example of over the top. Well in those days, the satire was rapier-like. But it was a kinder satire. And Ernst Lubitsch social comedies erm, they were a satire on social life. But they were funny.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I wouldn't say they were gentle. They weren't, but.... so I used to enjoy the writing of those.

**VB: Any particular favourites or..?**



**DH:** Off-hand I can't, no. There was Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald in *The Love Parade*. That comes to mind. But eh, I dare say in that encyclopaedia, if you looked under Lubitsch. L-U-B-I-T-S-C-H.

**VB: Right.**

**DH:** It might give a list of, I don't know if there's an index.

**VB: No. In that one...**

**DH:** I can't, I used to go to them, you know.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** As soon as I saw any of his, I would eh... No, don't think they have an index.

**VB: Ah.**

**DH:** No, they don't. So it'll probably be under directors or something like that.

**VB: I found a film directors bit in this one.**

**DH:** Film company.

**VB: Ah! Yes, there's a section on him here--**

**DH:** Oh. Eh, let's see. I wonder if he comes, I think this, the index here. I think this would be the stars. And then I think there'd be a separate one for--

**VB: Yes.**

**DH:** Directors and people like that. Eh, L-U-B, L-U, L-U, no. That's all stars. Myrna Loy.

**VB: This seems to have a list of some of them anyway. Erm...**

**DH:** Oh, Ernst Lubitsch. Yes. Right. Boo-boo-boom. Oh *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Kiss Me Again*, 'This is Marriage' [possibly referring to *So This Is Paris*], *The Student Prince*. Oh that's not quite what I had in mind. Oh, *Monte Carlo*. Yes, that's *The Smiling Lieutenant*, that's right. *Playboy of Paris*, *One Hour With You*. That's... I said *The Love Parade*, it's *One Hour With You*. Yes. They were marvellous. And eh, oh there's *The Love Parade*! Maurice Chevalier in *The Love Parade* with 1929!

**VB: Ah.**

**DH:** Paramount. 1929. They were delightful. They were considered a bit risqué in their time. 'Cause it was always about, eh, a man endeavouring to get the lady into the bedroom.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** But whereas nowadays it would show you writhing bodies on a bed and heavens knows what. Eh, it never actually happened in these. Actually, the nearest equivalent, these days, or recently, would be the Doris Day ones. Where Doris Day nearly always a virgin--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** In her films. They never, you know. He's chasing and she's saying, "No."

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And you know they'll fall into one another's arms in the end. That's the nearest. But, compared with Ernst Lubitsch, they are... I say, they were good. I used to enjoy them. But eh, they were a sabre compared to Lubitsch's rapier. So eh, Maurice Chevalier would be laying siege to Jeanette MacDonald. And eh, it might show you him going towards the bedroom door which would shut. And then the next thing it'd show you them having a grapefruit for breakfast the next morning! And you wouldn't know from the script, or the subtle direction, [laughs] whether they had or not!

**VB: Mm.**

**DH:** You know, that sort of thing. But, they're very funny. So, whoever was in it, I'd have gone to those anyway. And a lot of them you went to because erm...they give the stories in here of some of them. And then in 'Picturegoer', each week, they'd do about four or more. Give you the story and you might not be particularly interested in the first place, but I used to read it from corner to corner. And I'd think, oh this sound interesting! So eh, you've got the reviewer sort of coaxing you in really.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** So, there's various reasons why you went.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** But it was all for enjoyment really.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** You didn't think, you didn't go on the lines of, "I want to be taken out of myself. I want to escape from this harsh world." I mean, particularly as a schoolboy, you don't think of the world - [laughs] you're living in it! Eh, you don't think of political correctness and feminism and inequalities and racial discord and things like that. You are in a world and you think, "What's on, Jim, at The Grand tonight?" "Oh, it's *Robin Hood*." "Oh-h-h! Shall we go to that?" "Yes." And the gang would go, you know. A gang of you. But erm, so I suppose it really was escapism but eh...

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** 'Cause you went purely for pleasure! I mean, a lot of the films nowadays, I can't say they'd be pleasure for me. Even if it was convenient to go. But it isn't. But erm, so you went for the stars, you went for the story. You went for the writing. Mhm. You went to enjoy yourself and to bring pleasure to what was a simple life. I [emphasised] think it was simpler. I mean, I had my football as well. I was a fanatical footballer. Played it and everything, but it was an added attraction. And, as I say, you saw, you wouldn't have seen what America was like otherwise.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** You wouldn't have known. You'd get people on the radio talking about it, but I used to like the radio. I used to listen a lot. But, course, it stirred your imagination. You listen to somebody talking and you're having to put the picture yourself. Whereas in the cinema, the picture's put in front of you, and you can either revel in it or not, depending how you feel. So how you choose them? What you actually consider, how did you choose what film to go to? Well often as a youngster it was a gang of you, you know. Dozen of you. [laughs] Schoolboys.

**VB:** [laughs]

**DH:** From the elementary school. "What we going to see tonight then lads?" "What have we got?" "Well there's *Robin Hood* at the Grand. There's 'Zorro' [referring to *Mark of Zorro*] at the Arcadia." And there's something at somewhere else. "No, we don't want that. That's a sloppy one."

**VB:** [laughs]

**DH:** "We don't want to see that."

**VB:** [laughs]

**DH:** "We'll go and see *Robin Hood*." So, you went with the, the herd.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** [coughs] But erm, more often than not, if I went with my sister it'd probably be for the stars.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** You know we'd probably go because it was the big stars. Clive Brook was one of my sister's favourites. Always played the English gentleman. Or an English officer. And eh, [pause 2 seconds] looking back I don't think he was handsome as I used to think he was in those days – in those days, even I [emphasised] thought he was handsome. But looking at pictures now [laughs] I don't think he is.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** Oh, and then the other ones we used to like, although I'm not sure if they were the thirties or not, were the *Thin Man* films with William Powell and Myrna Loy. And the little dog, Asta. Where he used to be a private detective. Well, that sort of interplay between Myrna Loy as the wife of William Powell, and the repartee between them. That wittiness--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Was something of a follow-on from the Lubitsch films, which I used to like. We used to like. But eh, so we used to go to those. But eh, I never fancied the big Cecil B. De Mille epics, like 'Ben-Hur' [probably referring to *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*] and all these massive, *Ten Commandments* and all these. I mean erm, there again, I've seen them, [laughs] the then girlfriend just dragged me to them. But eh, apart from admiring the amazing sets and the chariot race in 'Ben-Hur' and things like that, it's not what I would've picked myself actually. So...

**VB: Did your sister have similar tastes to yourself?**

**DH:** Yes, but she had a bit more on the romantic side.

**VB: Ah, I see.**

**DH:** Norma Shearer. Norma Shearer's pictures and what today you would call a five tissue picture.

**VB: Right. [laughs]**

**DH:** But eh, yes, she eh, and my mother was the same. I remember, with my mother I can remember once seeing Norma Shearer in *Smilin' Through*. That would suit my mother. I can't recall whether my father had any particular... I don't think he had actually. But he would go. We would go as a family.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Oh, we would go as a family but erm, my sister and I would go more than my mother and father.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** But my mother and my sister would go more for the romantic films. I would go for a pretty wide variety, really. Erm, which I think is pretty much the same today. I think my taste today is probably the same as it was then. I see this, I think it's... [pause 3 seconds] this next Saturday coming up. There's *Gold Diggers of 1933*, coming on again. Well I must've seen than half a dozen times but, I can always see it again, because I used to like... Oh musicals! That's it. Oh, I loved the musicals. I even love them today. I watch them and I think, I don't know whether it's me or not. Although it's *Gold Diggers of 1933* say, doesn't seem particularly dated, except that I look at the costumes of all these chorus girls, like in *42nd Street*--

**VB: Ah.**

**DH:** Where they're all in big dollar coins or something on them.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** I see them now and I look at them and think... [pause 2 seconds] Now when I first saw that, we thought they were very risqué, those costumes. And eh, I mean, they were more like swimsuits. Two-piece swimsuits. Where the bottom half, it's like shorts! I mean, well, compared with the bikini today, I mean, to think of those back in the thirties--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** As rather risqué... [laughs] is, eh, is quite remarkable how things change. And we're reaching the stage where anything goes now, doesn't it? I mean, whereas as, as erm, [pause 2 seconds] in those days... So it went that far and stopped. It was a sort of, well it was, imposed anyway by the Hays Office. I mean they laid it down. What you could and couldn't show anyway. But eh, oh, it's funny. In fact, it's a standing joke. We watch them now. My wife, my sister and I. And eh, we'll probably watch *Gold Diggers of 1933* on Saturday [on television].

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And all these chorus girls will come on and I'll say to her, "You shouldn't be watching this. It's too sexy for you, this!" [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** [laughing] You know. When you look at it. [laughing] It's not a bit sexy at all. It's eh, for a start, the figures have changed. I mean, the erm, looking at the chorus girls those days--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** By present day standards, they should be on diets! [laughs]

**VB: Yes. Yeah.**

**DH:** Got footballers' legs, some of them, you know.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Perhaps that's what appealed to me since I was keen on football!

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** But erm, no, they were, aw they were great times, really. I enjoyed them. I'm sorry, oh well I don't think I am really. I still read. I read, I mean I get eh, my weekend supplement on my arts and books and theatre. I still read it all.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** To keep up with what's happening. And erm, I read all the film reviews and eh, there's precious few that would encourage me to want to go. Mind you, if I went I'd probably enjoy them. Now I saw *The 39 Steps*. I read the book [in my reading?], I read John Buchan's 'The Thirty-Nine Steps'.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Then I saw the film with Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll in. I don't know how old that was. That's in the thirties anyway, I'm sure. And then, I saw it since then. A more up-to-date version, with

Robert Powell in it [referring to *The Thirty Nine Steps*]. And erm, I still think the Robert Donat one is the definitive one.

**VB: Aw, I'm with you there. It's a wonderful film.**

**DH:** After all these years...

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Yes. After all these years. And erm... [pause 2 seconds]

**VB: He's a wonderful character, isn't he, Robert Donat?**

**DH:** Yes.

**VB: Very--**

**DH:** Yes and then of course Madeleine Carroll was my favourite English blonde.

**VB: You were saying. What was it that you particularly liked about Madeleine Carroll? Was it--**

**DH:** Well, the sort little boys could dream about. She's a blonde for a start. And gentlemen prefer blondes. And I was a gentleman even in those days. I mean she was very pretty. She had a pretty face. Erm. [pause 2 seconds] I don't know erm, it's a word I dislike but she was sweet. Eh, I don't like the word, the way people use it.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Well I mean that would condemn her now anyway. I mean if you said there was a film on now and the leading lady's rather sweet, that would put everybody off. [laughs] So eh, no, I suppose the blonde bit started it. But she, you know, I had a soft spot for her. A lot of these. Margot Grahame. Another blonde, you see. She came [up through?] the Rank school. [passes picture to VB]

**VB: She's lovely. She really is. She's not someone I'm familiar with at all.**



**DH:** Oh no, you wouldn't be.

**VB: No. [laughs]**

**DH:** They sort of faded away. Grahame, Margot Grahame. Margot Grahame, Canterbury. Blonde hair, blue eyes. [pause 4 seconds] Yes, we look in the 'Radio Times' these days to see some of these films. And we look at the cast, and I say to Joyce, "Good heavens! Gibb McLaughlin! Gordon Harker!" I say, "They've been dead for donkeys' years!" [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** "How old is this film?"

**VB: Yes.**

**DH:** And I look at the front of the 'Radio Times' and it's 1932! Or something like that. And we remember all the casts. Gordon Harker, the definitive cockney. And erm... [knock on door]

**VB: Hallo.**

[MrsH comes in: Hallo. Do you want tea or coffee?]

**VB: Erm, tea would be lovely. Thanks.**

**MrsH:** D'you take milk?

**VB: No, nothing in it.**

**MrsH:** No milk. No sugar.

**VB: No.**

**DH:** Tea'll do me.

**MrsH:** I think I know what you like.

**VB:** [laughs]

**MrsH:** [laughs]

**DH:** You should do by now, so. And eh, I couldn't find Wendy Barrie in this guide book.

**VB:** No. She's lovely as well.

**DH:** Yes. But I couldn't find her in this so I don't know. B-A-Double R-I-E. So my, you know, memory, won't throw open... Joan Barry, that's all, Wesley Barry.

**VB:** Did you ever display these on your wall or anything?

**DH:** No. No, no. I kept them in the envelope.

**VB:** That's why they're in such good condition.

**DH:** I just used to take them out from time to time.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DH:** Remind myself of who was what. But eh, I don't know if you've seen this one. I mean these photographs-- [laughs]

**VB:** Oh!

**DH:** Are not a patch on these in here. These are... Now, Henry Edwards and Chrissie White were the screen lovers of the day, in British films. But they go back to silent ones.

**VB:** Thanks very much. Thanks a lot.

**DH:** Eh, in fact they were a shade before my time. But oh! In the American ones there used to be Charles Farrell and Janet Gaynor. In the British ones it was Henry Edwards and Chrissie White. I don't suppose they'll have them in here. But they were the couple. You know, like you've got Burton and Taylor, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. No. [looking through photos] But erm...

**VB:** That's a nice one of Bette Davis there. Was she one, someone you liked?

**DH:** Bette Davis! [laughs] No, I didn't like her.

**VB:** Right.

**DH:** I saw some of her but eh, I didn't like her. She wasn't...

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

**DH:** She said, "What was the first one you ever saw?" Well, I honestly can't, well, it would be silents anyway. But I can't remember. But, there's one of Joan Crawford sticks in my mind. And it was... [pause 2 seconds] a college one, and it was before she became a dramatic actress. Erm, an ordinary sort of film. And Neil Hamilton, I can remember, was the hero. He was a good-looking little... with a Ronald Colman 'tache [moustache]. And I have a vague idea it had something to do with a college and a campus, and he was on the football team [probably referring to *This Modern Age*]. And I think she was a dancer or something like that. And she treated him rotten. And eh, he won the match for them. This rugby, this American football. He was the hero of the match. So, she succumbed at the end. And I thought she was a swine to him. But I liked her. Because she was pretty. And she had been a dancer, I gathered. And erm... [pause 3 seconds] The story, I was beginning to get to the sloppy stage myself at that time, you know. I'd got over the cowboys and Indians and I was getting to be... and eh, when they got together at the end I sort of went, "Ah-h!"--

**VB:** [laughs]

**DH:** Along with the rest of them. But then, so she was a sort of an ordinary sort of leading lady. Nothing in particular. But then, as the years went by, she became this heavily dramatic person. Aw! I went right off her.

**VB: Ah.**

**DH:** Couldn't stand her. Drove me up the wall, she did really.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Joan Crawford. Wonder what it was. Made a date with a passing show. [reads; inaudible] *The Taxi Dancer*. I think, I'm not sure, I think it was *Our Dancing Daughters*. I wonder if Neil Hamilton's in it. That would tie it up--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** If he is. But eh, Hamilton. [looks through book]. Neil Hamilton. That's right. [pause 3 seconds]

**VB: That's interesting what you were saying. Your tastes changed quite a bit then from--**

**DH:** Oh yes! Oh yes. Well it does like eh, as you grow up. Although, although things change, a lot of it is still basic. You know, I mean eh, my sense of humour. But that's developed. My sense of humour. And my liking for things funny. But eh, I don't like, I get in [inaudible] funny. I mean a lot of the alternative comedians. Alternative comedy to me, the alternative to comedy is boredom.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** There isn't, I mean if it's an alternative, it's not comedy. Although I must admit I've suffered through some of it, bits of it I've liked. But, the lavatorial humour. I thought I left that behind me when I left school. Rick Mayall. He's manic that bloke.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** He's better now as an actor--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Than he was as a comedian but eh, no I think my sense of humour was always there. But I think it's got finer. It's erm, I appreciate it more as wit. I like Ken Dodd. Ken Dodd. I mean, and Les Dawson. I mean apart from being Lancashire men anyway, same as me. So I suppose I'm bigoted anyway. I've been to the theatre. If you've never seen Ken Dodd in the theatre, I can assure you, if you ever get the chance and you like anything comic, even if you think you don't like him. Go. I had a girlfriend in the sixties. From Liverpool. And eh, I met her on these walking holidays we go on when I was a bachelor. Eh, started with writing, then it got to visiting. And eh, it cropped up about Ken Dodd and she said, "Can't stand him." I said, "A Liverpool girl?!"

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** "And you can't stand Ken Dodd. You traitor!"

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Erm, she said, "No, I don't like him." I said, "Well have you seen him in the theatre?" She said, "No." So I said, "You're going off at the radio, are you? And the television?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Well, come with me next time he comes to Manchester Palace and I will bet you whatever you like, you will like him." "Never," she said. I said, "Well, anyway. Just for me." I said, "I'll go wherever you want. Ask me anything and I'll say yes. You come with me to Ken Dodd at the Palace and I defy you not to like him." So she came. Erm, the first ten minutes, she sat there like a stone. Because it takes time, one of his shows, before he gets you. [laughs] He's standing on that stage, and he sticks his hand out in the audience and he scoops them all up like that.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** And after that, you're finished. She was rolling in the aisle. I use the word, quite guardedly. He's a genius. I think he's one of the all-time greats of the British theatre. Because he plays an audience and eh, he's fantastic. He is. And he'll go on all night. He's well known for it. 'Cause about 11 o'clock he'll say, "Right. Are you giving in?" And they all roar back, "No!"

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** And he had the manager of the theatre beside him, urging him to come off 'cause--

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** He'd go on till midnight. Or even longer. 'Cause the audience, it's like a party. It's just like one great big party. If he was in it again, well, if he's in Manchester--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** I'd go. If it cost me a fortune, I'd go. 'Cause, [laughs], I've heard most of it before anyway. But he's such an amazing bloke for getting them in the palm of his hands, that erm, even though, you know what's coming--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** It's still funny. And well like this girl, she said, "Well I wouldn't have believed it. I just don't believe it." She was staggered. So erm, he's... vulgar in a nice way.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** But he's certainly not obscene. But eh, no, that's how he can get away with slightly vulgar stuff because he's such a marvellous personality.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Anyway, we should be on the cinema.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I was looking up Neil Hamilton, wasn't I? See if I can tie up when he was with erm, Joan Crawford.

**VB: One of the things that came to mind when you mentioned that and the Lancashire comedians was George Formby.**

**DH: Yeah.**

**VB: Was he someone that you liked or..?**

**DH: Oh yes.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH: Marvellous. Mind you his films are terrible.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH: The films he made. They made them down... There used to be an old erm, chapel. A nonconformist chapel. Dickenson Road. Which is nearer town from where you are--**

**VB: Ah.**

**DH: On Wilmslow Road.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH: And eh. [pause 2 seconds] Eh, a Mr Blakeley used to make films there in this old chapel [referring to Mancunian Films]. [laughs] I don't suppose it cost him much. And they were all these George Formby ones. And Frank Randle and those people. And they churned... black and whites and eh, they made him a small fortune! And they were very popular but corny as could be. You know, they were. But erm, George being George, he erm, he, he was one of his own. I saw him during the war when he visited the troops.**

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And he came to my unit and eh, genuine sort a bloke. And I saw his, oh, that's Gracie Fields's brother. Tommy Fields.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I saw at the Kingsway. The Kingsway Cinema, by the way. When you catch the bus to go back, eh, about two hundred yards on your way back, on your left, you go through some traffic lights to begin with. That's about a hundred yards--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Then another hundred yards past that you come to a big island. Before you go under the railway. Along the corner, that's Kingsway actually, on the left.

**VB: Right.**

**DH:** The main road.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** On the corner is a building. M, M-B something. And it's Manchester Building. I think it's M-B-D. Manchester Building Department. But it's a big logo. M-D, something. M-D-A. And that is the site of the old Kingsway Cinema--

**VB: Right.**

**DH:** Which had the organ. The stage. And all that, oh! It was crying shame, you know. It was derelict for about eight years! Something like that before it was demolished. And that really was a super one. It was a beautiful cinema was that. And I used to like it but, anyway, I haven't found what we are looking for. *Beau Geste*. No, don't see it there. No. Oh, Joan Crawford. Oh dear. I liked her then because she was unassuming, but then she got these, got this terrible make-up. Overemphasised her mouth.

**VB: Mhm.**



**DH:** Then she got these meaty Hollywood roles. Big roles. She went all dramatic.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I went off her then. She wasn't my type at all.

**VB: Mhm.**

[pause 4 seconds]

**DH:** I can't say I miss the films but then I lead a quiet life now anyway. I mean we don't go out now in the evening if we can help it. If we go to the theatre, we go to matinees. It's easy. And cheaper. Erm, but I don't dream of going to the pictures in town. I used to do. I was courting, courting a girl from Newton Heath, which is east of Manchester. That way.

**VB: Right.**

**DH:** We're south. So I had to meet her in town. So we used to... that's the only time I went to the town cinemas. And eh, that was when we came back to this social habit, if you did your courting on the back row of the cinema--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** It was an expensive way of doing it, but, you see, you'd nowhere else. That is, you know, I do mention that as a serious point.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I mean nowadays nobody, the youngsters, somebody of my age then, wouldn't appreciate that to get a bit a piece and quiet, [laughs] privacy--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** You went to the cinema. The back row of the cinema. 'Cause he's got his car. He's got a flat. She's got a flat. They go to discos.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** See we had no discos! No youth clubs. We got the Boy Scouts. We got the Girl Guides. [laughs] But erm, you don't do your courting at the Scouts and Guides.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** So you need to, and when you weigh it up, it eh, there was an air of romance about it. Because you went into the cinema and you sat on the back row and the lights went down, and it was dark, it was warm. Centrally heated. It was cosy. You could cuddle up there. Enjoy one another's company. Share the comfort. There was ice-cream, chocolates. And they came round, you know, with the tray and sold ice-cream and chocolates. And eh, if the film was a decent one, you would even watch the film. [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** [hearty laugh] If it wasn't a de...if was a Garbo film, you thought, "Thank goodness for that!" You know.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** I'm not wasting my money! And eh, [laughs] but eh, but then there again. That's another point that's just cropped up and just struck me. Erm, my tastes have been affected by the people I've known. Now that was the same girl, I mentioned to you I used to go to the theatre a lot. And that was the same girl who was a keen balletomane. And I wouldn't, I mean, [laughs] to me, at that time, about twenty, something like that, it was a load of poofs, you know. Ballet! Aw! You know. Here am I wrapped up in footballers, you know, with footballer's legs and things like that. Ballet. But, since it was her turn, where we went, she says, "Right, we're going to see Margot Fonteyn." And I was [bloody?] enthralled. So I've been a ballet fan ever since.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And eh, so, looking back over my life, I'm grateful to my ex-girlfriends for introducing me to these things. I think it's possible that I've introduced them to some things like that that they wouldn't otherwise.... So you are determined, sort of, by the circumstances of your life. We were talking about this the other day. Erm, about somebody. I always wanted to be a foreign correspondent 'cause I love languages. And I love words. And, in those days all the refugees were coming from abroad. So, when I left school, they said, "What d'you want to be?" I said, "A foreign correspondent," thinking I'd get in the cotton warehouses, working in their foreign department, which will be mercantile foreign languages, not the erm, literary stuff.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** They said, "Oh no. You haven't a chance." You see, 'cause I couldn't go to university. Erm, I mean in my day you had to have money to get to university.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I mean, [laughs] nowadays everybody goes to university! [laughs] So, but on the advice of headmasters and teachers and, and you didn't get carers [sic] like you do now. Careers Officers and all.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Nothing like that in my... And they all said, "Oh no." There's all these foreigners coming over. Fleeing Hitler. And they've got English and Polish and German and French and heavens knows what. So, you won't stand a chance. After the war, the Army officer said, "What d'you want to be?" I said, "I'd like to be a foreign correspondent." "Oh no, no chance." So I was put off again. And everybody put me off.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And yet, a girl who lived in our street at the beginning of the war. Younger than me. Went to Levenshulme High School. She did languages. When she left she went to the College of Commerce in the city that I went to. Carried on with the languages from there. And when I was overseas, Joyce

wrote to me and said, "Do you remember Margaret Higson? She's working as a foreign correspondent. She's in the British Embassy in Libya." And I realise, looking back, I could have done the same--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Had I known. Except I was a few years ahead of her. And somebody said, "Oh dear! How awful." I said, "Well, yes, but, I'm not one of those, 'if only...'."

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Because, the reason I'm not one of those, 'if only...', is because I am what I am today because of the various circumstances fate has chucked me into. So, okay, it's disappointing I didn't. But had I become a foreign correspondent, would I have gone to films and cinemas? And watched films and been interested? Would I have played football? Would I have done this, that and the other?

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Would I have met this girl who got me interested in ballet? So, it's all circumstantial.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I suppose, in a way, you could call it fatalism. That fate's got something in store and that's it. But erm, that's all I will say. Well look, let's put it down to this in general. All my good points are what I've picked up from my sister and my father and my mother. All my bad points are my own! [laughs]

**VB: Ah! [laughs]**

**DH:** Which you are. You're moulded. You're moulded by your circumstances. Which isn't the same thing as class. When they talk about a class society and all that. Erm, I don't see it that way. I just see it that well, all right, if I'm working class or whatever you like to call me. I am what I am from being moulded--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** In the circumstances that have arisen! And, being on the, looking on the bright side, I can see all the good things that have come out of it. I can see the good thing of being called up for the Army. When [inaudible] district said, "Look, lad. We want you to fight this war for us." "Oh no! Not me." And erm, looking back, I can see how it's altered me. And erm, I think all the other circumstances have as well.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And I think the films have. Really. When I look at the films. When I think of the films I've seen--

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DH:** And that I've enjoyed. I mean the Lubitsch ones created this liking for witty repartee. Erm, witty humour. As opposed to just comic humour. Wit. You know, genuine wit. Erm, I used to read books from the library. Frederick Lonsdale's plays, which were witty comedies. I used to enjoy reading, I never saw the plays. But I used to enjoy reading the book of the play. Because of the witty dialogue. And erm, it stands me in good stead now. I enjoy it. I enjoy playing with words. So, I think the cinema's done that for me. Erm, it's given me a lot a pleasure as well. I wouldn't have missed it for the world! I don't know what I would have done without the cinema. I don't know what we'd all, [laughs] have done without. Oh, we'd have listened to the radio. Read books. And that would have been it! So. [pause 3 seconds] Curse or a blessing? I'd say it was a blessing really.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Although, as I say, I can't speak for it now 'cause I don't, I just don't know what it's like. I read a lot and I think, oh. Some of them. I'd like to see *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** 'Cause I've a feeling that'd be right up my street. It's a comedy.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** The way... I've read the reviews of it. Erm, I think I'd relish that. So eh, if we could afford it, I sometimes used to see a film twice. But I mean at threepence a time, it's a lot to erm, fork out--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Unless you could get your parents to pay the first time you saw, and they might pay for it the second time but eh. More often than not they'd say, "Well why d'you want to see it again?" But if I'd really enjoyed it, I'd want to see it again so... [pause 2 seconds]

**VB: I was interested when you said that about erm, your sense of humour being affected by going to films.**

**DH:** Yeah.

**VB: Do you think that it affected you in any other ways?**

**DH:** [pause 3 seconds; sound of cup and saucer clattering] Erm, [pause 2 seconds] off-hand I don't really think so. I don't think, even as I grew up, I don't think I ever got a social message from it. You know, [laughs] which is the obvious thing. Eh, theatre, yes. Eh, when I've seen a play in the theatre, if it's been that sort of play, 'Look Back in Anger'. I'm more conscious of the social theme of that than I have of a film. I've gone in a cinema and watched a film and enjoyed it. And I've come out and I haven't felt I've wanted to discuss the plight of whatever. Erm, because in those days, I might be wrong on this, and you will find out in your researches. But in those days, I don't think when they made films, they were made with the idea of putting over a social problem. Or, an answer to a social problem. I think they just made a film to make money for themselves, and they thought this would be a good subject. I don't think they wanted to change the world. Nowadays, film makers want to change the world. I mean they set out in the first instance, I think, to make a play with social impact. Never struck me like that. I just enjoyed them for what they were.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** *The Four Feathers* was one of mine I enjoyed. Erm, 'cause I used to read P.C. Wren's books. I read all P.C. Wren's books. And erm, did I say *The Four Feathers*?

**VB: Yes, you did.**

**DH:** Oh, not *The Four Feathers*. That was A.E.W. Mason. *Beau Geste*. *Beau Geste* [probably referring to the 1926 version]. Sorry. Although *The Four Feathers* was a good one as well [probably referring to the 1929 version]. And that was a good one. Eh, [pause 3 seconds] going back to the war, where eh, this bloke... mind you, you've got class in that. Which I wasn't conscious of at the time. Lady so-and-so, eh, with the family heirloom. [referring again to *Beau Geste*] The blue, the blue something. And erm. [pause 2 seconds] It's pinched [stolen]. There's three or four brothers. Beau, Digby and somebody else Geste. Three of them. And eh, couple join up. Something like that, and the other one doesn't. If I've got the story right. So they all send him a white feather. Erm, they must have had four mustn't they? For it to be called *The Four Feathers*. And eh, there's a jewel, the family heirloom is pinched and it's missing, so he takes the blame and everybody knows, we all know he's innocent. Poor old blighter! So he goes and joins the Foreign Legion to forget it. And erm, his brothers are looking for him. That's it! They couldn't have gone in the Army. So, why did he get the feathers? Anyway, it doesn't matter. But his brothers finally trace him and they join the Foreign Legion as well. And it finishes up with them all dead. But he's redeemed the family honour [now referring to *The Four Feathers*] because the truth comes out at the end. Oh, it's a good adventure yarn for boys. And P.C. Wren. *Beau Sabreur* was a follow-up. It was a sequel to it. And eh, so they couldn't have all been dead. There must've been at least one left.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** But it was good gutsy adventure stuff in the Foreign Legion.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** The fort's surrounded and erm... I can see it now, eh, Fort Zinderneuf, bullying sergeant [referring to *Beau Geste*]. It's been spoofed often enough. But eh, it's been overrun. But they run down and they put all the dead bodies at the crenellations. And then they're all run around, firing the rifles in--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** To give the Arabs the idea that it's still fully manned. And he dies a hero's death. Lady [Diana? - no such character in film] thinks he's marvellous. That's the girl he should have married. Stood by him all along. But erm, oh, it's... I mean, corny by today's standard. But we thought it was fantastic.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** As I say, I don't think they made, only the one film, but I don't think they made any others. But you know *Beau Sabreur* and quite a load of others, eh, which followed on. So eh...

**VB: Did you read the books--**

**DH:** I read the books.

**VB: Before or after the film?**

**DH:** Before.

**VB: Before.**

**DH:** Well they fitted.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** The character in the film fitted my imagination.

**VB: You weren't disappointed.**

**DH:** And Neil Hamilton was one of them [referring to *Beau Geste*].

**VB: Right.**

**DH:** Neil Hamilton again. But erm, no I can't say... [pause 3 seconds] I suppose in a way I picked up an impression of America from films. And what I thought America was like. [laughs] Which, with Jimmy Cagney as a gangster... [laughs] was not quite the thing I suppose. But eh...



**VB: Did you like these gangster films? 'Cause that was something you didn't--**

**DH:** Some I did, some I didn't.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** You know, but eh, [pause 2 seconds] Jimmy Cagney, Jimmy Cagney I liked 'cause he was a cocky little so-an-so but eh... I mean he did things, outrageous, not really outrageous but, I mean, at the time, eh, as lads we got, good heavens! Mae Clarke was his moll in it [referring to *The Public Enemy*]. And erm, it was in the twenties. They were sitting at the table. Like we are now. And they were having a, some argument. He was telling her what to do and she wasn't gonna do it, you know. So, [mimics moaning, growling voices] and all this. And everybody talked about it at the time and there's still things I can remember about the film since. She's wearing a short skirt. She'd be in her twenties, she had glasses on. And he leaned across, stuck his finger in her garter, lifted it up about this height [laughs] and then let go [probably referring to *The Picture Snatcher*]. And she nearly shot through the ceiling, you know. And we all thought, "By Jove! Daring, that!," you know. [laughs] But eh, it was ridiculous that, looking back at it, but eh, that was tough Jimmy Cagney. I mean that was in the days when you didn't strike women. You know, you respected women. 'Cause my father, I always remember my father's advice to me. He said, "Treat all females as ladies. Until you prove otherwise." And I've always done that. I've tried, [laughing] to do that. And it's worked out. I mean I would no more think of sticking my finger under your garter, lifting it that high and let it come thwack! Leave a big bruise. And I mean I think it was the same film. I'm not sure. He erm, stuffed a grapefruit in her face as well [referring to *The Public Enemy*]. I think that's the same film.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** If it wasn't the same film it was another one. That was typical of Jimmy Cagney. So, I suffered a little frisson of horror, went down our spines to see the way he could do this. You know, and get away with it. But, no, I didn't particularly like gangster films. I were never, never a violent person. You know, all these Tommy guns and bodies on the garage floor. All these massacres, you know. Even when we had fireworks on November the Fifth, I never bought any ha'penny bangers, they used to be, erm, and then penny bangers. These things that explode. I couldn't see any point in using my hard-earned money, a penny, to get something that I lit with a blue touchpaper and it just went

bang. I used to buy things called 'Chrysanthemum Rain' and it was like, [laughs] beautiful spray came out, you know. Chrysanthemum--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Which cost about tuppence but I could see something for my tuppence. [laughs] Instead of just a bang. So, or Roman candles, where coloured balls came out, one after the other. I used to enjoy those so, I would never... [laughs] I wonder if a was a sissy. I'm getting to, [laughs] I'm getting to wonder if I was.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Mind you, I was very small, [laughs] and I was known as Titch at school 'cause I was always the smallest. And eh, when we were in the gym and we had the, we had a donkey. We had a horse to vault over, the one they do the pommels on, but we always had a donkey, which was a smaller one. [laughs] And we had to leap over that. I used to leap and the gym instructor used to get hold of me belt, [laughs] up here and he'd lift me the rest of it, over the top. That's how small. He used to make allowances for me. Perhaps that's why, [laughs] I was never, never violent, 'cause I was too small. I'd probably get bullied if I tried anything.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** But eh, those were the days. I remember they put me on porridge. Did I tell you this the last you were here?

**VB: No I don't think so.**

**DH:** Well I went to the elementary school as it was in those days.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** And then I won a scholarship from there to Manchester Central High School for Boys. Which was sort of next to the Grammar School. If you couldn't get in at the grammar you got in at this one.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** It's in Whitworth Street and it's now a Shena, Shena somebody training college. Shena somebody teachers' college [referring to Shena Simon College].

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** On the corner of Aytoun Street opposite UMIST [University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology]. And I went there and they had this gym. And eh, the gym instructor was a retired sergeant major from the Army. Nice bloke he was. And on your school report, they used to give at the bottom, it used to give your height, your weight and your chest expansion. And when my mother got me for this report, [laughs] she looked at it. She laughed. Weight, minus something, you know. [laughs] And she thought, "Oh". Her poor little blue-eyed boy's getting nowhere, you know. This was 1928. Got to do something to build him up. So mother, mother was a country girl from Wiltshire. So she knew what to do with anything. She was marvellous. So she said, "Porridge". So she put me on porridge for breakfast. And I have had, except when I go to friends, or hotels that don't serve it. But since... for sixty-seven years I have had porridge for breakfast. Eh, with salt in it, and milk. Nothing else in it. No golden syrup or... Neat, with hot milk. For sixty-seven years, other than those exceptions. So I was glad when I went in the Army, you got porridge. So and, and that did actually build me up. And if, if, well not if, but when I get the Queen's telegram and they say what to what do you owe your longevity? I shall say, "Porridge and walking".

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Erm, and I swear by it. I mean, where Joyce, my sister, she will go on cereals during the summer.

[End of Side B]

{End of Tape One}

[Start of Tape Two]

[Start of Side A]

**VB: The only thing, the other thing that I wanted to ask was erm, when you're talking about all these stars erm, during the thirties, did you feel that you got to know them or were they always living in a world apart?**

**DH:** Well, the Hollywood ones I felt were like Mars, another planet.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** But the British ones, they were only in London. So they were there. So, they were part of me. And I think that's why I loved Madeleine Carroll.

**VB: Yes.**

**DH:** Eh, if I could've had the train fare to go to Boreham Wood, I could have met Madeleine Carroll. I felt she was there. She was part of me. Part of my social scene. Now... [pause 2 seconds] I told you I was a big theatre person.

**VB: Yes.**

**DH:** I went to the Opera House on one occasion and there was a play on. I can't even remember what play it was. I don't say it was in the thirties, mind you. But it had Sonia Dresdel in, who was a heavy dramatic actress in the British ones. Stewart Granger. I think I'm right in saying Jean Simmons was in it as well now [probably referring to Tolstoy's 'The Power of Darkness', staged at Manchester Opera House in 1949]. And there was quite a big cast of British film stars in it, although it was a stage play. And eh, I went round to the stage door to see them later, 'cause when I went to the theatre I used to look at the stage and see what they were like in person. And eh, I think Jean Simmons was with him. And he came out and eh, I was quite impressed with him and I was thrilled to bits. To think I was close to him as you and looking at Stewart Gran..., this is Stewart Granger! I mean as a young man that was, that was quite something. But on one occasion the old Princes Theatre which had been demolished for years, that's opposite the Odeon in town, on Oxford Street. That was a little theatre. We had erm, Mary O'Brien came from Hollywood in a, in a play. And I went to see it, and I thought she was awful. And I went to the stage door and then I got close to her. "Ooh! Don't think much of this." [laughs] I was disillusioned, you know. But eh, but it's nice now, it's funny, coming onto them now. It used to be a thing eh, 'cause on British films, I suppose this could be the

difference between them and American. Where I bonded more. A proper natural eh, affinity, indigenous natives. A lot of them were theatre actors. Like Joan Greenwood for instance. And erm, that's why those cards I've given you, a lot of them are actors like erm, Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson [possibly referring to Ann Casson]. They were mainly theatre with the occasional film. Some were film and the occasional theatre. One of the things I used to like was, we used to get 'Peter Pan' here regularly. Just after Christmas. At the Opera House. And they used to get somebody in it from a British film, more often than not. Margaret Lockwood was one. I thought, well, having seen her in films... And she's gorgeous. And then Joan Greenwood. She was one, the jammy [mimics] voice. 'Oh yes, my da-ar!' Terrible voice.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** But I liked her. And eh, she was Peter Pan. And I went down to the stage door, [laughs] to see her. And she came to the theatre in her Peter Pan outfit and she signed my autograph book. And eh, she chatted, and she was just the same! I was thrilled to bits. She was just the same in real life as she was up there on the, on the screen.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Mind you, she died, she only died fairly recently at a ripe old age. But eh, she looked dreadful in her old age. [laughs]

**VB: Mm.**

**DH:** You know, it wasn't kind to her. But in her youth she's quite pleasant. But erm, so I used to meet some of them like that and eh, they were quite fascinating. The British shocker I had, theatrically, was eh, for once, Arthur Lunt. [pause 3 seconds] Was it Lunt? Arthur Lunt [referring to Alfred Lunt] and Lynn Fontanne, was his wife. Now they were the American, top of the theatreland in America. And they played in a Noel Coward play at the Opera House. Which he'd written specially for them [referring to 'Design for Living']. And she was playing a thirty-year-old woman. [laughs] She was in her seventies! And yet, they were the top of the tree like Peggy Ashcroft and John Gielgud this side. When you watched the play, mind you, I was in the gallery.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** That's all I could afford. You didn't particularly notice, she seemed what she was. And I remember she had these long ringlets. It was an old-fashioned play. And when these ringlets fell off, I could have wept for her. But I went round to the stage door. Well he wasn't too bad the last time, but when I saw her! I thought seventy! She were more like eighty-five!

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Dreadful. That was a shock, that was. But usually most of them aren't too bad. But eh, no, the British ones I felt... were sort of... one of us kind of thing, you know. You could speak to them. You could. [pause 3 seconds]. And that's why as I say, you began to write to them. I thought well, my autograph book's the next best thing. I used to hope somebody'd drop me a little line with it like Anna Neagle did. Oh now, Anna Neagle, she was gorgeous. She really was gorgeous. Now, she started in, she started a bit like Joan Crawford as a dancer. She was a chorus girl in Cochrane revues. And I used to see Cochrane revues and Charlot revues, André Charlot.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Now, we're coming back to humour again now. They were witty, satirical reviews.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** They were. I used to love those. Oh ah! I adored those. And erm, a bit like 'That Was the Week That Was'. But on the stage. But doing quick sketches, you know. And erm, Marjorie Robertson became Anna Neagle. She was a chorus girl in André Charlot revues. And she got this lead and got into British films and started off as a dancer, then light stuff--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Light musical comedy. And then heavy dramatical. Like Queen Victoria [referring to *Victoria the Great*] and things like that. And she was quite a polished actress.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And, there again, you see, blonde.

**VB:** [laughs]

**DH:** English blonde with blue eyes. You know.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DH:** Tch. A-ah. I never met her unfortunately. I'd liked to have done. 'Course, sometimes some of them you see in the flesh eh, not what you imagine.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** I remember when Princess Margaret came as a princess, years ago. To some function in Manchester. I went to see her. And I thought she was like a little fairy queen! I thought she was gorgeous. In those days.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** She was small. A lot smaller than I'd imagined. She was probably at that time, mind you, she'd be what, twenty-five? Twenty-six? But she was about five feet. Five feet one, possibly. And eh, I got close to, beautiful complexion.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** Gorgeous! Nothing like, well, I wouldn't say nothing like but, eh, you missed her beauty on the newsreels, and things like that--

**VB:** Uhuh.

**DH:** So... [pause 3 seconds] don't think we've exhausted it yet. Go on for years I should think, if we stick at it.

**VB:** [laughs]

**DH:** I can't, knowing you were coming back I thought you might have had a whole list of questions. Whole host of questions but, having tried to think of one or two I could think of, well, why did we go and how did we choose?

**VB: Yes.**

**DH:** But apart from that, I mean eh, I thought, well, is there anything I've forgotten? Erm, I don't think there is. But erm--

**VB: I mean I think--**

**DH:** It is a bit of glamour in your life as well I suppose.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** And then again, I did start to save their autographs. I used to hope that they'd drop me a line. And that has never left me. Erm, because liking words, and English being my best subject at school, I love letter writing. But, mind you, I need time. I like space and time. I can't write on my knee. I can't write in these chairs. The arms are in the way and that's too low. I like a big table, then I can spread out. And then I need about three hours to sit down and write it from start to finish. I can't start today, carry on tomorrow and then a bit more. Eh, so I like writing it because [pause 2 seconds] I'm back to reading books again. I've probably picked up style from books I've read. Turn of phrase and things like that. And apply my own humour to it.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And, as I write, I tell people the same bit a news. But if I wrote to you, you'd get the same news but the style wouldn't be the same as if I wrote to her over there.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I write to suit whoever I'm writing to. But I give them the news in a way that I [emphasised] hope they find interesting.



**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Eh, so I've always liked it. But as I say I'm not a good writer because I have to keep waiting till I've got three hours to spare and I've never got three hours to spare!

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Everybody who's retired'll tell you, "However did I find time for work? I've got so much to do!" But even now, I like writing letters because I like to get a reply. And I've yet to meet anybody--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Who doesn't like getting a letter. The telephone has killed the art of letter writing. Stone dead. It's far easier to pick up a phone and say, "Is that you, Denis? That was a nice present you sent me. Thanks a lot. Are you all right?" "Yes." "And your sister?" "Yeah." "Cheerio." That's the end of it. Whereas with a letter you can read it again and again and again! And if I'm writing to thank somebody, I can make it interesting, I hope, to them. So, if they get a little chuckle out of it, they can read it again on Saturday and still get the same chuckle. So, but, I'm afraid letter writing is a lost art. So I stick with this, even now. And you won't be surprised to know that two of my favourite ladies. They're all ladies, you notice. [laughs] Standing joke. It's Cyd and Les. Well Cyd is Cyd Charisse--

**VB: Ah. [laughs]**

**DH:** [laughs] Whose legs never cease to amaze me. They go on for ever. Eh, Cyd Charisse. And the other one, nearer home, is Lesley Garrett, the opera singer. 'Les', I call her. She's a Yorkshire girl. And erm, I wrote to her after a programme about a month ago called 'Viva La Diva'.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And it was on the television. I would jump at anything if she's on. And it was an hour's programme, presented by her. Eh, with some dancers. Mainly operatic. But she's a Yorkshire girl with a sense a humour and a Yorkshire accent too, although she's an opera singer. She's got a beautiful Yorkshire accent. And I like this. So she introduces things her way. And eh, [pause 2

seconds] it was so good I wrote to her. And eh, I hoped she might've replied, but... And I said, well I write, let's digress a bit, I write because [pause 3 seconds] people complain. And I say, if you complain, you should also hand out bouquets.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Well I'm a good complainer I am. Battles galore!

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** If you don't know how to complain, see me. I have battles galore. But at the same time I hand out bouquets. So if I've enjoyed something that little bit more than just enjoying it, I write. So I wrote to her, and I make it witty as well. And at the end I put, as I said, "This is praise. Can I assure you. It's praise indeed, coming from a Lancastrian to a Yorkshirewoman."

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Well I didn't get a reply. So I wasn't too bothered about that. But, at Christmas, during the Christmas season she had an hour's programme on BBC, on Radio 2 in which she said, 'Lesley Garrett presents'. And it's her choice of records. And eh, I thought to myself, well, nyeh, I don't know. Because the fact that you're a good footballer--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Doesn't mean to say you're a good presenter of records. You might be a brilliant opera singer but presenting a programme, have you got the know-how? Eh, so, in other words, because you're an expert in one sphere, doesn't mean you're an expert in another sphere. So I switched on and crossed my fingers. And it was a joy.

**VB: Ah!**

**DH:** Eh, I liked the records she had. One was her father's favourite. I liked her comments. 'Cause they were witty comments. They weren't DJ's blather [laughs] you know. I can't stand blather. Erm, I

thoroughly enjoyed it. So, when I wrote 'Viva La Diva', I wrote to the Publishing Dep... well, Miss Lesley Garrett, care of--

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DH:** The BBC. But when I wrote about the TV one just now and got no reply. But when I wrote to erm, Radio 2, I wrote to the producer. Anthony Cherry I think it was. And I said, "Thank you," you know. "You've made my Christmas." I put down I feared the worst, you know. Eh, I like her. I'm a big fan. But that doesn't make her a brilliant presenter. Or even the programme...

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Brilliant. Whether you pick her record or whether she picks her record. But, it was like letting hot molasses flow over me.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** I said, it was gorgeous. And I got a lovely letter back from the producer.

**VB: A-ah!**

**DH:** Saying he would pass on my good wishes to Lesley. And he said, "I can assure you, she'll be thrilled." And erm, "At the moment there are no plans to do any more. But watch this space." So, I was quite pleased when I got a letter like that.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Oh, I do all sorts of things. I heard eh, one programme, [quarter of an hour?], Sue MacGregor, well-known BBC producer in Manchester. And she had one with erm, it was a series on different people, celebrities in their own work [possibly referring to 'Conversation Piece', Radio 4, 1991]. And this was a craftswoman. Think she was a sculptor or something like that. And it was Somebody Houlston! And I thought, well there's not many Houlstons about. So I thought, too good to miss this. So I wrote to Sue MacGregor the producer and said, "I enjoyed the programme. Blah, blah, blah". Naturally I had an extra thing about it because it was a Houlston and there can't be many Houlstons

about. "Could you tell me anything about her? Which Houlstons does she belong to? Where, how many are there of us?" And she wrote back and said, "Well, I'm afraid I can't give you a great deal of information but here's her address." Northumberland Way, somewhere.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** So I wrote to her. And I got a letter which can only be described as written by a sculptor. Aw dear!

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** You know how the theatrical world is all [lovely done?], don't you? Well this was just the opposite. It was eh, had to be written in pejoratives, you know.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** And eh, it was a nice letter, mind you. And of course it pointed out to me that she wasn't a Houlston. She only married a Houlston.

**VB: Ah yes.**

**DH:** But eh, her husband's brother Cyril was in Sutton Coldfield and he had a family tree and if I write to him, even if there was no connection, he'd be thrilled to bits, because he got the sort of Midlands Houlstons. So I wrote to Cyril and I got quite a screed back. But eh, it was quite interesting. Oh, had another one like that, years ago. We went to erm, Southport and eh, passing the theatre there, the repertory theatre in Southport and that time it was a Sunday, so it was shut. But they had the photographs on their wall and it said, "Diana Houlston." And I said, 'There's our Diana!' Well it isn't a common name. Houlston isn't.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** So I wrote. I thought, well I'll drop her a line. [laughs] So I write, you know, "How are you? I've missed you. What connection are you?' And I got a letter back. I swear it was written with a Chinese pen! You know the pens I use for writing.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** That were very theatrical. Very nice letter though. She was thrilled to bits. Any time I was there, call round and see her. And she... [pause 2 seconds] would be coming to Manchester Palace in a Noel Coward musical play. Eh, with a bit part in it--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** So erm, if I'd go and call round at the stage door and see her. Anyway, Joyce and I went, in fact we all went. To see this Noel Coward play. It was the one where his tune 'Chase Me Charlie' is in it. 'Ace of Clubs', the name of it. And eh, I checked in the programme, she wasn't, she wasn't in it.

**VB: Aw.**

**DH:** You know, 'cause they gave everybody and she wasn't in it. So I've never met her but eh, it's nice, you know.

**VB: It is. Yeah.**

**DH:** It makes life interesting. So, so I think that's why I'm never bored. I've too many interests. People when they retire, they're scared of retiring because they say they'll be bored. I think it's because they'll be bored... And quite a few of my colleagues, who were dreading retiring and were bored, quite a few of them died within two years.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I for one, I shan't, I refuse to. I'm not going...

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** I'm not ready yet. Eh, and I think it's 'cause I've got so many interests. Eh, Joyce and Eve, my wife, they think I'm bit of a crackpot writing to all these people but erm, well I enjoy it. And if I get a letter back I'm thrilled to bits. 'Cause I think, well, fair enough, you've had a bouquet. They've

probably had loads of complaints, so it must be nice to get a bouquet once in a while. If somebody does give you pleasure--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Well why shouldn't you tell them!

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** They've given you pleasure. Erm, otherwise, it's the same with these walking holidays we go on. Erm, [inaudible] after a few days, you get a questionnaire to fill in. Tick the box and, well, it's fair enough. But long before they introduced that, going back to 1953! After every holiday... oh eh, they have a general committee in London.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** It's a company that organises walks. Holiday walking. Eh, and it's a non-profit making concern. And it is a limited company. So they have a general committee. And I always used to write after every holiday and just give them a précis of what I liked and, if anything, what I didn't like--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And they always used to give me a reply. And I did that on the basis that you got a general committee trying to work out, well, what d'you think they like for 1996? And they come up with a schedule and all the rest of it. Well nobody writes in and says, eh, oh brilliant.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** They know what people don't like. 'Cause people will write in and tell them.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Or phone them.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** But nobody thinks they'll get in touch with them and say, "I don't know whose idea it was to have eh, strawberry pavlovas for breakfast but it was brilliant!" You know. Eh, so I think, well, fair enough. Let's tell them! Oh, I used to get a nice letter back, thanking me and saying we're pleased to know. You know, we've done something right. Because eh, I feel sorry. Some of these people like yourself, I mean if somebody tells you eh, they've enjoyed whatever you've produced--

**VB: Yes.**

**DH:** You're bubbling along there. [laughs] Keeping your fingers crossed--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Hoping that all your hard work [laughs] is being appreciated somewhere. But, you've no idea. Particularly if you should get the book out, the book reviewer said, "I've never read such a load of balderdash in my life!"

**VB: This is it.**

**DH:** Eh, you'd be crucified. But eh, all the others, if they liked it, wouldn't bother writing to you and saying--

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Eh, "Dear Valentina, I thought you did a marvellous job. It's a beautiful book and brings it all back."

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** They just take it for granted. So when I complain, erm, some places I complain to, they'll say, "Well we must be doing it right. Yours is the only complaint we had!" I say, "In that case, I'm the only intelligent customer that--

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** 'You've ever had! No-one else, they're all too bone idle to complain!' I mean the fact that there's only one complaint doesn't mean to say things are perfect.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I can see the argument.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** I can see the argument. I mean but eh, if they happen to have any complaints except mine, I'm the odd one out, you know. It's me that's wrong, [laughs] not them. But I disagree with that.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** It's just that... I mean, I know this. I stand at bus stops and people complain about the bus and whatever. And I say to them, "Well why don't you complain to the office?" "Oh, you get nowhere if you do!" And I always say to them, as Tommy Docherty says about football, "If you don't buy a ticket you'll never win the raffle!"

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** So if you don't tell them you, obviously you'll never get anywhere.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Even if you complain it's no guarantee you'll get an answer or they'll do anything. But then again, you never know. Even though you don't get an answer. Your complaint might have opened a can of worms. And, [laughs] there might be sackings and redundancies and all sorts--

**VB: Ah.**



**DH:** As a result of your letter, which they're not going to write and tell you about, "Dear Mr Houlston, Thanks for your letter. We sacked four supervisors and one bus driver."

**VB:** [laughs]

**DH:** They'll just get on with it and that's it! So erm, I'm all for writing, whether it's good or it's bad. But erm, and some of my relatives say, "You should write a book." You know, I write them once a year when they send me a birthday present or Christmas present or whatever. And I've got a year to write to them about then, you see. So, and they get about eight pages of A, that big one [presumably referring to A4].

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** And they always write back and they say, 'Oh, thanks very much for your letter. You really ought to write a book.' I say, "No I shouldn't. I'm not an author. I'm not a book writer. I'm a letter writer."

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** Which is a different thing. But erm. [pause 4 seconds] So there we are. Don't know, has it got us anywhere this, or is it just me?

**VB:** Oh, no I think so. I mean you've covered the things I was actually going to ask.

**DH:** Mhm.

**VB:** 'Cause that's what I was really interested in, finding out a bit more about--

**DH:** Yeah.

**VB:** You know, what the cinema really meant to you.

**DH:** Yeah.

**VB:** So it's been great to--

**DH:** Mhm.

**VB:** Talk about that.

**DH:** Well it meant a lot. Actually looking back, it meant more than I realised at the time. Because at the time, it was a habit to go.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DH:** Eh, it's like, how can you put it in present day things? Well in a sense, it's like schoolchildren who start off reading 'Black Beauty' and all these books. And these as they grow up, they go on to computers. [laughs] So all that lot, they drop, don't they? What interests they got they drop. Like these girls, youngsters are all gonna be ballet dancers. And they go out Saturday morning, to go to ballet school. Well they don't become ballet dancers. Eh, they become something else.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** Sooner or later in the present day and age they'll go on computers. And play computer games. So the ballet stuff. Well if they look back, that'll probably sustain them that. But they didn't think so at the time! S'only when they look back. And it's only when you got me thinking of my old years [inaudible] over, that I think what a lot time we spent in the cinema. And what a lot of pleasure it gave us!

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** And back to the recurring theme. There were nothing else! There was the radio, which made you think, I still like the radio. Erm, but use your own imagination. Which is marvellous!

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** I like that. And it's still, radio is still brilliant today. The BBC is still brilliant on radio. Erm, but apart from radio, you know, you wouldn't know. You read things in the paper--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** But eh, it's like this latest coach crash. You hear on the radio there's been a crash and ten are dead so, erm... [inaudible] swerved off the road, but until you see the television pictures and you say a crane hoist, you know, you don't realise how bad it was.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And until you see what was there, well, you only had the newspaper. You might have a newspaper photograph. Perhaps one. Well now you're spoilt. You get dollops on television. Showing you the same thing, the same day! I mean, then, we had to wait the next day before we got the *Pathé* and the *British Movietone News*. When I listen to those now, [laughs] and I think, I wonder what those commentators think of themselves when they erm, when they watch it. These old clips, [laughing] of them giving you the news. Because it's fraighfully, oh, "Who's for tennis?" [posh voice] "Now here we see the Queen Mother. She's about to raise a bottle of champagne to launch this beautiful ship." [mimics voice] "And there it goes... Ooh, it's covered in champagne!" Not that verbatim but, you know, it's that sort of, eugh! [laughs] And yet at the time it seemed normal. But they were good newsreels. I will say that much for them. The newsreels were good. Erm, *Pathé* and *British Movietone*. But eh, no, life was erm, a lot easier. Well, don't suppose it was really, when you weigh up the 1926 strike--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And things like the General Strike. Wasn't easier but was... [pause 3 seconds] There was less of everything. As I say, there was no cars, no motors. I mean you come down the street now, probably full of cars--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** More often than not. And [inaudible] lanes where you got a bus stop, you're full of cars. There weren't any. You wouldn't see any. You'd see a few on the main road. No cars. [pause 2 seconds] No anything. No, no youth clubs. No discos. We got pubs of course but then that wasn't my scene either. Eh, you made, in fact looking back I was thinking of my, I don't know how old I was, I'd be at elementary school, I'd a wooden hoop! I had a wooden hoop which I beat with a wooden stick. And

used to walk for miles round these streets here, bowling my hoop. Well I mean if you showed a kid a hoop and a stick and said, "What d'you think that is?" [laughs] Today. They wouldn't have a clue, would they? Mind you, my parents, [pause 3 seconds] had a hard life. They hadn't a lot of money. They were very frugal, my father and mother were very good with it. But, the fact that I'd a wooden hoop and stick indicated that I was that much lower down the social scale, because the real one was an iron hoop with an iron stick, which had a loop. And the hoop went through the circle at the end of this iron stick. In other words it was anchored--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And you had an awful job because you had to get this, like a lollipop--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** If you follow me. And it was permanently in that hole. It was made like that.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** So, to get it to revolve you had to get this at an angle. A tangent.

**VB: Ah I see.**

**DH:** You didn't hit it with the stick--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** It was in it so you sort of shoved it. Well, if you got too high up, if you didn't get this iron hoop to move and if you got too low down, you lifted it off the floor. I found them very difficult. In my simple mind. I found my wooden hoop and my stick a lot easier. But, the lads that had the iron hoops they were, that was considered the thing, that was. You never see hoops at all, these days.

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

**DH:** Bored? I might have been but I doubt it because if I wasn't in the street bowling my hoop, I'd be in the street playing football. If I wasn't playing football, I was at the pictures. And if I wasn't doing any of those I was reading a book. So, or I was doing my homework.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Homework, always, was lowest on the list. I did all these other things and somehow or other squeezed my homework in. Once again, to the big bands, well they weren't called big bands then but by present day standards they would be known as big bands--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Half ten until midnight. Lew Stone on a Wednesday for the Monseigneur. Ambrose from the Mayfair Hotel. Sid Phillips and his Quintet - I think it was from [inaudible]. But eh, you knew which night they were on so if they had a special band you all made a point of listening that night. And I used to do my homework! I've never been able to study. You know the people who lock themselves in the room, and study--

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** I could never do that. Which is like correspondence courses were never any use to me--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I haven't got the dis..., I'm not self-disciplined, which they lack these days. But in those days, not to that extent I hadn't got it. I liked music on [laughs] whilst I was doing my homework. [laughs] Anybody else'd say it was a distraction--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** But not me! I used to, bit like 'Music While You Work' during the war--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** I found it sort of encouraged me so, when I hear these old tunes. Eh, [pause 2 seconds] Carroll Gibbons in the Savoy Hotel, Billy Terment and his Orchestra. I can even hear the style, particularly Billy Terment. Erm... and I hear the tune now. This is why I listen to Desmond Carrington on a Sunday. Sunday afternoon is my big afternoon. Because I get Desmond Carrington from twelve till two. I get Benny Green from two till three. Three o'clock, I think I get Alan Dell with 'The Dance Band Days', which is all my period of music. I think that's on for about, I'm not sure if that's an hour or not. And then I get 'Sing Something Simple', follows on.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Which is all the tunes I know. Which [pause 2 seconds] isn't nostalgic. To me they were tunes. I enjoy them as much now as I always did!

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DH:** in fact, talking about writing letters, I've just written off to Desmond Carrington. You probably don't listen to his programme.

**VB: I haven't heard--**

**DH:** No. Well he plays erm, what's his programme called? Two hours of erm, [pause 2 seconds] oh-h! It's not 'Golden Hits'. He doesn't call it that. Forget what he does call it now. I haven't got the 'Radio Times' in. I can't check it but it's, it's the evergreens. You know, the Cole Porter stuff. and eh, Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra. And, to me, it's all good stuff. He had a bit on lost lyrics where listeners write in and say, "Knocking round my brain I've got two sentences. Does anybody know what it is?"

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** And erm, sometimes I can remember bits. But the funny thing is Joyce, my sister agrees with me. Erm, my father used to know a lot of parodies of the popular songs of his day. Like 'Three O'Clock in the Morning'. You know, [sings] "Three o'clock in the mor-ning! Singer take out her glass eye." And it's all about this young lady going to bed. "Put her false teeth [singing] in the co-erner. Hang up her hair on the wall!"

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** De-de-de-de-deh. [sings] And, he knew all these. Half the times we'd forget the original words! And he had one tune, and he said, the lost lyric. Did anybody know? And eh, he was in, during the war, so he's no chicken. And he presented eh, with the German radio, British forces in Germany. So, he's my vintage anyway, which [inaudible] And he came up with a tune once, erm, "De-da-da-doo-doo-doo-doo-do-de-da-di-di-di." [singing] I can't think what the original tune is but I said to Joyce, I know this one. "Darling Mabel, bought a table, half a doors and chairs. Then she bought a sofa." [singing] I said, "What was it after that?" I couldn't [inaudible] what the thing was. [laughs] A few weeks later when he said, "We've discovered this lost lyrics, but I was surprised, the number of you that came up with something about Auntie Mabel, [laughing] bought a table."

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** And this week he came up with one. Somebody eh, got some words. Erm, "Leave me alone, let me wander." Did we know what the rest of it was? And he said, "We can't find it. Does any reader know?" Well I never bothered writing before now. But erm, I remembered this one. And I could remember the tune and I could remember all the words. So I dropped Desmond Carrington, I hope, a humorous little line, telling him. I posted it on Monday--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** It was Sunday programme so I posted it Monday. I shall be listening in on Sunday to see, although, quite often it's weeks before he, you know, comes up with the answer. This week's lost lyrics were found. I wrote to him, and I said, 'I'm writing to you, and adding to the hundreds of letters you're going to get from fans of 'The Street Singer', Arthur Tracy. Who, next to 'Marta' which was his main song, which was his million-seller type, this was probably his second one [possibly referring to 'When the Wandering Boy Comes Home']. And you were quite right to think that it was an open-air country walking type of song. Because here are the complete words." I said, "I hesitate to sing it on tape for you because my voice would drive you up the wall!" But I gave him the complete words. And eh, I shall be anxious to see if he eh, if, first of all, if there are hundreds--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Who've let him know. Or whether he mentions me. Oh and so I said, "You were quite right, it is a sort of [Cabanel?] type of happy wanderer--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Song". So eh... [pause 2 seconds] Oh that was in the days when I used to listen to Radio Manchester when it was Radio Manchester. I used to write to them. 'Cause we haven't got a phone.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And we used to write to them. I wrote to them some years ago and they had a presenter. Ian somebody, who had a nice, ironic sense of humour which appealed to me. A Scot he was. And I wrote to him and said, about January. And his programme used to be about three hours. It was in the days when you got a lot of music. But they reorganised it. It wasn't bringing in the younger generation. I accepted that. Fair enough. So I wrote to him and I said, "Every year I write to the BBC and say, television and radio, and say, 'You make a big fuss about St Patrick's Day. You make a big fuss about St David's. You make a big fuss about St Andrew,' I said, 'And what do they do about St George? Nothing.'" So I said, "It's time we did something. Now I'm not saying this crawling, but I consider your programme is one of the highlights of the week." It used to be on a Tuesday. Erm, so I said, "I'm writing to you in desperation," I said. "I write to all the others. But it won't make a scrap a difference." But I said "Since I enjoy your programmes and your sense a humour appeals to me immensely, I'm writing to you to see if you can possibly put on a programme worthy of St George. This doesn't mean you have to play 'Land of Hope and Glory', 'Greensleeves' and 'Pomp and Circumstance'. There's plenty of other English tunes." And I gave him a list of eh, I went through a gramophone library and picked tunes, you see. I said, "You could do this." So, I reckon this was one of my successes. I was quite pleased about this because I switched on, on St George's Day, or near enough, whenever it was. I don't think it was St George's but it was Tuesday night anyway. He used to quote listeners. "I've had a letter from so and so." He said, "I've had a letter." Oh! And in the letter I put, "I don't know why I'm writing to you, a Scotsman, to do something on St George's Day", I said. "But it just shows you, to what desperate straits I've been driven!"

**VB: [laughs]**



**DH:** So, he [laughs] put this programme on and he said, "Now tonight's programme will be a little different from usual, because," he said, "I've had a letter from a Mr Houlston in Liverpool. And he says, "No", he says, "I'll not quote it," he said, "because it's too good." He said, "I'll read it in full."

**VB:** Oh dear! [laughs]

**DH:** [laughs] And he read it in full, and eh, he was chuckling when he read it.

**VB:** That's lovely.

**DH:** He was chuckling when he read it.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DH:** And erm, he put on a marvellous programme. He really did. He eh, he dug out some stuff I hadn't thought of, erm, I had never heard before but which I liked.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** Medieval stuff. He said, I always remember his second record because he said, "Now," he said, "The next record with the band of the eh, Grenadier Guards," he said, "Strictly speaking it isn't English. But," he said, "just for tonight, it's the English Grenadiers.'" And he put on 'The British Grenadiers' march.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** And he was full of wit all the way through. And he thanked me again at the end of the programme. So, I wrote back. [inaudible] I wrote back and said "God bless you," I said. "Thank you. It was absolutely superb."

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** And I said, "Those medieval ones you put on, which I didn't know of, thank you for letting me hear them because," I said, "Once again I'm not crawling, but they were delightful. And [I made a note of some of them?]"

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Oh I enjoyed it. You have to do another research on letter writing because erm, there used to be a bloke Alan Sykes. He had his programme. And erm, I found he was erm, would respond to letters and phone calls. And erm... [pause 2 seconds] [laughs] I'd written several times to him. And eh, I don't quite know why I put Joyce's name on this one. But, I don't know if you've heard them, there's a record that I listen to. It's erm, Joan Stafford and Paul Weston. That's her husband. She's an American singing star. She's in the erm, Peggy Lee class--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** You know. We're going back to the forties--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Thereabouts. Well, [laughs] they'd made some records under the name Darlene and Jonathan Edwards. And the first time I ever heard one, I thought, 'April in Paris' it was [probably referring to 'Paris in the Spring']. And I was listening to this and I thought, ooh! I'm sure she's off key! And I listened again very carefully and she was off key. And then in the bits where there was a pause and he had to play something on the piano, I thought, his fingers are running away with him! You know--

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** You know when you're running downhill and your legs carry you for...

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** I thought. So you could say how subtle it was and it were deliberate. Deliberate. Off-key. And this piano playing. The rhythm sort of got mixed up, you know. But only slightly. Because when you first heard it! But then I realised by the end of the record that it was a spoof!

**VB: Ah.**

**DH:** So, and I've heard some more since. They made several at the same time. So I wrote to Alan Sykes and I said, "Dear Mr Sykes." 'Cause, the thing in writing to people is to try and find out what, how they look at things. And what appeals to them. So, with his replies over the years to listeners, I realised that if you could introduce him to a record he didn't know, he'd play it. If you said, "Can you play 'Jealousy' or 'Bluebirds Over the White Cliffs of Dover'?" he wouldn't, because everybody wanted that. But if you could find one that was new to him, he'd probably play it. So I wrote to him and I said, "Dear Mr Sykes." (I wrote this, [laughs] in Joyce's name. I can't think why now!) And I said, "I have been enthralled by a record I had some time ago which I think is absolutely brilliant. I'm not going to say anything about it because if you don't know of it already, it will spoil the pleasure for you. So could I suggest you get a Darlene and Jonathan Edwards record? Because I like it and I think maybe most of the listeners will like it. And I am sure you will like it." Well as luck would have it, he'd never come across them. And he came on, and he's laughing his head off when he came on. And he says, "I'm indebted to Miss Joyce Houlston of Levenshulme for this next record." And he burst into laughter and he couldn't continue. He said, "I'm going to put it on", [laughs] he said, "And see what you think." He said, "But she likes it," he said, "And I must say I do." So, he played it and when he finished he was still laughing.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** And he said eh, "Well that was Darlene and Jonathan Edwards who, in case you're not aware, are Joan Stafford and Paul Weston." Later on in the programme, he was playing another record, he burst out laughing. He said, "I still can't get over that Darlene and Jonathan Edwards record!"  
[laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** So, he had pleasure all afternoon with that eh, record.

**VB: Ah.**

**DH:** And eh, although I didn't get a letter back, I got his, you know, a verbal answer. And it makes my day, you know. I'm quite pleased so. In other words, it's a bit like psychology sort of, a psychologist says something and then how do they react? But then you're on my pet subject now 'cause I say psychology, in a sense, is a load of rubbish because in books and plays and films--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** A psych... [laughs] a psychologist which is aptly whoever's written the book of whatever, says, "Well of course you do realise this is a double bluff." Blah, blah, blah, blah. And, course it works out I did what he says or what he doesn't according. But in real life, you can't do that.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Well least I can't. I mean, [laughs] if I was to say, "Well no, erm, if I say such-and-such to Valentina"--

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** "Her normal response would be so and so. So I'll divert her by saying..." It doesn't work. It's a load of poppycock. Yeah. So erm, so if I can write a letter to Alan Sykes and in my own mind he's going to say, eh, "I can't see anything for me in that. It's not what I'm expecting." But if he does actually react and find it as funny as he did, in fact funnier than I thought he would do, I feel quite pleased. But not that I'm trying psychology--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Don't think for a minute. But looking for a working,--

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DH:** Real sort of thing. When I write a letter what I'm actually trying to do is give pleasure to somebody. So, if in their response they indicate they got pleasure from it, like my sister-in-law said, you ought to write a book. Well, to me that's praise.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** You know, I thought, you get big-headed. So obviously, you know, I'm a bighead!

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** But erm, it's nice to get a response.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Or if you write, you get nothing. You just get frustrated!

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** But even so, even if I get a response which isn't what I want, I'm big enough to take it. You know, I can stand criticism. Doesn't worry me. In fact, eh, in a sense, I can welcome it. Because it reveals to me something about myself I didn't know. Erm, I wouldn't have thought I was like that.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** If they say, "I've got your letter and I think you're very self-centred." I think, "Me?"

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** "Me. Self-centred!?" Well, am I? Hadn't struck me I was. And I've often thought I'd love to be a fly on the wall when somebody's talking about me.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Because you never know what impression you give. And on these walking holidays we go on, this is one of my pet themes, the Saturday night we get there and you look around after dinner. Well at dinner you see people and you think, mhm! And then afterwards they usually barn dancing or something like that to get to know one another all on Christian name terms. And you look at them on the Saturday night. And when I first started as a young man I used to think, "Goh! What a bunch!"

Not gonna enjoy this week." But in actual fact, they're never like that. First impressions are hopeless. So I've learned the hard way that first impressions don't mean a thing.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And when I've mentioned this theory to people they've said, "Yes. When you look at somebody and say they look like a boring old stick, have you ever thought they probably look at you and say the same thing?" I say, "Oh ye-es!" I mean, I'm not trying to pass myself off as better than anybody else--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** But, I would, yeah, I would like to know if they think I'm a... And at one place I went to, when I was what? When I was about forty. I met a marvellous woman there, in her sixties. Walked up like Hillary up mountains [presumably referring to mountaineer Edmund Hillary] and all sorts. And Miss [Poppen?], she used to talk about 'my mothers', and I thought, "What does she mean my mothers?" And it dawned on me later. She was a district nurse from Bristol. And she went travelling round her mothers.

**VB: Ah, course, yes. [laughs]**

**DH:** So erm, so I, at the end of the week I thought there was a big disparity in our ages. And then she was going on to Bristol in her car. Her nurse's car. I said to her, "Well thanks, Pop." She liked to be known as Pop. "I've enjoyed the week. You've been really good company." She said, "Well I'd like to say the same to you." She said, "I've quite enjoyed it." She said, "You know on Saturday when I first saw you I thought, well he's a dry old stick!" And she didn't mean dry old stick in the sense of comedy--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** She meant a dry, old stick! And I was only forty then! And at the time, [laughs] I, ooh! But, it's good--

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** Because it deflates, if you--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** If you're likely to get big-headed, deflates you. And also, it's interesting to know how people see you.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** The best example I ever had of that was when I was working and eh... [pause 3 seconds] I used to work in my lunch hour 'cause I was overworked. So I had to catch up. And I used to get the midday post. Go and collect the midday post from our front office. Come and sort my own out and then go and dish the other departments' mail to them, you see. Well they'd be on their lunch. And, [laughing] I went to this department on this occasion, a big long room. And down at the far end there was a circle of men with a bloke in front of them, talking to them. So he had his back to me--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** But they were looking up the room. So I walked down the room to give them this mail. [laughing] And I heard him saying the most obscene things about me. And I could see all these blokes, sort of trying to shut him up--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Or trying to let him know I was bearing down on him. And he didn't know. And he tended to have a rather loud voice, [laughs] so, I heard all this and he called me the most, ooh dear! You know, they were obscene. He referred to ladies' genitals and things like that, you know. And eh, [laughs] I walked up to him and on the way I'm walking down I thought, "How do I deal with this?"

**VB: [Gasps]**

**DH:** I just tapped him on the shoulder and when he turned round I said, "There you are, Fred." I said, "There's all your midday mail." And turned round and walked out. [laughs] And eh, he went red and blue and purple--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And all sorts! But, coming back to sense of humour, eh, I thought, well eh, you know, I wouldn't have thought about myself, but, I mean obviously, interesting--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Interesting. And I could take it like that. You know I can take it since. So erm, it's fascinating. So it was one of the few occasions when, they do say eavesdroppers, although I wasn't eavesdropping, but it used to happen, never hear any good of themselves.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And I thought, well it would be nice to know, you know. But on these walking holidays, you know, you walk with a party and you tend to, say you're a party of twenty, you start off and you spread and spread and spread. well I might find myself with you in the middle. And I'm with you for an hour or so till we stop for a lunch break and then you go round talking to other people, and then we start again in the afternoon, and I'm up at the front with somebody else, you see. Well I always remember one of these holidays, there again, I was a lot younger, I was in Ross, Ross-on-Wye.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Beautiful area. And erm, we'd been walking couple of days. On the Tuesday. And I found myself talking to a girl I'd not spoken to previously, 'cause you don't get to know everybody right away. You meet everybody Saturday night but you tend to forget their names and you might not see them again. And eh, I'm talking to this girl and she said to me, "Are you Denis?" I said, "Yes." "Oh!" she said, "Make me laugh!" I said, "Beg your pardon?"

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** She said, "Make me laugh." I said, "Why? Why should I make you laugh?" She said, "Well, you've been walking for two days with my friend Kathleen and Kathleen says you've had her in stitches." I mean, you can't make people laugh! Well, I mean, that was pleasant--



**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** To be told that. [inaudible] [laughs] So, over the years I've learned that occasionally I make people laugh and that erm, I'm an "obscene, blah, [laughs] blah, blah, blah." And eh, I'm self-centred and I'm a 'dry old stick', and [clicks tongue]. It's funny now we go on these holidays and we come home and Joyce'll say, "Many interesting people there." And I'll say, "Oh yes, there's a very nice couple." Elderly couple they were from Glasgow. Jack and Kathleen. She's eh, a retired nurse and he's a retired something else. They were very nice. Quite good fun. And she digs me in the ribs and says, "Hold on a minute. Hold on a minute. Elderly couple from Glasgow," she says. "They were sixty! You're seventy-eight!" I went, "Oh right."

**VB: [laughs]**

**DH:** And it didn't strike me! I just see them, you know, with white hair and wrinkles.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** Well they see me with white hair. But I look at them and I go, "There's a nice old..." [laughs] and I never think I can give them the years until Eve reminds me. And I think, there again, this is erm, because I've a variety of interests--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** So many things, you know. I don't, erm, the only time I feel old is if, well that's the wrong expression, feeling old. Conscious of my age is perhaps the best thing. Is when I have a couple, brother and sister, who give me a lift to the football match when they're at home. And I remember them being born. It's eh, our next door neighbour's son's wife, which is her daughter-in-law. And she's about my vintage. And she's a widow. And this is her brother and sister who lived with her till they both got married. And I still look upon them as my kids. They're thirty-four now.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And sometimes when I see them at thirty-four, I remember them [amazed voice] being born. Oh-h, no, I couldn't have done! Not that long ago! I couldn't possibly!

**VB:** [laughs]

**DH:** And I do remember when they both born. And that's the only time I'm really conscious of my age but, I go to the match with them and we're all friends. You know, I don't feel I'm a grandfather or anything like that. [laughs]

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** So, whether cinema does anything to inculcate that I don't know, but--

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** But eh, but I often think, well, I look back to what I was then: 1930 when you'd, I'd be twelve. And I look at kids of twelve today and there just isn't any comparison! Well there couldn't possibly be--

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** 'Cause the whole social thing has changed. Whether it's for the better or whether it's for the worse, I wouldn't know. All I know, [laughs] is I wouldn't like to be a twelve-year-old kid today! I'm glad I was born when I did, when I was. But erm, I certainly wouldn't like to be, I don't like to feel there's a generation gap. You hear a lot about the generation gap--

**VB:** Uhuh.

**DH:** And I try not to be like that. I remember what it was like with me and my father when I played trad jazz. [laughs] And my father said, "What's that beastly noise?" And I used to think, well when I'm old, I'm not going to think like that. You know, I'll try and understand it. Well I try and understand [laughing] some of the pop stuff today, [laughing] and it's just beyond me.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DH:** But on the other and, then it's their life. This is their culture. And I'm not one to decry it.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** I'm not one to say, well, you know, "You ought to listen to opera," or something. You can't drive people into opera. Mind you I like all music, you will have gathered--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DH:** Not every bit of it. Some of it. Jazz if it's trad, but not if it's mainstream and not if it's modern jazz. And I don't like all the operas, some of the operas. Musical comedies things like that. Some of those I don't like, anyway, but eh, so keep saying to myself, "Well I'm not going to be an old fuddy-duddy." I try not to be. But eh, maybe that's the impression you give.

**VB: Not at all. Far from it. [laughs] Far from it.**

**DH:** But eh, on the other hand, you see, I've heard some of the pop songs taken away from these pop singers--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** And orchestrated for the Liverpool Philharmonic. As a ballad. And it's quite good! Musically. And I realised, it's their interpretation of it. Which is why I don't like Kiri Te Kanawa singing, coming down. Well I think it's coming down. They call it crossing over to the other side don't they? Eh, because, erm, it doesn't work! So I appreciate that these singers in pop groups, the lead singers seem to be strangling himself, that's the way that song should be! Musically, it's not as good as a pure tenor. But then a pure tenor singing that song would be awful.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DH:** So, let's just leave it that. And the example I always give is erm... [pause 2 seconds] There's a ballad erm, 'Smilin' Through'. One of the old ballads. Which sopranos and tenors used to sing, and I've heard...

[tape cuts out]

[End of Interview]